

Chapter 30 Outline - The Tumultuous Sixties, 1960–1968

- I. Introduction

Each administration from 1961 to 1974 promised reforms, but violence also marked the terms of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

By the time of his assassination in 1963, President John F. Kennedy had begun to offer more active support for the civil rights movement and more ambitious domestic policies. President Johnson used the memory of the dead president to launch a program of civil rights and to launch the Great Society. The era also witnessed the emergence of a revitalized conservative movement, the breakup of the New Deal coalition, and an explosion of African American rage in the “long hot summers” of the mid-1960s. In fact, passion over both domestic and international issues during the 1960s led millions of Americans to take to the streets. Although the passions of the people revitalized democracy, they threatened to tear the nation apart.

- II. Kennedy and the Cold War

- A. John Fitzgerald Kennedy

While serving as a Congressman and then a Senator, Kennedy generally cast liberal votes but avoided controversial issues. In foreign policy he endorsed the policy of containment.

The public image of Kennedy was at odds with reality.

- B. Election of 1960

Kennedy captured the imagination of many Americans in his campaign for the presidency in 1960; however, his popular vote victory over Richard Nixon was narrow.

Upon assuming the presidency, Kennedy surrounded himself with intellectuals with fresh ideas. His top priority was the waging of the

Cold War.

- C. Nation Building in the Third World

Kennedy came to understand there were limits to American power abroad. He took a cautious and pragmatic approach to foreign affairs.

Based on the concept of nation building, the Kennedy administration initiated aid programs to help developing nations through the early states of nationhood.

The concept of counterinsurgency was the tactic used to defeat revolutionaries in Third World countries friendly to the United States.

Both nation building and counterinsurgency encountered numerous problems.

- D. Soviet-American Tensions

During Kennedy's first year in office, little progress was made in limiting the nuclear arms race or on getting the superpowers to agree on a nuclear test ban.

In 1961, Kennedy rejected Soviet demands concerning Berlin, and he vowed to defend West Berlin. The Soviets responded by building the Berlin Wall to stop the flow of Eastern Germans into the more prosperous Western zone.

- E. Bay of Pigs Invasion

Kennedy inherited the Bay of Pigs invasion plan, but he ordered that no Americans be directly involved. The April 1961 invasion was a disaster.

In the aftermath of the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CIA initiated a project known as Operation Mongoose.

- F. Cuban Missile Crisis

Russia provided military assistance to Cuba and placed nuclear missiles on the island. Discovery of these missiles in 1962 sparked a frightening episode of brinkmanship.

Many observers see Kennedy's handling of the crisis as his finest hour.

Critics assert that Kennedy courted disaster in the way in which he handled the crisis.

The crisis led to some easing of Soviet-American tensions, with both Kennedy and Khrushchev taking steps to improve bilateral relations. In August 1963, the two superpowers signed a nuclear test ban treaty. The "hot line" was also installed.

- III. Marching for Freedom

- A. Students and the Movement

Students who formed Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to coordinate the sit-in movement were committed to nonviolence.

- B. Freedom Rides and Voter Registration

Beginning in May 1961, members of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized the Freedom Rides into the South. The Freedom Riders were met with violence in Anniston, Birmingham, and Montgomery.

The national and international response to this violence caused Kennedy to act.

Beginning in 1961, SNCC volunteers in Mississippi and Georgia urged African Americans to resist segregation and register to vote.

- C. Kennedy and Civil Rights

Kennedy was not at first fully committed to the civil rights movement. Civil rights activism and white violence ultimately caused Kennedy to commit himself to first-class citizenship for African Americans.

Kennedy ordered federal marshals to protect James Meredith, the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi.

- D. Birmingham and the Children's Crusade

Martin Luther King Jr. organized a 1963 nonviolent protest campaign in Birmingham, Alabama.

With children on the front lines of the march, Birmingham police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor ordered the use of water guns and attack dogs against the protestors. President Kennedy responded by demanding a negotiated settlement.

- E. "Segregation Forever!"

In the spring of 1963, the Kennedy administration confronted Governor Wallace of Alabama in his stand at the schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama.

A few hours after Kennedy delivered a nationally televised speech in which he called upon the nation "to fulfill its promise," Medgar Evers was murdered in his driveway in Jackson, Mississippi.

Kennedy called on Congress to pass civil rights legislation.

- F. March on Washington

In August 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered one of the most memorable speeches in American history to a quarter of a million American gathered in the area between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.

- G. Freedom Summer

Over a thousand young people joined the struggle in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer of 1964.

Freedom Summer volunteers formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

James Cheney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman were murdered by a Klan mob.

- IV. Liberalism and the Great Society

- A. Kennedy Assassination

Kennedy died in Dallas, Texas, and crushed the hope that many held for the future.

Although the Warren Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, many Americans still debate whether Oswald was a lone assassin or part of a larger conspiracy.

Critics fault Kennedy as president, but he seemed to grow in the office and his untimely death enhanced his reputation.

- B. Johnson and the Great Society

As a result of his years in Congress, Lyndon Johnson had learned how to manipulate people and wield power to achieve his goals.

Johnson's Great Society was built on his belief that government should work actively to improve the lives of Americans.

- C. Civil Rights Act

At the urging of President Johnson, Congress outlawed *legal* discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex in federal programs, voting, employment, and

public accommodations. The bill also included mechanisms for enforcement.

- D. Election of 1964

Johnson and the Democrats won a tremendous victory in 1964, paving the way for numerous domestic programs.

The SCLC put voting rights at the top of its agenda. King organized the Selma-to-Montgomery march. This led to confrontation on March 6, 1964, when Alabama state troopers attacked the peaceful marchers.

Johnson pledged his full support for passage of the Voting Rights Act, which he signed into law soon thereafter.

- E. Improving American Life

The Johnson administration established new student loan and grant programs, created the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, ended racially based quotas by signing the Immigration Act of 1965, and supported consumer protection legislation.

“Lady Bird” Johnson was successful in pushing for legislation to restrict billboards and junkyards along interstate highways. President Johnson signed legislation to protect remaining wilderness area and supported laws that addressed environmental pollution.

- F. War on Poverty

The War on Poverty was at the core of Johnson’s Great Society.

Johnson’s ambitious effort to destroy poverty through education and job training enjoyed mixed success.

Federal programs and economic expansion alleviated a number of problems the poor faced. However, the War on Poverty was not as

successful in addressing the root causes of poverty.

- V. Johnson and Vietnam

- A. Kennedy's Legacy in Vietnam

Kennedy sent more than 16,000 advisors to Vietnam. Diem created problems because of his oppressive policies and his persecution of Buddhists. The CIA urged South Vietnamese officers to overthrow Diem, and they murdered him in 1963.

- B. Tonkin Gulf Incident and Resolution

Despite flimsy evidence of attacks on American ships, in 1964 Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution giving Lyndon Johnson authority to wage war on North Vietnam. In effect, Congress surrendered its warmaking powers to the executive branch.

- C. Decision for Escalation

In February 1965, after the Vietcong attacked the American airfield at Pleiku, Johnson ordered Operation Rolling Thunder against North Vietnam.

Johnson decided to increase U.S. ground forces in Vietnam in July 1965. U.S. troop strength peaked in 1968 at 536,100.

- D. Opposition to Americanization

Democratic leaders in the Senate, major newspapers, prominent columnists, and some officials within the Johnson administration warned against the Americanization of the war in Vietnam.

Most of America's allies warned against an escalation of the war and called for a political settlement.

It appears that the Johnson administration decided in favor of

escalation because they feared American credibility was at stake.

- E. American Soldiers in Vietnam

Many Americans in Vietnam just tried to survive their tours of duty in a brutal and inhospitable environment.

Before long, the only indication of U.S. success was in enemy casualty tallies, which were usually inflated.

- F. Divisions at Home

Protests at home grew along with the military escalation in Vietnam.

The Fulbright hearings constituted the first in-depth national discussion of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam.

McNamara became convinced that continued bombing would not win the war, but Johnson vowed to continue the war.

- VI. A Nation Divided

- A. Urban Unrest

Many black leaders advocated nonviolence, but in 1964, frustration erupted into riots in several northern cities.

A bloody riot occurred in Los Angeles in 1965. In this case blacks, not whites, initiated the violence. Riots continued from 1966 to 1968. The Kerner Commission found that white racism had led to the disturbances.

- B. Black Power

Malcolm X, a symbol of African American pride, was killed in 1965 for moderating his hard-line positions.

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael encouraged African Americans to

express their identity through Black Power.

The Black Panthers combined black separatism and revolutionary communism and dedicated themselves to destroying capitalism and the presence of the police in the ghettos. They also worked to improve life in their neighborhoods.

- C. Youth and Politics

Some white college students from both the political right and the political left dedicated themselves to changing the system.

A group of conservative college students formed Young Americans for Freedom.

Students for a Democratic Society, meeting at Port Huron, Michigan, condemned racism, poverty, and the Cold War. The heterogeneous protest movement referred to itself as the New Left.

- D. Free Speech Movement

At the University of California at Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement indicated a new white activism.

- E. Student Activism

A major target of student activism was the doctrine of *in loco parentis*.

- F. Youth and the War in Vietnam

It was the war in Vietnam that truly mobilized a nationwide student movement. Teach-ins were held on college campuses as the war escalated in 1965. The first major antiwar march was held in Washington, D.C., in 1965.

- G. Youth Culture and the Counterculture

The music and styles of the young drove American popular culture in the late 1960s.

Music was the most unifying element of youth culture.

Some young people wanted to shape an alternative lifestyle. Cynicism, drug use, and contempt for many traditional values shaped the emergence of a counterculture.

Oral contraceptives led young people to adopt more casual sexual mores.

- VII. 1968

- A. The Tet Offensive

The Vietcong and North Vietnamese offensive in 1968 ended in an American victory, but many people, including presidential advisors, came to believe that the war could not be won.

- B. Johnson's Exit

On March 31, 1968, Johnson announced a halt to the bombing of most of North Vietnam, asked Hanoi to begin negotiations to end the war, and announced that he would not run for reelection.

- C. Assassinations

In April 1968, James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King Jr., touching off widespread violence.

In June 1968, an Arab nationalist assassinated Robert Kennedy, increasing a sense of despair in Americans.

- D. Chicago Democratic National Convention

In August 1968, a riot between demonstrators at the Democratic

convention and the police shocked the nation.

- E. Global Protest

Protests spread around the world in the spring and summer of 1968, including the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia in which demonstrators demanded a democratic government and an end to Soviet repression. The rebellion was crushed by Soviet tanks.

- F. Nixon’s Election

In November 1968, Americans narrowly elected Richard Nixon over Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace.