The New Frontier

MAIN IDEA
While Kennedy had trouble getting his ideas for a New Frontier passed, several goals were achieved.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW
Kennedy’s space program continues to generate scientific and engineering advances that benefit Americans.

Terms & Names
• New Frontier
• mandate
• Peace Corps
• Alliance for Progress
• Warren Commission

One American’s Story

On May 5, 1961, American astronaut Alan Shepard climbed into *Freedom 7*, a tiny capsule on top of a huge rocket booster. The capsule left the earth’s atmosphere in a ball of fire and returned the same way, and Shepard became the first American to travel into space. Years later, he recalled his emotions when a naval crew fished him out of the Atlantic.

**A Personal Voice** ALAN SHEPARD

“Until the moment I stepped out of the flight deck . . . I hadn’t realized the intensity of the emotions and feelings that so many people had for me, for the other astronauts, and for the whole manned space program. . . . I was very close to tears as I thought, it’s no longer just our fight to get ‘out there.’ The struggle belongs to everyone in America. . . . From now on there was no turning back.”
—*Moon Shot: The Inside Story of America’s Race to the Moon*

The entire trip—which took only 15 minutes from liftoff to splashdown—reaffirmed the belief in American ingenuity. John F. Kennedy inspired many Americans with the same kind of belief.

The Promise of Progress

Kennedy set out to transform his broad vision of progress into what he called the New Frontier. “We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier,” Kennedy had announced upon accepting the nomination for president. He called on Americans to be “new pioneers” and explore “uncharted areas of science and space, . . . unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.”

Kennedy had difficulty turning his vision into reality, however. He offered Congress proposals to provide medical care for the aged, rebuild blighted urban areas, and aid education, but he couldn’t gather enough votes. Kennedy faced the same conservative coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats that had...
blocked Truman's Fair Deal, and he showed little skill in pushing his domestic reform measures through Congress. Since Kennedy had been elected by the slimmest of margins, he lacked a popular mandate—a clear indication that voters approved of his plans. As a result, he often tried to play it safe politically. Nevertheless, Kennedy did persuade Congress to enact measures to boost the economy, build the national defense, provide international aid, and fund a massive space program.

STIMULATING THE ECONOMY One domestic problem the Kennedy team tackled was the economy. By 1960 America was in a recession. Unemployment hovered around 6 percent, one of the highest levels since World War II. During the campaign, Kennedy had criticized the Eisenhower administration for failing to stimulate growth. The American economy, he said, was lagging behind those of other Western democracies and the Soviet Union.

Kennedy's advisers pushed for the use of deficit spending, which had been the basis for Roosevelt's New Deal. They said that stimulating economic growth depended on increased government spending and lower taxes, even if it meant that the government spent more than it took in.

Accordingly, the proposals Kennedy sent to Congress in 1961 called for increased spending. The Department of Defense received a nearly 20 percent budget increase for new nuclear missiles, nuclear submarines, and an expansion of the armed services. Congress also approved a package that increased the minimum wage to $1.25 an hour, extended unemployment insurance, and provided assistance to cities with high unemployment.

ADDRESSING POVERTY ABROAD One of the first campaign promises Kennedy fulfilled was the creation of the Peace Corps, a program of volunteer assistance to the developing nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Critics in the United States called the program “Kennedy's Kiddie Korps” because many volunteers were just out of college. Some foreign observers questioned whether Americans could understand other cultures.

Despite these reservations, the Peace Corps became a huge success. People of all ages and backgrounds signed up to work as agricultural advisers, teachers, or health aides or to do whatever work the host country needed. By 1968, more than 35,000 volunteers had served in 60 nations around the world.

A second foreign aid program, the Alliance for Progress, offered economic and technical assistance to Latin American countries. Between 1961 and 1969, the United States invested almost
$12 billion in Latin America, in part to deter these countries from picking up Fidel Castro’s revolutionary ideas. While the money brought some development to the region, it didn’t bring fundamental reforms.

**RACE TO THE MOON** On April 12, 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri A. Gagarin became the first human in space. Kennedy saw this as a challenge and decided that America would surpass the Soviets by sending a man to the moon.

In less than a month the United States had duplicated the Soviet feat. Later that year, a communications satellite called Telstar relayed live television pictures across the Atlantic Ocean from Maine to Europe. Meanwhile, America’s National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had begun to construct new launch facilities at Cape Canaveral, Florida, and a mission control center in Houston, Texas. America’s pride and prestige were restored. Speaking before a crowd at Houston’s Rice University, Kennedy expressed the spirit of “the space race.”

**A PERSONAL VOICE** President John F. Kennedy

“We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.”

—Address on the Nation’s Space Effort, September 12, 1962

Seven years later, on July 20, 1969, the U.S. would achieve its goal. An excited nation watched with bated breath as U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong took his first steps on the moon.

As a result of the space program, universities expanded their science programs. The huge federal funding for research and development gave rise to new industries and new technologies, many of which could be used in business and industry and also in new consumer goods. Space- and defense-related industries sprang up in the Southern and Western states, which grew rapidly.
ADDRESSING DOMESTIC PROBLEMS  While progress was being made on the new frontiers of space exploration and international aid, many Americans suffered at home. In 1962, the problem of poverty in America was brought to national attention in Michael Harrington’s book *The Other America*. Harrington profiled the 50 million people in America who scraped by each year on less than $1,000 per person. The number of poor shocked many Americans.

While Harrington awakened the nation to the nightmare of poverty, the fight against segregation took hold. Throughout the South, demonstrators raised their voices in what would become some of the most controversial civil rights battles of the 1960s. (See Chapter 21.) Kennedy had not pushed aggressively for legislation on the issues of poverty and civil rights, although he effected changes by executive action. However, now he felt that it was time to live up to a campaign promise.

In 1963, Kennedy began to focus more closely on the issues at home. He called for a “national assault on the causes of poverty.” He also ordered Robert Kennedy’s Justice Department to investigate racial injustices in the South. Finally, he presented Congress with a sweeping civil rights bill and a proposal to cut taxes by over $10 billion.

Tragedy in Dallas

In the fall of 1963, public opinion polls showed that Kennedy was losing popularity because of his advocacy of civil rights. Yet most still supported their beloved president. No one could foresee the terrible national tragedy just ahead.

FOUR DAYS IN NOVEMBER  On the sunny morning of November 22, 1963, Air Force One, the presidential aircraft, landed in Dallas, Texas. President and Mrs. Kennedy had come to Texas to mend political fences with members of the state’s Democratic Party. Kennedy had expected a cool reception from the conservative state, but he basked instead in warm waves of applause from crowds that lined the streets of downtown Dallas.

Jacqueline and her husband sat in the back seat of an open-air limousine. In front of them sat Texas Governor John Connally and his wife, Nellie. As the car approached a state building known as the Texas School Book Depository, Nellie Connally turned to Kennedy and said, “You can’t say that Dallas isn’t friendly to you today.” A few seconds later, rifle shots rang out, and Kennedy was shot in the head. His car raced to a nearby hospital, where doctors frantically tried to revive him, but it was too late. President Kennedy was dead.

As the tragic news spread through America’s schools, offices, and homes, people reacted with disbelief. Questions were on everyone’s lips: Who had killed the president, and why? What would happen next?
During the next four days, television became “the window of the world.” A photograph of a somber Lyndon Johnson taking the oath of office aboard the presidential airplane was broadcast. Soon, audiences watched as Dallas police charged Lee Harvey Oswald with the murder. His palm print had been found on the rifle used to kill John F. Kennedy.

The 24-year-old Marine had a suspicious past. After receiving a dishonorable discharge, Oswald had briefly lived in the Soviet Union, and he supported Castro. On Sunday, November 24, as millions watched live television coverage of Oswald being transferred between jails, a nightclub owner named Jack Ruby broke through the crowd and shot and killed Oswald.

The next day, all work stopped for Kennedy’s funeral as America mourned its fallen leader. The assassination and televised funeral became a historic event. Americans who were alive then can still recall what they were doing when they first heard about the shooting of their president.

**UNANSWERED QUESTIONS**

The bizarre chain of events made some people wonder if Oswald was part of a conspiracy. In 1963, the **Warren Commission** investigated and concluded that Oswald had shot the president while acting on his own. Later, in 1979, a reinvestigation concluded that Oswald was part of a conspiracy. Investigators also said that two persons may have fired at the president. Numerous other people have made investigations. Their explanations have ranged from a plot by anti-Castro Cubans, to a Communist-sponsored attack, to a conspiracy by the CIA. What Americans did learn from the Kennedy assassination was that their system of government is remarkably sturdy. A crisis that would have crippled a dictatorship did not prevent a smooth transition to the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. In a speech to Congress, Johnson expressed his hope that “from the brutal loss of our leader we will derive not weakness but strength.” Not long after, Johnson drove through Congress the most ambitious domestic legislative package since the New Deal.
The Great Society

MAIN IDEA
The demand for reform helped create a new awareness of social problems, especially on matters of civil rights and the effects of poverty.

Terms & Names
- Lyndon Baines Johnson
- Economic Opportunity Act
- Great Society
- Medicare and Medicaid
- Immigration Act of 1965
- Warren Court
- reapportionment

WHY IT MATTERS NOW
Reforms made in the 1960s have had a lasting effect on the American justice system by increasing the rights of minorities.

One American’s Story
In 1966, family finances forced Larry Alfred to drop out of high school in Mobile, Alabama. He turned to the Job Corps, a federal program that trained young people from poor backgrounds. He learned to operate construction equipment, but his dream was to help people. On the advice of his Job Corps counselor, he joined VISTA—Volunteers in Service to America—often called the “domestic Peace Corps.”

Both the Job Corps and VISTA sprang into being in 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act. This law was the main offensive of Johnson’s “war on poverty” and a cornerstone of the Great Society.

VISTA assigned Alfred to work with a community of poor farm laborers in Robstown, Texas, near the Mexican border. There he found a number of children with mental and physical disabilities who had no special assistance, education, or training. So he established the Robstown Association for Retarded People, started a parents education program, sought state funds, and created a rehabilitation center. At age 20, Larry Alfred was a high school dropout, Job Corps graduate, VISTA volunteer, and in Robstown, an authority on people with disabilities. Alfred embodied Johnson’s Great Society in two ways: its programs helped him turn his life around, and he made a difference in people’s lives.

LBJ’s Path to Power
By the time Lyndon Baines Johnson, or LBJ, as he was called, succeeded to the presidency, his ambition and drive had become legendary. In explaining his frenetic energy, Johnson once remarked, “That’s the way I’ve been all my life. My daddy used to wake me up at dawn and shake my leg and say, ‘Lyndon, every boy in town’s got an hour’s head start on you.’”

FROM THE TEXAS HILLS TO CAPITOL HILL A fourth-generation Texan, Johnson grew up in the dry Texas hill country of Blanco County. The Johnsons never knew great wealth, but they also never missed a meal.
LBJ entered politics in 1937 when he won a special election to fill a vacant seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Johnson styled himself as a “New Dealer” and spokesperson for the small ranchers and struggling farmers of his district. He caught the eye of President Franklin Roosevelt, who took Johnson under his wing. Roosevelt helped him secure key committee assignments in Congress and steer much-needed electrification and water projects to his Texas district. Johnson, in turn, idolized FDR and imitated his leadership style.

Once in the House, Johnson eagerly eyed a seat in the Senate. In 1948, after an exhausting, bitterly fought campaign, he won the Democratic primary election for the Senate by a margin of only 87 votes out of 988,000.

**A MASTER POLITICIAN** Johnson proved himself a master of party politics and behind-the-scenes maneuvering, and he rose to the position of Senate majority leader in 1955. People called his legendary ability to persuade senators to support his bills the “LBJ treatment.” As a reporter for the *Saturday Evening Post* explained, Johnson also used this treatment to win over reporters.

**A PERSONAL VOICE** STEWART ALSOP

“The Majority Leader [Johnson] was, it seemed, in a relaxed, friendly, reminiscent mood. But by gradual stages this mood gave way to something rather like a human hurricane. Johnson was up, striding about his office, talking without pause, occasionally leaning over, his nose almost touching the reporter’s, to shake the reporter’s shoulder or grab his knee. . . . Appeals were made, to the Almighty, to the shades of the departed great, to the reporter’s finer instincts and better nature, while the reporter, unable to get a word in edgewise, sat collapsed upon a leather sofa, eyes glazed, mouth half open.”

—“The New President,” *Saturday Evening Post*, December 14, 1963

Johnson’s deft handling of Congress led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, a voting rights measure that was the first civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. Johnson’s knack for achieving legislative results had captured John F. Kennedy’s attention, too, during Kennedy’s run for the White House. To Kennedy, Johnson’s congressional connections and his Southern Protestant background compensated for his own drawbacks as a candidate, so he asked Johnson to be his running mate. Johnson’s presence on the ticket helped Kennedy win key states in the South, especially Texas, which went Democratic by just a few thousand votes.

**Johnson’s Domestic Agenda**

In the wake of Kennedy’s assassination, President Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress. It was the fifth day of his administration. “All I have I would have given gladly not to be standing here today,” he began. Kennedy had inspired Americans to begin to solve national and world problems. Johnson urged Congress to pass the civil rights and tax-cut bills that Kennedy had sent to Capitol Hill.
In February 1964 Congress passed a tax reduction of over $10 billion into law. As the Democrats had hoped, the tax cut spurred economic growth. People spent more, which meant profits for businesses, which increased tax revenues and lowered the federal budget deficit from $6 billion in 1964 to $4 billion in 1966.

Then in July, Johnson pushed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through Congress, persuading Southern senators to stop blocking its passage. It prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and sex and granted the federal government new powers to enforce its provisions.

**THE WAR ON POVERTY**

Following these successes, LBJ pressed on with his own agenda—to alleviate poverty. Early in 1964, he had declared “unconditional war on poverty in America” and proposed sweeping legislation designed to help Americans “on the outskirts of hope.”

In August 1964, Congress enacted the **Economic Opportunity Act** (EOA), approving nearly $1 billion for youth programs, antipoverty measures, small-business loans, and job training. The EOA legislation created:

- the Job Corps Youth Training Program
- VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America)
- Project Head Start, an education program for underprivileged preschoolers
- the Community Action Program, which encouraged poor people to participate in public-works programs.

**THE 1964 ELECTION**

In 1964, the Republicans nominated conservative senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona to oppose Johnson. Goldwater believed the federal government had no business trying to right social and economic wrongs such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of opportunity. He attacked such long-established federal programs as Social Security, which he wanted to make voluntary, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, which he wanted to sell.

In 1964, most American people were in tune with Johnson—they believed that government could and should help solve the nation’s problems. Moreover, Goldwater had frightened many Americans by suggesting that he might use nuclear weapons on Cuba and North Vietnam. Johnson’s campaign capitalized on this fear. It produced a chilling television commercial in which a picture of a little girl counting the petals on a daisy dissolved into a mushroom cloud created by an atomic bomb. Where Goldwater advocated intervention in Vietnam, Johnson assured the American people that sending U.S. troops there “would offer no solution at all to the real problem of Vietnam.”

LBJ won the election by a landslide, winning 61 percent of the popular vote and 486 electoral votes, while Senator Goldwater won only 52. The Democrats also increased their majority in Congress. For the first time since 1938, a Democratic president did not need the votes of conservative Southern Democrats in order to get laws passed. Now Johnson could launch his reform program in earnest.
Building the Great Society

In May 1964, Johnson had summed up his vision for America in a phrase: the Great Society. In a speech at the University of Michigan, Johnson outlined a legislative program that would end poverty and racial injustice. But, he told an enthusiastic crowd, that was “just the beginning.” Johnson envisioned a legislative program that would create not only a higher standard of living and equal opportunity, but also promote a richer quality of life for all.

A PERSONAL VOICE  LYNDON B. JOHNSON

“The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community. It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race.”

—“The Great Society,” May 22, 1964

Like his idol FDR, LBJ wanted to change America. By the time Johnson left the White House in 1969, Congress had passed 206 of his measures. The president personally led the battle to get most of them passed.

EDUCATION  During 1965 and 1966, the LBJ administration introduced a flurry of bills to Congress. Johnson considered education “the key which can unlock the door to the Great Society.” The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided more than $1 billion in federal aid to help public and parochial schools purchase textbooks and new library materials. This was the first major federal aid package for education in the nation’s history.

The New Frontier and the Great Society 689
**Great Society Programs, 1964–1967**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>POVERTY</strong></th>
<th>1964 Tax Reduction Act</th>
<th>cut corporate and individual taxes to stimulate growth.</th>
<th>1965 Medicare Act</th>
<th>established Medicare and Medicaid programs.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964 Economic Opportunity Act</td>
<td>created Job Corps, VISTA, Project Head Start, and other programs to fight the “war on poverty.”</td>
<td>1965 Appalachian Regional Development Act</td>
<td>targeted aid for highways, health centers, and resource development in that economically depressed area.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>CITIES</strong></th>
<th>1965 Omnibus Housing Act</th>
<th>provided money for low-income housing.</th>
<th>1966 Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Area Redevelopment Act</th>
<th>funded slum rebuilding, mass transit, and other improvements for selected “model cities.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>1965 Department of Housing and Urban Development</td>
<td>was formed to administer federal housing programs.</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>EDUCATION</strong></th>
<th>1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act</th>
<th>directed money to schools for textbooks, library materials, and special education.</th>
<th>1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities</th>
<th>was created to financially assist painters, musicians, actors, and other artists.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1965 Higher Education Act</td>
<td>funded scholarships and low-interest loans for college students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966 Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Area Redevelopment Act</td>
<td>funded slum rebuilding, mass transit, and other improvements for selected “model cities.”</td>
<td>1967 Corporation for Public Broadcasting</td>
<td>was formed to fund educational TV and radio broadcasting.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>DISCRIMINATION</strong></th>
<th>1964 Civil Rights Act</th>
<th>outlawed discrimination in public accommodations, housing, and jobs; increased federal power to prosecute civil rights abuses.</th>
<th>1965 Voting Rights Act</th>
<th>ended the practice of requiring voters to pass literacy tests and permitted the federal government to monitor voter registration.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1964 Twenty-Fourth Amendment</td>
<td>abolished the poll tax in federal elections.</td>
<td>1965 Immigration Act</td>
<td>ended national-origins quotas established in 1924.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>ENVIRONMENT</strong></th>
<th>1965 Wilderness Preservation Act</th>
<th>set aside over 9 million acres for national forest lands.</th>
<th>1965 Clean Air Act Amendment</th>
<th>directed the federal government to establish emission standards for new motor vehicles.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1965 Water Quality Act</td>
<td>required states to clean up their rivers.</td>
<td>1967 Air Quality Act</td>
<td>set federal air pollution guidelines and extended federal enforcement power.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966 National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act</td>
<td>set federal safety standards for the auto and tire industries.</td>
<td>1966 Department of Transportation</td>
<td>was created to deal with national air, rail, and highway transportation.</td>
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**HEALTHCARE**  LBJ and Congress changed Social Security by establishing Medicare and Medicaid. **Medicare** provided hospital insurance and low-cost medical insurance for almost every American age 65 or older. **Medicaid** extended health insurance to welfare recipients.

**HOUSING**  Congress also made several important decisions that shifted the nation’s political power from rural to urban areas. These decisions included: appropriating money to build some 240,000 units of low-rent public housing and helping low- and moderate-income families pay for better private housing; establishing the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); and appointing Robert Weaver, the first African-American cabinet member in American history, as Secretary of HUD.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Comparing**

How are Medicare and Medicaid similar?

Answer: Both provide government-sponsored health insurance.
IMMIGRATION The Great Society also brought profound changes to the nation’s immigration laws. The Immigration Act of 1924 and the National Origins Act of 1924 had established immigration quotas that discriminated strongly against people from outside Western Europe. The Act set a quota of about 150,000 people annually. It discriminated against southern and eastern Europeans and barred Asians completely. The Immigration Act of 1965 opened the door for many non-European immigrants to settle in the United States by ending quotas based on nationality.

THE ENVIRONMENT In 1962, Silent Spring, a book by Rachel Carson, had exposed a hidden danger: the effects of pesticides on the environment. Carson’s book and the public’s outcry resulted in the Water Quality Act of 1965, which required states to clean up rivers. Johnson also ordered the government to search out the worst chemical polluters. “There is no excuse . . . for chemical companies and oil refineries using our major rivers as pipelines for toxic wastes.” Such words and actions helped trigger the environmental movement in the United States. (See Chapter 24.)

CONSUMER PROTECTION Consumer advocates also made headway. They convinced Congress to pass major safety laws, including a truth-in-packaging law that set standards for labeling consumer goods. Ralph Nader, a young lawyer, wrote a book, Unsafe at Any Speed, that sharply criticized the U.S. automobile industry for ignoring safety concerns. His testimony helped persuade Congress to establish safety standards for automobiles and tires. Precautions extended to food, too. Congress passed the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967. “Americans can feel a little safer now in their homes, on the road, at the supermarket, and in the department store,” said Johnson.

Reforms of the Warren Court

The wave of liberal reform that characterized the Great Society also swept through the Supreme Court of the 1960s. Beginning with the 1954 landmark decision Brown v. Board of Education, which ruled school segregation unconstitutional, the Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren took an activist stance on the leading issues of the day.

Several major court decisions in the 1960s affected American society. The Warren Court banned prayer in public schools and declared state-required loyalty oaths unconstitutional. It limited the power of communities to censor books and films and said that free speech included the wearing of black armbands to school by antiwar students. Furthermore, the Court brought about change in federal and state reapportionment and the criminal justice system.

CONGRESSIONAL REAPPORTIONMENT In a key series of decisions, the Warren Court addressed the issue of reapportionment, or the way in which states redraw election districts based on the changing number of people in them. By 1960, about 80 percent of Americans lived in cities and suburbs. However, many states had failed to change their congressional districts to reflect this development; instead, rural districts might have fewer than 200,000 people, while some urban districts had more than 600,000. Thus the voters in rural areas had more representation—and also more power—than those in urban areas.
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These rulings greatly divided public opinion. Liberals praised the decisions, arguing that they placed necessary limits on police power and protected the right of all citizens to a fair trial. Conservatives, however, bitterly criticized the Court. They claimed that Mapp and Miranda benefited criminal suspects and severely limited the power of the police to investigate crimes. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Republican candidates for office seized on the "crime issue," portraying liberals and Democrats as being soft on crime and citing the decisions of the Warren Court as major obstacles to fighting crime.

**Rights of the Accused** Other Warren Court decisions greatly expanded the rights of people accused of crimes. In **Mapp v. Ohio** (1961), the Court ruled that evidence seized illegally could not be used in state courts. This is called the exclusionary rule. In **Gideon v. Wainwright** (1963), the justices required criminal courts to provide free legal counsel to those who could not afford it. In **Escobedo v. Illinois** (1964), the justices ruled that an accused person has a right to have a lawyer present during police questioning. In 1966, the Court went one step further in **Miranda v. Arizona**, where it ruled that all suspects must be read their rights before questioning. (See **Miranda v. Arizona**, page 694.)

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**POINT**

"The Great Society succeeded in prompting far-reaching social change."

Defenders of the Great Society contend that it bettered the lives of millions of Americans. Historian John Morton Blum notes, "The Great Society initiated policies that by 1985 had had profound consequences: Blacks now voted at about the same rate as whites, and nearly 6,000 blacks held public offices; almost every elderly citizen had medical insurance, and the aged were no poorer than Americans as a whole; a large majority of small children attended preschool programs."

Attorney Margaret Burnham argues that the civil rights gains alone justify the Great Society: "For tens of thousands of human beings . . . giving promise of a better life was significant . . . . What the Great Society affirmed was the responsibility of the federal government to take measures necessary to bring into the social and economic mainstream any segment of the people [who had been] historically excluded."

**COUNTERPOINT**

"Failures of the Great Society prove that government-sponsored programs do not work."

The major attack on the Great Society is that it created "big government": an oversized bureaucracy, too many regulations, waste and fraud, and rising budget deficits. As journalist David Alpern writes, this comes from the notion that government could solve all the nation's problems: "The Great Society created unwieldy new mechanisms like the Office of Economic Opportunity and began 'throwing dollars at problems . . . . ' Spawned in the process were vast new constituencies of government bureaucrats and beneficiaries whose political clout made it difficult to kill programs off."

Conservatives say the Great Society's social welfare programs created a culture of dependency. Economist Paul Craig Roberts argues that "The Great Society . . . reflected our lack of confidence in the institutions of a free society. We came to the view that it is government spending and not business innovation that creates jobs and that it is society's fault if anyone is poor."

**THINKING CRITICALLY**

1. **Evaluating** Do you think the Great Society was a success or a failure? Explain.

2. **Analyzing Social Problems** Research the most pressing problems in your own neighborhood or precinct. Then propose a social program you think would address at least one of those problems while avoiding the pitfalls of the Great Society programs.
Impact of the Great Society

The Great Society and the Warren Court changed the United States. People disagree on whether these changes left the nation better or worse, but most agree on one point: no president in the post–World War II era extended the power and reach of the federal government more than Lyndon Johnson. The optimism of the Johnson presidency fueled an activist era in all three branches of government, for at least the first few years.

The “war on poverty” did help. The number of poor people fell from 21 percent of the population in 1962 to 11 percent in 1973. However, many of Johnson’s proposals, though well intended, were hastily conceived and proved difficult to accomplish.

Johnson’s massive tax cut spurred the economy. But funding the Great Society contributed to a growing budget deficit—a problem that continued for decades. Questions about government finances, as well as debates over the effectiveness of these programs and the role of the federal government, left a number of people disillusioned. A conservative backlash began to take shape as a new group of Republican leaders rose to power. In 1966, for example, a conservative Hollywood actor named Ronald Reagan swept to victory in the race for governor of California over the Democratic incumbent.

Thousands of miles away, the increase of Communist forces in Vietnam also began to overshadow the goals of the Great Society. The fear of communism was deeply rooted in the minds of Americans from the Cold War era. Four years after initiating the Great Society, Johnson, a peace candidate in 1964, would be labeled a “hawk”—a supporter of one of the most divisive wars in recent U.S. history.