

# The Great Society Speech Answer Key

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Primary Source: President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" Speech,  
Annotated

## President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" Speech

*Delivered at the University of Michigan, May 22, 1964*

President Hatcher, Governor Romney, Senators McNamara and Hart, Congressmen Meader and Staebler, and other members of the fine Michigan delegation, members of the graduating class, my fellow Americans.

It is a great pleasure to be here today. This university has been coeducational since 1870, but I do not believe it was on the basis of your accomplishments that a Detroit high school girl said, and I quote, "In choosing a college, you first have to decide whether you want a coeducational school or an educational school."

Well, we can find both here at Michigan, although perhaps at different hours.

I came out here today very anxious to meet the Michigan

### Annotations

**Salutation – President Johnson addresses his speech to those present.**

## The Great Society Speech Answer Key

The Great Society Speech, delivered by President Lyndon B. Johnson on May 22, 1964, is a pivotal moment in American history, shaping the nation's social policy and civil rights. This speech outlined Johnson's vision for a more equitable society and served as a launching point for a series of domestic programs aimed at eradicating poverty and racial injustice. In this article, we will delve into the key components of the Great Society, its historical context, the major policies it introduced, and its lasting impact on American society.

## Historical Context

### The Civil Rights Movement

The Great Society emerged during a time of significant social upheaval in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum, with activists fighting for the end of racial segregation and

discrimination, particularly in the South. This landscape set the stage for Johnson's ambitious agenda, which aimed to address both civil rights and economic inequality.

## **Post-War Prosperity and Economic Challenges**

The 1960s were also marked by a period of post-war prosperity, but this prosperity was not shared equally. Many Americans, particularly in rural and urban areas, continued to struggle with poverty. The juxtaposition of wealth and poverty illustrated the need for substantial reforms, motivating Johnson and his administration to act.

## **Key Themes of the Great Society Speech**

In his speech, Johnson articulated several key themes that would guide his policy initiatives. These themes reflected his vision for a better America.

### **Equality and Civil Rights**

One of the most prominent themes in the Great Society Speech was the emphasis on equality and civil rights. Johnson urged Congress to pass legislation that would ensure equal opportunities for all Americans, regardless of race. He highlighted the importance of voting rights, education, and access to public facilities.

### **Poverty and Economic Opportunity**

Johnson's speech also addressed the pressing issue of poverty. He described his commitment to eliminating poverty in America, emphasizing that economic opportunity should be available to

everyone. This theme would later translate into various programs aimed at job creation, education, and healthcare.

## **Education and Health Care**

Education and healthcare were central to Johnson's vision of the Great Society. He believed that access to quality education and healthcare was essential for empowering individuals and fostering economic growth. This led to initiatives such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Medicare, which provided healthcare for the elderly.

## **Major Policies of the Great Society**

The Great Society encompassed a wide range of policies and programs designed to address the issues highlighted in Johnson's speech. Some of the most significant initiatives include:

### **1. Civil Rights Legislation**

- Civil Rights Act of 1964: This landmark legislation prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It aimed to end segregation in schools, workplaces, and public accommodations.
- Voting Rights Act of 1965: This act aimed to eliminate barriers to voting for African Americans, particularly in the South, through measures such as federal oversight of voter registration.

### **2. Economic Opportunity Programs**

- Economic Opportunity Act of 1964: This act established the Office of Economic Opportunity and

provided funding for various programs aimed at reducing poverty, including Job Corps and Head Start.

- Food Stamp Act of 1964: This legislation expanded the food stamp program to help low-income families afford nutritious food.

### **3. Education Initiatives**

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965: This act aimed to provide federal funding to improve schools, particularly in low-income areas, ensuring that all children had access to quality education.

- Higher Education Act of 1965: This legislation increased federal funding for colleges and universities and provided financial assistance to students, expanding access to higher education.

### **4. Health Care Reforms**

- Medicare and Medicaid: Established in 1965, Medicare provided health insurance for Americans aged 65 and older, while Medicaid offered coverage for low-income individuals and families.

## **Impact and Legacy of the Great Society**

The Great Society had a profound and lasting impact on American society, influencing subsequent policy decisions and shaping the political landscape.

### **Positive Outcomes**

- Reduction in Poverty: The initiatives launched under the Great Society led to a significant decrease in poverty rates in the 1960s and 1970s. Programs such as food assistance and job training helped lift

millions of Americans out of poverty.

- Civil Rights Advances: The passage of civil rights legislation marked a significant step toward racial equality in the United States, empowering marginalized communities and shifting public attitudes toward civil rights.

## Critiques and Challenges

Despite its successes, the Great Society faced criticism and challenges. Some argued that the programs were too costly and led to dependency on government assistance. Others contended that the focus on domestic issues diverted attention from foreign policy challenges, including the Vietnam War.

## Long-term Effects

The legacy of the Great Society continues to influence American politics and social policy today. Many of the programs initiated during this period laid the groundwork for ongoing debates about healthcare, education, and social welfare. For instance, the Affordable Care Act can be viewed as a continuation of Johnson's efforts to expand healthcare access.

## Conclusion

The Great Society Speech is a defining moment in American history that encapsulates President Lyndon B. Johnson's vision for a more just and equitable society. Through its ambitious proposals aimed at addressing poverty and racial injustice, the Great Society sought to transform the social fabric of the nation. While it faced challenges and critiques, its lasting impact on civil rights, education, and healthcare continues to resonate today. As we reflect on the Great Society, it serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for equality and justice in America, highlighting the importance of government

policy in shaping the lives of individuals and communities.

In examining the Great Society Speech and its implications, we can appreciate the complexities of social reform and the enduring quest for a society that truly reflects the values of equality and opportunity for all.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What was the main objective of the Great Society speech given by Lyndon B. Johnson?**

The main objective was to eliminate poverty and racial injustice in the United States through a series of social welfare programs.

### **When and where was the Great Society speech delivered?**

The Great Society speech was delivered on May 22, 1964, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

### **Which major legislation was inspired by the Great Society speech?**

The speech inspired significant legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Economic Opportunity Act.

### **What were some key programs introduced as part of the Great Society?**

Key programs included Medicare, Medicaid, the Head Start program, and various initiatives aimed at improving education and housing.

### **How did the Great Society speech address the issue of education?**

The speech emphasized the importance of education as a means to combat poverty and improve

opportunities for all citizens.

## What role did civil rights play in the Great Society vision?

Civil rights were central to the Great Society vision, as Johnson aimed to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all Americans, particularly African Americans.

## How did the public respond to the Great Society initiatives following the speech?

The public response was mixed; while many supported the initiatives, there was also significant opposition and criticism regarding government spending and effectiveness.

## What impact did the Great Society have on American politics?

The Great Society had a lasting impact on American politics, expanding the role of the federal government in social welfare and influencing future political debates about government intervention.

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