

This Day in History... August 27, 1908

Birth of President Lyndon B. Johnson

America's 36th President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, was born on August 27, 1908, in Stonewall, Texas. President Johnson promoted a "Great Society" and signed many initiatives into law aimed at civil rights, public broadcasting, health, education, the arts, and public services.

As a child, Johnson knew he wanted a more prosperous future and even proclaimed in school at the age of 12 that he would someday be President of the United States. After working a variety of odd jobs, he was admitted to Southwest Texas State Teachers College. He was a good student teacher and was assigned to teach at a small Hispanic school. Johnson thrived there, pushing the students, and giving them hope and pride in their success that they had never had before.

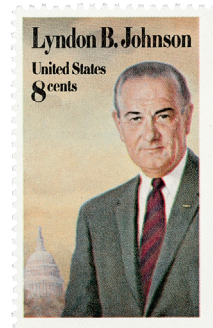
While Johnson proved to be an excellent teacher, the political work he did in his free time had sparked something in him and he knew he found his calling. After helping a family friend with his political aspirations, Johnson was made aide to US Congressman Richard Kelberg in 1931. Johnson took great pride in his job and stood out among the young people in Washington. He studied every aspect of congressional protocol and made sure every letter from Kleberg's constituents was answered. After being appointed the Texas director of the National Youth Administration, Johnson set his eyes on Congress. He won the election at just 28 years old and quickly won federal housing projects and dams for his district. Among these accomplishments was the arrival of electricity to the area where he grew up, which Johnson claimed was his proudest achievement.

The US entered World War II shortly after and Johnson requested an officer's commission into the Naval Reserve. He was then made congressional inspector of the war in the Pacific, allowing him to keep his seat in the House. Johnson flew one bombing mission during the war that earned him a Silver Star for serving under fire. In 1949, Johnson was elected to the Senate, an office to which he had long aspired. He proved to be one of the most powerful senators in the country, being named the Democratic whip (party leader's assistant) during his second year. He served as both minority leader (when the Democrats lost control in the Senate) and majority leader (when they regained it in 1955).

Johnson added Medicare to Social Security as part of his Great Society in 1965.

In 1960, Johnson was selected as John F. Kennedy's running mate. He campaigned rigorously and it paid off – the election was the closest of the century. As vice president, Johnson oversaw the space program, made important decisions on military policy, and led the President's Committee for Equal Employment Opportunity. In November 1963, President Kennedy was campaigning for his reelection and visited Johnson's home state of Texas to garner support. However, the president was shot and killed during a motorcade as Johnson watched in horror just two cars behind. Shortly after, Johnson boarded Air Force One, took the oath of office, and traveled to Washington, made president out of tragedy.

Johnson believed the nation needed continuity following the tragedy, so he kept Kennedy's cabinet and was dedicated to carrying out his promises. President Johnson called on America to



Stamp issued on what would have been Johnson's 65th birthday.



In 1968, Johnson established the week of September 15 as Hispanic Heritage Week.

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work toward not just “the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society [that would] end poverty and racial injustice.” Of greatest concern to Johnson was providing for the underprivileged, monitoring natural resources, and protecting consumers. Johnson passed countless environmental protection laws and conservation measures.

Johnson passed the Immigration Act, which ended the national origins quota system that was previously used. He also created the National Endowments for the Arts Humanities and the new Highway Safety Act that set new standards for cars and roads. Additionally, Johnson created the Public Broadcasting Act, which established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) as well as the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR).

The president also provided federal funds for underprivileged students and remedial programs in poorer districts. Johnson managed to get funding for Catholic parochial schools, which no president had done before. And he created the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which cleaned up slums, established housing programs, and redeveloped inner cities.



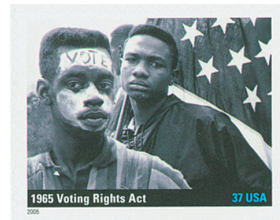
Johnson's popularity dropped due to his handling of the Vietnam War.

In addition to the Highway Beautification Act, spearheaded by his wife, Johnson created Medicare and Medicaid and expanded on Kennedy's program for the poor. His Head Start program provided early education for poor children. And the Legal Services Corporation gave legal help to those who could not otherwise afford it. Over the course of Johnson's presidency, government funding for the poor more than doubled, and proved effective. Millions of Americans brought themselves above the poverty line and the economy boomed. Johnson also sought to guarantee civil rights to African Americans. During his term, segregation was ended, voting rights were increased,

and racial discrimination in housing was outlawed. Despite these successes, race riots shook much of the nation, and this civil unrest became part of Johnson's legacy.

Another issue Johnson inherited from his predecessors was America's involvement in the Vietnam War. Though he had campaigned for peace and hoped to not escalate the war, the continued loss of American lives was too great. In early 1965 Johnson launched continued bombing of North Vietnam and called on additional troops to go ashore. As Johnson waged war halfway around the world, tensions brewed stateside. America was split, as many protested our involvement in the war, and the loss of thousands of lives.

Despite the successes he had with domestic issues, the race riots and war in Vietnam took their toll on President Johnson. He stunned voters and politicians alike when he announced that he would not seek reelection. He was in poor health by the time he left the White House and returned to his Texas ranch, where he prepared his memoirs and worked on establishing a presidential library. Johnson died on January 22, 1973, one day before the Paris Peace Accords that ended US involvement in Vietnam. It was also two days after what would have been the end of his second term if he had run in the election of 1968.



Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law, prohibiting racial discrimination in voting.



These stamps promoted Ladybird Johnson's Beautification of America initiative.

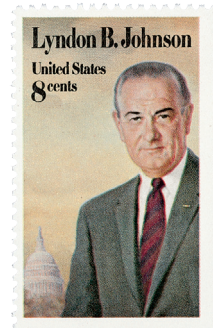
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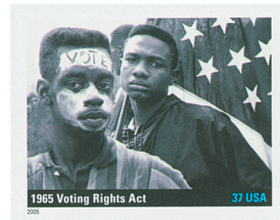
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