

Los Angeles Times
- 7/29/89, in response to
News article: "Can LBJ's
Great Society ever exist?"
July 14, 1989

The reasons why the Great Society failed lie more in human nature than in abstract economic or political theories.

The downhill slide of the Great Society began with the guns-and-butter policy of a nation that refused to tax itself to pay for the Vietnam War. It was given added, and perhaps fatal, momentum by two unprecedented national traumas—the “loss” of Vietnam, and the exposure of a sitting President—Richard Nixon—as the morally bankrupt politician many always said he was. Thus was triggered in millions of Americans an overwhelming feeling of personal defeat and failure.

One need not be a Freud or a Jung to understand that the natural responses to such emotional strain are rage and a thirst for revenge. Upon whom? Why, upon the “liberals,” of course. Didn't the “liberals” get us into Vietnam in the first place? Didn't the “liberals” then prevent us from winning? And wasn't it the “liberals” who always said that Nixon was a crook?

The fury of a woman scorned can easily be matched by the anger that comes from being proven wrong. What better way to express that anger than to dismantle the social programs which are so dear to those who were right?

It didn't happen overnight, of course—these things never do. Nor would things be better today if the liberals had failed, and we had “won” the Vietnam War. Since the war was immoral in itself, the Great Society would have rested on a rotten foundation, and would have crumbled sooner or later.

In fact, the problem of poverty-in-the-midst-of-plenty can be solved only after it is demystified. This means that simple compassion, community spirit, and a taste for simplicity must take the place of sterile theorizing.

BILL BECKER
Woodland Hills

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by editor

Letters to the Editor
Los Angeles Times
Times Mirror Square
Los Angeles, CA 90053

July 14, 1989

The reasons why the Great Society failed lie more in human nature than in abstract economic or political theories. [news article, Can LBJ's Great Society ever exist?, July 14]

The downhill slide of the Great Society began with the guns-and-butter policy of a nation which refused to tax itself to pay for the Vietnam war. It was given added, and ~~apparently~~ ^{provoked} fatal, momentum by two unprecedented national traumas--the "loss" of Vietnam, and the exposure of a sitting President--Richard Nixon--as the morally bankrupt politician many always said he was. Thus was triggered in millions of Americans an overwhelming feeling of personal defeat and failure.

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The fury of a woman scorned can easily be matched by the anger that comes from being proven wrong. What better way to express that anger than to dismantle the social programs which are so dear to those who were right? [And how better to humiliate them than to finally elect as President the perfect representative of everything they loathe--Ronald Reagan.]

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In fact, the problem of poverty-in-the-midst-of-plenty can be solved only after it is de-mystified. This means that simple compassion, community spirit, and a taste for simplicity must take the place of sterile theorizing. [We must come to like each other better. Only then can those who have find the courage to do with less until everyone has the basic necessities of life. It's really quite simple.]

Bill Becker
P.O. Box 6063
Woodland Hills, CA 91365

Sincerely,

