**CHAPTER 25**

**The Sixties**

**Learning Outcomes**

* 1. Describe the experiences John F. Kennedy had while president that led some to label him the “ultimate cold warrior.”

**Objectives**

1. Discuss Kennedy’s decision to go through with the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, and evaluate his leadership.
2. Give the details on the Cuban Missile Crisis, and evaluate Kennedy’s leadership during this period.
3. Provide details of Kennedy’s choice of actions in Vietnam, and assess his degree of success there.
   1. Discuss attempts made both by African Americans and by the legal system to provide voting and other rights to black citizens.

**Objectives**

1. Explain and evaluate the nonviolent ways in which African Americans fought for their civil rights during the early 1960s.
2. Explain how the March on Washington and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party aided the cause for African American civil rights, and discuss the rift that emerged in the movement.
3. List and describe the new laws enacted during the mid-sixties concerning civil rights, and explain the significance of each.
   1. Discuss Lyndon Johnson’s desire to build a “Great Society” and evaluate the relative success of his programs.

**Objectives**

1. Explain the impact of the death of President Kennedy.
2. Describe the elevation of Lyndon Johnson to presidency and the social problems that he was determined to alleviate with his “Great Society.”
3. Discuss the various programs and Congressional acts designed to carry out Johnson’s desire to improve living conditions of all Americans. Evaluate the relative success of each.
4. Signify the importance of revised immigration policies that led to legal entry for previously restricted Asians and Latin Americans.
   1. Explain the Cold War origins of the Vietnam War, and evaluate the decisions Johnson made that pushed the war into the forefront of Americans’ minds.

**Objectives**

1. Explain the Gulf of Tonkin incident that led LBJ to ask Congress for the necessary powers to take whatever measures were necessary in dealing with the Viet Cong.
2. Describe the experience of the troops in the battlefield in Vietnam.
3. Explain the Tet Offensive, and describe the ways in which it changed Americans’ perception of the ability of the United States to win the war.
   1. Discuss the growth of the “counterculture” in American society during the 1960s, the coming together of protesters against American culture and protesters challenging the war, and describe the various movements that began to gather strength as Americans sought to have their voices heard.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the protest movements that swept across many of America’s universities during the Sixties.
2. Explain the ways in which the civil rights movement changed as the Sixties progressed, especially with regard to the influence of Black Power and the Black Panther Party.
3. Explain what happened to the women’s movement and the Chicano Movement during the 1960s.
4. Describe the growing divide among Americans about the Vietnam War on campuses and in the counterculture.
5. Discuss how the anti-antiwar movement forces and the establishment reacted to dissent in the U.S. and how Nixon benefited from it.
6. Detail Nixon’s handling of the Vietnam War.

**Chapter Summary**

The transition to the excitement and disenchantments that people today associate with “the sixties” took place slowly, beginning about 1963 or 1964. It culminated in 1968, as liberalism seemed under attack from all sides. Liberalism was America’s dominant political system at the time, which stressed democracy, corporate capitalism, a generous system of social entitlements, and an ordered social system premised on obedience to the prevailing culture.

The Democrats nominated a young (forty-three-year-old) Massachusetts senator named John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy confronted communism in a series of encounters and bluffs. After overcoming resistance to his Catholic faith in the election, he spent his brief time as president engaging with threats near and far. Cuba continued to be a thorn in the American side, one that the CIA tried to eliminate in the Bay of Pigs invasion. This bungled operation was followed by a tense stand-off over Soviet weapons in Cuba, a situation that had the potential for a nuclear war.

While Kennedy was dealing with Cuba, he was also supporting an anticommunist government in South Vietnam. When an internal battle in South Vietnam between Catholic leaders like Ngo Dinh Diem and the Buddhist majority led to protests (several Buddhists publicly burned themselves to death to protest the repression of the Buddhist majority), the United States felt it was necessary to intervene in order to maintain stability. Within a few days, the U.S.-backed officers executed the old leaders and took charge. Nevertheless, political instability persisted, only increasing the apparent need for U.S. intervention.

At home, another type of conflict spread across the land as the Freedom Movement fought against racist laws. Sit-ins, SNCC, and the Freedom Rides contributed to the dismantling of discrimination in public accommodations. The movement became national, exemplified by the March on Washington. Although the nonviolent methods of Dr. King had demonstrated progress, a rift in the movement appeared as SNCC activists wanted change to come more quickly. Discontent increased despite some positive steps such as the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

Lyndon Baines Johnson’s Great Society was introduced to the American public after Kennedy’s shocking assassination. He confirmed his hold on the presidency after the landslide 1964 victory over conservative leader, Barry Goldwater. He then implemented his Great Society, aimed at lowering poverty and improving education and health care along with social welfare assistance. Congress discarded racist immigration laws leading to growing numbers of Asian and Latin American populations.

The expanding Vietnam War continually challenged Johnson’s domestic goals. LBJ took advantage of the Tonkin Gulf incident to introduce American air and ground forces to punish North Vietnam and the resistance in South Vietnam. Despite claims otherwise, the Tet Offensive made clear that a massive American intervention had not brought light at the end of the tunnel. LBJ, facing criticism from middle-of-the-road Americans, decided not to run for president in 1968.

Politics and social movements on the left and right responded unpredictably to the chaos of the late sixties. Student groups pushed the boundaries of free speech. Minority movements diversified into the Nation of Islam, Black Panthers, and the Chicano Movement, while the largest cities faced waves of racial riots, which in turn led to a “white backlash.” Women pushed for greater opportunities in the workplace and in society. College campuses became the scene for teach-ins about the Vietnam War and the location for student riots in a counterculture era that embraced drugs and celebrated popular music like the Beatles. The anti-antiwar movement responded by backing a law and order candidate in 1968, Richard Nixon. He transformed and eventually helped end the conflict with Vietnamization—Nixon’s plan to reduce American troops in Vietnam by encouraging South Vietnamese troops to take more responsibility for fighting. During his second term, he kept the promise to end the war, although his brief Cambodian excursion led to massive yet brief protests, including the Kent State shootings incident.

**Chapter Outline**

I. Kennedy and the Cold War

* 1. President Kennedy
  2. Kennedy the Cold Warrior

1. Nation Building
2. Kennedy and Cuba
3. Bay of Pigs Invasion
4. Cuban Missile Crisis
5. Kennedy and Vietnam

II. The Freedom Movement

* 1. Expanded Nonviolence

1. The Sit-ins and SNCC
2. Freedom Rides
3. Results
   1. National Successes

1. James Meredith, Project “C,” and the Children’s Crusade

2. March on Washington

3. A Rift Appears

4. Freedom Summer

* 1. Laws and Rifts

1. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act
2. Violence Continues
3. Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)
4. Voting Rights Act
5. Success and Rifts

III. The Great Society

1. The Kennedy Assassination
2. Lyndon Johnson
3. Johnson’s Great Society
4. Declaring War on Poverty
5. Education
6. Health Care
7. Social Welfare and Other Programs
8. Race and Immigration
9. Conclusion

IV. Johnson’s Vietnam

1. Initial Decisions
2. Tonkin Gulf Incident
3. Expanding U.S. Commitment
4. Battle
5. The Soldiers
6. The Tet Offensive
7. Domestic Criticism

V. Liberalism Adrift

* 1. Protests on Campus
  2. The New Left
  3. Free Speech Movement
  4. Black Power, Chicano Power
     1. Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam
     2. Urban Riots, SNCC, and Black Power
     3. Black Panther Party
     4. White Reaction
     5. The Chicano Movement
  5. The Women’s Movement
  6. The Vietnam War at Home
     1. Teach-ins
     2. Escalating Antiwar Protest
     3. Counterculture
  7. Social Divisions and Popular Unrest

1. The Anti-Antiwar Movement
2. 1968
3. Nixon
   1. Nixon and Vietnam
4. Vietnam as a Mistake

VI. Looking Ahead…

**Suggested Lecture Topics**

* + 1. JFK and His Family: America’s Closest Thing to Royalty
    2. George F. Kennan, “The Long Telegram,” and the Theory of Containment
    3. A Comparison and Contrast: Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon
    4. A History of the Music of the Sixties.
    5. Operation Northwoods: Some Plans are Better Off Ignored
    6. Logistics of the March on Washington
    7. Tet: The Celebration of a Vietnamese New Year
    8. How the Vietnam War Became so Negative at Home
    9. “Hey, Hey, LBJ, How many kids have you killed today?”–Protests Turn Ugly

(25-5f). There are several reasons why the Vietnam War was so divisive in the United States:

1. A questionable rationale
2. Class conflicts
3. Economic costs
4. Government deceit
5. Anger

The Reasons Why box provides good background information to prepare students for We Shall Overcome, a free online classroom simulation of American politics and issues from 1961 to 1972. Students should be divided into five groups simulating general interest groups of the era: Conservative Republicans, Traditional Republicans, Traditional Democrats, Democratic Left, and Populist Democrats. Instructors can create bonus questions if they want to add more content to the simulation.

**The Reasons Why…**

**Research Topics—Projects and Papers**

Students might choose to complete a project to be presented in class or to write a more traditional research paper. Or as an instructor, one could assign the topic to the students. Given below are a few topics that are relevant to this chapter. Instructors may, of course, choose to develop their own topics.

* + 1. Select five issues that ran through the presidencies of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. Prepare a chart with different columns for different presidents and stick a photo of the president above the respective column. Find the stance of each president and in simple terms print that in each president’s column. For extra “punch,” locate a quote or two from each president that exemplifies their stance.
    2. Gather information on the Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire to protest the fighting in Vietnam. Put together a poster to share with the class. It should be interesting to compare all of the students’ representations.
    3. As a class compile a list of commonly used phrases heard during the Sixties. Write them on strips of printer paper and hang them around the classroom.
    4. Conservatism retreated but did not disappear in the 1960s. Have students research the conservative movement in the 1960s and how they countered the counterculture and used the left to shape future victories

**Additional www Resources**

Gross, Terry. “Get on the Bus: The Freedom Riders of 1961.” NPR: National Public Radio Online.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5149667>

Bishop, Captain Donald M. “The Press and the TET Offensive: A Flawed Institution under Stress,” Air and Space Power Journal, November-December, 1978. Air and Space Power Journal Online.

<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1978/nov-dec/bishop.html>

“The Cuban Missile Crisis.” The Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale University Law School.

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/msc_cubamenu.asp>

“The Malcolm X Project at Columbia University.” The Center for Contemporary Black History and Research in African American Studies. Columbia University.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ccbh/mxp/staff.html>

“Escalation: Kevin O’Reilly.” A simulation of the presidential decisions faced by the LBJ Administration over foreign events and domestic pressures.

<http://www.escalationsim.com/>

“The Gay Sixties.” An examination of gay history in the 1960s including the pivotal Stonewall Inn Riot.

<http://www.nycnotkansas.com/GaySixties.htm>

**Primary Source Discussions**

**Assignment Name: The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society (1962)**

*Introduction*: The Port Huron statement was issued by a meeting of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) convention in Port Huron, Michigan, held on June 11–15, 1962. Largely written by Tom Hayden, the statement proclaims that young people are breaking away from the conservatism bred by the Cold War, frightened by the prospect of nuclear war, and alienated from American society by the falsehoods they have been told. The statement lays out the ways the New Left movement will create a grassroots "participatory democracy," able to reconnect the public with American politics.

*Visit URL*: http://college.cengage.com/history/shared/unprotected/ps/ah2porthuron.html

[The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society (1962)](http://college.cengage.com/history/shared/unprotected/ps/ah2porthuron.html)

*Instructions*: After reading the introduction and the primary source provided, answer the questions below.

1. What does the statement say about African Americans and civil rights?
2. What concerns are raised about poverty in the United States?
3. What economic changes are called for?
4. What are the key components of participatory democracy?
5. Why are the demands of the Port Huron Statement considered on the liberal/left end of the political spectrum?