

Lyndon B. Johnson: The Pragmatic Freedom Fighter in the Civil Rights Struggle

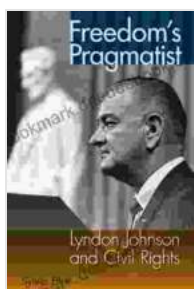


Johnson's Pragmatic Approach

Lyndon Baines Johnson was a complex and controversial figure in the history of the American civil rights movement. As the 36th President of the United States, he played a pivotal role in the passage of landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, Johnson's approach to civil rights was often pragmatic and

calculated, and he balanced his support for racial equality with his desire to maintain political power and appease Southern voters.

Johnson's pragmatism was evident in his early career as a politician in Texas. As a congressman and senator, he supported some civil rights measures, such as anti-lynching legislation. However, he was also known for his connections to conservative Southern politicians and his willingness to compromise on civil rights issues in order to gain their support.



Freedom's Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson and Civil Rights by Sylvia Ellis

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 1951 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 342 pages



Johnson's pragmatic approach continued when he became President in 1963 following the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Although Johnson had supported Kennedy's civil rights agenda, he was initially cautious about pushing for major legislative reforms. He feared that doing so would alienate white Southerners and damage his chances of reelection in 1964.

Political Calculations and Civil Rights

Johnson's political calculations played a significant role in shaping his approach to civil rights. As a Democrat, he needed the support of both

Northern and Southern voters to win elections. He feared that pushing too hard for civil rights could alienate white Southerners and cost him the White House in 1964.

Johnson's political calculations also influenced his decision to escalate the Vietnam War. He believed that a strong stance against communism would appeal to white voters, particularly in the South. However, the war proved to be deeply unpopular, and it further eroded Johnson's support among African Americans.

The Great Society and Civil Rights

Despite his pragmatic approach, Johnson made significant contributions to the civil rights movement. In 1964, he signed the Civil Rights Act into law, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment, public accommodations, and government programs. The act also established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce the law.

In 1965, Johnson followed up with the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discriminatory practices that had prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote. The act also authorized federal oversight of voter registration and elections in areas with a history of racial discrimination.

Johnson's commitment to civil rights was also reflected in his domestic policy agenda, known as the Great Society. The Great Society aimed to provide social and economic opportunities for all Americans, regardless of race. It included programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and Head Start,

which provided essential services to low-income and marginalized communities.

Johnson's Legacy and the Civil Rights Movement

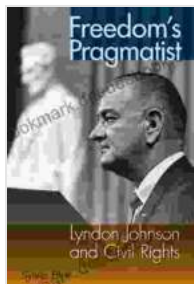
Lyndon B. Johnson's legacy in the civil rights movement is complex and contested. He was a pragmatist who balanced his support for racial equality with his desire to maintain political power. However, he also made significant contributions to the movement, including the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. These laws were major landmarks in the fight for civil rights, and they continue to have a profound impact on American society today.

Johnson's pragmatism and political calculations often led him to compromise on civil rights. He was unwilling to fully embrace the more radical demands of the movement, such as the call for reparations for slavery. He also supported the escalation of the Vietnam War, which disproportionately affected African Americans.

Despite these criticisms, Johnson's contributions to the civil rights movement cannot be denied. He used his political skills to achieve major legislative victories that advanced the cause of racial equality. His pragmatism allowed him to find common ground with segregationist politicians, but it also limited his ability to fully embrace the transformative goals of the movement.

Lyndon B. Johnson's legacy as a civil rights leader is a reminder that the fight for racial equality is complex and often fraught with compromise. Johnson was a pragmatist who balanced his idealism with his desire for political power. He made significant contributions to the movement, but he

also fell short of its more radical demands. Nevertheless, his role in the passage of landmark civil rights legislation ensures that he will always be remembered as a complex and consequential figure in the fight for racial equality in America.



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