

PRIMARY SOURCE

Lady Bird Johnson Diary

Building Context

During her years in the White House (1963–1969), Lady Bird Johnson kept detailed diaries in which she recorded her daily activities, observations, and reflections. Unlike formal speeches or public statements, these diary entries were intended as personal records of her work and experiences. They reveal how closely she followed legislation, communicated with advisers, traveled to promote policies, and connected her beliefs, especially about the environment and public spaces, to specific policy ideas.

Directions: Review the essential vocabulary. Then, read the excerpts and answer the questions that follow.

Essential Vocabulary

Parkway	A wide, landscaped road designed for scenic driving rather than heavy commercial traffic.
vistas	Wide, open views of the land or scenery.
Highway Improvement Bill	A proposed law to spend government money on improving highways, including their safety, appearance, and surrounding land. Formally known as the Highway Beautification Act, signed into law by President Johnson on October 22, 1965.
Job Corps	A government program that provides job training and education for young people.

Lady Bird Johnson Diary, October 11, 1965

Source: <https://discoverlbj.org/item/ctjd-19651011>

Text	Notes
I returned out the George Washington Parkway which is absolutely glorious -- the dogwoods a riot of red and here and there a maple turning green on one side and aflame with gold and crimson on the other. The vistas of the river below and the city in the distance and the breathtaking fall coloring would lift the spirits of the most troubled.	
Any Congressman in doubt of whether he was spending the U.S. taxpayer's money wisely after all on this Highway Improvement Bill ought to take that ride from Mt. Vernon on past the city and almost out to Great Falls.	
I talked with Sarg about getting Dr. Otis Singletary to put courses of gardening and landscape architecture and park maintenance into all of the Job Corps camps. They do have one at Camp Gary. But all of the highway and park people I meet talk about how hard it is to get workers. And this looks like a relatively low skill that could be taught in a few months and absorb many of the youthful unemployed	

Analysis Questions

1. What does Lady Bird Johnson's description of the George Washington Parkway reveal about her values? Use specific words from the excerpt to support your answer.
2. How does Lady Bird Johnson use her experience on the parkway to argue for government spending on highways and beautification?
3. What problem related to public works does Lady Bird Johnson identify in the third excerpt, and what solution does she propose?
4. Taken together, how do these excerpts show Lady Bird Johnson turning beliefs into public action or policy ideas?
5. How does Lady Bird Johnson's diary help us understand her sense of responsibility? What do her reflections reveal about why she believed beautification mattered for the country?
6. How do volunteer organizations continue to help beautify roads and highways across the country?