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Changing political winds

SIR – Your leader on the decline of the American right was interesting (“[Is America turning left?](#)”, August 11th). However, by comparison you pointed to the “liberal overreach” of the 1960s. This label confuses the politics and policies of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society with the wider protest movements and social turbulence of the late 1960s and early 1970s. LBJ's programmes were based on the idea of equality of opportunity, not entitlement or equality of outcome. Affirmative action, the War on Poverty, and federal aid to education were all passed in this light.

What conservative polemicists have been so good at is blaming and associating the Great Society with rioting, protests, urban breakdown, policy excesses and failure. Yet these had little to do with Johnson's liberalism. The Democratic Party's leftward shift and embrace of more radical protest movements took place after Johnson left office, most noticeably in 1972 when George McGovern ran on a rabidly anti-war ticket and proposed an annual guaranteed income for workers.

It is crucial to make this distinction because the ideological battles of the 1960s and 1970s live on and continue to shape contemporary American politics.

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