

Chapter 39- The Stormy Sixties

1960-1968

Kennedy's "New Frontier" Spirit

- John F. Kennedy delivered a stirring inaugural address on January 20, 1961 (glamour, vitality)
- He assembled one of the youngest cabinets with his brother, Robert, as attorney general who recast the priorities of FBI (targets had been focused on "internal security" not organized crime)
- J. Edgar Hoover, who had served as FBI director, resisted Robert Kennedy's efforts and Robert McNamara left the presidency of Ford Motor Company to take over the Defense Department
- Kennedy inspired high expectations, especially among the young; challenge of "New Frontier"
- Kennedy proposed the Peace Corps, an army of idealistic and mostly youthful volunteers to bring American skills to underdeveloped countries (ask what you can do for your country)
- Kennedy and his Ivy League lieutenants radiated confidence in their abilities (Harvard)

The New Frontier at Home

- Kennedy came into office with fragile Democratic majorities in Congress; Southern Democrats threatened to team up with Republicans and ax New Frontier proposals such as medical assistance for the aged and increased federal aid to education (Kennedy forced expansion of the all-important House Rules Committee, dominated by conservatives, New Frontier stalled)
- Kennedy had campaigned on the theme of revitalizing the economy after the recessions of the Eisenhower years and tried to hold the line against crippling inflation; his administration helped negotiate a noninflationary wage agreement in the steel industry in early 1962; steel management announced significant price increases, JFK was furious and steel operators backed down
- Kennedy appealed to free enterprise when he announced his support of a general tax-cut bill
- Kennedy promoted a multibillion-dollar project to land an American on the moon; 24 billion dollars later, in 1969, two American astronauts planted human footprints on the moon

Rumblings in Europe

- The new president met Soviet premier Khrushchev at Vienna in June 1961 and while the Soviets backed off the most bellicose threats, they began to construct the Berlin wall in August 1961
- IT was designed to plug the heavy population drain from East Germany to West Germany; the Wall stood for almost 30 years and symbolized the post-WW II division of Europe
- Western Europe, prospering after the Marshall Plan aid and growth of the American-encouraged Common Market (European Union), Kennedy secured passage of the Trade

Expansion Act in 1962, authorizing tariff cuts of up to 50 percent to promote trade with Common Market countries

- The Kennedy Round of tariff negotiations led to significant expansion of Euro-American trade
- American policymakers were dedicated to the “Atlantic Community” but were blocked by Charles de Gaulle, president of France who was suspicious of American intentions in Europe
- He vetoed British application for Common Market membership in 1963 fearing that the British “special relationship” with the US would deepen American control over European affairs

Foreign Flare-ups and “Flexible Response”

- Problems for US foreign policy emerged from the worldwide decolonization of European overseas possessions after World War II; the African Congo received its independence from Belgium in 1960 and immediately exploded into violence (UN sent in peacekeeping force)
- Washington contributed much money but no manpower; UN dominated by small nations
- Laos, freed from France in 1954, was festering dangerously by the time Kennedy came to office
- Eisenhower drenched the kingdom with dollars but failed to cleanse the country of communists
- As the Laotian civil war raged, Kennedy’s military advisers considered sending in American troops, but Kennedy sought a diplomatic escape hatch in the Geneva conference (peace in 1962)
- These “brushfire wars” intensified the pressure for a shift away from Secretary Dulles’ doctrine of “massive retaliation”—JFK pushed the strategy of “flexible response” developing an array of military “options” that could be precisely matched to the gravity of the crisis at hand
- Kennedy increased spending on conventional military forces and bolstered the Special Forces

Stepping into the Vietnam Quagmire

- “Flexible response” lowered the level at which diplomacy would give way to shooting; it provided a mechanism for a progressive, and possibly endless, stepping-up of the use of force
- The corrupt Diem gov’t despite American money had ruled since the partition of Vietnam in 1954; in 1961, Kennedy ordered a sharp increase in the number of troops in South Vietnam
- American forces had entered Vietnam to foster “political stability” and to protect Diem from the communists but the Kennedy administration eventually encouraged a successful coup against him in November 1963—by Kennedy’s death he had ordered 15,000 Americans into Vietnam

Cuban Confrontations

- Latin Americans feared and resented the powerful Colossus of the North; in 1961, Kennedy extended the hand of friendship with the Alliance for Progress hailed as the “Marshall Plan”
- A primary goal was to help the Good Neighbors close the gap between the rich and poor and thus quieting communist agitation but results were disappointing, no alliance, less progress
- President Kennedy had inherited from Eisenhower a CIA-backed scheme to topple Fidel Castro from power by invading Cuba with anticommunist exiles—supposed to trigger popular uprising
- On April 17, 1961, twelve hundred exiles landed (against direct intervention) but the exiles were no match for Castro’s air force; most of the invaders rotted in Cuban jails or ransomed
- The Bay of Pigs blunder along with American efforts to assassinate Castro and overthrow his gov’t pushed the Cuban leader further into the Soviet embrace; Soviets were secretly and speedily installing nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba intended to shield Castro and blackmail
- On October 22, 1962, Kennedy ordered a naval “quarantine” of Cuba and demanded immediate removal of threatening weaponry; he warned Khrushchev against any attack on US from Cuba
- The world teetered on the brink of global atomization; Khrushchev finally flinched and on October 28, he agreed to a partially face-saving compromise, by which he would pull the missiles out of Cuba and in return the US agreed to end the quarantine and not invade Cuba
- The American gov’t would also remove from Turkey some of its own missiles
- A disgraced Khrushchev was hounded out of the Kremlin and Moscow launched a program of military expansion; the Soviet buildup reached a crescendo in the next decade
- Kennedy pushed harder for a nuclear test0-ban treaty with the Soviet Union and a pact prohibiting trial nuclear explosions in the atmosphere was signed in late 1963
- Most significant was Kennedy’s speech at American University, Washington, D.C. in June 1963 in which the president urged Americans to abandon a view of the Soviet Union as a Devil-ridden land filled with fanatics—tried to lay foundations for a policy of peaceful coexistence with S.U.
- Here the modest origins of the policy that later came to be known as “détente”

The Killing of Kennedy

- Violence haunted America in the mid-1960s and on November 22, 1963, while in Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was assassinated; the alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was himself shot to death in front of television by a self-appointed avenger, Jack Ruby (official investigation)
- Vice President Johnson was promptly sworn in as president on an airplane (the first to do so)
- Johnson retained most of the bright Kennedy team; the nation was steeped in sorrow
- Kennedy proved that a Catholic could be trusted with the presidency of the United States

- Though Kennedy was tarnished partially by his womanizing and allegations about his involvement with organized crime figures, his vigor, charisma, and idealism made him an idol

The LBJ Brand on the Presidency

- The new president hailed from the populist hill country of west Texas who made it into a Senate seat in 1948 developing into a masterful wheeler-dealer (Democratic majority leader in 1954)
- He wielded power second only to that of Eisenhower and used the “Johnson treatment”—a display of backslapping, flesh pressing, and arm-twisting that overbore friend and foe alike
- As president, John shed the conservative coloration of his Senate years to reveal the liberal
- After a lengthy conservative filibuster, Congress at last passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 that banned racial discrimination in most public facilities, strengthened the federal gov’t power to end segregation, and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- The act’s Title VII passed the sexual clause intact and advanced gender and racial equality
- In 1965, Johnson issued an executive order requiring all federal contractors to take “affirmative action” against discrimination; Johnson also rammed through Kennedy’s tax bill in Congress
- Johnson added proposals of his own for a billion-dollar “War on Poverty” in which Johnson voiced special concern for Appalachia affected by the sickness of the soft-coal industry
- Johnson dubbed his domestic program the “Great Society”—a sweeping set of New Dealish economic and welfare measures aimed at transforming the American way of life; public support for LBJ’s antipoverty war was aroused by Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (20 %)

Johnson Battles Goldwater in 1964

- The Democrats nominated Johnson in 1964 that stood on the most liberal platform since Truman
- Republicans nominated Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona (champion of rock conservatism)
- Goldwater attacked the federal income tax, the Social Security system, the TVA, civil rights legislation, the nuclear test-ban treaty, and most loudly, the Great Society; the Democrats exploited the image of Goldwater as a trigger cowboy who would not hesitate to wage war
- Johnson cultivated the contrasting image of a resolute statesman by seizing upon the Tonkin Gulf episode early in August 1964 in which North Vietnam supposed attacked South Vietnam

- Johnson ordered a “limited” retaliatory air raid against the North Vietnamese bases, loudly proclaiming that he sought “no wider war”—the president not was given power to use further force in Southeast Asia; The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was the name given to the powers (61%)
- The towering Texan rode to a spectacular victory in November 1964; the voters were herded into Johnson’s column by fondness of the Kennedy legacy, faith in Great Society promises, and fear of Goldwater—cracking of once solidly Democratic South offered Republicans only slight hope

The Great Society Congress

- Johnson’s huge victory smashed the conservative congressional coalition of southern Democrats and northern Republicans; Congress poured out a flood of legislation (promise of social reform)
- Escalating the War on Poverty, Congress doubled the appropriation of the Office of Economic Opportunity to \$2 billion; tireless Johnson also created the Department of Transportation and the Department of housing and Urban Development (HUD), to which he named the first black cabinet secretary in the nation’s history, respected economist Robert C. Weaver
- Other noteworthy laws established the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities
- Even more impressive were the Big Four legislative achievements that crowned LBJ’s Great Society program: aid to education, medical care for the elderly and indigent, immigration reform, and a new voting rights bill; Johnson channeled educational aid to students not schools
- Medicare for the elderly, accompanied by Medicaid for the poor, became a reality in 1965
- The new programs were welcomed by millions of older Americans who had no health insurance and by the poor who could not afford proper medical treatment—they created “entitlements”
- They conferred rights on certain categories of Americans virtually in perpetuity, without the need for repeated congressional approval; they were part of a spreading “Rights revolution” (\$ lost)
- The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the “national-origins” quota system that had been in place since 1921 and the act doubled the number of immigrant allowed to enter annually, while setting limits on immigrants from the Western Hemisphere (120,000)
- The new law further provided for the admission of close relatives of US citizens
- Sources of immigration shifted heavily from Europe to Latin America and Asia
- Great Society programs came in for political attack in later years; conservatives charged that poverty could not be papered over with greenbacks and that billions had been wasted
- Poverty rate declined measurably in the ensuing decade, Medicare made dramatic reductions in the incidence of poverty among America’s elderly and other antipoverty programs like Project Head Start sharply improved the educational performance of underprivileged youth

- Infant mortality rates fell in minority communities as general health conditions improved