

JOHNSON'S LEGACY TODAY: DO WE LIVE IN A GREAT SOCIETY?

Seattle Repertory Theatre's productions of Robert Schenkkan's "All the Way" and "The Great Society" shed light on Lyndon B. Johnson's tumultuous U.S. presidency. In this 10-week series, we'll explore the legacy of Johnson's noteworthy legislative acts and how decisions made 50 years ago continue to resonate in modern America. Today's topic: The War on Poverty's higher education programs.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As outlined in his speech at the University of Michigan in 1964, education was a key component of the Great Society. Johnson believed that placing Americans on equal academic footing would grant them more career opportunities. The intention of the following acts was to create more opportunities for lower and middle income students while investing resources in libraries and universities that needed them the most. Johnson believed that by increasing educational opportunities and improving universities, national problems such as poverty would also be addressed.

Higher Education Facilities and Higher Education Act

Two acts brought great changes in higher education. The Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, signed into law a month after Johnson became president, authorized college aid and provided additional libraries, community colleges, graduate centers and technical institutes. The Higher Education Act of 1965 followed. This act increased federal money to universities, creating scholarships and low-interest loans for students. Johnson stated in his introduction of the act at Southwest Texas State College:

"To thousands of young men and women, this act means the path of knowledge is open to all that have the determination to walk it.

It means a way to deeper personal fulfillment, greater personal productivity, and increased personal reward. This bill, which I will make law, is an incentive to stay in school."

It means that a high school senior anywhere in this great land of ours can apply to any college or any university in any of the 50 states and not be turned away because his family is poor.

www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/lbjforkids/edu_whca370-text.shtm

The Higher Education Act has been amended and reauthorized by Congress approximately every five years.

Teacher Corps

The Higher Education Act of 1965 also established Teacher Corps, a program intended to send teachers to poverty-stricken rural and urban areas of the country. Colleges, public schools and poverty organizations provided training to future teachers. These future teachers not only gained teaching skills, but became better equipped to work with low income students by learning about the cultural and social traits of low income

populations. In 1989, Teacher Corps was later reestablished as Teach for America.

Upward Bound

Upward Bound also addressed the needs of low income high school students through a summer experience. For eight weeks over the summer, students studied literature and the arts in a residential program that also included field trips. The program hoped to connect higher education institutions with first generation potential college students to expose them to postsecondary education. Upward Bound was a part of Johnson's TRiO programs, which were federal programs established to provide services to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Adult Basic Education Act

Johnson also developed a program to address the basic education needs of people 18 years or older who lacked literacy skills or who had not completed secondary education. He believed this held them back from employment opportunities. The Adult Basic Education Act became a part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Run by the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Act partnered with local schools to address the gap. Look for our next section on the elementary and secondary education programs of Johnson's Great Society.



CURRENT CONNECTION

- Why is it important to place a high value on higher education?
- Why do you think higher education has become unaffordable to so many?
- What grant opportunities exist for youth pursuing higher education today?
- Do you think Teach for America is a good program? What changes would you like to see made to it?