**A Brief History Black Struggles for Liberation in the United States**

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Enslaved Africans were first brought, through violence and coercion, by British colonists to the Americas in 1619. The first slaves arrived in what would become New York City in 1625. Slavery did not end with British rule in the 1780s. The importation of enslaved Africans was sanctioned in the U.S. Constitution until 1808. Slavery was not outlawed in the United States until the passage of the 13th amendment in 1865.

***The John Punch Case (1640)***

*An indentured servant was someone who had their passage paid for to come to the United States in exchange for working off the debt for an agreed upon number of years. The practice was very common until Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 with poor Blacks and whites coming to Britain’s American colonies as indentured servants. During the time of their servitude, indentured servants were beholden to the demands and violence of their masters. Unlike enslaved peoples, however, indentured servants were granted their freedom after their “debt” was paid off.*

*In 1640 three indentured servants ran away from their “master” before their time had been completed. They were captured and placed in front of a tribunal to be judged for their crime of running away. The first two runaways, both white, received three years added to their service. The final indentured servant who had fled, a Black man named John Punch, was sentenced to a lifetime of service. This was the first time in U.S. history that different treatment based on race found its way into the legal system of the American colonies. (Coates)*

The racial classification laws of the 17th century codified differential treatment between white and Black people living in the American colonies. Legally and socially, Black Americans became officially outsiders, or “Others”. It is from this point that modern conceptions of race developed in the United States. Racial categories are not natural, and race is not biological. Racial categories were created and codified in law overtime to develop and maintain a social and economic system that benefited those at the top—wealthy white men.

Before the ending of the 17th century there were Africans in Britain’s American colonies who had basic economic and political rights. In what would become New York City some Blacks even owned property. However, as “racial” categories began to take hold, laws began to be enacted that would strip Africans of their social, political and economic rights. Throughout the 18th century, these rights continued to be stripped away, and second-class personhood was enforced for individuals with Black skin.

The capture, transportation and enslavement of Africans became big business. Enormous wealth could be made by families who transported and owned “enslaved Africans.” New York City would be a center of the slave trade, financing more expeditions to get slaves from Africa than any other U.S. city at the turn of the 19th century. The wealth collected by white people from Southern plantations to the Slave Market that sat at the foot of Wall Street was passed down

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from fathers to sons, to grandsons, to great grandsons. It is brutally ironic that the American Founding Fathers who talked about freedom and equality denied such freedoms to hundreds of thousands of their fellow humans at the time of Independence from England.

The relentless and structurally violent commitment to strip Blacks of personhood in the American colonies and early United States expanded as legal distinctions became justified by racist theories which were enshrined in the books, discussions and ideas. Enslaved Africans and all Black skinned persons became viewed as animals, not possessing souls, lacking intelligence, designed to be brutalized and therefore destined for perpetual forced labor (slavery). This stood in direct contradiction with ideals of freedom and liberty that the writers and signers of the American Constitution so valued. White “freedom” from the English could be had on the backs of captured men, women and children simply based on their Black skin. The framers of the U.S. Constitution would leave it to a future generation to address the inconsistency and structural violence sutured into the nation’s foundation.

Throughout our country’s history, there has always been racialized State violence and oppression. As important there has always been powerful, multi-racial resistance, Black intellectual and political leadership, progressive religious groups, abolitionists willing to risk their lives for collective freedom.

Generations of abolitionists advocated for the ending of chattel slavery. A wide mobilization of people throughout the U.S. fought to preserve the country when 11 Southern States decided that slavery, and the ownership of Black humans, was so important to them that they separated themselves from the United States of America and formed their own country. Even after the South’s defeat in the Civil War, the desire to maintain the structures of White Supremacy remained strong for Southern Whites who passed a series of “Black Codes” that relegated Black southerners to second class citizens. Many further attempted to enforce the subordination of African Americans through terrorism of institutions including the Ku Klux Klan and the White League, formed in the years following the Civil War. A series of post-Civil War massacres against African Americans including in Memphis Tennessee (1866) and Colfax Louisiana (1873) exposed many U.S. citizens to the harsh reality that racial injustice would not be easily eradicated.

A broad coalition of religious, political and everyday people mobilized, with Black intellectual and political leadership at the forefront, rejecting a return to the way things were before the Civil War. They sought out to reconstruct the South in a more inclusive way. People galvanized to pass the **Civil Rights Act of 1866** defining citizenship for all men (Americans) regardless of previous condition of servitude, and to pass the Reconstruction Amendments. Despite the limitations of these initiatives discussed in previous chapters, enormous progress toward racial equality was advanced in the decade following the Civil War. White Confederates who had just taken up arms against the United States were excluded from running for office by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the same time, over 2000 Southern Blacks would hold political office in Southern States, including fourteen congressmen, two Senators and a Governor of Louisiana.

The year 1877 marked the end of Reconstruction. Federal troops were withdrawn from the U.S. South as part of a compromise to settle the contested election of 1876. Over the next few decades

White Southerners would advance to reverse racial progress. They mobilized to strip the gains of African Americans and re-exert their political, cultural and economic authority. This was the start of the Jim Crow era that would last nearly 100 years.

World War I (1914-1918) seemed like an opportunity for Black Americans to advance toward economic and legal equality. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson entered the war in 1917 claiming he sought to “make the world safe for democracy.” Blacks, who had largely been stripped of the right to vote in the U.S. South, hoped their participation in the conflict would lead to true democracy at home, as well as abroad. Leading Black thinkers including W.E.B. DuBois even encouraged blacks to participate in the war, anticipating that military service would secure rights for African Americans in the United States. And yet, despite African American troops serving with distinction alongside French forces in the conflict, African American troops returned home to a nation determined to preserve white supremacy. DuBois would come to regret his pro-war stance. The 1910s mark one of the bloodiest decades in history. Blacks faced a re-emergent KKK as Whites sought to violently dispel any hopes for equality developed as African American soldiers fought for the United States in Europe. The Summer of 1919 has been termed the **Red Summer**. Aptly named for the extraordinary levels of violence enacted by Whites against Black communities as African American soldiers returned home from the War. Unsurprisingly many historians mark the 1910s as the beginning of the **Great Migration** North for African Americans, fleeing terrorism and economic persecution enforced by White Southerners.

*Assignment: In a paragraph explain why White Americans increased their violence against African American communities as Black soldiers returned home from World War I in 1919.*

During and after World War II, the Civil Rights movement gained traction again. Americans were fighting Nazi white supremacy abroad and yet witnessed segregation and discrimination at home. The **Double V Campaign**, a movement initiated by Black activists to secure victory against white supremacy at home, and victory against fascism abroad, made substantial progress during and after World War II in eroding legal segregation. A threat of a march on Washington forced President Roosevelt to desegregate the defense industry. It is not a coincidence that Major League Baseball was desegregated just two years after the war ended in 1947. *Brown v The Board of Education, Kansas of Topeka* ruled in 1954 that segregation in public education was not in keeping with the U.S. Constitution’s “Equal Protection Clause” found in the Fourteenth Amendment. Some have argued that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was an attempt to placate Blacks in the U.S. who were becoming deeply frustrated and angered by the prolonged racism and segregation of the United States, with a substantial group growing more radicalized with an interest in socialism, communism and Black nationalism. This fight took place in the U.S. South, but also the North. The struggle for Black liberation was waged in the courts and also the streets.

***The Harlem 9***

*The Brown case was decided in 1954, and five years later, in 1959, a group called* ***The Harlem 9****—nine Black mothers of children in Harlem who were attending segregated, ill- equipped, under-financed schools in New York—conducted a strike and withheld their children from school. The effort was led by an unsung civil rights warrior Mae Mallory, an activist for*

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*school desegregation, finance equity and Black power. In 1959, the parents were criminally charged for taking their children out of segregated schools. “We will go to jail and rot there, if necessary, but our children will not go to Jr. High Schools 136, 139 or 120,” Mrs. Viola Waddy told the city’s Department of Education and police. The case went to court. In the famous Skipworth decision, Judge Justine Wise Polier determined that the mothers’ mobilization was an act of love, not neglect, mandating that New York City dedicate resources to these schools and toward desegregation. (Back)*

The 1960s saw major protests for racial justice erupt on the streets across the nation. Social movements provoked legislative and judicial changes, and backlash followed. This pattern is well inscribed in our history. Following the passage of Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s, the implementation of *de facto* segregation through practices like **redlining** took hold in many communities and cities around the country. Many had come to the point where they realize that civil rights did not just mean integration and voting rights, but the “basic rights to be free from unequal treatment...in such settings as employment, education, housing, and access to public facilities.” Civil rights activists worked – then and now - to ensure the protection of individuals from arbitrary and discriminatory treatment by the government and also to ensure that the government acts to prevent individuals or groups from receiving unequal treatment by private citizens.

The **Civil Rights Act of 1964** was passed by Congress to prevent the violation of the civil rights of Black Americans, as well as other historically marginalized populations. The Act outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Passed in part as a reaction to the many White Americans especially (but not only) in the Southern States, who were in favor of segregation, the goal was to address the systemic unequal treatment that Black Americans were forced to deal with on a daily basis in many localities. While favored and advocated by President Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat, many whites in the Democratic Party disapproved of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, left the Democratic Party and joined the Republican Party. This shift in the allegiance of Southern White was no accident. Republican leaders including President Richard Nixon actively cultivated white southern voters through poorly disguised racist policies that argued for “States Rights.” In those days – often like today – States Rights was a dog whistle for white supremacy, that is permitting Southern States to maintain the structures of White Supremacy without interference from the federal government. Between 1930 and 1980 Black voters abandoned the Party of Lincoln for the Democratic Party, as the political ideology of the Republican Party shifted radically against racial and civil rights.

The **Voting Rights Act of 1965** was passed by Congress in response to the attack by Alabama State Troopers and other law enforcement officials on peaceful marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on Sunday March 7, 1965. The barbaric attack by law-enforcement against civil rights marchers would be remembered as “Bloody Sunday.” The Voting Rights Act targeted those parts of the country where Congress believed that discrimination was greatest. The Act eliminated arbitrary, racist and widespread disenfranchisement tactics such as “literacy tests” that had been used to prevent Black people from voting. Signed into law by President Johnson, the Act helped Black Americans to overcome barriers to voting, a right guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment. Moreover, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a case entitled, *Harper v Virginia Board of Election* (1966) would recognize the State of Virginia’s use of “poll taxes” as

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unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The last major piece of Civil Rights legislation from this era was the **Fair Housing Act** (1968), which prohibited housing discrimination by race, religion, national origin, sex and family status. Passed in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April, 1968, just a week after the murder of this civil rights’ leader.

Moving into the current era, we witness the erosion of many of these civil rights victories. In 2013, in *Shelby Count v. Holder*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned key provisions in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 citing a so-called “post racial society.” No such society exists, yet the ruling has allowed Republican states to pass laws intended to discourage or prevent Black and poor voters from voting.

Vast discrepancies between white and Non-white Americans, particularly African Americans remain in terms of economic resources, political influence and social equity. Civil rights violations by law enforcement officials and within the judicial system, denial of access to equal employment, business and educational opportunities, substandard housing and health care all contribute to the vastly distinct experiences of Black and white Americans in this country.

Today, we as a nation are still trying to resolve many issues as Black Americans continue to receive unequal treatment. Recent events related to the intentional murder of George Floyd by four Minneapolis police officers reveal how deeply civil rights have been violated – even or especially by those supposed to “protect.”

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**Facing History: Urban History Post War-Great Society**

The decade and a half immediately following the end of World War II was one in which middle- and working- class Americans hoped for a better life than the one they lived before the war. These hopes were tainted by fears of economic hardship, as many who experienced the Great Depression feared a return to economic decline. Others clamored for the opportunity to spend the savings they had accumulated through long hours on the job during the war when consumer goods were rarely available.

African Americans who had served in the armed forces and worked in the defense industry did not wish to return to “normal.” Instead, they wanted the same rights and opportunities that other Americans had. Still other citizens were less concerned with the economy or civil rights; instead, they looked with suspicion at the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe. What would happen now that the United States and the Soviet Union were no longer allies, and the other nations that had long helped maintain a balance of power were left seriously damaged by the war? Harry Truman, president for less than a year when the war ended, was charged with addressing all of these concerns and giving the American people a “fair deal.”

**The GI Bill of Rights**

Well before the end of the war, Congress had passed one of the most significant and far-reaching pieces of legislation to ease veterans’ transition into civilian life: the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, also known as the **GI Bill.** Every honorably discharged veteran who had seen active duty, but not necessarily combat, was eligible to receive a year’s worth of unemployment compensation. This provision not only calmed veterans’ fears regarding their ability to support themselves, but it also prevented large numbers of men—as well as some women—from suddenly entering a job market that did not have enough positions for them. Another way that the GI Bill averted a glut in the labor market was by giving returning veterans the opportunity to pursue an education; it paid for tuition at a college or vocational school, and gave them a stipend to live on while they completed their studies.

The result was a dramatic increase in the number of students—especially male ones—enrolled in American colleges and universities. In 1940, only 5.5 percent of American men had a college degree. By 1950, that percentage had increased to 7.3 percent, as more than two million servicemen took advantage of the benefits offered by the GI Bill to complete college. The numbers continued to grow throughout the 1950s. Upon graduation, these men were prepared for skilled blue-collar or white-collar jobs that paved the way for many to enter the middle class. The creation of a well-educated, skilled labor force helped the U.S. economy as well. Other benefits offered by the GI Bill included low-interest loans to purchase homes or start small businesses.

However, not all veterans were able to take advantage of the GI Bill. African American veterans could use their educational benefits only to attend schools that accepted Black students. The approximately nine thousand servicemen and women who were dishonorably discharged because they were gay or lesbian were ineligible for GI Bill benefits. Benefits for some Mexican American veterans, mainly in Texas, were also denied or delayed.

While most veterans received assistance to help in their adjustment to postwar life, others returned home to an uncertain future without the promise of government aid to help them resume their prewar lives. Japanese Americans from the West Coast who had been interned during the war also confronted the task of rebuilding their lives. In December 1944, Franklin Roosevelt had declared an end to the forced relocation of Japanese Americans, and as of January 1945, they were free to return to their homes. In many areas, however, neighbors clung to their prejudices and denounced those of Japanese descent as disloyal and dangerous. These feelings had been worsened by wartime propaganda, which often featured horrific accounts of Japanese mistreatment of prisoners, and by the statements of military officers to the effect that the Japanese were inherently savage. Facing such animosity, many Japanese American families chose to move elsewhere. Those who did return often found that in their absence, “friends” and neighbors had sold possessions that had been left with them for safekeeping. Many homes had been vandalized and farms destroyed. When Japanese Americans reopened their businesses, former customers sometimes boycotted them.

**SUBURBANIZATION**

Even as many Americans remained mired in poverty, many others with limited economic opportunities, like African Americans or union workers, were better off financially in the 1950s and rose into the ranks of the middle class. Wishing to build the secure life that the Great Depression had deprived their parents of, young men and women married in record numbers and purchased homes where they could start families of their own. In 1940, the rate of homeownership in the United States was 43.6 percent. By 1960, it was almost 62 percent. Many of these newly purchased homes had been built in the new suburban areas that began to encircle American cities after the war. Although middle-class families had begun to move to the suburbs beginning in the nineteenth century, suburban growth accelerated rapidly after World War II.

Several factors contributed to this development. During World War II, the United States had suffered from a housing shortage, especially in cities with shipyards or large defense plants. Now that the war was over, real estate developers and contractors rushed to alleviate the scarcity. Unused land on the fringes of American cities provided the perfect place for new housing, which attracted not only the middle class, which had long sought homes outside the crowded cities, but also blue-collar workers who took advantage of the low-interest mortgages offered by the GI Bill.

An additional factor was the use of prefabricated construction techniques pioneered during World War II, which allowed houses complete with plumbing, electrical wiring, and appliances to be built and painted in a day. Employing these methods, developers built acres of inexpensive tract housing throughout the country. One of the first developers to take advantage of this method was William Levitt, who purchased farmland in Nassau County, Long Island, in 1947 and built thousands of prefabricated houses. The new community was named **Levittown**.

Levitt’s houses cost only $8,000 and could be bought with little or no down payment. The first day they were offered for sale, more than one thousand were purchased. Levitt went on to build similar developments, also called Levittown, in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. As developers around the country rushed to emulate him, the name Levittown became synonymous with suburban tract housing, in which entire neighborhoods were built to either a single plan or a mere handful of designs. The houses were so similar that workers told of coming home late at night and walking into the wrong one. Levittown homes were similar in other ways as well; most were owned by White families. Levitt used restrictive language in his agreements with potential homeowners to ensure that only White people would live in his communities.

In the decade between 1950 and 1960, the suburbs grew by 46 percent. The transition from urban to suburban life exerted profound effects on both the economy and society. For example, fifteen of the largest U.S. cities saw their tax bases shrink significantly in the postwar period, and the apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives shifted to the suburbs and away from urban areas.

The development of the suburbs also increased reliance on the automobile for transportation. Suburban men drove to work in nearby cities or, when possible, were driven to commuter rail stations by their wives. In the early years of suburban development, before schools, parks, and supermarkets were built, access to an automobile was crucial, and the pressure on families to purchase a second one was strong. As families rushed to purchase them, the annual production of passenger cars leaped from 2.2 million to 8 million between 1946 and 1955, and by 1960, about 20 percent of suburban families owned two cars. The growing number of cars on the road changed consumption patterns, and drive-in and drive-through convenience stores, restaurants, and movie theaters began to dot the landscape. The first McDonalds opened in San Bernardino, California, in 1954 to cater to drivers in a hurry.

As drivers jammed highways and small streets in record numbers, cities and states rushed to build additional roadways and ease congestion. To help finance these massive construction efforts, states began taxing gasoline, and the federal government provided hundreds of thousands of dollars for the construction of the

interstate highway system. The resulting construction projects, designed to make it easier for suburbanites to commute to and from cities, often destroyed urban working-class neighborhoods. Increased funding for highway construction also left less money for public transportation, making it impossible for those who could not afford automobiles to live in the suburbs.

In the late 1940s, a network of newly constructed highways connected suburban Long Island with Manhattan. The nation’s new road network also served a military purpose; interstate highways made it easier to deploy troops in the event of a national emergency.

Following World War II, the majority of White Americans were members of the middle class, based on such criteria as education, income, and home ownership. Even most blue-collar families could afford such elements of a middle-class lifestyle as new cars, suburban homes, and regular vacations. Most African Americans, however, were not members of the middle class. In 1950, the median income for White families was $20,656, whereas for Black families it was $11,203. By 1960, when the average White family earned $28,485 a year, Black people still lagged behind at $15,786; nevertheless, this represented a more than 40 percent increase in African American income in the space of a decade.

While working-class men found jobs in factories and on construction crews, those in the middle class often worked for corporations that, as a result of government spending, had grown substantially during World War II and were still getting larger. Such corporations, far too large to allow managers to form personal relationships with all of their subordinates, valued conformity to company rules and standards above all else.

Conformity was still the watchword of suburban life: Many neighborhoods had rules mandating what types of clotheslines could be used and prohibited residents from parking their cars on the street. Above all, conforming to societal norms meant marrying young and having children. In the post-World War II period, marriage rates rose; the average age at first marriage dropped to twenty-three for men and twenty for women.

Between 1946 and 1964, married couples also gave birth to the largest generation in U.S. history to date; this **baby boom** resulted in the cohort known as the baby boomers. Conformity also required that the wives of both working- and middle-class men stay home and raise children instead of working for wages outside the home. Most conformed to this norm, at least while their children were young. Nevertheless, 40 percent of women with young children and half of women with older children sought at least part-time employment. They did so partly out of necessity and partly to pay for the new elements of “the good life”—second cars, vacations, and college education for their children.

The children born during the baby boom were members of a more privileged generation than their parents had been. Entire industries sprang up to cater to their need for clothing, toys, games, books, and breakfast cereals. For the first time in U.S. history, attending high school was an experience shared by the majority, regardless of race or region. As the baby boomers grew into adolescence, marketers realized that they not only controlled large amounts of disposable income earned at part-time jobs, but they exerted a great deal of influence over their parents’ purchases as well. Madison Avenue began to appeal to teenage interests. Boys yearned for cars, and girls of all ethnicities wanted boyfriends who had them. New fashion magazines for adolescent girls, such as Seventeen, advertised the latest clothing and cosmetics, and teen romance magazines, like Copper Romance, a publication for young African American women, filled drugstore racks. The music and movie industries also altered their products to appeal to affluent adolescents who were growing tired of parental constraints.

**DESEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION**

Until 1954, racial segregation in education was not only legal but was required in seventeen states and permissible in several others. Utilizing evidence provided in sociological studies conducted by Kenneth Clark and Gunnar Myrdal, however, Thurgood Marshall, then chief counsel for the NAACP, successfully argued the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas before the U.S. Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Earl Warren. Marshall showed that the practice of segregation in public schools made African American students feel inferior. Even if the facilities provided were equal in nature, the Court noted in its decision, the very fact that some students were separated from others on the basis of their race made segregation unconstitutional.

The challenge now was to integrate schools. A year later, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered southern school systems to begin **desegregation** “with all deliberate speed.” Some school districts voluntarily integrated their schools. For many other districts, however, “deliberate speed” was very, very slow.

It soon became clear that enforcing Brown v. the Board of Education would require presidential intervention. Eisenhower did not agree with the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision and did not wish to force southern states to integrate their schools. However, as president, he was responsible for doing so. In 1957, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, was forced to accept its first nine African American students, who became known as the **Little Rock Nine**. In response, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus called out the state National Guard to prevent the students from attending classes. The soldiers turned away the first student to attempt entry, Elizabeth Eckford, leaving the 15-year-old to be followed and threatened by dozens of White adults. A subsequent attempt by the nine students to attend school resulted in mob violence. Eisenhower then placed the Arkansas National Guard under federal control and sent the U.S. Army’s 101st airborne unit to escort the students to and from school as well as from class to class. This was the first time since the end of Reconstruction that federal troops once more protected the rights of African Americans in the South.

School segregation was not only a Southern issue. New York City became a segregation flash point due to significant deficiencies in resources, teacher quality, and services offered to schools serving Black students. In 1957, parent and activist Mae Mallory was the leader of what became known as the **Harlem Nine**, a group of nine mothers who filed suit and kept their children out of school based on inadequate and unequal education. Mallory and the other mothers asked for an “open transfer” policy that allowed them to send their children to schools outside of their district. City officials and local media fought back by declaring Mallory and her group to be unfit parents, but the Harlem Nine eventually won the right to transfer their children. Most importantly, they forced the local court and the New York City Board of Education to declare that segregation still existed in New York City schools.

**The Great Society**

In May 1964, Lyndon Johnson described in detail his vision of the Great Society he planned to create. When the Eighty-Ninth Congress convened the following January, he and his supporters began their effort to turn the promise into reality. By combatting racial discrimination and attempting to eliminate poverty, the reforms of the Johnson administration changed the nation. The **war on poverty**, as he termed it, was fought on many fronts. The 1965 Housing and Urban Development Act offered grants to improve city housing and subsidized rents for the poor. The Model Cities program likewise provided money for urban development projects and the building of public housing.

The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 established and funded a variety of programs to assist the poor in finding jobs. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), first administered by President Kennedy’s brother- in-law Sargent Shriver, coordinated programs such as the Jobs Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which provided job training programs and work experience for the disadvantaged. Volunteers in Service to America recruited people to offer educational programs and other community services in poor areas, just as the Peace Corps did abroad. The Community Action Program, also under the OEO, funded local Community Action Agencies, organizations created and managed by residents of disadvantaged communities to improve their own lives and those of their neighbors. The Head Start program, intended to prepare low-income children for elementary school, was also under the OEO until it was transferred to Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1969.

The Johnson administration, realizing the nation’s elderly were among its poorest and most disadvantaged citizens, passed the Social Security Act of 1965. The most profound change made by this act was the creation of Medicare, a program to pay the medical expenses of those over sixty-five. Although opposed by the American Medical Association, which feared the creation of a national healthcare system, the new program was supported by most citizens because it would benefit all social classes, not just the poor. The act and subsequent amendments to it also provided coverage for self-employed people in certain occupations and expanded the number of disabled who qualified for benefits. The following year, the Medicaid program allotted federal funds to pay for medical care for the poor.