



Presidents of the United States

Lyndon B. Johnson

Born: August 27, 1908, Stonewall, Texas.

Occupation: Teacher, navy commander, public official.

Wife: Claudia Taylor (Lady Bird). Children: Two girls.

President: 1963-1969. Democratic party.

Vice-President: John William McCormack, Hubert Humphrey.

Died: January 22, 1973. Buried: L.B.L. Ranch, Texas.



Lyndon Baines Johnson became the 36th president of the United States on the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963. A skilled promoter of liberal domestic legislation, he was also a staunch believer in the use of military force to help achieve the country's foreign policy objectives.

Johnson was born on August 27, 1908, near Johnson City, Tex., the eldest son of Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr., and Rebekah Baines Johnson. His father, a struggling farmer and cattle speculator in the hill country of Texas, provided only an uncertain income for his family. Politically active, Sam Johnson served five terms in the Texas legislature. Lyndon's mother had varied cultural interests and placed high value on education; she was fiercely ambitious for her children.

Johnson attended public schools in Johnson City and received a B.S. degree from Southwest Texas State Teachers College in San Marcos. He then taught for a year in Houston before going to Washington in 1931 as secretary to a Democratic Texas congressman, Richard M. Kleberg.

During the next 4 years Johnson developed a wide network of political contacts in Washington, D.C. On Nov. 17, 1934, he married Claudia Alta Taylor, known as "Lady Bird." A warm, intelligent, ambitious woman, she was a great asset to Johnson's career. They had two daughters, Lynda Bird, born in 1944, and Luci Baines, born in 1947.

In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt entered the White House. Johnson greatly admired the president, who named him, at age 27, to head the National Youth Administration in Texas. This job, which Johnson held from 1935 to 1937, entailed helping young people obtain employment and schooling. It confirmed Johnson's faith in the positive potential of government and won for him a coterie of supporters in Texas.

In 1937, Johnson won a Texas seat in Congress, where he championed public works, reclamation, and public power programs. When war came to Europe he backed Roosevelt's efforts to aid the Allies. During World War II he served a brief tour of active duty with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific (1941-42) but returned to Capitol Hill when Roosevelt recalled members of Congress from active duty. Johnson continued to support Roosevelt's military and foreign-policy programs.

During the 1940s, Johnson and his wife developed profitable business ventures, including a radio station, in Texas. In 1948 he ran for the U.S. Senate, winning the Democratic party primary by only 87 votes.

Johnson moved quickly into the Senate hierarchy. In 1953 he won the job of Senate Democratic leader. The next year he was easily reelected as senator and returned to Washington as majority leader, a post he held for the next six years despite a serious heart attack in 1955.

The Texan proved to be a shrewd, skillful Senate leader. A consistent opponent of civil rights legislation until 1957, he developed excellent personal relationships with powerful

conservative Southerners. A hard worker, he impressed with his attention to detail and his willingness to compromise.

In the late 1950s, Johnson began to think seriously of running for the presidency in 1960. His record had been fairly conservative, however. Many Democratic liberals resented his friendly association with the Republican president, Dwight D. Eisenhower; others considered him a tool of wealthy Southwestern gas and oil interests. Either to soften this image as a conservative or in response to inner conviction, Johnson moved slightly to the left on some domestic issues, especially on civil rights laws, which he supported in 1957 and 1960. Although these laws proved ineffective, Johnson had demonstrated that he was a very resourceful Senate leader.

To many northern Democrats, however, Johnson remained a sectional candidate. The presidential nomination of 1960 went to Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Kennedy, a northern Roman Catholic, then selected Johnson as his running mate to balance the ticket. In November 1960 the Democrats defeated the Republican candidates, Richard M. Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge, by a narrow margin. Kennedy appointed Johnson to head the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities, which enabled him to work on behalf of blacks and other minorities. As vice-president, he also undertook some missions abroad, which offered him limited insights into international problems.

The assassination of President Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, elevated Johnson to the White House, where he quickly proved a masterly, reassuring leader in the realm of domestic affairs. In 1964, Congress passed a tax-reduction law that promised to promote economic growth and the Economic Opportunity Act, which launched the program called the War on Poverty. Johnson was especially skillful in securing a strong Civil Rights Act in 1964. It became a vital source of legal authority against racial and sexual discrimination.

In 1964 the Republicans nominated Sen. Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona for president. Goldwater was a conservative in domestic policy and an advocate of strong military action to protect U.S. interests in Vietnam. Johnson had increased the number of U.S. military personnel there from 16,000 at the time of Kennedy's assassination to nearly 25,000 a year later. Contrasted to Goldwater, however, he seemed a model of restraint. Johnson, with Hubert H. Humphrey as running mate, ran a low-key campaign and overwhelmed Goldwater, who won only his home state and five others in the Deep South.

Johnson's triumph in 1964 gave him a mandate for the Great Society, as he called his domestic program. Congress responded by passing the Medicare program, approving federal aid to elementary and secondary education, supplementing the War on Poverty, and creating the Department of Housing and Urban Development. It also passed another important civil rights law - the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In foreign affairs, events in Panama, the Dominican Republic, the Middle East, and Vietnam caused the administration particular concern. In Panama, dissatisfaction with the existing Panama Canal treaty led to rioting in 1964 and the temporary breaking of diplomatic relations with the United States. Relations with Panama were improved by Johnson's agreement to begin negotiations on a new treaty. Reports of Communist influence in a rebel movement in the Dominican Republic prompted the president to send troops to that country

in 1965. The troops were withdrawn after a peaceful election the following year. In the Middle East the situation remained tense following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Johnson's most controversial decision was to increase the number of U.S. troops in South Vietnam and to bomb sites in North Vietnam. The Vietnam War became the most crucial issue facing the president in 1967 and 1968. Johnson frequently found himself attacked by both "doves," who were opposed to the war, and by "hawks," who supported the war but criticized his handling of it.

As early as February 1965, U.S. planes began to bomb North Vietnam. American troop strength in Vietnam increased to more than 180,000 by the end of the year and to 500,000 by 1968. While the nation became deeply involved in Vietnam, racial tension sharpened at home, culminating in widespread urban race riots between 1965 and 1968. The breakdown of the interracial civil rights movement, together with the imperfections of some of Johnson's Great Society programs, resulted in Republican gains in the 1966 elections, thus thwarting Johnson's hopes for further congressional cooperation.

It was the policy of military escalation in Vietnam, however, that proved to be Johnson's undoing as president. It deflected attention from domestic concerns, resulted in sharp inflation, and prompted rising criticism, especially among young, draft-aged people. Escalation also failed to win the war. The drawn-out struggle made Johnson even more secretive,



Claudia Taylor Johnson

dogmatic, and hypersensitive to criticism. His usually sure political instincts were failing.

The New Hampshire presidential primary of 1968, in which the antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy made a strong showing, revealed the dwindling of Johnson's support. Some of Johnson's closest advisors now counseled de-escalation in Vietnam. Confronted by mounting opposition, Johnson made two surprise announcements on Mar. 31, 1968: he would stop the bombing in most of North Vietnam and seek a negotiated end to the war, and he would not run for reelection.

Johnson's influence thereafter remained strong enough to dictate the nomination of Vice-President Humphrey, who had supported the war, as the Democratic presidential candidate in 1968. Although Johnson stopped all bombing of the North on November 1, he failed to make real concessions at the peace table, and the war dragged on. Humphrey lost in a close race with the Republican candidate, Richard M. Nixon.

After stepping down from the presidency in January 1969, Johnson returned to his ranch in Texas. There he and his aides prepared his memoirs, which were published in 1971 as *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*. He also supervised construction of the Johnson presidential library in Austin.

Johnson died on January 22, 1973, five days before the conclusion of the treaty by which the United States withdrew from Vietnam.

Claudia Taylor

Charming and energetic, the wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson was one of the best-liked First Ladies. She was an active defender of the environment and a successful business woman.

The daughter of a wealthy Texan, Claudia Alta Taylor got her nickname as a child when her nurse commented that she was as "pretty as a ladybird." She married Lyndon Johnson in 1934 and helped him win election to Congress in 1937. Four years later, Lady Bird ran his congressional office while he served in the army. In 1942, she bought a small radio station in Texas, which thrived under her management. Profits from the business helped fund LBJ's successful campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1948.

As First Lady, Johnson helped achieve the passage of a civil-rights bill by speaking out against racism. She also played a key role in the passage of the Highway Beautification Act.



The birthplace of Lyndon B. Johnson.
The house was originally built in 1889, was torn down
in the 1940s and was reconstructed in 1964

