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## LYNDON B. JOHNSON AND THE CIVIL RIGHT ACT OF 1964

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**Abstract.** The Civil Rights Movement is deeply intertwined with Lyndon B. Johnson. Throughout his career, Johnson supported the quest of African-Americans for political and civil rights. They found in him an ally whose role was fundamental in fulfilling the goals of Martin Luther King, Jr, and the Civil Rights Movement. This paper will examine the role of the Johnson presidency in the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964.

**Key words:** African-American history, Civil Rights Movement, Presidency, Civil Rights Act, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ), Martin Luther King, Jr.

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## ЛИНДОН Б. ДЖОНСОН И ЗАКОН «О ГРАЖДАНСКИХ ПРАВАХ» 1964 г.

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**Аннотация.** Движение за гражданские права тесно связано с фигурой Линдона Б. Джонсона. На протяжении всей своей карьеры Джонсон поддерживал стремление афроамериканцев к обретению политических и гражданских прав. В нем они обрели союзника, игравшего важнейшую роль в осуществлении целей Мартина Лютера Кинга – младшего и в борьбе за гражданские права. В данной статье исследуется роль президентства Джонсона в принятии законов «О гражданских правах» 1957 и 1964 годов.

**Ключевые слова:** афроамериканская история, движение за гражданские права, президентство, закон «О гражданских правах», Линдон Б. Джонсон, Мартин Лютер Кинг – младший.

### I

The Civil Rights Movement found an important ally in President Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Texan whose father had been a populist politician. Lyndon Johnson understood the problems of poverty and inequality of all the minorities in the United States through his early experiences as a teacher in a Mexican-American school. The problem of racial discrimination was the greatest issue in his political career, and

the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the most important achievement of his Presidency.

This article will examine the role of Lyndon Johnson's presidency in the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964. The development of these Acts is very closely intertwined with Johnson's personal and political life. By looking at his political career as congressman, senator, vice president and president, we can detect how the influences on his early life helped formulate his ideology and motivated him to pursue the passage

of civil rights legislation. In addition, Johnson's public speeches, private conversations and personal comments highlighted his personality, his beliefs, and his opinions. Lyndon Johnson's conception of presidential leadership is reflected in the methods he used to deal with the opposition he encountered in trying to move civil rights legislation through the legislative process.

## II

Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) was born in Stonewall, Texas, in 1908. His father, Sam Ealy Johnson, was a populist politician who tried to support the farmers and the laborers as a member of the Texas House of the Representatives. He was elected in 1904, and he gained a reputation for staying away from lobbies and illegalities. His son, Lyndon, adopted his father's principles and tried to help poor Americans. In 1927, Lyndon enrolled in the Southwest Texas State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. He then worked as a fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teacher at Welhausen School, a Mexican-American school in the town of Cotulla. His experience as a teacher of poor Mexican children stands out as very important for his career and his life. It was so important to him that when he addressed the American nation on March 15, 1965, in order to promote the Voting Rights Bill, he referred to his experience as a teacher. "My first job after college was as teacher in Cotulla, Texas, in a small Mexican-American school. Few of them could speak English, and I couldn't speak much Spanish. My students were poor, and they often came to class without breakfast – hungry. They knew even in their youth the pain of prejudice. They never seemed to know why people disliked them, but they knew it was so because I saw it in their eyes. I often walked home late in the afternoon after the classes were finished, wishing there was more that I could do. But all I knew was to teach them the little that I knew – hoping that it might help them against the hardships that lay ahead. Somehow you never forget what poverty and hatred can do when you see its scars on the hopeful face of a young child" [12, p. 9].

Johnson's career as a teacher was brief as he soon turned to politics. In 1931 Johnson was appointed as a secretary to a young congressman named Richard Kleberg. Johnson, even though

he was young, worked so effectively that he became a dominant figure in the office of Congressman Kleberg. Johnson's career as a secretary was not challenging enough for his skills and ambition, so he looked for an opportunity to run for Congress himself.

As a firm supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs, Johnson became a leader in the National Youth Administration where he worked hard, and as one of his colleagues and friends from the university said: "This man Johnson was operating the best NYA program in all of the states" [6, p. 31].

Johnson's opportunity to run for Congress came when a Texan Congressman died in 1937. LBJ announced his candidacy for the House seat and won the election. From his powerful new position, he followed in the footsteps of his father and helped the people who voted for him by securing funds for building dams, roads, and other public improvements in his Congressional district. LBJ also supported the construction of new post offices, soil conservation projects, and farm credit facilities. He was a politician who didn't just make promises to voters; he worked hard to get things done.

After failing to win a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1941, LBJ tried again in 1948. This time he won and took office in January 1949. Spending the next fifteen years of his life in Washington D.C., LBJ became a well known and active member of America's national political elite. LBJ was very ambitious, and he succeeded in becoming a principal leader of the Democratic Party. After the 1952 election, LBJ became the Minority Leader in the U.S. Senate, a clear indication that he was powerful enough to eventually run for president. Johnson quietly changed one of the old Senate traditions in 1953. He made certain that each young Democratic senator received at least one desirable committee assignment. To do so, LBJ had to persuade a number of senior Senators to give up their committee position – pleasantly surprising the Congressional freshmen. In 1955 LBJ became Senate Majority Leader, and he dominated the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress and succeeded in passing several important bills and resolutions. A member of the Democratic Party stated at the time, "As long as Lyndon was on the Senate floor, the Democrats lost only one party vote during the entire session" [6, p. 91].

LBJ drove himself very hard during the first half of 1955, and he nearly died from a massive heart attack. But he recovered fast, and he soon received an offer he had long been waiting for – the vice presidency. After more than fifteen years in active political life and with the full support of the Democratic Party, LBJ was encouraged to run for the vice presidency in 1956. He sought the Vice Presidency at the same time John F. Kennedy first ran for the Democratic Party's nomination for President. LBJ and JFK both lost their nomination bids, and President Eisenhower ended up being re-elected. Despite Eisenhower's re-election, the Democrats retained control of Congress. As Senate Majority Leader, LBJ continued being the highest ranking Democrat in the country.

### III

Johnson planned to run for president in the election of 1960. He knew that if he wanted to get elected, he needed to achieve some striking reforms; in that way he would become familiar to more voters and enhance his political status. Having been an active politician for decades, LBJ foresaw that the Civil Rights Movement would become powerful and that the struggle for civil rights would be at the center of the American political arena. According to LBJ, the southern black community should be seen as a voting body that should support the Democratic Party.

Under LBJ's leadership, the Democratic Party promoted liberal policies and actions in order to use the "affirmative government as a means of serving the people and enlarging their rights and the opportunities" [6, p. 98]. The opportunity that provided for Johnson was great; if he managed to pass the Civil Rights act he could use it as a positive point in seeking the nomination of the Democratic Party for the presidency. LBJ was a presidential candidate from the South, and he believed he should pay attention to the African-American community that could potentially support him in the elections. It was not lost on Johnson that successful passage of the Civil Rights Act would enhance his standing in the Democratic Party and place his name in the legislative history of the United States for passage of the first civil rights legislation enacted in the country since the Reconstruction Era.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957, signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, was the beginning of a civil rights legislative program that would include the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The 1957 Civil Rights Act was mainly a voting rights act intended to ensure that all African-Americans could exercise their voting rights. In addition, through the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the government established a civil rights office at the Department of Justice. The Civil Rights Commission, headed by the Assistant Attorney General, was established to investigate complaints of civil rights violations, coordinate the enforcement of civil rights throughout the Department of Justice, and support other federal agencies in civil rights enforcement. The original text of the Civil Right Act shows that the commission was given specific responsibilities in order to play an active role against racial discrimination: "SEC. 1 W.(a).The commission shall (1) Investigate allegations in writing under oath or affirmation that certain citizens of the United States are being deprived of their right to vote and have that vote counted by reason of their color, race, religion or national origin <...>" [9, p. 387] and "(3) Appraise the laws and policies of the Federal Government with respect to equal protection of the laws under the Constitution" [9, p. 387].

Lyndon Johnson did not admit publicly that he was supporting such civil rights laws; after all, many Southerners were racists. However, LBJ allowed the bill to be considered by the Senate Judiciary Committee. The main point of disagreement among the senators was that LBJ and Senator Richard Russell of Georgia proposed an important change to Eisenhower's original bill: Everyone accused of racial discrimination or violating the civil rights of the African-Americans (and therefore acting against Federal laws) would receive a jury trial. This section of the proposal caused massive resistance; it was neutralizing the previous law and enforcing a reality that would be unimaginable for a white segregationist; due to that change, it would be an obligation for white juries to convict whites for racial discrimination. However, a solution was found by revising the paragraph in that way that favored the whites: "SEC. 151. In all cases of criminal contempt arising under the provisions of this act, the accused, upon conviction, shall be punished by fine or imprisonment or both; Provided however,

that in case the accused is an natural person the fine to be paid shall not exceed the sum of \$1,000, nor shall imprisonment exceed the term of six months; Provided further, that in any such proceeding for criminal contempt, at the discretion of the judge, the accused may be tried with or without a jury; Provided further that in the event such proceeding for criminal contempt be tried before a judge without a jury and the sentence of the court on conviction is a fine in excess of the sum of \$300 or imprisonment in excess of forty-five days, the accused in said proceeding upon demand therefore, shall be entitled to a trial de novo before a jury, which shall conform as near as may be to the practice in other criminal cases". [9, p. 230-231]. The Civil Rights Act of 1957, even if it was limited to a voting rights act, was signed by President Eisenhower and became law. Even if it wasn't a great step forward for the civil rights of African-Americans, it can be seen as one of the first steps leading to further fights and victories for the Civil Rights Movement.

Senator Lyndon Johnson placed himself between southern and northern ideology concerning civil rights. He believed he could be the person to connect the liberal northern ideology concerning racial integration to the extreme southern ideology that was supporting racial discrimination. In March 1956, the Southern manifesto was signed by a majority of the southern senators. They declared: "In this trying period, as we all seek to right this wrong, we appeal to our people not to be provoked by the agitators and troublemakers invading our States and to scrupulously refrain from disorder and lawless acts" [5, p. 4459-4460]. In that way they separated themselves from the Federal Government, as they did not want it to interfere in their states. The Southern manifesto was not supported by LBJ; signing it would separate him from the majority of the other senators and cost him their support for the presidency.

Johnson was one of the few southern senators who didn't sign the manifesto. Opposing the will of both the Southern politicians and many white citizens could cause problems; they could withhold their support in the elections. Indeed, Johnson took a difficult decision; if he had signed it he could lose the opportunity to run for the presidency. One should keep in mind that the block

of northern and western senators would never support a segregationist for president [11, p. 163-166]. However, LBJ was an idealist; he believed that being Majority Leader should make him think in a broader way; he should support ideas accepted by the majority of the public that was supporting him. For that reason he took a significant decision; he officially separated himself from his southern fellow senators. Even if the southerners would probably oppose to his nomination for the presidency, he could not run for president as a segregationist. He knew that there was no other way for him to become president except by promoting the idea of a liberal and desegregated country.

#### IV

Lyndon Baines Johnson decided in 1960 to run for the Presidency. He participated actively in the primary elections for the Democratic Party nomination, but Senator John F. Kennedy defeated him. Even though Johnson was at the time Senate majority leader, he lost the race to the younger and less experienced Kennedy.

However, Kennedy surprised many people; he included Johnson in his team by offering him the nomination for the vice-presidency. It was unexpected because Johnson had no reason to leave his powerful position as a majority leader and as member of the Senate; he was safe because he had held high positions for decades. It was even more surprising that Johnson accepted the proposal to run for the vice presidency of the United States, with Kennedy as a running mate for the presidency. However, Kennedy believed in the skills of Johnson and despite their differences he thought that LBJ was the next-best-qualified candidate for President. Johnson and his wife threw themselves into the campaign, and worked especially in the South; their main goal was to counteract the traditional Protestant suspicion of a Roman Catholic candidate for president. One should keep in mind that many Protestants suspected that a Roman Catholic president might listen too closely to the advice of the Pope.

The election went well; one might say that it was Johnson's work that saved the Carolinas for the Democratic ticket and brought Texas and Louisiana, both of which had gone Republican in

1956, back into the Democratic fold. Kennedy had reason to be grateful to Johnson; however, many wondered how Johnson would settle down in such a low-pressure position as the vice presidency. In some cases, Kennedy thought of LBJ as a mentor and valued his opinion and experience; he relied on Johnson for advice on personnel appointments, on political strategy and tactics, and on policy matters, both domestic and foreign.

There can be no doubt that Johnson, accustomed to wielding immense power himself, felt frustrated as vice president; he must have believed that he could have been of enormous help in getting the Kennedy program through Congress if he had been asked to do so more frequently. "Every time I came into John Kennedy's presence, I felt like a goddamn raven over his shoulder" [6, p. 122]. This statement clearly explains how Johnson was feeling and maybe what Kennedy expected from him as a vice president. One can hypothesize that the fact that LBJ was for decades in the forefront of the nation's political life he was used to making decision as a Senator and as a majority Leader. The fact that Kennedy had almost no experience in comparison to LBJ might have made him feel less productive. Kennedy was younger, well educated, and he was the first president that was promoting the image of an aristocratic playboy. Johnson was the exact opposite of the aforementioned icon; he belonged to an older generation of politicians. LBJ tried to enhance his position as vice president by proposing that Kennedy put under his direct supervision several government agencies; this action shows that he wanted to be in the forefront and not under Kennedy's authority. Even if JFK did not accept his proposal, he considered him as the key character for the civil rights issues. Lyndon Johnson was the senator that promoted the 1957 civil rights law to the Congress; thus he could be useful because he was an expert in parliamentary procedures; he was a politician who could understand the way southern senators should be treated in order to get them to support – or at least remain neutral to – civil rights legislation.

In 1963 the Civil Rights Movement escalated; it seemed that many of the goals could be fulfilled and finally black people would be able to find their rightful position within the American society. Incidents such as the 1961 Alabama incidents

against segregated transportation, the Albany campaign and Meredith's effort to become the first black student at the University of Mississippi were only some of the actions the African American community took in order to promote the idea of desegregation of the Southern States. Despite the effort, the legislation that Kennedy tried to promote was so weak that it was certain not to make any significant changes.

The aforementioned process led to the campaign for the desegregation of the Birmingham, Alabama. The civil rights movement focused on that particular city as it was thought to be the most segregated city in the United States. The police were so brutal to the civil rights protesters that the embarrassing pictures of brutality forced Kennedy to propose a civil rights bill. The segregationist politicians were using the complexity of Congressional procedures in order to delay civil rights legislation; that was one of the reasons the legal process was slow. The main reason was that the Southern politicians who were opposing to any kind of civil rights laws chaired both the House Rules Committee and the Judiciary Committee in the Senate. Moreover, the conservatives (both Republicans and Democrats) ruled the Houses of Congress. The senate filibuster was the tactic they were using in order to control the legislative process by blocking or slowing down the procedures [4, p. 277].

The impassive President Kennedy and Congressional opposition slowed down the civil rights law. African-Americans were not satisfied as long as there were no strong civil rights laws passed for the elimination of segregation.

## V

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated during a political tour in Dallas, Vice President Johnson's home state. On the same day, Johnson took the presidential oath aboard Air Force One while heading to Washington, D.C. Five days later on November 27, he addressed a joint session of Congress where he invoked the memory of the martyred president. He urged the passage of the Kennedy's legislative agenda which had been stalled in Congressional committees. He emphasized the continuity of the Kennedy's program as it was of great importance

to the unity of the nation: “On the 20th day of January, in 1961, John F. Kennedy told his countrymen that our national work would not be finished ‘in the first thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet; he added ‘let us begin’. Today, in this moment of new resolve, I would say to all my fellow Americans, let us continue” [13, p. 8-10].

President Johnson placed great importance on Kennedy’s civil rights bill, which had become his main focus before the assassination. Johnson did not lose time at all and mentioned the issue in his speech before Congress on November 27: “I urge you again, as I did in 1957 and again in 1960, to enact a civil rights law so that we can move forward to eliminate from this Nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color. There could be no greater source of strength to this Nation both at home and abroad” [13, p. 8-10].

In his first two decades as a Congressman, Johnson was opposed to every civil rights bill: “I voted against the so-called and misnamed civil rights bills, and I expect to continue to continue fighting in my six years as a senator” [8, p. 19]. In his later career he turned into one of the most vocal supporters of the civil rights movement. In order to survive politically, LBJ could not oppose to the dominant idea of racial discrimination and he had to align himself with the extremely segregated Southern states, even though he was a Congressman for the State of Texas; maybe one of the most liberal of the Southern States. After gaining political power, he turned to the supporters of the civil rights. In his public speeches and private conversations he seemed to be a person in favor of the civil Rights Movement. Moreover, supporting African-Americans’ rights was a clever political move as it allowed him to run for the presidency and separated him from the conservative southerners.

Three days after the assassination of Kennedy, LBJ took action as President. He phoned the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Martin Luther King, Jr., to thank him for publicly expressing his confidence in him as a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement. Johnson said to King that as president, he was “<...> going to be of all [his] hopes” [1, p. 37]. This was an important moment

because President Johnson as the leader of a powerful nation clearly promised the continuation of his support and the enforcement of Kennedy’s policies on the civil rights legislation: “Well, I’m going to support ‘em all [Kennedy’s progressive policies], and you can count on that. And I’m going to do my best to get other men to do likewise. I’ll have to have you-all’s help. And I never needed it more than I do now” [1, p. 37].

Johnson tried to show his support to civil rights organizations in order to create a basis for mutual assistance [10, p. 151]. In January 1964, he invited the leaders of the four largest civil rights organizations to the White House to discuss the civil rights legislation process: Roy Wilkins from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Whitney Young from the National Urban League; James Farmer from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); and Martin Luther King, Jr., from the SCLC. They planned a strategy that should be followed in order to achieve the passage of stronger legislation. The importance of this meeting was that Johnson explained to the civil right leaders that he was an ally, that he supported their cause, and that he would work with them in achieving their goals.

The mutual support between the civil right leaders and President Johnson can be underlined by the examination of the topics that were discussed in their telephone conversations; one should also mention that Johnson taped many of the phone sessions for further use. For example, in a phone communication between Johnson and Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the NAACP, they discussed what should be done to speed up the passage of the Civil Rights Bill: “I can’t be too much dictator” Johnson said “but I’ll help you in any way I can... You are going to have to persuade Dirksen why this is in the interest of the Republican party” [1, p. 148]. In another conversation after the Senate had passed the civil rights bill, Wilkins and Johnson spoke to each other in a very friendly way and expressed their appreciation for each other. Johnson said to Wilkins: “You’re a mighty good man. You deserve all the credit. I sure do salute you. And I’m mighty proud of you” [1, p. 420]. In another part of this conversation, Wilkins said: “<...> I’ll think about that and I’ll do what ever I can to help. But nobody can think of as many ideas as Lyndon Johnson” [1, p. 421].

Johnson was exceedingly active in the early months of his presidency; being an expert of the processes of Congress let him produce impressive results by having Congress adopt his legislation. Of crucial importance was his detailed knowledge of the personality and the local concerns of nearly every member of Congress. Equally effective was his untiring use of the prestige and power of his office. In order to work for the passage of specific programs, Johnsons exerted the power of his office by making personal telephone calls to key legislators. Within three months after he became President, he had the satisfaction of seeing the Civil Rights Bill pass the House and the Tax Cut Bill get through the Senate.

The president's greatest legislative triumph was the passage on June 2, 1964, of a sweeping civil rights bill which outlawed racial discrimination in public facilities; to be more specific, the legislation banned prejudice in accommodation, employment, schools, unions, and voting registrars: "All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin" [3]. In case of labor "it would be an be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" [3].

The speech that Johnson delivered a few hours before he signed the Civil Rights Act is an example of the way he gave his speeches to the public. At first, he connected past and present American ideals: "One hundred and eighty-eight years ago this week a small band of valiant men began a long struggle for freedom. They pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor not only to found a nation, but to forge an ideal of freedom – not only for political independence, but for personal liberty – not only to eliminate foreign rule, but to establish the rule of justice in the affairs of men" [2]. Their ancestors that had fought in the battlefields around the world for freedom and equality were to be the models for Americans. Furthermore, citizens should devote

themselves to the fight against inequality and discrimination: "Americans of every race and color have died in battle to protect our freedom. Americans of every race and color have worked to build a nation of widening opportunities. Now our generation of Americans has been called on to continue the unending search for justice within our own borders" [2]. President Johnson attempted to awaken the feeling of continuity between the past and the present in order to underline the importance of the civil rights laws to the public and to gain support for it. In his speech, he underlined the importance of free will; in his view, the "Civil Rights Act relies first on voluntary compliance, then on the efforts of local communities and States to secure the rights of citizens" [2]. Furthermore, he did not forget to mention the important role of the state in this venture as it provided the means "for the national authority to step in only when others cannot or will not do the job" [2]. The State officials should work in order to "to meet with representative groups to promote greater understanding of the law and to achieve a spirit of compliance" [2]. This law would lead to the eradication of discrimination "in the classrooms, in the factories, and in hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, and other places that provide service to the public" [2].

In the last paragraphs, he appealed to the patriotic sentiment of Americans and on an emotional note underlined that they must make an effort to succeed in the desegregation of their country. In detail, he stated: "This Civil Rights Act is a challenge to all of us to go to work in our communities and our States, in our homes and in our hearts, to eliminate the last vestiges of injustice in our beloved country. So tonight I urge every public official, every religious leader, every business and professional man, every workingman, every housewife, I urge every American, to join in this effort to bring justice and hope to all our people and to bring peace to our land. My fellow citizens, we have come now to a time of testing. We must not fail" [2].

The importance of this speech is not only that it introduced Americans to one of the most innovative laws in the history of their country, but it also showed the strong leadership of President Johnson. LBJ, being an experienced politician, knew that racial discrimination would not be

eliminated easily and that if necessary, he might have to use his presidential authority as a method of fulfilling his goals.

Johnson believed that the institution of the presidency was the base of the American political system. He used his presidential power in order to “<...> implement the law under his ‘constitutional obligation’ to take care that the laws... [would] be faithfully executed” [3]. He was informed by a special committee, of every action of discrimination by a state official that disobeyed the Civil Rights Law and he personally took action to remind them their legal obligations.

The thirty years of experience in politics Johnson had helped him in getting the passage of the Civil Rights Act. He used Senator Hubert Humphrey’s power of persuasion; Humphrey lobbied the Republicans who were against the bill and delaying the legislative process. Humphrey managed to successfully lobby many of the senators who did not want to fully support the civil rights legislation. Because Johnson had been a member of the Senate for many decades, he understood that it was significant to have important information about each senator so that he could manipulate his or her decisions through the use of flattery or pressure. Lobbying or promising favors to senators were also tactics that helped him gain the votes of two-thirds of the Senate and passage of the Civil Rights Act. LBJ intimidated some senators of the southern states by implying that he could use his presidential power to hurt them politically. He seemed very obstinate in his decision to have the bill pass: “They can filibuster until hell freezes over, I’m not going to put anything on that floor until this is done” [6, p. 169]. After seventy-five days of debate, he managed to have the Civil Rights legislation pass. Passing the most important civil rights law in modern American History was due to his knowledge of legislative procedure and his belief in the importance of the civil rights legislation.

The Southern public with a few exceptions accepted the Civil Rights Act; therefore Lyndon Baines Johnson almost managed to eliminate one of the greatest social problems of his country. Johnson managed to transform the U. S. Senate and to overcome barriers that had kept millions of African-Americans living in a segregated

country for centuries. Through his fight, he managed to “make this an American Bill and not just a Democratic Bill” [8, p. 142].

## VI

Lyndon Baines Johnson was the dominant presidential figure in the Civil Rights Movement. More than any other President before him, he succeeded in supporting civil rights organizations and created a common front against the segregationist politicians. His knowledge of legislative procedures and his experience as a Congressman, Senator, and Vice President had great influence on his actions as President. Civil rights legislation was one of the main successes of Johnson’s presidency, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a hard won victory in the battles of hard debate that lasted for months. The act was possibly the greatest achievement of the Civil Rights Movement because it desegregated education, employment, and the public facilities. In that way the Jim Crow laws were abolished and race discrimination became illegal.

Lyndon Baines Johnson viewed his role as Vice President under Kennedy with great dissatisfaction as he was unable to deal with large and important issues. Following Kennedy’s assassination, when Johnson took office as President, he was able to tackle big issues like poverty and the inequality of civil rights among Americans. He devoted himself to the passage of strong and important civil rights laws because he believed that civil rights could be seen as a constitutional problem that should have a legal solution.

Johnson believed that the presidential leadership is important and useful only when it was used in an appropriate way. He stated that a president should promote his ideas, fight for his opinions, support his plans, and succeed in making positive changes. Johnson also had strong democratic ideals, which he tried to pass onto his fellow southern politicians. Finally, President Johnson was a multifarious personality. The opinion of his aide, Jack Valenti, offers a clear view of this important political figure: “President Johnson was kind and thoughtful, vengeful and bullying, petty and duplicitous. But he was a visionary, energetic, a man whose goal it was to

be the greatest American President, doing the greatest amount of Good for the American nation” [7, p. 84-96].

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