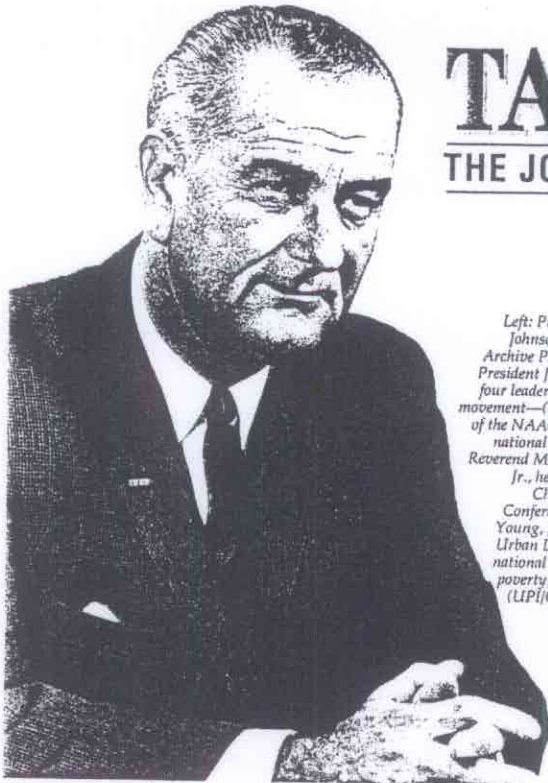


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# TAKING CHARGE

## THE JOHNSON WHITE HOUSE TAPES, 1963-1964

edited and with commentary by  
**MICHAEL R. BESCHLOSS**



Left: President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973) (© Archive Photo, 1994). Right: President Johnson meets with four leaders of the civil rights movement—(l to r) Roy Wilkins of the NAACP; James Farmer, national director of CORE; Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and Whitney Young, Jr., of the National Urban League—to discuss national initiatives against poverty, January 18, 1964 (UPI/Corbis-Bettmann).



Lyndon Baines Johnson was the first president to secretly tape-record phone conversations and private Oval Office meetings from the first hour of his presidency to the last. Because of what happened to his immediate successor, Richard Nixon, Johnson was also probably the last. In 1973, on Johnson's orders, these tapes containing some 9400 conversations with such figures as Martin Luther King, Jr., J. Edgar Hoover, Helen Gahagan Douglas, Robert F. Kennedy, Katharine Graham, and Robert S. McNamara were sealed and locked in a vault, not to be opened until at least 2023. Michael R. Beschloss, the author and political commentator whom *Newsweek* has called "America's leading presidential historian," recently gained access to these tapes. Working with actual transcribed conversations, and with other sources, including the personal journals of the former First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson, Beschloss edited and annotated these texts and set them in historical context. The result of his work, *Taking Charge*, offers a unique and unprecedented account of this pivotal era in American and presidential history.

### "The Johnson Treatment"

*Taking Charge* covers the period spanning November 1963 and late August 1964. What emerges from these tapes is a stunning portrait of a consummate politician at work; a man who employed his "irresistible charms"—a heady brew of bluster, flattery, intimidation, and cajoling that came to be called "the Johnson Treatment" by many inside the Beltway—in pursuit of his national agenda. Because "the Johnson Treatment" of friends and foes alike was so instrumental to his use of power, these tapes offer compelling insight into how Johnson governed—struggling to surpass his martyred predecessor, John F. Kennedy, on civil rights legislation; guiding the nation into a more active, participatory role in Southeast Asia; and campaigning for a landslide election in his own right. We also get a better understanding of Johnson's complex, changing relationships with Lady Bird and the rest of his family, Jacqueline Kennedy, and the ex-presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Harry S. Truman.

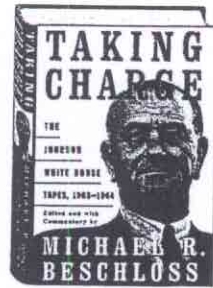
Reading these transcripts and Beschloss's insightful commentary we come to know the real Lyndon Johnson behind the public image. His tireless lobbying for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 shows his commitment in principle to securing and protecting the citizenship

rights of all Americans. His sometimes tentative early approach to the growing war in Vietnam—an experience the historian Henry Graff described as "the dark side of Johnson's moon"—underscores his reluctance to, as he stated in a 1964 campaign speech, "send American boys nine or ten thousand miles from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves," as well as Johnson's unease over matters of foreign policy. His discussion with a prominent New York hairdresser in which he tried to wheedle free hairstyles for his wife and daughters demonstrates the legendary LBJ frugality (as did his habit of turning off light bulbs in unoccupied White House rooms, which earned Johnson the sobriquet "Light Bulb Johnson")—and that he was not above using the office in pursuit of personal favors from time to time.

Certain to cause a sensation among those who lived in these times and those who are interested in them, *Taking Charge* is living history, teeming with intimate details and provocative revelations. It is, in Johnson's own words, history "with the bark off."

About the Author: MICHAEL R. BESCHLOSS is the author of four previous books on American presidents and world affairs, and is a regular commentator on PBS's *The News-Hour* with Jim Lehrer.

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