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A Tumultuous Tenure: The Presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Michael P. Jones
December 2010

Dr. Emmett Essin III
Dr. Elwood Watson
Dr. Stephen Fritz

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Republican, U.S. Congress, U.S. Senate

ABSTRACT

A Tumultuous Tenure: The Presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson

by

Michael P. Jones

This thesis is a work that focuses on how significant the press was to the success and failure of President Lyndon Baines Johnson. In the thesis, three aspects of the Johnson years are analyzed. The first chapter discusses the media's portrayal of Lyndon Johnson during the presidential campaign of 1964. The second chapter is an analysis of how the press reported on President Johnson concerning the issue of civil rights. The third chapter dissects the media's perception of Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam conflict.

The primary research used in the thesis is a culmination of polls, editorials, personal letters, and memos from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library. Through use of these sources and a number of secondary materials, one is able to witness the period in which the popularity of the Johnson Administration began to experience a downturn.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God, my family, and Ms. Hannah Reed. Because of your constant support and dedication, I have been blessed to fulfill my aspirations. Thank you for all of the time and sacrifice that each of you have provided.

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Thank you to Dr. Emmett Essin III for chairing my thesis and providing me with the needed and important guidance to see this project through to completion. I truly appreciate the wise counsel of Dr. Elwood Watson regarding the topic and research of this thesis. Thank you to Dr. Stephen Fritz for reading this thesis and providing crucial insight. In closing, I would like to thank the Department of History for endowing me with the knowledge that was required to accomplish this particular undertaking and enrich my overall approach to the study of History.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE AMERICAN PRESS AND TWENTIETH CENTURY
POLITICS

Perhaps no other segment of society was as altered by the media's modern technique of reporting as politicians. When Lyndon Baines Johnson entered Texan politics during the 1930s, he arguably understood this lesson better than most in his generation. Johnson had witnessed the way in which the press provided information about politics from an early age. In Southeast Texas politics had always been frequently discussed. Through stories covered by the national media, Johnson understood that the Great Depression provided a unique opportunity for Democrats to seize the control of the White House and increase their numbers in Congress.

During Johnson's campaign for U.S. Representative in 1936, the press noted that he was a New Deal Democrat. People across Texas excitedly supported Johnson because of his desire to better the lives of Texans as President Roosevelt was attempting to strengthen the nation. Lyndon Johnson used the press to his political advantage by offering voters an energy and determination that was all too often absent in most politicians of the age. Johnson inspired Texans to believe that their lives could be better if they just had proper assistance at the federal government level.

Through favorable newspaper articles and radio reports, Texans became much more impressed by the qualities that Lyndon Johnson had to offer as he advanced from the Legislative to the Executive branch of government. During Johnson's tenure as president, the American media's influence can be strongly witnessed through three definitive events. The press's reporting concerning the election of 1964, civil rights, and

the Vietnam conflict immensely altered the public's perception of the Lyndon Johnson White House. The style in which the media reported on the election of 1964 and civil rights during the early years of the Johnson Administration caused a large majority of Americans to support the president. While public approval ratings witnessed an increase during the early years of the conflict in Vietnam, it would be the one issue that would prove destructive for the Johnson presidency.

As Americans agonized over the loss of President Kennedy, an increase in support occurred for Lyndon Johnson. Many Americans offered the new president good sentiments and encouragement during the transition period that took place in late November 1963. As 1964 came into sight, the public continued to support the decisions of President Johnson. The press approved of President Johnson's domestic and foreign programs. News reports declared that Johnson was continuing the Kennedy initiative of furthering American prosperity. Indeed, the ideals of the New Frontier had not died alongside President Kennedy.

As the election of 1964 came into focus, few within the press doubted that Lyndon Johnson would lose. During the campaign of 1964, the press reported highly of President Johnson and caused the public to view him as an individual who related much better with the American public than his challenger from Arizona. Many elements of the press opted to denigrate the positions of Senator Goldwater as erratic and dangerous to America's position in the world. President Johnson was regarded as someone who understood the correct balance of force and diplomacy. In the end Johnson won the approval of the American public by an overwhelming majority that no incumbent had achieved prior to his administration.

Events throughout the South caused the press to focus much of its reporting on that portion of the nation. While the Kennedy Administration had worked to correct troubles for African Americans that were occurring in the southern region of the country, more action was required. Lyndon Johnson used the passing of President Kennedy to further a goal that no American leader had achieved since Franklin D. Roosevelt. Passage of numerous amounts of civil rights legislation advanced the popularity of Lyndon Johnson to record levels. While many presidents had feared the public reaction to such legislation, the majority within the press claimed that the nation could no longer afford to ignore the injustices being dealt to minorities. When President Johnson took the opportunity to increase the quality of life for all Americans regardless of their race, the media defended him with a barrage of editorials that only increased the public's sentiment for their leader.

The issue of communistic aggression resonated loudly within the thoughts of many Americans during the early and mid 1960s. The Cold War had many Americans fearful that an attack from an unfriendly European nation could occur at any moment. It had only been a little more than one year since the Cuban Missile Crisis took place and caused many individuals to feel insecure within the confines of the United States. An overwhelming percentage of Americans believed that communist nations could not be allowed to export their influence around the globe.

Prior presidential administrations had stated that the United States would support nations that opposed communism. President Johnson understood that his administration could not show weakness on the subject of communism. As the civil war concerning communism in Southeast Asia increased, the American media reported that South

Vietnam would not be able to defend itself against North Vietnam unless it was provided with significant support. President Johnson's belief that all people should have the ability to experience freedom led him to further United States involvement in that region of the world.

As the United States began to fully enter the Vietnam conflict, the media provided favorable coverage of the battles that were taking place. Americans believed that the United States Military would have no trouble defeating the oppressive forces of a primitive communist regime. The press reported that, while fighting was fierce, the American military was able to hold its territory and assist in the defeat of Viet Cong forces while incurring minimal casualties. To most Americans the actions underway in Southeast Asia were comparable to those that had been taken over a decade earlier in Korea.

During the next few years the American press began to report the conflict in an increasingly different format. Several within the media began to question the significance of South Vietnam to United States security. Coupled with increasing loss of life, many Americans began to feel uncomfortable with the situation in Southeast Asia. The president who had been hailed as a hero of the underprivileged began to be accused as a warmonger. Popularity ratings for the president suffered a severe decrease as the conflict carried on into 1968. At this point, the press were showing themselves to be anything but supportive of the president on matters of foreign policy.

While the mired years of the Johnson Administration do not cause one to question if there was change taking place within American society, the period does cause one to question what level of significance the press had on altering the public's perception of the

president. The 1960s do represent a moment in American history that was unlike other decades before. Not only did a break from tradition occur within the youth culture of the period but within the press as well. One can visibly notice how events the media reported on had a direct correlation as to how the American public reacted. Was it truly that the conflict in Vietnam was drastically unlike other American wars or was it that the press consciously chose to make its reservations publicly known?

CHAPTER 2

THE 1964 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

The presidential campaign of 1964 is considered to be among the most fascinating in the history of the United States. One may note that the campaign was unlike any other that many had witnessed over the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps what set the 1964 campaign apart from others of the century was the degree to which the press participated. Johnson wrote, “It stimulates me to be in the company of thoughtful people like yourself who do so much to inform the American people.”¹ Never before had the American media been so involved in a presidential campaign. The candidates of each party represented drastically opposing views of the nation’s political landscape. Each man posed a different political direction which would determine the direction of the nation’s future.

Few dates rival that of November 22, 1963. Likewise, few events caused Americans to feel as though their lives were being threatened by an outside entity. Prior to that tragic day, many American families lived in the comfort and security of the nation’s post-World War II era. Americans had sacrificed during the Great Depression and throughout the war years, but from the late 1940s onward, Americans enjoyed unprecedented levels of prosperity.

The assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy caused an uneasiness that reminded a large percentage of Americans that the nation was relatively unstable. Fearful Americans looked to their new leader, Lyndon Johnson, for condolence and leadership. Johnson seemed ready to respond. Johnson’s background demonstrated he was ready for

¹ Lyndon Johnson to E.L. Holland Jr., May 26, 1965, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 18.

the challenge. Lyndon Johnson had always known that the chance of assassination was a reality but never wished to inherit the office of president through the death of his predecessor. “Never once in those three years did I have any reason to believe that John Kennedy looked upon me as a liability.”² Johnson had long been a loyal Democrat when the youthful senator from Massachusetts proffered the running-mate position to him at the Democrat National Convention of 1960. Johnson accepted and the stage for the general election of 1960 was formed. Johnson had served the will of his nation as an ambassador who was determined to improve the image of the United States abroad. For all intents and purposes, Vice President Johnson accomplished the task with astounding precision. Serving as the head of NASA, Johnson witnessed the expansion of America’s space program. In a short matter of time, the leading figure from Texas had arrived on the national scene and his presence caused many individuals to feel honored that a man of such character was residing in the second most powerful position within the hierarchy of American government.

All the years of Johnson’s political ascendancy from Texas congressman to vice president had been observed by various elements of the national press. As a congressman, the media noted that Johnson was a New Deal style of Democrat who President Roosevelt could always count on for support. Johnson was written of favorably during his years as a Texas representative because of legislation that benefited his constituents, such as that which brought electricity to central Texas through the relationship with the Colorado River Authority.³ As Johnson took on his position in the Senate during the

² Lyndon B. Johnson, *Vantage Point* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 2.

³ Lower Colorado River Authority, “The History of the LCRA,” <http://www.lcra.org/about/overview/history/history2.html> (accessed August 25, 2010). The LCRA is a

Truman Administration and served on the Armed Services Committee, members of the press noted that he had a remarkable ability to create relationships with other members of Congress in order to procure needed legislation.

Throughout his years leading up to the presidency, Johnson had made defining strides to form positive relationships with many individuals within the media. While not always being completely transparent, Johnson had attracted the interest of a large number of the press. An article in *Life* magazine during his years in the U.S. Senate noted, “Lyndon Johnson is a tremendously persuasive man who rose to the top of the Senate heap through his ability to win allies in that highly competitive political arena, the Senate corridor.”⁴ The fact that he did not have the typical personality of a Washington DC bureaucrat was of particular interest to many. The overwhelming Texan personality that Johnson had developed over the course of many decades set him apart from his peers in Congress. His interactions with people from all elements of Washington DC society proved to be an intriguing task for those who were assigned to cover his actions while serving as majority leader of the Senate.⁵ In its history, the Washington DC press had encountered few politicians with the tenacity and wit of Lyndon Johnson.

Given all of the accomplishments Johnson had achieved in the U.S. Congress, it only appeared logical that he would decide to enter the 1960 Democrat Primary. It

government agency that provides electricity to a large percentage of the Midwest. During Johnson’s early career as a U.S. Congressman, he was able to secure legislation which ensured that people of his district would receive electricity.

⁴ Edward K. Thompson, “Lyndon Johnson has the Ball,” *Life*, January 1958, 19.

⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 119. The Washington D.C. press had witnessed Johnson’s varying degrees of personality during his tenure as majority leader of the U.S. Senate. “The Treatment”, as the press commonly referred to it, underscored Johnson’s willingness to manipulate members of congress, by almost any means necessary, in order to pass key pieces of legislation.

seemed as though Johnson was destined to run for president from the very beginning. Many political speculators were surprised when Senator Kennedy acquired enough of the electoral vote to not only defeat Lyndon Johnson but also the very well liked Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. In the end, very few within the media predicted that Johnson would be considered for the running-mate position. Johnson and Kennedy were two entirely different entities on a large number of topics. One came from wealth and represented the northeastern liberal establishment, while the other was raised in poverty and had made sacrifices to acquire success. Together, Kennedy and Johnson had the ability to not only relate with Americans of differing social and economic conditions but craft legislation that would improve life for all citizens.⁶

Barry Goldwater had arrived in Washington DC on the coattails President Eisenhower's 1952 victory over Senator Adlai Stevenson. Much of Eisenhower's political philosophy was based on that of a moderate Republicanism. Eisenhower did not embrace solely conservative principals because he believed that certain facets of New Deal and Fair Deal legislation were beneficial to a large percentage of Americans. Eisenhower did not intend to overturn a vast amount of the legislation that had been passed by the two previous Democrat administrations. The decision to continue several policies of the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations were welcomed by members of his own party. The programs had been viewed as progressive, and he had no interest in witnessing the demise of legislation that had been responsible for easing the harsh experiences of the Great Depression.

⁶While many political analysts did not expect the pairing of Kennedy and Johnson for the 1960 Democratic ticket, it proved to be a winning combination. Not just for victory in the general election of 1960, but for the impoverished who were in desperate need of economic assistance. Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *A Life: LBJ* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), 245.

Senator Goldwater, however, was not an Eisenhower Republican. “Barry Goldwater’s national reputation had its roots in his public confrontations with the American labor movement beginning in the late 1950’s.”⁷ The Republican Party of the era was not truly representative of many of Goldwater’s beliefs.

While many believed that there was not a difference between members of the Republican Party, Goldwater’s victory is representative of this mindset because he was elected based on the momentum of the Eisenhower name. Goldwater arrived in Washington DC having more respect for the political views of Vice President Nixon than he had for those of President Eisenhower. Throughout his first term, Goldwater’s embrace of conservatism caused many Republicans across the country to take notice of the Arizonian senator. 1958 has been recorded as one of the worst years for the Republican Party due to the fact that many lost their congressional seats. Forty-eight Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives and thirteen Republicans in the Senate lost their congressional races. The nation was experiencing a recession and many Americans blamed the lack of action desired to correct the matter on the Republican Party.

Two years later, the political tide was still not cresting in favor of the Republican Party. Vice President Richard Nixon was defeated by Senator John Kennedy and the Republicans failed to gain a majority in either house of Congress. Senator Goldwater’s influence, however, had increased among certain elements of the Republican Party. Goldwater had been traveling and giving speeches in favor of Nixon. At the same time, he was expressing his beliefs in conservative politics. Many within the press believed that

⁷ William F. Buckley Jr., *Flying High* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 59.

Goldwater was doing more to increase the role of conservatism within the Republican Party than building a strong block of support for his fellow Republican, Richard Nixon.

Conservative Republicans desired to see the Arizona senator take on a larger role in the national scene. College students in the Northeast and Midwest began to unite in favor of drafting Goldwater as a nominee for the Republican nomination against Richard Nixon. When Senator Goldwater rejected the notion, many of the students sought to have Goldwater added to the ticket as Nixon's running-mate. Nixon was not oblivious to the undercurrent of support for the Arizona senator. Because the conservative brand had been awarded to Senator Joseph McCarthy, Nixon understood the dangers of directly relating himself with a fervent anti-communist conservative. He also understood that winning the primary was one objective, but winning the presidency was something entirely different. Richard Nixon maintained the belief that when running for the nomination of any given party, one must do all that is possible to appeal to the base. After receiving the nomination, one had to then position the campaign in a moderate direction so as to acquire independents and some members of the opposing party.⁸

While Goldwater had objected to running for the Republican nomination in 1960, he did not oppose the notion of being selected as the vice presidential running-mate on the Republican ticket. With the release of *Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater's success had ascended to an all-time high. "The book debuted at number ten on *Time* magazines best-seller list on 6 June, and number fourteen on the *New York Time's* list on

⁸Vice President Nixon understood that there was a growing desire within the Republican Party to embrace conservatism. In order to ensure that the party would unite behind him, Richard Nixon strived to appeal to all types of Republicanism. John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 34.

26 June, alongside books by authors like James Michener, Leon Uris, and Allen Drury.”⁹

Some within the media began to notice how the release of *Conscience of a Conservative* and Goldwater’s active role within the Republican Party coincided with one another.

After the book’s release, conservatives discussed who could have actually authored the work.¹⁰ While many had been familiar with Goldwater’s opposition to labor unions, it

was widely believed that the senator’s brand of conservatism would never find acceptance among the American public. Why would a nation that had benefited from liberal programs suddenly reverse course and want to have government entirely out of their personal lives?

Conscience of a Conservative had sold well; its author had garnered a following but failed to capture the Republican nomination for vice president in 1960. “Now, from Stanford to MIT, from Michigan State to Washington and Lee, Barry Goldwater has, in the past two years, become the American politician most sought by student bodies, and everywhere he goes, whether out of interest or curiosity, he finds packed halls.”¹¹ Nixon had selected a moderate by the name of Henry Cabot Lodge as his running-mate. After taking the necessary precautions, the highly attuned politician Richard Nixon then went on to lose the 1960 presidential campaign. The nation did not appear to reject the notion of moderate Republicanism as much as it did the Republican Party altogether. Had Nixon

⁹ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 63.

¹⁰ While William F. Buckley Jr. was ruled out, his brother-in-law L. Brent Bozell, was not. Bozell was notorious for remaining silent and not taking credit, but those around the offices of National Review knew that Senator Barry Goldwater had not written the book. Buckley, 54.

¹¹ Osborn Elliott, “Conservatism in the U.S. and its Leading Spokesman,” *Newsweek*, April 1961, 28.

chosen Goldwater as his running-mate, it is highly possible that it would not have positively affected the outcome of the campaign.¹²

After the Republican losses of 1960, conservatives and liberals looked to the future for the next level of both political ideologies. Several pundits believed that Goldwater was taking the lead for the nomination in 1964. At the same time, others believed that moderate Republicans, such as Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney, or William Scranton, would be strong enough to resist the surge of Goldwater conservatism. By 1962 the press began to discuss the likelihood of a matchup between Kennedy and Goldwater. "So far as LIFE is concerned, a review of his stated positions on foreign affairs finds us agreeing with some, opposing some, and on most of them needing to hear more."¹³ The two had served for several years together in the Senate and were also personal friends. Senator Goldwater, while being among the most loyal opposition, personally enjoyed the thought of running against his long-time friend from the Senate.

Kennedy and Goldwater had been notorious opponents of one another's legislation during their years in the Senate. However, politics as usual had not altered the course of life outside the halls of the capitol. Kennedy invited Goldwater to the White House for a social gathering. The two often engaged in conversations about the office of president. President Kennedy was not oblivious to the fact that Senator Goldwater was preparing to take a run against him for the office in 1964. Once, Kennedy even questioned Goldwater

¹² Senator Kennedy caused many Americans to believe that the nation could achieve unprecedented success in the new decade with the leadership of the Democrat Party. The Eisenhower years had proven to be mediocre to a number of Americans and Richard Nixon was believed to be a continuation of the policies of the 1950's. James L. Sundquist, *Politics and Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1973), 470.

¹³ George P. Hunt, "Goldwater's Foreign Policy: Let's Hear More," *Life*, November 1963, 4.

as to why he would consider a run for the office given all the hardships that it seemed to attract.¹⁴

While Goldwater had sought to run against Kennedy in 1964, he found the reality of November 22, 1963, difficult to accept. After the assassination of President Kennedy, Goldwater questioned the validity of running for the office. To many around the middle aged senator, the assassination of a beloved president seemed to end the thrill of the upcoming campaign. Goldwater had also served in the Senate with Lyndon Johnson. While Goldwater opposed Kennedy, he absolutely disapproved of the political ideology of Lyndon Johnson. Johnson and Goldwater had similar backgrounds. Both men were from southwestern states. Each had been born into poverty and had achieved personal success with the assistance of their families. The two appeared to have a tremendous adoration and appreciation for their respective states. With so much in common, it left many within the press to question how two individuals could develop severely opposing political perspectives.¹⁵ However, it became clear that similarities could not prevent the possibility of differing political ideologies.

The Great Depression was still relevant to many adult voters during the early 1960s. Johnson and Goldwater were young adults during the Great Depression. Each man made personal sacrifices. Goldwater was asked to leave college and return home to run the family department store in Phoenix. While Johnson did attend Southeast State Texas Teachers College, he left before graduating and devoted a year to teaching Hispanic

¹⁴ *Mr. Conservative*, DVD, directed by C.C. Goldwater (2006; Burbank, CA: HBO Documentary Films, 2006).

¹⁵ While Johnson and Goldwater had experienced similar western backgrounds, the two were politically polar opposites. Johnson believed that the government should serve as a means to better the quality of life for all individuals, especially the poor. Goldwater believed that the individual was able to succeed with less government intervention. *Mr. Conservative*, 2006.

children who came from impoverished backgrounds.¹⁶ During the campaign a well known Texan wrote a book which publicly criticized Johnson on various issues. “At times he contends that the basis of his philosophy is what is best for America. But what is best for America seems always equated with what is best for Lyndon Johnson. He is skilled in double-talk.”¹⁷ While a large percentage of the media’s reporting was favorable towards the president, there were detractors such as William F. Buckley and J. Evetts Haley who served to create fervor among conservatives.

While both Johnson and Goldwater gained favor through noble actions, the means by which such actions were accomplished were based on different ideologies. Goldwater devoted much of his time to insuring that all of his employees were able to maintain their jobs at the family department store during the depression. Johnson had developed a sympathy for minorities who had little to no hope at receiving a quality education while their parents labored each and every day. For Goldwater, the belief that government functioned best when it did not interfere within the affairs of business best suited his personal feelings. For Johnson, the personal view was the polar opposite. Johnson believed that the federal government could be used as a force for good. If enough representatives witnessed the awful plight of migrant workers and their families, there would be a possibility to instigate necessary change.¹⁸

¹⁶ Prior to graduating from Southeast State Texas Teachers College, Lyndon Johnson taught impoverished Hispanic children. *American Experience: LBJ*, Produced by David Grubin (1991; Hollywood, CA: PBS Home Video, 2006).

¹⁷ J. Evetts Haley, *A Texan Looks At Lyndon* (Canyon, Texas: Palo Duro Press, 1964), 15.

¹⁸ Johnson had witnessed poverty in Texas and other areas of the country. He believed the most prosperous nation in the world should not have individuals who were in need of bare necessities. *American Experience: LBJ*, 2006.

At the beginning of the presidential campaign, anyone who was remotely attentive to the news noticed a drastic difference in the way each candidate was portrayed. The press had witnessed the events of the last several years. The press may have not expected Johnson to become president in the manner by which he did, but while serving out the final year of the Kennedy Administration, Lyndon Johnson had proven he was capable of delivering the progressive legislation the nation was seeking.¹⁹ Decades of legislative experience had proven beneficial to a nation that was witnessing severe domestic strife.

Senator Goldwater had not been depicted in the same manner as President Johnson. Many within the press wrote critically concerning Goldwater's positions because they did not appear to have the same level of merit. For the past four years, the Democrats had crafted policies effectively. Their policies had not been detrimental to the well being of the nation as Goldwater had commented. Johnson was determined to prove that he was undeniably capable of dealing with the troubles that faced the United States domestically and internationally. As he served out the term of John F. Kennedy, Johnson proved to many Americans that he was the best qualified individual to continue the work that his predecessor had begun.²⁰

The major problem with Goldwater was not that he was inexperienced, just that he lacked the necessity of providing detail about his agendas. Being that Goldwater was staunchly opposed to communist nations, how could he hope to form new relations with

¹⁹ Most notably, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Johnson was able to accomplish what Kennedy had failed to achieve. Through the use of his predecessor's assassination, Johnson transformed the means by which race was accepted by the nation. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 211.

²⁰ There were few individuals who could have hoped to fulfill the initiatives of the Kennedy Administration. Lyndon Johnson understood the importance of continuing the domestic programs that President Kennedy had begun. Johnson, 88.

other countries to increase goodwill around the globe? President Johnson wrote, “Would we cast aside thirty years of progress and reform and return to the days of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, or would we strengthen and build on the programs of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy?”²¹ How could American prosperity be expected to continue if the role of government was vastly reduced? Many within the press believed that Senator Goldwater was offering speaking points drafted by members of the conservative movement instead of substantive solutions. Even if Goldwater’s assertions were factually based and the scope of government should be reduced, how would a nation with a sterling economy believe their personal lives could be better by reversing the steps that had been taking over the course of the past three decades?

As the campaign began to take shape, each candidate expressed how his particular platform would best benefit the nation. For members who were assigned to report on the presidential campaign, it provided the opportunity to observe the personal attributes of the candidates as well. Many individuals knew the differing positions of each candidate, but even more were unaware as to what types of people were running for the position of highest office in the land. Like the campaign of 1960, members of the press would have the ability to analyze the candidates concerning their personal attributes.

As a man who had courted the press consistently, many believed that Johnson would be the most entertaining candidate. When traveling as vice president, “He insisted on a seven-foot bed to accommodate his six-foot-three-and-a-half-inch frame, a special shower head that emitted a needlepoint spray, cases of Cutty Sark, and boxes of ballpoint

²¹ Johnson, 103.

pens and cigarette lighters with L.B.J. inscribed on them travel with him to Dakar.”²² He was well known for inviting members of the press to his ranch in Texas. The ranch provided an escape from the aristocratic atmosphere of the White House. Many commented that President Johnson seemed to be the most comfortable while on retreat to his private ranch. When in the presence of the media, Johnson never seemed to mind what reporters around him thought about his personal habits. Driving members of the press around the massive acreage of the Johnson Ranch in his Lincoln Continental was not unusual. What did catch many reporters by surprise was his driving around the ranch in the same Lincoln while significantly intoxicated. Many times, Johnson would not only drive while considerably inebriated but offer members of the press who were along for the ride a round of bourbon that was stored in the dash of his car.

While at the ranch, Johnson would also take time to insure that the press was treated with authentic Texan hospitality. First Lady Claudia Johnson would serve large meals that typically consisted of her special dish of “LBJ Chili”. For those who sought to intimately know Lyndon B. Johnson, the ranch was the best place to accomplish the aspiration. Members of the press often received the same amount of treatment that foreign dignitaries were provided on their stays at the family ranch. The press was able to capture personal moments of the president taking strolls by the Pedernales River or around the hill country. Whether or not the images were politically motivated, they did appear to have a considerable impact on the public. Throughout the nation, pictures of Johnson riding horses, feeding cattle, or playing with his beagle caused people to feel that their president was not a member of the elite ruling class but much more like an ordinary individual. The pictures that were printed in Time and Life magazines caused the public

²² Dallek, 12.

to believe that Johnson adhered to a simplistic way of life, much like those of many Americans. In many ways the pictures related to average citizen in a way that other presidents, such as Kennedy, had failed to accomplish.

President Johnson developed personal relationships with members of the media. Whether or not press officials agreed with every aspect of the Johnson White House, the president was able to confide in certain individuals. The president understood the benefit of positive editorials. With the assistance of beneficial press relations, Johnson's policies experienced highly favorable ratings from the American public. Among those that the president was able to discuss issues with was Ralph McGill of the Atlanta Constitution. Johnson wrote, "It is always a source of comfort to be with you and talk with you."²³

One of the most spectacular aspects of the 1964 presidential campaign was less political and much more cultural. While in the world of Washington DC politics, Johnson's appearance did not stray far from the typical politician, while on the ranch his style kept pace with his personality. The press was able to showcase Johnson's ranch attire. While completely opposite from the prep shorts and polos made famous by President Kennedy's vacations at the family retreat in Hyannis Port, Johnson preferred a Stetson hat and boots.²⁴ While Americans were entranced by the Kennedy images of sailing, many were unable to embrace the lifestyle for themselves. Johnson's appearance was something that was much more relatable to the middle class. Not only did the look provide a basic view of life but a much more adventurous one as well.

²³ Lyndon Johnson to Ralph McGill, June 2, 1965, The Paper of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 18.

²⁴ While Goldwater wore the traditional western hat, Johnson preferred the more modern Stetson "Open Road". The "Open Road" had a traditional crown, but a shorter and more angled brim. The hat was a symbolic representation of Johnson, an individual who represented the values of America, but sought progress to better life for all. *American Experience: LBJ*, 2006.

Johnson was not the only political figure who gained the media's attention. One of the most unexpected occurrences of the 1964 Presidential Election was the media's experience at socializing with the Goldwater family. Attending the LBJ Ranch always guaranteed an adventure of epic proportions, but little was known about the personal lives of the Goldwaters.

On one particular visit to the Goldwater home in Arizona, ABC reporter Robert MacNeil witnessed a peculiar event. For many journalists the Goldwaters had been cordial and well rehearsed in front of the camera. For this visit Mike and Barry Jr. had been told to entertain the members of the press until their father was available, which would not be for a sizeable amount of time. To maintain the attention of the press, Mike and Barry Jr. decided to take them across the border into Mexico for an authentic bullfight.²⁵ While on the expedition the sons decided to provide alcohol, which made for an unpredictable evening. While Senator Goldwater did not seem to have condoned the day's excursion, he appeared to be more entertained by the stories than angered. Perhaps the visit reduced the packaged image for which so many politicians were known. While the event was not officially released as a story, it did cause many of the reporters who accompanied the Goldwater sons to Mexico to recalibrate their judgments on the senator and his family.²⁶

As the campaign entered its closing months, the press took particular notice of how impressive of a race that President Johnson orchestrated. Johnson had not only offered the American public progressive reform that would take the nation into the next century

²⁵ *Mr. Conservative*, 2006.

²⁶ *Mr. Conservative*, 2006.

but directly challenge to the Goldwater campaign. Johnson's selection of Hubert Humphrey was highly approved by members of the press. "Johnson chose a vice presidential candidate not merely to balance the ticket or to provide campaign skills but because he believed that Humphrey is the best man to take over if something happens to the president."²⁷ Goldwater's selection of William Miller was not as noteworthy an event as Johnson's addition of Hubert Humphrey. Miller was criticized as being an unknown individual and failed to generate desperately needed excitement for the ticket. While Senator Goldwater was focused on expressing the values of conservatism and running a campaign like that of previous elections, President Johnson was actively working to evolve the way campaigns thrived. Given that the nation was not likely to switch leaders after only one year in office, the Johnson campaign could have opted to use a simple and assured strategy. Instead Lyndon Johnson ran for office using the same technique he had as a young Texan politician, always on the offensive.

Because of his decision to continue the programs that President Kennedy had not gotten to complete, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Johnson entered the race leading all the Republican candidates. After it was evident that Goldwater would be the nominee, the Johnson campaign took full advantage of the situation. Johnson immediately began attacking Goldwater on every extreme statement that he had made as a senator. President Johnson stated, "If they want to elect Goldwater, that's not gonna make me cry one bit. I left the majority leadership to be Vice President, which no man would do unless he wanted to get away from activity. And I decided I wanted to get away from it."²⁸ The

²⁷ George P. Hunt, "The President's Wise Selection," *Life*, September 1964, 4.

²⁸ Michael R. Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 515.

president understood the importance of the media, so his campaign crafted carefully produced commercials that would air at what was believed to be the most optimal viewing time on the major networks.

Among the most notable commercials were those which attacked Goldwater, portraying him as an extreme right-wing candidate. Senator Goldwater had expressed how he would like to see the entire Atlantic seaboard sawed off from the continent so that it could float off into the sea. The Johnson campaign seized the initiative and read the quote as a saw cut through a diagram of the United States and allowed the viewer to watch every state from Florida to Maine fall into a pool of water that depicted that Atlantic Ocean. Johnson stated to C. Richard West, that “Goldwater is a nervous man. An impulsive man. A childish man. You want the real questions answered, don’t you? Goldwater has had two serious nervous breakdowns. Had to be taken out of the country, hospitalized. His wife wrote about it in full in *Good Housekeeping*.”²⁹ Another impressionable commercial showed a group of cloaked Ku Klux Klansmen on horses while the announcer read the official endorsement of a leading member of the organization. By placing Barry Goldwater on defense, the Johnson campaign was able to seize the momentum and determine what issues would be debated throughout the duration of the election.

While the commercials proved to be highly effective at explaining the dangers of a Goldwater Administration, none came quite as close as one campaign ad that was so descriptive it only aired one time. Senator Goldwater had stated a number of years prior to the election that he would like to lob an atomic bomb into the men’s room of the

²⁹ Michael R. Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 39.

Kremlin. The Johnson campaign decided to release one of the most damaging of all political commercials. As a young girl of elementary school age picks petals from a daisy, a voice, which resembled that of Barry Goldwater, counted down to a black screen, followed by the scene of an atomic bomb's detonation. After the single airing of the commercial, Senator Goldwater telephoned the Johnson campaign and informed that he would file a lawsuit if the commercial was not removed. While the Johnson campaign did oblige the statement, the political damage had already been accomplished. Goldwater had been successfully depicted as a mad man who was prepared to destroy the Soviet Union if pressured. "To his critics he is the personification of the Bad Guy, shooting first and answering questions afterward."³⁰

After the election of 1964, Senator Goldwater not only harbored negative feelings toward President Johnson but also berated the entire media establishment. Senator Goldwater wrote, "I never understood the media's judgment. They virtually ignored some of my proposals while reacting in a vituperative way to others. This didn't contribute to public understanding of our campaign as a whole."³¹ Goldwater believed that he had been unjustly depicted time and again because of his political views. If the election outcome was any indication as to how much of a role the media played, then the evidence was conclusive. Goldwater may have had far right leanings that were not acceptable to a large number of Americans, but the press had portrayed President Johnson in a method that resembled his personality. Landslide Lyndon was truly a larger than life character. To many, regardless of the period, Johnson was not a typical individual.

³⁰ Hedley Donovan, "The Man on the Bandwagon," *Time*, June 1964, 31.

³¹ Barry Goldwater and Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (New York, Doubleday, 1988), 194.

The press provided Americans with an impression of a man who had a desire to serve and motivate his previous boundaries. A poll conducted following the election stated, “Among those who voted for President Johnson, 51% said he is doing better than they had expected. Only 26% are disappointed with his performance and 20% of the respondents think he is performing as they thought he would.”³² Like Goldwater, Johnson harbored an enjoyment for exploration, which was nevermore evident in other aspects of his life than politics. Johnson always appeared to be in search of a new agenda that he could dominate and leave completely different than when he took on the objective. President Johnson was always intrigued by the unknown and dared to be extraordinary. His bold persona altered the reality of the civil rights movement and declared war on poverty. For better or worse, it was also his intrigue that escalated the conflict in Southeast Asia in an attempt to lessen the influence of communism and make the world secure for democracy.

Because of the media’s pursuit for information on the candidates of the 1964 Presidential Election, the American public received a vivid depiction of the life and character of President Lyndon Baines Johnson. While many felt as though they knew their leader prior to the campaign, however the press was able to provide a much deeper analysis. The American public believed that Lyndon Johnson was a man of high demands and even higher expectations. Having lived through a century that had brought forth the luxuries of science and technology, the new era had to be met by a president who could responsibly react and engage events with the same vigor of the previous administration. Johnson had come into the White House with the Kennedy Administration and was the

³² WBBM-TV, *Feedback Finds LBJ Surpasses Hopes of November Supporters*. The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16, 1965.

individual who could be best trusted to be a proper steward of the new frontier in American culture. Through favorable reports on President Johnson, the press must be partially credited for the overwhelming victory of 1964. The White House understood this particularly well. A special assistant to the president wrote “He was so pleased to see the informative explanation which your editorial gave to his foreign policy decisions and he asked me to write and express his sincere appreciation.”³³ The next years would determine the validity of the media’s assertions. In a period of unprecedented challenge and media exposure, the trials of foreign and domestic issues awaited the experienced politician from Texas.

³³ W. Marvin Watson to Robert W. Lucas, May 17, 1965, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 18.

CHAPTER 3

THE ISSUE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Truly many events in 1964 showed that America still possessed an innocence that would serve positively to inspire many of its citizens. And at the same time, the year began a maturing process. Most notably, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 proved to be a seminal achievement for the Johnson Administration.

Without the assistance of the press, it is highly unlikely that the legislation would have passed as rapidly as it did. The act led to a much more progressive era within American society. The American media provided the public with evidence of the horrific acts of racism that were occurring throughout the nation. Coupled with the slaying of Kennedy, Americans found themselves in a state of limbo. They had not only lost direction but a hope that had given so many Americans the promise of a better society in which to live.

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy had served during a transitional age. He had been successful at halting the threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union while building allies around the globe. The Kennedy image had transformed the presidency from that of an elder statesman to a youthful professional and the media had been present from the beginning. What many felt was impossible to accomplish, prior 1960 became a reality. A young senator from Massachusetts trumped a vice president from California with years of political experience and alliances. The Kennedy upset of 1960 proved to provide necessary advancement for civil rights. The election of Kennedy had set a chain of events into motion that would ensure a new era.

In order to understand the significance of 1964, one must consider the importance of the 1960 presidential election. While Richard Nixon was an expected nominee for the Republican Party, the Democrat Party's nominee was much less certain. Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson of Texas had served in both houses of congress since the Roosevelt Administration. After years of service, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson had earned an allegiance with key officials within the Democratic Party, which was beneficial for him in making a serious bid for the presidency. Although other members of the Democrat Party, such as Hubert Humphrey, were also entering primaries, it was clear to many observers that the true contest would be between Kennedy and Johnson.³⁴

The deciding moment in the primaries came when Kennedy was able to win against Humphrey in West Virginia. Because many questioned whether or not a Catholic from the northeast could win in a general election against a vice president of considerable popularity, it was evident that Kennedy would need a running-mate who would have both name recognition and the ability to provide a key state that was not likely to be won by a Catholic.

The obvious answer was Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson was a candidate who was unique in being from the south. Growing up in a family that was by no means wealthy, Johnson had the opportunity to see what many in both political parties did not, extreme poverty. Before graduating from Southwest Texas Teachers College in 1930, Johnson pursued the opportunity to work with various minorities, mainly Mexicans. While teaching Mexicans the English language and other subjects, he was able to witness the

³⁴ While Senator Hubert H. Humphrey was well liked within the Democrat Party, many political writers believed that a challenge between Kennedy and Johnson would ensue. Kennedy entered the race with charisma, but Johnson had a seasoned record after more than two decades in the United States Congress. Unger and Unger, 231.

poverty in which they lived. Johnson was astonished that humans could actually live in such despair. Johnson stated, “Somehow, you never forget what poverty and hatred can do when you see its scars on the face of a young child.”³⁵ This realization, combined with the fact that the Great Depression was taking its toll upon the rest of the nation, led Johnson to become invested in finding ways to assist those who were less fortunate. In the years that followed, Johnson worked quietly with other officials to make life better for minorities in southwest Texas. Johnson’s determination was reminiscent of another southerner in his early political years, Harry S. Truman, who believed that no human being should ever be without basic necessities. Members of the Democrat Party inspired Johnson to further his work of assisting poverty stricken members of society in southwest Texas by entering national politics.³⁶

While Kennedy and Johnson were Democrats who believed in bettering the lives of minorities and the poor, Johnson’s passion at times was visible during his political career. John F. Kennedy was born into an upper class New England family which had very little experience dealing with both African Americans and the poor. Until Kennedy served in the Navy during World War II, he had not witnessed many other social elements of society. While the argument can be made the Kennedy had traveled to Europe and other areas of the world in his younger years, it must be stated that he had never personally dealt with the many other social classes prior to his service in the military.

³⁵ Bruce Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 10.

³⁶ In the early years of Johnson’s political career, Texan politicians Sam Rayburn and Richard Kleberg provided him with important advice. Rayburn and Kleberg understood the nature of Texan politics and believed that Johnson would serve his district with distinction as a United States Congressman. Schulman, 15.

During the Democrat National Convention of 1960, the party nominated Senator Kennedy as its presidential candidate. At the time, Johnson had to overcome the criticisms of the office of vice president. Being a vice president during the early 1960s entailed acting as a figurehead. Critics told Johnson that if he were to leave the Senate, it would cause him to become politically docile. However, to assume that a man such as Lyndon Johnson would simply follow suit and not broaden the role of vice president was to invite ignorance.

Johnson was just what the 1960 Democratic ticket needed to win the election. Kennedy was able to win Texas, a task that many within the press believed would take a sheer miracle to accomplish for a New England Catholic. It was understandable that Johnson was so adored by Texans that the state cherished the opportunity to assist Kennedy's ascent to the White House.

One of the most notable attributes of the 1960 election was that many minorities backed the Kennedy/Johnson ticket. Beginning with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936, the Democrat Party gained the support of African Americans. During the 1950s, African Americans were troubled over the Eisenhower Administration's policy concerning civil rights. In 1956 presidential campaign, African Americans supported Governor Adlai Stevenson.³⁷ Many believed that Eisenhower had not done enough to curb the racial violence that was occurring in the segregated South. Tensions continued to climb higher when the media began to broadcast the acts of racism that were occurring. President Eisenhower did very little, aside from calling for the National Guard in order to ensure that nine high school students were afforded entry into Little Rock Central High

³⁷ The Eisenhower Administration had not been highly proactive on the issue of civil rights during the first term. Sundquist, 223.

School, against the will of Governor Orval Faubus in 1957.³⁸ The governor's decision to blockade the high school student's right to enter Little Rock Central High School was in complete breach of the 1954 ruling of the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Many African Americans believed that change would not come unless laws were adopted to allow for desegregation and equal rights. It was highly evident to African Americans around the nation that the Eisenhower Administration and the Republican Party were slow to act on the situation and that they only moved because of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Richard Nixon appeared to be a continuation of the same lethargic policies of the previous administration. To many individuals throughout the United States, Nixon embodied the attributes of the typical politician who would say anything in order to be elected to office.

After the November 1960 victory of Kennedy, minorities throughout the nation celebrated. It finally seemed as though the 1960s would be the decade of change that so many had hoped to witness. The increases in acts of violence against African Americans caused many Caucasians to take notice and begin working to remedy the situation.³⁹ People from different sections of the nation became interested in the events taking place throughout the south. While more people were continuously becoming engaged by what they witnessed on the evening news, it was certain that they believed much more had to be done. Kennedy knew that he could not take the same actions as the previous

³⁸ Sundquist, 238.

³⁹ By the early 1960's, the South had erupted with numerous acts of racial violence and intimidation. African American churches were targeted and burned. After witnessing the terror that African Americans were experiencing, President Kennedy called for more action concerning civil rights. John A. Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 25.

administration. Had Kennedy sat idly by and reacted as the Eisenhower Administration, it would have led to a complete disillusionment of both major political parties within the African American community.

President Kennedy did hesitantly make some strides toward achieving equal rights during his tenure. The most memorable was the creation of the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity which was hailed throughout the media. The commission benefited African Americans by ensuring that government agencies could not discriminate upon the basis of skin color when hiring. Kennedy also called in the Mississippi National Guard to make certain that James Meredith was allowed to enter the University of Mississippi to begin work on his doctorate in September 1962. While the decisions may not seem spectacular in the modern context, both were a show of progress on behalf of the executive branch of government.⁴⁰

When Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963, many within the African American community became fearful that the small advancement of civil rights would be tremendously diminished. Lyndon Johnson found himself thrust into the presidency, much like Harry Truman being informed of President Roosevelt's passing. Johnson stated, "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long. We have talked long enough in this country about civil rights. We have talked for one hundred years or more. It is now time to write the next chapter and to write it in the books of law."⁴¹ Lyndon Johnson encountered the most difficult responsibility of any individual who had inherited the office to date. Americans had been

⁴⁰ Robert A. Dallek, *A Life Unfinished* (New York: Little Brown, and Company, 2003), 330/1.

⁴¹ Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society*, 23.

nationally violated and desperately needed to recover in order to resume the progress that had been so forthcoming in the nearly three years of the Kennedy Administration.

There can be little doubt that Lyndon Johnson was the correct person for that fateful moment in time. Concerning the Kennedy's decision to select Johnson, George Reedy wrote, "My guess is that it represented shrewd political judgment on Kennedy's part."⁴² Johnson had served as a strong willed vice president who worked to transform the office into what it resembles today. Under Johnson the office was not just a position that existed solely to continue the command of government in the event that the president became incapacitated. Kennedy knew that Johnson would not be content serving in same way as past vice presidents. While there is debate among scholars that Kennedy detested Johnson, it must be noted that the two appeared to have a decent relationship. One cannot expect two leading figures within a major political party to always agree on every key issue.⁴³

Johnson provided Kennedy with the advantage of having experienced counsel whenever it was needed without having to call in numerous officials from past administrations. John Kennedy understood that Johnson had served in Washington DC far longer than he had, and that the years of experience only translated to into benefits for him. Kennedy was also astute to the fact that the media did appear to hold favor for Johnson and presented him in a likeable fashion. Johnson knew how the politics of Washington ebbed and flowed. Whenever the president needed assistance on getting a

⁴² George Reedy, *Lyndon B. Johnson: A Memoir* (New York: Andrews and MC Meel, 1982), 129.

⁴³ While the two may have had differences of opinion, Lyndon Johnson stated that he believed that John F. Kennedy never viewed him as a liability. Other members of the Kennedy Administration, such as Theodore Sorenson, also seem to believe that Kennedy had no regrets over his selection of Johnson as running mate. Johnson, 2.

bill legislated through congress, the vice president went to work to ensure its success. Johnson proved to be a loyal and continual ally. One major show of confidence on behalf of the president was allowing Johnson to become the head of the space program. By doing so, Kennedy publicly demonstrated a deep trust in Johnson that pleasantly surprised many Washington insiders of the period.

Perhaps the most advantageous decision made by President Kennedy concerning Johnson was using him as a goodwill ambassador.⁴⁴ During his years in congress, Johnson had proven to be an impressive socialite. As with the first lady, President Kennedy understood that the American image must be exemplified as much as possible through the use of the press. Although Jacqueline Kennedy was the epitome of American sophistication and elegance, Lyndon Johnson symbolized the nation's desire to always outreach to people who were less fortunate. Johnson took numerous trips in his first year as vice president in an effort to appeal to nations that had not made up their minds regarding an alliance with the United States.

Time and again Johnson proved himself a successful diplomat. Much of the time the vice president would arrange visits to the United States for officials who had never had the privilege of such a visit. The trips that the vice president made provided officials with a feeling that the United States valued their relationship and was interested in finding new and better ways of making improvements in their respective dialogues. It is hard to imagine a period when America's image was as favored as it was during the Kennedy Administration. The outreach of Vice President Johnson made America's appreciation of democracy much more inviting. In an era when the United States was in

⁴⁴ As an ambassador, Johnson represented the United States in Beirut, Lebanon, Scandinavia, and Vietnam. The Kennedy Administration placed a significant level of importance on improving the image of the United States within nations that were not overly accepting of democracy. Dallek, 12.

competition with the Soviet Union to build and strengthen allies, Lyndon Johnson confirmed himself to be a statesman.⁴⁵

Part of the attractiveness that representatives noticed in Johnson was the ease with which they could build a relationship. Maybe it was the Texan personality that made such an impression upon world leaders. Possibly, it was the years of working in congress that gave Johnson the experience of functioning with people who opposed his ideas. It may have been a combination of the two that allowed Johnson to be seen as likable to so many people. Whatever the reason, it is certain that achieving so many friendships with world leaders was no small matter. By improving relationships with existing allies and forging friendships with new ones, one must be able to find ways to be seen as attractive to the largest number of people without appearing artificial. It was no secret that Johnson embodied all of the characteristics required to positively engage and charm many leaders during their era.⁴⁶

President Lyndon Johnson had as much experience as anyone on either side of politics in Washington DC. The public sentiment of the period affirms that the largest majority of Americans believed Johnson could be trusted to lead the nation. While Johnson may have cosmetically adjusted the White House to suit the Texan tastes of him and Ladybird, the memory of John F. Kennedy would continue to thrive. Immediately Johnson began reminding Americans of all the good that had been accomplished during the Kennedy years. Johnson had a desire to ensure that legislation that had begun under

⁴⁵ Johnson was liked very well by the government and people of various nations, especially throughout the Middle East. Johnson's Texan personality caused many individuals to believe that the United States served as a force for good. Dallek, 15.

⁴⁶ On several occasions Vice President Johnson would serve as a goodwill ambassador. While representing the United States abroad, Johnson would often treat heads of state and average citizens with the highest regard. Dallek, 12.

Kennedy would be continued until it was granted passage.⁴⁷ Many writers within the press were encouraged to see a southern politician take the initiative to end segregation. Johnson never came into power believing that he was a better person for the office. Instead, he envisioned himself as being the best individual to carry forth the legacy of a beloved American president.⁴⁸

Many Americans championed the notion of helping to create a better nation. Many enlisted in the military and peace corp. Johnson admired the will of so many to volunteer in order to progress the cause of liberty. The country was healing better than any nation could have expected after the tragedy of an assassination. The United States was proud of its new leader and proved its confidence in him through action. Large numbers of Americans, especially the youth, sought to honor the request of President Kennedy to offer service to the nation. It seemed almost as though the new president could receive any assistance that he wished from Congress. As is often the case, America always seems to become more unified by catastrophe. The world community understood that America had a determined and charismatic leader. Many looked forward to the coming years in order work alongside the United States and see John Kennedy's dream expand far beyond the borders of America.

While the United States appeared to be healing, the nation still had problems that required answers. Civil rights and escalating conflict in Vietnam were two large issues that plagued America at home and abroad. While many Americans had been satisfied with the Kennedy years, not all were equally content. "Civil rights was both an emotional

⁴⁷ Among the most prominent was the passage of civil rights legislation. Andrew, 23.

⁴⁸ President Johnson did not seek to form an entirely different political platform from his predecessor. Instead, Johnson believed that he could ensure the survival of many of his predecessor's policies. Johnson, 19.

and moral issue. An emotional issue, it contained the seeds of rebellion on Capitol Hill not just over civil rights, but over my entire legislative program.”⁴⁹ The 1964 election provided the chance to unseat Lyndon Johnson and place a new president in office. While there was no doubt as to who the Democrat Party would nominate for president, the answer was much less certain on the Republican side.

In 1964 the Republican Party leaders were working to overcome its defeat in the past election. The GOP had experienced a devastating loss during the 1960 presidential election and had been in the minority in Congress since 1955. The Republicans did not appear united in the early days of the campaign. In doing so, it created an appearance of weakness within the party. In comparison, the Democrats appeared strongly united behind Lyndon Johnson. Given that the nation had lost a president the year earlier, it was unlikely the popular sentiment would be to deny the successor of John F. Kennedy the occasion to continue on his legacy.⁵⁰

In January 1964 Senator Barry Goldwater announced that he was a candidate for the presidency. His stubbornness on civil rights was a major catharsis by which African Americans would solidify their support for the Democratic Party if Goldwater won the nomination. While many African Americans had voted for Democrats in elections before 1964, the solid majority of the vote was still not secured by the party. The mass appeal of Dwight D. Eisenhower was responsible for drawing a significant number of African Americans to the Republican Party during the 1952 election. Even future representatives

⁴⁹ Johnson, 37.

⁵⁰ During the 1964 campaign, it was highly unlikely that the American public would be comfortable enough to experience a succession of three different presidents within the period of a little more than one year. *Mr. Conservative*, 2006.

of African Americans in the Civil Rights movement such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. tended to side with the Republican Party.⁵¹

At the onset of the 1964 campaign, Senator Goldwater drew a clear distinction between himself and President Johnson. Goldwater, even before winning the Republican Primary, was completely different from other candidates. Goldwater was a representative of a far different section of the Republican Party from what the public had become accustomed to knowing.⁵² The GOP had been largely moderate since the party's beginning. The press charged that Senator Goldwater was an individual who would regress American political culture. Since the days of Abraham Lincoln, African Americans had looked positively upon the Republican Party. Even during the years of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Republicans had been able to show bi-partisan support of New Deal initiatives.

Goldwater signified a change in course for the Republican Party. He represented a completely different wing of the Republican Party. Governor Nelson Rockefeller represented a much more moderate wing of the GOP and appeared to be the media's favored nominee of the Republican Party. Early in 1964 many were certain that the party would nominate Rockefeller. Being the governor of New York and a successful businessman caused many people to look favorably upon Rockefeller. While not having originally planned to get involved in the 1964 primary, Governor William Scranton of Pennsylvania entered at the request of a large number of the party leaders. Scranton was

⁵¹ As an adult, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. considered himself Republican. However, later he did switch his party affiliation to Democrat. Elwood Watson, "Guess What Came to American Politics? Contemporary Black Conservatism," *Journal of Black Studies*, 29, no.1 (September 1998): 74.

⁵² Many prominent members of the Republican Party, including Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney, and Henry Cabot Lodge opposed Goldwater because of his conservative record that was deemed as highly negative. Buckley, 143.

another figure who moderates hoped would be able to halt the progression of Goldwater. Having attended the Republican convention in California, Jackie Robinson wrote, “A new breed of Republicans had taken over the GOP. As I watched this steamroller operation in San Francisco, I had a better understanding of how it must have felt to be a Jew in Hitler’s Germany.”⁵³ In the end, neither Rockefeller nor Scranton was able to block the tide that Goldwater was riding upon.

In the months following the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson had been received exceptionally well among the American public. Johnson’s approval rating was high and the Vietnam conflict had not yet become a major political issue. To the American public Johnson seemed to be more concerned about domestic issues. Furthering the programs to end segregation and poverty seemed to be a higher priority of Johnson during the early months of his presidency. The initiatives appeared to be winning acceptance from the press and the public. In December of 1963 the White House received 437 pieces of mail that were in favor of civil rights legislation, while only 42 were in opposition.⁵⁴ Many Americans viewed Lyndon Johnson as a continuance of the Kennedy presidency. It was Kennedy who had begun the war on poverty and who had taken the first drastic step to end racial inequality. While one may truly realize that Johnson was much more invested in working to end the segregation and provide working Americans with financial assistance, it took the popularity and likability of John F. Kennedy to set the chain of progress into motion.

Having success in finishing Kennedy’s term, Johnson proved to be a very attractive candidate to many Americans. Johnson seemed to be much more connected to

⁵³ Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made* (New York: Harper Collins Books, 1995), 169.

⁵⁴ Mail Summaries, December 5, 1963, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: WH 5-1.

the problems that individuals were facing on a day to day basis. In order to finalize the election, Johnson would have to prove that the Republican Party was completely unaware of the modern troubles that plagued the domestic front. Given that Senator Goldwater had been nominated by the Republicans in response to the so called 'liberal agenda' of the Johnson Administration, the president could not have hope for anything more.

While Republicans believed that Johnson's presidency was only a continuation of the liberal policies of the Kennedy years, the nation would have to be convinced that the initiatives were as bad as Goldwater claimed. By 1964 many Americans understood that life in America had not reached a pinnacle. African Americans were being heavily discriminated against in the south and high rates of poverty were noticeable in various areas of the country. Johnson stated, "The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use our wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization."⁵⁵ The evening news on any of the three major networks allowed average American citizens the opportunity to realize what was occurring in their own cities and towns.

The fall campaign began with a large amount of activity by both Johnson and Goldwater. Johnson's tone was that of an experienced political figure who viewed the future of America optimistically. He believed that domestic problems could be solved with the assistance of the federal government. One could noticeably understand the frustration that Johnson had for a nation which sought to promote the luxuries of democracy abroad while so many people went homeless and hungry in the United States. In allowing for a portion of American citizens to continue living in abject poverty, it created an international problem for the United States. At such a crucial moment during

⁵⁵ Unger and Unger, 316.

the Cold War, America could not be seen as having several pockets of homeless within its cities and countrysides. A selling point for becoming an ally with the United States was the financial assistance it offered in return. Many nations realized that Communism, as found within the Soviet Union, did not allow for the same level of success that capitalism did within the United States. Johnson's attempt to stifle poverty resonated with many Americans who were in need of financial assistance and stated to other nations around the world, that America would not accept a fraction of its citizens to live without the basic necessities.⁵⁶

Civil rights was another issue that required immediate attention during the 1964 general election. Night after night, Americans witnessed the severe brutality by which African Americans were treated throughout the South on the evening news. Nick Kotz wrote in reference to Bloody Sunday, "The events in Selma that Sunday registered shock waves across America that would have a pronounced impact on national politics and race relations, yet Lyndon Johnson and Martin Luther King were both taken by surprise."⁵⁷

While many Americans knew that certain areas of the south refused to advance with the rest of the nation in allowing for equal rights, the events only appeared to be worsening. In states such as Alabama and Mississippi civil rights to many state legislators were the last of major concerns. The problem with calling for an end to segregation and violence was that it required much more than a request from President Johnson. Governors in the southern states were loudly voicing criticism for any possible involvement of the federal government intervening on the state level. Johnson could not continue to allow the

⁵⁶ President Johnson believed that America could provide its most poverty stricken citizens with a higher standard of living that would provide for basic necessities. Johnson, 79.

⁵⁷ Nick Kotz, *A Passion for Equality* (New York: Norton, 1977), 258.

governors to force him into such a position because of the political implications that it created for his campaign. Instead, a highly drastic measure would have to be taken.⁵⁸

The president called upon Congress to create a piece of legislation that would ensure equality for African Americans in all states. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had a number of detractors, one must realize that it was the only logical approach to take. African Americans could not be expected to continue living in a nation that provided more equality in certain states than it did in others. The measure made segregation instantaneously illegal. Since President Lincoln took determined actions to end slavery, segregation had served to undermine the progressive nature of the Emancipation Proclamation. Many Caucasian businessmen and politicians, especially in the South, had used segregation as a method to maintain a level of superiority over African Americans. Johnson understood, almost better than any other politician, that segregation was among the worst acts that any individual could promote.

Segregation, to many like President Johnson, was synonymous with tyranny. Not providing equal opportunities on the basis of skin color was a primitive act that only opposed the good that the United States had fought to protect since the early days of the republic. Many politicians, even those who had supported the treacherous Jim Crow laws around the south, knew that segregation was evil by definition. It was clearly noticeable that many southern politicians believed that segregation was a violation of human rights. Even politicians who opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, such as Barry M. Goldwater,

⁵⁸ While Southern governors may have been unwilling to work alongside of the president on creating meaningful legislation, he could no longer allow the racial violence that was occurring throughout the South to continue. Dallek, 119.

had to be aware of the problems caused for residents living in states that did not recognize equal rights.⁵⁹

One of the most common reasons for opposing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was political expediency. Southern politicians, in general, refused to support the act based solely upon the notion that they would lose favor among their constituency.⁶⁰ Powerful blocks of voters in the south rallied against the act. “Clearly, many white southerners backed Goldwater because he opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and supported states’ rights over federal intervention.”⁶¹ Many believed as though they had been betrayed by a man they had supported for president in 1960. After the slaying of John F. Kennedy, many southerners believed they would have a defining voice in the White House. However, the problem was that Lyndon Johnson was an atypical minded Texan in regard to minorities. While he understood the plight of the American farmer and factory worker, he was not blinded to the racism that minorities received from individuals who had supported Democrats in past elections.

The issue of civil rights became a defining topic during the presidential election of 1964. The representatives of each party stood solidly opposed to one another on the matter. Goldwater was certainly an interesting political figure. While he did not appear to have racist tendencies, he was surprisingly opposed to the legislation. Johnson was able to benefit from the media’s focus on Goldwater as a means to show Americans the Republican’s position on civil rights. Goldwater made certain that the public realized that

⁵⁹ While Senator Goldwater opposed action at the federal government level, his campaign did not address how the problems of America’s racial division could be quickly and effectively solved. (*Mr. Conservative*, 2006).

⁶⁰ Members of both political parties opposed passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, such as Republican John Tower and Democrat Robert Byrd. Andrew, 27.

⁶¹ Andrew, 209.

he was a student of the United States Constitution. In being such, his view was that the federal government had no right to impose its authority over individual states and business owners. Johnson stated, “If they ain’t for civil rights, let’s find out about it right now.”⁶²

While a Republican, it would be of interest to know how Lincoln would have viewed a member of his own party on the topic of civil rights. Nearly one century since the close of the American Civil War, one may believe that President Lincoln would have been astounded to learn of such a position. Johnson stated in regard to the Republicans, “They’ve got nothing really, except the Klan and the Kooks. He voted against the civil rights bill to try to sew up the South, and he’s going to do it.”⁶³

Goldwater seemed to be more enchanted by following the Constitution to the last line than working to end segregation throughout the nation. While he did oppose the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is vastly important to note that he often referred to his on state regarding the issue. The senator would often discuss how Arizona had been working to end segregation through education. According to Goldwater, in educating the public on the immorality of segregation, his state had made strong advancements in achieving equality without the use of a federal mandate. While this was an exceptional show of good will on behalf of the people of Arizona, it did not mean the rest of the nation would follow suit.⁶⁴

⁶² Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 90.

⁶³ Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 34.

⁶⁴ The proposals to end segregation without the direct intervention of the federal government did not appeal to a large amount of Americans. Many people did not believe that educating the public on the ills of racism would create a positive outcome. (*Mr. Conservative*, 2006).

If Goldwater had won in 1964, it would not have been the end of civil rights. More than likely, it would have meant that equality would have been much longer in coming than under Johnson. President Johnson understood the urgency of decisive legislation. After all, Johnson had served longer in Congress and had much more political experience than Goldwater.⁶⁵ The press believed the problem with Goldwater's solution to ending inequality was how long it would take. The action called for an immediate end to racial oppression, which Johnson did in one stroke of the pen. It was impressive that Arizona was being proactive on the matter, but the state was not topping the evening news with acts of racism. Store owners in Arizona were not the ones who were senselessly demanding African Americans to dine in another part of their establishment or not at all. Arizona government officials were not attempting to block the ability of African Americans to vote with Jim Crow related tactics. Goldwater wrote,

“It so happens that I am in agreement with the objectives of the Supreme Court as stated in the Brown decision. I believe that it is both wise and just for negro children to attend the same schools as whites, and to deny them this opportunity carries with it strong implications of inferiority. I am not prepared, however, to impose that judgment of mine on the people of Mississippi or South Carolina, or tell them what methods should be adopted and what pace should be kept in striving toward that goal.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Johnson had served in the U.S. Congress since 1937 and had garnered a considerable amount of experience by the time that Goldwater was elected in 1952. *American Experience: LBJ*, 2006.

⁶⁶ Barry M. Goldwater, *Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville: Victor Publishing Company, 1960), 37.

While the Goldwater Campaign did place an emphasis on state's rights, it did not effectively answer how African Americans would deal with the varying laws of different states as they traveled from one to another.

The presidential election of 1964 proved that the nation was decidedly in favor of an immediate end to segregation wherever it existed. Goldwater was sternly refused at the ballot box. Johnson won by one of the largest landslide victories in United States history. The policies ushered in during the Kennedy years received a mandate to continue long after his passing, although it must be noted that not all attitudes accepted the change in public policy. The press admired Johnson's view on civil rights so much that David Brinkley wished to apologize to the president after an uncomfortable exchange that had taken place on his NBC program, *The Huntley-Brinkley Report*. "Harry McPherson talked to David Brinkley who said that he had not meant to go hard on the President in regard to civil rights and that if he had given any such impression he would correct it in the future since he knows the president is an ardent civil rights advocate on the civil rights issue."⁶⁷ The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was one of the most exceptional victories for human rights in world history. The world was able to witness a nation that had embraced slavery a century earlier make a progressive achievement toward ending inequality.

The years to come would only serve to further the cause of civil rights. By October 1965, 60% of the nation approved of Johnson's handling of civil rights.⁶⁸ President Johnson would be a loyal ally to African Americans around the nation, while

⁶⁷ Robert E. Kintner to Lyndon Johnson, January 11, 1967, *The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson*, Austin: PR 18.

⁶⁸ *The Harris Survey*, September 12, 1966, *The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson*, Austin: PR 16.

opposing members of his own party who believed enough had been achieved with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Representative Olin E. Teague stated of the Sixth Congressional District of Texas, “90% of those responding opposed rent subsidies and additional civil rights legislation.”⁶⁹ The policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson altered the course of history for African Americans and the Democrat Party. From 1964 on African Americans believed that they had a friend in the party. While the Johnson Administration would have its troubles in other parts of the world, African Americans never forgot the progress he afforded them. Members of Johnson’s own party would criticize his handling of the Vietnam War; however, few could criticize his domestic agendas. In 1966 a majority of Americans believed that the most significant domestic issue was civil rights.⁷⁰ The Democrat Party continued to embrace civil rights and provided African American voters with significant representation in the years to come.⁷¹

1964 will always be remembered as a significant year for the United States. The nation was experiencing a dynamic shift that would lead to a different era in American society. While years leading up to 1964 during the twentieth century have noticeable similarities, they do not hold the same amount of importance. The twentieth century had very progressive years for civil rights, but few can even begin to compare to 1964. What 1964 represents, is a break from former tradition. No politician, especially not within the presidency, had ever had to be as concerned about retaining the office as Lyndon Johnson was in 1964. While occasionally presidential candidates failed to win the support of their

⁶⁹ Olin E. Teague, July 1966, *The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson*, Austin: PR 16.

⁷⁰ The Gallop Poll, September 11, 1966, *The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson*, Austin: PR 16.

⁷¹ President Johnson would appoint Thurgood Marshall as the nation’s first African American Supreme Court Justice in 1967. The Civil Rights Act of 1968 would provide African Americans with additional rights by working to end housing discrimination. (Johnson, 178-179)

home states, Johnson faced losing the entire section of the nation with which he was most commonly related. Johnson stated after being told he could lose the south, “If that’s the price I’ve got to pay, I’ll pay it gladly.”⁷² President Johnson was well astute of the fact that presidents typically did not win the office without winning a solid majority of southern states. In 1964 Lyndon Johnson exuberated magnificently a heroic profile in courage. The memory of John F. Kennedy could not have sought to receive a more honorable accomplishment than the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

It would have been almost impossible to witness legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to have occurred within a century following the Civil War without the correct balance of political and social elements. The press played a paramount role in ensuring the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Without the media, it is very unlikely that civil rights legislation, in any form, would have passed at that moment in time. The decision of Lyndon Johnson to enter politics as a champion of minorities and John Kennedy’s decision to add him to the 1960 Democrat ticket were both monumental elements. The 1950s under the Eisenhower Administration and its decision to confront segregation in Little Rock, Arkansas was as significant to civil rights as the opening shot at Fort Sumter was to The Civil War. The various examples of racial violence throughout the south were the final component in calling for an end to segregation with legislation as decisive as the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

As 1964 was a turning point for civil rights, it was for American politics as well. The presidential election represented an end to the older, more moderate, Republican Party. The new direction of the Republican Party sent African Americans to the Democrat Party in droves. No longer could the party of Lincoln provide the

⁷² Dallek, 112.

representation for African Americans it had in past years. As long as divisive figures such as Barry Morris Goldwater had a serious chance to ascend to the upper levels of the party, African Americans could no longer take such a chance on supporting a party many had admired for generations.

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was an exceptional advancement for the United States. The good that has come from the act is immeasurable. “When Johnson stepped down from office in January 1969, he left a legacy of social legislation unmatched by any other modern president.”⁷³ The Democrats allowed for America to become much more united in the decades following the act’s passage. Like Lincoln, Johnson understood that the nation could not be as divided over civil rights as it was and seek to win the Cold War. Kennedy and Johnson understood that America would have to attract other nations to the cause of democracy in order to win against Communism. Both presidents were well aware that a nation which promotes liberty for all must mean the words. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 proved to be the crowning achievement for a nation which sought to represent its word to protect liberty for all individuals by deed.

⁷³ Jim Hargrove, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Thirty-Sixth President of the United States* (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1987), 81.

CHAPTER 4

THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

Any military conflict has the potential to create masses of negative issues for any presidential administration. Several administrations have experienced the realities of unfavorable media reports. Public confidence is directly influenced by how the press portrays an elected official through the use of news reports and daily editorials. The American reliance upon the media dates back to the nation's founding. Given that the primary objective of the press is to analyze and provide informed insight into political legislation, its importance must never be underestimated.

The presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson is an example of how dramatically the unpopularity of a single administration can evolve. "Johnson's failure, America's failure" one author wrote, "has continued to vex historians, policymakers, and the entire nation."⁷⁴ As vice president Lyndon Johnson had a positive experience with the press. He proved to be highly entertaining to many media officials during the early 1960s. While the president and first lady evoked the essence of Camelot, the vice president provided an impression that appeared larger than life to many within the press. His public mannerisms were not solely brought on by his acceptance as Kennedy's running-mate during the 1960 presidential campaign.

Throughout his years in congress, Johnson exuded a quality that can best be described as an egocentric Texan. From the moment Johnson entered a room, he was immediately the center of attention. People were attracted to Johnson in a way that separated him from other political figures of the era. Constantly taking time to make

⁷⁴ Schulman, 161.

individuals feel honored to be in his presence, Johnson was an exceptionally adept politician. Shaking hands, hugging, smiling, and laughing became known Johnson trademarks. “Politics, and only politics, could give him what he wanted.”⁷⁵ Never one to lack in the technique of conversation, Johnson caused people to feel as though they held the center of his attention.

Early on during his tenure as vice president, the press assigned a decent number of journalists to report on the actions of Johnson. Whether the vice president was greeting guests at a White House social affair or traveling abroad to meet with foreign dignitaries, he never allowed for a dull moment. Johnson’s foreign visits often made for entertaining stories. The main reason for the media’s intrigue was because Johnson would travel without the president. Knowing that the vice president would not feel as though the president was looming over his activities, allowed for him to be more like the Lyndon Johnson that so many within the press had gotten to know during his years in congress.⁷⁶

After Kennedy was assassinated, Johnson was sworn in even before the flight back to Washington DC. Johnson now had to confront a series of issues that Kennedy had been unable to resolve. Among the most demanding was the matter of a conflict taking place in a small country in Southeast Asia. In the autumn of 1963 Vietnam was a nation that was relatively unknown to a large number of Americans. While the United States had been involved with the country since the Truman Administration, it was not until the Eisenhower and Kennedy years that America had committed soldiers in the form of military advisors.

⁷⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) 120.

⁷⁶ The press viewed Johnson’s persona in deep contrast with that of Kennedy’s. Kennedy’s actions were equated with that of a statesman, while Johnson’s behavior was not. Dallek, 16.

As the people of the United States were attempting to forget the tragic loss of a president, Lyndon Johnson was becoming better acclimated to the office of commander-in-chief. Understandably, the vast majority of the press provided the new president with positive coverage and served to offer Americans a solid level of confidence in their new leader. Many within the press had been reporting on America's involvement in Vietnam prior to the assassination of President Kennedy. The larger topic was the fight against communism. President Kennedy, and now Johnson, was strongly opposed to the actions of communism around the globe.⁷⁷

President Johnson understood the importance of continuing many of the foreign military policies that his predecessor had undertaken. Kennedy had promised a continuation of the Truman Doctrine and Johnson realized that he had no other choice but to honor the position. During the early 1960s the American public was largely in favor of combating communism.

Given that the 1964 presidential campaign was within one year, President Johnson knew that he could not ignore the conflict in Vietnam. South Vietnam had been using the assistance of the American Military as advisors during an internal conflict against North Vietnam. With each passing day, the American people were informed that Ho Chi Minh sought to unite all of Vietnam under his rule. Still yet, many Americans were reluctant for the United States to fully intervene militarily in a nation half way across the world.

In August 1964 Americans learned that the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy, on deployment in the Gulf of Tonkin, had been torpedoed by the Viet Cong. While events in the Gulf of Tonkin were still unclear, the Johnson Administration ordered airstrikes on

⁷⁷ Both John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson opposed the build up of communist forces around the globe. Kennedy believed that force was necessary in Vietnam and Johnson believed that he could not allow the struggle to go unsupported. Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, 345.

targets in North Vietnam. Within the span of forty-eight hours, events in Vietnam had drastically escalated for the United States. After the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, it was no longer a question of if the United States would commit ground forces to Vietnam but when. While on the campaign trail, the Republican candidate for President, Arizona Senator Barry Morris Goldwater, began attacking President Johnson on the topic of Vietnam. He accused Johnson of attempting to conceal an escalating conflict.

By the autumn of 1964 President Johnson understood that he had to either commit or fall victim to a position that would allude to appeasement. The American public did not support allowing the Gulf of Tonkin events to go unpunished. In a conversation with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Johnson stated from the LBJ Ranch, “Some of quite critical about my coming down here last night. Said that here’s a war going on in two or three fronts and he’s walking off here to play for the weekend.”⁷⁸ Johnson believed that he could not allow himself to be viewed as weak on commitment during the election. At the same time, he did not wish to direct the United States into a conflict that would deter him from more pressing domestic agendas. The press had written favorably of the Johnson domestic policies that were in the process of remedying social injustices that were stunting American prosperity.

After his landslide victory in 1964, the president was positioned to use his political capital in a variety of ways and means. Believing that he could cause Ho Chi Minh to agree to negotiations within a small amount of time, President Johnson decided to commit the first significant wave of American forces in early 1965. In a conversation with McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson stated, “There must be somebody out there

⁷⁸ Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 509.

that's got enough brains to figure out some way that we can find some special targets in North Vietnam to hit on."⁷⁹ Most of the media's reaction to the escalation was positive which pleased the president. He was so pleased with certain newspapers that he even wrote letters to commend their reports.

By the time that General William Westmorland implemented the three point phase to win against the Viet Cong; American forces were beginning to experience high mortality rates in a guerilla warfare strategy. In November 1965 American forces were coming under assault in the Ia Drang Valley. While the North Vietnamese ground forces lost an estimated 2500 fighters, the United States lost 234 lives. The Ia Drang Valley Battle of November 14th through 18th served as a pretext for how each side would fight throughout the conflict. Prior to the fighting in Vietnam, the American Military had little experience with the methods used by the Viet Cong. Most who had fought in World War II and Korea were unfamiliar with the guerilla techniques that the North Vietnamese were using against the forces of the United States.⁸⁰

The difference was that the North Vietnamese forces reduced the ability of the American Military by fighting within close proximity. Because of the limited distance, the Viet Cong may have taken on more casualties, but were able to keep American forces from using the training to which they had been accustomed during past military conflicts. The Viet Cong had rendered helicopter landings, which were responsible for delivering more soldiers, almost futile. "I have heard it said about the difference between results and consequences that results are what we expect, consequences are what we get. This

⁷⁹ Beschloss, *Reaching For Glory*, 259.

⁸⁰ Later in life, Secretary of Defense McNamara stated that there were a number of problems that America faced in Vietnam due to the fact that the enemy was misjudged. Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect* (New York: Random House, 1995), 323.

certainly applies to our assumptions about Vietnam in Summer and Fall of 1965. Reality collided with expectations.”⁸¹ The battle provided evidence that stated the North Vietnamese were willing to fight no matter how technologically advanced the opposition. For one of the first times since the Civil War, the American Military would have to revise its tactics in order to gain the necessary advantage.

The reaction of the American press was somewhat confident. Having lost 234 lives during the battle of Ia Drang Valley, the press was not instantly critical of American involvement in the Vietnamese conflict. Many within the press believed that the Viet Cong’s high loss of life proved how capable the United States Military was of fighting and winning in Vietnam. A poll conducted in June of 1965 stated, “Among those who voted for President Johnson, 51% said he is doing better than they had expected. Only 26% are disappointed with his performance and 20% of the respondents think he is performing as they thought he would.”⁸² The nation’s confidence in its commander-in-chief was maintained and America’s patriotism experienced a surge as the world witnessed the beginning of a decade long struggle against communism in Southeast Asia. Papers across the nation were filled with columns that increased America’s belief that victory could be achieved. While the loss of 234 lives was not the news that Americans wanted to hear, it was accepted as a victory.

As America’s involvement in Vietnam continued into 1966, the public’s trust that the Johnson Administration would be able to lead the nation to victory held reasonably high. The primary reason that President Johnson was able to continue experiencing a

⁸¹ McNamara, 207.

⁸² *Feedback Finds LBJ Surpasses Hopes of November Supporters*. The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, PR16. June 25, 1965.

favorable public rating at the time was because of an optimistic press. The year was important to the Johnson Administrations. Perhaps the most significant reason was the 1966 Midterm Election that would determine the president's congressional support for the remainder of his first full term. Considering that President Johnson had a vast amount of domestic and foreign policies in place by the beginning of his first term, a victory over the Republicans would be an encouraging mandate.

As the year continued, one issue became much more pronounced than it had ever been before. American males of draft age began to make their presence known. Many were antiwar. Students of college age had been stating their objections to America's involvement in Southeast Asia since the beginning of the conflict. 1966 was somewhat unlike the prior years because public opinion began to shift. If there was one element of the American society that had been absolutely opposed to military conflict it was the youth.

Two evident characteristics allude to why the youth were so vocal in their opposition during the early years of the fight in Vietnam. College age students were eligible for the draft and became part of a college culture which questioned American military involvement in Vietnam. As America began taking a larger role in defending South Vietnam from the communists of the north, youth across the nation began witnessing a significant rise in mortality rates. Students adjusted at a brisk pace as they began realizing that a number of peers were losing their lives on the battlefield in Southeast Asia. While professors were lecturing on the evils of an undeclared war, young adults were personally experiencing the results of America's latest entry into the fight against communism.

In the early months of the Vietnamese conflict, the press did not dedicate much of its print to the growing opposition to Vietnam. Many members of the press continued to report favorably on how the Johnson Administration was taking necessary measures to insure that communism would not threaten the United States by showing opposition against Ho Chi Minh. The 1964 victory over Senator Goldwater and the Republican Party had generated an excitement unlike many within the press had witnessed in recent memory. After living through eight years of the era of Eisenhower and McCarthy, the media establishment desired an age in which new and progressive legislation would correct the ills of society. While President Kennedy's years in office was evidence that the United States was entering an unprecedented epoch of history, many within the media were longing for more.⁸³

Lyndon Johnson's Great Society was the answer that many rested their hopes in to end the age of racial oppression and class struggle. While not on the public oratory level of his predecessor, Johnson inspired not only with elegantly crafted syntax but with action. If many within the American press had enlisted their confidence in Johnson to cure the problems that plagued society, then why could the same man not be trusted to turn back the tide of communism and bring freedom and democracy to an area of the world that few had ever known about, but wanted to see gain independence from tyranny? While certain elements of the press did believe that Johnson was making a questionable decision by entering the conflict in Southeast Asia, those numbers were nothing close to being a solid block of the media.

⁸³ Many within the press had witnessed the beginning of progressive legislation during the Kennedy Administration and were hoping for more to come on the issues of civil rights. Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society*, 23.

Throughout 1966 President Johnson received numerous reports concerning the evolving sentiment of the American public on the topic of Vietnam. Public opinion polls began to reflect the nation's questioning of the Johnson Administration's handling of the conflict.⁸⁴ Several Americans did not approve of the reports that were given to them. Casualties were on the increase and the conflict appeared to be lengthening instead of coming to an end.

A study that was conducted on Tennessee democrats concerning the Vietnam conflict showed that there had been a 12% increase in apprehension over 1965.⁸⁵ The results of this particular survey proved that the administration knew that overall support for the conflict was declining. In the past Tennessee had been a staunch region of support for U.S. military involvement. Now that support was waning within his own party, Johnson understood that drastic measures had to be in order. In order to win, President Johnson would have to commit to General Westmorland's request for more soldiers or withdraw and risk being written as one of America's weakest presidents on communism.

Another group of Americans shifting their opinions in 1966 were Jews. For several decades Jews had been largely in favor of Democrat candidates. During the 1930s, many were in support of President Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. Throughout the first year of the Johnson Administration, support for intervention in Vietnam had been favorable among Jews. However, by 1966 a good percentage of Jews were questioning America's involvement in Southeast Asia. News of the conflict's implications was not generating the support that the Johnson Administration had expected. The lack of Jewish

⁸⁴ Gallop Poll, September 18, 1966, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

⁸⁵ A Study of the Political Climate in Tennessee, May 1966, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

support was made known to the administration in a September 1966 Gallop Poll. It stated that 40% of Jews disapproved of the administration's handling of the conflict while 17% did not have an opinion. By contrast, 54% of Catholics favored supporting the conflict at the same time.⁸⁶ In order to maintain the necessary footing for victory against the Viet Cong, President Johnson could not afford to continue losing important elements of the Democrat base.

While the Jewish vote was significant, African American support was crucial. Support for Democrat policies had been high among African Americans since the era of the New Deal. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had increased African American support for the Democrat Party to all time levels. African Americans who had been Republican supporters had switched to the Democrat Party in favor of its recognition of the social injustices that minorities were being served during the period.

By 1966 a significant number of African American Democrats had begun to second guess their support for the conflict in Vietnam. Even with the vast amount of progress that had been made with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there was still much in the way of social inequality taking place. Many African Americans were becoming disheartened over the fact that the United States had too many domestic troubles. The September Gallop Poll stated that 32% of African Americans disapproved of the way that Johnson was waging the fight in Vietnam, while 20% had no opinion.⁸⁷ A sizeable number of African Americans believed that President Johnson should not divert

⁸⁶ Gallop Poll, September 21, 1966, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16. ⁸⁷

Gallop Poll, September 21, 1966, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

his attention away from the issues of poverty and race in order to fight against communism abroad.⁸⁸

The most intriguing aspect of the relationship between the Johnson Administration and press concerning the conflict in Vietnam is perhaps how rapidly it deteriorated. At the close of 1966 the public noticeably became much wearier of the conflict in Southeast Asia. Evening after evening the public was informed of American casualties. After two years of constant information on high mortality rates, the public began to demand reasoned answers from the administration as to why America should expect to benefit from an incursion into what seemed more and more like a civil war in Vietnam.

What a number of Americans also believed was that the commitment to Vietnam would take years to accomplish a victory. By 1967 a large number of people who had supported the conflict were no longer as optimistic about its outcome. By this period, the American press had begun to center the focus of its attention on the amount of youth dying on foreign soil. Editorials ran in national newspapers questioning the significance of the military effort. Americans had been vastly united over the course of the twentieth century, through two world wars and conflict in Korea. Up until the beginning of 1967 the unifying sentiment had remained in place.⁸⁹

By the beginning of 1967 the political capital that President Johnson had acquired during the 1964 campaign had nearly depleted. "The year following the 1966 Midterm

⁸⁸ President Johnson witnessed a dramatic turn of events as the conflict in Vietnam progressed. African Americans were upset with existing inequalities that had not been focused upon in period since civil rights legislation had been enacted. Dallek, 411.

⁸⁹ Fred Panzer to Lyndon Johnson, June 16, 1967, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

Election was the nadir of Johnson's presidency. From the start it did not go well."⁹⁰ The majority of Americans believed that the president had provided them with the truth about the consequences of not entering the fight in Vietnam. The press provided favorable articles and news reports on the dangers of not fighting communism.

Another major aspect that caused a change in the American perspective of the Vietnamese conflict was how the national networks portrayed the fight by reporting directly from Southeast Asia. Prior to Vietnam the American press had witnessed war but never shown the horrors of battle to the public. The evening newscasts on all three major networks were providing an overwhelming amount of film from the battles. Americans who had been more accustomed to spending Sunday evenings being entertained by various acts featured on The Ed Sullivan Show were not inclined to seeing America's youth injured and dying before their eyes.⁹¹

Beginning in 1967 overall favor of the conflict began to take a steady decline. The press had altered the nation's perception of the Vietnamese conflict by broadcasting the highly visible terrors of the conflict to an audience that was not expecting to witness such graphic scenery. While the foreign policy of Lyndon Johnson appeared at times during the year to be an abject failure, Americans still supported the president. During international crises, such as the Six Day War between Israel and Egypt, the nation appeared to applaud Johnson's decision not to intervene. Had the president chosen to involve American forces in the Middle East during a time of conflict in Southeast Asia,

⁹⁰ Unger & Unger, 407.

⁹¹ Those who were born after the close of the Second World War tended to become highly concerned about the amount of casualties as a result of the conflict in Vietnam. Schulman, *Lyndon Johnson and American Liberalism*, 152.

the ramifications would have more than likely been disastrous for his foreign policy agenda.

Early 1967 showed that support for the conflict was steadily eroding in the home states of administrative officials. One of the most notable was Minnesota, the home state of Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Hubert H. Humphrey had served as a senator from Minnesota before accepting the position as running-mate on the 1964 Democrat ticket. Humphrey had been well liked by people from his home state for a good number of years. Yet, Humphrey was able to do little to persuade Minnesotan voters to continue supporting the conflict in Vietnam. People throughout Minnesota witnessed the evening news reports and questioned why the security of the United States depended so heavily upon a small nation in Southeast Asia. By early 1967 the overall view of the conflict in Vietnam had turned vastly negative for the Johnson Administration. The cause of victory in Vietnam could never be within sight as long as states like Minnesota disapproved of the president's handling of the situation in Southeast Asia. A poll released in January of 1967 showed that 72% of Minnesotans disapproved of President Johnson's handling of Vietnam.⁹²

The Six-Day War eclipsed the press's attention from Vietnam. During the period President Johnson could have chosen to come to the aid of Israel. The president opted to keep American forces uninvolved and focused on the fight in Southeast Asia. While a strong number of Americans did oppose the Johnson Administration's handling of Vietnam, many were in approval of the president's decision to not involve soldiers in the Middle East. The Johnson Administration appeared to understand that Israel could defend itself without the assistance of the United States. To have chosen to intervene in the

⁹² Minnesota Poll, January 1967, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

Middle East during an ongoing conflict in Southeast Asia would have more than likely resulted in a larger loss of public support for the president. In a memorandum provided to President Johnson, 47% of Americans were in favor of the president's foreign policy decision regarding the Middle East.⁹³

The Vietnam conflict had created such havoc for the Johnson Administration by late 1967 that many within the Democrat Party began to question whether or not he would be the best candidate for the 1968 election. After the success of the 1966 midterm elections, the Republican Party began searching for the best possible candidate to challenge President Johnson in 1968. Several popular individuals within the Republican Party were analyzed by Louis Harris⁹⁴ and many were viewed as worthy challengers to the president. Now the Republicans were feeling much more confident about their chances to capture the presidency. Two years earlier, few political commentators would have been bold enough to venture such a prediction. A memorandum that was sent to President Johnson in the fall of 1967 provided the GOP with a number of reasons to feel positive about the future. The poll stated that several Republican candidates, including George Romney, William Scranton, Nelson Rockefeller, John Lindsay, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan, were more favored by voters than President Johnson.⁹⁵

The most significant event to deter public support for the Vietnamese conflict was the Tet Offensive which occurred during January 1968. The time of year that the Tet Offensive took place was typically a restful period for the Vietnamese population. With

⁹³ Fred Panzer to Lyndon Johnson, June 10, 1967, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

⁹⁴ The Harris Survey, September 1966, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

⁹⁵ Fred Panzer to Lyndon Johnson, November 3, 1967, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

many members of the United States press embedded with the military, many Americans were able to witness the struggle on television. American commanders such as General William Westmorland stated that the exchange had been a victory for the United States. Many individuals who watched the events unfold on the evening news were emotionally stirred. People thought of their children and those of their friends and family who were possibly involved in the volatile conflict. To a sizable number of Americans, the Tet Offensive was not the form of victory they had in mind.

There was a singular moment that caused a large segment of the American public almost completely to abandon any hope of a victory in Vietnam. CBS Evening News host Walter Cronkite took to the airwaves on the evening of February 27, 1968, and gave a scathing review of the conflict. For years Americans had trusted Walter Cronkite to deliver the evening news. Cronkite had been a media presence through many national successes and tragedies. Few can pause in remembrance of the event of November 22, 1963, without hearing the voice of Walter Cronkite announce that President John F. Kennedy had died from wounds that he had suffered at the mercy of an assassin's bullet. Cronkite had personally witnessed the turmoil that American forces were suffering day after day in Southeast Asia but had not offered his opinion publicly. When Walter Cronkite lost confidence for an American victory in Vietnam, so did a massive number of Americans.⁹⁶

By early 1968 even a strong percentage of the residents of Texas, Johnson's home state, disagreed with his handling of the conflict in Vietnam. For years Texans had been among the most supportive of the handling of the Vietnam conflict. By early 1968

⁹⁶ CBS newsman Walter Cronkite was among the most trusted of the American media establishment by the public. Cronkite's statement had an overwhelming impact and worsened an increasingly unpopular conflict. *American Experience: LBJ*, 2006.

Texans were beginning to feel as many others did on the topic of Vietnam. Newspaper articles and television reports had caused a large number of Texans to abandon their support for the Vietnam effort. The Tet Offensive caused Texans to feel as though victory was far from being achieved. A Texas Poll released in February 1968 showed that 48% of respondents disapproved of military action in Vietnam, while only 37% approved.⁹⁷

Johnson had not only lost the support of religious and minority groups that the Democrat Party had depended upon for decades but that of his home state.

After the Tet Offensive, the majority of the American public did not believe that President Johnson could lead the nation to victory against communist forces in Vietnam. As President Johnson agonized over his next decisions concerning the method by which the conflict should be fought, the press continued to offer criticize Johnson's foreign policy. In a letter to Creighton Abrams, President Johnson told the general to "follow the enemy in relentless pursuit. Don't give them a minute's rest. Keep pouring it on. Let the enemy feel the weight of everything you've got."⁹⁸ Once President Johnson realized that a significant number of Americans no longer supported the effort in Vietnam, he understood that few alternatives existed. A little more than one month after the Cronkite editorial on March 31, 1968, President Johnson issued a national address from the oval office. While much of the American public believed that the president would issue further strategies concerning the conflict in Southeast Asia, what occurred was anything but predictable.

Americans had become very familiar with the Texan politician who had been their commander-in-chief for over four years. Lyndon Baines Johnson had a political history

⁹⁷ The Texas Poll, March 10, 1968, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Austin: PR 16.

⁹⁸ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1999), 87.

and personality that were equally larger than life. While members of his own party were prepared to challenge him for the Democrat nomination of 1968, few expected that he would resist the offer of his party for a second term as president. “Many different threads were woven into the final decisions I announced on March 31. The military and political developments in Vietnam were crucial factors in shaping the ultimate result.”⁹⁹ The televised speech was an indicative testament to a colossus of a man who had been defeated by an event that only four years earlier he was certain he could conquer.

Within the span of five years President Lyndon Johnson had experienced unprecedented domestic success with the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to being detested by an important percentage of the population for entering a conflict that he believed would generate an image of weakness if he allowed it to go unnoticed. Along the way, the media had documented all of Johnson’s successes. Being the experienced Texan politician that he was, Johnson always knew the influence that the media maintained over the American public. President Johnson had exerted respect and interaction with members of the press to insure that his tenure as president would not only be well recorded but highly regarded. In the end, the public estate to which Lyndon Johnson appeared to allow the most access of any president failed him during a period when they were needed the most.

⁹⁹ Johnson, 365.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE CONSEQUENCE OF VIETNAM

The 1960s were a decade of tumultuous events and unexpected outcomes. The tenure of President Lyndon Johnson may just as easily be surmised by the same events and outcomes that defined the decade. For most of his political career Lyndon Johnson had the approval of most of his constituents. As a leading member of the United States Congress and respected vice president, he experienced successes unparalleled by most politicians of the twentieth century. Before becoming the president he was able to stir meaningful legislation through the Congress that helped minority Americans and women. What made Lyndon Johnson so appealing to many Americans was how his experiences of his childhood in Texas allowed him to relate with the hardships of others much easier than it was for other politicians who had not witnessed similar circumstances.

From the very beginning of his political career, the American press recorded and documented the actions of Lyndon Johnson. The press provided Lyndon Johnson with reports that created within the minds of the American public a myriad of feelings. In the early years of his political career the press served to generate a considerable amount of elation for his Texan constituency. News of federal funding that provided electricity and roads were well received by individuals who could only relate to life as being harshly primitive by the standards of the modern age. In the eyes of those Texans he represented, Johnson was seen as being a man of compassion who understood the needs of those who elected him.¹⁰⁰

During his years as a leading figure in the United States Senate, the press

¹⁰⁰ *American Experience: LBJ*, 2006.

provided Lyndon Johnson with the advantage of becoming a nationally known political figure. Americans began to witness Lyndon Johnson in many of the similar ways as had those residents of his congressional district in Texas. The primary difference was that events involving race which were taking place during the mid and late 1950s were creating a new chapter in American political history. Civil rights were becoming a topic of conversation in many homes around the nation. While many politicians were attempting to find socially acceptable and beneficial ways of dealing with the issue, Lyndon Johnson approached the matter with the same care and compassion he had with teaching Hispanics during his youth in Southeast Texas.

During the campaign of 1960 Lyndon Johnson was viewed as a well experienced running mate who provided the Democratic nominee with volumes of legislative experience. Americans appeared to feel relatively comfortable in the selection of Lyndon Johnson as the vice presidential candidate. Aspirations such as racial and social equality, as well as strengthening the defense of America against the threat of communism were analyzed by members of the media. With a considerable amount of years between the two, each man symbolized positive attributes that many Americans believed were reasonable goals for the nation.

After the assassination Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson became president at a controversial moment in American history. The press showed that Lyndon Johnson could comfort the nation and at the same time focus on pressing domestic and international troubles. Johnson successfully called for and received civil rights legislation that awarded African Americans with the most freedoms since the era of the Emancipation Proclamation. As the press reported on these actions, it was simple for Americans to

notice that Lyndon Johnson was not the typical president. Johnson often directly engaged the issues that other presidents had often chosen to avoid.

While Lyndon Johnson may have been exceptional at focusing on topics that other presidents had paid little or no attention to, he was not above receiving criticism from his opponents. During the campaign of 1964 Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona often took the opportunity to attack the president whenever he had the chance. Whether the senator chose to criticize the president regarding domestic spending or national defense, the press took notice. A number of Americans were comfortable with their quality of life and did not seek to entrust the executive office to such a negatively critical individual. While a solid number of Americans were in support of the positions of the president, Lyndon Johnson decided to approach the campaign of 1964 just as he had with previous political endeavors. Johnson did not spend a large amount of time attacking Senator Goldwater but expressed why he was the best candidate for the office of president. President Johnson's desire for America to use its full potential on the world stage was shared by an optimistic public. The press did not fail to report on the exchanges that took place between the two candidates, but when Election Day arrived Americans voiced their approval for the progressive mandates of President Johnson.

One of the major topics of the 1964 campaign had been the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Many within the press knew that Lyndon Johnson had been a staunch advocate for racial equality as a senator and was proving the point even more so during the early years of his presidency. While the two presidential candidates debated over the necessity of the new law, it was Johnson who took action to ensure racial equality.

While many Americans were highly confident with the actions of President

Johnson during his first few years in the White House, one issue always remained confrontational and difficult for all who were associated with the topic. The United States had been involved in the Vietnam conflict in some capacity since the years of the Truman Administration. Each president since Harry Truman had dealt with the issue in a way that attempted to honor America's commitment to freedom from communism around the globe, while not beginning an all out land war in Southeast Asia. After two decades the conflict that no president wished to commit to could no longer be avoided. The time for indecisiveness had passed on the issue of Vietnam and Lyndon Johnson had to make the ultimate decision.¹⁰¹

As the first year of the conflict passed, the American press provided President Johnson with positive coverage. Stories of how the president who sought for maximizing freedom at home was now rightfully attempting to do so abroad. The Johnson White House was encouraged by a vast number of stories that detailed the valiant efforts of American forces in Southeast Asia. As the conflict expanded President Johnson understood that he had to risk all in order to achieve victory in Vietnam the forces of communism. Stories concerning the "domino theory" were discussed and the president was portrayed as the leading individual who would not allow communism to surge past Vietnam.

During the next few years, an interesting storyline began to develop concerning the presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Could America truly ever hope to accomplish victory in Southeast Asia? As the conflict continued beyond its first few years, the American press began to drastically question the chances of a victorious outcome.

¹⁰¹ After conferring with his top military advisors, cabinet members, and former President Eisenhower, Johnson made the decision to commit American Armed Forces to fight in Vietnam. McNamara, 173.

Editorials began to show doubt of and resentment in the president's decision to wage a fight in Vietnam. The evening news began to show an increased number of casualties. Soon the American public's perception of the conflict underwent a firm shift. By 1968 the public support of the conflict had decreased to an all time low. However, for many Americans it took the insight of the trusted CBS Evening News host Walter Cronkite to state what many people believed was the inevitable truth. The president found himself surrounded by the resignations of many of those whom he deemed the most intelligent on the issue of foreign policy. It only took one issue to end the career of a man who had known vast success and relatively limited failure.

Lyndon Johnson understood the power of the American press and used it well during his political career. From domestic to foreign issues, Lyndon Johnson had highly benefited from using the media to craft his public image. In the end, the one issue that many around Lyndon Johnson believed he would perform successfully created an image of failure so vast that it not only ended the public's confidence in his handling of the conflict but overall leadership on issues that had nothing to do with Vietnam. In decades past the press had provided American presidents with positive stories. The American public held and retained a high level of confidence in their leaders during times of conflict. Many within the press during the mid and late 1960s, however, did not harbor the same feelings for Johnson or the conflict. To them, Vietnam became the conflict with no actual end, only a prolonged military effort that would ultimately cost more American lives than what it was actually worth. When a strong contingent within the press and perhaps a majority of academia accepted the belief that the conflict was an unwinnable

one, any president would have had a difficult time convincing the American people as to support his effort in Southeast Asia.

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