LBJ and the Making of His Civil Rights Legacy

By Sarah Beech

Lyndon Baines Johnson was a man of bold intentions and avid ambition from the start of his life. At only twelve years old, he told his classmates that he wanted to be President of the United States.[1] Little did he know that wish would come true after his predecessor, John F. Kennedy, unexpectedly died. Like his father, LBJ was a "jack-of-all-trades" who knew how to charm, outwit, and persuade those around him to support his goals.[2] Over time, his people-pleasing abilities helped him garner widespread support for the passage of civil rights legislation in a racially divided nation. LBJ fought to uplift the status of all people by the passage of major civil rights legislation in the 1960s through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Upon passing these civil rights victories, LBJ outlawed racial discrimination in the workplace, neighborhoods, schooling system, polls, and many other public facilities.

The success of LBJ's civil rights legislation of the 1960s was contingent upon a perplexing combination of events that struck the nation during his time in the White House: political tragedy, assassination, mounting civil rights protest, and a growing sensitivity to the fact that freedom was not equally shared among all Americans. JFK's death on November 23, 1963 delivered the presidency to LBJ. Coming to power through bloodshed likely instilled in LBJ the expectation that he devote the rest of his presidency to JFK's honor. This pressure can be seen in LBJ's first public remarks five days after the assassination. At his Address to the Joint Session of Congress on November 27, 1963, LBJ expressed that "John Fitzgerald Kennedy lives on in the

[1] Mark Updegrove, *Indomitable Will: LBJ in the Presidency* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2012), 34.
[2] Updegrove, *Indomitable Will: LBJ in the Presidency*, 31.

immortal wounds and works that he left behind."[3] By appealing to the heartache of a grieving nation, LBJ further promised to bring the unfinished deeds of JFK into fruition.

When listening to LBJ's joint session address, it appears that LBJ's main priority after becoming president was to appease the nation by promising to "continue" the Kennedy legacy.[3] However, LBJ may have used the assassination as a pawn in his possession, to expand on a watered-down civil rights bill under the guise of living out JFK's legacy. By telling the public that his main intention was to honor the fallen president, LBJ was crafting a civil rights narrative that a mourning nation would be receptive to. He refused to outwardly embrace the agenda as his own, instead claiming that he would carry on the unfinished works of his predecessor. Yet, evidence of LBJ's past remarks on civil rights points towards his dissatisfaction with JFK's modest vision for the country, especially in the civil rights arena.

To what extent was LBJ's civil rights agenda a legacy of his own and not a path set by his fallen predecessor, John F. Kennedy? To answer this question, I will examine LBJ's attitudes about civil rights from his Gettysburg Address on May 30, 1963, to his remarks made at the Joint Session of Congress on November 23, 1963. Analyzing this time period, as well as briefly assessing the role LBJ's Southern roots played, will allow me to make the following argument: LBJ appeared to be upholding the legacy of his fallen predecessor; he rhetorically portrayed himself to be a gracious steward of continuity who would carry on the ambitions of the dead ex-president. However, upon further analysis, his rhetoric reveals that he was building a vast legacy of his own as passed unapologetically sweeping civil rights legislation.

The Limitations of a Southern Politician

[3] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress" (speech, Washington, DC, November 27, 1963), LBJ Presidential Library, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/november-1963-1964/11-27-1963.html.

In order to fully understand LBJ's motives behind civil rights, one must first understand how his roots as a white Southerner affected his ability to promote civil rights. By virtue of growing up in the Deep South, LBJ's identity was intrinsically tied to a region that still prided itself on separate "white" and "colored" water fountains and white-only swimming pools and restaurants.[4] Thus, the powerful influences of racism, desegregation, and white privilege heavily influenced the way representatives behaved in their elected positions. Politicians like LBJ knew the passage of meaningful civil rights reform would likely come at the expense of Southern support in his future political campaigns. Perhaps this is why, in his early beginnings as a Texas congressman, LBJ conformed his political agenda to the anti-civil rights attitude—"for twenty years, from the time Johnson entered the House of Representatives in 1937 until 1957, he had voted against every civil rights proposal he faced," asserts biographer Bruce Schulman.[5] It is perplexing to note how a man, whose early career shaped him as an adversary to the civil rights cause, could be labeled as "[doing] more for civil rights than any president [had] since Lincoln," according to American historian Joshua Zeitz.[6]

As a Texas congressman, LBJ was a strategist who practiced the art of political gradualism. When he did vote in favor of civil rights, he was not overly ambitious or boisterous in his goals. Pushing a radical civil rights bill could have easily enraged the averse, hostile Southern population. However, he did support the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and 1960 as a Senate majority leader. Although these bills "were rendered largely toothless in Committee," they were symbolically important for a nation that had not passed civil rights legislation in nearly one hundred years, according to Mark Updegrove, President and CEO of the LBJ Foundation.[7] Yet,

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[4] Joshua Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson's White House* (New York: Viking, 2018), 72-74.
[5] Bruce Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism.* 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford, 2007), 54.
[6] Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson's White House*, 72.
[7] Updegrove, *Indomitable Will: LBJ in the Presidency*, 52.

as these bills were passed, LBJ did not advocate for radical change on the civil rights front during his time in Congress; the 1957 act was so watered down that it was largely unenforceable in the Deep South.[8] Evidently, LBJ's outward passion for civil rights was still restrained by the electoral power of the south—and even the North. Many liberals condemned LBJ for the 1957 act. They claimed that LBJ crafted a weak bill "in order to make his prospective presidential candidacy in 1960 palatable to northern Democrats but unobjectionable to his fellow southerners,'" remarked Joshua Zeitz.[9] It appears that LBJ outwardly concealed his passion for civil rights by either voting against the issue entirely or by supporting weak initiatives. However, when he accumulated more power as a national figurehead, he began to publicly demonstrate his desire for bolder, more pressing reform.

The Discrepancy between LBJ and JFK

Although they both championed civil rights during their presidencies, JFK and LBJ differed on the extent to which they endorsed equal opportunity for African Americans. Both men shared the same fear—they were slow to endorse a domestic civil rights agenda due to an unnerving fear of inflaming southern hostility.[10] The issue of civil rights was not JFK's top political priority, for it was placed on the backburner until it was necessary that he address the issue. According to historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "Kennedy responded to the successive civil rights crises of 1961-62 primarily in terms of crisis management."[11] To assuage the tension created by Birmingham and to satisfy a weary public, JFK ordered his administration to speed up the drafting of a civil rights bill in 1962. It took the publicizing of a national

[8] Todd Purdam, *An Idea Whose Time has Come* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 7.
[9] Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson's White House*, 14.
[10] Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism,* 63.
[11] Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s,* 62.

atrocity—seeing police-ordered attack dogs advance on young, African American children—for JFK to finally express public support for a new civil rights bill.

Only winning the presidency by a slim margin in 1960, JFK knew he needed Southern support if he wanted to be reelected for president in 1964. Nevertheless, he expressed support for civil rights through executive actions rather than codified law. In fact, JFK once remarked "there is a good deal…that can be done by the executive branch without legislation.'"[12] Accordingly, he showed his support by appointing a number of African Americans to high-level government positions, writing an executive order to end housing discrimination, and ordering his brother, the attorney general of the United States, to focus on civil rights matters.[12]

However, the pace at which JFK and LBJ pursed civil rights was vastly different. As soon as LBJ rose to the presidency in 1963, within his first two weeks as president, "he met with principle leaders in the civil rights movement…and warned them to lace up their sneakers because he was going to move so fast on civil rights that they would have trouble keeping up with him"[13] Evidently, President LBJ had a fervor for civil rights that manifested into radical advocacy as soon as he had the political leverage to implement change, and the assassination gave him this leverage. LBJ accordingly announced to the nation that he would press for "the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill" in his Joint Session Address to Congress, just five days into the presidency.[14] JFK, on the other hand, was more modest in his ambitions, only passing a civil rights bill when national attention to the cause necessitated a response in his later presidential years. Biographer Bruce Schulman confirms JFK's lack of enthusiasm and energy on the civil rights front. He asserts, "In the early months of his presidency, Kennedy sent 16

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[12] Arthur Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and his Times*, 40th Anniversary ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 288.
[13] Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism,* 76.
[14] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress."

separate messages to Congress defining his legislative agenda. None of them mentioned civil rights…Kennedy wanted to end racial segregation in the south, but he had decided to wait and watch."[15]

Gettysburg and the Transition to National Spotlight

LBJ was asked to join the JFK ticket in the 1960 election. By offering LBJ the opportunity to be his running mate, JFK gave LBJ the gift of freedom—freedom to explore a controversial civil rights agenda without depending on the southern vote for his political livelihood. However, LBJ's ambitions were still restrained in the JFK administration; a vice president unfortunately has no significant power. A politically active, audacious LBJ had to contain his zeal in this largely symbolic position. Historian Arthur Schlesinger notes that "Johnson was a man notably larger than life in ambitions, energies, [and] needs…In the senate he had been accustomed to the exercise of personality and power. [As Vice President], his role was suddenly one of self-abnegation." Others like Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who worked alongside LBJ in the White House, referred to Vice President LBJ as '"a bull castrated very late in life."'[16] Those close to LBJ knew how difficult it was for him hold a position with such a restrained political role, one that undermined his ability to provoke the moral conscience of a racially divided country.

LBJ chose to wield the power of his new leadership to speak on behalf of the cause he cared for; securing equal opportunity for African Americans in voting, education, employment, housing, and all other aspects of the American life. LBJ could have fixated on a number of other policy issues, yet, he decided to pursue civil rights. An invitation from the Memorial Day Committee from Gettysburg, requesting that the vice president speak at the One-Hundredth

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[15] Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism,* 67.
[16] Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and his Times*, 622.

Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, afforded LBJ the opportunity to do this. At the Gettysburg National Cemetery, on May 30, 1963, he chose to speak in favor of uplifting the status of the American "Negro." The White House aides who conferred with LBJ about the advantages in giving the Gettysburg speech left several notes to him. They described the speech as a potential "masterpiece to be remembered by."[17] His advisors remarked that "the obvious subject matter and logical theme [of the speech] will most likely serve a highly constructive purpose this year…for the Vice President."[18] Many individuals recognized that this speech was an opportune time for LBJ to advance a favorable political agenda. LBJ subsequently took this opportunity to unleash his true, unrestrained view on civil rights.

LBJ addressed a crowd of thousands of people at the Gettysburg National Cemetery. For the first time in his political career, LBJ gave an impassioned, animated, speech on behalf of the African American plight and the inequality they faced. He denounced the "fields of hate" that filled the nation. He also employed a bitter tone when admitted that America had "fallen short of assuring freedom to the free."[19] LBJ then condemned the United States for allowing bigotry and racially motivated hatred to influence the country's legislative priorities. As he continued to advocate on behalf of the marginalized, downtrodden community, he challenged all Americans, including himself, to "yield up the destiny of greatness among civilization" and to "ask of [the Negro] perseverance."[19] LBJ recognized that asking for equality in American society was not a novel request. However, unless proclamations for equality and elevation turned into action, LBJ

[17] Note from the Office of the Vice President, addressed to Johnson, signed off by "Mary Juanita [Roberts]**,** May 1963, Box 80, Statements of LBJ President File, LBJL.
[18] Memorandum from unknown author responding to Juanita Roberts Note, May 1963, Box 80, Statements of LBJ President File, LBJL.
[19] Remarks by Vice President, Memorial Day, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Press Release, 30 May 1963, Box 80, Statements of LBJ President File, LBJL.

claimed the country would continue to denigrate the "Negro" just as it had during the times of U.S. slavery.

LBJ managed to combine his vision for both foreign and domestic affairs in his Gettysburg speech. Drawing on the significance of the Civil War and the Battle of Gettysburg, LBJ drew upon the sentimentality of the anniversary to endorse a lasting message: the United States must fight to secure freedom both at home and abroad. He remarked, "until the world knows no aggressors, until the arms of tyranny have been laid down, until freedom has risen up in every land, we shall maintain our vigil to make sure our sons…have not died in vain"[20] LBJ rooted his hope of achieving peace, security, and racial tolerance in the fight that took place at Gettysburg, PA nearly a century prior. In rebuking aggression and tyranny, LBJ rallied his audience on the causes which have, for so long, run rampant throughout the world and in places like the United States. Although LBJ spoke on foreign affairs at Gettysburg, he seemed primarily concerned with maintaining a "vigil of justice" on the domestic front as he fixated on the plight of the American "Negro."

LBJ concluded by asserting that "until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skin, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact."[20] LBJ wanted every American to taste the joys of freedom. He wanted the guarantee of "American freedom," which is enshrined in the early founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence*,* to be a reality for the country—not a meaningless, vapid promise that was reiterated across time. However, some may argue that LBJ was driven by a thirst for power, and that he chose to exert his energy on the civil rights front to increase this power. After all, LBJ was no longer expected to address the needs of the South as a

[20] Remarks by Vice President, Memorial Day, Gettysburg.

national figurehead. He was expected to address the needs of a country with escalating racial unrest. It remains true that LBJ craved power and meaning in his vice presidency. However, he chose to exert a disproportionate amount of energy into the civil rights cause long before it was politically necessary or expected of him. LBJ had a heart for advancing racial equality and he tackled the issue with a profound sense of urgency and importance—his efforts far outmatched the current president. Thus, it can be argued that LBJ's drive for power was as real as his concern for social uplift, making it impossible to distinguish between the two.

In all, LBJ's Gettysburg speech can be seen as a launching point for the ambitious civil rights plan that he would carry out as president. It highlights a monumental moment for LBJ as he arguably overstepped his bounds as a vice president and delivered a radical speech on civil rights. Civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. had long implored President Kennedy to initiate civil rights legislation before he was ready to. Advocates like Johnson and MLK wanted to see the president express unwavering support for the cause. They wanted him to finally denounce the racially intolerant country and give legitimacy to the black movement. King lobbied Kennedy to issue a "'Second Emancipation Proclamation,' to come one hundred years after the first," according to author Clay Risen. However, this request was too much for "cautious Kennedy," who failed to respond as president.[21] What Kennedy failed to do, LBJ took it upon himself to do in the Gettysburg speech. LBJ echoed the sentiments of Abraham Lincoln, who expressed a vehement distaste for American slavery and unbridled racism one hundred years prior.

Johnson's Dissatisfaction and The Making of a Martyr

[21] Clay Risen, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 9.

In the Gettysburg speech, LBJ distinguished himself from President JFK in the civil rights arena. Some may even argue that LBJ was dissatisfied with JFK's progress in advancing racial equality. Just prior to delivering the speech, "[LBJ] broke his usual silence in high-level meetings and pressed JFK to induce a tough, no-holds barred bill that would end segregation in the south…[He] lobbied the reluctant president to take the case directly to the people, going over the heads of congress, to build support for the measure."[22] Yet, despite the LBJ's insistence, JFK refused to endorse a sweeping civil rights agenda as earnestly as LBJ had wanted. Kennedy, while expressing support for the civil rights issue, thought it was "alien" to most of his experience and referred to the issue as a '"god-damned civil rights mess.'"[23] In contrast, LBJ took the initiative to rally public support for the cause. He took his stirring, controversial thoughts directly to the people when he delivered the Gettysburg address.

LBJ was finally given the opportunity to carry out the goals he introduced in his Gettysburg speech when JFK was assassinated on November 23, 1963. LBJ inherited a position of extreme political power from this tragedy, a position that enabled him to extoll the riches of a "Great Society." The presidency put him in a unique position—as Mark Updegrove explained, "Kennedy's death…created an opportunity for reform as the martyred president became a vessel for the progressive beliefs he was thought to have held."[24] Accordingly, all eyes were on LBJ to see what he would do with his newfound power and support as president of the United States. The grieving nation wanted an answer to the following question: "Would [LBJ] be a front man for the Southern segregationists, as many Northern liberals believed, or a turncoat segregationist, as many white southerners suspected?"[25] In delivering his Address to the Joint Session of

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[22] Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism,* 63.
[23] Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and his Times*, 287.
[24] Updegrove, *Indomitable Will: LBJ in the Presidency*, 30.
[25] Randall Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 435.

Congress on November 27, 1963, LBJ tried to reassure the public that he would not forsake his predecessor's plans. He would push a civil rights agenda that would "eliminate from this Nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color." He continued, "John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not live—or die—in vain."[26] In short, LBJ told the public he would carry on JFK's legacy.

LBJ's joint session speech reminded the public that, first and foremost, continuity would dominate his domestic and foreign policy agenda. Accordingly, LBJ knew that JFK's image was enmeshed in a "Second Reconstruction"[27] and that his success as the new president depended upon his adherence to the New Frontier.[28] In order to align his interests with that of his predecessor, LBJ crafted a speech that depicted a sincere desire to mobilize Kennedy's stalled agenda. However, the rapid pace at which LBJ expanded on and stretched the small ambitions of the former president made the civil rights agenda into a legacy of his own—a legacy that "was meant to evoke memories of JFK" even though "it was pure LBJ," as historian Randall Woods argues.[29] The ambitious civil rights platform LBJ had introduced at Gettysburg was finally implemented with full force now that he was president. LBJ's true desires came to life as soon as he appeared before Congress and instructed them to quickly enact a civil rights law with a "new spirit of action."[26]

The JFK Assassination: A Tragedy or Political Advantage?

Grief, consternation, and heartache struck the American people when JFK was assassinated. Yet, at 3:54 pm on the day JFK died, LBJ was already preparing a speech to

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[26] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress"
[27] Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*, 469-70.
[28] Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson's White House*, 28.
[29] Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*, 436.

mobilize Congress in the fight against racial inequality. In a call to John McCormack during this time, LBJ declared "I can't sit still, I've got to keep the government going." In response, McCormack advised him, "You make your bold decision. There's a delicacy involved. You should respect this delicacy."[30] In referring to the delicacy of honoring the fallen president, McCormack reminded LBJ of his duty to not further upset a grieving nation by hastily imposing a political agenda. The nation, as well as the JFK family, needed time to mourn this great loss. Yet, LBJ knew he was expected to respect and continue the legacy of his former president and friend. Public opinion polls taken just days after the assassination confirmed this expectation—seventy percent of Americans did not want to the country to "carry on" without Kennedy.[31] Thus, in a phone call to George Smathers the same day, LBJ affirmed that "We can't abandon [Kennedy's] program. Because he's a national hero…and we've got to keep this Kennedy era around."[32]

LBJ's advisors and speechwriters even instructed him to attribute the civil rights era to JFK's legacy rather than his own. They advised him to not assert a radical agenda based on his own interests. Rather, he was to glorify and embody the ambitions of Kennedy. In doing so, LBJ was trying to comfort the nation by upholding continuity. His advisors wrote to him, "No revolution in purpose or policy is intended or will occur. Rather it will be your purpose to implement effectively the noble objectives so often and so eloquently stated by your great predecessor."[33] Although he was instructed to avoid being too radical in his agenda, LBJ had a penchant for unconventionality. He had constantly pushed the boundaries set before him.

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[30] Johnson to John McCormack, 23 November 1963, Telephone Conversation #21, Telephone Conversations, LBJL.
[31] Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s,* 100.
[32] Johnson to George Smathers, 23 November 1963, Telephone Conversation #16, Telephone Conversations, LBJL.
[33] Memorandum from Colonel Wm. F. Jackson to Johnson, 23 November 1963, Box 89, Statements of LBJ President File, LBJL.

Nevertheless, he countered his advisors when they requested that he restrain any of his ambition. He responded to them, "'Well, what the hell is the presidency for?'"[34] If he was not going to be a bold, ambitious caretaker of the nation, LBJ did not think he was living out his full potential as president.

Yet, the strategic LBJ knew how to be both bold and honorable. He knew how to build a narrative that glorified, extolled, and carried on the legacy of JFK in way that would bring his own radical goals into fruition. LBJ, a master manipulator and opportunist, knew exactly how to "make use of the ambitions and anxieties of the people around him" to his own advantage, according to Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin.[35] LBJ saw a nation wrought with grief and portrayed himself as the humble hero who would restore hope in a broken nation. In one of the many speech drafts made for him, LBJ was to declare to Congress: "I have come to ask for your help, your strength, and your support. The burdens of this office are the burdens of us all."[36] LBJ and his advisors understood how growing national unity could translate into meaningful legislative reform. If he could channel the nation's collective grief into unyielding support for his agenda, he could readily advance new civil rights legislation through Congress.

Subsequently, LBJ was to call his new position as president an "unwelcome" one, an unexpected duty that was "thrust upon [him]."[37] While his advisers crafted a speech to make LBJ appear humble and meek, LBJ aimed to manipulate historical tragedy for personal gain. In his speech, he remarked that "We meet in grief, but let us also meet in renewed dedication and renewed vigor."[38] LBJ used every ounce of support available to him so that he could rally a

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[34] Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*, 434.
[35] Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s,* 101.
[36] "Draft: Message, Joint Session," 27 November 1963, Box 89, Statements of LBJ President File, LBJL.
[37] "Third Draft on Joint Session," 27 November 1963, Box 89, Statements of LBJ President File, LBJL.
[38] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress"

racially divided nation. He refused to settle on his all-encompassing vision for America; he wanted to eradicate racial discrimination in all facets of society, including all public accommodations. Nevertheless, he thought revamping JFK's stalled civil rights bill should be his first domestic priority, aside from battling communists on the other side of the world. In his speech, he reiterated the following declaration myriad ways; "Our most immediate tasks," he announced, "are here on this Hill." According to him, "this [was] no time for delay."[39] In creating a sense of urgency, LBJ was impressing upon the public that he was zealous for immediate, sweeping change. He was priming the American people, as well as their elected representatives, for the mountain of bills heading its way to Capitol Hill.

Building a Legacy of His Own

All it took was a martyr and a worthy cause for LBJ to link his ambitions on the civil rights front with those of his predecessor. It goes without saying that LBJ was adept at eliciting public support by incorporating JFK's image into his work. However, the immediacy at which he sought to implement the "JFK agenda" and the boldness of his proposed measures are more telling of his own ambition than that of his former companion's. LBJ remarked in his speech to Congress that, "from the brutal loss of our leaders we will derive…strength; that we can and will act now."[38] LBJ was not willing to let the nation dwell on sorrow and discontentment for a moment too long. He yearned to immediately turn inaction into action on the domestic scene, where he saw a plethora of racial injustice. Scholars agree that, by passing ambitious legislation and attempting to rally all Americans to his cause, "Johnson was becoming the country's leader in his own right, no longer simply chief caretaker of the Kennedy shrine,"[40] as noted by Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin.

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[39] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress"
[40] Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s,* 108.

JFK, a man who had "paid scant attention to civil rights as a domestic policy issue…was expected to do the bare minimum necessary to secure the black vote," according to Clay Risen, author and editor for the New York Times.[41] In contrast, Johnson's actions prove he did anything but the "bare minimum necessary" in the civil rights arena. He signed the most monumental, transformative piece of civil rights legislation since the end of the civil war. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, along with its related acts, made racial segregation, sexism, and other forms of institutionalized bigotry illegal in the United States. Isserman and Kazin note how "the Civil Rights Act [of 1964] proved a turning point in the legal rights of women as well as blacks,"—it banned both gender and racial discrimination in the United States.[42] LBJ thus transformed a bill that JFK initiated out of political turmoil into one that completely transformed the lives of both men and women, white and blacks alike. LBJ refused to settle for anything short of achieving his bold civil rights platform, which he introduced at Gettysburg in May of 1963.

In all, LBJ left behind a civil rights legacy that was defined by his own volition. While he used JFK's name to promote his ideas, he pushed beyond the vision of his predecessor to achieve his own, far-reaching ends. In an interview with Doris Kearns in his post-presidency years, he confessed that '"Everything I have ever learned in history books taught me that martyrs have to die for causes…But [JFK's] cause was not really clear. That was my job. I had to take the dead man's program and turn it into a martyr's cause."'[43] However, in adopting the martyr's cause, LBJ made the cause into his own. It remains clear that LBJ cared for and deeply respected the man who invited him onto the 1960 Democratic ticket. However, his adherence to JFK waned to

[41] Risen, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act*, 5.
[42]Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s,* 103.
[43] Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s,* 102.

the extent that following in his humble footsteps eroded LBJ's growing, larger-than-life presidential ambition.

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