

**The Legacy of Lyndon Johnson
Lessons for the New President**

**Keynote Address
By Joseph A. Califano, Jr.
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For many in this room, Lyndon Johnson's Centennial is a time for personal memories. We remember how much bigger than life he was, how he filled a room the moment he entered it, how he drove himself—and many of us—to use every second of his presidency. But this evening, I remember most of all his enormous highs and lows, his love of politics and government, not in and of themselves the way a miser loves money, but for what he could get done through politics and government, the way a visionary builds a great enterprise or a generous philanthropist helps the needy.

How I wish LBJ were alive today to see what his work has wrought! Can you imagine how happy he would be! For more than any other president, Lyndon Johnson is responsible for clearing away the political brush, using his popular landslide like a machete to open up the path of opportunity that Barack Obama walked through so brilliantly and gracefully to become the 44th president of the United States.

Of all Obama's predecessors, Lyndon Johnson is the one who would be proudest of Barack Obama's victory and what it says about America. And deservedly so, for he is the president uniquely responsible for the laws that gave this man (and millions of others) the opportunity

to develop and display his talents and gave this nation the opportunity to benefit from them.

Lyndon Johnson would see an Obama presidency as capable of building on the lasting achievements of this nation's progressive tradition. He would see it as the third volume in a trilogy of progressive administrations—after his own Great Society and the New Deal of his hero Franklin Roosevelt.

There are so many lessons for Obama from the FDR and LBJ presidencies: that courage counts, that bold experimentation and quick action are essential, that government can work—and it can work to the benefit of the least among us in ways that enhance the well-being of all of us. Think about this: Americans under 40 have seen in Washington only administrations that were anti-government, corrupt, mired in scandal, inept, gridlocked and driven by polls; that favored the rich and powerful, or were tied in knots by Lilliputian lobbyists and partisan bickering.

Talk to many Americans today about Washington and they're likely to say: it doesn't work; it doesn't care; it doesn't understand my problems; special interests control it. Tell an American that Washington can work, it can help them, and they react like doubting Thomas: I won't believe it till I see it. Let Obama show me.

So let us celebrate this centennial of Lyndon Johnson's birth by hoping the new president will rekindle support for progressive ideas, for a modern progressive movement that will build on the achievements of the New Deal and Great Society, the way LBJ built on the achievements of FDR. There's no better way to observe the launch of this new presidency than by taking stock of the vision and achievement

of Lyndon Johnson's presidency, the domestic revolution that he not only conceived, but carried out.

The last 40 years have been an era of political micro-achievement. It has been considered an accomplishment when a President persuades Congress to pass one bill, or a few, over an entire administration: one welfare reform; one No Child Left Behind. Partisan attacks and political ambition choke our airwaves, not reports of legislation passed or problems solved.

What a contrast. In those tumultuous Great Society years, the President submitted, and Congress enacted, more than one hundred major proposals in each of the 89th and 90th Congresses. In those years of do-it-now optimism, presidential speeches were about distributing prosperity more fairly, reshaping the balance between the consumer and big business, rebuilding entire cities, eliminating poverty, hunger and discrimination in our nation. And when the speeches ended, action followed: problems were tackled, ameliorated and solved. This nation did reduce poverty. We did broaden opportunity for college and jobs. We did outlaw segregation and discrimination in housing. We did guarantee the right to vote to all. We did improve health and prosperity for older Americans. We did put the environment on the national agenda.

When Lyndon Johnson took office, only eight percent of Americans held college degrees; by the end of 2006, twenty-eight percent had completed college. His Higher Education legislation, with its scholarships, grants and work-study programs opened college to any American with the necessary brains and ambition, however empty the family purse. Since 1965 the federal government has provided more

than 360 billion dollars to provide 166 million grants, loans and work study awards to college students. Today six out of ten college students receive federal financial aid under Great Society programs and their progeny. Both Barack and Michelle Obama benefited from this financial assistance.

Below the college level, LBJ passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, for the first time committing the federal government to help local schools. By last year, that program had infused 552 billion dollars into elementary and high schools. He anticipated the needs of Hispanics and other immigrants with bilingual education, which today serves four million children in some 40 languages. His special education law has helped millions of children with learning disabilities.

Then there is Head Start. To date, more than 24 million pre-schoolers have been through Head Start programs in nearly every city and county in the nation. Head Start today serves one million children a year.

If LBJ had not established the federal government's responsibility to finance this educational surge, would we have the trained human resources today to function in a fiercely competitive global economy? Would we have developed the technology that leads the world's computing and communications revolution?

In 1964, most elderly Americans had no health insurance. Few retirement plans provided any such coverage. The poor had little access to medical treatment until they were in critical condition. Only wealthier Americans could get the finest care, and then only by traveling to a few big cities like Boston or New York.

Consider the changes Johnson wrought. Since 1965, some 112 million Americans have been covered by Medicare; in 2006, 43 million were enrolled. In 1967, Medicaid served 10 million poor citizens; in 2006, it served 63 million people. The program is widely regarded as the key factor in reducing infant mortality by seventy-five percent--from 26 deaths for each 1,000 live births when Johnson took office to less than seven per 1,000 live births in 2004.

The Heart, Cancer and Stroke legislation has provided funds to create centers of medical excellence in just about every major city--from Seattle to Houston, Miami to Cleveland, Atlanta to Minneapolis. To staff these centers, the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act provided resources to double the number of doctors graduating from medical schools and increase the pool of specialists, researchers, nurses and paramedics.

Without these programs and Great Society investments in the National Institutes of Health, would our nation be the world's leader in medical research? In pharmaceutical invention? In creation of surgical procedures and medical machinery to diagnose our diseases, breathe for us, clean our blood, transplant our organs, scan our brains? In the discovery of ingenious prosthetic devices that enable so many of our severely wounded soldiers to function independently?

Closely related to LBJ's Great Society health programs were his initiatives to reduce malnutrition and hunger. Today, in this time of economic distress, the Food Stamp program helps feed some 30 million men, women and children in 13 million households. The School Breakfast program has served more than 30 billion breakfasts to needy children.

It is not too much to say that Lyndon Johnson's programs created a stunning recasting of America's demographic profile. When President Johnson took office, life expectancy was 66.6 years for men and 73.1 years for women. Forty years later, by 2004, life expectancy had stretched to 75 years for men and 80 years for women. The jump was most dramatic among poor citizens--suggesting that better nutrition and access to health care have played an even larger role than medical advances.

For almost half a century, the nation's immigration laws established restrictive and discriminatory quotas that favored blond and blue-eyed Western Europeans. With the Immigration Reform Act of 1965, LBJ scrapped that quota system and put substance behind the Statue of Liberty's welcoming words, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This Great Society legislation refreshed our nation with the revitalizing energies of immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe, south of the border, Asia and Africa, converting America into the most multi-cultural nation in the history of the world and uniquely positioning our population for the Twenty-First century world of new economic powers. I can't see LBJ eating at an Ethiopian or Sushi restaurant, but I can see him tapping into the intellectual acumen, diversity and energy of this new wave of immigrants.

Lyndon Johnson put civil rights and social justice squarely before the nation as a moral issue. Recalling his year as a teacher of poor Mexican children in Cotulla, Texas, he once told Congress, "It never even occurred to me in my fondest dreams that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students and to help

people like them all over this country. But now I do have that chance—and I'll let you in on a secret—I mean to use it."

And use it he did. He used it to make Washington confront the needs of the nation as no president before or since has. With the 1964 Civil Rights Act Johnson tore down, all at once, the "Whites only" signs and social system that featured segregated hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, toilets and water fountains, and rampant job discrimination.

The following year he proposed the Voting Rights Act. When it passed in the summer of 1965, Martin Luther King told Johnson, "You have created a second emancipation." The President replied, "The real hero is the American Negro."

In 1964 there were 79 black elected officials in the South and 300 in the entire nation. By 2001 (the latest information available) there were some 10,000 elected black officials across the nation, more than 6,000 of them in the South. In 1965 there were five black members of the House; today there are 42. This year we elected our first African-American president.

LBJ set the pace personally. He appointed the first black Supreme Court Justice (Thurgood Marshall), the first black cabinet officer (Robert Weaver) and the first black member of the Federal Reserve Board (Andrew Brimmer).

Less known, and largely ignored, was Johnson's similar campaign to place women in top government positions. The tapes reveal him hectoring cabinet officers to place women in top jobs. He created what one feminist researcher called in her book, *Women, Work and National Policy*, "An affirmative action reporting system for women,

surely the first of its kind...in the White House..." LBJ proposed and signed legislation to provide, for the first time, equal opportunity in promotions for women in the Armed Forces. Signing the bill in 1967, Johnson noted, "The bill does not create any female generals or female admirals—but it does make that possible. There is no reason why we should not someday have a female chief of staff or even a female Commander in Chief." In 2008, the runner up for the Democratic Presidential nomination (with 18 million votes) and the Republican vice presidential nominee were women.

LBJ had his heart in his War on Poverty. Though he found the opposition too strong to pass an income maintenance law, he took advantage of the biggest ATM around: Social Security. He proposed, and Congress enacted, whopping increases in the minimum benefit. That change alone lifted 2.5 million Americans 65 and over above the poverty line. Today, Social Security keeps some thirteen million senior citizens above the poverty line.

For years conservatives have ranted about the OEO programs. Yet Johnson's War on Poverty was founded on the most conservative principle: put power in the local community, not in Washington; give people at the grassroots the ability to walk off the public dole. Today, as we celebrate LBJ's 100th anniversary some forty years after he left office, eleven of the twelve programs that OEO launched are alive, well and funded at an annual rate exceeding eleven billion dollars. Of all the Great Society programs started in the Office of Economic Opportunity, only the Neighborhood Youth Corps has been abandoned—in 1974, after enrolling more than 5 million individuals.

Ronald Reagan quipped that Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty and poverty won. He was wrong, dead wrong. When LBJ took office, 22.2 percent of Americans were living in poverty. When he left five years later, only 13 percent were living below the poverty line—the greatest one-time reduction in poverty in our nation's history.

Since Lyndon Johnson left the White House, no president after him has been able to effect any significant reductions in poverty. In 2006 the poverty level stood at 12.3 percent. Today it is undoubtedly higher.

Lyndon Johnson took the environmental movement far beyond setting aside public lands and national parks. In 1965, he introduced an entirely new concept of conservation:

"We must not only protect the countryside and save it from destruction," he said, "we must restore what has been destroyed and salvage the beauty and charm of our cities. Our conservation must be not just the classic conservation of protection and development, but a creative conservation of restoration and innovation."

That new environmental commandment spelled out the first inconvenient truth: that those who reap the rewards of modern technology by industrial pollution must also pay the price of their pollution. It inspired a legion of Great Society laws: the Clean Air, Water Quality and Clean Water Restoration Acts and Amendments, the 1965 Solid Waste Disposal Act, the 1965 Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act, the 1968 Aircraft Noise Abatement Act. It also provided the rationale for later laws creating the Environmental Protection Agency.

Johnson created 35 National Parks, 32 within easy driving distance of large cities. The 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act today protects 165 river segments in 38 states and Puerto Rico. The 1968 National Trail System Act has established more than 1,000 recreation, scenic and historic trails covering close to 55,000 miles. No wonder *National Geographic* calls Lyndon Johnson "our greatest conservation president."

Those of us who worked with Lyndon Johnson would hardly consider him a patron of the arts. I can't even remember him sitting through more than ten or fifteen minutes of a movie in the White House theatre, much less listening to an operatic aria or classical symphony.

Yet the historian Irving Bernstein, in his book on *The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson*, titles a chapter, "Lyndon Johnson, Patron of the Arts." Think about it. What would cultural life in America be like without the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts or the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden? Both are Great Society initiatives.

The National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities are fulfilling a dream Johnson expressed when he asked Congress to establish them and, for the first time, to provide federal financial support for the Arts to increase "the access of our people to the works of our artists, and [recognize] the arts as part of the pursuit of American greatness."

In awarding more than 130,000 grants totaling more than four billion dollars since 1965, the Endowment for the Arts has spawned art councils in all 50 states and more than 1,400 professional theater companies, 120 opera companies, 600 dance companies and 1,800

professional orchestras. Since 1965, the Endowment for the Humanities has awarded 65,000 fellowships and grants totaling more than four billion dollars.

Johnson established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to create public television and public radio which have given the nation countless hours of fine arts, superb in-depth news coverage, and programs like "Sesame Street" and "Masterpiece Theater." This initiative has spawned more than 350 public television and nearly 700 public radio stations that offer quality broadcasting today. They, as well as the rest of the media, have been helped by the Freedom of Information Act, the Great Society's contribution to greater transparency in government.

For urban America, LBJ drove through Congress the Urban Mass Transit Act, which gave San Franciscans BART, Washingtonians Metro, Atlantans MARTA, and cities across America thousands of buses and modernized transit systems. His 1968 Housing Act and establishment of the Department of Housing and Urban Development have helped some 75 million families gain access to affordable housing.

In the progressive tradition in which Franklin Roosevelt confronted huge financial and corporate enterprises, Johnson faced a nationalization of commercial power that had the potential to disadvantage the individual American consumer. Super-corporations were shoving aside the corner grocer, local banker, independent drug store and family farmer. Automobiles were complex and dangerous, manufactured by giant corporations with deep pockets to protect themselves. Banks had the most sophisticated accountants and lawyers to draft their loan agreements. Sellers of everyday products—soaps,

produce, meats, appliances, clothing, cereal and canned and frozen foods—packaged their products with the help of the shrewdest marketers and designers. The individual was outflanked at every position.

Seeing that mismatch, Johnson pushed through Congress a bevy of laws to level the playing field for consumers: auto and highway safety for the motorist; a Department of Transportation and National Transportation Safety Board; truth in packaging for the housewife; truth in lending for the homebuyer, small businessman and individual borrower; wholesome meat and wholesome poultry laws to enhance food safety; the Flammable Fabrics Act to reduce the incendiary characteristics of clothing and blankets. He created the Consumer Product Safety Commission to assure that toys and other products would be safe for users. When he got over his annoyance that it took him five minutes to find me in the emergency room of George Washington University Hospital, with my three year old son Joe who had swallowed a bottle of aspirin, he proposed the Child Safety Act which is why we all have such difficulty opening up medicine bottles.

By the numbers, the legacy of Lyndon Johnson is monumental. It exceeds in domestic impact even the New Deal of his idol Franklin Roosevelt. It sets him at the cutting edge of the nation's progressive tradition. But there is also an important story behind these programs that speaks to the future—that offers the lessons of what it takes to be an effective president.

What lessons do the presidencies of LBJ and FDR hold for Barack Obama?

First, move boldly and quickly with your programs to make our government the generous, merciful and just instrument of all the people.

Live your presidency by LBJ's signature admonition: "Do it now. Not next week. Not tomorrow. Not later today. Now."

However grand your margin of victory, however adoring the crowds and the media, your time is limited, before the opposition takes your measure.

Choose your priorities carefully and move swiftly to accomplish within your first 100 days, as both FDR and LBJ did.

Despite his glamour and eloquence, John Kennedy was stymied in Washington. In the weeks before his assassination he was criticized for his inability to get anything passed in Congress and the November 22, 1963 issue of Time magazine predicted a Goldwater victory in 1964. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton forfeited their 100 days opportunity by getting mired in politically and emotionally charged side issues. Franklin Roosevelt had little success after the frenetic achievements of his first hundred days; beyond that period he was repeatedly rebuffed by Congress and stopped cold after his effort to stack the Supreme Court failed. Johnson faced more difficulty as the Vietnam War sapped his political clout.

President elect Obama, you have had a great victory. You are blessed with extraordinary political and rhetorical skills, and are enjoying an unprecedented honeymoon with the media.

But let's put your victory in perspective:

FDR won the presidency with 472 electoral votes and 58 percent of the popular vote.

Lyndon Johnson won the presidency with 486 electoral votes and 61 percent of the popular vote.

Barack Obama won the presidency with 365 electoral votes and 53 percent of the popular vote.

FDR and LBJ lost only six states each; Obama lost 22 states and carried two others by only one percentage point. LBJ raised the Democratic total in the House to 295 Representatives and in the Senate to 68 Democratic senators. Barak Obama will have 256 Democrats in the House and 57 Democrats in the senate.

Yet from the time LBJ was inaugurated, he saw himself in a desperate race against time as he sized up Congress, political reality and attitudes of affluent Americans. LBJ knew that he must use--now!--the sympathy generated by John Kennedy's assassination and the huge margin of his own election victory in 1964. He knew that his political capital--no matter how gigantic in the early days of his presidency--was a dwindling asset.

Second, take the progressive fork in the road and stay on it.

FDR and LBJ were unabashed, proud progressives who eschewed the center. For them, government was neither a bad man to be tarred and feathered nor a bag man to collect campaign contributions.

To Lyndon Johnson, government was not a bystander, hoping wealth and opportunity might trickle down to the least among us. To LBJ, government was a mighty wrench to open the fountain of opportunity so that everyone could bathe in the shower of our nation's blessings. He wanted his government to provide the poor with the kind of education, health and social support that most of us get from our parents and to assure everyone of a fair chance to share in the nation's blessings.

History makes clear that the Presidents who held fast the progressive path—notably Roosevelt and Johnson—had the greatest long-term impact on American society. There are few lasting accomplishments in the presidencies of those who have snuggled in the security of the center. It is the committed and tenacious progressives whose accomplishments change the course of our nation for the better and nourish the finest in our people.

Third, back your boldness with courage.

Johnson showed how much a truly courageous political leader can accomplish.

Sure, LBJ had the politician's hunger to be loved. But, more than that, he had the courage to fall on his sword if that's what it took to move the nation forward. He did just that when, in an extraordinary act of abnegation, he withdrew from the political arena to calm the roiling seas of strife and end the war in Vietnam.

To me no greater example of Presidential political courage exists than Lyndon Johnson's commitment in the area of civil rights. He fought for racial equality even when it hurt him and clobbered his party in the South.

After signing the Civil Rights Act in 1964, Johnson was defeated in five southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina), four of them states that Democrats had not lost for 80 years, and all of them states that Barack Obama lost this year.

Still Johnson kept on. In 1965 he drove the Voting Rights Act through Congress. In 1966, he proposed the Fair Housing Act to end discrimination in housing. His proposal prompted the most vitriolic

mail we received at the White House, and Congress refused to act on the bill that year.

In the November 1966 mid-term elections, the Democrats lost a whopping forty-seven seats in the House and three in the Senate. Border and southern state governors met with the President at his ranch in December. In a nasty assault on his civil rights policies, they demanded that he withdraw his fair housing proposal and curb his efforts to desegregate schools.

Undeterred, in 1968 he drove the Fair Housing Act through the senate—tragically it took Dr. King's assassination to give Johnson the leverage he needed to convince the House to pass it.

Historian David McCullough has said that the threshold test of greatness in a president is whether he is willing to risk his presidency for what he believes. LBJ passes that test with flying colors.

Fourth, use your political power to harness the private sector and to muster bipartisan support.

Johnson married his revolutionary progressive zeal, impatience and courage to a phenomenal sense of how to use power skillfully—to exploit a mandate, to corral votes, to reach across the aisle in order to move this nation, its people and the Congress forward.

Lyndon Johnson felt entitled to every lever, to help from every person, every branch of government, every business, labor and religious leader. He had no inhibitions in reaching out for advice, ideas, talent, power, support. He often saw traditions of separation of powers, or an independent press, or a profit-minded corporate executive, as obstacles, to be put aside in deference to the greater

national interest. He was brilliantly opportunistic, calling upon the nation and the Congress in the wake of even the most horrific tragedies—the assassinations of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King—to bring a new measure of social justice to all Americans. So Obama should take advantage of the opportunities that the crises he faces present.

He knew how to harness the power of the protestors and the media to tap into the inherent fairness of the American people. He asked Martin Luther King in January 1965 to help with the Voting Rights Act by "getting your leaders and you yourself...to find the worst condition [of voting discrimination] that you run into in Alabama...and get it on radio, get it on television, get it on—in the pulpits, get it in the meetings, get it every place you can...and then that will help us on what we are going to shove through in the end."

LBJ enlisted hundreds of the country's corporations in a National Alliance of Businessmen to educate and train the hardcore unemployed.

LBJ offers a defining lesson in the importance of mustering bipartisan support. These Great Society proposals were cutting edge, controversial progressive initiatives and LBJ assiduously courted Republican members of congress to support them. His instructions to us on the White House staff were to accord Senate Republican minority leader Everett Dirksen and House minority leader Gerald Ford the same courtesies we extended to Senate Majority leader Mike Mansfield and House Speaker John McCormack. It was not only that he needed Republican votes to pass bills like the civil rights, health, education and consumer laws; he saw bipartisan support as an essential foundation on which to build lasting commitment among the American

people. He knew that the endurance of his legislative achievements, and their enthusiastic acceptance by state and local governments, powerful private interests and individual citizens across the nation, required such bipartisan support.

There is an historical cadence to the progressive tradition and it is fitting and fair that we regard Barack Obama as charged with composing the third volume in the progressive trilogy begun by FDR and LBJ.

Lyndon Johnson built on the accomplishments and brought to reality programs that FDR and his New Dealers only dreamed of. As Arthur Krock wrote in the New York Times in 1965, "the social legislation of Johnson's 100 days—for health insurance, public and parochial school education, Appalachia, antipoverty and federal enforcement of private as well as political equality for the Negro—got no further than the argumentative stage in New Dealer 'bull sessions' in Georgetown."

Like Roosevelt, who abandoned the idea of including health care coverage in his social security legislation and lost many legislative battles after his remarkable first 100 days, Lyndon Johnson did not get all he wanted. And, just as Roosevelt left an unfinished agenda for LBJ, so LBJ has left an unfinished agenda for Barack Obama.

Johnson tried, unsuccessfully, to get Congress to expand Medicare to cover pre-natal care and children through age six, and used to say, "If we can get that, future presidents and Congresses can close the gap between six and sixty-five."

He saw the threat posed by the spread of guns and proposed national registration of all guns and national licensing of all gun owners. Congress rejected his proposals.

He saw the for sale signs going up in the halls of congress and the executive branch agencies and called for public financing of all campaigns and tight restrictions on lobbyists.

He wanted federal regulation of the insurance industry and even tighter regulation of big corporate and financial institutions that he believed were outmaneuvering individual Americans. (In passing, it is worth noting that LBJ spent more time on the economy than any other matter; each day he received a memo from the Council of Economic Advisors on economic developments.)

At a moment in our history when a black American is preparing to assume the Presidency, many domestic issues dominate our political debate: access to health care, persistent poverty amidst such plenty, our need for affordable higher education and effective public schools, environmental protection. All of these are issues LBJ put on the national government's agenda. It is time now to take to heart the many lessons of his presidency.

In this troubled time, when political pollsters and consultants parse the positions of candidates for public office, Johnson's exceptional courage on civil rights should be a shining example for a new generation of political leaders. His recognition of the significance of bipartisan support for controversial-but needed-domestic initiatives, and his ability to muster such support, should be studied by politicians and citizens who seek "change we can believe in." His unique ability to make Washington work, to nourish and

maintain partnerships between the Executive and the Congress, the public and private sectors, and to focus the people on critical needs like racial justice and eliminating poverty demonstrate "Yes, we can!" to skeptical citizens who have never seen Washington get it done.

It's time to take off the Vietnam blinders and let our eyes look at and learn from the domestic dimension of this presidency. Let everyone think what they will about Vietnam. (And indeed, there is a lesson for Obama in the tragedy of Vietnam: not only to get out of Iraq, but to think hard and long before increasing troop levels in Afghanistan and making other entangling military commitments.) But let us—especially the new president and Democrats—also recognize and learn from this revolutionary's remarkable achievements, as have some of Johnson's severest anti-war critics like George McGovern and John Kenneth Galbraith.

A progressive Obama presidency has the potential to earn from historians the kind of assessment LBJ has received from the distinguished historian Robert Caro, Johnson's most meticulous and demanding biographer:

"In the twentieth century, with its eighteen American presidents, Lyndon Johnson was the greatest champion that black Americans and Mexican Americans, and indeed all Americans of color, had in the White House, the greatest champion they had in all the halls of government. With the single exception of Lincoln, he was the greatest champion with a white skin that they had in the history of the Republic. He was...the lawmaker for the poor and the downtrodden and the oppressed... the President who wrote mercy and justice into the statute books by which America was governed."

Lyndon Johnson died 36 years ago in 1972. But his legacy endures.

It endures in the children in Head Start programs in hamlets across our nation, in the expanded opportunities for millions of blacks, Hispanics and other minorities. It endures in the scholarships and loans that enable the poorest students to attend the finest universities. His legacy endures in the health care for the poor and the elderly that are woven into the fabric of American life. It endures in the public radio stations millions of drivers listen to as they drive to and from work. It endures in the cleaner air we breathe, in the local theatres and symphonies supported by the National Endowments, in the safer cars we drive and safer toys our children play with.

That legacy also endures—let us remember—in the unfinished business of our nation's long progressive movement that he pressed so impatiently for us to finish. LBJ knew that the progressive movement could be stalled, but he knew that it must never be stopped.

And that legacy endures as a history lesson that can help Barack Obama write the third volume in a trilogy of progressive government to complement the earlier volumes crafted by Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.