A Celebration of President Johnson’s Legacies

AN OCTOBER PARTY
AT FIESTA GARDENS

A Fundraiser for
Texas Low Income Housing Information Service

Mighty Fine Food & Drink provided by Threadgill’s
Great Music by Grupo Fantasma

Coupled with gripping storytelling
How far we have come in addressing civil rights and affordable housing...

OCTOBER 1, 2008
6:00 - 9:00 pm
The Pavilion at Fiesta Gardens
YEARS AGO

Lyndon Baines Johnson

Born near Stonewall, Texas
LBJ

We built this Nation to serve its people.

We do not intend to live in the midst of abundance, isolated from neighbors and nature, confined by blighted cities and bleak suburbs, stunted by a poverty of learning and an emptiness of leisure. The Great Society asks not how much, but how good; not only how to create wealth but how to use it; not only how fast we are going, but where we are headed.

This kind of society will not flower spontaneously from swelling riches and surging power.

It will not be the gift of government or the creation of presidents.

It will require of every American, for many generations, both faith in the destination and the fortitude to make the journey.

And like freedom itself, it will always be challenge and not fulfillment.

And tonight we accept that challenge.


TxLIHIS

As children of the 1960’s, we are inspired by President Johnson’s call to make unrelenting war on poverty and to build The Great Society.

The struggle against poverty, President Johnson’s War on Poverty, has been declared lost by some conservative pundits. They are wrong. For us, as well as others, the struggle is not over and the war is not lost.

Today the war on poverty is fought with a variety of tools — ours is housing.

We are winning a steady stream of victories. When we help a neighborhood association to build a home for a poor family, when we convince the Texas Legislature to outlaw fraudulent land sales that prey on the poor, when we bring together a group of Texans to design and build a home for a widow made homeless by a hurricane, we strike blows against poverty and injustice.
"We do not intend to live in the midst of abundance, isolated from neighbors."

Embracing a new low income housing program.

Congressman Johnson successfully advocates public housing.

March 20, 1938, documents authorizing Austin’s first public housing developments signed by Nathan Straus, US Director of Housing. Congressman Johnson with Vice President John Nance Garner, Representative Joachim Fernandez of Louisiana and Representative Steagall of Alabama on right.

President Roosevelt, Texas Governor James Allred, and LBJ during FDR’s Texas tour when LBJ made the pitch for public housing.
LBJ

Recently a man said to me, ‘Lyndon, I’m against this [public housing] program, because I have been told it is Government competition with private business.’ He asked me if this was true, and I said, ‘Yes sir; it is true. The Government is competing with shacks and hovels and hog sties and all the other foul holes in which the underprivileged have had to live. The Government is attempting to wipe out these wretched excuses for American homes. If you object to that kind of Government competition, then I’m disappointed in you.’

- Austin Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson, during an Austin radio address, January 23, 1938.

In a meeting attended, according to people’s memories, by conservative realtors, Mayor Miller, Johnson, and others, the opposition was pincered. When one of the realtors would flail the socialistic plan [for public housing], Johnson would point out how many slum units the man owned. Once again he was slugg back hard at the charge of socialism and unfair public competition with business. “The government is competing,” he said, “with the shacks and hovels and hog sties and all the other foul holes in which the underprivileged have to live.” At a meeting of several hundred at the courthouse he said one out of every six houses in the city had no running water, one out of five no lights, almost one out of three no bath – at that, the clubwomen joined the crusade.”

- Ronnie Dugger, The Politician: The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson.

TxLIHIS

We follow in Congressman Johnson’s footsteps, often literally. He confronted the business community of Austin to demand their support for public housing. Today we bring the same fight to Austin’s City Hall and the Texas Legislature. We fight for decent housing for the poor and for an end to racially segregated housing. Every time we stand up to testify and to demand fair consideration for the poor we stand on the shoulders of the housing victories that Congressman Johnson began in Austin 70 years ago.
Taking on special interests that oppose housing the poor.

(clockwise from right) LBJ speaks to a crowd in Austin about the need for public housing / Angry citizens protest public housing / Crowd in Austin listens to LBJ on public housing.
LBJ

In the 1920’s a movement had begun in Europe to provide slum dwellers who could not afford private housing with publicly-owned or publicly-aided living quarters. In 1937 this movement reached the United States with the enactment of the Wagner-Steagall bill to have the federal government provide the poor with low-rent public housing through local agencies.

Johnson didn’t just vote aye. He went to Austin, called together Tom Miller and his other local heavies, and said, “Now look, I want to be the first in the United States if you’re willing to do this, and you’ve got to be willing to stand up for the Negroes and Mexicans.”

Austin’s housing agency became the first in the country to complete and lease a unit under the 1937 Housing Act. Posing happily with five Mexican America children in from of their new home in the project, Johnson said, “This country won’t have to worry about ‘isms’ when it gives its people a decent, clean place to live and a job, they’ll believe in the government – they’ll be willing to fight for it.”

- Ronnie Dugger, The Politician: The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson.

TxLIHIS

Those first public housing apartments are still housing low-income Austinites to this day.

We have worked to protect and improve this invaluable community asset. We drafted a bill and worked with State Representative Elliott Naishatat to see Texas enact the first legislation in the US requiring all public housing authorities to have a resident serve on each of the public housing authorities’ boards of directors. Making public housing a better place to live begins with listening to the people who live there. Working through VISTA volunteers we established a resident-run learning center in two of the three developments, which Congressman Johnson got built in 1938.

We have helped public housing residents across Texas organize and speak out on issues that affect their lives. We have and will continue to fight plans to demolish older public housing apartments unless there is a firm commitment to rebuild unit for unit new housing, affordable to public housing residents in desegregated neighborhoods.
Convincing local government to support housing the poor.

(clockwise from top left) LBJ tours Santa Rita as first residents move in. / Santa Rita tenant. / Santa Rita, September 25, 1939, first family to move into public housing. / E.H. Perry (Chair of Austin Housing Authority), Nathan Straus (Housing Director for FDR), and Tom Miller (Mayor of Austin), at Rosewood dedication. / LBJ in meeting with residents.
LBJ

This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

It is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next, and the most profound stage of the battle for civil rights.

- Commencement Address at Howard University: “To Fulfill These Rights,” June 4, 1965.

TxLIHIS

After a hard-fought battle President Johnson outlawed housing segregation with the signing of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. But as President Johnson said, we seek not just legal equality as a right but equality as a fact. And the fact is that over the 40 years since the passage of the Fair Housing Act, no city in Texas has achieved truly racially integrated neighborhoods.

Austin, for instance, is a city of intense racial and economic segregation. Despite a self-image as a laid-back, tolerant contemporary community, we have blinded ourselves to problems of race and poverty.

Perversely our city searches for answers to community problems everywhere but at their true source. It is separateness that is the root cause of Austin’s problems of income inequality, racial and ethnic tensions, poor police - community relations, crime, youth alienation and violence.

TxLIHIS is providing research and speaking out about the lingering patterns.

There is nothing natural or inevitable about racial and economic segregation. As much as individual housing preferences, deliberate policy decisions regarding planning, transportation, education, housing finance, land use, taxation and expenditures by all levels of government have determined Austin’s predicament. We as a community have shaped our city and we as a community must correct the disgrace of residential segregation.
Outlawing housing segregation so that all may walk through the gates of opportunity.

President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968 also known as the Fair Housing Act, outlawing racial discrimination in housing.

The enactment of the federal Fair Housing Act on April 11, 1968 came only after a long and difficult journey. From 1966-1967, Congress regularly considered the fair housing bill, but failed to garner a strong enough majority for its passage. However, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson utilized this national tragedy to secure the bill’s speedy Congressional approval.
[The Great Society] is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.

Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.

- Remarks at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, May 22, 1964.

TxLIHIS

All across Texas special communities of low-income families have developed. They are places with a strong sense of identity and community. Today many of these unique communities are threatened as competition for housing closer to the downtown areas causes economic pressures known as gentrification.

The Guadalupe and Clarksville neighborhoods in Austin are two such special communities.

The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service has worked for two decades with leaders from these neighborhoods to prevent the involuntary displacement of long-time residents. We have helped these neighborhoods to develop and operate community-owned housing as a means of maintaining a critical base of low income housing.

In the Texas Legislature, we have worked with State Representative Eddie Rodriguez to provide cities with a suite of tools to combat gentrification through the state Homestead Preservation District Act.
So that each may achieve according to their ability, a rich and nurturing community.

Community preservation
Community-owned, low-income housing in the historic Clarksville and Guadalupe neighborhoods of Austin.
LBJ

The American city should be a collection of communities where every member has a right to belong. It should be a place where every man feels safe on his streets and in the house of his friends. It should be a place where each individual’s dignity and self-respect is strengthened by the respect and affection of his neighbors. It should be a place where each of us can find the satisfaction and warmth which comes from being a member of the community of man. This is what man sought at the dawn of civilization. It is what we seek today.


TxLIHIS

When the University of Texas announced a proposal to expand the campus in a way that would result in the university buying up and tearing down all of the homes in the Blackland neighborhood, the community was galvanized to take action. In the course of their successful fight to save the neighborhood, residents took on the challenge of people who had lost homes.

Rather than waiting for government or institutions to meet these needs, Blackland neighbors, with TxLIHIS’ help, founded the Blackland Community Development Corporation to build homes for low-income families, the elderly and the homeless right inside the neighborhood, welcoming the families who moved in and making them part of the community.
Building open, supportive communities so that all can belong.

Community based solutions for the elderly and homeless

Blackland neighbors joined together to provide low-income housing for the elderly, the homeless and displaced families and integrated them into the community with the help of the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service.
LBJ

An educated and healthy people require surroundings in harmony with their hopes.

In our urban areas the central problem today is to protect and restore man’s satisfaction in belonging to a community where he can find security and significance.

-Annual message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 4, 1965.

TxLIHIS

The promise of Urban Renewal was broken for Austin’s Blackshear neighborhood.

Rather than give up, community leaders like Ora Lee Nobles, president of the Blackshear Residents Organization, struggled with and worked to improve programs that grew out of the Great Society like Urban Renewal, Model Cities and others. But government leaders did not heed the advice and counsel of community leaders. When the programs tore down homes and left lots vacant for decades, Ms. Nobles led her community to realize the true promise of the Great Society programs by taking direct responsibility for the rebuilding of the community.

Working with TxLIHIS, Ms. Nobles and the Blackshear Residents Organization developed a plan to build a new home back on every vacant lot — homes that would be affordable to the residents who had been displaced by Urban Renewal. The homes were built and sold under the direct action of the neighborhood organization.
Local action makes good on the promise of Model Cities and the Great Society.

Building a "model community"

Blackshear neighborhood residents took over where Urban Renewal left off and rebuilt a neighborhood of affordable housing for low-income families.
LBJ

My first job after college was as a teacher in Cotulla, Tex., in a small Mexican-American school. Few of them could speak English, and I couldn’t speak much Spanish. My students were poor and they often came to class without breakfast, hungry. They knew even in their youth the pain of prejudice. They never seemed to know why people disliked them. But they knew it was so, because I saw it in their eyes. I often walked home late in the afternoon, after the classes were finished, wishing there was more that I could do. But all I knew was to teach them the little that I knew, hoping that it might help them against the hardships that lay ahead.

Somehow you never forget what poverty and hatred can do when you see its scars on the hopeful face of a young child.

I never thought then, in 1928, that I would be standing here in 1965. It never even occurred to me in my fondest dreams that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students and to help people like them all over this country.

But now I do have that chance—and I’ll let you in on a secret—I mean to use it. And I hope that you will use it with me.


TxLIHIS

For years, the only housing for farm workers was a settlement known as the San Jose labor camp beyond the city limits of Hereford, Texas. Much of the housing in the labor camp consisted of abandoned barracks, which had been built to hold prisoners from the Korean War. Housing conditions were wretched. A Department of Agriculture program existed to house farm workers, but the norm for these facilities was also barracks-like structures built so that they could be “easily hosed down.”

TxLIHIS partnered with MET, Inc., a farm worker service organization, and members of San Jose Catholic Church in Hereford to improve these housing conditions. Church members formed a vision of farm labor housing that would be an asset to farm laborers and their whole community. With no representation of the Hispanic community in local government, and a hostile attitude from regional representatives of the federal government, the community leaders’ vision met formidable resistance. Ultimately, federal officials in Washington overruled local decisions, opening the way for the Amistad farm labor housing development to be built. Today the development, impeccably maintained, is hailed within Hereford and nationally as a model. Founding members of the Amistad group have gone on to become the first Hispanic members of the Hereford city council, school board, and county government.
Erasing the scars of poverty from the faces of farmworkers.

Homes for the harvesters

Working with Mexican-American leaders organized out of the local Catholic parish, the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service and Motivation Education and Training Inc. help build a model community for farmworkers on the Texas plains.
LBJ

Beyond this great chamber [the US House of Representatives], out yonder in 50 States, are the people that we serve. Who can tell what deep and unspoken hopes are in their hearts tonight as they sit there and listen. We all can guess, from our own lives, how difficult they often find their own pursuit of happiness, how many problems each little family has. They look most of all to themselves for their futures. But I think that they also look to each of us.


We should embark upon a major effort to provide self-help assistance to the forgotten in our midst—the American Indians and the migratory farm workers. And we should reach with the hand of understanding to help those who live in rural poverty.

- Annual message to Congress on the State of the Union, January 10, 1967.

TxLIHIS

Our mission is to support low-income Texans’ efforts to achieve the American dream of a decent, affordable home in a quality neighborhood. We believe that Texas’ critical low-income housing and community development needs can best be solved through a public-private partnership led by the initiative of low-income Texans and supported by government, the private sector, and the general public.

We believe the solution lies in the involvement of the whole society, not just the rich doing for the poor, not just the poor helping themselves, all of that of course but also the rich and the poor working together.

The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service, with Senator Eddie Lucio and members of the United Farm Workers Union, worked to create a unique mortgage program that makes interest-free home loans to extremely low-income families. The Texas Bootstrap owner-builder housing program has placed Texas at the forefront of the growing self-help housing movement.
Aiding the poor to look to themselves for solutions.

Self-help home building

Self-help housing programs now exist all along Texas’ border with Mexico. The program helps colonia residents build a home, which meets all standards. On average families provide 500 hours of labor toward building their homes. Monthly payments are often $250 or less.
LBJ

Men are shaped by their world. When it is a world of decay, ringed by an invisible wall, when escape is arduous and uncertain, and the saving pressures of a more hopeful society are unknown, it can cripple the youth and it can desolate the men.

- Commencement Address at Howard University: “To Fulfill These Rights,” June 4, 1965.

Let us, above all, open wide the exits from poverty to the children of the poor.


TxLIHIS

The colonias along the Texas-Mexico border are a major focus of our work.

We have taught community leaders from the colonias to speak out for the needs of their communities. We have helped these leaders gain audiences with elected leaders and their voices have been heard.

We have worked for almost two decades with residents of the poorest colonias to get water, sewer, roads and decent housing. Together we sought and won funding for colonia self help centers that provide colonia residents the help they need to build their homes in the colonias. Together we have won tens of million in funding for interest free home loans to colonia homeowners from the State of Texas. We have reformed laws that permitted the exploitation of low-income families who buy lots in colonias.

We are most proud of work with colonia residents in building strong and effective community organizations to provide housing and other services to their neighbors. Independent, indigenously staffed and governed these are the type of democratic institutions that permit communities to actively solve their own problems.
Opening wide the exits to poverty through community based initiative.

Solving problems within the community

One of our proudest accomplishments is helping colonia residents create and sustain effective community institutions to solve community problems.
LBJ

Very often the lack of jobs and money is not the cause of poverty, but the symptom.

The cause may be deeper — in our failure to give our citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities, in a lack of education and training, in a lack of medical care and housing, in a lack of decent communities to live and bring up their children... But whatever the cause, our joint Federal-local effort must pursue poverty. pursue it wherever it exists — in city slums and small towns, in sharecropper shacks or in migrant worker camps...


TxLIHIS

That our society should tolerate the poverty and substandard living conditions present in colonias along the Texas - Mexico border and, now growing across the state, is inexcusable.

The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service has been at the forefront of advocating for an end to the exploitation of colonia residents by land developers and lobbied for remedial public action to provide water, sewer, roads and housing. We have made much progress, yet the number of Texans living in colonias has grown.

We are a loud and insistent voice for pursuing and curing the problem of poverty and its physical manifestation in the form of substandard colonias.
To pursue poverty wherever it exists: the colonias

Colonias

More than 2000 Texas colonias are a manifestation of unaddressed poverty in our midst. The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service is a loud and insistent voice at the Texas Capitol calling for these needs to be addressed.
Colonias
Lastly, this bill is a challenge. It is a challenge to men of good will in every part of the country, to transform the commands of our law into the customs of our land. It is a challenge to all of us, to go to work in our states and communities, in our homes, and in the depths of our hearts to eliminate the final strongholds of intolerance and hatred. It is a challenge to reach beyond the content of the bill to conquer the barriers of poor education, poverty, and squalid housing which are an inheritance of past injustice and an impediment to future advance.

- Statement of the President following Senate Passage of the Civil Rights Bill, June 19, 1964.

**TxLIHIS**

Working with members of legislative bodies, we were able to see the following adopted:

- Colonia Fair Land Sales Act
- Texas Bootstrap Owner-Builder Housing Program
- Colonia Model Subdivision Program
- Outlawed “rent to own” home sales scams
- Comprehensive reform of state housing programs
- Expanded elderly homestead protections
- Extended colonia water and sewer programs statewide
- Consumer protection for housing evictions
- Regulations on predatory home mortgage lending
- Expanded fair housing protections to residents of public housing
- Establishing then increasing the Texas Housing Trust Fund
- Providing consumer protections for mobile home buyers
- Protecting tenants from unfair landlord lockouts
- Targeting government housing programs to the poor and most needy
- Preventing gentrification by creating Homestead Preservation Districts
- Expanding housing benefits to hurricane victims
- Putting a halt to contract-for-deed and rent-to-own home sales scams
- Establishing community land trusts
- Creating Tax Increment Finance Districts for affordable housing
- Reforming farmworker housing inspection and licensing
- Giving members of the armed forces and victims of domestic violence a break in rental housing
- Ensuring elderly Texans do not pay excessive taxes on their homes
- Fought back proposal to undo housing reforms.
- Passage of a $55 million affordable housing bond program in Austin
- Establishment of an Austin Housing Trust Fund to build low income housing
- Passage of a state law to require public housing residents serve on housing authority governing boards
To reach beyond the content of the bill to conquer squalid housing which are an inheritance of past injustice and an impediment to future advance.

Securing resources to house the poor

The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service is the foremost advocate before the Texas Legislature on the behalf of the housing and community development needs of the state’s poor.
LBJ

As it was 189 years ago, so today the cause of America is a revolutionary cause. And I am proud this morning to salute you as fellow revolutionaries. Neither you nor I are willing to accept the tyranny of poverty, nor the dictatorship of ignorance, nor the despotism of ill health, nor the oppression of bias and prejudice and bigotry. We want change. We want progress. We want it both abroad and at home and we aim to get it.

- Remarks to college students employed for the summer by the government, August 4, 1965.

One thing I did know, when I got through no one in this country would be able to ignore the poverty in our midst.


TxLIHIS

Just as building a community is a way to fight poverty, so too is building a community of people dedicated to the fight against shelter poverty an important tool.

We call the members of that community “housers” after the name adopted by the early 20th-century housing reformers who brought about the creation of the public housing programs of the 1930s.

We honor the achievements of today’s housers with our annual Texas Houser Awards and bring housers together to formulate strategies and coordinate our attack on shelter poverty through an umbrella coalition we call Housing Texas.

Our current project through Housing Texas is to secure $50 million per year from the Texas Legislature to provide for more and better low-income housing across Texas.

HOUSER Awardees

opposite page left to right from top:

Supporting community poverty revolutionaries so no one in this country would be able to ignore the poverty in our midst.

Honoring heroes of the housing movement
**LBJ**

Immediately after Hurricane Betsy devastated New Orleans in September 1965, President Johnson flew to the city. In the flooded Ninth Ward, Johnson visited the George Washington Elementary School, on St. Claude Avenue, which was being used as a shelter. “Most of the people inside and outside of the building were Negro,” the White House diary reads.

The diary describes the shelter as a “mass of human suffering,” with people calling out for help “in terribly emotional wails from voices of all ages. . . . It was a most pitiful sight of human and material destruction.” Johnson was deeply moved as people approached and asked him for food and water; one woman asked Johnson for a boat so that she could look for her two sons, who had been lost in the flood.

Johnson had entered the crowded shelter in near-total darkness; there were only a couple of flashlights to lead the way. “At first, the people in the darkened shelter did not believe that it was actually the President.”

Directing the flashlights pointed at him Johnson announced to the refugees, “This is your President!. I’m here to help you!”

- Adapted from the White House Daily Diary, September 10, 1965 and news reports.

**TxLIHIS**

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have caused shock and outrage over the way low-income people are treated as they are provided temporary housing and assisted with rebuilding their permanent housing. It is clear that existing federal programs do not serve the poor well. The Bush administration has been far less supportive of hurricane victims than President Johnson.

TxLIHIS is working to make sure that the next time disaster strikes a low-income population the government’s response is more compassionate and more effective.

* Texas Grow Homes - we are designing and building modular housing to rebuild the homes of low income families destroyed by hurricanes and natural disasters.
* We continue to advocate housing for Katrina evacuees in Texas.
* We are providing leadership to develop a new state and national policy for housing victims of natural disasters.
Bringing compassion and hope to the victims of the storms.

Hurricane rebuilding

Working through a statewide design competition, the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service has developed new models for housing to replace the homes of low-income families destroyed by natural disasters. We are building prototype homes based on these designs for four Port Arthur, Texas families whose homes were destroyed by Hurricane Rita.
LBJ

Our mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country: to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man.

- Address to Joint Session of Congress, March 15, 1965

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