

The Great Society and Its Critics

by Jonathan Burack

Each unit in *The Historian's Apprentice* series deals with an important historical topic. It introduces students to a five-step set of practices designed to simulate the experience of being a historian and make explicit all key phases of the historian's craft.

The Historian's Apprentice: A Five-Step Process

1. Reflect on Your Prior Knowledge of the Topic

Students discuss what they already know and how their prior knowledge may shape or distort the way they view the topic.

2. Apply Habits of Historical Thinking to the Topic

Students build background knowledge on the basis of five habits of thinking that historians use in constructing accounts of the past.

3. Interpret the Relevant Primary Sources

Students apply a set of rules for interpreting sources and assessing their relevance and usefulness.

4. Assess the Interpretations of Other Historians

Students learn to read secondary sources actively, with the goal of deciding among competing interpretations based on evidence in the sources.

5. Interpret, Debate, and Write About the Topic Yourself

Students apply what they have learned by constructing evidence-based interpretations of their own in a variety of ways.



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Teacher Introduction

★ *Teaching the Historian's Craft*

The goal of *The Historian's Apprentice* units is to expose students in a manageable way to the complex processes by which historians practice their craft. By modeling what historians do, students will practice the full range of skills that make history the unique and uniquely valuable challenge that it is.

Modeling the historian's craft is not the same as being a historian—something few students will become. Therefore, a scaffolding is provided here to help students master historical content in a way that will be manageable and useful to them.

Historical thinking is not a simple matter of reciting one fact after another, or even of mastering a single, authoritative account. It is disciplined by evidence, and it is a quest for truth; yet, historians usually try to

clarify complex realities and make tentative judgments, not to draw final conclusions. In doing so, they wrestle with imperfect sets of evidence (the primary sources), detect multiple meanings embedded in those sources, and take into account varying interpretations by other historians. They also recognize how wide a divide separates the present from earlier times. Hence, they work hard to avoid present-mindedness and to achieve empathy with people who were vastly different from us.

In their actual practice, historians are masters of the cautious, qualified conclusion. Yet they engage, use their imaginations, and debate with vigor. It is this spirit and these habits of craft that *The Historian's Apprentice* seeks to instill in students.

★ *The Historian's Apprentice: Five-Steps in Four Parts*

The Historian's Apprentice is a five-step process. However, the materials presented here are organized into four parts. Part I deals with the first two of the five steps of the process. Each of the other three parts then deals with one step in the process. Here is a summary of the four parts into which the materials are organized:

Teacher Introduction. Includes suggested day-by-day sequences for using these materials, including options for using the PowerPoint presentations. One sequence is designed for younger students and supplies a page of vocabulary definitions.

Part 1. A student warm-up activity, an introductory essay, a handout detailing a set of habits of historical thinking, and two PowerPoint presentations (*Five Habits of Historical Thinking* and *The Great Society and Its Critics*). Part 1 (including the PowerPoints) deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Steps 1 and 2.

Part 2. A checklist for analyzing primary sources, several primary sources, and worksheets for analyzing them. Part 2 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 3.

Part 3. Two secondary source passages and two student activities analyzing those passages. Part 3 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 4.

Part 4. Two optional follow-up activities enabling students to write about and/or debate their own interpretations of the topic. Part 4 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 5.

★ Suggested Five-Day Sequence

Below is one possible way to use this *Historian's Apprentice* unit. Tasks are listed day by day in a sequence taking five class periods, with some homework and some optional follow-up activities.

PowerPoint Presentation: *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation comes with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have used it before with other units, you need not do so again. If you decide to use it, incorporate it into the **Day 1** activities. In either case, give students the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout for future reference. Those “five habits” are as follows:

- History Is Not the Past Itself
- The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation
- Time, Change, and Continuity
- Cause and Effect
- As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment: Students do the *Warm-Up Activity*. This activity explores students’ memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the *Warm-Up Activity*, then either have students read or review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout, or use the *Five Habits* PowerPoint presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the background essay “LBJ’s Great Society.”

Day 2: Use the second PowerPoint presentation, *The Great Society and Its Critics*, to provide an overview of the topic for this lesson. The presentation applies the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to this topic. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources:

- Sourcing
- Contextualizing
- Interpreting meanings
- Point of view
- Corroborating sources

Day 3: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete “Source Analysis” worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. (Worksheet questions are all based on the concepts on the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.”)

Day 4: In class, students complete the remaining “Source Analysis” worksheets and use their notes to discuss these sources. Take some time to briefly discuss the two secondary source passages students will analyze next.

Homework assignment: Student read these two secondary source passages.

Day 5: In class, students do the two “Secondary Sources” activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria:

- Clear focus on a problem or question
- Position or point of view
- Use of evidence or sources
- Awareness of alternative explanations

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher’s discretion).

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

★ Suggested Three-Day Sequence

If you have less time to devote to this lesson, here is a suggested shorter sequence. The sequence does not include the PowerPoint presentation *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation is included with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have never used it with your class, you may want to do so before following this three-day sequence.

The three-day sequence leaves out a few activities from the five-day sequence. It also suggests that you use only seven key primary sources. However, it still walks students through the steps of the *Historian's Apprentice* approach: clarifying background knowledge, analyzing primary sources, comparing secondary sources, and debating or writing about the topic.

Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment: Ask students to read or review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout and read the background essay “LBJ’s Great Society.”

Day 1: Use the PowerPoint presentation *The Great Society and Its Critics*. It provides an overview of the topic for this lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 2: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete “Source Analysis” worksheets on them. They then use their notes to discuss these sources. Documents 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 are suggested.

You may wish to make your own choices of primary sources. Use your judgment in deciding how many of them your students can effectively analyze in a single class period.

Homework assignment: Student read the two secondary source passages.

Day 3: In class, students do the two “Secondary Sources” activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher’s discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

★ *Suggestions for Use with Younger Students*

For younger students, parts of this lesson may prove challenging. If you feel your students need a somewhat more manageable path through the material, see the suggested sequence below.

If you want to use the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation, this sequence takes four class periods. If you do not use this PowerPoint, you can combine **Day 1** and **Day 2** and keep the sequence to just three days. We suggest using five primary sources only. The ones listed for **Day 3** are less demanding in terms of vocabulary and conceptual complexity. For **Day 4**, we provide some simpler DBQs for the follow-up activities.

Vocabulary: A list of vocabulary terms in the sources and the introductory essay is provided on page 7 of this booklet. You may wish to hand this sheet out as a reading reference, you could make flashcards out of some of the terms, or you might ask each of several small groups to use the vocabulary sheet to explain terms found in one source to the rest of the class.

SUGGESTED FOUR-DAY SEQUENCE

Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment: Students do the Warm-Up Activity. This activity explores students' memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the Warm-Up Activity. Show the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation (unless you have used it before and/or you do not think it is needed now). If you do not use this PowerPoint presentation, give students the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout and discuss it with them.

Homework assignment: Ask students to read the background essay, "LBJ's Great Society."

Day 2: Use the PowerPoint presentation *The Great Society and Its Critics*. This introduces the topic for the lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist offers a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 3: Discuss the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist" and talk through one primary source document in order to illustrate the meaning of the concepts on the checklist. Next, have students complete "Source Analysis" worksheets after studying primary source documents 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8.

Homework assignment: Students read the two secondary source passages.

Day 4: Students do *only* "Secondary Sources: Activity 2" and discuss it. This activity asks them to choose the two primary sources that best back up each secondary source passage.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher's discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Here are some alternative DBQs tailored to the six primary sources recommended here:

In the opinion, what were the Great Society's biggest successes? What were its biggest failures?

"The Great Society held out the hope of ending all poverty. This was its biggest flaw, because that is a hope that can never be achieved." Explain why do you do or do not agree with this statement.

Vocabulary: The Introductory Essay

- **compromised:** In this case, weakened or worsened in some way
- **consensus:** General agreement by all or nearly all members of a group
- **fiscal:** In this case, having to do with government spending and taxing
- **ghetto:** In this case, a term used for poor, mainly minority, inner-city slum neighborhoods
- **redistribution:** In this case, government efforts to reduce income inequality through taxation and spending plans
- **segregation:** In this case, the separation of races in public facilities and other places
- **unemployment:** The condition of being out of work and unable to find a job

Vocabulary: The Primary Sources

- **aspiration:** A longed-for goal or strong desire
- **coercion:** Force or threats used to achieve a result
- **commensurate:** Corresponding with or proportionate to something else
- **demography:** The statistical study of population makeup and patterns of changes in it
- **ideology:** An organized set of beliefs or myths about political, social, or economic systems and plans
- **impervious:** Incapable of being affected or influenced by something
- **integrated:** In this case, including one group being included into some larger group
- **permeated:** Pervaded by or filled with something
- **subsistence level:** In this case, a level of income considered enough to meet basic needs
- **unemployment compensation:** Regular payments to workers to help them during times of unemployment
- **welfare programs:** Programs providing funds and other benefits to poor people who cannot support themselves

Vocabulary: The Secondary Sources

- **cadres:** Groups of trained, dedicated workers in an organization
- **deprivation:** The state of being denied something basic or essential
- **discrimination:** In this case, treating one group unfairly in comparison with other groups
- **dissonance:** A harsh lack of harmony; discord or conflict
- **divisive:** Something that creates discord and divides people or groups of people
- **liberalism:** In this case, not classical liberalism but a political philosophy stressing public action to remedy inequality
- **socioeconomic inequality:** Various groups not being equal in a social and/or economic sense
- **quintessentially:** Perfectly or purely an example or essence of something

Part 1: The Great Society—Providing the Context

Note to the teacher: The next pages provide materials meant to help students better understand the Great Society. The materials also seek to teach students the Five Habits of Historical Thinking.

This section includes the following:

- **PowerPoint presentation: *The Five Habits of Historical Thinking***

This presentation illustrates five habits of thought or modes of analysis that guide historians as they construct their secondary accounts of a topic. These five habits are not about skills used in analyzing primary sources. (Those are dealt with more explicitly in another handout in the next section.) These five habits of historical thinking are meant to help students see history as a way of thinking, not as the memorizing of disparate facts and pre-digested conclusions. The PowerPoint uses several historical episodes as examples to illustrate the five habits. In two places, it pauses to ask students to do a simply activity applying one of the habits to some of their own life experiences.

If you have used this PowerPoint with other *Historian's Apprentice* units, you may not need to use it again here.

- **Handout: *The Five Habits of Historical Thinking***

This handout supplements the PowerPoint presentation. It is meant as a reference for students to use as needed. If you have used other *Historian's Apprentice* units, your students may only need to review this handout quickly.

- **Warm-Up Activity**

A simple exercise designed to help you see what students know about the Great Society, what confuses them, or what ideas they may have absorbed about it from popular culture, friends and family, etc. The goal is to alert them to their need to gain a clearer idea of the past and be critical of what they think they already know.

- **Introductory essay: “LBJ’s Great Society”**

The essay provides enough basic background information on the topic to enable students to assess primary sources and conflicting secondary source interpretations. At the end of the essay, students get some points to keep in mind about the nature of the sources they will examine and the conflicting secondary source interpretations they will debate.

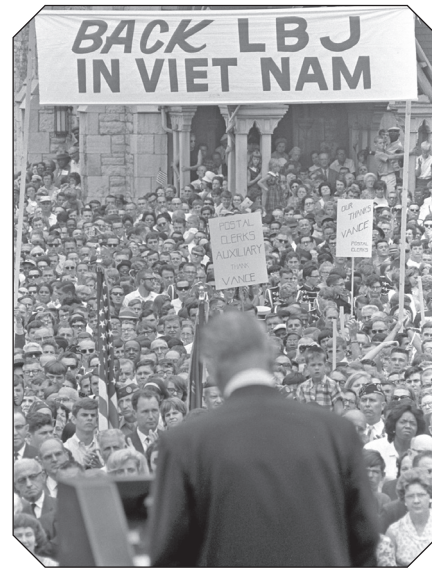
- **PowerPoint presentation: *The Great Society and Its Critics***

This PowerPoint presentation reviews the topic for the lesson and shows how the Five Habits of Historical Thinking can be applied to a clearer understanding of it. At two points, the presentation calls for a pause and students are prompted to discuss some aspects of their prior knowledge of the topic. It is suggested that you use this PowerPoint presentation after assigning the introductory essay, but you may prefer to reverse this order.

Warm-Up Activity

What Do You Know About LBJ?

This lesson deals with Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) and his Great Society programs. Whenever you start to learn something about a time in history, it helps to think first of what you already know about it, or think you know. You probably have impressions, or you may have read or heard things about it already. Some of what you know may be accurate. You need to be ready to alter your fixed ideas about this time as you learn more about it. This is what any historian would do. To do this, study this photograph and take a few notes in response to the questions below it.



This photo shows a rally for the Vietnam War. What do you know about that war and the president who led the nation as that war intensified in the late 1960s? Can you tell who the man speaking to this crowd is? What else can you tell about the views or attitudes of the crowd itself?

What do you know about protests against the Vietnam War? Does it surprise you that many people rallied to support the Vietnam War as many others rallied to protest it? Some of the support for LBJ came from people who also supported his Great Society programs. What do you know about those programs?

What have you learned from family, TV, books or other sources about the years 1964–1969? From these sources did you ever learn about LBJ’s “Great Society”? What is your sense of how the Vietnam War and the Great Society affected each other in those years?

LBJ's Great Society

The year 1964 was in many ways a time of both triumph and tragedy for America. On the plus side, the nation was enjoying a high tide of more than a decade of prosperity, which many Americans had come to see as normal. This is startling, in a way, given the very hard times of the Depression decade (the 1930s) and the years of the 1940s during and just after World War II. However, the 1950s and early 1960s were years of economic growth, middle-class suburban comfort, and a calm mood of political consensus. The one big exception to that mood was the battle over civil rights. A huge movement to end segregation began to shake the nation in the mid-1950s, yet this battle did not threaten middle-class prosperity, and, in a way, only added to a sense of a nation on the move, overcoming all the obstacles of the past.

President John F. Kennedy caught this mood in the early 1960s with the slogan “New Frontier” for his programs. His tax and fiscal policies seemed able to manage the prosperous economy smoothly. His tough anticommunist foreign policy seemed to combine idealism and strength. Civil rights leaders were pressuring him to back strong legislation, which would pass in 1964 and make that year a historic moment, ending the age of legal “Jim Crow” segregation that had kept African Americans in quasi-bondage for so long.

On the other hand, 1964 was also a turning point in a less positive way. It began with the nation still mourning and in shock over Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963. The Kennedy years were a time when battles over civil rights triumphed in one way, but then also turned even angrier in other ways. Southern resistance seemed to reach a high point with police battling protesters in Selma, Alabama, and other Southern cities. Meanwhile, the far more complex forms of racial injustice in America’s cities—including Northern cities—were not going away. In fact, they were erupting in violent ghetto riots, which became a constant feature of life each summer of the late 1960s. Finally, dramatic Buddhist protests and ongoing warfare in South Vietnam were making Americans aware of that conflict, one that would grow and unsettle life in America in the upheavals of the late 1960s.

It was in this context of prosperity and growing uneasiness that President Lyndon Baines Johnson (“LBJ”) called on America to undertake vast new social programs in a speech he gave at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964. In that speech, he vowed to create what he called a “Great Society.” In doing so, he harkened back to the days of his own political hero, Franklin Roosevelt and the programs of the New Deal. Lyndon Johnson saw his Great Society as a way to complete the New Deal’s unfinished business.

However, the New Deal had been implemented in a time of widespread poverty and massive unemployment. Its programs were directed at economic recovery and relief for as wide a group of Americans as possible—for example, in the Social Security legislation ensuring retirement income for the elderly. President Johnson’s programs took place amidst a very different context: affluence had left pockets of poverty in places like Appalachia or among minorities in the inner city ghettos of major metropolitan areas. This meant the Great Society would be different from the New Deal, and the popular reactions to it would be different.

So isolated were the areas of real impoverishment that it took a book to awaken Americans to the problem. That book, Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, conveyed in its title the reality Johnson sought to change.

The term “Great Society” was applied to a range of programs with many different goals. Some sought to ensure civil rights and voting rights for African Americans. The Medicare and Medicaid programs provided health insurance for the elderly and for many poor people. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided federal funding for low-income school districts. Head Start offered them preschool education and health services. The phrase “War on Poverty” was used for a sizable group of job training and community action programs—for example, the Job Corps, the Model Cities Program, or Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), which sent community organizers and lawyers to poor neighborhoods in order to aid groups and individuals seeking change.

The poverty programs directed resources to cities, sometimes through existing state and local authorities and sometimes directly to activists in the poor neighborhoods themselves. The overall approach was to give poor communities social services that would help them get the education and training necessary to compete equally for jobs and in other ways. In other words, it stressed economic opportunity through massive government redistribution of resources directly to communities in need.

The Great Society's popularity did not last nearly as long as the New Deal's did. Several factors account for this. The biggest—the Vietnam War—may have had nothing to do with the programs themselves. By 1967, massive escalation of the war had inflated the defense budget and made it much harder to sustain social programs at home.

However, the Great Society on its own did generate heated controversy. This was especially true of the community action programs and their principle of “maximum feasible participation” of the poor themselves. Critics charged that this side-stepped elected local officials and put many programs in the hands of radical activists who exploited federal resources without actually helping the poor that much. Other critics saw the programs as ineffective and tending to promote passive dependency on government, not real opportunity. Still others said the programs simply did not go far enough in offering the poor the resources they really needed.

Today, historians still debate these and other aspects of the Great Society. Its expansion of government's role, they say, had both positive and negative effects, and these still cause great controversy, not only among historians but among other citizens as well.

Points to Keep in Mind

Historians' Questions

Historians have argued about the Great Society in several ways:

Some view LBJ's efforts as noble, but tragically compromised by his Vietnam war spending. In their view, this spending made it impossible to expand Great Society programs enough. They say Johnson hoped to guide the nation to “overcome” (as he himself said) all forms of racial injustice and poverty. However, his tragic obsession with a doomed war prevented him from accomplishing this.

Others criticize LBJ as a cynical politician who merely used the issue of poverty to help his Democratic Party hold on to Northern black voters as Southern whites were abandoning the party. In their view, Johnson did not go nearly far enough in redistributing wealth and empowering the poor as he should have.

Finally, some see the purely economic focus of LBJ's programs as inadequate. They say he failed to deal fully with the social, cultural, and family roots of poverty, the factors keeping many people poor in what was otherwise a land of plenty.

All of these arguments continue to divide historians and others today.

The Primary Source Evidence

For this lesson, you will study ten primary source documents on the Great Society. Some of these will focus on the justification for the Great Society programs. Others express views critical of the programs, or of the assumptions and political strategies LBJ and his allies held. Together, these sources will give you evidence to help you better understand and evaluate the Great Society programs of the 1960s. They will also enable you to make some informed judgments of your own about what two historians say about this era.

Secondary Source Interpretations

After studying and discussing the primary sources, you will read two short passages by different historians assessing the Great Society. The historians who wrote these passages agree about most of the facts, but they make quite different overall judgments about LBJ's reforms. You will use your own background knowledge and your ideas about the primary sources as you think about and answer some questions about the views of these historians.

Five Habits of Historical Thinking

History is not just a chronicle of one fact after another. It is a meaningful story, or an account of what happened and why. It is written to address questions or problems historians pose. This checklist describes key habits of thinking that historians adopt as they interpret primary sources and create their own accounts of the past.

History Is Not the Past Itself

When we learn history, we learn a story about the past, not the past itself. No matter how certain an account of the past seems, it is only one account, not the entire story. The “entire story” is gone. That is, the past itself no longer exists. Only some records of events remain, and they are never complete. Hence, it is important to see all judgments and conclusions about the past as tentative or uncertain. Avoid looking for hard-and-fast “lessons” from the past. The value of history is in a way the opposite of such a search for quick answers. That is, its value is in teaching us to live with uncertainty and see even our present as complex, unfinished, open-ended.

The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation

Historians can’t observe the past directly. They must use evidence, just as a detective tries to reconstruct a crime based on clues left behind. In the historian’s case, primary sources are the evidence—letters, official documents, maps, photos, newspaper articles, artifacts, and all other traces from past times. Like a detective, a historian defines a very specific problem to solve, one for which evidence does exist. Asking clear, meaningful questions is a key to writing good history. Evidence is always incomplete. It’s not always easy to separate fact from opinion in it, or to tell what is important from what is not. Historians try to do this, but they must stay cautious about their conclusions and open to other interpretations of the same evidence.

Time, Change, and Continuity

History is about the flow of events over time, yet it is not just one fact after another. It seeks to understand this flow of events as a pattern. In that pattern, some things change while others hold steady over time. You need to see history as a dynamic interplay of both change and continuity together. Only by doing this can you see how the past has evolved into the present—and why the present carries with it many traces or links to the past.

Cause and Effect

Along with seeing patterns of change and continuity over time, historians seek to explain that change. In doing this, they know that no single factor causes change. Many factors interact. Unique, remarkable and creative individual actions and plans are one factor, but individual plans have unintended outcomes, and these shape events in unexpected ways. Moreover, individuals do not always act rationally or with full knowledge of what they are doing. Finally, geography, technology, economics, cultural traditions, and ideas all affect what groups and individuals do.

As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Above all, thinking like a historian means trying hard to see how people in the past thought and felt. This is not easy. As one historian put it, the past is “another country” in which people felt and thought differently, often very differently from the way we do now. Avoiding “present-mindedness” is therefore a key task for historians. Also, since the past includes various groups in conflict, historians must learn to empathize with many diverse cultures and subgroups to see how they differ and what they share in common.

Part 2: Analyzing the Primary Sources

Note to the teacher: The following pages provide the primary sources for this lesson. We suggest you give these to students after they read the background essay, after they review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout, and after they watch and discuss the PowerPoint presentation for the lesson.

This section includes the following:

- **Handout: “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist”**

Give copies of this handout to students and ask them to refer to it when analyzing any primary source.

- **Ten Primary Source Documents**

The Documents are as follows:

- Document 1. Passages from Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*
- Document 2. A photo of the 1964 riot in Harlem
- Document 3. Passages from LBJ’s “Great Society” speech, May 1964
- Documents 4a & 4b. Two photos of LBJ
- Document 5. Joseph Califano on the Great Society
- Document 6. LBJ signs the Medicare bill, next to President Harry S Truman
- Document 7. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks out against the Vietnam War
- Document 8. A short passage from Edward Banfield’s *The Unheavenly City*
- Document 9. A passage from the Moynihan Report
- Document 10. From Frances Fox Piven’s “The Great Society as Political Strategy”

- **Ten “Source Analysis” Worksheets for Analyzing the Primary Sources**

Each worksheet asks student to take notes on one source. The prompts along the side match the five categories in the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” Not every category is used in each worksheet, only those that seem most relevant to a full analysis of that source.

You may want students to analyze all of the sources. However, if time does not allow this, use those that seem most useful for your own instructional purposes.

Students can use the notes on the “Source Analysis” worksheets in discussions, as a help in analyzing the two secondary sources in the next part of this lesson, and in follow-up debates, DBQs and other activities.

Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist

Primary sources are the evidence historians use to reach conclusions and write their accounts of the past. Sources rarely have one obvious, easily grasped meaning. To interpret them fully, historians use several strategies. This checklist describes some of the most important of those strategies. Read the checklist through and use it to guide you whenever you need to analyze and interpret a primary source.

Sourcing

Think about a primary source's author or creator, how and why the primary source document was created, and where it appeared. Also, think about the audience it was intended for and what its purpose was. You may not always find much information about these things, but whatever you can learn will help you better understand the source. In particular, it may suggest the source's point of view or bias, since the author's background and intended audience often shape his or her ideas and way of expressing them.

Contextualizing

"Context" refers to the time and place of which the primary source is a part. In history, facts do not exist separately from one another. They get their meaning from the way they fit into a broader pattern. The more you know about that broader pattern, or context, the more you will be able to understand about the source and its significance.

Interpreting Meanings

It is rare for a source's full meaning to be completely obvious. You must read a written source closely, paying attention to its language and tone as well as to what it implies or merely hints at. With a visual source, all kinds of meaning may be suggested by the way it is designed, and by such things as shading, camera angle, use of emotional symbols or scenes, etc. The more you pay attention to all the details, the more you can learn from a source.

Point of View

Every source is written or created by someone with a purpose, an intended audience, and a point of view or bias. Even a dry table of numbers was created for some reason, to stress some things and not others, to make a point of some sort. At times, you can tell a point of view simply by sourcing the document. Knowing an author was a Democrat or a Republican, for example, will alert you to a likely point of view. In the end, however, only a close reading of the text will make you aware of point of view. Keep in mind that even a heavily biased source can still give you useful evidence of what some people in a past time thought. However, you need to take the bias into account in judging how reliable the source's own claims really are.

Corroborating Sources

No one source tells the whole story. Moreover, no one source is completely reliable. To make reasonable judgments about an event in the past, you must compare sources to find points of agreement and disagreement. Even when there are big differences, both sources may be useful. However, the differences will also tell you something, and they may be important in helping you understand each source.

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.

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 1

Passages from Michael Harrington's 1962 book *The Other America*

Contextualizing

From what you know about America in the 1950s and early 1960s, why might a book about poverty at that time have been titled "The Other America"?

Interpreting meanings

Harrington describes the people he talks about as "the new poor of the other America." What groups do you think he had in mind, and why did he describe them as "the new poor"?

At several points, Harrington uses psychological terms to describe the new poor, referring to "will," a sense of failure, or "aspiration." Find these references and discuss why they are important to the point Harrington is trying to make about the new poor.

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 2

A photo of the 1964 riot in Harlem, sparked by the fatal police shooting of an African American

Contextualizing

This Harlem riot in 1964 was only one of many urban riots that took place between 1964 and 1969. Given the course of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, this surprised many Americans. Why do you think they found this so surprising?

Interpreting meanings

What features in this photo help suggest the mood of people and danger these riots posed?

Point of view

A key factor in triggering the urban riots were all-white police forces of many cities. How does this photo hint at this issue? Do you think the photo seeks to express a point of view about the riot, or does it simply neutrally record a scene from it?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 3

Passages from LBJ's speech at the University of Michigan, May 1964

Sourcing

To fully appreciate the historical significance of this source, it is crucial to know who the speaker was. Is it also crucial to know to whom he was speaking? Why or why not?

Contextualizing

Johnson says the choice facing Americans in 1964 was whether to build a society "where progress is the servant of our needs," or one in which "old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth." Why might many Americans in 1964 have felt themselves facing such a choice?

Interpreting meanings

What phrases or sentences here best explain what Johnson meant by saying he wanted the nation to "move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society"?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Documents 4a & 4b

Lyndon Johnson as an official in the National Youth Administration in the 1930s and as president visiting a job training center in the 1960s

Contextualizing

LBJ began his political career as a New Deal official who deeply admired President Franklin D. Roosevelt. What do you know about Roosevelt and his New Deal programs? Why is understanding this context important in understanding the Great Society as well?

Interpreting Meanings

What do these two photos together suggest about Johnson's political interests and commitments?

Do the photos in any way suggest the differences between the New Deal era and programs on the one hand, and the Great Society era and its programs, on the other?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 5

A passage from a book by Joseph Califano, President Johnson's senior domestic policy aide during the Great Society years

Sourcing

How does the information about Califano help you evaluate his statement? Why might he be an especially good source of information on the Great Society? Why might you need to be cautious in accepting his account of it?

Interpreting meanings

In general, how does Califano justify his claim that the Great Society “was nothing short of a revolution that saved this nation”? What does he include and what might he have left out of his explanation?

Contextualizing

In 2004, Califano claimed that LBJ's expansion of government's responsibility “has been accepted by every successive president regardless of political party or ideological bent.” In what sense is this so? In what sense is it not so?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 6

LBJ signing the Medicare bill, with former president Harry S Truman seated next to him

Contextualizing

Health care reform was one of the key parts of LBJ's Great Society legislation. Briefly explain what Medicare and Medicaid are.

Some would say that of all of LBJ's programs and laws passed, his civil rights laws, Medicare, and Medicaid were his most lasting legacies. Why do you think people might claim that?

Interpreting meanings

Sitting with LBJ at this signing ceremony was Harry S Truman. Identify and explain why Johnson wanted him present at this signing.

Corroborating sources

How does this photo and Primary Source Documents 4a and 4b together help you to understand LBJ and how he viewed his place in history?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 7

From a speech by Martin Luther King Jr., titled “The Casualties of War in Vietnam,” February 25, 1967.

Sourcing

From what you know about Martin Luther King Jr., explain why a speech by him critical of LBJ’s Great Society is important as a primary source document.

Contextualizing

King was at first an enthusiastic backer of LBJ in 1964 and 1965, but soon became critical of him over foreign policy issues. Briefly explain why he felt as he did at first and why his attitude changed.

Interpreting meanings

Putting aside the question of whether the Vietnam War was worth fighting, do you agree with King that fighting it necessarily had to mean spending less on the Great Society?

Was King criticizing the Great Society itself when he said of its \$53 spent per poor person that “much of that \$53 goes for salaries of people who are not poor”?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 8

A passage from Great Society critic Edward Banfield's book *The Unheavenly City*

Interpreting meanings

Edward Banfield was one of the Great Society's sharpest critics. Here, he criticizes efforts at radical social change in a general way. In your own words, state his point here as best you can.

What do you think Banfield means when he says acting on a "faith in the perfectibility of man" leads in the end to "frustration, loss of mutual respect and trust, anger, and even coercion." Do you agree? Why or why not?

Contextualizing

Banfield's book, *The Unheavenly City*, was a rallying point for a group of formerly liberal writers and others who reacted against the Great Society and came to be labeled "neocons" (for "neoconservatives" or "new conservatives"). Banfield himself was once a backer of the New Deal. Why do you think the Great Society provoked this sort of backlash among some formerly liberal intellectuals?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 9

Passages are from *The Negro Family*, a March 1965 U.S. Department of Labor report also known as the “Moynihan Report”

Interpreting meanings

In the first part of this passage, the Moynihan Report says African American poverty was deeply entrenched due to two powerful forces that had affected blacks over many years. What were these two forces?

The second part of the passage then says that because of these two forces, the fundamental problem for poor African Americans now is “family breakdown,” which traps them in a “cycle of poverty.” Why do you think the report saw family breakdown as the fundamental problem?

Point of view

Critics of Moynihan accused his report of unfairly “blaming the victims” for their own poverty. What do you think these critics meant? Do you think this charge was fair? Why or why not?

Corroborating sources

Look over the primary sources for this lesson that are critical of the Great Society. Of these, which do you think would agree with the Moynihan Report? Which would disagree with it? Why?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 10

A passage from “The Great Society as Political Strategy,” by Frances Fox Piven, 1970

Contextualizing

Frances Fox Piven speaks of the Democratic Party losing the “once solid South” in the 1960s. What does she mean, and why did it happen then?

Interpreting meanings

Johnson’s Economic Opportunity Act called for “maximum feasible participation” of the poor people served by the act’s community action programs. This idea was very controversial, especially with big-city mayors, other local officials, and many established organizations. Can you explain why that might be?

In Frances Fox Piven’s view, LBJ favored this approach not merely out of concern for the poor, he wanted to shore up the national power of the Democratic Party. Can you explain her point?

Point of view

Piven analysis implies a criticism of Johnson from the point of view of someone who favored the Great Society as an idea. Do you agree with her views? Why or why not?

Part 3: Analyzing the Secondary Sources

Note to the teacher: This next section includes passages from two secondary source accounts of LBJ and the Great Society, along with two activities on these sources. We suggest you first discuss the brief comment “Analyzing Secondary Sources” just above the first of the two secondary sources. Discuss the four criteria the first activity asks students to use in analyzing each secondary source. These criteria focus students on the nature of historical accounts as 1) problem-centered, 2) based on evidence, 3) influenced by point of view and not purely neutral, and 4) tentative or aware of alternative explanations.

Specifically, this section includes the following:

- **Two secondary source passages**

Give copies of these passages to students to read, either in class or as homework. The two passages are from *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan*, by Michael Barone (New York: The Free Press, 1990) and from *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974*, by James T. Patterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

- **Two student activities**

Activity 1

Students analyze the two passage taking notes on the following questions:

- How clearly does the account focus on a problem or question?
- Does it reveal a position or express a point of view?
- How well does it base its case on primary source evidence?
- How aware is it of alternative explanations or points of view?

Activity 2

In pairs, students select two of the primary sources for the lesson that best support each author’s claims in the secondary source passages. Students discuss their choices with the class.

The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

Analyzing Secondary Sources

Historians write secondary source accounts of the past after studying primary source documents like the ones you have studied on the Great Society. However, they normally select documents from among a great many others, and they stress some aspects of the story but not others. In doing this, historians are guided by the questions they ask about the topic. Their selection of sources and their focus are also influenced by their own aims, bias, or point of view. No account of the past is perfectly neutral. In reading a secondary source, you should pay to what it includes, what it leaves out, what conclusions it reaches, and how aware it is of alternative interpretations.

* * * *

Secondary Source 1

Information on the source: The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan*, by Michael Barone (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 419. In this passage, Barone depicts LBJ and his advisers as committed to the Depression-era New Deal's approach of redistributing income and wealth, as it did above all with the Social Security program and its backing for labor unions in 1935.

There was a dissonance here between the administration and the people it sought to govern. Administration policy makers and growing cadres of urban specialists, people who had come of age and lived almost all their adult lives in the years of the politics of economic distribution which had begun so abruptly in May 1935, saw the problem posed by the riots as one largely—or at least in important part—of economics, and the solution as one of redistribution. If antidiscrimination laws were passed, an action Congress had already taken, many of them then reasoned that society then needed only to enable blacks to get jobs, and the problem would go away. But at a time when unemployment for blacks was still not much

higher than for whites, earnings by blacks were far lower, and the effects of past discrimination were hard to overcome immediately. This situation led some to conclude that the only way to achieve economic equality was for the government to redistribute income and wealth. One who agreed with this conclusion was Martin Luther King Jr. . . .

But most American voters by July 1967 had long since moved away from the politics of economic distribution and found such responses to the riots repugnant and baffling. They saw the divide between blacks and other Americans as cultural, not economic, and they saw the threat not as economic deprivation but as deep-seated disorder.

The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

Secondary Source 2

Information on the source: The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974*, by James T. Patterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 589–590. In this passage, Patterson suggests LBJ did not think through his programs and did not go far enough in the direction of income redistribution.

LBJ, unable to contain his ego, indeed wanted to outdo FDR—and every other President in history. He measured accomplishment in largely quantitative terms: the more programs passed, the better. Some of these programs, such as OEO, were hurried into law without much research to sustain them and without much forethought about potentially divisive political consequences. Other programs, such as aid to education, relied overoptimistically on injections of federal spending to cope with complicated social problems that, like poverty, needed more thoughtful study than they received...

Secondly, Johnson had little stomach for taking on well-entrenched political interests. In part because he was fearful of conservatives, including corporate interests, he refused to consider creation of large-scale public employment programs, such as WPA, that might have provided work and raised the income of the poor. Labor unions, too, feared such programs—because they threatened to endanger the jobs of the working poor.

Respectful of lobbyists for the National Education Association, Johnson permitted local school administrators overwide leeway in their spending of federal money. Aware of the power of the American Medical Association, he approved health care legislation that (among other things) benefitted hospitals, physicians, and insurance companies. He refused to raise taxes [at first] to pay for any of these programs.

The Great Society programs were for these reasons quintessentially liberal, not radical. Except in the area of race relations—a major exception—they made no serious effort to challenge the power of established groups, including large corporations. In no way did they seriously confront socioeconomic inequality or seek to redistribute wealth. The essence of Great Society liberalism was that government had the tools and resources to help people help themselves. It sought to advance equality of opportunity, not to establish greater equality of social condition.

The Secondary Sources: Activity 1

In this exercise, you read two short passages from much longer secondary sources dealing with the Great Society. For each secondary source, take notes on the following four questions (you may want to underline phrases or sentences in the passages that you think back up your notes):

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question? What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

Our Country, Barone

Grand Expectations, Patterson

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about the Great Society? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

Our Country, Barone

Grand Expectations, Patterson

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

Our Country, Barone

Grand Expectations, Patterson

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

Our Country, Barone

Grand Expectations, Patterson

In pairs, discuss your notes for this activity.

The Secondary Sources: Activity 2

This activity is based on the passages from *Our Country: The Shaping of America From Roosevelt to Reagan*, by Michael Barone, and from *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974*, by James T. Patterson. From the primary sources for this lesson, choose two that you think best support each author's point of view about Ellis Island. With the rest of the class, discuss the two secondary source passages and defend the choice of sources you have made.

1. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Barone's interpretation of the Great Society. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.
2. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Patterson's interpretation of the Great Society. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.
3. Does your textbook include a passage describing or summing up the Great Society? If so, with which of the two secondary sources (Barone or Patterson) does it seem to agree most? What one or two primary sources from this lesson would you add to this textbook passage to improve it?

Discuss your choices with the rest of the class.

Part 4: Follow-Up Options

Note to the teacher: At this point, students have completed the key tasks of *The Historian's Apprentice* program. They have examined their own prior understandings and acquired background knowledge on the topic. They have analyzed and debated a set of primary sources. They have considered secondary source accounts of the topic. This section includes two suggested follow-up activities. Neither of these is a required part of the lesson. They do not have to be undertaken right away. However, we do strongly recommend that you find some way to do what these options provide for. They give students a way to write or debate in order to express their ideas and arrive at their own interpretations of the topic.

Two suggested follow-up activities are included here:

- **Document-Based Questions**

Four Document-Based Questions are provided. Choose one and follow the guidelines provided for writing a typical DBQ essay.

- **A Structured Debate**

The aim of this debate format is not so much to teach students to win a debate, but to learn to listen and learn, as well as speak up and defend a position. The goal is a more interactive and more civil debating process.

Document-Based Questions

Document-Based Questions (DBQs) are essay questions you must answer by using your own background knowledge and a set of primary sources on that topic. Below are four DBQs on the Great Society. Use the sources for this lesson and everything you have learned from it to write a short essay answer to one of these questions.

Suggested DBQs

“The Great Society failed to live up to its promise for one simple reason — Vietnam.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

In pushing the Great Society programs, to what degree were LBJ’s motives those of an idealist and to what degree were they those of a practical and partisan politician?

“The Great Society did not go far enough in expanding government programs. Hence, it did not eliminate poverty.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

“LBJ put way too much faith in economic redistribution. He did not pay enough attention to the cultural and psychological factors trapping the poor in a ‘culture of poverty.’” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

Suggested Guidelines for Writing a DBQ Essay

- **Planning and thinking through the essay**

Consider the question carefully. Think about how to answer it so as to address each part of it. Do not ignore any detail in the question. Pay attention to the question’s form (cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, assess the validity, etc.). This form will often give you clues as to how best to organize each part of your essay.

- **Thesis statement and introductory paragraph**

The thesis statement is a clear statement of what you hope to prove in your essay. It must address *all* parts of the DBQ, it must make a claim you can back up with the sources, and it should be specific enough to help you organize the rest of your essay.

- **Using evidence effectively**

Use the notes on your “Source Analysis” activity sheets to organize your thoughts about these primary sources. In citing a source, use it to support key points or illustrate major themes. Do not simply list a source in order to get it into the essay somehow. If any sources do *not* support your thesis, you should still try to use them. Your essay may be more convincing if you qualify your thesis so as to account for these other sources.

- **Linking ideas explicitly**

After your introduction, your internal paragraphs should make your argument in a logical or clear way. Each paragraph should be built around one key supporting idea and details that back up that idea. Use transition phrase such as “before,” “next,” “then,” or “on the one hand...but on the other hand,” to help readers follow the thread of your argument.

- **Wrapping it up**

Don’t add new details about sources in your final paragraph. State a conclusion that refers back to your thesis statement by showing how the evidence has backed it up. If possible, look for nice turns of phrase to end on a dramatic note.

A Structured Debate

Small-group activity: Using a version of the Structured Academic Controversy model, debate alternate interpretations of this lesson's topic. The goal of this method is not so much to win a debate as to learn to collaborate in clarifying your interpretations to one another. In doing this, your goal should be to see that it is possible for reasonable people to hold differing views, even when finding the "one right answer" is not possible.

Use all their notes from previous activities in this lesson. Here are the rules for this debate:

1. Organize a team of four or six students. Choose a debate topic based on the lesson *The Great Society and Its Critics*.

(You may wish to use one of the DBQs suggested for the Document-Based Questions activity for this lesson, or you may want to define the debate topic in a different way.)

2. Split your team into two sub-groups. Each sub-group should study the materials for this lesson and rehearse its case. One sub-group then present its case to the other. That other sub-group must repeat the case back to the first sub-group's satisfaction.
3. Next, the two sub-groups switch roles and repeat step 2
4. Your team either reaches a consensus which it explains to the entire class, or it explains where the key differences between the sub-groups lie

Answers to “Source Analysis” Activities

Source Analysis: Document 1

Contextualizing: The poor were now in isolated pockets (rural areas, city slums, etc.) and seemed almost invisible to the rest of America.

Interpreting meanings: Impoverished people in Appalachia or the Southwest, poor minorities in inner-city slums, etc.

Answers will vary, but the focus should be on the idea that a loss of hope adds to the poverty itself of these isolated groups.

Source Analysis: Document 2

Contextualizing: The civil rights movement had achieved its key goals by 1965 (an end to legal segregation, voting rights, etc.), yet it did not really deal with the problem of poverty in isolated urban ghettos, etc.

Interpreting meanings: The gated-up stores, the intense emotions of the rioters, the seemingly helpless police officer, etc.

Point of view: Answers will vary, but the discussion should suggest that photos always are somewhat selective and can convey a point of view.

Source Analysis: Document 3

Sourcing: Answers may vary. LBJ was speaking at a university at a time when students were becoming active in efforts to reform society. He was also speaking to the entire nation through this university audience.

Contextualizing: Answers will vary but should focus on the pros and cons of the sort of prosperity Americans had experienced in the post–World War II years.

Interpreting meanings: Answers and choices will vary and should be discussed, but the same considerations should apply in analyzing photos as suggested in the answers to Document 2.

Source Analysis: Document 4

Contextualizing: Answers will vary. Johnson seemed to want to complete what he saw as the New Deal's unfinished work, but some may feel his programs differed in basic ways from those of the New Deal.

Interpreting meanings: Answers to both questions will vary and should be discussed. The photos could be used to talk about Johnson's rural background as opposed to more urban economic issues the Great Society programs had to deal with, etc.

Source Analysis: Document 5

Sourcing: Califano was LBJ's closest adviser on many Great Society programs. His knowledge is reliable; however, he is also clearly biased in favor of the Great Society.

Interpreting meanings: His emphasis is on programs. In this passage, he does not deal much with their results.

Contextualizing: Not all presidents since LBJ have favored the Great Society, and not all of its programs survived.

Source Analysis: Document 6

Contextualizing: Medicare was a government-provided health insurance program for the elderly; Medicaid covered certain health-care expenses for the poor.

Both civil rights legislation and Medicare and Medicaid brought major changes which have lasted.

Interpreting meanings: As president from 1945 to 1953, Truman was a New Deal Democrat who made the first presidential effort to achieve a public health insurance program.

Corroborating sources: All of these photos focus on Johnson as a loyal New Deal Democrat seeking to carry forward reforms that fit with the party's modern-day version of liberal social policy.

Source Analysis: Document 7

Sourcing: King was the top leader of the civil rights movement, and his voice would count with many people whose support LBJ needed, etc.

Contextualizing: LBJ was crucial in getting the major civil rights bills through Congress in 1964 and 1965. King soon came to see the Vietnam escalation as both harmful in itself and a diversion of energy and resources from the poor, whose needs he was starting to emphasize.

Interpreting meanings: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

He may have been criticizing the many administrative salaries and payments for contracted services that all the new bureaucracies and programs required.

Source Analysis: Document 8

Interpreting meanings: Responses will vary. Students should see that Banfield thought such efforts often backfired because they were unrealistic about human imperfections.

Answers to the second question should follow from the first. They will likely vary and should be discussed.

Contextualizing: Answers will vary. Some may see former liberals as unwilling to do what was necessary to meet the Great Society's challenges, others may see people who felt it defined the problem incorrectly, etc.

Source Analysis: Document 9

Interpreting meanings: Racism and the long-term legacy of slavery in their psychological effects on African Americans.

It is not entirely clear from this passage, but it suggests that family breakdown made it hard for young people to acquire the education, skills, habits of discipline, etc., needed to compete.

Point of view: Answers will vary. This is still an ongoing controversy.

Corroborating sources: Answers will vary. Banfield would probably agree. Perhaps King might or might not? Frances Fox Piven would not, etc.

Source Analysis: Document 10

Contextualizing: The Democrats as the party of segregation ruled in the South. When Kennedy and LBJ backed civil rights, the Democrats' solid control of the South began to crumble.

Interpreting meanings: It meant federal money was diverted to community activists and others instead of mayors, city officials, established social agencies, etc.

In her view, LBJ felt white local power establishments would not include African Americans enough, so to hold their loyalty to the Democrats he had to create new bases of support among them and help them get funds.

Point of view: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Evaluating Secondary Sources: Activity 1

These are not definitive answers to the questions. They are suggested points to look for in student responses.

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question? What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

Barone seeks to explain why he feels the Great Society programs were flawed and why they generated opposition more rapidly than Roosevelt's New Deal programs did in the 1930s.

Patterson also sees the Great Society programs as flawed, and he also seeks to understand the reasons for those flaws. He differs from Barone in his understanding of what those reasons were. He also pays less attention to broad public opposition to Great Society programs than Barone does.

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about the Great Society? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

Barone finds the flaws of the Great Society in the emphasis LBJ and his advisers put on redistributing income and providing economic opportunity without dealing with the cultural factors holding back the poor—especially the minority poor. He thinks the public turned against the Great Society because it feared the disorder it saw as arising more from these cultural or attitudinal factors than from income inequality per se.

Patterson takes a view opposite to Barone's in the sense that he thinks the Great Society was far too timid in redistributing income massively—for example, through major public works programs to hire poor people, as was done in the New Deal era. He believes Johnson was too fearful of corporate and other conservative opposition to such redistributive programs.

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

Neither *Barone* nor *Patterson* make specific reference to primary source documents in these passages, though they do extensively throughout their books.

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

Neither *Barone* nor *Patterson* make any reference to other historians who might take issue with their interpretations. Their debates with other historical interpretations are only implied here.

