

**George Christian and Harry Middleton**  
**LBJ Lecture Nov. 28, 2000**

UNEDITED

LBJ Distinguished Lecture  
Remarks for President Jerome Supple  
Alkek Teaching Theater  
Tuesday, November 28, 2000  
7:30 p.m.

We are delighted that all of you could be here this evening.

We have a special treat tonight — a Lyndon B. Johnson distinguished lecture on Lyndon Johnson, given by two men especially close to Lyndon Johnson during his lifetime.

President Johnson was a larger-than-life character, much maligned in his own time.

But with the passage of time, and perhaps in the light of the men who have held the office since, we have come to a renewed appreciation of the Johnson presidency.

Johnson was a president who had vision and compassion and drive.

He knew people, and he knew politics.

In his hands the presidency was powerful, aggressive and — like him or not — respected.

Few people know this better than our speakers tonight.

George Christian and Harry Middleton served in the white house with LBJ.

Both came from journalism backgrounds.

George Christian was President Johnson's press secretary from 1966 until 1969.

Harry Middleton served as staff assistant from 1967 to 1969 and stayed on with Johnson to help write his White House memoirs.

Both continue their LBJ connections.

Christian is now vice chair of the Lyndon Baines Johnson foundation.

And Middleton has directed the Lyndon Baines Johnson presidential library since its beginning in 1970.

We are pleased to have them with us tonight.

Please welcome George Christian and Harry Middleton.

{Transcriber's note: due to the large blocks of text from each speaker, the speakers will be identified as follows: George Christian in plaintext, *Harry Middleton in italics*, and **the tape recordings in bold.**}

Thanks President Supple.

In case ya'll don't know, I'm the George Christian part of this act. Harry Middleton is my able assistant, he's going to work the machine over there. He will have approximately half of this program.

For both of us, I will express our appreciation for being here, and for the opportunity to see so many old friends. And that is a fact, because we've seen some folks here tonight that I haven't seen in at least a quarter of a century. So, it's nice to see you here and we especially appreciate being asked by Dr. Supple to come down for this lecture.

We entitled our presentation, "The Return of Lyndon Johnson" for a very good reason.

As the 2000 Presidential campaign was getting under way David Schribman, who is Washington Bureau Chief of the *Boston Globe*, wrote in a column "The hottest political figure in the nation right now isn't John McCain, Bill Bradley, George W. Bush, or Al Gore; it's Lyndon Johnson." And one of the reasons, of course, is that this revived interest in Lyndon Johnson seems to come around with every Presidential election but when you think about it, almost everything that was being debated in this years' Presidential race had some connection to President Johnson; particularly Medicare.

Every time you hear the word Medicare, if you didn't know that harks back 35 years to Lyndon Johnson. Harry, this is one of the reasons that we brought this machine here [a cassette player] is that we're gonna to try to play you some LBJ tapes.

This is a tape involving Vice President Humphrey and Jim Rowe, I think, isn't it Harry?

*Yeah.*

Jim Rowe was a longtime Washington hand going clear back to President Roosevelt. Of course, Vice President Humphrey was a part of the administration.

We'll see if this works.

*Everybody who has ever written about Lyndon Johnson, talks about the complicated and multifaceted character attributes of the man. If we were going to do a program tonight on LBJ the man, we would began, probably, with his childhood. But, to talk about the return of LBJ, it is really necessary, or it's appropriate, to begin with Johnson when he was a public figure and he first came to the attention of the American people. And that was when he was in the Senate.*

*When he was in the United States' Senate, and particularly after he became Majority Leader of the Senate, he was known as, he achieved a reputation of being the most effective majority leader of the Senate for this century, and perhaps in the history of the whole Senate. And the reason for this are many.*

*But, there are three in particular that right now I would like to discuss. One was his attention to detail. The second was his sensitivity to the needs and concerns of his fellow Senators. And the third was his masterful sense of timing.*

*We in the LBJ library have conducted oral history interviews with a good many people that were associated with LBJ. And here are a few observations by some of the people who worked for him, including Senator Humphrey who, at that time, was the Senator from Minnesota; Jim Rowe, a longtime associate; Ralph Hewitt who was a staff member for LBJ that attest to these three attributes.*

**[unidentified voice] He always knew where a Senator was. I mean, you could be out of town, anyplace, and he'd find ways and means of discovering where you were. And if he needed you, he'd be at you.**

[next voice] I mean, there was nothing that he wouldn't try. Nobody that he wouldn't call. No person he wouldn't bring in. No expert that he wouldn't tap in pursuit of something that he wanted.

[next voice] Sparkman was traveling by car across Georgia and Johnson said we've got to have him back here for this vote. So, actually, they had the State Police intercept Sparkman's car and take him to the airport in Atlanta and flew him to Washington.

[next voice] He never would give up. There was a labor bill he wanted. He found he just didn't have one vote. And the only fellow he hadn't talked to was Harry Byrd Sr. of Virginia, who hated labor. He thought, "My God, I'll never get hi." But he called Byrd, and Byrd said yes. And Byrd said, "would you like to know why?" Byrd's niece had died, and they lived down in Winchester. Johnson had the flu, and got up, and he wrapped up (it was a miserable day) and he drove all the way done and he got to the church and he was the only Senator there. Byrd said, "You came to my niece's funeral. Nobody else did."

[next voice] And it was late in the afternoon. And I remember Johnson saying to me, looking around I was there with him on the floor, and he said, "I think we'll pass that minimum wage bill now." And he had a little short forum call. And he called it up and it passed like that, with a voice vote, that was it. And boy oh boy, Spesser Holland came running out of the Senate dining room and he wanted to know what had happened in here. He was jumping and screaming and hollering and pounding the desk. And Johnson said, "Well, Spesser, I had a little quorum call," he said. "If you fellows aren't on the job around here, I got legislation to pass." He just slipped it right on through there, zip. Oh boy they were furious with him.

I think that Humphrey recording was made, as you recall after he was Vice President he went back and ran for the Senate from Minnesota and was elected and served in the senate again.

Now those attributes of Johnson, I think, were God given and they may have been developed in large measure right here on this campus when he decided to be a campus leader.

And all through his Congressional career, and on to the White House, he used that same type of persuasion and other things to get what he wanted.

Once when he was asked to comment on his reputed power as Senate majority leader, he said, "The only power I have is the power to persuade." And as one of his colleges responded, "God almighty, that's like saying the only wind we have is a hurricane."

Early in his presidency, after the assassination of President Kennedy, President Johnson wanted the Senate to pass an excise tax bill. Two members of his own party were balking, and here's how he got them to vote the way he wanted them to.

**Johnson: Vance, Vance? Can't you help me on this excise tax thing? You're going to wreck this damn bill. We're not going to have any. They're going to get together this afternoon and try to make a motion to keep all excise taxes in there, and we need your help.**

Hartke: [searching for words] Well, I mean, I suppose [unclear] started out to it . . .

Johnson: I know it. And Clint Anderson though, they all got mad yesterday because you all screwed up that oil vote. And they're after the oil companies and [Senator John] Williams and everything else. Those big oil companies oughtn't to be raising hell [for] \$40 million. They got off with \$400 million, and they ought to let you all off the hook. But now we've got it in a big screwed-up mess, and we—all of us—are going down in defeat if we can't operate any better than that. There's no leadership in the committee. So for God's sake, get in there. Clint Anderson says he'll change, and you change, and get two or three more and let's . . .

Hartke: The one big thing in there, the one thing I wanted, was [to cut the tax on] musical instruments.

Johnson: Oh, well, what's important is the big credit to the Democratic Party and let's go on. The goddamned band and musical instruments—they won't be talking about it next November. What they're going to be judging us by, they're going to be judging us whether we can pass a tax bill or not and whether we've got prosperity. And if we have it . . . Every day, it costs us \$30 million in our economy. So get in there and try to help me on this thing.

Hartke: OK. Say, can I save one vote out of there?

Johnson: We want to just have a general vote. One vote to put all the excises back. That's the way we can get the majority of the people. Out of the bill.

Hartke: Yes, let me try to get that done.

Johnson: You do that, and get a hold of Clint Anderson. You all go together. See if you can't do that for me.

Hartke: [chuckles] All right.

Johnson: I'll do something for you.

Hartke: I know you will.

Johnson: Goodbye.

Hartke: Goodbye.

Johnson: That'll do it.

Johnson: Hey Abe. Can't you go with us on this excise thing and let us get a bill? Goddamn it, you need to vote with me once in a while—just one time.

Ribicoff: Mr. President, look. I made a commitment. President . . . Let me say this—the Treasury Department is reaping the whirlwind.

Johnson: I know it. I know it. I know it. We were ready to report this bill, and now we've got it just good and screwed up, and the Democrats are going to be a miserable failure in the eyes of the whole country. Now why can't you all meet at two o'clock, and let's leave this excise like we had it before you met this morning?

Ribicoff: Well I don't know how you're going to keep it—the thing was overwhelming.

Johnson: No, it's not. No. Clint Anderson is going to help us. Hartke will help us. And if you'll help us, we'll have it over. And I'll appreciate it and I'll remember it. Help me one way or the other.

Ribicoff: You know, just one word, Mr. President—

**Johnson:** You've had these problems, executive, and you know we've had that damn bill there since September. And every day it's costing us \$30 million in consumer income, every single day.

**Ribicoff:** One of my problems is one of the amendments in there is for something in my own home state that's already been announced.

**Johnson:** I know it, but every one of them has got it in there, my friend. But God almighty, I think about the problems I've had. And when you wanted to go on that committee, I just stood up and said, "By God, it's going to be." Now, I just want one vote, and I want to get that bill out of there, and I got to have it, Abe. And you've had problems. You've been an executive. And you can find a way to help me.

They've asked me to call you 40 times this year and I've never done it. But this time, when it means \$400 or \$500 million—this is going to be a whole motion to leave all the excises as they were before Williams and them got mad on the oil thing. And don't let John Williams and Everett Dirksen screw me this way.

**Ribicoff:** Mr. President, I wish you had called me. I had talked to President Kennedy before he died about what I looked at [as] the troubles of the Finance Committee. And then he said to me, he said, "Abe, look, once we get this in up there, I will call all the Democrats together and try to work it out." Now, the Treasury . . . the great tragedy to me, Mr. President, and I want to be very frank with you, is that [Douglas] Dillon doesn't know the politics, and the—

**Johnson:** I think that's right and he's sick. And he's sick. And I don't know 'em either. But I want you to know 'em this afternoon and go in there and either don't vote one way or the other, but let them put these damn things back and vote with us, if you will. We can't lose \$400 to \$500 million revenue in this thing.

**Ribicoff:** Let me see how I can save my face. I've got a problem—

**Johnson:** Don't you worry about saving your face. Your face is in damn good shape, and it's going to be better when I get with you. I'll save your face. [Ribicoff chuckles.] You save my face this afternoon, and I'll save your face tomorrow.

**Ribicoff:** Well some time, I would really like to talk to you.

**Johnson:** You can do it any hour, any hour. I've had 56 days in this job, and they've been the most miserable 56 I've ever had.

**Ribicoff:** You're doing good, sir.

**Johnson:** And my people are going [in] opposite directions. And now damn Harry Byrd goes one way and he says cut your damn budget, and I'll help you get your bill out. He called me yesterday and said it will be reported tomorrow. I thought it was all settled.

**Ribicoff:** You're doing great, Mr. President. Honest to God. You're doing so great it isn't even—

**Johnson:** Will you go in there and help me this afternoon?

**Ribicoff:** Let me try. Let me see how I can work it out.

**Johnson:** You just work it out. Now don't say how. I don't give a damn about the details. I just want you to work it out. Will you?

**Ribicoff:** I'll do my—OK, Mr. President.

**Johnson:** Bye.

**Ribicoff:** Bye.

Everybody knows that LBJ was called a “wheeler dealer.” He hated that term, but we’ll let you decide after you hear the next tape as to whether he really was.

The Republican leader Everett Dirksen was desperate to have the Army Corps of Engineers tell the Congress that there was enough money to plan an improvement project on a river in his home state of Illinois.

Here’s what he said to the President in asking him to intervene with the corps, and here’s what Johnson responded. There are two calls back-to-back.

**Dirksen:** [unintelligible—presumably Gen. Jackson Graham] of the Civil Works he’s going appear before the public works appropriations subcommittee tomorrow morning. There is planning money in the bill for the Kaskaskia River navigation project.

**Johnson:** How you spell it?

**Dirksen:** Uh, K-A-S-K-A-S-K-I-A. Kaskaskia River navigation project. Now, all I want him to do, is to have Graham say to the committee that the engineers do have construction capabilities for fiscal 1965. And if it’s only 25 or 50 thousand dollars that’ll be enough to nail the thing down.

**Johnson:** How big’s the project?

**Dirksen:** Huh?

**Johnson:** What’s the total cost?

**Dirksen:** The total cost is, I think is, thirty some million dollars. Now it’s in that area of Illinois that’s distressed. And already Kaiser Aluminum and a half a dozen other plants have optioned sights in that area just waiting for the time when this thing can be finished so they can barge coal out of there and raw materials. And it’s going to be the making of the southern thirty counties of the state.

**Johnson:** Let me get on that and I’ll call you back. Okay?

**Dirksen:** Yeah, I just want to be sure that General Graham will say

**Johnson:** Now, you’re not going to beat me on excise taxes and ruin my budget this year. I got that. I got Ways and Means holding hearings and we’re going to come up with a recommendation one way or the other. But don’t beat me on that now. You can do it if you want to, and you can ruin my budget. But you hollering economy and trying to balance it and I cut the deficit fifty percent under what Kennedy had it. Now if you screw me up on excise taxes and get that thing going, I’ll have hell. Now, let my Ways and Means Committee go

**Dirksen:** Now look at the pressure I’m under

**Johnson:** Nah, you’re not under

**Dirksen:** Goddamn trade association

**Johnson:** Well, I know it. But they got you also for good fiscal prudence. And you know, you know the way to do this is through the House committee. And you know, if you put it in you’re not going to get it. They’re not going to let you write a bill over in the Senate on taxes. Now, please don’t push me on that.

**Dirksen:** Well, I’ve got a

**Johnson:** Well, who ya gonna take? You gonna take all your Republicans? Give me one or two of them and let them be prudent. You’ve got people on there that can

**Dirksen:** Well, you’ve got enough votes to be

**Johnson:** No I haven't. I haven't. You can beat me. And you, you ought'n do it. You see how you [sic] going to let me win by one vote in there and I'll call you back in a little bit on this.

**Dirksen:** You never talked that way when you were sitting in the Senate

**Johnson:** Well, I did if my country's involved. I voted for Ike one time when no one voted against him, I cast the vote on his foreign aid and brought it up out of committee.

**Dirksen:** You're a hard bargainer.

**Johnson:** Well, no I'm not. But you just take care of me and I'll look at this and see what I can do and call you right back.

**Dirksen:** Alright.

[next call]

**Johnson:** . . . the General, I guess at home and he says that if I want him to that he'll testify. He says he's got a hundred thousand restudy going on that won't be out until September.

**Dirksen:** Yeah.

**Johnson:** That he can't tell. That if the railroads haul this coal out of there and the economics are such that it won't justify, well, he'd be in a hell of a shape. So he says what he'll testify is this: that the engineers have a construction capability for 1965 contingent on favorable restudy of the economics of the project.

**Dirksen:** Yeah.

**Johnson:** That he believes that it will be a favorable restudy. That he believes that they can get barges out of there. But he can't say positively because he's got a hundred thousand wrapped up in this study, it's coming out in September. And said if it came out the wrong way he'd be in a hall of a shape. But he'll put it in. He'll say that they have a capability contingent on the restudy. You can put the money in contingent on the restudy and then if the restudy goes against it and the project is no good, he'll just have to not spend it.

**Dirksen:** Yeah, except his division engineer in St Louis told us today that they did have this construction capability.

**Johnson:** Well, he says they'll have a construction capability if the thing ought to be built at all. But if the economics of it are not justified, and they'll know when they get through this hundred thousand study, which will be through in September. So, he said put your money in, contingent on it being justified.

**Dirksen:** Oh, okay.

**Johnson:** I told him to go as strong as he could. And he said he'd go sixty thousand. So, he'll testify for sixty thousand for you. And don't you tell anybody now that you got a backdoor to the White House. But you go up there and don't you kill my goddamned tax bill tomorrow. And quit messing around in my smokehouse.

**Dirksen:** You forget that I key at people's drug store.

**Johnson:** Well, I know it.

**Dirksen:** It's got a label on it, "back door to White House."

**Johnson:** What Republican is going to vote against it tomorrow?

**Dirksen:** [chuckles] Against what?

**Johnson:** Against your raid on the treasury.

**Dirksen:** I don't know whether anybody's going to vote

**Johnson:** Well, how many will you let vote against you?

**Dirksen:** Well, I don't know. I'll have to do a little listing.

**Johnson:** I'm going to lose a bunch of people on my side, so I've got to get two or three of your men.

**Dirksen:** You're a hard bargainer.

**Johnson:** Well, you get them for me. Now here's what Joe Fowler [Henry H. Fowler] says. Joe Fowler says, "that the position [Wilbur] Mills is taking is the correct position."

**Dirksen:** Uhuh.

**Johnson:** "that his committee will make a full, definitive study of present taxes immediately and that study should be continued."

**Dirksen:** Yeah.

**Johnson:** "that is my strong feeling. I would have to stick with colleges in the Treasury. Once you uncork this thing just a little bit, your little bit pregnant and you'll never know where it ends. You'll have great difficulties with Mills if you try to take off some of the taxes. He wouldn't allow that. Whatever was said at the time the big tax bill is up about hearings was not to give any indication that the administration subscribed. Furthermore, no statement was made that hearings would be held before June the thirtieth." Some of them said that was May, so I called him. Now, the amendment, but don't you, don't you.

**Dirksen:** Wilbur's got time on his side. He can kill it in conference.

**Johnson:** No, don't kill it in conference. That gets everybody upset and you get every damned outfit in the country. Don't make it cruel and inhuman punishment, that's unconstitutional.

**Dirksen:** Well, everybody's upset all of the time.

**Johnson:** No. Hell, I just got you straightened out—thirty million dollars worth!

**Dirksen:** You left me upset for a hundred days on that damn civil

**Johnson:** Thirty million dollars! You got yourself in that. You're the hero of the hour. Hell they'll have forgotten anyone else is around. Every time I pick up the papers: Dirksen. Magazines. NAACP is flying Dirksen banners and picketing the White House tomorrow.

**Dirksen:** I couldn't even get you to change your tune about that damn house bill.

**Johnson:** The hell you couldn't.

**Dirksen:** I didn't

**Johnson:** I told them, that was the first thing they asked me. I said whatever and the Attorney General agree on, I'm for. That's what I sent him up there to agree for. You know you never got a call from me during the whole outfit and you know it.

**Dirksen:** I know.

**Johnson:** But don't mess up that tax bill tomorrow now Everett. Please don't.

**Dirksen:** Well, I got to offer this but

**Johnson:** Well offer it, but John Williams is not for raiding the treasury so get him to save you.

**Dirksen:** [chuckles] Well, he's been my savior before.

**Johnson:** Well, get him to do it.

**Dirksen:** Well, we'll see.

**Johnson: Okay.**

**Dirksen: Bye.**

He got them too. He got the bill.

The President rarely chastised members of congress.

But he didn't hold back when he really needed to.

Representative Adam Clayton Powell was chairman of a committee and when he reneged on a promise to report one of the President's education bills, this is what transpired.

**Powell: How's my friend?**

**Johnson: Fine Adam. What the hell's been happening with your committee? I thought you told me two months ago that you were going to pass a bill for me.**

**Powell: That's right. Well, what's happened is all hell's broken loose because**

**Johnson: Well, what the hell are you blackmailing me on a four hundred thousand**

**Powell: No I . . .**

**Johnson: Well, hell, you did me on a four hundred thousand dollar appropriations for you we couldn't pass a billion, two hundred million for school kids. Now, you know that I'm for you and I'm going to help you any way I can, but I've got nothing to do with what you're doing in the House investigation, but you've damn near defeated the best education bill I've got and I hope you're going to be happy with it.**

**Powell: Now, Now, you know in you Appalachian bill there's . . .**

**Johnson: Appalachia ain't got a damn thing to do about you. Now you handle your committee and let us handle the other one.**

**Powell: Yeah, but there's a clause in there, Mr. President . . .**

**Johnson: There's a clause been in there all the time, and if you're gonna let Ayers and Edith Green lead you off the reservation then I ran for nothing last year with fifteen million votes. If you're gonna tie this Congress, and screw it up, which you've done for three weeks by running off until you get four hundred thousand appropriation then we never can get anywhere. Now if you defeat this, and you hold it up and you delay it, and you get us in this kind of shape why we can't pass anything and that's alright. And I think you'll beat a bunch of your liberal Democrats. And I'm gonna be here, it's not going to bother me. But I just sure thought I had better leadership on that committee than what I've got without even talking. And I'm awfully disappointed. Very Disappointed.**

**Powell: Now, Mr President, don't you think I'm entitled to the money?**

**Johnson: No, I don't think you're entitled to damn thing but your death. I think you told me—looked me straight in the eye—and told me “I'll report this bill, get it on the floor.” And you didn't do it. You did not do it.**

**Powell: March first, that's what I told . . .**

**Johnson: Oh, no you didn't say . . . . Oh hell no, you didn't say March first. You told me you [were] gonna do it. And then you ran off for three weeks and they couldn't even locate you—I asked the Speaker to call you and tell you that this was serious. This is bad. This is the thing we ran on all over the country.**

He got his way that day too.

*It's clear all these many years later that Vietnam is going to shadow Johnson's administration in one way or another. It was a contentious and controversial issue. It tore the country apart. I think it's fair to say that history has not yet made its final judgment on Vietnam.*

*It is said, and it is said forcefully, that Vietnam was a mistake. And it may well turn out in the final judgment of history that it was a mistake. But it's not clear yet, that it was a mistake.*

*It is also said that Vietnam was a skirmish in a war that ended on our side, on our terms. The Cold War did end. Vietnam was a part of it.*

*It is said that the commitment by the communist powers to help the North Vietnamese contributed eventually to the downfall to the Soviet Union. That may also be what history ultimately says.*

*The only point I really want to make is that I don't think that it is clear yet what will be said twenty-five years from now about that tragic war in southeast Asia. But I think what can be said now is that all these years later the war in Vietnam is receding as an issue of contention. Debates still go on. But no longer do people march in the streets. No longer are people as bitterly divided as they once were. As happens with the passage of time the passions of that particular time are receding.*

*As Vietnam does recede as the powerful issue that it was that really clouded over the whole subject of LBJ for a while, as that recedes it becomes much clearer for all of us, and for history, to see the accomplishments of Lyndon Johnson in his time and his administration.*

Let's contemplate for a few moments about the LBJ accomplishments. I'm not going to give you a total laundry list.

Starting when he was a member of the US House of Representatives, he had the good sense to befriend two of the most powerful men in Washington: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Sam Rayburn.

And he knew how to use his contacts, and again his powers of persuasion to do an awful lot for this part of Texas. Which many of you are familiar with. All you have to do is look at the dams on the Colorado, look at the electric wires that went out to the farms and ranches that came with the rural electrification program.

And when he was in the Senate, you can look at the highways out here. I know nobody likes to look at IH-35 right now, but the Federal Act of '56 that President Eisenhower proposed and that then Senate Majority leader Lyndon Johnson helped shepherd through.

NASA and its Houston connection.

And the 1957 Civil Rights Act, where he was only one of a handful of Southern Senators and Representatives who were willing to toe the line.

And just talking about civil rights, we take a lot of that for granted now, but those of you in this room who have a little gray hair remember how it used to be before LBJ. Nobody could pass the civil rights legislation that he was able to pass. By breaking down the racial barriers, he changed this country forever—especially the South.

With the Public Accommodations Act of 1964, the “whites only” signs began to come down all over this country.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally brought African Americans into the electorate. In 1964 there were 79 black elected officials in the South; 300 in the entire nation. In 1989, there were 6000 elected African Americans in the South, 9000 across the nation. In 1964, there were five black members of the US House. Today there are 39. Southern politicians finally had to recognize black voters. When you're a second-class citizen, you're a second-class constituent. No longer. Even Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and George Wallace had miraculous conversions when African Americans began to vote.

Then there was the Open Housing Act of 1968, when President Johnson was a lame duck and everyone said he couldn't get anything passed. That law ended the last vestige of legal segregation.

And then go down the list of the other Great Society landmarks and think about how many are still there—how many still resonate.

Medicare and Medicaid. In 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated, most older people had no health insurance. Nineteen million people enrolled in Medicare in its first year. And since 1965, 79 million have enrolled. Has anybody in this presidential race recommended repealing Medicare? Not hardly. And since 1966, Medicaid has served 200 million people. I haven't heard any protests of Medicaid now, or demands that it be repealed. The poverty program was much criticized from time-to-time, including the Johnson years—and certainly afterwards. You might think its outmoded and no longer serviceable. Yet, 11 of the 12 anti-poverty initiatives LBJ passed are still up and running. There won't be any repeal in our lifetime.

The education legislation. Head Start—still going strong. It's serving nearly one million preschoolers every year. Aid to secondary education—still a valuable supplement to local school funding. Student loans—29 million young people have benefited from this program that LBJ passed.

Public television, public radio through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The National Endowment for the Arts.

Thirty-five new National Parks.

Child safety, consumer protection, truth in packaging, all going strong.

An end to discrimination in immigration law that he pushed through; still in existence.

The Freedom of Information Act.

Urban renewal.

Space exploration, setting in place the trips to the moon.

Urban Mass Transit Act, all the subway systems that came into being in the Bay area, and in Washington DC.

I won't bore you with a full list, but after thirty-five years I assure you that the Great Society is still with us and we're a better country because of it.

*In this presentation, we have played some tapes that are obviously tapes of telephone conversations.*

*They are conversations that President Johnson made from the White house.*

*Let me tell you a little about the history of that.*

*After President Johnson died, a longtime aide of his told me that she had in her possession tapes that President Johnson had made while he was in the White House. He had left her with her with instructions that if they were still in her care when he died,*

*that she should give them to me [Middleton] with instructions that they should be kept closed for a period of 50 years.*

*And for a long time I looked upon that as instruction from the grave and we did keep them close.*

*We did begin to make some efforts to make sure to preserve them so that fifty years later the boxes would not be opened to find only dust.*

*But, for a number of reasons, it began to be clear to me that we should not honor that fifty year restriction that President Johnson put on them. That they were important historical materials, and that they really should be opened, and that I frankly wanted to open them on my watch.*

*I got Mrs. Johnson's approval, I talked to her about it and she agreed with me that they should be opened. So, several years ago, we did begin, twenty-five years earlier than the President had wanted, to open them. Without knowing what was in them; it was sort of a pig in a poke.*

*It turned out that it was—up to this point, half of them have been opened at this time—it turned out that it was a good thing to do.*

*They are important historical materials. Historians have indicated that they are important in the new look that LBJ has been receiving because, as no other materials can do, they bring the man to life. The papers that we have in the library tell a lot about George Christian and a little about me, and a lot about Bob Hardesty and about Dean Rusk and other members of the cabinet and the staff, but they don't tell a lot about LBJ. They tell what he did, but not a good deal about his personality.*

*He did not keep a diary as Harry Truman did.*

*He did not write notes to himself.*

*He did not really dictate, himself, many letters.*

*But he was, uniquely, a man of the telephone.*

*So these conversations that were recorded do bring him into the room.*

*Michael Beschloss, who has reordered many of them in a book says, "One of the marks of an historian is if you can find out, determine how sincere a man is—a president is—in what he says in private as opposed to what he says in public." And according to Beschloss and others who agree with him, the tapes show a conviction that Lyndon Johnson had that would not have been revealed in any other way.*

*He really believed in the civil rights legislation. He really believed in getting Medicare passed. He really believed in all of these measures that went into the Great Society.*

*These are the things that are there that are to be discovered, to be learned, by anybody who listens to these tapes.*

*So that has been a beneficial effect of releasing the tapes.*

*Now one of the side effects of releasing them, one of the things we did not really anticipate was that they would also reveal other aspects of Lyndon Johnson.*

*LBJ was, as everybody who worked for him or was in his orbit knew, was an outrageous fellow.*

*Un wittingly, I guess unwittingly, I have no idea why some of these things were recorded, some of these telephone conversations show just how outrageous he could be. And here is one in which he is talking to the president of Hagar slacks.*

**Operator:** Go ahead sir

**Johnson:** Mr. Haggar?

**Haggar:** Yes this is Joe Haggar

**Johnson:** Joe, is your father the one that makes clothes?

**Haggar:** Yes sir - we're all together

**Johnson:** Uh huh. You all made me some real lightweight slacks, uh, that he just made up on his own and sent to me 3 or 4 months ago. There's a light brown and a light green, a rather soft green, a soft brown.

**Haggar:** Yes sir

**Johnson:** and they're real lightweight now and I need about six pairs for summer wear.

**Haggar:** yes sir

**Johnson:** I want a couple, maybe three of the light brown kind of a almost powder color like a powder on a ladies face. Then they were some green and some light pair, if you had a blue in that or a black, then I'd have one blue and one black. I need about six pairs to wear around in the evening when I come in from work

**Haggar:** yes sir

**Johnson:** I need...they're about a half a inch too tight in the waist.

**Haggar:** Do you recall sir the exact size, I just want to make sure we get them right for you

**Johnson:** No, I don't know - you all just guessed at 'em I think, some - wouldn't you the measurement there?

**Haggar:** we can find it for you

**Johnson:** well I can send you a pair. I want them half a inch larger in the waist than they were before except I want two or three inches of stuff left back in there so I can take them up. I vary ten or 15 pounds a month.

**Haggar:** alright sir

**Johnson:** So leave me at least two and a half, three inches in the back where I can let them out or take them up. And make these a half an inch bigger in the waist. And make the pockets at least an inch longer, my money, my knife, everything falls out - wait just a minute.

**Operator:** Would you hold on a minute please?

[conversation on hold for two minutes]

**Johnson:** Now the pockets, when you sit down, everything falls out, your money, your knife, everything, so I need at least another inch in the pockets. And another thing - the crotch, down where your nuts hang - is always a little too tight, so when you make them up, give me an inch that I can let out there, uh because they cut me, it's just like riding a wire fence. These are almost, these are the best I've had anywhere in the United States,

**Haggar:** Fine

**Johnson:** But, uh when I gain a little weight they cut me under there. So, leave me , you never do have much of margin there. See if you can't leave me an inch from where the zipper (burps) ends, round, under my, back to my bunghole, so I can let it out there if I need to.

**Haggar:** Right

**Johnon:** Now be sure you have the best zippers in them. These are good that I have. If you get those to me I would sure be grateful

**Haggar:** Fine, Now where would you like them sent please?

**Johnson:** White House.

**Haggar:** Fine

*Oh, man.*

*There are two other telephone conversations we want you to hear.*

*The first does not really demonstrate anything. We're not going to play it because it does demonstrate anything. It's just that it is so very interesting.*

*In 1965, there was a crisis in the Dominican Republic. The US sent troops in to keep the peace.*

*President Johnson sent over to the Dominican Republic an old college, Abe Fortis, a lawyer in Washington who had been a friend of his back from the early days of Johnson in Washington. Fortis later would go to the Supreme Court, but at this time he was not. So, he sent Fortis over as his personal representative to access the situation and to report back to him what was happening.*

*On this occasion Fortis was calling, from the Dominican Republic, Johnson in the White House in Washington.*

*The conversation took place over what you would think, because it involved the president of the United States in the White House, would have been the most secure telephone line in the world.*

*But, the unthinkable happened.*

**Johnson:** Hello?

**Female Voice:** Hello.

**Fortis:** Hello.

**Johnson:** Yes, operator, can we finish? You put another call right in here.

**Female Voice:** [garbled] Are you a member?

**Fortis:** Hello!

**Johnson:** Operator, who are you?

**Female Voice:** I'm in Denver.

**Johnson:** Denver?

**Female Voice:** Yeah. Where are you calling from?

**Johnson:** This is Washington.

**Female Voice:** Ah, well, we must have gotten our lines crossed. 'Cause I was talking long distance to the [sic] Washington.

**Fortis:** Alright, get the hell off the line.

**Johnson:** Please let us finish operator.

**Fortis:** Sounds like you're pretty. This has been a very good conversation. Please get off the line. Please.

**Johnson:** Operator?

**Female Voice:** Hello?

**Johnson:** Operator?

**Johnson:** Yes? Are you in Washington?

**Johnson:** Yes.

**Female Voice:** Well, I wonder where the other party is.

**Johnson:** I don't know, but would you just hang up and let us talk? He can hear me and I can hear him. If you'll just get out of our way, honey.

**Female Voice:** I will.

**Johnson:** Huh? Is that alright?

**Female Voice:** Alright. I'll put my call in again.

**Johnson:** Oh, I thought you were an operator.

**Female Voice:** Oh, no. I'm calling from Denver.

**Johnson:** Who are you calling?

**Female Voice:** Well, what number are you on?

**Johnson:** I'm on 408. Who is it that you want and I'll see if I can help you.

**Female Voice:** Well, I'll have to call back. Thank you.

**Johnson:** Hello? Hello?

**Fortis:** Hello?

**Johnson:** Alright. Go ahead.

*Among his other qualities, Lyndon Johnson was a hell of a flirt with the ladies. This is a very brief part of a conversation he had with Katharine Graham the publisher of the Washington Post.*

*And we do want you to hear this one.*

**Johnson:** Hello?

**Graham:** Hello Mr. President.

**Johnson:** Hello sweetheart. How are you?

**Graham:** Well, I'm fine. Are you?

**Johnson:** You know, the only thing I dislike about this job is that I'm married and I can't ever get to see you. I just hear that sweet voice and it's always on the telephone. And I'd like to break out of here and be like one of the young animals down on my ranch—jump a fence.

**Graham:** [laughs heartily] Now, that's going to shut me up for the month.

**Johnson:** No, that's the truth, but we've got to get together pretty soon.

He was a flirt.

We can't top that.

So, I think at this point, since it's getting a little late, if any of ya'll have any questions, we'd be happy to try to tackle those.

We might even tell a LBJ story or two in response.

Anybody?

*Lecture transcribed by Benjamin Hicklin, graduate research assistant 2007-08*