

Thirty-sixth ~ President Lyndon B. Johnson

Presidential Biographies

“A Great Society” for the American people and their fellow men elsewhere was the vision of **Lyndon B. Johnson**. In his first years of office he obtained passage of one of the most extensive legislative programs in the Nation’s history. Maintaining collective security, he carried on the rapidly growing struggle to restrain Communist encroachment in Viet Nam.

Johnson was born on August 27, 1908, in central Texas, not far from Johnson City, which his family had helped settle. He felt the pinch of rural poverty as he grew up, working his way through Southwest Texas State Teachers College (now known as Texas State University-San Marcos); he learned compassion for the poverty of others when he taught students of Mexican descent.

In 1937 he campaigned successfully for the House of Representatives on a New Deal platform, effectively aided by his wife, the former Claudia “Lady Bird” Taylor, whom he had married in 1934. During World War II he served briefly in the Navy as a lieutenant commander, winning a Silver Star in the South Pacific. After six terms in the House, Johnson was elected to the Senate in 1948. In 1953, he became the youngest Minority Leader in Senate history, and the following year, when the Democrats won control, Majority Leader. With rare skill he obtained passage of a number of key Eisenhower measures.

In the 1960 campaign, John-



son, as John F. Kennedy’s running mate, was elected Vice President. On November 22, 1963, when Kennedy was assassinated, Johnson was sworn in as President.

First he obtained enactment of the measures President Kennedy had been urging at the time of his death—a new civil rights bill and a tax cut. Next he urged the Nation “to build a great society, a place where the meaning of man’s life matches the marvels of man’s labor.” In 1964, Johnson won the Presidency with 61 percent of the vote and had the widest popular margin in American history—more than 15,000,000 votes.

The Great Society program became Johnson’s agenda for Congress in January 1965:

aid to education, attack on disease, Medicare, urban renewal, beautification, conservation, development of depressed regions, a wide-scale fight against poverty, control and prevention of crime and delinquency, removal of obstacles to the right to vote. Congress, at times augmenting or amending, rapidly enacted Johnson’s recommendations. Millions of elderly people found succor through the 1965 Medicare amendment to the Social Security Act.

Under Johnson, the country made spectacular explorations of space in a program he had championed since its start. When three astronauts successfully orbited the moon in December 1968, Johnson congratulated them: “You’ve

taken ... all of us, all over the world, into a new era. ...”

Nevertheless, two overriding crises had been gaining momentum since 1965. Despite the beginning of new anti-poverty and anti-discrimination programs, unrest and rioting in black ghettos troubled the Nation. President Johnson steadily exerted his influence against segregation and on behalf of law and order, but there was no early solution.

The other crisis arose from Viet Nam. Despite Johnson’s efforts to end Communist aggression and achieve a settlement, fighting continued. Controversy over the war had become acute by the end of March 1968, when he limited the bombing of North Viet Nam in order to initiate negotiations. At the same time, he startled the world by withdrawing as a candidate for reelection so that he might devote his full efforts, unimpeded by politics, to the quest for peace.

When he left office, peace talks were under way; he did not live to see them successful, but died suddenly of a heart attack at his Texas ranch on January 22, 1973.



Thirty-Seventh ~ Richard M. Nixon

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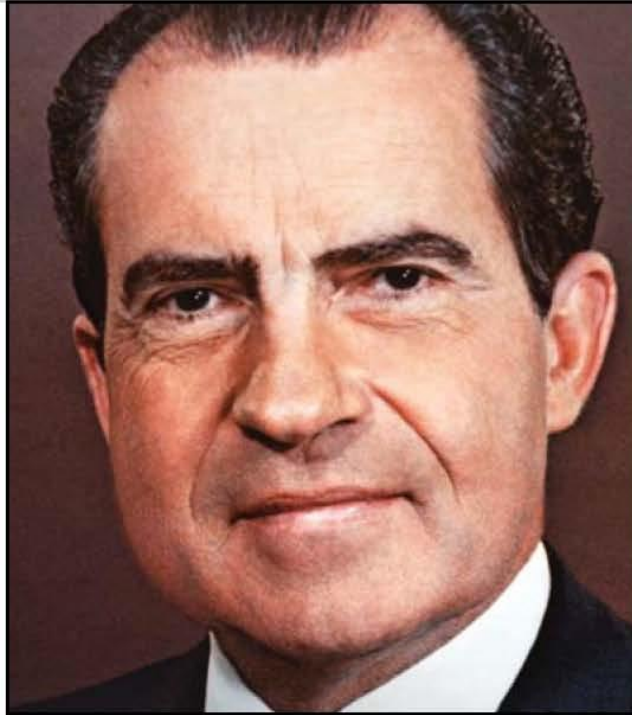
Reconciliation was the first goal set by President **Richard M. Nixon**. The Nation was painfully divided, with turbulence in the cities and war overseas. During his Presidency, Nixon succeeded in ending American fighting in Viet Nam and improving relations with the U.S.S.R. and China. But the Watergate scandal brought fresh divisions to the country and ultimately led to his resignation.

His election in 1968 had climaxed a career unusual on two counts: his early success and his comeback after being defeated for President in 1960 and for Governor of California in 1962.

Born in California in 1913, Nixon had a brilliant record at Whittier College and Duke University Law School before beginning the practice of law. In 1940, he married Patricia Ryan; they had two daughters, Patricia (Tricia) and Julie. During World War II, Nixon served as a Navy lieutenant commander in the Pacific.

On leaving the service, he was elected to Congress from his California district. In 1950, he won a Senate seat. Two years later, General Eisenhower selected Nixon, age 39, to be his running mate.

As Vice President, Nixon took on major duties in the Eisenhower Administration. Nominated for President by acclamation in 1960, he lost by a narrow margin to John F. Kennedy. In 1968, he again won his party's nomination, and went on to defeat Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and



third-party candidate George C. Wallace.

His accomplishments while in office included revenue sharing, the end of the draft, new anticrime laws, and a broad environmental program. As he had promised, he appointed Justices of conservative philosophy to the Supreme Court. One of the most dramatic events of his first term occurred in 1969, when American astronauts made the first moon landing.

Some of his most acclaimed achievements came in his quest for world stability. During visits in 1972 to Beijing and Moscow, he reduced tensions with China and the U.S.S.R. His summit meetings with Russian leader Leonid I. Brezhnev produced a

treaty to limit strategic nuclear weapons. In January 1973, he announced an accord with North Viet Nam to end American involvement in Indochina. In 1974, his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, negotiated disengagement agreements between Israel and its opponents, Egypt and Syria.

In his 1972 bid for office, Nixon defeated Democratic candidate George McGovern by one of the widest margins on record.

Within a few months, his administration was embattled over the so-called "Watergate" scandal, stemming from a break-in at the offices of the Democratic National Committee during the 1972 campaign. The

break-in was traced to officials of the Committee to Reelect the President. A number of administration officials resigned; some were later convicted of offenses connected with efforts to cover up the affair. Nixon denied any personal involvement, but the courts forced him to yield tape recordings which indicated that he had, in fact, tried to divert the investigation.

As a result of unrelated scandals in Maryland, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew resigned in 1973. Nixon nominated, and Congress approved, House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford as Vice President.

Faced with what seemed almost certain impeachment, Nixon announced on August 8, 1974, that he would resign the next day to begin "that process of healing which is so desperately needed in America."

In his last years, Nixon gained praise as an elder statesman. By the time of his death on April 22, 1994, he had written numerous books on his experiences in public life and on foreign policy.

