

Hello everybody and welcome again to another episode of Presidential Archives Uncovered--the podcast that brings to you cool clips from the collections of the Presidential Libraries of the U.S. National Archives.

This episode features a number of audio clips from the Johnson Presidential Library and Museum.

Lyndon B. Johnson envisioned a “Great Society” to end poverty, promote equality, improve education, rejuvenate cities and protect the environment. In a speech at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964, Johnson declared, “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 this is just the beginning.”

The following clip is an excerpt of a recording of a telephone call from President Johnson to Speaker of the House John McCormack. The clip, recorded at 12:10 PM on August 4, 1964, concerns passage of the poverty bill.

LBJ: I’m going to tell them to go to hell in about another week; all of them, because I, I’ve got a bellyful. If I can’t pass one bill, I can’t lead the country. They can get somebody else to lead it. I have enough hell in my own outfit. I spend all day answering Bobby Kennedy’s leaks, and he’s got all the people hired around here giving us hell. And [I’ve] got no loyalty in the government. And you can’t, you can’t get your own people-- they’d rather go with [House Minority Leader Charles] Halleck. I can’t understand what’s in a man’s mind that he would go to Halleck against us. But they do.

McCormack: That’s true.

LBJ: And [Congressman] George Mahon, good fellow like him, he just said, “Well, the United States Chamber of Commerce came up and got him to make a broadcast denouncing poverty.” I said, “Now, George, don’t tell another person this, but go on and vote against my Appalachia bill, poverty, and maybe we can get some Republican votes from Ohio and Pennsylvania. If we can’t, well, we can’t pass it. But don’t vote against this bill because this means more to me than all the bills put together, all year.”

McCormack: What did he say?

LBJ: Well, he just said that [mimics Halleck] he’s kind of halfway committed and the paper was after him and he’s afraid of the paper and he’s just--so he left and I don’t know what he’s going to do. And I talked to this fellow [Congressman J. Russell] Tuten, and he swore me to absolute secrecy, not to [tell] a human being, but he said that they had a barbershop poll in his district; about 500 to 50 or something like that, 600 to 8. And that the civil rights thing was just something terrible, and that he had gone down and told them that he loved Johnson, but they hated all the civil righters and all the Kennedys and all the administration. And that it was just suicide for him. But he said, “Now, if you won’t tell anybody and won’t quote me”--and I’m not going to quote him to anybody but

you; I'm not even going to tell Walter Jenkins, but he said--"I'm going to sit in the well and when they get to the 'T's, and if my vote will make the difference, you've got it. I'll get kicked out of Congress if I have to, but I'll vote with you. If you've got it won anyway, don't make me do it." And, I said, "Alright." [pause] So don't even let them know it. Don't count him at all, but remember that he's a courageous fellow; that he's willing to stand up.

McCormack: Well, on the--on the other--they've got to be here on Friday! I wouldn't, what the hell, I'm not going to go around kissing their backside on that because they--the hell, I protected them for years, and, like yourself, I'm getting goddamn sick and tired of it. As a matter of fact, I got sick and tired long ago. The only goddamn reason that I didn't announce that I wasn't going to run again was because of you. It might be misconstrued. I'm telling you now for the first time--

LBJ: Well...

McCormack: --for once I've been--I figure, why don't Harriet [McCormack] and I have a rest and so forth. And I won't tell anyone else, but I just said, "Well, the only thing is it would be misconstrued," and I said, "Oh hell, I'm caught in a trap."

LBJ: Well, we can both do it. We can both do it if we lose this bill. Let's just--let's get [House Majority Leader] Carl [Albert] and let's all go to the line, the last ones, and if Halleck's got more than we are, we'll just let him have it. That's the way--

McCormack: Well, I agree with you.

LBJ: Okay.

McCormack: Now don't--I'm doing everything I can.

LBJ: I know that. I know that, faithful. I know that. And you just tell Carl, tell him what they're doing to us and let's try to get them to stay here Friday if they will.

McCormack: Yeah

LBJ: Bye.

McCormack: Alright.

On August 20, 1964, Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, establishing the Office of Economic Opportunity to direct and coordinate a variety of educational, employment, and training programs, which were the foundation of Johnson's "War on Poverty."

The next clip is an excerpt of a telephone conversation between President Johnson and Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, In this telephone conversation, recorded on December 14, 1964 at 11:30 a.m., Johnson asks Katzenbach for possible ways to insure equal voting rights for African American citizens. In July of that year Johnson had signed the Civil Rights Act into law. This legislation prohibited discrimination in public places and provided the federal government with a means of enforcing desegregation by barring the use of federal funds for segregated programs and schools. Additionally, it prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

LBJ: I've already told Dick Russell and some of them that we're going to try to get everybody to register and that those that don't register we're going to register at the postmasters. That the Congressmen nominate them and Senators confirm them and they're bound to be good men even in Mississippi and Georgia. But we're going to see that the Attorney General and the Postmaster General got the flanks and whatever they need and that they're registered - if they can get halfway qualified. And he growled a little bit. But that may not be the way. I don't know. I want you to - I want you to undertake the greatest midnight legislative drafting that's happened since Corcoran and Cohen wrote the Holding Company Act.

Katzenbach: Alright.

LBJ: On that. I basically believe that if we can have a simple effective method of getting them registered. Now if the state laws are too high and they disqualify a bunch of them maybe we can go the Supreme Court and get them held unconstitutional. Or if the registrars make them stand in line too long maybe we can work that out where the postmasters can do it. Let's find some way...

Katzenbach: The big problem, you know, under the Constitution...

LBJ: Yes sir.

Katzenbach: ...with the qualification.

LBJ: That's right. I know that. How can we beat it?

Katzenbach: Alright.

LBJ: Can we beat that some way?

Katzenbach: It's a, well we've tried hard to beat it and of course, that's what we have in the act that you got through and then these modifications of it in the last thing with '57, '60 and then now, and you're familiar with all those problems.

LBJ: No I'm really not. I don't know what we are really doing but I know this...

Katzenbach: The Constitutional Amendment, Mr. President, to, you know, to flatly have Federal officials register them for Federal elections...

LBJ: Well, let's do that. Let's shoot at that. Let's recommend that, if you can't do it any other way.

Katzenbach: Well, let's go into all the other alternatives, and then...

LBJ: Let's just get - Let's get the best people you've got. Now Joe Rauh's been talking about the postmasters...

Katzenbach: Um, hm.

LBJ: But see what you can do and we're going to need it pretty quick.

Katzenbach: Alright.

Although the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment, ratified in 1870, gave African American men the right to vote, more than ninety-five years later, African American men and women in the South continued to face challenges that prevented them from exercising their right to vote. These obstacles including poll taxes, literacy tests, bureaucratic restrictions, physical threats and intimidation.

The next clip is a telephone conversation from Lyndon B. Johnson to Bill Moyers on March 9, 1965 at 7:33 a.m. In this telephone conversation, Moyers, Johnson's special assistant, relates his recent telephone conversation with Martin Luther King, Jr., and reports on the events in Selma, Alabama, including plans for a march for that day, the question of calling out the National Guard to protect marchers, and the current Federal presence in Selma.

LBJ: Yeah?

Moyers: This is Bill.

LBJ: What happened with Martin Luther King?

Moyers: I didn't call you back because it was 4 o'clock when he finally called back. But, the whole arrangement is this that they will march. They'll march at the same point they were. They'll sing and pray for less than an hour. And then disperse peacefully. Wallace says he will, he will - he will maintain law and order. He doesn't know what will happen to the rowdies and toughs but he will maintain law and order. He said he's talking about calling up the National Guard which we don't want him to do. And the way we suggested to Ellington that he handle it is to say that - he's just talking as an individual - but he knows that telegrams and everything have been flowing into

Washington urging the President to do something and that if Wallace calls up the National Guard to halt the march, it will only increase the pressure on Justice to use the National Guard to protect the marchers. So Ellington is, at this very moment, talking to Wallace. And, that's where it stands. Very tenuous, but that's it.

LBJ: Why wouldn't they go with the other – what they agreed on earlier? Join the court, join and send...

BM: Collins down?

LBJ: Yeah.

Moyers: He says that his...

LBJ: Who is he, now?

Moyers: King says his left wingers will not let the day go by without some symbol of a march. With all these people pouring in there, he's just got to establish that they have the principal, at least, to march. And the pressure is too much, he claims, from that side. Katzenbach told me, about 7, that he talked to him again and that he was very fearful for his life. And he really wanted out of it, but he couldn't get out of it, at least, a token march around Selma at this time. It will start at 11 o'clock our time and the best we can do now is just hope that Wallace will be true to his word and that King will break them up peacefully after 35 or 40 minutes of singing and praying.

LBJ: Well now, what are we doing in the way of Federal people there?

Moyers: We have more than the usual number of FBI agents and that's about it. The question is should extra marshals go in there? And there's a bad and good side to that. The bad side is that any effort to put a federal presence in there would only likely cause Wallace to feel that he's being pressured and confronted. And he might go in the wrong direction. The problem is that if there are no more federal presence there than the FBI and John Doer. How does it look if things go wrong? And we've done nothing more than that - a risk on either side. And, I think Katzenbach leans to just doing nothing more than what we're doing right now because of the delicate nature of the agreement.

LBJ: Shouldn't we have something to say about it this morning?

Moyers: Let me talk to Kazenbach. We meet at... Yes. I think so Mr. President. I think we would say that Katzenbach has gone in as a friend of the court and that you very much hope that this will go into the court and that a favorable resolution will be achieved that way. Katzenbach want to may say something a little stronger and then come out strong on voting and the right to vote and the protection of the rights of the individual and the use of the courts and the federal government to enforce the courts. Of course, Wallace indicated yesterday, in fact he said he wanted us to go into the courts. But Nick and I will work on a statement and have it before too long.

LBJ: Okay. I'd, I'd have it for sure when George and...

Moyers: Alright. Alright, I'll get it in time, though, for you to look at it carefully.

LBJ: Okay.

Moyers: Thank you.

Civil rights groups and activists led efforts to put an end to the discriminatory voting practices. On March 15, 1965, weeks after the violence in Selma, President Johnson gave a speech before a joint-session of Congress, calling upon it to enact a bill that would strike down restrictions at the local, state, and federal levels, which prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote.

On August 6, 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law. The bill provided for direct federal action to enable African Americans to register and vote. Nationwide it prohibited the denial of the right to vote based on literacy tests and expanded voting rights for non-English speaking Americans. In 1969, in his final press conference as President, Johnson cited passage of the Voting Rights Act as his greatest accomplishment.

To learn more about the events that took place during the Johnson Administration, visit the Presidential Timeline at [www.presidentialtimeline.org](http://www.presidentialtimeline.org).