Assignment # 3 Research Paper

Amy Verrelli

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Nova Southeastern University

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The election of 1960 took place between Republican Richard Nixon and Democrat John F. Kennedy (JFK) and was an election of many firsts. It was the first election in which televisions were used to show the presidential debates, it was the first election in which a Roman Catholic candidate was elected President of the United States, it was the election that produced the youngest President in history, it was one of the closest elections in history, it was the first election in which a president was born in the 20th century, and for that time period it was the first election in which an election was won by the smallest popular vote margin. The Democratic candidate of the election of 1960 and the newly elected President of the United States of America was John F. Kennedy.

John F. Kennedy was sworn in at the age of forty-three and as previously mentioned, was the youngest president in history. John F. Kennedy gave his inaugural speech on January 20, 1961. Some of the most memorable lines from JFK’s inaugural speech were, “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.” (International Business Times, 2011). This past January marked the 50th anniversary of JFK’s inaugural speech. Historians have ranked JFK’s speech as one of the four best inaugural speeches given by a U.S. president. (Grier, 2011).

During the time period (1961) when John F. Kennedy gave his inaugural address to the American people, events had taken place previous to his address that gave cause for JFK to speak the memorable lines quoted above. The 1950s had created a lot of discontent among Americans but in turn created opportunities for new leaders and ideas in the 1960s. Right and left wing politicians and intellectuals all offered their input as to solutions for the problems that the United States was facing both internationally and domestically.

Conflict that the U.S. was facing on an international level before the 1960 election was the spread of Communism and the Cold War. The Cold War took place from 1945 until 1960 and was given its name because there was no actual declaration of warfare by either the Soviet Union or the United States. Instead of fighting one another by the use of weapons, the Soviet Union and the U.S. used, “propaganda, economic war, and diplomatic haggling,” to fight one another during the Cold War. (Cold War, 1979).

The Cold War came about because of major political and social differences between the Soviet Union and the United States. Essentially, because of these major differences, the Soviet Union and the U.S. did not trust one another. The U.S. was a democratic nation and the richest world power that believed in free elections, capitalism, and freedom. (History Learning Site, 2000). On the other hand, the Soviet Union was a dictatorship with a poor economic base that believed in censorship, communism, and having no elections. (History Learning Site, 2000).

The spread of Communism in Europe by the Soviets was alarming to the United States, particularly in February of 1947 when the British could no longer give financial aid to the Greeks because they (the Greeks) were being overthrown by Communism. Turkey was also being overthrown by Communist guerillas, leading the U.S. to believe that dominating Greece and Turkey would give extreme power to the Soviet Union. (Cold War, 1979).

Although there was cause for concern about Communism expanding in Western Europe, President Eisenhower was also concerned about Communism spreading in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. The U.S. and seven other nations created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in order to protect South Vietnam from Communism. The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) was also established as an alliance in the Middle East among the U.S., Turkey, and Iran as a defense to Communism.

John F. Kennedy may have been inclined to address the issue of ‘support any friend,’ in his inaugural speech because prior to his inauguration the Eisenhower administration had established the defense alliances SEATO and CENTO to help support and protect their friends in Asia and the Middle East from Communists. Also, the U.S. was fighting for the ‘survival and success of liberty’ in the Cold War by opposing Communism around the world, as Communism took away liberties.

Conflict that the U.S. was facing on a domestic level before and during the 1960 election was the fight for civil rights among African-Americans. Segregation was in full effect as ‘separate but equal’ facilities such as buses, restaurants, schools, and public restrooms just to name a few were used to keep whites and African-Americans segregated from one another. Boycotts of the bus system led by Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) began in response to the arrest of Rosa Parks, an African-American woman who refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man in Alabama. As a result, the homes and churches of African-Americans were bombed and burned down. However, Alabama eventually allowed the integration of the buses as it was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court to segregate the bus system.

The arrest of Rosa Parks only sparked the beginning of the civil rights movement among African-Americans in the U.S. Slowly, but surely the integration of whites and blacks took place within the United States. President Kennedy himself supported civil rights and the integration of whites and blacks and during his presidential campaign in 1960 he even had Martin Luther King Jr. released from jail. JFK gained a lot of support from the African-American community for his part in MLK’s freedom from jail.

Once JFK was officially in office he was faced with many forms of international conflict, including problems with the Soviet Union, the Berlin Wall, Cuba and the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. President Kennedy experienced two major confrontations with the Soviet Union: the rise of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The rise of the Berlin Wall occurred in 1961 at the beginning of JFK’s presidency when Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, wanted to put a halt to Westerners entering West Berlin. The Eastern side of Germany was dominated by the Soviet Union and was of course, Communist. As a result, President Kennedy increased spending for defense and had American troops on reserve. Khrushchev acknowledged these actions by President Kennedy and decided to take a step back. However, this incident between President Kennedy and Khrushchev caused the government of Eastern Germany to erect a concrete fence that was laced with barbed wire between East and West Berlin, also known as the Berlin Wall.

The actions of the U.S. to get their troops ready demonstrates the viewpoint expressed by President Kennedy’s statement in his inaugural speech because the Soviet Union was a nation that wished the U.S. ill and JFK was showing his support for West Berlin and Western Europe to assure their liberty. These actions taken by the U.S. created more problems for the United States because the Berlin Wall did not come down until 1989. However, before the Berlin Wall was erected and even after the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989, tensions remained high between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The second major confrontation was the Cuban Missile Crisis which occurred in 1962. U.S. spy planes produced photographic evidence that the Soviet Union was secretly building missile launch sites in Cuba so that the Soviets would have missiles aimed at the United States. President Kennedy and his administration demanded Khrushchev to remove all of the Soviet missile bases in Cuba. In addition, JFK ordered a naval blockade of Cuba so that Russian ships could not bring additional missiles and construction materials to Cuba. Premier Khrushchev was not backing down as he gave his authorization to Soviet troops in Cuba to launch their missiles at the state of Florida if the United States sent troops to invade Cuba. “Deadlocked in this manner, the two leaders of the world’s greatest nuclear superpowers stared each other down for seven days – until Khrushchev blinked.” (Goldman & Stein, 1997). One week later Khrushchev decided to remove the missiles from Cuba along with his Soviet supply ships.

The actions of the U.S. ordering a Cuban naval blockade and demanding Khrushchev to remove all Soviet missile bases in Cuba demonstrates the viewpoint expressed by President Kennedy’s statement in his inaugural speech because the Soviet Union was once again wishing ill upon the United States and President Kennedy was not going to stand for Khrushchev’s actions. As opposed to bombing Cuba from the air or sending troops to invade on the ground, President Kennedy opted for something less dangerous which brought a satisfactory resolution for the United States because Khrushchev ended up backing down and if the U.S. had used lethal force on Cuba it may have sparked a World War.

Another major international conflict that President Kennedy faced during his administration was the Bay of Pigs Invasion, which took place on April 17, 1961. The situation arose when Cuban exiles who the support of the U.S. had wanted to overthrow their Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. The Cuban exiles had been trained by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to invade Cuba, which was approved by President Kennedy.

On the day of the invasion over one-thousand Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs, located on the southern coast of Cuba. Within the first few hours the exiles were not making any progress and it was clear that they were going to be defeated. Although President Kennedy contemplated bringing in the United States Air Force in order to fight the Cubans he decided not to. Ultimately, Fidel Castro’s army stopped the exiles and when the invasion stopped two days later about one-hundred exiles were killed and the rest were held as prisoners. “The failure of the invasion seriously embarrassed the young Kennedy administration. Some critics blamed Kennedy for not giving it adequate support and others for allowing it to take place at all.” (ThinkQuest, 1997).

The actions taken by the U.S. during the Bay of Pigs Invasion demonstrates the viewpoint in President Kennedy’s inaugural speech because the Soviet Union and Cuba were ill wishers of the United States yet President Kennedy made the decision to overthrow Cuba’s dictator Fidel Castro.

In my opinion from the beginning to the end of President Kennedy’s administration, which ended in 1963 due to his assassination, JFK stood up for the United States, supported it’s friends and fought for freedom until the very end. The beginning being before JFK was even elected into The White House and used his authority to have Martin Luther King Jr. released from jail. Therefore, President John F. Kennedy lived up to the statement in his inaugural speech. To this day, President Kennedy is still regarded as one of the greatest presidents in United States history and it is easy to understand why.

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