

## The Primary Sources for the Lesson

### Document 1

**Information on the source:** Michael Harrington's 1962 book *The Other America* directed the attention of a highly affluent society toward the remaining areas of poverty in the nation. The book had a powerful impact on Johnson's War on Poverty. These passages are from *The Other America*.

*Out of the thirties came the welfare state. Its creation had been stimulated by mass impoverishment and misery, yet it helped the poor least of all. Laws like unemployment compensation, the Wagner Act, the various farm programs, all these were designed for the middle third in the cities, for the organized workers, and for the upper third in the country, for the big market farmers. If a man works in an extremely low-paying job, he may not even be covered by social security or other welfare programs. If he receives unemployment compensation, the payment is scaled down according to his low earnings.*

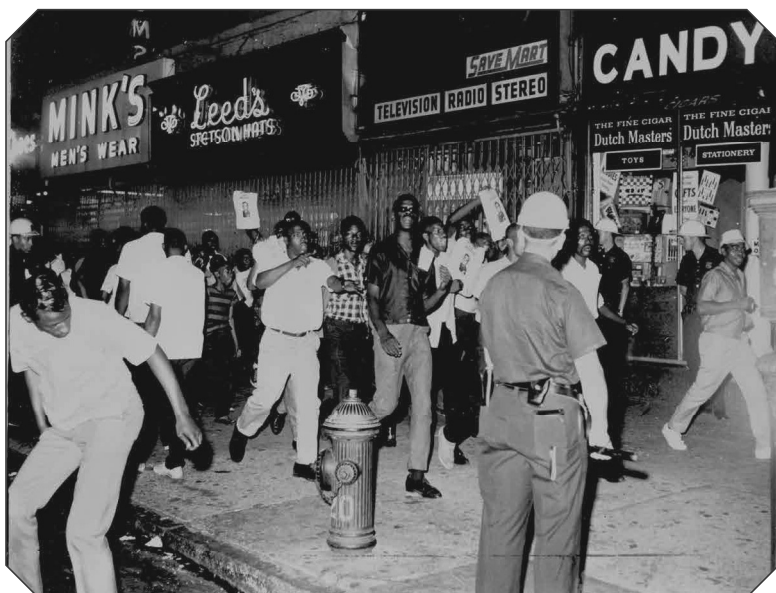
*One of the major laws that was designed to cover everyone, rich and poor, was social security. But even here the other Americans suffered discrimination. Over the years social security payments have not even provided a subsistence level of life...*

*The new poor of the other America saw the rest of society move ahead. They went on living in depressed areas, and often they tended to become depressed human beings. In some of the West Virginia towns, for instance, an entire community will become shabby and defeated. The young and the adventurous go to the city, leaving behind those who cannot move and those*

*who lack the will to do so. The entire area becomes permeated with failure, and that is one more reason the big corporations shy away.*

*Indeed, one of the most important things about the new poverty is that it cannot be defined in simple, statistical terms. Throughout this book a crucial term is used: aspiration. If a group has internal vitality, a will—if it has aspiration—it may live in dilapidated housing, it may eat an inadequate diet, and it may suffer poverty, but it is not impoverished. So it was in those ethnic slums of the immigrants that played such a dramatic role in the unfolding of the American dream. The people found themselves in slums, but they were not slum dwellers.*

*But the new poverty is constructed so as to destroy aspiration; it is a system designed to be impervious to hope. The other America does not contain the adventurous seeking a new life and land. It is populated by the failures, by those driven from the land and bewildered by the city, by old people suddenly confronted with the torments of loneliness and poverty, and by minorities facing a wall of prejudice.*



### Document 2

**Information on the source:** In 1964, the fatal police shooting of an African American provoked angry rioters to race through the streets of Harlem in New York City carrying pictures of the police officer responsible for the shooting.

## Document 3

**Information on the source:** Passages from Lyndon Baines Johnson's University of Michigan speech, May 1964. It was in this speech that Johnson used the term "Great Society" and explained what he meant by it.

*For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent. For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people.*

*The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization.*

*Your imagination, your initiative, and your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth. For in your time we have the opportunity to move not*

*only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society.*

*The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning.*

*The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.*

## Documents 4a & 4b

**Information on the source:** LBJ was an admirer of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. Photo 4a shows him (center) as an official in one New Deal program in the 1930s, the National Youth Administration. Photo 4b shows him visiting a job-training center. Job-training programs were one part of his Great Society.

4a



4b



## Document 5

**Information on the source:** In July 1965, Joseph Califano became a special assistant to the president, and served as President Johnson's senior domestic policy aide. This passage is from Califano's book *Inside: A Public and Private Life* (Public Affairs, 2004), pp. 186–187.

*To me the public legacy of those years was nothing short of a revolution that saved this nation. It was during those years that Johnson proposed and Congress enacted hundreds of bills that forever changed America, by establishing: civil rights and voting rights for blacks and minorities; the Head Start program for pre-school children; aid to elementary and secondary education; financial aid programs that made college available based on talent, not on the thickness of daddy's wallet; the first air-, water-, and noise-pollution laws; the public television and radio systems and the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities; a raft of consumer laws; health care for the old and the poor; immigration reform, which reshaped the demography of America. The role of the federal government was forever changed; its expanded responsibility has been accepted by every successive president regardless of political party or ideological bent.*

## Document 8

**Information on the source:** Edward Banfield, a well-known political scientist, was a critic of the Great Society approach to social problems. This passage is from his book *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), p. 257.

*Faith in the perfectibility of man and confidence that good intentions together with strenuous exertions will hasten his progress onward and upward lead to bold programs that promise to do what no one knows how to do and what perhaps cannot be done, and therefore end in frustration, loss of mutual respect and trust, anger, and even coercion.*

## Document 6

**Information on the source:** LBJ signing the Medicare bill. Former President Harry S. Truman is seated next to him.



## Document 7

**Information on the source:** From a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., titled "The Casualties of War in Vietnam," February 25, 1967.

*A third casualty of the war in Vietnam is the Great Society. This confused war has played havoc with our domestic destinies. Despite feeble protestations to the contrary, the promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefield of Vietnam. The pursuit of this widened war has narrowed domestic welfare programs, making the poor, white and Negro, bear the heaviest burdens both at the front and at home...*

*It is estimated that we spend \$322,000 for each enemy we kill, while we spend in the so-called war on poverty in America only about \$53 for each person classified as "poor." And much of that \$53 goes for salaries of people who are not poor. We have escalated the war in Vietnam and de-escalated the skirmish against poverty. It challenges the imagination to contemplate what lives we could transform if we were to cease killing.*

## Document 9

**Information on the source:** These passages are from *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research United States Department of Labor, March 1965. This came to be known as the “Moynihan Report” for its author Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an assistant secretary of labor in the Kennedy administration and, for a time, in LBJ’s administration.

*In this new period the expectations of the Negro Americans will go beyond civil rights. Being Americans, they will now expect that in the near future equal opportunities for them as a group will produce roughly equal results, as compared with other groups. This is not going to happen. Nor will it happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made.*

*There are two reasons. First, the racist virus in the American blood stream still afflicts us: Negroes will encounter serious personal prejudice for at least another generation. Second, three centuries of sometimes unimaginable mistreatment have taken their toll on the Negro people. The harsh fact is that as a group, at the present time, in terms of ability to win out in the competitions of American life, they are not equal to most of those groups with which they will be competing. Individually, Negro Americans reach the highest peaks of achievement. But collectively, in the spectrum of American ethnic*

*and religious and regional groups, where some get plenty and some get none, where some send eighty percent of their children to college and others pull them out of school at the 8th grade, Negroes are among the weakest.*

*...The gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society is widening.*

*The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence—not final, but powerfully persuasive—is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. A middle-class group has managed to save itself, but for vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated city working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated. There are indications that the situation may have been arrested in the past few years, but the general post-war trend is unmistakable. So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself.*

## Document 10

**Information on the Source:** “The Great Society as Political Strategy,” by Frances Fox Piven, *Columbia Forum*, 13, Summer 1970, p. 70. In 1970, Piven was a strong advocate of welfare rights, but in this article she criticizes the Great Society from a liberal standpoint.

*By 1960, the Democrats felt that the black vote, especially in the cities, had become crucial in presidential elections... Yet blacks had not become integrated into urban political parties, nor were the agencies of city governments giving blacks a share of patronage, power, and services commensurate with their voting numbers. To remedy this imbalance, the Kennedy-Johnson administrations gradually evolved a two-pronged approach: first, they developed a series of novel programs directed to slums and ghettos, bypassing both state and local governments; second, they encouraged various tactics to pressure city agencies into giving more services to blacks...*

*The old New Deal coalition of Southern states and Northern cities was crumbling, and, as the once solid South gave way, the Northern cities became more important. This shift cast in sharp relief the weakness in the liberal-labor-[white]-ethnic alliances on which Democratic power in the cities had been based since the thirties...*

*The federal government had to take a unique initiative. It had to establish a direct relationship between the national government and the ghettos, a relationship in which both state and local governments were bypassed. It was this shift in relations among levels of government that caused much of the controversy.*