1964

Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

A 105-minute lesson on the 1964 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Lyndon B. Johnson (Democratic) · 486 EV	RUNNER-UP Barry Goldwater (Republican) · 52 EV
KEY ISSUE Civil rights; Great Society programs; nuclear war fears; Kennedy legacy	TURNOUT 62.8%

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1964: Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1963-64 America that would produce an LBJ landslide. For each identify the specific 1963-64 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1964 election was 45th U.S. presidential election. LBJ 486 EV / Goldwater 52 EV. Biggest popular vote margin in U.S. history (LBJ 61.1% vs Goldwater 38.5%). JFK assassinated November 22, 1963 Dallas. LBJ sworn in aboard Air Force One. 1964 pre-election achievements: July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act; August 7, 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution; August 20, 1964 War on Poverty; economic prosperity. Democratic Convention Atlantic City August 24-27, 1964 renominated LBJ. Humphrey VP. MFDP challenge. Republican Convention San Francisco July 13-16, 1964 nominated Goldwater first ballot over Rockefeller and Scranton. Rep William Miller VP. Goldwater acceptance speech: "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." Goldwater positions: against Civil Rights Act; voluntary Social Security; tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam; sell TVA. LBJ Daisy Girl ad September 7, 1964. Aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie. First major political attack ad. LBJ 486 EV; Goldwater 52. LBJ 44 states; Goldwater 6 (AZ + AL, GA, LA, MS, SC). Margin 15,951,287. LBJ Great Society 1965: Voting Rights Act; Medicare/Medicaid; Hart-Celler Immigration Act; ESEA; HEA; HUD; DOT; PBS/NPR. Vietnam War destroyed LBJ presidency. March 1968 Tet Offensive. March 31, 1968 LBJ declined another term. 1964 election structural significance: (1) LBJ's 61.1% biggest in U.S. history. (2)

Goldwater 5 Deep South states inaugurated Republican Southern realignment. (3) Goldwater 1964 candidacy = structural beginning of modern American conservatism. (4) Daisy Girl inaugurated televised attack advertising.

Goldwater 1964 defeat catastrophic but structurally transformative. Reagan's October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" launched political career. Reagan CA Governor 1966; U.S. president 1980.

The 1964 election can be analyzed retrospectively as the structural inflection point between New Deal Democratic dominance (1932-68) and Republican-conservative ascendance (1968-2008). LBJ's 61.1% appeared to confirm Democratic dominance but in fact 1964 produced two consequential realignments: (1) Southern Democratic-to-Republican realignment that would deliver South to Republicans by 1972. (2) Conservative movement infrastructure that would produce Reagan 1980.

Great Society 1964-65 legislative achievements = most extensive federal social-policy expansion since New Deal. Federal government took on structural responsibilities for civil rights, healthcare, education, housing, transportation. Many programs survived Reagan-era challenges and remain structural features today.

Vietnam War 1965-73 escalation was structural counterpoint. ~58,220 American military deaths; ~1.5M Vietnamese deaths; ~$1T in 2024 dollars. Damaged structural Democratic coalition. 1968 Nixon victory inaugurated post-LBJ political era.

The 1964-1968 four-year period is one of the most structurally consequential in 20th-century U.S. history. The 1964 election produced LBJ's landslide and Great Society mandate. The 1965-66 legislative achievements transformed federal government. The 1965-68 Vietnam War escalation destroyed LBJ's coalition. The 1968 election produced Nixon victory and the structural realignment that would dominate U.S. politics for the next 40 years. The cumulative trajectory: 1964 = peak of New Deal Democratic dominance; 1968 = beginning of New Deal coalition collapse and Republican-conservative ascendance.

The 1964 LBJ landslide can thus be analyzed as both the high point of post-FDR Democratic dominance and the structural beginning of its collapse. LBJ's Civil Rights Act produced his "lost the South" prediction; the 5 Deep South Goldwater states operationalized it within months; the trajectory through 1968 Wallace + Nixon, 1972 Nixon all-South sweep, 1980 Reagan all-South sweep would complete the realignment. Goldwater's 1964 defeat was the foundation of the modern conservative movement that would eventually produce Republican Southern dominance and conservative ideological ascendance.

20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.

20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ)
36th U.S. president (1963-69).

Barry Goldwater
Arizona Senator and 1964 Republican presidential nominee.

Daisy Girl ad
LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad.

Civil Rights Act of 1964
July 2, 1964 federal law banning racial discrimination.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
August 7, 1964 congressional resolution authorizing U.S. military action in Vietnam.

Great Society
LBJ's 1964-68 federal social-policy expansion.

"A Time for Choosing" speech
Reagan's October 27, 1964 televised speech for Goldwater. Launched Reagan's political career.

Voting Rights Act of 1965
August 6, 1965 federal law banning literacy tests and other voter-suppression devices. Established federal supervision of voter registration in states with histories of discrimination. Section 5 preclearance requirement; Section 4 coverage formula. The most consequential civil rights legislation since Reconstruction.

Medicare and Medicaid
July 30, 1965 federal health insurance programs. Medicare: federal health insurance for elderly (65+). Medicaid: joint federal-state health insurance for poor. Signed at Truman Library in Independence, Missouri with former President Truman attending (Truman had proposed federal health insurance during his presidency).

Acceptance Speech for Republican Presidential Nomination

BARRY GOLDWATER, JULY 16, 1964

Goldwater delivered this acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco on July 16, 1964.

> *"I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. The beauty of the very system we Republicans are pledged to restore and revitalize, the beauty of this Federal system of ours is in its reconciliation of diversity with unity. We must not see malice in honest differences of opinion, no matter how great, so long as they are not inconsistent with the pledges we have given to each other in and through our Constitution. Our Republican cause is not to level out the world or make its people conform in computer-regimented sameness. Our Republican cause is to free our people and light the way for liberty throughout the world."*

Goldwater, "Acceptance Speech for Republican Presidential Nomination" (San Francisco, July 16, 1964). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

Acceptance Speech for Republican Presidential Nomination

BARRY GOLDWATER, JULY 16, 1964

“I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. The beauty of the very system we Republicans are pledged to restore and revitalize, the beauty of this Federal system of ours is in its reconciliation of diversity with unity. We must not see malice in honest differences of opinion, no matter how great, so long as they are not inconsistent with the pledges we have given to each other in and through our Constitution. Our Republican cause is not to level out the world or make its people conform in computer-regimented sameness. Our Republican cause is to free our people and light the way for liberty throughout the world.”

Goldwater, "Acceptance Speech for Republican Presidential Nomination" (San Francisco, July 16, 1964). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

SOURCE B

"A Time for Choosing" Speech

RONALD REAGAN, OCTOBER 27, 1964

“You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we will sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness. If we fail, at least let our children and our children's children say of us we justified our brief moment here. We did all that could be done. The Founding Fathers knew a government can't control the economy without controlling people. And they knew when a government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose. So we have come to a time for choosing. Either we accept the responsibility for our own destiny, or we abandon the American Revolution and confess that an intellectual belief in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves.”

Reagan, "A Time for Choosing" (NBC television broadcast, October 27, 1964). Public domain.

The 1964 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Goldwater July 1964) articulating conservative philosophy. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Reagan October 1964) articulating the conservative critique of welfare state. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources are 1964 conservative campaign speeches but were delivered by different figures in different contexts. Identify the specific political function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Reagan's "rendezvous with destiny" passage draws on FDR's 1936 acceptance speech but reframes it for conservative purposes. Identify the specific rhetorical strategy.

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify three specific 1964-1980 developments that demonstrate Goldwater's 1964 candidacy launched the conservative movement that produced Reagan 1980.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How much did Reagan's "A Time for Choosing" speech raise for Goldwater?

( ) A. ~$250,000
( ) B. ~$500,000
( ) C. ~$1 million
( ) D. ~$5 million

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

In what year was Reagan elected California Governor?

( ) A. 1962
( ) B. 1966
( ) C. 1968
( ) D. 1970

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1964 election about LBJ-landslide, Southern-realignment, or conservative-movement-launch? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Goldwater's July 1964 acceptance speech (Source A) articulated the conservative philosophical commitment that defined his 1964 campaign and the modern American conservative movement. Reagan's October 1964 "A Time for Choosing" speech (Source B) launched Reagan's political career and articulated the conservative case against the welfare state. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1963-1980 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1964 election represented (a) LBJ's 61.1% landslide confirming Democratic dominance and producing the Great Society mandate, (b) Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories inaugurating the Republican Southern realignment, or (c) Goldwater's 1964 candidacy launching the modern American conservative movement that would produce Reagan 1980. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the LBJ-landslide-vs-Southern-realignment-vs-conservative-movement axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Civil Rights Act 1964, the Voting Rights Act 1965, Medicare/Medicaid, the Vietnam War, the 1968 Wallace campaign, the 1972 Nixon landslide, the Reagan 1980 election, the Heritage Foundation founding. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice", "moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue", "Our Republican cause is to free our people and light the way for liberty throughout the world". The "extremism in the defense of liberty" phrase is the most distinctive.

Goldwater's framing established the conservative philosophical commitment.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "you and I have a rendezvous with destiny", "we have come to a time for choosing. Either we accept the responsibility for our own destiny, or we abandon the American Revolution", "an intellectual belief in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves", "a government can't control the economy without controlling people". The "rendezvous with destiny" phrase is the most rhetorically distinctive.

Reagan's framing established the conservative critique.

QUESTION 3

Source A is Goldwater's presidential acceptance speech - articulated as the Republican nominee to define his campaign's ideological identity. The function is to commit the Republican Party to conservative philosophy and to repudiate moderate Republican alternatives. The "extremism" passage made the commitment politically toxic but ideologically clear. Source B is Reagan's campaign closing speech - articulated one week before Election Day to mobilize conservative voters for Goldwater. The function is to articulate the conservative case against the welfare state and to launch Reagan's political career. Together, the sources reveal the 1964 conservative movement's ideological-rhetorical framework: Goldwater's philosophical commitment + Reagan's rhetorical translation = the structural foundation that would produce Reagan 1980 and subsequent conservative victories.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural relationship.

QUESTION 4

Reagan's "rendezvous with destiny" passage draws on FDR's June 27, 1936 Democratic Convention acceptance speech: "This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny." FDR had used the phrase to articulate the New Deal's structural commitment to federal welfare-state expansion. Reagan reframed the phrase for conservative purposes through four rhetorical strategies: (1) Appropriation - taking FDR's phrase out of its original context and applying it to conservative goals. The appropriation neutralized FDR's structural authority. (2) Reframing - the "destiny" Reagan invoked was the preservation of limited government rather than the New Deal's welfare-state expansion. (3) Generational continuity claim - "preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth" framed the conservative cause as the continuation of American constitutional tradition. (4) Apocalyptic alternative - "sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness" created stakes-based urgency. The cumulative effect: Reagan demonstrated that conservative rhetoric could appropriate New Deal-era language for opposite purposes. The strategy would shape post-1964 conservative rhetoric: appropriate liberal-progressive language and reframe it for conservative goals. Reagan's 1980 campaign rhetoric ("Morning in America"; "shining city upon a hill") would continue this rhetorical pattern.

AP students should be able to articulate the rhetorical strategy.

QUESTION 5

Three specific 1964-1980 developments that demonstrate Goldwater's 1964 candidacy launched the conservative movement: (1) Reagan emergence (1964-1980). October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" launched Reagan's political career. Reagan elected California Governor 1966 (defeated incumbent Pat Brown by 1M votes). Re-elected 1970. Sought 1968 Republican presidential nomination (lost to Nixon). Sought 1976 Republican presidential nomination (narrowly lost to Ford). Won 1980 Republican presidential nomination. Defeated Carter 489-49 EV in November 1980. (2) Conservative movement infrastructure (1960s-70s). Young Americans for Freedom (founded 1960 by Goldwater supporters); American Conservative Union (founded 1964 after Goldwater defeat); National Review (founded 1955 by William F. Buckley) provided intellectual platform; Heritage Foundation (founded 1973 by Goldwater-era conservatives); American Enterprise Institute (founded 1938 but expanded 1970s); Cato Institute (founded 1977); Federalist Society (founded 1982). The cumulative infrastructure would sustain conservative movement through electoral defeats and provide policy expertise during Republican administrations. (3) Republican Southern realignment (1964-1980). Goldwater's 5 Deep South victories (AL, GA, LA, MS, SC) operationalized within 16 years: 1968 Wallace 5 different Deep South states; 1972 Nixon all 11 Southern states; 1980 Reagan carried all Southern states except Georgia (Carter's home state). The trajectory completed the structural realignment Goldwater's 1964 campaign had inaugurated. (4) Religious-cultural conservative mobilization (1970s). Roe v. Wade January 1973 + Equal Rights Amendment campaigns 1972-1982 + busing controversies + 1979 Moral Majority founding (Jerry Falwell) mobilized religious conservatives into Republican coalition. Reagan 1980 won evangelical Protestant voters by 56-43% margin - the structural foundation of subsequent Republican religious-cultural conservative coalition. The cumulative effect: by 1980, Goldwater's 1964 ideological-coalitional foundation had matured into a winning national political movement.

AP students should be able to articulate multiple developments.

QUESTION 6

~$1 million. Reagan's "A Time for Choosing" speech raised approximately $1 million for Goldwater in its final week - more than any political speech to that point. The fundraising success demonstrated the structural mobilization potential of televised conservative political speech.

AP students should know the $1M fundraising figure.

QUESTION 7

1966. Reagan was elected California Governor in November 1966 - defeating incumbent Pat Brown by approximately 1 million votes (3,742,913 to 2,749,174). Reagan was 55 years old at the election. He was re-elected in 1970. His successful gubernatorial career established him as the leading conservative presidential candidate for the 1970s.

AP students should know the 1966 California gubernatorial victory.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the LBJ-landslide-vs-Southern-realignment-vs-conservative-movement axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source.

The thesis sketch is preparatory.