

## American Presidents and Their Attitudes, Beliefs, and Actions Surrounding Education and Multiculturalism

A Series of Research Studies in Educational Policy

Fifth Installment:  
Examining Presidents Thomas Jefferson,  
Abraham Lincoln, and Lyndon B. Johnson



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### Introduction

When looking at social injustice and the oppression of “others” in our country, one can look no further than the political leadership of our government to take the moral and ethical responsibility to eradicate such injustices. Looking at the political leadership, the president is held accountable and sets the agenda which will promote, hinder, or ignore social justice issues. Each President has the power to decide what actions and policies will comprise his administration and impact the nation.

This article, the fifth in a series about American Presidents and their attitudes, beliefs, and actions surrounding education and multiculturalism, will examine Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and

Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidencies and how their actions and failed actions impacted social issues and influenced social realities as they continue to exist today.

Dominant groups set the parameters for subordinates. “One group holds power and authority in society relative to the other group and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used” (Tatum, 2000, p. 11). With these two groups, the superior group and the inferior group, one can easily assume the answers to these questions, whose history is taught, who gets the best jobs, and who can seek membership to these groups?

Members of privileged groups, because they have the power to initiate change, must choose to either ignore or fight for issues of oppression and social justice. Too often our textbooks lack an analysis of inequality (Loewen, 1995). The result is a society that fails to recognize inequality and learns to embrace conformity. The white, male privilege defines many aspects of American culture, and others must conform to that point of view (Wildman & Davis, 2000). Consequently, executive and legislative decisions are made in the name of liberty, which too often reflect the dominant white, male’s point of view.

We become academically socialized in a monocultural curriculum (Boyer & Baptiste, 1996). “Our desire for power based on cultural norms slows the process of learning—of understanding—and seeing knowledge and truth right in front of us” (Thomas, 1998). Too often we base our way of thinking and living in a society on only one perspective. We use cultural blinders and justifications to help our way of thinking that hinders the possibilities or blocks out other multiple perspectives.

We have not learned how to embrace diversity through a multicultural lens. We need to study the actions and policies of our past presidents and analyze the social realities of African Americans, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, women, and other cultural and ethnic groups through their leadership. We need to take off our blinders so we can internalize multiple perspectives and fully participate as citizens in a democracy.

### Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson was the third President of the United States. However, his most prominent contribution to the nation was the Declaration of Independence. His

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affirmations about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are still interpreted and recited today. His personality has been described as mild and agreeable (Degregorio, 1946). Yet others describe him as being cold, reserved, and a political animal (Dabney, 1991; Degregorio, 1946). He was an eloquent writer, but lacked public speaking skills (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999; Wilkins, 2001).

The Presidential election campaign of 1800 was based on domestic issues and states' rights. The election ended in a tie between Aaron Burr and Jefferson. Jefferson, a Democratic Republican, pledged he would not get rid of Federalists if elected President. However, Jefferson used his executive influence on the legislative branches of government to promote his own agenda, power, and political beliefs. Jefferson said that the Federalists were part of the rich (Hartman, 2003). After his election, he removed 16 Federalist judges (Wills, 2003). The constitution was established to protect judges from being punished, but Jefferson used his power to remove and impeach judges who did not agree with his views (Wills, 2003).

### *Social Justice Issues and Use of Power*

How did Jefferson use his power and status? Was it for the common good? Did he use his power to promote the rights of oppressed populations? During his two terms as President, Jefferson used his power to be an advocate for the slave holding South (Dabney, 1991). In his first inaugural address as President, there was no mention of slavery (Garrett, 1982).

Jefferson's public life has aspects of scandal, leadership, failure, and vision. Jefferson was convinced of his own beliefs and made presidential decisions based on his own perspectives of society. He disregarded legislation such as the federal ratio, which allowed southern slave owners to count each slave held as three fifths of a person for his own personal gain. This legislation promoted slavery, and allowed unfair representation to those states that did not promote slavery. Despite the slave states declining population, they used this to give them an unfair majority and became known as the "Jeffersonian Republican Party" (McPherson, 1991, p. 12).

Jefferson is often called the Negro president because the federal ratio gave him thirteen votes that would not have been allotted otherwise (Robinson, Rakove, & Wills; 2004; Wills, 2003). This southern leverage allowed the south a greater share of the votes and protected Jefferson's agrarian culture and use of slaves.



Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson used his power to terminate the Alien and Sedition Acts (created during John Adam's administration). The Republicans were negatively impacted by the Naturalization Act because it postponed citizenship and denied immigrants voting privileges until 14 years of residency. The Alien Act and Alien Enemies Act gave the President the power to imprison or deport aliens that posed a threat to the national government. The Sedition Act was devised to silence spoken or written Republican criticism of The Federalist, which hindered First Amendment freedoms.

Jefferson was in protest of this law during Adam's presidency. Jefferson exposed Adams in the 1800 election and used his presidential power to free all the men imprisoned by Adams, which was one of his first acts of office (2003). This became known as "The Revolution of 1800" (p. 4).

Other legislation during Jefferson's term included the Judiciary Act of 1802 which nullified the last minute appointments of previous administrations, which consequently had given Federalists leverage in the Judiciary branch. The 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment was also implemented, which subordinated the Vice President and increased the power of the President.

In June 1807 a British ship, Leopard, attacked the USS Chesapeake. Some historians state Jefferson's concern for keeping the Nation uninvolved in the Napoleonic wars led to the Embargo act 1807-1809 (Averon, 2001). Others state it was Jefferson's anti-commercial bias and the South's agrarian life that led to the Embargo Act (Robinson, Rakove & Willis,

2004). The act had a negative impact on the American economy, as many jobs were lost.

### *Jefferson's Attitudes and Actions of Social Justice*

Another change in policy was that President Adams had supported Haitian leadership and was sympathetic to their quest for freedom (Bender, 2001). Jefferson was less supportive of Black slaves claiming universal rights (2001). In 1804 Jean Jacques Dessalines, a Black leader, had overthrown the French rule of Haiti. This was the largest slave rebellion in history and they had attained universal human rights of freedom (Bender, 2001). Jefferson did not grant diplomatic recognition or support. Historians concur this was due to the fact they were Black (Bender, 2001; Robinson, Rakove & Willis, 2004; O'Brien, 1996).

Jefferson was worried that contact with Haiti might advance a Black rebellion in the United States and Black crews with cargoes would receive an unwelcome response from Southern traders (Bender, 2001). Jefferson's refusal to recognize the independence of Haiti set a precedent that Madison and Monroe continued (2001).

Jefferson used his power to change and pass laws that favored his party beliefs, and which failed to protect the rights of other groups. Jefferson's writings seem to contradict his attitudes and actions. Jefferson's writings do reflect his moral anguish of slavery. However, Jefferson believed Blacks were not capable to survive on their own and that they were an inferior race (Belote, 2004; Dabney, 1991; Jefferson, 1999). Jefferson wrote,

comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. (1999, p. 146)

Jefferson also believed that African Americans would be an obvious problem to society because they were untrained and illiterate (Dabney, 1991). However, he had personal knowledge of African Americans who were educated, intelligent, and capable of being productive citizens (Haber, 1970). Phillis Wheatly, a Black slave, was taught how to read and write. She also learned Latin and by the age of 21 had her first full volume of poetry published (De Pauw, 1975). There was also Benjamin Baneker who was a mathematician and to whom Jefferson personally wrote a letter

and submitted his Almanac to Secretary of the Academy of Sciences in Paris (Garrett, 1982). In the letter to Baneker, Jefferson writes:

No body wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colors of men, and that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa & America. I can add with truth, that nobody wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body & mind to what it ought to be, as fast as the imbecility of their present existence, and other circumstances which cannot be neglected, will admit. (1984, p. 982; Garrett, 1982, p. 26)

It is evident from the examples of Wheatly and Baneker that Jefferson was well aware that Blacks were equals in intellectual abilities to Whites. By not providing opportunities and improving the conditions of African Americans comparable to the privileged whites, Blacks would continue to suffer in terms of equality. However, Jefferson because of his racist views, failed to use his power and continued to deny African Americans the opportunities they deserved.

Jefferson, in March 1807, signed into law a bill banning the importation of slaves. Although this slowed the number of slaves being imported, it didn't stop the importation (Degregorio, 1946) because there were no serious consequences if it was violated; thus slaves continued to be smuggled. Historians state the decrease in the number of slaves being imported increased the value of slaves (Wilkins, 2001). Jefferson's slaves became of greater value and some were sold at this higher price. His moral beliefs, once again, were set aside for personal gain (Robinson, Rakove & Wills, 2004).

There are numerous perspectives to the question of why Jefferson tragically failed to end racial oppression and injustice by using his political power. One reason given is that Jefferson's biggest assets were slaves and that they were needed to pursue his agrarian culture (Wilson, 1992). A second reason is that Jefferson was showing his loyalties to Virginia (O'Brien, 1996). Another reason cited for his failure was due to his indebtedness and need of slaves (Wilkins, 2001). Jefferson was never free from his serious indebtedness (Belote, 2004; Dabney, 1991). Lastly, a plausible reason why Jefferson may not have fought for the freedom of slaves is he believed emancipated slaves would not prosper and enjoy freedom due to the racial conditions (Garrett, 1982; Wilson, 1992).

Even if Jefferson felt he could not emancipate the slaves, he could have improved the conditions in which they were forced to live. Although Jefferson foresaw that slavery could not prevail (Wilson, 1992) he also did not believe Blacks could coexist with whites (Jefferson, 1999). Jefferson states in his autobiography,

Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation as deportation peaceably...

Jefferson's writings between 1778 and his death show no consideration toward racial coexistence on the basis of equality (O'Brien, 1996). His use of political influence in the end is tainted instead with the expansion and protection of slavery (Belote, 2004; Wills, 2003).

### *Social Justice and Native Americans*

Jefferson's opinion of Native Americans was higher than that of Blacks. He writes,

It is in North America we are to seek their original character. I am safe in affirming, that the proofs of genius given by the Indians of North America, place them on a level with whites in the same uncultivated state. The North of Europe furnishes subjects enough for comparison with them, and for a proof of their equality. (1999, p. 267-268)

Jefferson spent his first year and a half as President tying up what his predecessors had done and formulating a policy of his own (Wallace, 1999). The Indian-owned territory was unsurveyed and unmarked, which led to trespassing and disregard (1999). Additionally, ambiguity lay in the enforcement of the Trade and Inter-course acts by the military (1999).

In January of 1802, Jefferson requested a renewal of the Trade and Inter-course Act. He specifically asked for the prohibition of liquor trade. Jefferson said that the Indians

are becoming very sensible of the baneful effects produced on their morals, their health, and existence by the abuse of ardent spirits, and some of them earnestly desire a prohibition of that article from being carried among them...It has been found, too, in experience that the same abuse gives frequent rise to incidents tending much to commit our peace with the Indians. (as cited Wallace, 1999, p. 212)

However, the prohibition, even though the act authorized the President the power

to enforce it, was ineffective because it could only be enforced in Indian Territory (1999). In 1808 Jefferson requested that all territorial and state governors propose legislation restricting or prohibiting the sale of liquor to Indians. Some responded, but the end result was widespread abuse and trade of liquor (1999).

Jefferson believed Native Americans to be vagrants, British soldiers and traders to be interlopers, and French and Spanish subjects not capable of self-governance. Jefferson's plan was for 'civilizing' the Indians and persuading them to sell their lands to pay their trading debts (Wallace, 1999). Jefferson's plan to Congress was for the inhabitants to be governed by executive authority. He justified his rule by saying "the people there were not capable of self-rule" (as cited, Wills, 2003, p. 120).

Every state was to be guaranteed a republican form of government, but Jefferson clearly forgot about this while advancing his own agenda, uncompromising without justification or explanation. Jefferson's plan for obtaining Indian Territory resulted in the acquisition of 200,000 square miles in nine states (Wallace, 1999). Wallace states

if one looks at the location of the tracts secured, one realizes that for the most part they were chosen primarily to clear Indians from the banks of the great rivers, the Ohio and the Mississippi, and to compress the eastern tribes into an interior region west of the Appalachians and east of the Mississippi, where they would be easier to dominate. (p. 239)

Jefferson had secured the future expansion of the white population into the remaining Indian Territory east of the Mississippi, a task which Andrew Jackson would later complete (1999).

One of the most significant achievements during Jefferson's administration was the purchase of the Louisiana Territory (Degregorio, 1946), which was made possible by the French defeat in Haiti which encouraged Napoleon to sell Louisiana at a bargain price (Bender, 2001). Once the Louisiana Purchase was accomplished, there was a debate if the land should be slave or free soil (Garrett, 1982). Jefferson raised no objection for its existence to be one of slavery (1982). Prior to the purchase, slaves were guaranteed such rights as to observe Sundays and holidays, instruction in religion, a plot of ground for their own use, being allowed to testify in court when whites were not available, and be buried in consecrated ground (Garrett, 1982). This all changed following the Louisiana Purchase by the United States.

Jefferson's plan was to divide the new territory at the 31<sup>st</sup> parallel, with the land

north for use as Indian resettlement. The land to the south was to be processed into territories and later to states. The total territory was to be comprised of plantations, consequently further promoting the use of slaves. This plan would have further shifted the electoral power in favor of the South and in support of the Republican agenda. Many suggest Jefferson's plan for the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 was unconstitutional (Wills, 2003).

Jefferson concluded that Indian's were equal: "I believe the Indian, then, to be, in body and mind, equal to the white man" (Jefferson, 1999, p. 268). Equal? Yes. Deserving of their freedom according to his policies and able to partake in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? No (O'Brien, 1996). Jefferson's presidential removal policies became a negative consequence to the Native Americans (Belote, 2004;1996; Wallace, 1999). His actions set the means for the Indian Removal Bill that would later be signed by President Jackson (2004;1999). Jefferson's decisions two centuries ago continue to plague Native Americans; furthermore, his decisions continue to be found in society's discriminatory practices of today (O'Brien, 1996; Wallace, 1999).

### *Jefferson's Beliefs*

Another quality of Jefferson was his perspective of religion. Jefferson tried not to allow religion to factor into his elections; however, opponents tried very hard to campaign his religious beliefs against theirs. He was raised as an Anglican. He contributed financially to every denomination in his town (Belote, 2004). Jefferson reformed the Christian faith to meet his own beliefs. At the White House he cut out segments of the four Gospels and created his own version in 1804 called "The Philosophy of Jesus" (Belote, 2004). The version published by congress was finished in 1820 and titled "Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth" (2004). He deleted all Greek influence, the virgin birth, all claims of miracles, Jesus' divinity, and the resurrection. This is another example of how Jefferson changed anything that did not meet his own beliefs and viewpoint.

Jefferson had a strong belief in limited national interference and wanted state rights. He used that belief to defend why the fate of slavery should be left up to the states. However, his use of power contradicts that belief. He employed his power to change previous practices and policies. Additionally, he employed his power over the states by restricting slavery from the Northwest Territory (Read, 2000). Read states the 'true' Jefferson "split off and did

battle with one another over slavery, states' rights, equality, and many other things" (2000, p. 154).

## Abraham Lincoln

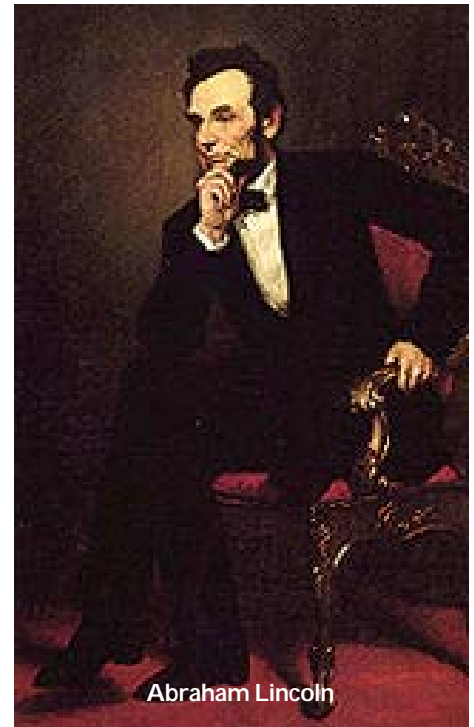
Examination through a multicultural lens with concerns for issues of social justice enables us to critically question who Abraham Lincoln was by his opinions on political matters, his actions and non-actions, the policies he supported, words he wrote and spoke, and also words he may have failed to speak. President Lincoln is depicted by many to have been a humble and compassionate man who made his way up from poverty, whose example of leadership is one people feel our country should be forever grateful. As many think about and conjure up thoughts from what they were taught in school and from pictures that many historians portray in their writings concerning the legacy of Lincoln as President, the one title that always comes to mind is Abraham Lincoln, "the Great Emancipator."

It is Lincoln whom we recognize as freeing the slaves from the bondage of captivity and suffering. Often, when the issues of civil rights are discussed it is not unusual to hear Lincoln's name mentioned as one of the key figures associated with that movement. Watching the *I Have a Dream* speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which took place at the Lincoln Memorial one can't help but notice the monument of Lincoln in the background.

However, more recently speculation has surfaced with respect to Lincoln and his role in the emancipation of slavery and his feelings concerning social justice for people of color. The question of consideration is, was Lincoln, as many biographers portray him, the humble man who emancipated slaves because of his compassion and recognition that all people should be treated equal or was Lincoln, as some authors seem to think, the President who was forced into emancipation against his will, who held whites to be a superior race when compared to people of color, who was relentless in serving only his party and his party's agenda to further their views while continuing to oppress others with a disregard of the Constitution? (Bennett, 1999; Di-Lorenzo, 2002). Exposing the different sides of Abraham Lincoln from a multicultural perspective leaves the question for you to answer.

### *Lincoln's Rhetorical and Storytelling Abilities*

Many books have been written on the



life and Presidency of Abraham Lincoln with authors' views of Lincoln contrasting one another. One aspect which all of them seem to be in agreement on concerning Lincoln is that he was an impressive orator, often speaking out of both sides of his mouth with a skilled proficiency. Lincoln was a great speaker and considered to be a master of rhetoric (DiLorenzo, 2002).

David Donald wrote in his book *Lincoln Reconsidered* that "perhaps the secret of Lincoln's continuing vogue is his essential ambiguity. He can be cited on all sides of all questions" (Bennet, 1999 p. 43). Bennet noted, "Lincoln spoke with a forked tongue... by saying two different things at the same time" (Bennet, 1999, p. 618). Lincoln used his gift of rhetoric to convince and deceive people for the purpose of advancing his views and policies. Murray Rothbard, an economist, said of Lincoln, "Lincoln was a master politician, which means that he was a consummate conniver, manipulator, and liar" (as cited in DiLorenzo, 2002, p.11). It is apparent through his speeches and debates that Lincoln would say one thing to one audience and turn around and say the total opposite to another audience, offering both sides of many issues.

Associated with his gift of rhetoric, historians often describe the sixteenth president as having the talent and skillfulness of telling jokes and stories. "Lincoln became a general favorite because of his simple manners and fund of jokes...when about to tell an anecdote...Lincoln would place his elbows upon the table, rest his

face between his hands and begin with the words 'that reminds me' and proceed.... Everyone prepared for the explosion sure to follow" (Thomas, 1994 p. 116). "Lincoln credited the farmer boys with originating most of the aphoristic stories he told" (Thomas, 1994, p. 135).

One close observer recorded in his diary, "The masses are taken in by Lincoln's apparent simplicity ... and by his vulgar jokes" (Thomas, 1994, p. 411). What few historians fail to speak about when discussing Lincoln as a story teller and humorist are the actual jokes and stories he told, a number of which appear to have been at the expense of people of color. "In the role of storyteller I never knew his equal.... He could perfectly mimic a Dutchman, Irishman, or Negro" (Thomas, 2002 p. 143). Bennett gives several examples of the jokes and stories that Lincoln often recited. Colleagues voiced their criticism to Lincoln about his telling of "Dinky" and "Massa Lincoln" jokes. "This was cruel, racist, and sadistic, but he ignored them and even managed to imply, as almost all modern Lincoln interpreters imply, that there was something wrong with men who didn't like a good 'Dinky' joke" (Bennett, 2002 p.99).

Blacks weren't the only people of color that Lincoln belittled to get a chuckle from his constituents. When speaking to a crowd about Douglas's plan for expansion of the country Lincoln says, "When we shall get Mexico.... We know the Judge has a great horror for mongrels, [laughter] and I understand that the people of Mexico are most decidedly a race of mongrels[renewed laughter]" (as cited in Bennett, 2002 p. 329).

Lincoln's telling of racial stories and jokes and referring to Mexicans as mongrels are factors that our textbooks fail to recognize and authors often seem to ignore. Could it be that we suppress this aspect of Lincoln because our country would be embarrassed to celebrate a holiday for a man who said such disparaging things?

Early in his political career Lincoln voiced his concern for wanting to make life better for every man and that given the chance he would see to it that his agendas would reflect those of his supporters who voted him into office. In Springfield, Illinois, on March 9, 1832, he declared, "For 'every man' should have sufficient education to enable him to read the history of his and other countries... 'Every man' is said to have his peculiar ambition" (Thomas, 1994 pgs. 28-29).

Whom was Lincoln referring to when he spoke using the phrase 'every man'? Was he including people of color, poor white immigrants, freed Blacks, Native Indians, women, and slaves? Or did he mean, as the

previous presidents had before him, when referring to "every man," the white man, males who owned property, the privileged who could vote? Because slavery was a major political issue leading up to and during Lincoln's presidency, this scrutiny from a multicultural perspective, with respect to his presidency on the issues of slavery and the equality of Blacks, lends itself to address the question presented above.

The quote earlier that Lincoln spoke with a forked tongue is never more apparent than by the revelation of his speeches, debates, and written documents. Looking at the issues of slavery during the immediate time leading up to the Civil War, research reveals conflicting views of Lincoln's position on this topic. On the one hand, he spoke out against slavery with such conviction that it appeared if he had the chance he would ensure its destruction. John Hanks said that on Lincoln's second visit to New Orleans, he was so distressed by a slave auction that he declared: "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing, I'll hit it hard." Thomas then goes on to say that doubtless what he saw of slavery repelled him (as cited Thomas, 1994 p. 24).

Another experience is when Lincoln wrote in a letter to his friend Josh Speed while on a trip in 1841, "...that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were on board ten or twelve slaves, shackled together with irons. That sight was continual torment to me" and concluded, "That memory still had the power of making me miserable" (Loewen, 1995 p. 173).

Yet when given an opportunity politically to voice his outrage and opposition to slavery, which may have led to something being done about it, he often remained silent. Thomas notes, "The House and Senate recommended the adoption of a series of resolutions condemning the abolitionists, that the Constitution sanctified the right of property as slaves.... The resolutions did not accord with Lincoln's thinking on the slavery question...for the moment he kept quiet and the resolutions passed" (Thomas, 1994 p. 61).

Later, Thomas says, "Opposed to unnecessary agitation of the slavery question, Lincoln remained silent during the discordant debates that shook the house" (Thomas, 1994, p. 126). Donald Riddle, an authority on Lincoln the Congressman, said, "The most conspicuous feature of Lincoln's congressional career on the slavery issue was his discreet silence...even Lincoln's colleagues were among the thirty-six speakers on slavery.... But Lincoln remained silent" (Bennett, 2002, p. 213).

"In October, 1854 a convention was held in his hometown of Springfield for the

purpose of forming a Republican party favoring the abolition of slavery and a repeal of the fugitive slave law, Lincoln feeling his presence at such a gathering might compromise him with more moderate voters, did not attend" (Wieck, 2002, p. 127).

Another example of his silence, when confronted with an issue involving people of color, was with concern to his opposition of the war against Mexico, "From the beginning Lincoln had some inner doubts about the justness and necessity of the war, but he voiced no opposition to it" (Thomas, 1994, p. 107).

A third citation that demonstrates Lincoln's passivity with issues of oppression of people of color is found in *Lincoln's Last Moments* written by William C. Harris. Harris states, "He virtually ignored the growing conflict between Indians and settlers in the West and the need to reform policies toward Indians after years of abuse" (Harris, 2004, p. 4).

One can only speculate what Lincoln's reasons were for not speaking out and for his failure to act on issues concerning social injustices. Was it a political strategy? Or was it that he didn't want to risk his career in politics?

Just as historians cite many examples of the stories that Lincoln told, they also recognize the many stories that are told about Lincoln with regards to his exalted unconditional compassion for others. General Sherman said of Lincoln, "He seemed to have charity for all and malice toward none" (Thomas, 1994, p. 508). When an officer exclaimed that Jefferson Davis should be hanged for his treatment of Union prisoners Lincoln replied, "Judge not, that ye might be judged" and when Lincoln was asked how to treat Richmond's conquered people Lincoln replied, "I'd let em up easy" (Thomas, 1994, p. 512).

It distressed Lincoln that his own constituents sought revenge upon the south after the Union's victory. Lincoln appealed to the people then to act with forgiveness and compassion. He signed the pardon of a deserter commenting, "This boy can do us more good above ground than under ground," while also revoking the death sentence of a confederate spy (Thomas, 1994, p. 517).

Yet, what is so confounding, Lincoln had this overwhelming abundance of compassion for others in need yet failed to show this compassion when confronted with a situation involving people of color, such as the Sioux Indians.

In August of 1862, the Santee Sioux Indians revolted when thousands of white settlers began settling on their land after the federal government refused to pay what

it had owed the Sioux for land the government bought in a treaty made in 1851. After the federal army overwhelmed the Sioux, killing many of them, hundreds of prisoners of war including women and children were imprisoned and sentenced to death just because they were present during the battle.

Lincoln, fearing the execution of 303 Sioux would draw criticism from Europe, bargained with Minnesota to only execute thirty-nine of them. But in return he promised to have the federal army murder or chase out of the state all the other Indians, in addition to sending the Minnesota Treasury two million dollars. On December 26, 1862, Lincoln ordered the largest mass execution in history (DiLorenzo, 2002, p. 158).

As to this mass Indian execution, George Sinkler wrote in his book *The Racial Attitudes of American Presidents*, "Thirty-eight Indians were hanged, while after the civil war, not one rebel swung for rebellion" (Sinkler, 1972 p. 68). Bennett commented on this injustice, "A double standard of race value might have had something to do with his treatment of the Sioux" (Bennett, 2002, p. 165).

Lincoln also appeared to have a double standard with respect to his compassion on the treatment of Black and White union soldiers who fought in the civil war. "Unfortunately, the black soldiers did not receive the same pay and treatment as the white soldiers" (Garret, 1982, p. 124). Union soldier George Washington Williams wrote in his book, *The History of the Negro Race*, published in 1882, "I was appalled by his conservative policy which paid White soldiers thirteen dollars a month and Black soldiers seven dollars a month and who failed to take decisive action when Confederate generals and soldiers murdered Black troops" (Bennett, 2002, p. 32). This leaves one to question if Lincoln's compassion for men may have been different depending upon the color of their skin.

Lincoln's attitudes on the equality of people of color paints another blurred picture by his contrasting discourse. In a letter that Lincoln wrote to Speed questioning what political party he felt attached to he said,

As a nation we began by declaring that all men are created equal, we now practically read it all men are created equal except Negroes. When the Know-Nothings get control it will read all men are created equal except Negroes, and foreigners and Catholics. When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty. (Thomas, 1994, pp. 163-164)

On June 26, 1857, Lincoln, in a

speech, replied to Douglas on his position in disagreement of the Supreme Court's ruling on the Dred Scott case, defending his views of what the founding fathers implied in the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln said, "They meant to set up a standard maxim for a free society, which should be familiar to all and revered by all...constantly spreading and deepening its influence and augmenting the happiness and value of life to people of all colors everywhere..." (1994, p. 174).

Later in that same speech, when speaking about a Black woman slave, Lincoln said, "but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own two hands without asking leave of any one else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others" (1994, p. 175). Here we see a Lincoln who holds Blacks to be his equal in that men and women should not be denied the privilege of these rights based on sex and race. However a year later, in his 1958 debate speech with Douglas in Ottawa, Lincoln says, "I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the White and Black races. There is a physical difference between the two...I am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position" (DiLorenzo, 2002, p. 11).

At Galesburg Lincoln said, "I have all the while maintained that inasmuch as there is a physical inequality between the White and Black races that the Blacks must remain inferior..." (as cited Bennett, 1999, p. 212). Lincoln also claimed the White race to be superior to the Native American race, as Harris stated, "he believed the Native Americans could and should be civilized into Anglo-American ways" as Lincoln told a group of Indian chiefs at a White Horse meeting in 1863, "I can see no way in which your race is to become as numerous and prosperous as the white race except by living as they do" (Harris, 2004, pp. 169-170).

Although Lincoln's opposing views on Blacks with concerns to equality would qualify him as a fence sitter rather than a rail splitter, his plan for the colonization of Blacks clearly exemplifies his view on the equality of Blacks.

Due to Lincoln's belief that Whites were the superior race, he concluded the mixing of races should be prohibited (Bennett, 1999; DiLorenzo, 2002). With this view Lincoln's plans for the slaves and for all Blacks was colonization. Thomas says of Lincoln's plan for slaves, "His first impulse would be to free the slaves and send them to Liberia, where the American Colonization Society had established a Negro republic" (Thomas, 1994, p. 150).

On December 1, 1862, when Lincoln

was addressing Congress, he stated, "I cannot make it better known than it already is, that I strongly favor colonization" (DiLorenzo, 2002, p. 17). Thomas noted that Lincoln had proposed to Congress for the United States to recognize the Negro republics of Haiti and Liberia as a sign to the antislavery radicals that he was against slavery (Thomas, 1994).

Although this action by Lincoln may be an attempt to argue his willingness to recognize people of color, one could also argue that his action and involvement with these countries was a part of his plan for the colonization of Blacks to be deported by the United States to these countries. Did Lincoln favor colonization, out of concern for Blacks realizing African Americans would always suffer under the power of White supremacy, or was his intention one that the nation would be better off without Blacks or was he also concerned for the possible extinction of the White race through interbreeding?

### *Proclamation of Emancipation*

One thing in history that can't be denied is that Lincoln did sign the Proclamation of Emancipation. However, Lincoln, in his wording of the proclamation freed slaves in the rebellious states of the south over which he had no control and held slaves in captivity in the north where he did have control (Sinkler, 1972; Bennett, 1999). Sinkler poses the question as many have wondered, did emancipation make Lincoln or did Lincoln make emancipation?

Lincoln seems to answer for us himself with respect to the emancipation, "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me" (Donald, 1961, p. 138; Sinkler, 1972, p. 63). It is clear that although Lincoln's Proclamation of Emancipation was a step in the right direction, it was not a giant step and it appeared to be a forced step. It wasn't until April 1865, eight months after the death of Lincoln and three years after he signed the Emancipation Proclamation that the Thirteenth Amendment was enacted which abolished slavery ([www.mdcbowen.org](http://www.mdcbowen.org)).

Yet, with regards to the emancipation of slaves, Lincoln the "Great Emancipator," in his own words declared before, during, and after the Civil War that he had no intention for abolishing slavery. In 1860 during his first inaugural address he said, "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists" (DiLorenzo, 2002, p. 21). In 1861 Lincoln said to

Seward, "As to fugitive slaves and slave trade among the slave states...I care but little" (Bennett, 1999, p. 338). Even after the Civil War Thomas noted, "It had never been Lincoln's intention to interfere with slavery in the states; he had been driven to it by necessity, he explained" (Thomas, 1994, p. 502). Lincoln openly admitted that the Proclamation of Emancipation was merely a war measure, so it only was effective while the war was going on.

### **Social Justice Issues**

Many historians explain that the reason why Lincoln felt he couldn't abolish slavery is that the Constitution prohibited him as the President and the Congress from doing anything about it. Yet his concern and allegiance for the Constitution was often ignored as he used the war to justify his causes. "In 1861 Lincoln implemented a series of unconstitutional acts including launching an invasion of the South without the consent of Congress, as required by the Constitution; declaring martial law; blockading the southern ports; suspending the writ of habeas corpus....." (DiLorenzo, 2002, pp. 131-132).

When his Generals tried to abolish slavery in the cities and states they conquered, Lincoln admonished them for it and made them recant their statement (DiLorenzo, 2002; Thomas, 1994). Under the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, thousands who opposed the war and Lincoln's policies were imprisoned. DiLorenzo writes of this social injustice, "Thus it was in Maryland that the orgy of suppression, of civil liberties reached its apex" and "Under the protection of federal bayonets," wrote David Donald, "New York went Republican by seven thousand votes in the 1864 presidential election" (as cited DiLorenzo, 2002, p. 144).

These actions are in direct contrast to the political philosophy of the parties that Lincoln held himself to as a Whig and Republican. These parties believed that the President was a mere passive figure in the government under the control of the Congress and that matters and interests of the people were to be left up to the individual state's government control. The actions that Lincoln took as the President seem more associated with that of a tyrant than of the leader of a democratic nation.

Regardless of how right or wrong one thinks Lincoln was in his actions, one must take into consideration that he had the overwhelming responsibility as the commander and chief of a country which was greatly divided by the Civil War throughout his presidency. He acknowledged that

his one and only priority was to save the Union, by winning the war.

Lincoln said, "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the union and it is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could do it by freeing all the slaves I would do it....and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free" (Thomas 1994, pp. 342-343).

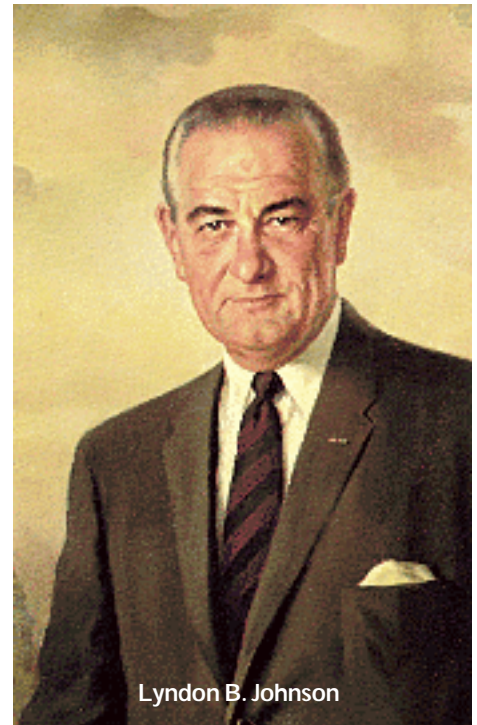
Lincoln's speeches and letters about his position on slavery and equality of Blacks appear to contradict one another. Although Lincoln may have done more than the previous presidents about the cause for social justice concerning slavery, it appears that the Civil War which happened while he was President seemed to be the cause for the social revolution of Black equality. Based on Lincoln's actions and words and the many conflicting sides he portrayed, we think referring to him as the "great emancipator" is a huge stretch that Lincoln himself would contradict.

### **Lyndon B. Johnson**

Some of Lyndon Johnson's earlier experiences may have influenced his actions and policies during his Presidency. LBJ grew up poor without indoor plumbing or electricity in a small rural area near Johnson City, Texas (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991). Johnson stated, "When I was young, poverty was so common we didn't know it had a name" (Dalleck, 2004). Johnson's first teaching job was in a very poor Mexican-American school district in Cotulla, Texas.

These poor conditions touched Johnson deeply and impressed upon him a desire to help his students to find and live the American dream (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991; Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). Johnson was personally touched by this experience because he could identify with the disadvantaged and was moved by the oppressed (Kunhardt, 1999; Unger & Unger, 1999).

Johnson was very tied to his Southern roots. His Southern political bonds kept Johnson from more forcefully advancing many of his moral and national concerns (Dalleck, 2004). He was the youngest man to become a state director of the National Youth Administration. He was later elected to the House of Representatives, and then to the Senate. He then became the Senate majority leader (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin 1991). In 1960 he became the Vice President of the United States. Johnson attained power by being an apprentice to those who had power and he learned how



Lyndon B. Johnson

to use his power effectively (Caro, 1982; Caro, 2003; Goodwin, 1991).

Once Johnson took office as the President of the United State he considered himself a leader of *all* people (Goodwin, 1991; Johnson, 1971). He wanted action and set his priorities on civil rights, which promoted complex and mixed feelings among the public (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). On May 22, 1964 at the University of Michigan, Johnson spoke of a "Great Society." He stated "The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all" (Johnson Library). This set forth Johnson's platform and vast agenda for social reform. What set Johnson's "Great Society" apart from other reform efforts of previous Presidents, such as Wilson's "New Freedom" or Roosevelt's "New Deal," was his reforms included *all* people.

### **Social Justice, Actions and Policies**

Johnson was more of a domestic policy leader than a foreign policy leader (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991). Johnson is considered by many to be one of the greatest domestic reform presidents (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991). He initiated the "Great Society" reforms which included the "War on Poverty." These reforms included an array of initiatives, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Medicaid/Medicare, Federal Aid to Education, environmental protection, food stamps, Headstart, public radio and TV legislation, and consumer protection laws.

Johnson stated, "...Well I wanted power to give things to people—all sorts of things

to all sorts of people, especially the poor and the Blacks” (Dalleck, 2004, p. 13). His colleague George Reedy states that Johnson had no racial, ethnic, or religious prejudices, unlike himself (Dalleck 2004). Johnson believed in racial equality. He believed African Americans and Hispanics deserved a chance. He believed Federal aid to education could transform lives and raise their standard of living (Johnson, 1971). One may question if this was part of Johnson’s true beliefs, or just his political goals, or maybe he truly had undergone a transformation after serving in the Senate.

Johnson knew if he could lead a major civil rights bill through the Senate, it would be the first in 82 years. Johnson was warned by Senator Russell if he passed the Civil Rights Bill, it would cost him the South and the election. Johnson said, “If that’s the price I’ve got to pay, I’ll pay it gladly” (Dalleck, 2004, p. 163). In June, 1963 Johnson submitted to Congress the most extensive civil rights bill ever proposed (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). Sex discrimination was added to the bill to actually persuade Congress to vote against it (Eisenberg & Ruthsdotter, 1998; 1999). “Judge” Smith thought no one would vote for his provision, Title VII, which extended the benefits to women, however it passed the House 290 to 130 (1999; Loren 1993). At the signing of the equal rights act Johnson stated,

We believe all men are entitled to the blessings of liberty. Yet millions are being deprived of those blessings—not because of their own failures, but because of the color of their skin. The reasons are deeply imbedded in history and tradition and the nature of man. We can understand without rancor or hatred—how this happened, but it cannot continue.... Our Constitution, the foundation of our Republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it. And the law I will sign tonight forbids it.” (Dalleck, 2004, p. 169)

Johnson remained concerned that the South might resist the law. He feared a revolution, bloodshed, and violence (2004). The issue of civil rights was unpredictable and Johnson faced criticism from both sides. The Civil Rights Bill set Johnson apart forever from the South (Johnson, 1971; Unger & Unger, 1999). Some people refused to recognize the bill. In a speech in New Orleans with 2, 500 people gathered Johnson spoke from the heart,

we have a Constitution and we have a Bill of Rights, and we have the law of the land, and two-thirds of the Democrats in the Senate voted for it and I am going to observe it, and I think that any man that is

worthy of the high office of President is going to do the same thing. ( 1971, p. 109)

Johnson considered the passing of the bill to be his greatest achievement of his administration (Johnson, 1971). It led to an increased number of African Americans holding political office positions. Johnson predicted then that the Voting Rights Bill would be better and do things that the civil rights act could not do (Beschloss, 2001).

Johnson’s ability to convey a message publicly and privately was very different from one another. He felt more comfortable one-on-one or in a small group (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). He had a special ability to reach all sides, even opposing sides, by using subtle differences in tones and in the way he conveyed a message to reach liberal Democrats, people of color, the Southerners, and the Republicans (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991). Johnson is often portrayed as a manipulator due to this skill (Caro, 1982; 1991; Kunhardt, 1991). “To Johnson there were foreign customs, foreign religions, foreign governments, but there were no foreign cultures, only different ways of pursuing universal desires” (1991, p. 194). He continued to convey his message that the Great Society had something to offer everyone.

Johnson’s campaign for President was built on two messages, building the “Great Society” and fighting the “War on Poverty.” The public seemed enthusiastic about the future and its possibilities (Johnson, 1971). The “Great Society” was described with different words at different times (1971). Johnson’s vision of the “Great Society” was an extension of the fundamental American rights that were set forth by the Founding Fathers. Johnson states, “....in our time a broadened concept of freedom requires that every American have the right to a healthy body, a full education, a decent home, and the opportunity to develop to the best of his talents” (p. 104).

Johnson’s “Great Society” was to include something for everyone: Educational assistance for the youth, civil rights for the oppressed, vocational training for unskilled, higher minimum wage for the laborer, subsidies for farmers, tax relief for business, Medicare for the elderly, reduced quotas for the immigrants, and more (Goodwin, 1991).

### *Justice: Move Toward Equality*

Beginning with Andrew Jackson, every American president that tried to use federal money for public schools had been unsuccessful for one of three reasons (Unger & Unger, 1999). The issues that blocked the legislation were racial segre-

gation, local control of neighborhood schools, and the separation of church and state (1999).

Despite the advisement of Johnson’s staff and members of Congress to also avoid the issue of federal aid for education, Johnson made it a fundamental issue in his 1964 campaign (Johnson, 1971). Unger and Unger (1999) describe education as a

...piece of American mythology that poverty, social inequality, racism, and crime can be expunged if everyone has access to good schooling. By the 1960’s most Americans also agreed that the public schools were in crisis, beset by overcrowded classrooms, underpaid teachers, bad teaching, and a soaring pupil dropout rate. (p. 343)

Johnson realized the conditions of public schools and sought legislation to improve it. In addition to the poor conditions of the public schools, in 1964 the public became aware that the armed services had rejected more than a quarter of all draftees because they were unable to read or write at an eighth-grade level (1999).

In December 1963 Johnson ended the previous unsuccessful attempts and passed the Higher Education and Facilities Act. He requested to double federal education spending from 4 billion to 8 billion. In 87 days Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that included Title I funding and an antipoverty program. This was a step toward improving educational opportunity. Johnson called ESEA “the most significant education bill” in congressional history (as cited Unger & Unger, 1999, p. 346). Further it led to a cabinet level for the Department of Education. In 1965 Johnson signed the Higher Education Act which provided federal aid, loans and work study programs to the economically disadvantaged.

### *Following The Election*

On November 3, 1964, Lyndon Johnson was elected President with the greatest percentage ever attained by a candidate with the total popular vote of 61 percent (Lyndon Baines Library, 2004). With the public and congress behind him, Johnson felt the moment was right to push his agenda for the “Great Society” forward. Johnson’s agenda included education, protection of civil rights, urban renewal, Medicare, conservation, beautification, control and prevention of crime, the arts, consumer protection, and foreign policy (LBJ Library). Johnson had a moral conviction to end segregation, discrimination and disfranchisement (Unger & Unger, 1999).



Johnson knew that the time was right to get legislation passed while he had such broad support (Johnson, 1971; Unger & Unger, 1999). Most of Johnson's legislation originated from task forces consisting of men and women who were considered experts in their fields (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). Johnson requested the task forces work secretly and required that information remain closed to others because he feared those in opposition would try and sabotage his reform efforts. Johnson started with 15 task forces and by 1968 there were 27 task forces (1991; 1999).

### Civil Rights

In the 1940s and 1950s African Americans had few Presidents that took action to improve their conditions (Goodwin, 1991). One exception was Truman's desegregation of the armed forces (1991). Only six civil rights bills made it to the floor of the Congress and every single one was defeated.

Johnson felt the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would begin the process of integrating African Americans (Dalleck, 2004). In Johnson's view, allowing Blacks to vote and hold a political office would further advance their influence and serve their interests (Dalleck, 2004). Johnson was determined to put forth a voting bill of rights by 1965. In his 1964 State of the Union address Johnson demanded an end to unconstitutional limits on Black voting. In 1965 Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership conference lead a campaign in Selma, Alabama, that persuaded Johnson to sponsor a voting bill of rights act (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). A violent confrontation in Selma called "Bloody Sunday" further pushed Johnson to mobilize congressional action on voting rights (1991; Katz, 1993).

Johnson was attacked from both political sides. The Southern conservatives felt he was doing too much in the area of civil rights and the northern liberals felt he did too little (Dalleck, 2004). Many of his constituents warned him that he would jeopardize his political ties and career if he continued to support such social reform efforts (Johnson, 1971). Johnson would have preferred to work behind the scenes on issues of civil rights, but was pushed by momentous events (2004; Katz, 1993).

Johnson's speech on March 15, 1965, was one of the most moving speeches in this country's history (Beschloss, 2001; Dalleck, 2004). He compared Selma to Lexington and Concord, to Appomattox, as

a turning point in man's unending search for freedom.... Rarely in any time does

an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself.... Rarely are we met with a challenge...to the values and the purposes and the meaning met with a challenge...to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation. The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation."... And he further declared "what happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reached into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause too. It is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And (Johnson paused, raising his arms for emphasis) We shall overcome." (Dalleck, 2004, p. 205; Lyndon Baines Library, 2003)

Senators, congressmen, and other observers were moved to tears and elation. Martin Luther King, Jr., watching on TV, cried (Dalleck, 2004; Unger & Unger, 1999).

Johnson continued,

A century has passed, more than a hundred years, since the Negro was freed. And he is not fully free tonight.... A century has passed, more than a hundred years, since equality was promised. And yet the Negro is not equal.... The real hero of this struggle is the American Negro. His actions and protests, his courage to risk safety and even to risk his life, have awakened the conscience of this Nation.... He has called upon us to make good the promise of America. And who among us can say that we would have made the same progress were it not for his persistent bravery and his faith in American democracy?

In our research of the Presidents and social justice issues no other President has spoken so strongly about these issues and utilized the power of the presidential office to begin to remedy these inequalities.

### Other Oppressed Groups Impacted

*Mexican Americans.* Our history leads us to believe that civil rights changed society on racial issues concerning only African Americans. However, the civil rights act was intended to give rights to all Americans regardless of their sex, color, race, religion, or national origin. Mexican Americans were also seeking the opportunities that civil rights and Johnson's "Great Society" offered (1997). Furthermore, they were in support of Johnson and his agenda (1997).

Mexican Americans may have been

overlooked, at the time, because there was a lack of accurate census numbers for Hispanics and Latinos, and a language barrier that also complicated the issues (Pycior, 1997). Many Mexican Americans felt unaccepted in the educational system because it banned Spanish and ignored their heritage (Katz, 1993).

The Voting Rights Act opened new political avenues for Mexican Americans. It eliminated state literacy tests for those whose first language was Spanish and enabled them to register and vote (Katz, 1993). Under Johnson's administration almost 2,000 Mexican Americans were placed in federal jobs (Pycior, 1997).

*Women's Movement.* Many women also began to rethink their lives following 1963 (Katz, 1993). A Commission on the status of women issued a report that year which documented the discrimination against women in every area of American life (Eisenberg & Ruthsdotter, 1998). The movement was further spurred by Betty Friedan's landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which documented women's oppression and motivated women to inspire beyond the duties of housewife (1993; 1998).

Johnson encouraged his staff to fill federal positions with women (Borner, 1983; Pycior, 1997). By October of 1965, Johnson had appointed 120 women to key positions in the government (1983). Furthermore, he signed Executive Order No. 11375 that prohibited sex discrimination in federal employment or by anyone doing business with the government (Katz, 1993). Johnson appointed Patricia Harris to become the first African American woman to serve as an American ambassador. The decade began with 17 women in Congress and those numbers have continued to increase (1993; Pycior, 1997).

### Voting Bill of Rights

Johnson continued to spread his message for increased civil rights legislation. On June 4, 1965, at a commencement address at Howard University entitled "To Fulfill These Rights," Johnson stated,

Our enemies may occasionally seize the day of change, but it is the banner of our revolution they take. And our own future is linked to this process of swift and turbulent change in many lands in the world. But nothing in any country touches us more profoundly, and nothing is more freighted with meaning for our own destiny than the revolution of the Negro American. In far too many ways American Negroes have been another nation: deprived of freedom, crippled by hatred, the doors of opportunity closed to hope. (Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, 2003)

On July 7, 1965, Johnson continued to feel the pressure from the press, the South, and the Republicans. In a meeting with Dr. King, discussing the Voting Bill of Rights, Johnson stated,

We're confronted with the...problem that we've faced all through the years—a combination of the South and The Republicans.... How do we avoid this combination?... I've done the best I could. But they're hitting me on different sides, and the press is...[on] Vietnam or the Dominican Republic. (Beschloss, 2001, p. 387)

He felt the vote for the bill would be close and dangerous because he had lost his influence on the Republicans. Johnson also felt that Congress was getting tired of his continued requests (Johnson, 1971).

They [Congress] don't like for me to be asking for rent one day and poverty the next day, and education the next day, and voting rights the next day. They know I can't defeat them out there in their district in Michigan and some other place. So I am fighting the battle the best I can. (Beschloss, 2001, p. 388)

Johnson requested that King advocate and get the local chapters of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), NAACP, or his group in New York to get out and "answer the roll call" (p. 388).

Despite the controversy and public criticisms, the Voting Bill of Rights passed the Senate 77 to 19 and the House 333 to 85 vote. The Voting Rights Act eliminated almost all qualifying tests for voting and allowed the federal government to make the decision whether or not a voter's rights had been violated. It also eliminated the state literacy tests that prevented many Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and others whose first language was Spanish from voting (Katz, 1993).

On August 6, 1965, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. Johnson declared, "to every Negro in this country: you must register. You must vote... Your future and your children's future depend on it." He demanded equality "not as a theory, but as a fact and a result" (Beschloss, 2001, p. 419). By the end of 1966 only four states had less than a 50 percent (three reached 47 percent) of their voting-age African Americans registered (Dalleck, 2004).

### *Immigration Reform Bill*

Johnson asked for a new immigration bill designed to eliminate "the bigoted national origins quota system" (Unger & Unger, 1999, p. 338). On October 3, 1965, Johnson signed the Immigration Reform Bill which ended the National Origins Act of 1924. Prior to this legislative reform,

quota systems discriminated against people from Asia, Africa, the West Indies, and eastern and southern Europe (Katz, 1993; 1999). Additionally, Japanese-born residents were denied naturalization. Admission to the U. S. would now be based on family ties, rather than race, nationality, and ethnicity.

### *Johnson's Support Declines*

The country became divided when Johnson escalated the war in Vietnam (Goodwin, 1991; Katz, 1993). This action diverted funds from his War on Poverty (1993). By July 1966 public support for civil rights legislation had declined, with 90 percent opposing additional civil rights legislation. Despite declining public support, Johnson continued to push the reform efforts of his "Great Society."

There was strong support for safety legislation and pollution programs because they came at a lower cost (Unger & Unger, 1999). Johnson attempted to sustain African American gains through the courts and additional legislation that required little or no increases in spending (Dalleck, 2004). In his state of the union address, he urged Congress to enact a civil rights bill with housing, jury selection, and crime enforcement provisions. Johnson stated

The time has come for the Congress to declare resoundingly that discrimination in housing and all the evils it breeds are a denial of justice and a threat to the development of our growing urban areas...The truly insufferable cost of imprisoning the Negro in the slums is borne by our national conscience. When we restrict the Negro's freedom inescapable we restrict a part of our own. (Dalleck, 2004, p. 241)

Johnson's unrelenting drive toward equality for people of color and the economically oppressed resulted in the housing bill being passed by the house, but the Senate refused to act on the bill.

Johnson feared that like FDR's New Deal, the Supreme Court might consider some of his programs to be unconstitutional (Beschloss, 2001). This compelled him to want to appoint Abe Fortas (a friend) to the Supreme Court. Fortas declined, but Johnson publicly announced his nomination anyway. This was another example of Johnson's character, not to take no for an answer, manipulate people, and do whatever it takes to continue his agenda.

Johnson's war on poverty began to falter. The Vietnam expenditures, inflation, and economic struggles weakened his social programs (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). Johnson rebuked the criticism by repeatedly stating the gains being made

(Johnson, 1971). Federal outlays for health and education were up 59 percent, city spending up 76 percent, and unemployment was down 32 percent for whites and 34 percent for African Americans (Dalleck, 2004).

The last two years of Johnson's presidency was negatively marked by the war in Southeast Asia and the urban riots at home (Pearson Education). By 1966, 85 percent of the American people believed Negroes were moving too fast and demanding too much (Goodwin, 1991). The Democrats in the 1966 mid-term election also suffered a reversal (Kunhart, Kunhart Kunhart, 1999). Johnson found his initiatives increasingly voted down (1999), but continued to submit them anyway.

Johnson was faced with the disunity of the nation and challenges at home and abroad. He was slow to recognize the significance of the riots and the public backlash (1991). The first riot to capture national attention was in the Watts section of Los Angeles, August 1965. More than 100 riots followed, leaving 225 dead, 4,000 wounded, and \$112 billion in property damage. Johnson's reaction was "It simply wasn't fair for a few irresponsible agitators to spoil it for me and for the rest of the Negroes...." (p. 305).

Johnson never took responsibility for the riots, but did say, "We'll never know how high a price we paid for the unkindness and injustice we've inflicted on people—the Negroes, Mexicans, and Jews—and everyone who really believes he has been discriminated against in any way is part of the that great human price... (p.305). The media used the riots to make it clear that "equality for the Negro was a far greater problem than anyone had imagined and its solution probably more remote than ever" (p. 307).

The growing anger on all sides presented Johnson with a far more difficult task, which forced him to take the defensive and further drained his resources (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). Black nationalists, radicals, Feminists, militants, Mexican Americans, and social nonconformists once hopeful of the "Great Society" began to find discontent with the Great Society and believed the President's vision was too wide and raised hopes it could not fulfill (1991; 1999).

By 1968 Johnson had lost the American people's trust because he did not fully disclose America's increased involvement in the Vietnam War (Califano, 1991; Goodwin, 1999; Unger & Unger, 1999). There was growing opposition towards the war and increasing resistance to social reform bills.

Johnson's term in office was filled with

highs and lows. Despite the growing opposition, there were highs in 1968 such as, the Civil Rights Act of 1968, The Fair Housing Act of 1968, and the Federal Jury Reform Act of 1968. In the years 1964-1968 the lows seemed to materialize in the form of the war, riots, burnings, killings, and assassinations.

Johnson's leadership for the legislative phase of the Great Society included 535 individuals and 45 committees. Between the years of 1965 and 1968 a collection of over 500 social programs had been created (Goodwin, 1991). Eventually the number of employees grew to one million in order to implement the growing programs under the Great Society.

Additionally, the growing tensions in Vietnam demanded that Johnson turn his attention to the war. Due to these factors Johnson could not control and monitor each social program as he had in the past. This resulted in each program operating in its own way and following sometimes different loyalties (1991). Others believe that it was Johnson's lack of commitment to monitor each program (1991) that led to ineffectiveness.

## Legacies:

### Jefferson, Lincoln, and Johnson

Each President left a legacy on society. The President holds a very influential position on the matter of social justice.

From the beginning, American national identity has been less a condition than a set of ideas—the values and virtues and purposes and ideals that have served to unite us as a people. Through our history, the president has been in a unique position to help articulate these basic values.... (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999, p. 259)

The President must make a decision to free or oppress others through his actions and policies. "The president is the central player in the American political order" (Remini, 2002, p. xiii). He also has the power to do nothing in the area of social justice continuing the institutionalization of the status quo.

### Jefferson Legacy on Social Justice

Jefferson was instrumental along with George Washington and James Madison in placing the nation's capital at its present (southern) position so that the national governmental business would be conducted in a southern agrarian culture. "Washington, supported by Jefferson and Madison, decided that a location in a more isolated and southern position would help secure

slavery and the culture of slavery for other plantation operators such as themselves. This insulated position would protect the interests of the slave owning community" (Baptiste & Sanchez, 2004, p. 37). The decision prevented federal business and members of congress from having to conduct their business in an "abolitionist' environment.

Most of what Jefferson wrote is contradicted by something he did (Kirn, 2004; Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999; Read, 2000; Wilkins, 2001). Jefferson had the power and the opportunity to do great things in the area of social justice. Instead he remained silent and failed to submit any plan for emancipation to Congress for consideration (Ellis, 2000). He used his power and made a personal and political choice not to free slaves or provide social justice for all (Garrett, 1982).

As a result, inequality grew and became institutionalized. His acceptance of slavery was extended and today we continue to fight the injustices of our past. Jefferson could have freed his own slaves, "but financially, and probably psychically as well" he was incapable of such sacrifices (Wilkins, 2001, p. 122). Even at his death, he failed to free his own slaves (Garrett, 1982; Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999; Robinson, Rakove & Wills, 2004).

Jefferson's actions, policies, and attitudes set a precedent to oppress other groups. Jefferson taught his daughters that they were created for men's pleasures and believed women's place was at home, not in the office (Appleby, 2003). Jefferson "took his daughter, Patsy, to France to clothe her with culture and to stay close to her, yet he shut her away in a convent" (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, Kunhardt, 1999, p. 270). Here again is yet another example of how his actions contradict his beliefs.

Jefferson believed people of color were inferior and Whites and Blacks could never coexist (Jefferson, 1999; Gordon-Reed, 2004). Even though Jefferson knew of African Americans that possessed great talent and intellectual abilities, he still chose to ignore that knowledge. The federal Indian removal policy was set by Jefferson as "the solution to dealing with Indians who rejected 'civilization' or waged war on the United States" (Wallace, 1999, p. 275).

Jefferson had the opportunity to establish policies that embraced diversity and instead he chose actions of assimilation or separation of other groups. Jefferson's actions continue to influence how others are viewed. "Institutionalized learning's at the individual level are reinforced throughout our experience by organizational and soci-

etal structures of privilege and of disenfranchisement" (Adams, p. 6).

### Lincoln's Legacy on Social Justice

Lincoln is credited as the president who emancipated the slaves and it can be argued that without his support for freedom, this process of emancipation would have taken a lot longer. He spoke out often about the social injustice of slavery and oppression, yet he also spoke of Blacks, Mexicans, and Indians as being inferior to Whites, and he favored colonization. His proclamation paved the way for the thirteenth amendment (abolishing slavery).

However, Lincoln's gradual emancipation plan could have continued slavery until the 1900s. His contradictions are similar to those of Jefferson as it appears they both struggled with the issues of equality for people of color and freedom for slaves. Lincoln's legacy that is evident in today's existing economy and government is that of federal control and one of centralized government. Lincoln held strongly to the views of his idol Henry Clay and his "American System," which included internal improvements, protective tariffs, and centralized banking (DiLorenzo, 2002). It was Abraham Lincoln who signed into law the first income tax in American history, including a tax bill imposing hundreds of taxes on the people.

DiLorenzo suggests instead of referring to Lincoln as the Great Emancipator he should be known as the Great Centralizer (2002). Lincoln, through his success at centralizing government, left the people from the South no alternative after the war but to conform to the Northern way of thinking. Although we can look at Lincoln's apparent emancipation of slaves through the war as the great triumph it was, at the same time, it was a tragedy enslaving freemen to the control of the federal government. "Lincoln declared that he fought the war to preserve the Union...the Union, however, was preserved in name only, while the formerly free condition of America was subjugated to the power of the president" (Dieteman, 2001).

### Johnson's Legacy on Social Justice

Johnson is not a highly recognized President as compared to Jefferson and Lincoln. It seems his failed efforts in Vietnam overshadow all other aspects of his Presidency (Dalleck, 2004). The recognition he deserves for his efforts will forever suffer because America will not forget he was the only President to lose a war (2004). Johnson stated "once the war began, then all those conservatives in the Congress would use it as a weapon against the Great

Society. You see, they'd never wanted to help the poor or the Negroes in the first place" (Goodwin, 1991, p. 252).

Despite Johnson's successes and failures, his legacy continues to have a significant impact on Americans today. His social reforms such as Civil Rights, the Voter's Bill of Rights, Medicare, Headstart, and federal aid to education continue to endure.

Johnson took up the cause for the rights of people of color at a time that very few politicians had or would (Goodwin, 1991). Johnson "took the most advanced position on racial issues of any President in American history" (Goodwin, 1991, p. 232). Johnson had an unmatched capacity to persuade individuals (Dalleck, 2004; Goodwin, 1991). Despite opposition he was able to persuade nearly everyone that his goals were in the best interests of all Americans.

Johnson felt he had made major progress in the five short years that he was in office (Johnson, 1971). He stated,

Distinguished Black men and women have assumed their rightful places in the highest offices of the land—the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, the foreign service, the Federal Reserve Board, the mayorship of Washington, D. C., the chairmanship of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commissions—Thurgood Marshall, Robert Weaver, Andrew Brimmer, Patricia Harris, Walter Washington, Clifford Alexander—and many others for their competence, wisdom, and courage, not for the color of their skin. (p. 179)

In 1964 there were only 280 elected African American officials, serving in mainly minor offices (Katz, 1993). By 1968 there were eight African American members of Congress, 11 federal judges, seven ambassadors, 79 state representatives, 18 senators, seven mayors of major cities, and 212 convention delegates (1993).

Johnson's Voting Bill of Rights led to the fact that only four states had less than a 50 percent (three reached 47 percent) of their voting-age African Americans registered by the end of 1966. By 1980 ten million African Americans were on the nation's voting rolls, only seven percent less than the proportion of voting age whites (Dalleck, 2004). In the six states most impacted by the law, the number of elected office positions for people of color increased from 70 to 400 (Unger & Unger, 1999). In 1965 only a couple hundred African Americans held public office, by 1989 there were 6,000 (2004). The bill also promoted an increased number of Mexican Americans, Latinos, and women into Congress (Katz, 1993).

We are in agreement with Goodwin (1991) that "Johnson took the most advanced position on racial issues of any

President in American history (p. 232). The civil rights movement provided a model for social change for other reform movements, like the women's movement and "free speech" campaigns. It provided "a language about equality, rights, and community that transformed public discourse in a decade" (as cited Katz, 1993, p. 48).

However, we must almost recognize that despite Johnson's convictions the Great Society reforms suffered under Johnson's administration due to his escalatory policy in Vietnam. Johnson failed to make a choice between war or the Great Society, which resulted in poor results for both (Goodwin, 1991; Unger & Unger, 1999). We believe that the Vietnam War did negatively impact Johnson's efforts toward his reforms; however, he continued to submit, promote, and further advance these needed initiatives. In 1968 he was still able to achieve such acts as Fair Housing, Indian Bill of Rights, Safe Streets, Food for Peace, School Breakfast, Truth in Lending, Fair Federal Juries, Juvenile Delinquency Prevention, Guaranteed Student Loans, FHA-VA Interest Rate Program, Health Manpower, Gun Controls, Aid to Handicapped Children, and Vocational Education.

### *Great Divide on Government*

Does increased power of government mean a loss of liberty for the governed? The resistance to the amount of government intervention in matters of social justice still separates political parties and agendas today. Jefferson believed in less government control and intervention in social issues, and Lincoln and Johnson believed in more government intervention and control on social issues.

Jefferson was concerned about the power of strong central government and that it might put an end to slavery (Reed, 2004). During Jefferson's presidency he strived to limit government and change elite practices of the federal government (White House Historical Association). However, he was willing to exercise his leadership by making the Louisiana Territory, which was actually outside the power of the President (Kirn, 2004). He was also willing to expand the military force (Kirn, 2004). He used Federal action to enforce the Embargo Act, which crippled the economy (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). His position promoted elitism over equality for people of color and women (Appleby, 2003).

It is Lincoln that we credit for preserving our United States of America as he saved the Union from secession by the

South, but Lincoln can also be credited for changing the Constitution and system of government that the founding fathers created when this country was founded. Lincoln's belief in a centralized government made it so that state control has been replaced with federal control. It is easy to argue that his Presidency moved our country further from a true democracy and closer to the tyranny that once existed before the Declaration of Independence.

It was Lincoln who set the precedents for the powers that the president could assert during times of war. In order to do this Lincoln had to maneuver his way around the obstacles that the Constitution presented to him. His success is apparent, as today we deal with the federal control that exists with respect to education, health care, and the many other social programs that exist in our country.

Johnson's actions also promoted a more centralized form of government. His presidency brought fourth a historical groundswell of government control and intervention. However, Johnson was unable to recognize the growing resentment due to the increased degree of central authority. It was not specific objections to his social reforms, but whether or not the federal government should be involved (Goodwin, 1991).

### *Legacy on Education*

Jefferson's idea of education was based on social class. Every citizen was entitled to an education in proportion to his pursuit of life (Sparagana, 2002). The role of education for women was that they were to educate their children. The rationale given for allowing more serious education for women was that it "would make the Americans better wives and mothers (De Pauw, 1975, p. 212).

Lincoln had little to do with education during his presidency due to the ongoing Civil War and efforts in trying to save the Union. He did believe and spoke out that every person should have the right to an education. However, when states set up education policies that weren't socially equitable for Blacks, Lincoln only persuaded states to reconsider their policies rather than demanding such.

Prior to Johnson's term in office, very few education laws were enacted at the national level. At a time when schools had grown 43% and were in need of repair, Johnson stepped forward to improve education with federal resources, despites many who argued against it (Johnson, 1971). Out of Johnson's legacy many federally-funded urban action programs were

developed to empower the oppressed by providing them resources that facilitated and liberated them from their inadequate conditions. These programs offered services such as career opportunities, counseling, and financial assistance (Baptiste & Meindl, 1971). During Johnson's term 60 laws regarding education were passed. As a result of his efforts, by 1970 one out of every four college students was receiving federal financial aid (Dalleck, 2004).

## Conclusion

We must remember that there is not a single historic truth or perception. Each President leaves us a legacy, which sometimes is allowed to become somewhat distorted. Each of us seeks truth and uses our own lens from different vantage points to pass judgment on actions and failures of our past leaders. We can only hope to use our past as a source of knowledge that inspires us to widen our lens and enables us to continue our pursuits in a land of opportunity.

Our society is greatly influenced by the actions or failures to act of our past Presidents. We have all learned to conform to an ethnocentric culture and call it the "American Way." We have continued to oppress people of color and have learned to justify it by saying all Americans have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We fail to embrace diversity and are taught to say we are proud to be an American. Our awareness of inequality, conscious or unconscious, at all three levels (individual, institutional, and societal) needs to be revealed, questioned, and changed so that together we can proclaim the U. S. is indeed a place where all people can partake in the same opportunities and have equal access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Some of the possible conclusions that can be drawn are that Jefferson's stance on emancipation was deficient. He failed to take a risk and take a stand against slavery, his choosing not to do anything left a legacy that continued to oppress people of color while benefiting white males. Jefferson failed to present Congress with a gradual plan for emancipation even for consideration and therefore, he was fully in support of slavery. Lincoln, like Jefferson, struggled with equality as he appeared to support the emancipation of slaves yet still apparently believed people of color to be inferior, and thus he planned for their colonization.

Many credit Lincoln for using his power to free slaves, referring to him as the "Great Emancipator," yet others find

it ironic that he used this same power to enslave not only the slaves he freed but freemen of all colors by forcing citizens to live under the control of the federal government. Lincoln's legacy is that he ignored and disregarded the Constitution, that while saving the Union he establish a less democratic society that conformed to his philosophical views of a centralized government.

It is hard to envision how the United States would be today if Johnson had not taken a strong stance on civil rights. He was not content with what Kennedy had started. He pursued reforms and tried to provide each individual with some kind of benefit in spite of the fact he was advised not to and faced tremendous opposition. He leaves us with a great legacy in the area of social justice. It is our hope that one day we may recognize and celebrate his crusade to end racism and poverty. If we were to rank the presidencies and legacies of each of these presidents, in terms of who brought about equity and social justice for all people, especially people of color, we would conclude Johnson would be ranked first. What do you conclude?

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