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University of Huddersfield

*Reassessing the  
Johnson Presidency*

By Freya Johnson

September 2013

This thesis is submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the  
degree of Masters by Research

**The purpose of this thesis is to show that a hegemonic discourse has developed through the literature based on Lyndon Baines Johnson. This thesis also serves to challenge the discourse that has developed through the use of Archival research in order to gain a more informed understanding of the legacy of LBJ. To test this hypothesis, the existing literature has been examined and organised into primary and secondary (those who knew Johnson and those who did not) this allows us to establish if a discourse has developed, how it has developed and how it affects our perception of the Johnson Presidency. Secondly, Archival sources and data are used to challenge the hegemonic discourse that has developed. It is apparent that by conducting this research, the hegemonic discourse is mainly developed and perpetuated through secondary literature. When looking at the archival sources, it is apparent that this discourse is underdeveloped and omits key features of the Johnson Presidency that could drastically alter our perception of his time in office and ultimately his legacy as a President of the United States.**

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# Chapter One

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## Introduction

The Purpose of this research project is to critically analyse and challenge the recognised and established body of work that currently serves as a source of knowledge and debate on a key figure in American political history. The hypothesis of this thesis is to challenge the hegemonic discourse that has developed in relation to the Johnson. This will be achieved firstly by demonstrating that a biographical hegemonic cannon has developed, which has created an uneven narrative of Lyndon Baines Johnson and his time in office. Secondly, the biographical hegemonic cannon can be challenged by using archival research. In 2008 Barack Obama gave his Primary night speech in North Carolina. Obama asked the party and nation to remember 'that we are the party of Jefferson and Jackson; of Roosevelt and Kennedy; and that we are at our best when we lead with principle; when we lead with conviction; when we summon an entire nation around a common purpose – a higher purpose' (*Obama, 2008*). Here Johnson has been overlooked; this could be due to the fact that President Johnson's reputation has been so tarnished throughout the years.

## Methodology

We are inclined to assume that the source of knowledge, i.e. a publication or professional teacher is a source of expertise. The expert opinion is largely regarded as the opinion that holds the most validity. This phenomenon is most apparent when dealing with a subjective issue that cannot be tested by way of experiment or output. It could be argued that the acceptance of an opinion presented by those deemed as experts is most apparent in the development of historical narrative. It is accepted that the people writing the books and articles are the experts, mainly because you are reading *their* published book or article and therefore the narrative in these scholarly articles and books is legitimised by the market. The increasing use of knowledge as a commodity that we can trade has only added to this. Of course, this is not to say that what is written is not an accurate narrative, but, in the reading and interpreting of historical discourse, like in the judicial or legislative process, it is always important to assess the legitimacy of the expert opinion so as not to create a discourse that refracts the actual course of events.

The issue of acceptance of biographical writing as the expert opinion and the decreasing objectivity of an issue derives from the Foucaudian concept of knowledge as power, our casual acceptance that the people who are writing about Johnson are the experts; this then limits our view of what we know about Johnson to what we have been told (*Foucault, 1980*). The biographers who are writing the life and times of a person hold great power in that they can shape the legacy of that person or historical figure. This in turn affects our understanding of that person and, the moral or political lessons to be learned from them. Philosopher Jacques Ranciere's 'On the Ignorant School Master' contributes to gaining a greater insight in to this issue. Ranciere talks of the initial acceptance of inequality between those who are emancipated by knowledge and those who are not. In first accepting this inequality, we are leaving ourselves open to be misguided in our lessons (*Ranciere, 1991*).

To write a biography with no agenda or bias towards the subject matter is impossible. Therefore to write a biography with enough credibility to be accepted as 'the most likely' account of the truth, it must conform to a number of criteria; the writer must adhere to the accepted notion of how history is written using factual information, evidence, counter arguments and critical analysis through philosophical or political debate. This allows the author to hide any biases and opinions behind credibility which is created by conforming to this accepted scholarly format. It is therefore possible for the biographer to express their perception of what the information is telling them, to create a narrative that is accepted as 'a most likely' account of the truth (*Munslow, 2012, p.g.69*). This most likely account of the truth

can often become the most dominant historical narrative. For the Johnson Presidency, it is apparent that this is the case; the numerous biographies written about Johnson have created a hegemonic discourse of his time in office and the years before. In many cases, even the more sympathetic biographers can fixate on certain personality traits, detracting from the external aspects of his time, which in reality had more effect on his presidency than the personality traits that are so extensively investigated.

By creating a well-rounded scholarly paper or book, it is possible to weave the threads of judgement and personal agenda through a scholarly structure that creates legitimacy. When assessing the role of biographies it is also important to establish what type of history is being communicated. The nature of a biography lends itself easily to social science. Munslow describes this type of history as “historicism’ that can be defined as the idea of “social science” and social science-inspired ‘historizing’ (in particular) can predict future developments on the basis of discoverable laws of ‘historical change’ (*Munslow, 2012, pg. 69*). By writing a biography, most historians are trying to communicate a lesson and the concept of learning from past events. The way in which the biography is written is therefore subject to the author’s opinion of whether that person is someone we can positively learn from or avoid the mistakes made by that person. This enforces the notion that some biographies are either critical or sympathetic in their approach.

To assess the role of the biographer there must be a case study that allows legitimacy to be tested. This paper will explore the Johnson Presidency as this case study. Presenting personal opinion is not the objective of this paper but, an assessment of the dominant historical narrative of the Johnson Presidency and how it has been affected by the role of the biographer or expert, is. In estimation, this paper will allow for a more diverse view of the presidency and therefore more insight can be given into the aspects of the Johnson Presidency that have not been given their full credit or, have been given too much. The main objective of this paper however, is to show an example of how the hegemonic discourse of historical narrative can be contested, by first looking at how an author has gained legitimacy and then, to what extent has that author, along with their peers, created the historical discourse in question. Also explaining why some biographies emphasise the analysis of some aspects of Johnson’s presidency that are not, in the grand scheme of things, as important or influential as other aspects.

The method of this research is qualitative and draws on extensive archival research from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. One method of research that is used in this thesis is Narrative Inquiry in which the interpretation of event is analysed in



conjunction with the event itself. The way in which an event or person is being described or recounted can give greater insight into things that are harder to understand historically. For example, by looking at biographies, interviews, or notes there are elements of emotions and detail that would not be found in other documents. However, there is also a downside to this type of research method as it is reliant on the person telling the story; therefore human error plays a major role for example, memory lapse and clouded judgement due to personal or external events/issues (*Tracey, 2013*). Archival research plays the largest role in this thesis and therefore it is important to establish some of the problems that could occur through this method, and of course, understand the benefits of this methodology. The reactivity problem of collecting data is minimised with the use of archival research as the data is already collected, therefore there is no interaction with the participants, and this is particularly significant when taking into account the purpose of this thesis. The archival data used in this thesis can be accessed by anyone in a relatively short amount of time (compared with a study that relies on data that does not yet exist). This reinforces the notion that the biographical canon is being perpetuated by the authors and historians that have previously written about Johnson. This is due to the recurrence of the same themes, even though the data that could be used to expand on the historical narrative is readily available for the writer to use. There are also downsides to the use of archival data, while some sources of data are deemed better than others, it is safe to say that the funding and standards of the LBJ Presidential Library are high, however the library is monitored very carefully, the Library itself was set up by Johnson himself. Although this was in the late 60's, it must be taken into consideration that some documents may have been omitted from the archives for various reasons and these reasons can never really be established without seeing the documents in question (*Jackson, 2008*).

## **Why Johnson?**

As part of my undergraduate dissertation, I conducted research on the Johnson Presidency to assess the nature of his time in office. While reading some of the existing literature on the Johnson Presidency it became apparent to me that there were some major themes that occurred throughout. It was also apparent that there was over emphasis on these themes and a lack of information on other aspects of his presidency. This led me to believe that there was a hegemonic narrative that had developed through the existing literature on Johnson. From the perspective of someone who had little previous knowledge of the Johnson Presidency, it appeared that some aspects of his time in office were being omitted from the historical legacy of Johnson.

## **The Johnson Presidency- a brief overview**

Early 1960s America was a complicated era for the American government. The Cold War, including the beginnings of the Vietnam conflict and the intensity of the Cuban Missile Crisis, created an air of fear and mistrust. The Civil Rights movement, although it held the promise of great progressive reform in America, was an issue that split the nation and indeed Congress. The Johnson presidency was a watershed in terms of the role of the Executive; there had been a gradual development of the way that the Executive branch operated throughout the twentieth century. There are many theories as to why this change happened, mostly the watershed is attributed to Johnson as a person, his overreaching power and determination to be a Great President and the focus on Federal involvement in domestic life have given way to the Imperial Presidency theory that was sustained and re enforced with the Nixon administration (*Schlesinger, 2004*). However, there are many aspects that affected the Johnson Presidency that mainly boil down to the time in which he was in office, and the circumstances in which he came to be president.

Kearns Goodwin brings the role of the media in the 1960s into the debate as it was never more apparent or encompassing of the presidency as it was when Johnson was in power. This meant Johnson could always be at the centre of government. He was able to contact any world leader in a matter of seconds, he could send commands to forces on the battlefield in Vietnam, and he was at the centre of the media and in the public eye at all times. When Johnson was enjoying the successes of his Presidency he was given full credit, but this intense focus on the President also had an adverse effect. It meant the failures in Vietnam were his failures, not the advisors, Army or Congress. To the American people it was his war, the successes were his and the unending failures were his. This is a very important issue to remember when assessing Johnson's presidency as it leads into the deeper debate of how elitist democracy can result in political leadership becoming a popularity contest resulting in a celebrity president, subject to all the gossip and judgments of the general public (*Fishkin, 1991*).

The Johnson Presidency began under tragic circumstances with the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas. Vice President Johnson, a Texan himself, moved into the Oval Office while the nation grieved for their martyred president. Johnson had assumed that he would only ever go as far as Vice President in his political career, believing that a southerner would never reach the presidential office and, that he would retire back to his Texas ranch once JFK had served his second term, not accounting for the tragedy of the

President's death and the line of succession (*Valenti, 1976*). For Johnson, filling the boots of Kennedy in the eyes of the nation was never going to be an easy task, but it was something that Johnson longed to do. Johnson never did win the love of the nation like Kennedy had done. Johnson lacked the public persona and his oratory skills were very much tailored to one on one conversation and at best the small audience of Congress where he thrived.

The 1960s as an era itself was already set against Johnson and his success as a president. The decade was turning out to be one of violence, upheaval and endless social movements, although a positive time for reform, it meant Johnson had to move with the times, something many would not have expected Johnson to do. A 'crude Texas cowboy without a Harvard degree' (*Matusow, 2009, pg. 376*) was an image that he would fail to overcome. Johnson's biggest critics, although surprising at first, were the liberal intellectuals. As the war progressed and its failures were becoming ever more apparent, the traditional liberalism that Johnson exercised in both social and foreign policy began to fragment from the constantly developing and reforming ideas of the New Liberals. Johnson was left behind in the old traditionalist 1950's liberalism, while the intellectuals that he held so high in his estimations, had moved on without him (*Matusow, 2009*). In 1956 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote a very accurate account on America and its liberalist tradition.

"The great advantage of the American," Tocqueville wrote over a century ago, "is that he has arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution and that he is born free without having to become so." With no social revolution in his past, the American has no sense of the role of catastrophe in social change. Consequently, he is, by nature, a gradualist; he sees few problems which cannot be solved by reason and debate; and he is confident that nearly all problems can be solved. It is characteristically American that every war in American history has been followed by an outburst of historical "revisionism" seeking to prove that the war was unnecessary' (*Schlesinger, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. 2008, pg.83*).

In light of his background, Johnson looked an unlikely president, his education was not the calibre expected of a US Leader. In 1926 Johnson enrolled at the Texas State University-San Marcos, known at the time as the Southwest Texas Teacher's College. Johnson took a break from his studies due to a lack of money, and taught at a small segregated boarder school called Welhausen elementary in Cortulla, Texas. The school was predominantly Mexican immigrant children who spoke none, or very little English. Johnson made enough money working at the school to graduate college, and it was the lessons he learned here

that would affect his presidency greatly. Johnson's political career began to develop when in 1930 he campaigned for Texas state senator Willy Hopkins, who following this, recommended him to Richard M. Kelburg. Johnson then worked as Kelburg's legislative secretary; along the way Johnson widened his circle of friends and met the people who would allow him to climb the political ladder.

In 1935 Johnson was appointed as head of the Texas National Youth Administration. This was an important turning point in Johnson's political career and would have more than likely had a great deal of influence on his social policy plans as president. The role allowed him to appropriate government money for the creation of job opportunities and education of young Texans. No doubt this job role highlighted the issues within the field and drew to his attention the availability of education to the poor and how this affected America. After two years in the post, Johnson resigned and successfully ran for Congress. Director of the Division of Negro Affairs, Mary McLeod Bethune, wrote to Johnson congratulating him on his election to Congress. The letter gives a brief insight into Johnson's work at the Texas Youth Administration.

'Honorable Sir,

Dr Horne joins me in extending to you our heartiest congratulations for the honor done you by the citizens of your district.

We feel certain that the same energy and vigorous imagination that characterized the outstanding success of your program with the National Youth Administration will write your name high in the annals of the House of Representatives.

We are indeed happy that one who has proven himself so conscious of and sympathetic with the needs of all the people should take his place in a Congress that is so indelibly writing a more human and more Christian concept of American Democracy.

Very sincerely yours,

Mary McLeod Bethune

Director, Division of Negro Affairs' (*McLeod Bethune, 1937*)

The letter gives an insight into Johnson's congressional ambitions and also his standing within the National Youth Administration. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1949 Johnson is elected Senator of Texas and 6 years later on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1955 LBJ becomes the Senate Majority Leader. This is one of the most significant periods of Johnson's political career apart from the Presidency. Johnson brought a new power to the office of Majority Leader. It was also a period of time that Lady Bird Johnson would reflect on as the happiest days of their lives (*Flom, 2012*). This success in the Senate put him in a good position for the 1960 Democratic Presidential candidate. However, he was beaten to the post by John F. Kennedy.

When Kennedy asked Johnson to be his running partner in the upcoming election, and in effect asked Johnson to take the second place, Johnson accepted. This came as a surprise to many of Johnson's colleagues and friends, as the Vice Presidency is not regarded as a position of power (something that Johnson had become accustomed to). Johnson's response to the people counselling him against accepting the position was 'Power is where power goes' (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976, pg.161*). Johnson also had a crippling insecurity that he sought to rid himself of by accepting the Vice Presidency; his Texas roots. It was not that he was ashamed in any way of being from Texas but, his status as not only a southern politician but a state politician meant that he did not feel he belonged in the unfamiliar world of national politics. Johnson saw the Vice Presidency as a way of shaking off this image and subsequently presenting himself in the national political arena (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976*).

When President Kennedy was shot in on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963, Johnson was sworn in as President aboard Air Force One. In his first year of office, the year that belonged to Kennedy, Johnson was determined to honour Kennedy's work and policies but was determined to become President in his own right and sought re-election in 1964 (*Valenti, 1977*). Doris Kearns Goodwin interprets Johnson's comments on his position as an unelected President;

'I became President. But for millions of Americans I was still illegitimate, a naked man with no presidential covering, a pretender to the throne, an illegal usurper. And then there was Texas, my home, the home of both the murder and the murder of the murderer. And then there were the bigots and the divider and the Eastern intellectuals, who were waiting to knock me down before I could even begin to stand up. The whole thing was almost unbearable' (*Kearns Goodwin, pg 170, 1976*).

In 1965 Johnson went on to implement the Great Society, a legislative package focused on increasing the quality of life of all Americans sustainably. However, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution the previous year had escalated the conflict in Vietnam seemingly without end and as America trenched deeper and deeper into the war in Vietnam peace became less likely; a tremendous anti-war movement began to spread throughout the nation. The inability to win or withdraw from the war in Vietnam was a constant strain on the President who eventually announced that he would not be seeking another term of office. Some of Johnson's more positive acts as President had also brought even more distress to Johnson as the Civil Rights Act along with the various social movements had brought with them a rise in expectations which by today's standards were vital for progression but Johnson, with the country now against him more than ever, could not continue.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis will first address the existing literature on the Johnson Presidency, firstly by looking at how Vietnam is a major part of the literary body; and then by looking at the Primary literature (by which the author has worked with, or known the President personally and has based their writing on this experience). Then the literature review will look at the secondary literature (by which the author has not known or worked with the president but it writing based on the experience of others, personal opinion and various methods of research). Chapter three will be examples of archival research drawn from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. The purpose of this will be to prove or disprove the hypothesis stated earlier in the thesis, by way of exemplifying the perpetuation of certain themes within the literature, and how the archival resources show that there are other aspects of the presidency that could be explored within this literature to a larger extent. The third chapter will consist of conclusions that can be made from the evidence shown, and how the Johnson Presidency is viewed today and ask if there is any room for revisionism of the Johnson Legacy.



# Chapter Two

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## Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to show the historical discourse of the Johnson Presidency that has developed by looking at some of the literature that has influenced the legacy of Johnson and his time in office. It will also address the issue of legitimacy of the author, how credibility is gained either through their writing, profession or proximity to the president himself. By analysing some of this literature, it is possible to gain an understanding of why each author portrays the president as they do, how this is legitimised by their peers and subsequently how this has created the discourse that is apparent within this field. To show this phenomenon to the fullest extent, this literature review will analyse the earliest literature which is most often written by those who knew him personally. This section will mainly consist of those who were in some way close to the President or have first-hand experience working with him. These accounts will be referred to as the primary literature. By looking at the existing literature in this order, it will help to create an understanding of how the historical discourse is created. The secondary literature will then be reviewed as a way of exemplifying how the discourse is created by the influence of the primary literature and subsequently, how it is perpetuated through the secondary literature. The literature on the social policy of LBJ will be the main focus of this paper as it provides the most convincing piece of evidence that the literature on Johnson has overlooked aspects of his time in office which play a vital role in understanding Johnson. Most importantly it is the aspect of his presidency that was not predetermined or confined by previously established legislation, policy, interests of national security or external organisation to the *extent* that foreign policy was, in particular Vietnam and any other Cold War related issues. While, of course, many of the programs and bills that Johnson pushed through Congress were influenced by the Kennedy administration and public opinion, his social policy was also a reflection of Johnson and his motives, hopes and ambitions for his presidency.

Firstly, the Vietnam Conflict must first be addressed to give context to the debate. While the existing literature on the Johnson Presidency is varied in scope, in many cases it offers an insight into the internal workings of the White House during the Johnson administration, and in some circumstances the literature can offer an insight into the President's private life. Understandably most existing literature is centred on the Vietnam War and while there is a lot of literature that addresses Johnson's social policies, it is apparent that many scholars

have chosen to focus on the undeniably negative aspect of the period in question. While the Vietnam War is not the primary focus of this paper, it is important to address the existing literature on the subject. The existing literature on Johnson is predominantly on the subject of the Vietnam War. The complexity of the war has allowed for a diverse and broad basis for debate resulting in many different schools of thought, some focusing on the ideological basis for the war, others on the role of the executive and legislator. While there are many different opinions on the conflict, the majority, if not all, will agree that the war was a failed effort for one reason or another. Whichever way the war in Vietnam is assessed, it is still irrefutable that the legacy of Johnson is still plagued by the war and its failures. The literature shows how Johnson's reputation has been dominated by this war, as was his presidency. Not only this but as Johnson was so committed to his work and presidency, the war dominated his private life too, especially as his son in law was out in Vietnam fighting.

Brian Van De Mark relays a conversation Johnson had with his generals; this conversation demonstrates Johnson's frustration with the war and calls for solutions to his problem. Johnson urged his generals; 'I want to know why there is nothing else. You generals have all been educated at the taxpayers' expense, and you're not giving me any ideas and any solutions for this damn pissant country'... 'Now I don't need ten generals to come in here ten times and tell me to bomb' He growled. 'I want some solutions. I want some answers' (*Van De Mark, 1995, pg.95*). This shows Johnson's frustration with the war and his eagerness to find a solution and bring an end to the war in a way that would still save face for America. Unfortunately, Johnson would not see an end to the war during his presidency and because of his role in the escalation of the war; his name will always be synonymous with the Vietnam conflict.

Many consider the war to be a product of Johnson's leadership style as an imperialist with an aggressive mentality towards foreign policy. Others see it as a valid reaction to the threat of communism and the domino effect. Other schools of thought see it as inevitability unspecific to South East Asia but an act to secure credibility in the global arena (*Kolko, 1999*). While most see the war as a military failure, some would argue that the war was necessary to make a tough stance against the Soviets, especially after the Bay of Pigs incident which many argue made the US look weak (*Lind, 2002*). On the other hand, Walter Lippmann, a journalist who opposed the war, had great influence on the people of America at the time. Lippmann, had 'decidedly 'realist' (*Riccio, 1996, pg 154*) views on America's foreign policy in Vietnam. Likewise, scholar and diplomat George Kennan shared these 'realist' views which subsequently lead to the Minimal Realist Kennan-Lippmann school of

thought. Kennan and Lippmann based their writing on the premise that America had 'greatly exaggerated the Soviet threat to American interests' (*Lind, 2002, pg.50*) and that this essential have Vietnam less strategic value than the conflict implies. They also state that the attitudes and policies of the American government were too ideological. This was due to the way in which the 'Truman Doctrine overcommitted the United States by defining American interests in ideological and expansive terms' (*Riccio, 1996, pg. 154*). While many have their opinions on the fundamental basis of the war, there are also many interpretations of Johnson's role in the war, in particular the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution remains the most controversial aspect of Johnson's involvement in Vietnam. While many scholars accept that the war in Vietnam was a product of many factors that Johnson was unable to control as Michael Lind's book 'Vietnam: The Necessary War', explains that the concepts of Domino theory and the threat of The Cold War are very real and it was credibility on the world stage that was of the utmost importance for America to show strength in the global market, Lind's most vital point being that the war in Vietnam was a 'Proxy war' (*Lind, 2002, pg. 4*). However, this view is contradicted when looking at the ways and means in which the war in Vietnam was escalated. Some scholars would disagree that the escalation of the war was either inevitable or a product of external influences on Johnson. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolutions remains a very controversial aspect of the Vietnam War as many question the legitimacy of its enactment, and more crucially, they question the wording that seemingly gave Johnson too much power when making decisions concerning the war in South East Asia. Ezra Y. Siff writes that the executive branch was able to wage its own war with limited accountability to Congress through the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. Siff's book, *Why the Senate Slept* suggests that Congress were too passive when it came to the resolution, allowing Johnson and his advisors to get their own way and appropriate the power needed to wage war independently (*Siff, 1999*). The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was an emergency bill, pushed through Congress after the supposed attack on a US navy vessel by North Vietnam, while it is not apparent that this incident ever happened as it was originally reported, the resolution had huge ramifications and was the starting point of real military intervention by American forces in Vietnam. The resolution stated that the US is prepared to take military action as the President determined and that the resolution will also expire when the President determined although it did state 'except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress' (*Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, 1964*).

Passing this sort of legislation, regardless of the fact that only two senators opposed the bill, is undoubtedly frustrating for those it affected. On the face of it, the Gulf of Tonkin resolution

is a clear violation of the checks and balances that are so central to America's governmental system (McKay, 2009). However, the sentence 'except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress' This implies that Congress are still in control of the extent of involvement in Vietnam. However, with a heavily democratic Congress and the apparent hold that Johnson had over the Senate, a two-thirds majority in both houses that is required to overpower a Presidential Veto would be hard to achieve, and was not achieved until 1973 during the Nixon administration with the Case- Church Amendment that essentially put an end to the military involvement in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (Tucker, 2011). With the basis of the war already in question, it is easy to see where the opposition to the war might have begun. There were also many more social factors that encroached on the support for Vietnam and, in turn, support for Johnson.

The Vietnam War was the first conflict ever to be televised in such a way that it brought the war right into the living rooms of American citizens. The media had a massive presence in the fighting of the war and more often than not it played a vital part in determining public opinion of the war. The images of what was really going on in Vietnam were a sobering reminder of what their sons were going to fight in and just how horrific the conditions really were. A key figure in the media representation of the war was Walter Cronkite. Cronkite visited Vietnam after the Tet Offensive in 1968 to report back to the American Nation his findings. He reported that 'we are mired in a stalemate' and that 'And with each escalation, the world comes closer to the brink of cosmic disaster' (Cronkite, 1968). The realisation for many Americans that they or their family was fighting in a war with no end in sight was extremely damaging and support for the war and morale in general was low.

While this is a very brief estimation of the war in Vietnam, it highlights the concerns and negative feeling towards the war itself and subsequently the Johnson Presidency, and while not all of the critical evaluations of the Johnson Presidency form their roots in the Vietnam debate, the general consensus of why Johnson's time in office is seen as so unsuccessful, can largely be attributed to the unstable foundations of the war and the military failure that proceeded. As the following primary literature will show, Vietnam is not the only issue the biographers and scholars have with Johnson, the psychological assessment of Johnson and his personality is also a strong theme, among other things. But, the conclusive picture of Johnson is that of a war monger or of a president led down the wrong path in an attempt to cement his name in history as a great president.

## Primary Literature

Democrat Statesman and Veteran William Averell Harriman stated;

'LBJ was great at domestic affairs, Harry Truman had programs, but non got through. Kennedy had no technique. FDR talked simply during the crisis, but didn't act enough later. Johnson went back past the new Frontier all the way to the New Deal. His Loved FDR, and it was fantastic what he did. If it hasn't been for ... Vietnam he'd have been the greatest president ever. Even so he'll still be remembered as great.' (*Averell Harriman, 2008, pg. 307*)

In response to this statement Doris Kearns Goodwin, Johnson's personal aide and friend writes; "If it hadn't been for Vietnam" – How many times this phrase has been spoken in conversations assessing Johnson's place in history. For it is impossible to disconnect Johnson from that war, and undeniably that the fighting abroad halted progress toward the great society' (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976 pg. 251*). This sentence epitomises the literature and general consensus of the Johnson Presidency amongst most authors. While there are those who have focused on the social policy of Johnson, the ramifications of the war are still reflected, either in the affect it had on social policy in terms of funding, or the affect the war had on Johnson personally in terms of his mentality and health. The quote here from Harriman is very significant as it outlines the issue of Vietnam versus social policy but his prediction of Johnson being remembered as great, is not necessarily accurate. Even though there are so many aspects of Johnson's social policies, Vietnam has taken precedent when assessing LBJ's legacy. Johnson was very cautious of the issue of legacy and set out to be a president that would be remembered for the good he had done in his time in office. In his first State of Union address in 1964, Johnson stated;

'If we fail, if we fritter and fumble away our opportunity in needless, senseless quarrels between Democrats and Republicans, or between the House and the Senate, or between the South and North, or between the Congress and the administration, then history will rightfully judge us harshly' (*Johnson, 1964*).

Johnson asked Doris Kearns Goodwin to join him on his ranch at the end of his presidency. Johnson wanted Goodwin to stay with him and write down every anecdote and story that he had to tell about his time as a politician. This was an important task for Johnson, he hoped his memoirs would be read and included in the history books in years to come. This did

happen, but not how Johnson would have hoped. Goodwin writes of Johnson's need to be remembered and his doubts about his own legacy;

“Listen,” he began. “I’ve been reading Carl Sandburg’s biography on Lincoln and no matter how great the book’s supposed to be, I can’t bring Lincoln to life. And if that’s true for me, one President reading about another, then there’s no chance the ordinary person in the future will ever remember me. No chance. I’d have been better off looking for immortality through my wife and children and their children in turn instead of seeking all that love and affection from the American people...They’re just too fickle” (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976 pg. i*).

Goodwin was close to Johnson, while she did work with him in the same way that many other authors did, Goodwin was not just an aide to Johnson but also a confidante and friend. At the end of Johnson's time in office, Goodwin would spend time with him on his ranch in Texas and write the many anecdotes and memories he had to tell. However, Goodwin also knew him as President, working alongside him in the White House. This gave her a unique vantage point of Johnson as a President, politician and man; (if it is possible to separate those things) this is clear in her writing. It also gives Goodwin credibility as an author of his biography, in the sense that many who read her book would see her connection with Johnson and her time spent with him. Kearns Goodwin not only knew him in a working environment, but also in his home environment too. This gives Kearns Goodwin the legitimacy to form her opinions and intertwine them with the facts that she had learned about Johnson in relation to the stated theory that this allows the reader to take this account of Johnson as the ‘most likely account’ of the truth due to the her understanding of and proximity to the President. Kearns Goodwin gives a different account of Johnson and is understanding of the legacy of Vietnam and how this weighed down on Johnson. Kearns Goodwin is an exemption; it is clear that the different circumstances under which she knew Johnson have changed the story significantly from the literature that will come later in this chapter.

While Goodwin is in no way ignoring any of Johnson's misgivings, mistakes and failures, there is still an even balance of critical and sympathetic analysis. Goodwin explains ‘between 1965 and 1968 five hundred social policies were created—administered with varying degrees of success. Some of these programs—e.g., Medicare and voting rights—succeeded admirably in achieving their objectives; others accomplished far less than was originally hoped—e.g., Model Cities and federal aid to education; still others proved self-defeating—e.g., community action’ (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976*). The most telling aspect of Kearns

Goodwin's understanding of Johnson and the Great Society is her explanation of what Johnson meant by the term. Goodwin acknowledges that 'Even now when commentators discuss the Great Society, they concentrate on new programs for the relief of poverty, help to education, etc. – measures, in the New Deal tradition, for the just distribution of rising abundance' (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976*). However she then goes on to recall how Johnson saw his Great Society and his ideas of how he saw the challenge he faced during his presidency and "the next half century" (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976 pg.211*). Johnson asked, "whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life," to prevent "old values" from being "buried under unbridled growth." A rising Gross National Product and full employment would not by themselves create a civilisation'... 'Where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods... where the demands of morality, and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the nation'" (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976 pg. 211*).

Here Goodwin reminds us that the Great Society, for Johnson, was not just a legislative package, but a new way of life for America, or rather a revolutionary way back to the 'old values', as he put it, of American society. The type accounts of the Great Society and Johnson's intentions for it are, for the most part, missing from other literary sources. It is significant that Kearns Goodwin does not hold back when criticising the President, the overall honesty of the book is surprising as it is clear that Goodwin has an emotional connection to Johnson. This makes the narrative all the more convincing as an 'account of the truth' as it is apparent that the story is not coming from someone who dislikes the President or feels there is any sort of injustice they are victim of, or that there was a whistle to be blown, like other biographers may have felt. It is significant, then, that other authors have not taken the same view as Kearns Goodwin and analysed the Johnson Presidency in the way that she has done. On the other hand, Kearns Goodwin's overall conclusion is not too dissimilar to that of other authors, both primary and secondary. Her conclusion of the President is that his legacy is indeed, tragic. 'Tragedy' is a word that is so often used to describe Johnson and it is repeated in the chapters of secondary literature countless times and the title of the next piece of primary literature that will be discussed in this thesis, further highlighting the consensus that existed at the time and the almost fashionable use of the term in reference to LBJ.

The majority of the primary literature on Johnson is written as a narrative, rather than the clear scholarly format that is more apparent in the secondary literature. This story telling element is expected from this sort of literature as the author is indeed telling the story of their interpretation of Johnson and the period in question. It is important to remember the pitfalls

of this type of narrative as it is so easy to immediately accept this account as the most likely account of the truth (*Muslow, 2012*). While Goodwin's credibility is strong taking into account the definition of a scholarly piece of literature discussed earlier in this thesis; a lot of the quotes and recollections of conversations with Johnson are subject to interpretation. Goodwin used verbatim and took notes when listening to Johnson and then interpreted these notes. While this is an effective method of relaying these conversations, certain aspects of these accounts are lost in translation. For example, tone of voice, expression and gestures are all things that cannot be as easily expressed through pen and paper and therefore some of these aspects are forgotten. Although this may seem minor, it is just a small example of how the reader must be vigilant, especially when the literature is used for more analytical purposes.

In *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* by Eric Goldman, Goldman takes a view (as mentioned earlier) that is quite commonly accepted within the realms of the Johnson legacy specifically when looking at the secondary literature. The title of the book alone indicates Goldman's conclusions about Johnson. Goldman takes a very critical view that the Johnson Presidency was by no means a success and, that his name will always be synonymous with the disaster of Vietnam. The latter point has to be accepted as a legitimate claim to a certain degree; however the interpretation of his presidency as being ultimately unsuccessful is where the issue of taking Goldman's account and using it as a historical source, is futile. Goldman worked for Johnson as a special consultant, from December 1963 until September 1966. This not only gives Goldman a unique insight into the workings of the White House, but also an accurate view of Johnson himself. However, the fact Goldman worked *for* Johnson in the White House is also something to be wary of. The professional nature of the relationship between Goldman and Johnson means that facts can be distorted by emotions, opinions and circumstance, but also implies that the legitimacy of the source is strong. Again his proximity to the President implies that this account is the 'most likely account of the truth'. However, An example of why caution must be taken when taking Goldman's narrative of his time working with Johnson as a likely account of the truth is exemplified by the fact that the end of Johnson and Goldman's working relationship was not altogether pleasant as Goldman despaired of Johnson's unwillingness to listen to new ideas and left his service. This is reflected greatly in his writing with his final comments being almost entirely negative 'He stood the tragic figure of an extraordinarily gifted President who was the wrong man from the wrong place at the wrong time under the wrong circumstances' (*Goldman, 1968 pg. 531*).

Goldman does not claim to be an insider writing an exposé on the President, but does explain the extent of his relationship with him. Although Goldman worked closely with the



President and occasionally mixed at social events, he was not an intimate of Johnson. Goldman does claim he 'knew and functioned with the people around them, (The President and Mrs Johnson) and inevitably heard a great deal of what was going on in connection with matters big and small' (*Goldman, 1968, pg. vi*). This again creates a problem in itself when trying to create a true representation of the Johnson Presidency as, whilst there is factual information, it is laced with the opinion and hearsay that is a common problem when using the method of narrative inquiry. Goldman refers to Johnson's Texas upbringing, often relating most things Johnson does as a product of this, for example 'The President, who, eye glasses down on his nose, scrutinized it like a bull he was considering for his ranch' (*Goldman, 1968, pg.55*) This can be sometimes unfair as, although Johnson, in many ways, is a product of his heritage, Goldman focuses on the negative connotations of being a Texan. This was also something that Johnson struggled with personally; his Texan roots did in fact colour the public opinion of Johnson and he knew that it would be something he would have to overcome. The fact that Goldman also draws on this is an example of how much this issue really did affect his Presidency and the challenge Johnson faced of gaining the trust of his peers and the people of America.

Goldman's views hold a great deal of credibility in the context of looking at this literature as an account of the truth in the sense that he had first-hand experience with the President and his policies, not to mention the political consensus of the time. However, his view of the Presidency is limited. Goldman wrote the book in 1968, this gives a very short time to really assess the outcome of the Presidency; therefore, Goldman is purely relying on the immediate impact of Johnson's policies. Now, the political, economic and social situation can be assessed with a wider and more informed perspective. With this in mind, it is important to assess whether Goldman would judge Johnson as critically if he had been aware of the true impact of the social policy that Johnson passed, for example, Civil Rights, Immigration, Environmental, Health Care and Education. Another factor that detracts from Goldman's credibility as a scholarly writer is the lack of debate and evidence that is so essential to a scholarly piece of literature. While the source is not without any evidence or debate, (as the author himself is providing the evidence with his experience) in comparison to the secondary literature, the format is very different in that there is much more human emotion involved and therefore it is very clear to the reader that the source is not without its flaws and must be read with this in mind.

While it is important to gather insight from these literary sources, as limited in numbers as they are, it is also imperative that we consistently reassess the information that is being presented. The information in these sources not only give us a window into the life of those who worked with and knew Johnson personally, it also give an in depth account of the

consensus of the time. However, it is apparent, as the second section of this literature review will show, that the subsequent literature that has emanated from the primary literature has yet to present a more alternative view of the presidency and the affects that it has on American society today. The number of primary literary sources of the Johnson Presidency is limited. The secondary literature is much more abundant and it is possible that this has contributed to the literary cannon in a much more dramatic way than the primary literature.

## Secondary Literature

John Morton Blum, a historian teaching at Yale and writing throughout the 50s and 60s wrote *The Imperial President; Lyndon Johnson and the Uncertain Legacy*. Morton Blum and Goldman's style of writing are, for the most part, quite dissimilar. Morton Blum's objective stance does give more credibility to his writing as it displays a more in-depth and scholarly debate however Goldman's first-hand experience working with the President allows for a more detailed view of the President himself. Either way, both books come to roughly the same conclusion. Johnson cannot be remembered for the socially innovative policies due to his leadership style and the disastrous decisions that were made whilst dealing with the Vietnam War. This raises the question of whether Johnson's Presidency is really being assessed to the full extent, and not only being judged on its negative points due to the slightly lower level of objectivity shown in the conclusions of Morton Blum's book.

While Morton Blum does take into account some positive aspects of Johnson's social policy, like many others, he does not show the extent of the policies or the wide range of policies and mainly focuses on the poverty bills and Civil Rights legislation. The approach taken by John Morton Blum from the outset is mostly in references to Johnson's brutish way of getting what he wants. Morton Blum's book also addresses the growth of central government under Johnson and his apparent need for power, claiming that 'Johnson was creating a personal leviathan beyond any man's ability to manage' (*Morton Blum, 1982, pg.178*). This statement says a lot about how Morton Blum really views Johnson as a president; progressive in his policies but spoilt by his tendencies to be power hungry and belligerent. Another key quote from the book shows how Johnson himself believed he would be remembered for his attempts at socially innovative policies, "Deep down", he said, "I knew... that the American people loved me." After all he had done for them, he asked, how could they help but love him'... 'Alas there were those around him who shared this sad fantasy' (*Morton Blum, 1982, pg. 202*). This suggests that in Blum's view, Johnson could not be remembered for his social policies as the Vietnam War and his need for power over those who worked around him had overshadowed everything good he had tried to do, and that it was merely a fantasy that this outcome had not been of his own making. The language used here is potent and would no doubt stick in the readers mind; 'sad fantasy' suggests that under no circumstances is it plausible to remember Johnson for his efforts in passing social policy. The inclusion of this quote is also in keeping with the idea that Johnson was a tragedy, the quote in many ways inspires pity for Johnson and the theme of 'tragedy' is only emphasised by Morton Blum's 'sad fantasy' comment.

Alonzo L. Hamby, a professor of History at the University of Ohio who has written extensively on the subject of American History, in particular on The New Deal. It is not clear that Hamby had any direct contact with the President. However, due to the time that this book was written, it is an example of the opinions that were formed on Johnson by those who understood the intricacies of government, and experienced it through the perspective of an educated professional. Again, the credentials of the author along with the scholarly format of the literature are working to give credibility to the source.

Hamby describes in the preface of his book that he makes no claim to the 'truth', he also claims that the book is not an 'encyclopaedic recitation of events with no apparent direction or purpose other than a negative goal' (*Hamby, 1976, pg.vii*). Hamby also addressed the issue's that are raised in this paper.

'Any memory is fallible, and collective memory is especially open to dispute. Nations and groups attempting to employ the past for their own purposes arrive at dramatically opposed views of the same episode or problem. Academicians, presumably capable of greater objectivity, hurl conflicting interpretations at one another with an abandon that must bewilder laymen who come into contact with the world of scholarship. A welter of tangled events and uncertain facts, history yields few self-evident guides to the future' (*Hamby, 1976, pg. vii*).

Hamby is able to portray Johnson, for the most part, with a fair evaluation. This is most likely a product of his position as a historian rather than someone with ties to the President. However, there are still elements of his evaluation that are subject to the same psychological and personality analysis that is so overwhelming in the biographies of those who did work with him or knew him, rather than the overall outcome of his time in office.

It is also important to take into account when this book was written. 1976 was still a time when the LBJ presidency is fresh in the minds of the American people, and the aftermath of the war in Vietnam is all too obvious in American society, not to mention the Nixon Administration having an adverse effect on the role of the Executive in the minds of many Americans. Arguably, it is a time in which the real legacy of the Civil Rights Act has yet come to fulfil its potential as the implications of the legislation were not quite as apparent as they are today with America's first black President in office. Therefore, even though Hamby is conscious of the narratives that can be created by the academic accounts of history, he is unable to fully assess the true success of the President with such little time between the writing of this book and the actual time period in question. In the opening paragraph of Hamby's account of LBJ, he describes how 'Johnson would lead America through an era of frenetic activity and bitter controversy, lifting the nation out of the despair of the Kennedy

assassination only to leave it in a mood of even deeper despair. His ambitions were vast, his vanity overweening; the result was a record of major achievement and enormous failure' (*Hamby, 1976, pg. 299*). Although Hamby is recognising the achievements of Johnson, the language he uses is very telling. It is clear that Hamby is stressing the failures of Johnson rather than the successes, with terms such as 'deeper despair' and 'enormous failure'. Hamby then goes on to discuss Johnson's time as Senate Majority Leader, stating; 'Johnson's control of the upper chamber was never absolute, but few men in American history were more powerful legislators' (*Hamby, 1976, pg.300*). 'The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was a milestone in the history of social legislation'... 'it was the most ambitious example of welfare liberalism to clear Congress since the New Deal; yet it has been rushed through with surprising rapidity and remarkably little debate. The achievement was testimonial to Johnson's legislative skill, but allowed little time for intelligent debate, careful, analysis or sober second thoughts' (*Hamby, 1976, pg. 305*). Here we can see clear examples of how the language in Hamby's book is emphasising the negative themes. Hamby's conclusion is again an example of swaying opinion by the use of unbalanced language when assessing good versus bad aspects of Johnson's time in office. Hamby's concluding sentence is a brilliant example of over emphasis on the negative aspects of the Johnson Presidency through the use of dramatic language, while ostensibly letting the reader make up their own mind. 'It was the record of enormous historical personality overcome in the end by the boundlessness of his aspirations and his ego, but able, one hoped, to spend his final years taking solace in the knowledge that the good he has done would outlive the evil he had unleashed' (*Hamby, 1976, pg 328*).

David Mervin, author of *The Presidents of the United States* writes a brief overview of his interpretation of the Johnson Presidency, titled 'The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson, presumably influenced by and in reference to Goldman's book; *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*. Mervin often makes reference to Goldman and the conversations that Goldman himself recounts in his book. This is representative of the way in which primary literature is reflected in the working of scholars and historians who did not know Johnson personally but have an understanding of the time period and therefore use the literature of those who did know him, to give credibility to their writing.

In examining Johnson in terms of social policy, Mervin merely recounts the struggle between congress and the executive in his attempts to raise money for Great Society programs, the programs themselves and the impact they had on America are left out of this analysis. When Mervin makes further reference to Johnson's social policy it is at the very end of his

conclusive thoughts on the President. Mervin writes, 'Once he had reached that peak, President Johnson sought to use the power he had gained to change the world. On the international scene, his efforts were tragically counterproductive whereas his record at home, while uneven, was at least partially successful' (*Mervin, 1993, pg. 192*). Mervin concludes his evaluation of the President with 'Why did the Johnson Presidency end so disastrously? To a large extent the explanation lies in his pursuit of misguided and ill-founded policy in South East Asia'... 'If other leaders shared the decision to escalate, it was the President who decided, against the advice of several senior colleagues, to do so by stealth, without taking the people or Congress into his confidence' (*Mervin, 1993, pg. 186*). The first paragraph of this conclusion is quite damning for Johnson's reputation. The claim that he in no way included the people or Congress in his decision to further involve America in the war in South East Asia could be strongly contested, however it is the view that this author has chosen to portray.

Mervin's portrait of Johnson can be described as somewhat one sided when taking into account the scope of the assessment. However, Mervin was not a presidential aide or politician, he did not know Johnson personally or work for him. When taking account of Mervin's reference list, it is the same authors in the first section of this literature review that feature most prominently, in particular Eric Goldman. This is significant as it underlines the issue of the perpetuation of historical discourse. The account that Mervin has given of Johnson is not one of his own experience, but it is the amalgamation of the information learned from the existing literature that was written in the early days after the Johnson Presidency. Although Mervin is able to take a much more calm approach to the story of Johnson's time in office, it is clearly influenced by the primary literature on the subject.

One of the most controversial and damning account of the Johnson Presidency is *The Dark Side of Lyndon Baines Johnson* by Joachim Joesten. The book was originally published in the UK as the subject matter was deemed too controversial for the US market. Published in 1968 the book predates most primary literature on the President therefore it is in no way influenced by the primary literature in question but instead relies on oral histories, some documentation and primarily the stories of those who might, or might not have been involved in the events described. *The Dark Side of Lyndon Baines Johnson* is predominantly a book of conspiracy theories, some of them very believable and now, deemed to be a likely series of events, e.g. the 1948 stolen election against Coke Stevenson (*Joesten, 1968*). However, some content of the book is, arguably, overreaching. For example, as the book went to press, the Democratic National Convention was still a few weeks away, Joesten, at this point is convinced that Johnson's step down from the presidential race is a rouse, and of course

he will not relinquish his power that easily. 'But I, for one, do not believe that the man will relinquish power of his own free will. Not the supreme power he grabbed so ruthlessly from the man who held it by the will of the people. I have a hunch, let us say, that at the critical moment Johnson will jump back into the race and will accept – oh, ever so reluctantly, of course – the draft which his henchmen are already busy preparing. And the trick may well work (*Joesten, 1968, pg 386*). Joesten had a successful publishing career and wrote many books on the subject of conspiracy, predominantly surrounding the Kennedy assassination, however when arriving back from a research trip in Dallas, Joesten's wife described him as 'on the verge of a nervous breakdown' (*Simpkin, 1997*). Joesten's book largely amounts to a string of quotes, each one wilder and more controversial than the next; the conclusion of Joesten's book reads:

'But Lyndon B. Johnson's time is running out, and, unless he stages as last-minute *coup d'etat*, one that will do away with the Constitution itself, he is inextricably doomed'... 'If Lyndon B. Johnson has any brains left, he'll blow them out before the law gets around to him. That way he could at least escape the pinnacle of infamy and save his country from foundering in an abyss of national shame' (*Garrison, cited by Joesten, pg. 384-385, 1968*).

The statements being made here are, in most cases, extreme, i.e. 'do away with the Constitution', and 'If Lyndon Johnson has any brains left, he'll blow them out'. Joesten's whole outlook on Johnson is extreme. Due to the sensationalist theme of the book, and in most cases the lack of any real evidence, it is a narrative that is hard to give credibility. The book was not published in America until many years after the presidency. This inspires conflicting ideas of why that might be through the perspective of the audience. It could have been because, as already mentioned, the book lacks any real credibility, or it could be that there was something to hide and no publisher would take that risk. While the lack of credibility coupled with the highly controversial tone of the book is a more likely reason for any publisher in the US not to touch it, many would believe the latter.

Joesten's book does not address Johnson's policy as a president, only corruption and greed within the American government, in many, many ways it is very dissimilar to most literature on Johnson, however, Joesten does draw on one aspect of Lyndon Johnson that many other do, especially Goldman. Johnson's Texan roots are again the source of much debate, especially in chapter 9, 'Texas Billie'. Joesten writes; 'LONG, long ago, Texas was the land of enterprising pioneers and derring-do cowboys. Then it became the private preserve of the greediest and most ruthless type of oilmen in the world. And, in the wake of the great oil

boom, Texas produced a new human species known as the wheeler- dealer' (*Joesten, 1968, pg. 107*). Joesten then goes on to define 'a wheeler-dealer' 'The hallmark of the authentic wheeler-dealer is his ability to amass a multimillion dollar fortune in a minimum of time without ever doing anything flagrantly illegal, or at any rate, without ever getting on the wrong side of the law' (*Joesten, 1968, pg 108*). Firstly, this is a broad definition; secondly, to amass this sort of behaviour to Texas alone is very much a generalisation. Of course Joesten goes on to place Johnson in this category, which may be a fair estimation, but it is the implication that this behaviour is down to him being a Texan that places Joesten in the same school of thought as Goldman and those who could not overcome the air of mistrust surrounding a Texan National Politician.

To sum up, to say that Joesten's account of Johnson is critical, is an understatement. While the book was not published in the US for some time, it was published in the UK in 1968, giving the reader and image of Johnson that is both shocking and damning. Coupled with the reports of the on-going war in Vietnam, the image being created of Johnson throughout this time period would not have been the basis for the legacy of greatness that Johnson had always dreamed of. While Joesten never worked with Johnson or even knew him personally, he had already established himself as an author on the topic. Having an already successful publishing career gives Joesten an air of credibility; *The Dark Side of Lyndon Baines Johnson* being one of his last books, it is clear that Joesten has little concern for ensuring that this book is rational enough to be published in the States. Joesten's final remarks on the president are that Johnson has 'failed miserably as a warlord' (*Joesten, 1968, pg 387*). In light of more recent literature on the Vietnam war, and evaluating Johnson's role in the war along-side the actions of his advisors, previous administrations and the implications of withstanding foreign policy it is arguably safe to say that failed 'warlord' is an exaggerated evaluation of Johnson's time in office. While many would be very taken by the conspiracy themes in the book, and many of Joesten claims may hold a great deal of credibility, it is hard for the reader to accept this as a very credible source due to these seemingly outlandish and poorly proven claims.

In stark contrast to (but still by no means sympathetic) Joesten's book is *The Power of the Modern Presidency* by Prof Erwin C. Hargrove. The book was written in 1974 in light of the crisis of the role of the Executive within American government. The book focuses on the role of Johnson and Nixon in the creation of this crisis. The book explores various models of Presidency, for example The Heroic Presidency Model and Hamiltonian Presidency' (*Hargrove, 1974*) in relation to the presidencies of Johnson and Nixon, he also compares the two presidencies with others such as FDR, JFK and Truman. Hargrove, again, never worked



directly with Johnson and takes most of his information from those who did, some of the books in Hargrove's reference list are those written by Goldman, Barry Goldwater and Joseph Califano. Hargrove is particularly fixated on the role of presidential personality and how that has affected the role of the Executive. In doing this, Hargrove analyses this aspect of Johnson's presidency more than any other, creating a limited view of his time in office.

Firstly, Hargrove uses the Johnson Presidency as a case study to exemplify the erosion of the Heroic Model of the Presidency. Within this analysis is an overview of the Great Society in which Hargrove states; 'President Johnson and his aides were more interested in legislative victories than in program implementation. The competition of politics drives a President to define achievement as a good legislative box score with Congress, (*Hargrove, pg 23, 1974*). Hargrove explains that this was one of the reasons for some of the social policies that Johnson put in place were not successful as they were rushed through Congress too quickly for their flaws to be highlighted. Again the haste in which Johnson's social policies were rushed through is a product of Johnson's need to be a successful and great leader in the eyes of Hargrove. When discussing Vietnam, Hargrove follows a similar theme of presidential personality as a cause for the demise of the Heroic Model. Hargrove uses language that is suggestive of a monarchical role within the presidency; 'People began to talk about the need for Congress to regain possession of some of its abdicated authority in foreign affairs' (*Hargrove, 1974, pg 22*). The use of the word 'abdicated' is suggestive of a new monarchical authority. Hargrove again chastises Johnson's leadership style and persona by describing his direction of the war as 'high handed and as secretive as possible' (*Hargrove, 1974, pg22*). When directly addressing the issue of personality, Hargrove describes Johnson as;

'Lyndon Johnson was a problem in and of himself. He was far too openly and nakedly a man of power to be able to establish a rapport with the American people. A man of genuine idealism, he was his own worst enemy because of a compulsive insecurity that caused him to continually take defensive position against criticism and an offensive position toward associates and friends'... 'Other great Presidents of this century shared a psychological need for personal power and developed a skill of power manipulation out of such a need. However the two Roosevelts and Wilson were able to disguise their liking for power under the veneer of aristocratic public personalities (*Hargrove, 1974, pg 25*).

Throughout the chapter Hargrove enforces the issue of personality as a key factor in the erosion of the Heroic Model and indeed the demise of the President as an upstanding public

figure. In a later chapter, Hargrove also suggests that Johnson's flawed personality was linked to his skill as a legislator.

'In the heyday of Lyndon Johnson this writer developed the thesis that personal insecurity and political skill were linked. The creative politician insecurity and political skill were linked. The creative politician was depicted as the man who required attention and needed to dominate and therefore had developed skills of self-dramatization and persuasion that would serve those needs' (*Hargrove, 1974, pg 34*).

While Johnson's skill as a legislator is being acknowledged, Hargrove is suggesting that there is little positive outcome for the presidency regardless. For Hargrove, Johnson's personality is his defining feature as a President, causing him to lead a ruinous war and push through a number of unsuccessful social policy bills, all the while damaging the image of the Executive with his apparent need for personal power, adding;

'These character flaws would probably not have damaged Johnson's Presidency seriously had it not been for Vietnam. He would have been an unloved but respected President of great domestic achievement admired for his political skill. But this would have been a Johnson operating in a field of pluralistic, domestic, political constraints. In the Vietnam arena he could impose his will on the government, though not on the society or even on reality, and in the absence of constraints he fell back on the urge to dominate, which when fed by his insecurity in the face of criticism eventually destroyed him' (*Hargrove, 1974, pg 40*).

Hargrove's account of Johnson is one that is strongly influenced by his personality and what affect this has had on the overall perception of the President himself, and ultimately, how this has affected the dynamics of the Presidency within the American governmental system. Again, the book was written not long after the Johnson Presidency and is a scholarly evaluation of the apparent crisis of the time, 'Imperial Presidency' (*Schlesinger, 2004*). The book is a clear example of the discourse that has been developed throughout the years and shows how personality and psychology have become the main focus of the Johnson Presidency. By looking at the reference list it is apparent that Hargrove has used the insight of those who worked with Johnson, such as Goldman. Also, by looking at the date of publication, it is apparent that Hargrove has been able to rely on his own perception of the President, even if it is not a first-hand account.

In conclusion, the secondary literature on the Johnson Presidency is, in many ways, more extensive and significantly more scholarly than the primary literature. This is mainly due to the nature of the primary literature being more narrative and written from personal memory. The secondary literature, on the other hand, is using the Johnson presidency, for the most part, as a way of testing a hypothesis or creating historiographical timelines in which we are able to learn from or use in a social science capacity. However, this is where the issue of perpetuating a narrative is established. By taking account of the more personal accounts of Johnson in scholarly work, these opinions and biased accounts of Johnson are taken as the most likely account on the truth, when, it is not always the case or there are substantial gaps. Another aspect of the literature on Johnson, as a whole, is that the focus of the literature is far too limited in scope. This is most apparent when the author is assessing the social policy of Johnson. The primary focus of these authors is the subject of legislation and how quickly and under what circumstances Johnson was able to get the bills through Congress, there is also a clear concentration on poverty bills, which is again limited as the Great Society was not only primarily focused on this. One cause of this limited view could be the very concentrated time period in which most of the literature was written, most of the writing on Johnson, not accounting for the literature on Vietnam, was published in the late 1960s and 70s, in some cases the early 80s. This is significant as Johnson's actions in the social area have had a profound effect on American Society today and the literature that has been developed throughout this time period could be described as reactionary to the discontent that was rife in America as a result of the war, the damaged role of the Executive and the general feeling of unrest in America at the time.

When assessing the literature overall, it is clear that the secondary literature is where we can see the hegemonic discourse developing. The predominant themes of personality and power are clear throughout and it is clear that most have recycled by the concept of the LBJ 'tragedy'. It is understandable that these themes have emerged as they are discussion points that peak interest and as previously mentioned, most of this literature is a product of its time. The literature review section of this thesis has allowed us to test the first part of the hypothesis which is that a hegemonic discourse has developed. The evidence here shows that, indeed, there are central themes that runs throughout this literature and create a discourse that is not altogether thorough in its analysis and that the popularity of these themes has allowed for perpetuation of the narrative. The archival section of this thesis will show that the existing literature can be challenged by way of showing that there is much more to the Johnson Presidency than is made clear throughout the literature. The legacy of

Johnson is significantly influenced by the existing literature and therefore it is important to present a more informed analysis.

# Chapter Three

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## Archival Research

The biographical work on Johnson clearly demonstrates the recurrence of certain themes; the subject of Vietnam and the interest in his persona and method as a politician have become the main topic of discussion when assessing the Johnson Presidency. Although there are instances of praise for the social policies he put in place, they are often fleeting and in many cases followed by more grounding points, bringing the legacy back to the Vietnam War, a failing 70s economy, or their interpretation of his personality or mental state. Within the biographies and various accounts of the Johnson administration, the Great Society is not left unreported, it is analysed and debated to a large extent. On the other hand, when looking at the archival resources and in particular the administrative histories of the Johnson Presidency, it is apparent that some major aspects of these policies are under emphasised and therefore the picture created of Johnson, mainly in terms of his domestic and social policy, lack the detail that is essential in understanding what the Great Society programs actually did, and more importantly, what Johnson intended The Great Society to be. The Great Society did not just encompass Johnson's drive and ambition to educate the poor and raise living standards for all ethnicities; it was a new way of living for Americans across the nation, a way of preserving America both environmentally and culturally.

“The Challenge of the next half century ,” Johnson said “is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life,” to prevent “old values” from being “buried under unbridled growth.” A rising Gross National Product and full employment would not by themselves create a civilisation “where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not feared cause of boredom and restlessness... where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community...Where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods... where the demands of morality, and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the nation” (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976, 210-211*).

This section of the paper aims to bring back into focus some of the aspects of the presidency that are not discussed in the biographical sources on Johnson. The archival research will

mainly address aspects of social policy that are, for the most part, missing from the popular concept of Johnson's legacy, such as environmental policy and immigration. It will also address issues such as Civil Rights and War on Poverty with a more detailed look at how these programs and acts were able to come into fruition and the successes and rewards the Johnson administration enjoyed and can still take credit for today.

While Johnson served as principal and teacher at Welhausen School in Cotulla, Texas, Johnson worked closely with the impoverished immigrant children and gained a deep understanding of what it meant to be poor in America. Although Johnson liked to make out he had a much more humble upbringing than he actually did, he did know poverty, he knew it from his time at Welhausen and this because the catalyst for the War on Poverty (*Goldman, 1969*) (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976*). In a visit to Cortulla in 1966 Johnson explains the origins of his war on poverty.

'Mayor Cotulla, my friend Dan Garcia, all of my former students, boys and girls:

I have come back to Cotulla this afternoon, not just because this school is part of my past, but because this school is a part of America's future.

Everything I want to work for, as your President, to achieve peace, to conquer poverty, to build a worthy civilization--all of these depend in a very large degree on what happens in this school and what happens in other schools throughout our land.

Thirty-eight years ago I came to Cotulla. I was still a student myself. I was working my way through the San Marcos Teachers College.

In those days, neither America nor her schools shared any abundance. We had only five teachers here in the Welhausen public school. We had no lunch facilities. We had no school buses. We had very little money for educating people of this community. We did not have money to buy our playground equipment, our volleyballs, our softball bat. I took my first month's salary and invested in those things for my children.

About the only thing we had an ample supply of was determination--determination to see it through' (*Johnson, 1966*).

Johnson's social policy did not just extend to poverty, the Civil Rights movement was well underway when Johnson became president and the Civil Rights Act was well overdue. Jack

Valenti, one of Johnson's most trusted aides describes how Johnson had planned his assault on the bill on the first evening he became president in his book *The Very Human President*. Valenti takes a much more sympathetic view of Johnson, This could be down to the fact that Valenti and Johnson remained friends and therefore wanted to paint a rose tinted picture of the President. Valenti describes Johnson's thoughts on the Civil Rights bill;

'He talked about civil rights. He had disagreed with the Kennedy approach and had so advised JFK by memorandum. He believed, as he wrote JFK, that the president should take civil rights to the people, over the heads of the Congress, and take it to the country as a moral crusade flattening all opposition with the sharp edge of principle and moral righteousness. He had prophesied the civil rights legislation would bog down, led into quicksand by the crafty parliamentary-wise southern Senate patriarchs, unless special and visibly muscular effort were put forth. Now he was in the captain's chair and he spoke almost eagerly about his commitment to get civil rights off its backside' (*Valenti, 1976, pg. 119*)

Valenti takes a very personal approach to the legacy of LBJ, as a trusted aid of the president he saw the inner workings of the office and often had dinner with the president and his wife even after Valenti had finished working for him. This gives Valenti an insight into LBJ's mood and even how Johnson, himself, perceived his presidency. Valenti gives the reader an insight into LBJ's past and how his previous posts influenced his compassion and urge to help those who needed it most. Valenti describes how his experience teaching young Mexican- American children at a school in south Texas imprinted on him to such an extent he would never forget it. He describes how 'One cannot grow up on the land in Texas, soil that grudgingly gave up a living to those who inhabited it, and not be affected by the ebb and flow of the quality of life. Rain, grass, weather because enormously important'. (*Valenti, 1976, pg. 9*) This is the closest reference in most existing literature to the motives behind Johnson's extensive environmental policies and how Johnson was always connected to the land he grew up on and therefore could sympathise with the people who were still trying to eke out a living in the hill country. While the literature on the social policies of President Johnson covers many issues and gives detailed accounts of the varied policies enacted by LBJ and his administration, some of the policies that are paramount to understand Johnson as a person and president are not analysed. Johnson, along with his wife Lady Bird, were keen bring about many environmental bills to ensure the sustainability of their country and also to preserve beauty for generations to come. In the literature explored here, Johnson's success with this type of legislation is not discussed, neither is the reasoning behind it, other than by Jack Valenti when describing Johnson's connection to Texas land and people.

In 1964 Johnson made a speech in which he explained the importance of declaring war on a domestic enemy. Johnson explained:

‘On similar occasions in the past we have often been called upon to wage war against foreign enemies which threatened our freedom. Today we are asked to declare war on a domestic enemy which threatens the strength of our nation and the welfare of our people. If we now move forward against this enemy, if we can bring to the challenges of peace the same determination and strength which has brought us victory in war, then this day and this Congress will have won a secure and honourable place in the history of the nation and the enduring gratitude of generations of Americans yet to come.’ (*Johnson, 1964*)

Johnson’s determination is clear here, the ferocity in which he addresses the need for progression in social policy is a clear sign of Johnson’s commitment to the cause, the language used, while reflective of the foreign policy at the time, is in some ways overbearing and extremely militant. However it is key to the legacy of his presidency, Johnson’s skill and power as a legislator is fundamental when assessing the Johnson presidency. It is the driving power behind the successful passing of the Civil Rights bill, immigration reform, environmental policy and the numerous social policy bills that were headed under the War on Poverty.

While it is apparent that a lot of the legislation signed by Johnson and implemented during the Johnson Administration started life in some way as a Kennedy policy, the way in which Johnson was able to use the martyred president to bring his policies to fruition was a stroke of genius. Not only this but Johnson experience as Senate Majority Leader, his southern roots, his Southern ‘oil men’ friends and his overbearing personality meant that he was a force to be reckoned with. He was a president who was able to persuade, some may say bully, and cajole people into doing what he wanted. As unethical as that may be, it worked. The only other legislative package ever to be passed through Congress at the speed the Great Society package was is FDR’s New Deal package (*McKay, 2009*).

The table below shows the number of presidential vetoes and how many times they are overridden by Congress, from Roosevelt to George W. Bush. The table shows that throughout the Johnson Administrations there are no major presidential vetoes made. This was not the case for many other presidents both before and after Johnson. For example, Nixon and Ford used their Presidential Veto to a large extent and were often overruled by a two thirds majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Ford used the Presidential Veto for major bills 11 times, with an average of 4.4 major vetoes per year in office, 7 of which were overruled. The only other president not to use his presidential veto



was Kennedy. Both Kennedy and Johnson were working with a predominantly Democratic Congress, this could be significant when assessing why they did need to make any major vetoes. However, Kennedy did not manage to pass his New Frontier legislative package; he was also unable to pass the Civil Rights bill.

**Table 1, Table to Show Major Bills Vetoed 1933-2008 (McKay, 2009, pg.241)**

President	Total	Number involving appropriations	Number involving foreign and foreign economic policy	Major Vetoes per year in office	Number overridden
Roosevelt	2	0	0	0.16	2
Truman	6	0	0	0.8	5
Eisenhower	2	2	0	0.25	1
Kennedy	0	0	0	0	0
Johnson	0	0	0	0	0
Nixon	13	10	1	2.4	4
Ford	11	10	1	4.4	7
Carter	5	2	2	1.3	1
Reagan	15	7	5	1.9	5
Bush Senior	15	4	5	3.7	1
Clinton	19	10	4.2	2.5	2
G.W. Bush	7	1	3	1.15	2

The most extensive source on the War on Poverty lies in the Lyndon B Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas in the form of the Office of Economic Opportunity Administrative Histories by Bertrand M. Harding, Acting Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity. The document extensively recollects the chronology of the OEO and the problems it faced, along with the successes it enjoyed. The document begins;

‘This record of genesis, the events and the personalities of the War on Poverty, is an honest attempt to see the first five years of this infant effort with clarity and integrity. The warts and the blemishes are there; the frustrations as well—as well as the victories and the justifications. Never before has a major nation attempted

such a feat. To put an end to poverty of the minority, at a time when the majority were enjoying their greatest prosperity' (*LBJPL: 001, 1969, pg. 1*).

The OEO brought with it extensive change to the HEW as well as changing the lives of many undereducated and under privileged Americans, young and old. An interview with Robert Perrin, who joined the OEO in 1966, describes some of the OEO's achievements.

'The hardest impact to pinpoint is the actual emergence of people from poverty. Now, we can only assume that the accelerated rate at which this has been taking place must be due to the kinds of emphasis on the programs for the poor that the OEO has been spearheading.'... 'We will justly take credit for that, particularly in the rate with which the non-whites have been coming out of poverty'... 'Certainly the impact on communities is without question. We've had mayors tell us that if they didn't have the community action agencies, they'd have to invent them, because they have to have a means of expressing, of listening to the voice of the people, which they never had before.' (*Perrin, 2010, pg. 411*)

This interview shows a fraction of the success that the OEO and War on Poverty had on the poor. Here Robert Perrin describes how the programs have an effect on the community as a whole as well as helping non-white Americans rise up out of poverty. However, this sort of account of success is predominantly left out of the literature surrounding Johnson's presidency with many scholars only focusing on Johnson's failure to actually see out his mission of ending poverty in America. Johnson declared war on poverty on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1964. The term War on Poverty was the banner for the numerous bills and legislation brought in by Johnson in an aim to overcome the 19% poverty rate. (*Gillette, 2010*) When looking at Johnson's domestic policy it is very easy to slip into the Orthodox mind frame. Much of the literature on the Johnson's domestic policy describes the ambitious policies and millions of tax dollars spent on programs and welfare for the poor and while there is credit given to some of the policies and the outcome of them, they then also describes how Johnson's attention is taken from his War on Poverty and then focused on the very *real* war in Vietnam and subsequently the struggling economy.

One of the most crucial elements of Johnson's War on Poverty is not any particular piece of legislation, but the awareness that it created. The hidden world of the poor was a bigger issue in 1960s America than many books or biographies acknowledge. Even though some of the anti-poverty policies that Johnson established could not be sustained, Johnson still succeeded in bringing the issue of poverty into the conscience of the American people. In *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History* by Michael Gillette, Gillette describes how in

1964 President Lyndon B Johnsons travelled up the side of an Appalachian Mountain to seek out a family who symbolised the very epitome of the poverty that ran throughout America. The Fletcher family 'had been "chosen" by the White House to personalise poverty- to symbolise the 35 million Americans who in 1964 earned less than \$3,000 a year.' (*Gillette, 2010, pg. xi*) Gillette describes how even if the War on Poverty failed, there were significant victories. This was because the offensive on poverty demanded the attention of the Media, Government and subsequently the American people.

Gillette describes how the formally invisible problem came to the forefront of people's minds and meant changes were made in all levels of government. Within Gillette's Oral history, there are accounts of the OEO and the work that it did from those who were working within it. This book is a good indicator of how the people working in the OEO felt about the work that they were doing, and although it is not an unbiased account, it gives both critical and sympathetic viewpoints from the people who knew the programs well. These accounts talk about how the success of the OEO does not only reside in the programs themselves and the work that they did but also in how it was an implement of reform and how it is very important to remember that the formulation of the OEO had a significant effect on how Congress, the public and HEW (Department of Health, Education and Welfare) saw certain programs. The nature of American government means there is great scepticism when it comes to the appropriation of money for welfare. As Gaither states in Gillette's book;

OEO played a major role in redirecting the government programs through example. When I got there, preschool education was in disfavour in HEW: the federal government should not be supporting that. Within a couple of years, preschool education was the darling. The office of Education was supporting it, thought it was a good thing, though that, indeed, the age level ought to be reduced.'... 'It is, I think, the most successful attempt in terms of redirecting the attention of government that we've seen in this century.' (*Gaither 2010, pg.412*)

Here Gaither is showing example of how there are more aspects to the social policy of the era than first meets the eye, and certainly more than is generally accepted in the orthodox view of the Johnson Presidency.

'I don't know if I'll pass a single law, or get one dollar appropriated, but before I'm through, no community in America will be able to ignore the poverty in its midst' (*Johnson, 1963*)

Michael Harrington's short story *The Other America* describes the unseen poor. Harrington describes how the middle classes and the tourist do not see the poor in American as they are hidden on the outskirts of society, rarely venturing from their homes into the inner city or

affluent suburb. The cheap manufacturing of clothing adds to this as the poor are hard to distinguish from the rest due to the relative low cost of fashionable or acceptable quality clothing. Historians such as Maurice Isserman claim that it was the publication of Harrington's book in 1962 that sparked the War on Poverty.

'Then, too, beauty and myth are perennial masks of poverty. The traveller comes to the Appalachians in the lovely season. He sees the hills, the streams, the foliage but not the poor. Or perhaps he looks at a run-down mountain house and, remembering] Rousseau rather than seeing with his own eyes, decides that those people are truly fortunate to be living the way they are and that they are lucky to be exempt from the strains and tensions of the middle class. The only problem is that those people, the quaint inhabitants of those hills, are undereducated, underprivileged, lack medical care, and are in the process of being forced from the land into a life in the cities, where they are misfits' (*Harrington, 1962 pg. 1-4*).

The book written by Harrington was just a small insight into the culture of poverty at the time. It was also an example of the growing discontent within the country and emphasised the need for social reform, especially when taking into account the poverty levels in the African American communities in conjunction with the Civil Rights movement. From 1960, there had been some significant changes within the Department for Health, Education and Welfare; however it was not until 1963 onwards that the significant changes were made.

In 1960 the HEW celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at this point in the establishment of the HEW there was 14.3 million people receiving benefits. The annual payments totally to a bill of \$10.8 billion with an increase of 1,075,000 people joining the social security roll in the due to recent amendments. When looking at the history of the HEW and the various amendments and new acts that were added, there is a significant change from the end of 1963 onwards. A noticeable shift took place in the types of programs that are run. There is also a noticeable change in how money is appropriated rather than the focus being who the money is appropriated too. Rather than programs changing to include different demographics they are instead targeting a larger demographic but through educational means. An example of this would be The Nurse Training Act of 1964. This act meant that money was appropriated to extend existing nursing schools and also build more. It also provided a loan to those who were training to be nurses. Another example would be the Library Services and Construction Act 1964. This act extended the 1956 Act to increase the construction of libraries in urban areas and areas with no or inadequate facilities, including a rise in federal spending on public library services and construction, and, of course Job

Corps. These programs were no longer targeting a specific demographic for welfare but they were indirectly servicing those who would not usually have the means to educate themselves or their children. By increasing federal spending on public services, Johnson was laying the foundations for educating the poor and therefore increasing their chances of employment. This is a crucial shift for the American welfare system from April 1963 onwards and one that has gone un-noticed as part of Johnson's legacy.

Although some of the first changes started to appear within the last months of Kennedy administration, the significant policies were not implemented until the Johnson administration. Johnson's aim throughout his presidency was not to just give money to the people who needed it, but to give them the means to earn it themselves. This is a very fundamental and age old idea of sustainability but still an idea that seemed to almost elude the HEW until the Johnson Administration. 1965 was a particularly significant year for the HEW bringing with it two major organisational changes. Firstly, the Older Americans Act was signed by the president on July 14<sup>th</sup>. This meant that the administrative department that dealt with the welfare of America's elderly population was raised to agency standard and subsequently elevated the importance of care and welfare for the elderly in America. The Water Quality Act, signed in October 1965, established the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration, again elevating a Public Health Service to agency standard. These organisational changes were followed by an astronomical total of 25 major pieces of legislation. The legislation passed was the foundation of Johnson's Great Society and tackled a wide range of issues such as education, environment and poverty. (*DHEW Publication, 1972*)

## ***Job Corps and the Youth Opportunity Campaign***

As part of the War on Poverty, Unemployment was a major battle. To get to the bottom of the problem of unemployment, for Johnson, education had to be tackled. Increasing federal aid to educational programs was something that would take a great deal of hard work, persuasion and power to pass. The opposition to Johnson's programs came from the traditional self-deterministic attitude of America.

'It's a huge political Pork Barrel, and a feeding through for welfare industry, surrounded by sanctimonious, hypocritical, phoney, moralistic crap... across the country, City Halls have their committees on Economic Opportunity to identify what they call positive and negative programs and leaders. Positive means you do what every City Hall tells you to do and negative means you are subversive, that you think for yourself.' (Alinsky, 1965, Vol. 231, No.1382)

To overcome this type of opposition, Johnson utilised the task forces and studies that had not originally been intended for this purpose. Three days before Johnson gave his State of the Union Message to the Labour Department he submitted a report entitled 'One Third of the Nation' of the task force on Manpower Utilisation. The report was established by President Kennedy to evaluate the Selective Service rejection rates. Johnson hoped that the evidence of this report could be used to support the Youth Employment proposal by showing how dire the situation was for lower class youths, especial African Americans and most importantly, how educating them would not only be beneficial for them and their life style but for national security, something that would have been a pressing issue under the weight of the Cold War. The task force discovered that close to 750,000 young people dropped out of school every year before obtaining a diploma, and that one out of every six dropouts was unemployed. Subsequently if this was to continue, 'One Third of the Nation' would not be eligible to serve in the armed forces due to low IQ levels in the coming years. In urban areas, the proportions were even higher, close to 50%. The task force predicted that if the current trend continued then in 5 years' time there would be 'one and a half million unemployed youths—without adequate education or training, without jobs, and without a future' (LBJPL:002, 1964 p.12).

The report was one of the few available data sources that the Task Force could draw from. This is a prime example of Johnson's technique and skill as a legislator. It showed that one

third of the country's 18 year old draftees would not qualify for the armed forces. The study showed that these men were the next generation of poor in America, they were born into poverty and their children would be born into the same lifestyle. The report explained that the poverty within these communities was perpetuated and that something needed to change for this cycle to be broken. (*LBJPL: 003, 1964*) Moynihan wrote 'The study revealed, for example, the disproportionately high rates of Negro failure of the mental test, the great importance of family size for all the races, the sharp difference in the rejection rates not only among races, but among regions of the nation' (*Moynihan, 1968, Pg.21*) In the spirit of self-determination, cash hand-outs were not the answer here, but investment in education was a priority for Johnson and the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO).

One of the pivotal programs run by the OEO was the Job Corps, an educational program that was designed to break the vicious cycle of poverty. At this time the average amount of years that an American labourer had spent in education was 12.2 years which is only slightly above the high school level. However, for those who were unemployed long-term the average time in education was as low as 10.5 years meaning that around two thirds of the long term unemployed did not even finish high school. The Americans who had failed to reach the high school diploma standard were twice as likely to be part of the long term unemployed population, resulting in the numbers of long term unemployed Americans without a high school diploma being 50% higher than their proportion in the labour force. (*LBJPL: 004, 1965*)

The concept of a Job Corps was not a new concept. There were many attempts to resurrect the program since 1942, FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps, but none succeeded. The old conservation corps model had officially died when Hubert Humphrey put forward 'A Plan to save trees, land and boys' in 1958 and 59. It faced a general lack of Congressional Interest and Administration opposition, the two bills failed to pass. In 1960 the Democratic Party, with an upcoming election looming, started to put the feelers out for proposals around the subject of youth employment. Humphrey's plan was taken on board and in 1961 he forced the issue by submitting his bill on the very first day of the 87<sup>th</sup> Congress. President Kennedy, David E. Bell and the Bureau of the Budget were unconvinced that the Conservations Corps was enough to tackle the youth unemployment issue. With this in mind, a small experimental Youth Corps was set up. The Corps consisted of 6,000 and 'on-the-job' training programs were set up for a further 50,000 members. This was combined into the Administration substitute Youth Employment Act. Congress rejected Kennedy's bill, revised the scope of the program and the final report bill was killed by the House Rules committee (*Sundquist, 1968*) (*LBJPL, 005, 1965*). The revised Job Corps was eventually initiated in 1964. The mission of

the Job Corps was to supply young people (16-24) with free education and training in order to make them more employable.

As Adam Yarmolinsky put it, the Job Corps was 'offering school dropouts a chance to live, learn and work in a completely new environment where they would be prepared for a productive role in society' (*LBJPL: 006, 1964, pg. 12*) Originally officials of the OEO were hoping for a speedy, visible result to demonstrate success of a nationwide strategy to increase the earning power and social adaptability of a critical segment of the nation's population (*John Bainbridge, 1968*). The idea was that by starting with youth it would be possible that poverty would be overcome by breaking the poverty cycle and that youth was 'the best place for the poverty cycle to be broken' (*LBJPL: 007, 1963-1969 pg. 456*). It was thought that if they improved health, education, training, welfare and rehabilitation, this would in turn prepare them for employment as an adult. However this notion was opposed by the Secretary of Labour, W. Willard Wirtz.

Secretary of Labour W. Willard Wirtz, originally a Kennedy man serving from 1962 to 1969, maintained that while conventional techniques were desirable, they would not produce results. He said 'Poverty is, by definition, lack of income and income comes from jobs...'. Here Wirtz is emphasising that the priority itself must be creating jobs for rather than just training people to be suitable for the jobs available. Johnson took this on board and did so in a way that would ensure that those who had been part of his youth training programs would be the ones who got the jobs. One of the ways in which Johnson encouraged the employment of American youths was the Youth Opportunity Campaign; Johnson looked to the federal agencies to find jobs or training opportunities for those who had taken part in youth training programs under the Youth Opportunity Campaign. He not only called out to the public sector but also to private employers (*LBJPL: 008, 1965*). On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1965 Vice President Humphrey made these comments;

'Ten days ago the President announced a nationwide youth opportunity campaign to provide job opportunities for the out-of-work young people between the ages of 16 and 21. The President asked me to head a task force to implement this campaign. I am pleased to report that the response to the President's appeal among Federal, State, and local government agencies, private businesses, our unions, and non-profit organizations has been most encouraging. And we meet here this afternoon to honor those firms and organizations who responded most promptly to the youth opportunity campaign.' (*Humphrey, 1965*)



A training manual was also sent out to all those who Johnson had called out to supply work opportunities, both public and private; the manual's aim was to instruct the employers how to engage these people in their work. The manual read;

'This summer the largest group of young people in history have become eligible for work. The President has called upon all employers, public and private, to provide summer jobs and job training for these young people. He has pointed out the need for young people to be able to have jobs and to learn to work if they are to become useful members of society. As employers we cannot consider these young people as simple a resource for meeting our summer employment needs; we must recognise that we are making an investment in the future workforce of the nation'  
(LBJPL:009, 1965)

The evidence here shows how Johnson was not only interested in the unemployment rate going down in national statistics but he was determined that the youth of America were going to benefit from these policies, as were their employers. Johnson's aim was of sustainability and of longevity therefore not only must these youths be employed, they needed to stay employed. To sustain the employment of youths in America, hiring them needed to be mutually beneficial and positive for both employee and employers and therefore training and information was provided for the employer. The detail of the program that the training leaflet demonstrates is a sign of a dedication to the social policies that were implemented and most of all, the longevity of their success. In turn, the evidence shows how Johnson was not looking to just demonstrate to the American public that he was merely honouring the campaign slogans from the previous year, he was determined make the programs work by putting one million youths in work. This sort of attention to detail can also be viewed as a counter argument to the authors and historians that claim Johnson's social policy bills were rushed through without thought (*Hamby, 1976*). The Job Corps, as established by Johnson, still exists today serving 60,000 16 to 24 year olds, through 122 centres (*Expect More.gov, 2013*).

## ***Fair Labour Standards Act***

Another way that Johnson sought to decrease the poverty rate was to increase the minimum wage. In the 1964 State of Union message, Johnson urged that there must be significant improvements to the Fair Labour Standard Act; this was also reflected in the President's economic report. The Fair Labour Standards Act and Minimum Wage Act was targeted as an area for reform, this was not due to any issues that were inherent in the policy itself, but because previous amendments that had been made in 1961 as part of the adoption of major amendments, and the various aspects of the act that were present in its conception, had limited the acts coverage. Specific exemptions had been made that meant workers who would otherwise be covered, were not. Also, the act worked by way of monetary testing known as enterprise coverage. Enterprise coverage applied to annual sales and engagement of commerce or production of commerce, this method limited the Act even further. With these limitations applied to the Act it became fragmented and created inequality in regulating against substandard working conditions and payment. Therefore, Johnson needed to ensure that the Act was amended to remove the inequalities that had been created within it. *(LBJPL: 010, 1968)*

An interagency task force was set up to discuss the parameters of the proposed amendments of the Fair Labour Standards Act. Within this task force, members of the OEO, HEW, Treasury Commerce, Bureau of Budget and the Council of Economic Advisors, discussed the proposed plans to extend the coverage of the minimum wage act, in particular to hired farm workers, increase minimum wage overall and raise the overtime rate from one half to double time. In 1966 the required amendments were made and Johnson approved the bill, extending the bill to a further 10 million workers and establishing an overall increase in the minimum wage to \$1.60 per hour. *(LBJPL: 011, 1968)*

The president made these remarks when approving the bill;

‘Today in this country, when you are poor, you are poor alone. The new minimum wage \$64 a week, will not support a very big family, but it will bring workers and their families a little bit above the poverty line...My ambition is that no man should have to work minimum wage, but that every man should have skills that he can sell for more.’ *(LBJPL: 012, 1968, pg.3)*

However, even before minimum wage was amended, American families were rising above the poverty line; the following evidence is part of a memorandum sent to Johnson from his special aid in domestic affairs, Joe Califano. The data that was collected was from the Census Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service. The evidence is an example of the significant increase in income levels during the years of the Johnson Administration. 1966 was the first time in American history that more than half of American Families (54%) had income of \$7000; Ten years ago 77% of families had income under \$7000. In 1963 58% of families had incomes under \$7000. The median family income in America reached \$7,436 in 1966, in 1963 the median income was \$6,249. This mean that between 1959 and 1966, the income of all families had increased by 37% and between 1963 and 1966, the income of all families increased 19%. More than 2/3 of this increase is a gain in real purchasing power after adjustment for price increase. For non-white families the overall increase in income between the years 1959-56 was 59%, 34% of this increase was between the years 1963 and 1966. In light of this, families living below the poverty line from 1959 to 1966 dropped from 22% to 15%, a considerable improvement (*LBJPL: 013, 1967*).

As well as average income rising, unemployment was going down too. The table below (Table 2) shows a small but significant insight into the unemployment rates of civilians over the age of 20. The unemployment rate dropped from 5.9 to 5.1 in the space of just 1 year between May 1963 and May 1964.

**Table 2- Table to show seasonally adjusted rates of employment (*LBJPL: 014, 1964 pg.1*)**

<b>Selected Unemployment Rates</b>	<b>May 1964</b>	<b>April 1964</b>	<b>March 1964</b>	<b>May 1963</b>
Total (All Civilian Workers)	5.1	5.4	5.4	5.9
Men 20 years and over	3.6	3.8	3.9	4.4
Women 20 years and over	5.0	5.4	5.6	5.4
Married men (wife present)	2.6	2.9	2.9	3.3
Experienced wage and salary earners	4.8	5.0	5.1	5.5
Labour force time lost through unemployment or part time work*	5.7	5.9	5.8	6.5

\*Man hours lost by the unemployed and those on part time work for economic reasons as a per cent of total man hours potentially available to the civilian labour force.

In a Memorandum for the President in September 1965, Wirtz describes how recent reports show an unprecedented increase in new job opportunities, underscoring the direct correlation between education and employment. The statistics of the unemployment show that nearly half of the reduction in unemployment took place with those who were unemployed for 15 weeks or more. Long term unemployment was reduced by 21% (*LBJPL: 015, 1965, pg.1*). For Wirtz, originally sceptical of the education plans Johnson had put in place to increase employment; this must have been an astonishing achievement for the administration. In a later report from Wirtz to the President, unemployment was still decreasing. Unemployment had dropped to 4.0%, the lowest level America had seen since early 1957. Unemployment for adult men was down 500,000 from the previous year and the unemployment for women was now at its lowest level for 8 years and down 150,000 from January 1965. In one year, the unemployment rate for teenagers, the demographic Johnson targeted specifically, was down to 12.0% from 15.2%. The unemployment figure for Non-whites, mainly African Americans, who made up 1/5 of the unemployed population, now stood at 7.0% from 9.0% the year previous. (*LBJPL: 016, 1966*) Wirtz concluded his report with a bold and underlined statement that '**January employment stood at 71.2 million, up 2.2 million over January 1965 and the highest January employment level in our history**' (*LBJPL: 017, 1966, pg.1*). This was not the only figure to break records during the Johnson Administration one example being that the hourly and weekly wages of factory workers set an all-time high (*LBJPL: 018, 1966*).

## ***Immigration***

The Civil Rights Movement brought with it a multifaceted debate of equality not just focused on voting rights or employment. Immigration was also a very potent issue as the system in American at the time was inherently racist. The National Origins Formula was an immigration law introduced in 1921 as the Emergency Quota Act. The formula meant that immigration into America was limited to meet quotas. These quotas were established on the basis of the existing population of a particular ethnicity already in America in 1910. The Act was a preventative measure taken to stop unskilled workers entering the country and overall, to maintain the ethnic composition of America. In 1924 the Act was amended to include the Asian Exclusion Act which flatly banned people of Asian origin from migrating to America, completely counter-intuitive to the American premise that all men are created equal.

The changes that were made to immigration policy in 1965 are largely accredited to Kennedy's efforts in 1963 and his work with the Anti-Defamation League during his senatorial years, but like many of the Kennedy's social policies they either received very little interest or were not achieved during his short presidency. Kennedy had been an advocate of immigration reform for years and wrote 'A Nation of Immigrants' in his senatorial years as part of the Anti-Defamation League (*Kennedy, 1959*). As it would be more damaging and unfair to immediately change the system as it would be to just leave it as it is, Kennedy proposed that each countries immigration quota be reduced by 1/5 every year, for 5 years. The quota numbers that would be released would then be collected in a reserve pool where the first come, first served basis would be in action. Kennedy also proposed that 50% of this reserve pool be used to admit immigrants with special or useful skills and education, another 30% would be used to admit the unmarried sons and daughters of US citizens who would otherwise not be eligible for citizenry. The remaining 20% would be used to admit the spouses or children of resident aliens. However, the bill received little if any attention from Congress and Kennedy was never able to see his ideas of a new immigration policy come to fruition. President Kennedy initially sent Congress a draft bill of the proposed changes and to abolish the national quota system. Hearings were held by the Senate immigration and neutralisation subcommittee however, no bill was ever reported (*Congressional Quarterly, 1965*).

In July 1964, Johnson began to put pressure on the issue once again and eventually hearings were scheduled for immigration reform. The Feighan subcommittee began hearings in July (*Congressional Quarterly, 1965*). While the Bill was subject to a large amount of opposition by both congress and the people of America, it was finally passed and the

Immigration and Nationality Act was finally signed into law in 1965 by Johnson outside the Statue of Liberty. While it could be argued that immigration reform was more down to the efforts of JFK and later his brother Ted, it is important to take into account the congressional consideration of the Act, the main opposition of immigration reform was from the south. With this in mind, and the fact Kennedy had previously tried to instigate immigration reform and failed; would Kennedy have ever overcome these obstacles and signed the new immigration bill himself? While this question can never be answered for sure, it is only fair to say that Johnson's connections in the south and legislative skill gave him a distinct advantage. Johnson made these comments when signing the Act into law;

‘Our present law fails in compassion by keeping families apart,  
Our present law fails in justice by choosing immigrants—not on the basis of their  
character and capacity – but by the accident of birth or origin.

Our present law fails to serve the nation by excluding men and women whose  
skills and talent could contribute much to American progress.

I intend to eliminate these failures. Our bill will permit families to reunite on  
American soil. I will bring people to these shore regardless of origin, if they want to  
come they can’ (*LBJPL: 019, Johnson, 1965*).

Immigration reform is a controversial subject as it has not come without some disadvantages; the overall effect of immigration reform was far larger in scale than the administration had predicted. When signing the bill Johnson also made these comments

‘This is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions....It will  
not reshape the structure of our daily lives or add importantly to either our wealth or  
our power’ (*LBJPL: 020, Johnson, 1965*).

The demographic of America has dramatically changed since 1965 and the issue of identity has been a great source of debate, however, the diversity and opportunity that immigration reform has offered to people around the world and the American people has been vast, not to mention the inherently discriminatory quota policy is no longer a problem for those seeking a better life in America.

### ***Civil Rights***

A prime example of Johnson's undoubted legislative talent is the Civil Rights bill, a bill fervently opposed by many. Undoubtedly, Johnson's greatest achievement was guiding the Civil Rights Bill through Congress, in no way was it an easy task either. Many would argue that it was Kennedy who put the Civil Rights legislative plan together and therefore the praise would lay with Kennedy, however, although Kennedy's intentions were to get the bill through; the reality was that he was unable to. Johnson was not merely trying to get the bill passed to win votes and show people he was worthy of being president. He fought for the rights of Black Americans and other minorities because he had a deep belief in the equality of Americans and that all men are created equal (*Kearns Goodwin, 1976*). Johnson managed to overcome an 83 day filibuster and signed the bill into law on 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1964. In 1965 Johnson commented to an aide that 'Kennedy couldn't have got the Ten Commandments through Congress' (*Sundquist, 2009, pg. 216*).

### ***Environmental Policy***

The environmental legislation is not a topic that is usually addressed within the existing literature on the Johnson Presidency. 'Unfortunately, much of the existing historical literature does not do justice to the Johnson period with respect to the environment (*Lerner, pg 189, 2012*). However, it is an area in which Johnson had a great deal of involvement and the effects of the legislation that the Johnson Administration put in place made great strides in the regulation of pollution and the preservation of natural habitats and beauty spots in America. Not only did he improve the environment in America for generations to come, but he was determined to make National Parks and areas of natural beauty accessible to as many Americans as possible. LBJ was not alone in his quest to preserve and protect the wildlife, beauty and natural resources of America; his wife Lady Bird Johnson also had a large role to play in the various Beautification Acts and environmental policies (*Lerner, 2012*). The environmental legislation was all part of Johnson's Great Society and it included legislation such as the Clear Air, Water Quality and Clean Water Restoration Acts and Amendments. The Wilderness Act of 1964, Land and Water Conservation Act 1965, Solid Waste Disposal Act 1965, Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act 1965, National Historic Preservation Act 1966, Endangered Species Act of 1966, National Trails System Act 1968, Wild and scenic Rivers Act 1968, Aircraft Noise Abatement Act 1968, National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

One of the most significant policies that Johnson was able to implement was the clean water acts and amendments. At the point of Johnson Presidency there was little restriction on what could be thrown into rivers, especially in urban areas where rivers were 'flowing red with blood from slaughterhouses (*Johnson, 1965*). Johnson wanted to bring water pollution to an end. Up until this point there had been a laissez faire attitude towards pollution, but Johnson declared that 'There is no excuse for paper mills pouring sulphuric acid into the lakes and the streams of the people of this country. There is no excuse—and we should call a spade a spade—for chemical companies and oil refineries using our major rivers as pipelines for toxic waste. There is no excuse for communities to use other people's rivers as a dump for their raw sewage (*Johnson, 1965*). In a memo to Jack Valenti, Johnson's aide, Walter Pozen, Assistant Secretary to the Interior, describes some the quality of some of the lakes, he describes that at Mockley Point, Maryland 'this is the area where most of the debris, garbage and old tiers wash ashore', he then goes on to describe that at Mason Neck, Virginia the effects of the Washington Sewage Discharge are clear with 'a thick mat of green algae on the surface and dead fish' (*LBJPL: 023, 1965*).



Johnson signed into law around 300 environmental measures resulting in the most legislation of its kind passed by Congress in 187 years (*Lerner, 2012*). On the other hand, the Great Society environmental policy was, again, not just about implementing laws. In reference to Hargrove's comments of legislative victories being the backbone of Johnson's Great Society (*Hargrove, 1974*), the ideas and policies that came out of the Great Society were for the purpose of changing the mind frame of American society, although Johnson is focusing on sticking to old American values of looking after the land, new industry and technology meant that a new way of thinking about the environment and finding a balance between allowing industry to thrive and yet still preserving the land and resources that America has must be of the utmost importance. 'Our conservation must be not just the classic conservation of protection and development, but a creative conservation of restoration and innovation' (*LBJPL: 024, 1965*). Johnson also pledged his support to the International Hydrological Decade, this was a worldwide effort to advance knowledge on water related issues (*Lerner, 2012*). This was not a piece of legislation; it was a commitment to the advancement of knowledge and therefore an indication of how Johnson wanted not only a good legislative record but to really understand how America and the world could conserve natural resources. Johnson's approach to the environment was very much in keeping with the liberal tone of the great society, while secretary Udall was somewhat of a traditionalist he praised Johnson extensively for his work as an 'environmental president'

A general conclusion—quite inescapably—Presidential leadership has changed the outlook of the nation with regards to conservation and has added vital “new dimensions.” No longer is peripheral action – the “saving” of a forest, a park, a refuge for wildlife – isolated from the mainstream. The total environment is now the concern and *new conservatism* makes man, himself, its subject. The quality of life is now the perspective of new conservation (*Udall, 1968 cited in Lerner 2012*).

Johnson's environmental policy is one aspect of the Great Society where the issues that are addressed here are not just significant to the poor in America. The environmental policy that was implemented in both urban and non-urban areas improved the quality of life for the vast majority. On the other hand, some of the policies that Johnson implemented had deep connections to the issues of equality and poverty. Johnson understood that not everybody had the means to appreciate the beauty of America's National Parks, even though this was central to his idea of improving the quality of life for American people. Johnson added 50 new National Parks as well as expanding those that already existed. He also introduced urban park sites within short distance of urban areas so as to improve accessibility to nature and open spaces even further (*Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, 2013*).

The 1960s was an era of environmentalism. Kennedy's efforts in the environmental arena were there, but somewhat insignificant and anything that Kennedy tried to get through Congress was lacking in the fundamental changes that the Johnson administration brought with it. 'His tragic death in 1963 leaves only speculation of how Kennedy would have fared as an "environmental president". However, his lack of congressional support for his legislative initiatives was, as Irwin Unger stated, "at most half-hearted." What he was able to accomplish was "either killed off or seriously watered down"' (*Lerner, 2012*).

In terms of institutional changes to the way Federal government regulated and implemented conservation, the strides made by the Johnson Administration created an environment in which consolidation of the of environmental agencies could be created. The struggle to reach a federal department that could bring together the various departments was not reached until 1970 when President Nixon proposed that the various agencies should be brought together as the Environmental protection Agencies, in order to regulate the National Environmental Act of 1969, signed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1960. Throughout the Johnson administration, there had been many attempts to consolidate the various departments as the creation of environmental policy was reliant on the coordination and communication of the departments with only the executive as a central figure to unite them. The Johnson period seemed a likely time for the reorganisation of the departments, however all attempts were halted by vested interests (*Lerner, 2012*). It was not until 1970 that there was a major change in the way in which regulatory policy was decided. Once regulatory policy was in the hands of the Courts, public lobbyist and environmental groups were now in the competition for the federal agencies attention and therefore business could no longer have a hold over the agencies like it once did (*McMahon, 2006*). On the other hand, that is not to say that institutional change did not occur during the Johnson Presidency to some extent. The use of Task Forces and specialist 'think tanks' were a relatively new concept and played a vital role in feeding the Executive with the information needed to develop environmental policy, the office of Science and Technology being the most influential task force in advising the President on environmental quality.

In summation environmental policy was a subject that was personal to Johnson and his wife. The revolutionary feeling of the 60s as a whole created an environment ripe for reform with more and more people starting to question the effects that industry was having on nature. Coupling this with Johnson's passion for preserving nature and his extraordinary legislative skill, Johnson was able to change the course of Environmentalism in America, whilst also improving the quality of life for many American by creating wider access to nature regardless

of location or class. While it was not until the 1970s that concrete institutional change was implemented, it is arguably the actions and efforts of the Johnson administration that paved the way for the eventual establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. Given President Nixon's lack of interest in the environment (*McMahon, 2006*), it could be argued that it was a crucial time for the environment as it is hard to say whether any greater action would have been taken to clean up the mess that industry was creating and also to preserve parts of America for future generations.

# Chapter Four

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## ***Leadership and the Johnson Treatment***

To understand Johnson's leadership style it is imperative to understand how he was able to behave in the manner he did. Johnson became powerful at a very young age, his political career just starting at the age of 28 in 1936. By October 1940 his stance in the political arena changed dramatically. At this point he was a Junior Congressman writing to other more senior Congressmen asking for moments of their time. The switchover happened when he realised he was a person who had access to two different groups of people. On one hand he was friends with Texan oil men, willing to pay for federal favours, on the other hand he was friends with North Eastern liberals who needed money for campaigns. Johnson managed to persuade these oil men to channel all money through him. Within weeks these North Eastern Liberals knew that Johnson was the man to go to for money. (Caro, 2003) With this money he gained power. Johnson once claimed, 'I do understand power, whatever else may be said about me, I know where to look for it, and how to use it.' (Caro, 2002, pg. ii) Robert Caro claims that Johnson was a legislative genius in his book *Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate*. Johnson became Senate Majority Leader in 1953 and is regarded by authors such as Caro and Dallek as the most proficient and effective Senate leader ever. Johnson was in his element as Majority Leader, this is mainly down to Johnson's skill and understanding of power. Caro describes Johnson at this time; 'The face of Senate leader Lyndon Johnson, in his forties for most of his senatorial years, was the face of a man confident, cocky, tough, the face of a man in the full flush of power (Caro, 2003, pg. xvii).

It is hard to distinguish whether the diversion of money through Johnson was a cause or effect of Johnson's extremely overbearing method of convincing or coercing people into his mind frame but Johnson was notorious for his methods of persuasion. Johnson knew that when he was announcing his poverty bill he would face opposition and therefore used his persuasion skills and connections to make sure the rest of his party would vote for the bill. In a conversation to George Mahon in 1964 Johnson aired his concerns

'I'll take a good look at it and I want you to take a good look now and help me on my poverty. That's what the republicans want to beat, that one bill and I'm going to take tax eaters and make tax payers out of them and I'm going to stop these damn

riots. I've got everyone these cities, all these young people with nothing to do, sitting around, and I have got them to agree today, no more demonstrations. And they're asking please, put these people to work, and I'm going to put 150,000 of them to work in 90 days' time on useful, hard-working projects. Teach them some discipline, and when to get up and how to work all day and in two years I'll have them trained, so they can at least drive a truck instead of sitting around a pool room all day'... 'And I've got.... Halleck said that he's going to have every Republican vote against it and this is the only bill that is strictly mine is the poverty bill.' (*Johnson, 1964*)

Here, Johnson is not only airing his concerns on the vote of the Republicans, he is also convincing Mahon to talk to every Democrat to vote for Johnson on this bill, in a later part of the conversation Johnson urges Mahon to help him until he eventually agrees. This was a common tactic of Johnson and regardless of the critics; it was a tactic that got results.

Johnson used both his imposing physique and robust personality to cajole his peers into submission. Pictures were often taken catching Johnson standing inches away from the faces of those he was trying to persuade, most of the time laughing and on occasion scowling. Johnson's methods were unique and arguably the reason he had such success with legislation. Caro claims that the Senate never worked more efficiently than when Johnson was majority leader. Arguably, the Johnson Treatment is the reason for this success. Johnson was able to over-power, overwhelm and outsmart his opponents or the people he wanted on his side due to his relentless energy and commitment to politics. This meant Johnson was switched on all the time and never missed a trick. As Valenti put it 'the LBJ work schedule was unending, a ceaseless collaboration of energy and sense of duty, was beyond any question' (*Valenti 1977, pg 123*).

## ***Great Society Failures***

Johnson brought in many programs to help the poor and disadvantaged in American but not all of the programs were successful and funding eventually became a problem for most. Author Robert Dallek talks of how the laws passed in 1964 were works in progress that never reached their full potential and that the War in Vietnam meant he never reached the promised land (*Dallek, 1998*).

Model Cities is an example of a Great Society project falling short of the mark. Model Cities was a program created alongside the Department of Housing and Urban Development and was the closest America had ever come to any sort of national policy for cities (*Lerner, 2012*). However, the program did not live up to what was expected and showed signs of weakness in the Great Society in light of the Vietnam War and the funding problems that came with it. The program was severely underfunded and was constantly subject to bickering between management. There were many issues that meant Model Cities did not work, but these problems boil down to the fact that the War in Vietnam had taken its toll and as Dallek suggests, the speed in which some of the Great Society Policies were rushed through, meant that the War on Poverty was indeed a work in progress, and one that could have benefited immensely from the money and attention that the Vietnam War stripped away from it (*Dallek, 1998*) (*Lerner, 2012*).

Another example of how the Great Society, and indeed Johnson himself, suffered was the backlash that was experience in light of Affirmative Action. The Civil Rights Act 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 were a great success for the Johnson Administration and marked a significant watershed in history and the Civil Rights Movement. For Johnson, however, equality was not enough. Johnson saw equality not just as the breaking down of laws that restricted them from fully taking part in the democratic system but offering preferential treatment in employment and education to make up for past oppression. Johnson felt a duty to make up for lost time; the years of oppression that African American had suffered were not going to go away. On the other hand, no part of the Civil Rights movement called for anything more than *equal* rights therefore the preferential treatment that Affirmative Action programs provided was more than anyone had asked for. While for many African Americans, civil rights was the opportunity to level the playing field and then work towards their goals, on their own merit, not through the preferential treatment of an Executive Order (*Fobanjong, 2001*). This understandably created a backlash, and the fact that Affirmative Action was brought about by an executive order, rather than through congress made it highly controversial. Not only was there a backlash from the African Americans who had fought so long for equality, not preferential treatment, but other white males were increasingly

frustrated at the Act. As the Executive order had eventually developed to include sex as a discriminatory factor, white males seemed to be the only group left out in the cold. Affirmative Action fell down in many areas. For a start it was seen as unconstitutional and worked against the Fourteenth Amendment which protects irrespective of race or sex. Not only was it unconstitutional but it ran in the opposite direction to the ethos of the Civil Rights Act (*Fobanjong, 2001*).

While there is no doubt that Johnson got some aspect of the Great Society wrong, and many of the projects that he set up did not reach their full potential this is still not where the hegemonic cannon of literature stems from. As already stated, the negative and uneven evaluation of the Johnson Presidency largely stems from themes that are not as constructive in terms of evaluation as more explicit analysis of various aspects of his presidency would be.

## **Conclusions**

Today, there is evidence to suggest that it is deemed acceptable to enter into a state of amnesia when assessing the legacy of Johnson. It is also apparent that simply summing up his time in office as a 'tragedy' is common among literature and therefore this has transpired into the everyday assessment of Johnson. The Vietnam War, the Kennedy Assassination and Imperial Presidency are issues that are synonymous with his name. While many do regard Johnson as one of the most progressive social reformers of the century, his legacy, as we have seen, is overcome with negativity. In 2008, Joseph Califano, one of Johnson's aids who worked closely with him on many Great Society projects made a speech at the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. The speech was positive; it was a speech that addresses the same issues that are reflected in this paper and underlines the injustice of Johnson's Legacy.

'The tragedy of Vietnam has created a dark cloud obscuring the full picture of Lyndon Johnson's Presidency. Without downplaying in any way the tragedy of the Vietnam War, I am convinced that to make Lyndon Johnson the invisible President—particularly for Democrats to indulge such amnesia as politically correct—is unfair not so much to him, but to our nation and its future' (*LBJPL:021, 2008*).

During the Presidential campaigns in 2008, Hilary Clinton made a comment that shocked the nation by referencing that it took a President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, to pass the Civil Right Act of 1964. The outrage was widespread across the nation, as if Clinton had done something more outrageous than correctly reciting a historical event (*Mackenzie, 2008*). While many saw this as an issue of race and a way of downplaying the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, the real issue in the scandal is the willingness to disregard Johnson's efforts to overcome the filibusters and use his extraordinary power and talent to once and for all pass the legislation that the Civil Rights Movement had worked so hard for. Califano commented on the incident in his speech saying that 'she broke the taboo and mentioned President Johnson' there was instant shock and retort against the comment and 'Lyndon Johnson was put back in his place as the invisible President of the twentieth century' (*LBJPL, 022, Califano, 2008*).

An article in the Huffington Post also gave a rare glimpse of vibrant praise for Johnson in response to comments made by Republican Paul Ryan,



"We have spent \$15 trillion from the federal government fighting poverty," Said Rep. Paul Ryan on Fox News last month, "and look at where we are, the highest poverty rates in a generation, 15 percent of Americans live in poverty".

Ryan is speaking on behalf of millions of Americans who believe that the War on Poverty was a failure, when in fact it's one of the greatest success stories in our nation's history (*Orlando, 2013*).

The comments in Orlando are related to the comparative poverty rates that stood at 50% in parts of the country before the War on Poverty. The fact remains that poverty was not eradicated; complete eradication of poverty through any policy by any leader is a far-fetched and ultimately impossible goal in a capitalist system. We do know, however, that for many poor and underprivileged Americans, their chances of a better education, medical care and equality were significantly improved through the Great Society.

The resistance to recognising Johnson as a great president of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is understandable, for many a product of the Vietnam conflict still present in the nation's memory. The war was of course an event that can never be ignored. However, it is unfair to tar all aspect of Johnson's time in office with the same brush. Today, there is no greater example of how Johnson has influenced American society and created more opportunity for American people than that of the current President. The fact that Johnson was missed out of Obama's speech in 2008 is not surprising when considering the pattern of historical amnesia that has developed throughout the years; it is however surprising that *Obama* should forget Johnson as Obama's Presidency is an intrinsic part of Johnson's legacy.

Johnson's skill as a legislator is something that very few, if any, could criticise. Johnson clearly had the ability to push through bills and policies that many other experienced politicians and even presidents would struggle to push through. The one thing that is questionable is the morality of his methods. Was it Johnson's abrasive and sometimes forceful manner that meant he got his own way? Or was it the experience and confidence he had gained throughout the years that meant he could duck and dive through the filibusters to get to his goal. However, the literature on the Johnson presidency, primarily the secondary literature, is not always focused on the success of the policies; the theme that is most common in the secondary literature is the theme of personality and Johnson's apparent preoccupation with power. This has resulted in some of the more positive aspects of Johnson's presidency, such as his legislative skill, being turned into the reasons he failed. For example, when discussing the speed and efficiency in which he was able to pass

legislation, Hargrove claims that this was only a product of Johnson's attempts to show a good legislative box score (*Hargrove, 1974*). However, this is not the only issue. The secondary literature is not just creating a false image of the Johnson presidency purely through what it is saying, but rather what it is not saying. The lack of detail in the secondary literature is an issue, as we can see from the archival analysis in this thesis; there is more to the Johnson Presidency than what the secondary literature is explaining. Arguably, if the author was to include more detail of the Great Society in their books, it would alter the tone of the book drastically, no longer relying on the shock value of describing Johnson as the power hungry and borderline psychotic Imperial President. While there is no denying that the Great Society had its downfalls, it is significant that it is not the description of the failed policies that set the tone of the secondary literature, it is the description of the man himself and his psychology that dominate the literature.

### ***Reflections on the Research***

Throughout this thesis there were challenges and issues that had to be overcome, the first of which being the issue of Vietnam. Vietnam is a very important aspect of the Johnson Presidency and is in many ways a sensitive topic. While it is extremely important that Vietnam is not undervalued in this reassessment; this thesis does steer away from the issue for the purposes of re-evaluating Johnson without following the biographical cannon most literature follows. The main issue is striking the right balance between including Vietnam in the appropriate proportion, and not letting it overshadow the other aspects of Johnson's time in office. After conducting the archival research that features in this thesis, it was important that care was taken to present the data and the literature as evenly as possible and without being too biased. It was important to highlight the fact that Johnson's Presidency was indeed plagued by various issues and this is also taken into account when assessing the hypothesis.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that a hegemonic biographical narrative has developed predominantly through the secondary literature on the Presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson. By using Narrative Inquiry it has been possible to establish how this narrative has developed through the use of primary literature and the experiences and opinions of the author themselves. This has been very useful in terms of gaining an overall insight into the literature as it allows the reader to compare and contrast the opinions and theories on Johnson over a broader scope of literature. This, in turn, has highlighted the key, and rather negative, themes of the work and reaffirmed the notion that a biographical cannon has developed. By using Archival Research as a secondary research method it is possible to challenge this views and key themes that are established within the literature in question. We can see from the archival section of this thesis, that it is possible to look deeper into his presidency and understand some of the intricacies that were part of the Great Society. By looking further into the development of the Great Society and examining certain aspects of his social policy with greater detail, it is apparent that there are other elements of the Johnson Presidency that portray a different side of the story. At this point, it is apparent that the archival data is contradicting the key themes of the literature, therefore proving a conclusion to the interrelated hypothesis that a hegemonic biographical cannon has developed, and that this view can be challenged by using archival research. This is very significant as the legacy of Johnson is influenced greatly by literature and when this literature is somewhat under developed, so is Johnson's legacy.

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