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**Great Society Activity**

**Part I – Reading History: Working With a Source Document and Informational Chart**

**Background**

In May, 1964 President Johnson (LBJ) summed up his vision for America in a phrase:

the “Great Society.” The President declared that “the Great Society demands an end to poverty

and racial injustice.” But, he said that was just the beginning. Johnson envisioned a legislative

program that would create not only a higher standard of living and equal opportunity but also

promote a richer quality of life.

LBJ set lofty goals for his nation and himself. Like his idol Franklin Delano Roosevelt

(FDR), he wanted to change America. During the years 1965 and 1966, the Johnson

administration introduced a series of bills to Congress. By the time Johnson left the White

House in 1969, Congress had passed 206 of his bills. For most of them, the President

personally led the battle to get them passed.

The following sources provide information about the problems President Johnson

wanted to solve and laws he supported to try and solve those problems. Complete each of the

activities connected to each source.

**Activities 1 - Read the following primary source document, an excerpt from a speech by**

**President Lyndon Johnson, and answer the questions that follow.**

The information below provides information about the document. Noticing and considering this

information when reading and trying to understand a document is called ***"sourcing of the***

***document."***

* Historical Context: (What was going at the time) - *The Civil Rights movement and the Cold War…specifically events in Vietnam front and center*
* Intended audience? - *The American people*
* Purpose? *- President Lyndon B. Johnson wanted to use government programs to help Americans*
* Point of View?: Liberal Democrat who idealized FDR’s New Deal

**Speech - May, 1964**

***The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an***

***end to poverty and racial injustice,*** *to which we are totally committed in our time.*

*But that is just the beginning.*

*… I want to talk to you today about three places where we begin to build the*

*Great Society -- in our cities, in our countryside, and in our classrooms.*

*… In the remainder of this century urban population will double, city land will*

*double, and we will have to build homes, highways and facilities equal to all those*

*built since this country was first settled. So in the next 40 years we must rebuild the*

*entire urban United States.*

*…Our society will never be great until our cities are great.*

*A second place where we begin to build the Great Society is in our countryside.*

*We have always prided ourselves on being not only America the strong and America the free, but America the beautiful. Today that beauty is in danger. The*

*water we drink, the food we eat, the very air that we breathe, are threatened with*

*pollution... Green fields and dense forests are disappearing…*

*A third place to build the Great Society is in the classrooms of America. There*

*your children's lives will be shaped. Our society will not be great until every young*

*mind is set free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination. We are still*

*far from that goal.*

*Today, 8 million adult Americans, more than the entire population of*

*Michigan, have not finished five years of school. Nearly 54 million -- more than one*

*quarter of all America -- have not even finished high school.*

*Each year more than 100,000 high school graduates, with proved ability, do*

*not enter college because they cannot afford it…*

*Most of our qualified teachers are underpaid, and many of our paid teachers*

*are unqualified. So we must give every child a place to sit and a teacher to learn*

*from*. *Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must offer an escape from*

*poverty.*

**Understanding the readings – Gathering Information from the background and a primary**

**source document: answer the following questions**

1. According to President Johnson, why, in 1964, were we not yet a “Great Society?”
2. Not enough people graduated from college
3. Most Americans were poor.
4. Three places in our society, the cities, the countryside, and the classrooms, faced problems that need to be solved.
5. He believed that achieving a “Great Society” was not possible.
6. With which of the following position’s on today’s society would President likely agree?
7. We have achieved a “Great Society.”
8. If we are to achieve a “Great Society,” we have to make progress in making sure that all Americans share in the wealth our society produces.
9. People living in poverty should next not expect any help in trying to improve their economic situation.
10. A person’s educational level is not connected to their economic success.
11. Which of the following statements best connects Johnson’s “Great Society” to President Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal?”
12. The Great Society was created to solve problems created by the New Deal.
13. The Great Society sought, like to the New Deal, to improve the lives of Americans facing economic hardships.
14. The Great Society had no connection to the New Deal.
15. The Great Society and New Deal were both ideas of the Republican Party.
16. Which of the following statements best summarizes the New Deal and the Great Society?
17. The New Deal was universally supported while the Great Society met with strong opposition.
18. The New Deal continued as World War 2 was being fought while the Great Society was ended to focus on the Vietnam War
19. The New Deal and the Great Society were both considered failures by most historians
20. New Deal programs tended to favor White Americans while Great Society programs provided relief to poor minorities.

**Understanding the readings – Speculating on what policies and laws President Johnson**

**might propose to achieve his “Great Society.”**

1. President Johnson argued that a focus on cities, the countryside, and classrooms was necessary for building a “Great Society” in the United States. For each of these areas what were the main problems Johnson discussed?

Please respond to this question by filling out the following chart.



1. President Johnson also argued that a Great Society “rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice.”

* Suggest two laws or policies the President might propose to “end poverty and racial injustice.” For each suggestion explain how it would it help achieve this goal.
  1. Suggested law or policy and explanation:

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* 1. Suggested law or policy and explanation:

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1. Speculate on what challenges President Johnson might have faced in the 1960s in achieving his goal of ending poverty and racial injustice?

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**Activity 2** - **Reading an informational chart: Connecting ideas and actions** - Below is a

chart that summarizes a number of the laws President Johnson proposed and got passed by

Congress between 1964 -1967. Examine the laws and their purpose, and complete the chart

that follows. The chart asks you to connect a specific piece of legislation to a specific goal

mentioned by President Johnson in the previous activity.



1. From the above chart, select three pieces of legislation and explain how each might help solve a problem or support a Great Society goal President Johnson *articulated in the excerpt from his speech* that you read previously.

