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The Best Intentions: How Lyndon Johnson Lost the War on Poverty

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Abstract

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty during his first State of the Union address. The policies that followed were designed to support the most economically vulnerable citizens and promote integration and equality. In spite of this progress, civil unrest throughout the 1960s had the effect of shifting the feelings of White people from supportive to fearful. Riots and protests across the country demanding equality, rather than garner sympathy for their cause, generated renewed calls for law and order. Only a year after announcing his War on Poverty, Johnson pivoted and declared a War on Crime, greatly expanding police powers and resources. By laying this groundwork, Johnson unwittingly set in motion the carceral crisis we still observe today. Through my research, I sought to uncover how the relationship between criminality, skin color, and White fears evolved during the Johnson administration. Why was criminality assigned to and constructed within the characteristic of being Black? What pressure was Johnson under that caused him to change his strategy? To answer these questions, I drew on the work of other sociolegal scholars, historians, theoreticians of presidential power, specific laws passed during the 1960s, and statistics regarding rates of incarceration.

Introduction

In the United States today, over 1.9 million people are incarcerated, almost 4 million are on probation or parole, and 79 million have a criminal record.[1] These astonishing statistics reveal a program of carcerality that is unrivaled in the rest of the world. Much has been written about

President Richard Nixon's War on Drugs, and significant blame for this current condition is placed at his feet.[2] Undoubtedly, Nixon's fixated attention toward combating drugs and crime fueled the massive rise of imprisonment, particularly for Black Americans, but his law-and-order policies are not the only contributing factor in this lamentable equation. In the years before Nixon, President Lyndon B. Johnson implemented and oversaw some of the most consequential and longstanding domestic programs since the Rooseveltian New Deal. The Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, Fair Housing Act, and enactment of Medicare are perhaps some of the greatest accomplishments of his tenure. These programs were part of Johnson's stated goal of improving the lives of his country's citizens through intelligent and targeted intervention by the federal government. However, despite his promise to "replace their despair with opportunity," Johnson would usher in a War on Crime that contributed to the deprivation, incarceration, and devastation of those living in those urban communities he was initially most keen on supporting.[3]

What were the causes of this shift from the lofty Great Society goals that marked the beginning of Johnson's presidency to the focus on criminality that punctuated its end? How did support for the principles of the Civil Rights Movement turn to skepticism of its methods in the minds of its most ardent White supporters? And why did Johnson concede to his harshest critics by bringing the might of the federal government to bear on Black urban centers with a War on Crime that ultimately evolved into the catastrophe of incarceration we are witnessing today? These are the questions I intend to answer through the synthesis of works from sociolegal scholars, historians, theoreticians of presidential power, and an analysis of individual pieces of legislation enacted during Johnson's reign. I will show that it was ultimately the will of Johnson's constituents—the majority-White, landowning, and voting public—that coerced the president into abandoning his dream of a Great Society. Those citizens, who would otherwise have supported

equality, cowered at the news reports of cities on fire in the wake of protests during the Civil Rights Movement. They began to conflate Black skin color with notions of criminality and thereby participated—unwittingly or otherwise—in the subjugation of those who would have benefitted the most from Johnson's policies. This retraction of White support forced the president to realign his goals from fighting a War on Poverty to commencing a War on Crime. The perceptible shift in attitude ultimately paved the way for a staunch law-and-order politician like Nixon to step in, build upon Johnson's groundwork, and undertake the greatest carceral experiment ever attempted.

Although Johnson entered the presidency with the best intentions, he left it having contradicted himself in his application of federal power to the problems of urban governance. What began as a concept of supporting those less fortunate and ensuring the ideals of liberty were granted to every citizen, Johnson's shift to advocating for the enforcement of law and order created the conditions for his own goals to be undermined. Rather than ushering in an era of peace and prosperity, the Great Society is widely regarded as a failure and the War on Crime that took its place is still raging in our cities today.[4] It would seem unlikely that a man so committed to the principles of fairness and equality of opportunity would so readily open the door for those concepts to be discarded. While there has been previous scholarly debate over how the conflation of race with criminality originated, as well as exploration of the idea that the bloody fight for civil rights unintentionally alienated some of its supporters in the long run, these analyses have largely regarded Johnson as a singular actor upon the stage of politics. They often fail to account for the obligations and societal pressures that bombard the president and instead consider him to be operating independent of this influence. What my paper offers to this field of study is the contention that presidential power is not wielded solely by the officeholder but is granted to him conditionally by the constituents under his care. Should the will of the people falter, the president

will waver with them. In Johnson's case, it was not an independent desire to initiate a carceral state that drove him to forestall his Great Society, but, as I will show, it was the capricious feelings of the voting public—White liberals and conservatives alike—that caused him to realign his goals.

Ambitious Beginnings and Criminal Ends

> *"This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America."*
>
> - President Lyndon B. Johnson, State of the Union Address, January 8, 1964.[5]

In his first State of the Union address, President Johnson declared a war on poverty with the intention of providing all people of the United States the means to pursue their own versions of the American Dream. Johnson had ascended the office after the assassination of his predecessor, President John F. Kennedy, just a few months prior and was prepared to implement his own conceptions of liberal government in the pursuit of this aim. The Texan's meager upbringing cemented in his mind the idea that any person could make something of themselves if they were only guaranteed the principles of justice, equality, liberty, and opportunity.[6] With these principles in mind, and by harnessing the power of the martyred Kennedy's memory, Johnson launched a campaign of reform through his first years in office. Perhaps the most consequential of the several proceeding bills was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Originally spearheaded by Kennedy, the mantle was picked up by Johnson who lobbied Congress in support of the bill, its intent being the outlawing of discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.[7] The passage of this landmark statute set the tone for the incoming president's administration, which continued to have legislative successes well into the later years of its reign.

With the signing of the Economic Opportunity Act in August 1964, Johnson began in earnest his War on Poverty.[8] The bill implemented several strategies to fight destitution which including the formation of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Community Action Agencies, Job Corps, funding for adult education, job training, and small business loans.[9] These policies, Johnson hoped, would usher in a new era of American prosperity and lift the most downtrodden communities in the country out of poverty. There is an argument to be made for the effectiveness of this strategy. During the latter half of the 1960s, and continuing into the early years of the 1970s, the percentage of people living below the poverty line was halved.[10] In addition, the number of incarcerated individuals decreased by the thousands every consecutive year throughout the entirety of Johnson's presidency.[11] The correlation between economic prosperity and crime has long been established, lending further credence to the notion that the War on Poverty was actually treating some of the root causes of disorder and crime without relying on excessive police intervention or the warehousing of those deemed undesirable by the general public. Although in the long run these successes were only temporary, at the time Johnson's Great Society seemed to be well on its way.

Despite the lofty goals, intelligent design, and apparent viability of the War on Poverty, its efficacy would be curtailed as Johnson's administration was marred by civil unrest in the nation's urban centers. Even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and its associated equality programs, people in underserved communities still recognized the structural disadvantages faced by those who had been subjugated and discriminated against for generations. A single year of beneficial legislation could not undo these disparities, and so the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement marched on. Starting with the Harlem Riots in 1964 and the Watts Riot in 1965, the public struggle for equality reached its crescendo in 1967 with a "long, hot summer" of unrest.[12] The destruction, desolation, and death that accompanied the rioting, along with the increasing prevalence of

television and sensationalist news, generated within the minds of many White people the feeling that the Black recipients of Johnson's welfare policies were undeserving of aid. Conservatives believed "unrest or rebellion was the responsibility of individuals, not society…Therefore the fault belonged first and foremost to the black rioters and looters themselves."[13] Liberals, even though they recognized "a growing sense of relative deprivation" among Black community members, still could not condone the razing of homes and businesses in their city centers.[14]

Johnson's White voter base—liberals and conservatives alike—began perceiving the Black struggle for civil rights as evidence of increasing violence in their neighborhoods and started to pressure the president to enforce law and order in cities across the country. It is here that Johnson was forced to concede parts of his Great Society in order to pacify outspoken opponents while also trying to maintain the essence of what his War on Poverty was about. Elizabeth Hinton summarizes his predicament succinctly:

> President Johnson found himself on tenuous ground. He needed to placate liberals and respond to the riots so that it did not appear that he ignored the problem of urban poverty, but growing conservative reactions to civil rights gains and sensationalized depictions of urban civil disorder meant that the president could not appear to concede to rioters or reward their actions. [Johnson declared,] "Effective law enforcement and social justice must be pursued together, as the foundation of our efforts against crime."[15]

With these competing forces at play, Johnson chose the middle ground. He attempted to continue funding social programs, still convinced that poverty was the true cause of all social disorder, while at the same time calling for increased support for law enforcement and condemning those he characterized as looters and rioters.[16] On March 8, 1965, barely a year after the initiation of his

War on Poverty, Johnson sent a Special Message to Congress calling for their support in combatting this perceived delinquency through enhanced funding of local police agencies, dismantling of organized crime, curtailing the distribution of drugs, and restrictive gun control measures. Although he did reiterate in his message that efforts to alleviate poverty would ultimately decrease crime, in referring to the "role of the individual" as the starting point of criminality, and to a "crime rate [that] continues to increase," Johnson implicitly accepted the conservative construction of the causes and responses necessary for the resolution of criminality.[17]

For the rest of his presidency, Johnson would work to regain control over the most disruptive segments of the population through the implementation of policies designed to support and expand law enforcement. In 1968, he signed the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (OCCSSA) which greatly increased the number of federal grants available to police and extended the power of the state to surveille its subjects. In addition to providing funding for local law enforcement programs, the Act set the standard for obtaining wiretap orders which allowed police to spy on "organized criminals" and bring private conversations into courts of law.[18] Perhaps most indicative of Johnson's shift in priorities was the OCCSSA's creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), the agency tasked with coordinating this massive instrument of federal assistance. The LEAA would later be responsible for promoting local crime control initiatives like the infamous CRASH unit in Los Angeles, as well as inflating police budgets across the country.[19]

Not only did the OCCSSA contribute to the militarization of law enforcement still observable today by funding purchases of body armor and weapons of war, but the law also included a critical—if often overlooked—section that directly targeted those participating in the struggle for civil rights. Title V expressly prohibits any person convicted of inciting, participating

in, or supporting a riot or act of civil disorder from holding any government position for a minimum of five years.[20] What this section reveals is the dichotomy with which Johnson governed. While at the same time working to moderate the plight of Black Americans and progress civil rights, the president armed police, denounced protestors, and prohibited those who might actually represent their constituents the best from attaining any congressional office or government appointment. These actions, as I will show in the coming sections, were not the will of one man but instead the insidious combination of White voters' fears of inflated crime rates, the conflation of Black skin color with criminality, and an apparatus of political power which constrained the ability of the president to enact his agenda as he so envisioned.

Characterizing the Problem

> *"A rioter with a Molotov cocktail in his hands is not fighting for civil rights any more than a Klansman with a sheet on his back and mask on his face. They are both more or less what the law declares them: lawbreakers, destroyers of constitutional rights and liberties, and ultimately destroyers of a free America."*
>
> - President Lyndon B. Johnson, remarks at the White House conference on equal employment opportunities, August 20, 1965.[21]

The struggle for civil rights is perhaps the most consequential political movement to have taken place on American soil since the Revolution that formed the country itself. In the 1960s, although slavery had been outlawed for decades and the project of integration was well underway, Black people still found themselves at a significant disadvantage in terms of their employment opportunities, income, health outcomes, and housing availability when compared to their White neighbors.[22] President Johnson, having ascended the office riding a wave of liberalism and an increased sense among White voters of the need for fairness and equality, pushed hard to pass the

Civil Rights Act in 1964. While this and other programs, such as efforts to provide economic opportunities and housing accessibility to those in disadvantaged neighborhoods, were widely supported, there was a sense of disagreement among officials and the public alike as to what caused these disparities in the first place. Johnson felt strongly that structural and societal issues were to blame and intended to use federal funds to target these discrepancies. Some of his contemporaries such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a scholar and academic serving as Assistant Secretary of Labor, believed it was a breakdown of the Black family unit and failure at the individual level that limited their success. The Moynihan Report, published in 1965, was intended to solve this apparent mystery of Black poverty. What Moynihan concluded was that "The steady expansion of this welfare program, as of public assistance programs in general, can be taken as a measure of the steady disintegration of the Negro family structure over the past generation."[23]

No single document had such disastrous implications for Johnson's goals as the Moynihan Report did when it was published. Not only did its author claim that the War on Poverty was not effective, but he also argued that those policies were actually operating in opposition to their stated intentions. Moynihan laid the blame for Black poverty at Johnson's own feet and reinforced the White hegemonic conception of the family unit by contending that its breakdown was commensurate with societal decay. Ultimately, it did not matter whether Moynihan's research was flawed or whether his conclusions had any merit, his report gave conservatives ammunition with which to attack Johnson's policies and even made many liberals reconsider their views. After all, as the logic goes, Blacks and Whites were now finally equal under law, so discrimination could be no excuse for their disadvantaged position in society. With newspapers latching onto this message and repeated airings of riots being played on television, "more and more Americans would come

to believe that the Great Society, in general, and the War on Poverty, in particular, were not antidotes to urban unrest, but the abettors of it."[24]

To add to these inflamed tensions, the struggle for civil rights was far from resolved by the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Only months after the bill was signed into law, thousands of Black people took to the streets in Harlem, NY to protest the enduring and excessive instances of police brutality they experienced in their neighborhood resulting in days of unrest, hundreds of injuries, and millions of dollars in damage.[25] A poll conducted shortly after the Harlem Riots revealed that "53 percent of Americans were more worried about safety in the streets than a year earlier."[26] As the rebellious summers of the late 1960s wore on, more and more White people began to question their own ideological priorities. Unable to reconcile why Black urbanites would still feel the need to raze businesses and battle in the streets with police after being granted equality under law, many Whites felt—if unconsciously in some cases—that there must be some other, pathological problem at play, rather than decades of structural issues that were finally being redressed. Randall Woods summarizes elegantly:

> By the fall of 1967, restoring law and order meant putting down urban riots. Polls showed that the racial crisis was now the nation's chief domestic concern. Even among those without an ideological axe to grind, there was a growing perception that the nation was in the grip of a crime wave and that the vast majority of criminals were black…Predictably, the Detroit and Newark riots hardened racial stereotyping among many whites. Blacks were lazy, immoral, less intelligent—people who wanted something for nothing. White America had extended its hand, and look what happened.[27]

This shift in public sentiment can be credited with causing the abrupt change in the Johnson administration's priorities from fighting poverty to fighting crime. The longer protests in city centers raged on, the more White voters pressured the president to address the apparent violence in their neighborhoods. By aiming to redirect the imposing force of ever-worsening public opinion polls, Johnson found himself compelled to address the problem of urban violence.[28] Federal support for law enforcement was seen as a necessary step in returning a sense of law and order to neighborhoods across the country. In the minds of the voting public, "rioters were assumed to be violent criminals who victimized those law enforcement authorities acting in their own self-defense and in defense of the American social order."[29] By categorizing the struggle for equality as an attack on White society, Johnson was made to change his target to a War on Crime.

Even if we can grant some concessions to those White individuals who equated protests for equal rights with an increased sense of violence and disorder in their neighborhoods, there was a more insidious conflation occurring at the same time that perhaps played a more important role in the defeat of the War on Poverty. With the implementation of Johnson's Great Society policies, many people believed that racism had been overcome. Only 26 percent of Americans in a 1965 Gallup poll felt the struggle for civil rights was a problem facing the nation.[30] Discrimination was outlawed, housing was being built, economic opportunities were abundant, and the Great Society seemed to be succeeding. With that background in place, when analyzing disparities between Blacks and Whites, the assumption of all things being equal places any failure or fault on the individual actor and no consideration is given to structural issues that could still be affecting those unequal outcomes. This idea that all people were starting on a level playing field contributed to the conflation of Blackness with crime by ignoring cultural, structural, and historical differences and assigning normalcy to hegemonic White society. President Johnson, by choosing to usurp his

poverty programs in favor of combatting crime, added to this conflation by legitimizing it in the eyes of the public. His support of law enforcement through the OCCSSA made it apparent that the administration would no longer target the structural issues that the War on Poverty strove to resolve. Instead, it would focus on addressing urban rioting as a crime issue. Since most of those involved in the protests were Black, and by ignoring their actual calls for equality, civil disobedience, criminality, and Blackness were all combined and conflated into a single entity that could be addressed by law enforcement. Johnson and his constituents, as their words and actions demonstrate, certainly believed that "the law was now clean, so the lawbreakers were truly to blame."[31]

Why Johnson Went Along

> *"You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair."*
>
> - President Lyndon B. Johnson, commencement address at Howard University, June 4, 1965.[32]

What I have traced thus far is the trajectory of President Lyndon Johnson's administration, its relevant laws and major events, and its notable shift in priority from fighting a War on Poverty to a War on Crime. These two conflicting goals seem incompatible with one another, yet they were proposed and implemented by the same man. What is even more surprising is the speed with which this shift occurred. Barely a year after announcing his War on Poverty, Johnson was petitioning Congress to support law enforcement agencies around the country so they might control urban uprisings more effectively. This change, I argue, was the result of political and public pressures that influence the office of the president much more than any single person holding that office

could contend with. There are two major theories on presidential power that I will draw upon for this analysis. Fred Block argues from a Marxist perspective that class struggle offers a structural factor that state leaders must contend with in their decision making.[33] Stephen Skowronek, on the other hand, articulates a temporal theory of the presidency in which the executive's power is curtailed by public sentiment at the time in which they are elected.[34] Both these views offer insights into the apparent dichotomy of the Johnson administration and help explain why his shifting priorities contributed to the carceral crisis we still observe today.

Inherently, the president is beholden to those who elected him. While most executives do attempt to avoid alienating those citizens in the opposing party, the fact remains that in order to be reelected, the president must maintain the goodwill of his primary voting bloc. Johnson, who only served one full term, undoubtedly had this on his mind while trying to steer the country in the direction he thought was morally required. As has been discussed above, Johnson was a strong proponent for equality of opportunity and truly believed in supporting the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement with laws and policies designed to address structural issues in the Black community. What he failed to recognize, however, was that his majority-White voters would begin to equate the concept of Blackness with criminality through depictions of rioting spread throughout the country by the ever-advancing technology of media. Naomi Murakawa argues that this conflation was in many cases purposeful, as in order to pressure their representatives to pursue progress in the civil rights arena "liberals relied on a political strategy of compelling reform by making black people seem damaged and potentially violent."[35] While perhaps effective when measured by the quantity of equality-promoting laws passed during the Johnson administration, it also resulted in the alienation of White voters by making them fearful of racialized violence. This fear can be observed, in one of many instances, by the resistance of Whites to integrate their suburban

neighborhoods even while vocally supporting policies that promoted equal housing opportunity.[36] In essence, the criminalization of Black people through both the intentional methods described above and the unconscious marrying of race with ideas of delinquency created a shift in Johnson's White voting bloc and thereby pressured the administration to lessen its focus on poverty and begin waging a war on crime.

Through the lens of racialized class struggle, it can be argued that this political pressure was one driven by anxieties of Black people competing for labor, housing, and resources that were previously dominated by Whites. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was one of the first major pieces of legislation brought forth in the fight against poverty and distinctly targeted downtrodden areas with funds for job creation and worker training.[37] While the bill was outwardly race-neutral, it was an obvious response to the migration of Black workers who had moved North over the previous decades to escape the stifling conditions of the Jim Crow South.[38] It is easy to imagine that White workers, many of whom were in just as dire an economic situation as their Black neighbors, equated the establishment of a welfare system with providing handouts to Black people that were no more deserving of assistance than they themselves were.[39] It is also not inconceivable—and has actually been empirically shown—that White peoples' attitudes toward Black people in general negatively influences their feelings about the legitimacy of government-provided welfare.[40] Adding in the continuous flareups of civil unrest and it becomes plain that Whites began to feel that Black protesters were asking for more than equal rights; they were demanding a special kind of attention that had not previously been granted to White people. This jealousy and sense of unfairness, particularly in those White workers who were not a part of the wealthiest strata of the population, led to increasing pressure being put on the Johnson administration to address the rioting and disorder in city centers. Johnson, who had won 59 percent

of the White vote, 71 percent of the vote from workers in manual occupations, and 73 percent of the vote from labor union families, was compelled to address these issues and bend to the will of his constituents.[41] Through this mechanism of economic and class struggle, we can see that Johnson, beholden to those who elected him, was pressured to alter his stance on the War on Poverty and forced to begin a War on Crime in its stead.

A second theory on presidential power, forwarded by Stephen Skowronek, might offer another insight into Johnson's wavering commitment to his Great Society programs. He posits that an executive's ability to garner support for their agenda is greatly influenced by their temporal location along a scale measured by public sentiment.[42] In Johnson's case, he ascended the office after the untimely death of the eminently popular Kennedy and was thereby compelled to continue legislating along the path the late president had chosen. In Skowronek's words, Johnson inherited the role of regime manager and was "challenged not to break down the old order and forge a new one, but to complete the agenda."[43] In a sense, Johnson's personal ideas about forging a Great Society were less relevant than the fact that his predecessor had already planted the seeds of those ideas in the minds of the voting public. It can also be argued that the notion of Black delinquency, which would be capitalized upon and expanded by conservatives later, originated with the Kennedy administration and simply grew throughout the Johnson presidency. Kennedy's Juvenile Delinquency Act of 1961 attempted to target the causes of disorder among Black youth, inherently placing the blame on the disintegration of Black families—which Moynihan would later amplify—and creating a roadmap for what would become the War on Crime by introducing the ideas of law and order into those most disadvantaged areas.[44] Within this framework, Johnson was simply acting out the path that had been laid before him by others. As public sentiment shifted, Johnson was forced to acquiesce and abandon his construction of a Great Society for the offensive against

crime that his constituents called for. What makes Skowronek's ideas even more compelling is the fact that President Nixon, Johnson's successor, won the election on a strong law-and-order platform and by opposing the welfare programs that had been put in place by his predecessor.[45]

What remains in both Block and Skowronek's work is the assumption that presidents have little personal agency in determining the direction of the country. While to what degree this agency extends is unanswerable, it can be argued that even the most unrestricted executives are beholden to their constituents to the extent necessary that supports their party's reelection. In Johnson's case, although he had strong personal ideas about equality and opportunity, he was still a first-term president and was forced to give concessions to his opposition while campaigning. Johnson's administration, rather than remove the influence of public opinion, "systematically tracked [it] using both published and private opinion surveys."[46] This is a critical factor which supports the reliability of both theories and demonstrates how shifting public sentiment can persuade the executive to alter a political strategy, even when that strategy has been shown to be effective. Ultimately, Johnson would not seek a second term, but this decision was not made until eight months before the 1968 election, well after his War on Crime initiative had been well underway.[47] Through forces that shape political power, the president was beholden to public opinion and swayed by its abandonment of welfare programs. This shift in the minds of White voters that I have described therefore directly influenced Johnson's own policy goals and contributed to the criminalization of Black Americans, the initiation of the War on Crime, and the subsequent carceral crisis we still experience today.

Conclusion

As I have shown, there were several important developments that occurred during the Johnson presidency which contributed to the failed experiment in mass incarceration America is

currently participating in. While he entered the office riding a wave of populism, driven largely by the memory of the late Kennedy, Johnson's priorities quickly shifted away from providing welfare and instead began funding what can only be described as urban warfare. With the passing of the Civil Rights Act and various other equality-promoting laws in the early days of his tenure, Johnson unwittingly established a sense in his constituents that a level playing field had finally been established. Why then, with all the same opportunities available to them—in theory anyway—did Black Americans have such a disparity in outcome? And why, with discrimination officially abolished, did Black Americans continue to protest injustice and demand civil rights? These were the questions White voters asked themselves as the long years of the Johnson presidency wore on. The Moynihan Report, which drew a correlation between welfare policies and increased rates of Black familial illegitimacy, along with sensationalized news reports of a crime wave gripping the country, fed the flames of discontent in the minds of the White citizens. They began to feel as though their Black neighbors were asking for more than equal rights, they were demanding special treatment and willing to raze businesses and indeed entire cities in order to get them. Not only did these tensions develop into disdain for Johnson's War on Poverty and a sense of distrust for their disadvantaged neighbors, but it also contributed to a conflation of Blackness with criminality that still haunts our carceral system today.

In the realm of political theory, it is apparent that Johnson was beholden to the will of his constituents and was compelled to alter course as their support for his Great Society faltered. The competition for employment that accompanied the equalization of economic opportunity drove Johnson's voters to question the efficacy of his programs. In addition, the shifting of public sentiment toward calls for law and order forced the administration to acquiesce and begin funding law enforcement programs in earnest. In essence, "the Great Society's welfare initiatives collapsed

in important part because the administration was unable to maintain order while expanding liberty."[48] In the aftermath of the Johnson presidency, these calls for law and order led to the election of Richard Nixon and the implementation of a War on Drugs that decimated the same population Johnson initially intended to support. What I have demonstrated in this paper is the way in which public sentiment drove executive policy during the 1960s and how public unrest, a characteristic of the Civil Rights Movement, contributed to the conflation of Blackness with criminality. In so doing, I have illuminated at least one of the root causes and catalysts of America's modern carceral crisis and I hope further research in this area will result in actionable proposals for its just resolution.

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