

The Tumultuous 1960s



I. The New Frontier of John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)

A. JFK defeated Richard Nixon in 1960 in a very close election partially decided by a series of televised debates

B. Spirit of optimism and Camelot inspired Kennedy's supporters and frustrated opponents.

C. Inauguration speech heralded new approaches

1. "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."
2. Promised a landing on the moon by the end of the decade
3. Strong challenge to the Soviet bloc to respect human rights

D. Success and failures of New Frontier

1. Domestic

a) Promoted economic expansion by cutting taxes and holding down prices. Economy boomed thorough the 1960s

b) Many domestic programs proposed to address civil rights, Medicare, education issues. Very few actually won Congressional approval.

2. Foreign

a) Alliance for Progress--economic aid for Latin American nations

b) Peace Corps--paid volunteers 11¢ a day to assist underdeveloped nations with education, economic, and health programs

c) Bay of Pigs invasion (April 1961)--Failed invasion by anti-Castro Cuban-Americans embarrassed JFK as the CIA had trained and financed the mission

d) Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962)--Soviets placed offensive missiles in Cuba. U.S. used diplomatic and military pressure (embargo of ships bound for Cuba). After tense two-week period, Soviets removed missiles.

e) Berlin Visit (1962)--JFK declared "I am a Berliner" to huge crowd in challenge to Soviet presence and response to building of the Berlin Wall ("For those who say communism is a better system, let them come to Berlin")

f) Vietnam Quagmire (see Vietnam War chart). JFK continued Eisenhower's policy of support for anticommunist forces in Southeast Asia to prevent "domino effect" of nations falling under communist control

E. Kennedy's assassination (November 22, 1963) in Dallas, Texas by Lee Harvey Oswald (a pro-Castro malcontent) ended his presidency, about which historians have widely differing assessments.

II. Johnson Presidency (1963-1969)

A. LBJ pushed through more domestic legislation than any 20th century president except FDR

1. Declared a war on poverty and creation of a Great Society

a) Medicare and Medicaid programs

b) VISTA--domestic Peace Corps

c) New cabinet offices created in Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

d) Head Start programs to aid underprivileged children

e) Food Stamp aid to help poor families

2. Significant civil rights legislation passed through Congress, including Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Acts

B. Urban unrest

1. Watts Riot (1965) resulted in 34 deaths and \$35 million damage and demonstrated frustration of urban blacks with unemployment and police practices

2. Riots followed in black neighborhoods in Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, and Jacksonville from 1965-1967.

3. King's assassination in April 1968 further antagonized racial tensions. National Commission concluded "Our nation is moving towards two societies, black and white, separate and unequal."

C. Foreign problems

1. U.S. invasion of Dominican Republic to bolster pro-American dictator put down revolt but weakened LBJ's credibility in foreign affairs

2. Vietnam (see Vietnam War chart). Because of criticism, LBJ announced on March 31, 1968 he would not seek second full term as president in 1968 election.

III. Countercultural Movements

A. Port Huron Statement (1962)--group of young intellectuals formed the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and set out an agenda for societal reform, that included student rights, economic justice, and anti-nuclear war views

B. Free Speech Movement (1964) begun at UC Berkeley by Mario Savio in protest of university policies spread to other universities as general student unease focused on anti-establishment sentiments.

C. Radicalization of American students led to challenge to Establishment norms and laws

1. Youth culture openly scornful of middle class values

2. Increased and public use of hallucinogenic drugs

3. Rise of hippies ("tune in, turn on, drop out") led to development of communes and other counterculture movements

4. Rock and folk music reflected iconoclastic views of the counter culture.

a) Rock groups such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Doors expressed mystical approach that embraced drugs and Eastern religions as well as themes of anger, frustration, and rebelliousness

b) Folk singers (Joan Baez, Bob Dylan) expressed explicit radicalism and challenged traditional mores.

D. New militancy among ethnic groups (Native Americans and Hispanics) and feminists also challenged values and laws through affirmative action and university programs that focused on correcting past abuses and stridency in pushing for equal treatment and legal protection