



2018–2019  
**SOCIAL  
SCIENCE**  
Resource Guide

# **The 1960s: A Transformational Decade**



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# Table of Contents

## **INTRODUCTION . . . . . 5**

## **SECTION I: THE DAYS OF CAMELOT . . 6**

### America in the 1950s: The Origins of Transformation. . . . . 6

Prosperity and Liberalism . . . . . 6

Legacies of the New Deal State . . . . . 6

The Fruits of War . . . . . 7

The Postwar Economy . . . . . 9

A Consumers' Republic . . . . . 9

The Suburban Middle Class . . . . . 10

Conformity and Discontent . . . . . 10

The Vital Center . . . . . 11

Suburban Womanhood . . . . . 11

Youth Culture and Sexuality . . . . . 12

The Other America: African Americans,

Latinos, and the Poor . . . . . 12

Eisenhower's Cold War . . . . . 14

Massive Retaliation . . . . . 14

Stalling in the Arms Race? . . . . . 15

The Military Industrial State . . . . . 15

### A New Frontier: Kennedy and the World . . 16

The Rise of John F. Kennedy . . . . . 16

Nixon vs. Kennedy . . . . . 16

A Catholic President . . . . . 17

The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy . . . . . 17

Kennedy and the Image of Vitality . . . . . 17

Kennedy and the Cold War . . . . . 18

Racing the Soviets to Space . . . . . 18

The Berlin Wall . . . . . 18

Nuclear Proliferation in Europe . . . . . 19

The Bay of Pigs Invasion . . . . . 20

The Cuban Missile Crisis . . . . . 20

The Turn Toward Non-Proliferation . . . . . 20

A New Approach to the Developing World . . . 21

America Volunteers: The Peace Corps . . . . . 21

Kennedy and the African Post-Colonial

Movement . . . . . 21

An Alliance for Progress: Kennedy and Latin

America . . . . . 22

Flexible Response and Counterinsurgency . . . 22

Kennedy and Indochina: Stepping into the

Quagmire . . . . . 22

### New Frontiers at Home . . . . . 23

Civil Rights: From the Courts, to the Streets, to the

Ballot Box . . . . . 23

A Lackluster Leader in the White House . . . 23

Going Public: The Sit-Ins of 1960 . . . . . 23

Hitting the Road: The Freedom Riders . . . . . 24

Blood on the Pavement: Facing Bull Connor in

Birmingham . . . . . 25

White Backlash: Civil Rights Opposition . . . 25

Still a Dream: The March for Jobs and

Freedom . . . . . 26

Domestic Policies: Economic Growth . . . . . 26

Economic Policy: Keynesian Fine-Tuning . . . 26

Kennedy's Domestic Reform Efforts . . . . . 27

The Assassination of John F. Kennedy . . . . . 27

November 22, 1963 . . . . . 27

The Warren Commission . . . . . 27

### Section I Summary . . . . . 28



**SECTION II: THE APEX OF AMERICAN LIBERALISM . . . . .29**

Indomitable Will: The Johnson Presidency . . . 29

    President Johnson . . . . .29

        Texas Roots . . . . .29

        Mastering the Ropes of D.C. . . . .29

        Dreams of a new New Deal . . . . .29

        The Johnson Treatment . . . . .30

        A Vice President in the Wings . . . . .30

Legislating the Kennedy Legacy . . . . .31

    The Kennedy-Johnson Tax Cut . . . . .31

    The Civil Rights Act . . . . .31

    Women and the Civil Rights Act . . . . .32

    The Election of 1964: Johnson vs. Goldwater . . . . .32

The Great Society . . . . .33

    The War on Poverty . . . . .34

    Education . . . . .34

    Housing and Urban Development . . . . .34

    Medical Care . . . . .34

    Immigration Reform . . . . .35

    The 1965 Voting Rights Act . . . . .35

The Warren Court . . . . .36

    Civil Rights . . . . .36

    The Rights of the Accused . . . . .36

    Preserving Democracy . . . . .36

From Civil Rights to Black Power . . . . . 37

    The Limits of Nonviolent Resistance . . . . .37

        The Mississippi Freedom Summer . . . . .37

        Dead End in Selma . . . . .37

        The Black Separatism of Malcolm X . . . . .38

The Urban Crisis . . . . .38

    The Black Urban Experience . . . . .38

    The Watts Riots, August 1965 . . . . .39

    Ghettos in Flames Nationwide . . . . .39

Black Power . . . . .40

    Stokely Carmichael’s Black Power . . . . .40

    The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense . . . . .41

    Black Pride in Culture and Society . . . . .41

    Black Power’s Global Influence . . . . .42

Section II Summary . . . . . 42

**SECTION III: THE CENTER DOES NOT HOLD . . . . .43**

Social and Cultural Dissent in the Early 1960s . . . . . 43

    The New Left—and Right . . . . .43

        Students for a Democratic Society . . . . .43

        The Berkeley Free Speech Movement . . . . .43

        Young Americans for Freedom . . . . .44

The Sexual Revolution and the Women’s Movement . . . . .45

    Birth Control . . . . .45

    Cohabitation . . . . .45

    The Liberal Women’s Movement and Politics . . . . .45

The United States and the World, 1964–68 . . . . . 46

    Vexing Vietnam: The Quagmire Deepens . . . . .46

        The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution . . . . .46

        The Policy of Gradual Escalation . . . . .47

        The Best and the Brightest: Managing a War of Annihilation . . . . .47

        The Draft: Race and Class . . . . .48

        The American Soldier in Vietnam . . . . .48

        The Tet Offensive and its Political Fallout . . . . .49

        My Lai . . . . .49

The United States, Europe, and the Developing World . . . . .50

    The Dominican Republic . . . . .50

    Israel and the Six-Day War of 1967 . . . . .50

    The Long Road to Détente: U.S.-Soviet Relations . . . . .50

The Antiwar Movement . . . . .51

    Teach-Ins and Campus Protests . . . . .51

    Catholic Priests and Draft Resisters . . . . .51

    Opposition to the War Comes to Congress . . . . .52

    Vietnam Topples Johnson . . . . .52

    Student Protests and Antiwar Sentiments around the World . . . . .52



Social and Cultural Dissent in the Late 1960s. . . . .	53
Counterculture: Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll . . .	53
“Dropping Out”: Youth Culture and Drugs . . .	53
The British Invasion: From San Francisco to Woodstock. . . . .	54
Flower Children: Communes and Alternative Societies . . . . .	54
Modern Environmentalism . . . . .	55
<i>Silent Spring</i> . . . . .	55
<i>The Population Bomb</i> . . . . .	56
Earth Day . . . . .	56
The Rights Revolution . . . . .	56
The Chicano Movement . . . . .	56
The American Indian Movement. . . . .	57
Second Wave Feminism . . . . .	57
NOW . . . . .	57
Women’s Liberation Emerges . . . . .	58
The Resurgence of the Equal Rights Amendment . . . . .	58
The Stonewall Riots and the Birth of Gay Pride . . . . .	59
Section III Summary . . . . .	59

**SECTION IV: THE RISE AND UNDOING OF A LAW-AND-ORDER PRESIDENT . . . . .60**

The Age of Aquarius . . . . .	60
1968: The Conflict Erupts . . . . .	60
The Crime of Memphis . . . . .	60
Another Kennedy Assassination . . . . .	61
Police Run Riot: The Democratic National Convention . . . . .	61
The Chicago Seven . . . . .	62
The Election of Richard Nixon . . . . .	62
The Richard Nixon the Cold War Made . . .	62
Lessons in Media and Resentment . . . . .	62
The Election of 1968 . . . . .	63

The Nixon Presidency . . . . .	64
Nixon at Home: The Accidental Liberal . . . . .	64
Welfare and the Great Society. . . . .	64
The Environment, Workers’ Safety, and Consumer Protection . . . . .	64
Civil Rights and Affirmative Action . . . . .	65
Roots of Stagnation: The Seeds of the Seventies. . . . .	66
Nixon’s Strategy of Vietnamization . . . . .	67
Nixon and Kissinger: Traitors or Clever Politicians? . . . . .	67
Troop Withdrawals and the End of the Draft . . . . .	67
The Invasion of Cambodia . . . . .	68
Kent State and Jackson State . . . . .	68
The Pentagon Papers . . . . .	69
Soldiers and Veterans against the Vietnam War. . . . .	69
Nixon’s Foreign Policy . . . . .	70
Nixon’s Recognition of Beijing . . . . .	70
Détente with Moscow . . . . .	71
The Nixon Doctrine in South America . . . . .	71
Nixon’s Landslide and His Path toward Resignation . . . . .	71
Nixon’s Bombing Campaigns: “Peace Is at Hand” . . . . .	71
The Election of 1972 . . . . .	72
The Watergate Break-in: The Making of a National Crisis . . . . .	72
Section IV Summary . . . . .	73

**CONCLUSION . . . . .74**

**TIMELINE . . . . .75**

**GLOSSARY . . . . .79**

**NOTES . . . . .88**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .91**



# Introduction

Few historical periods are as evocative in today’s popular culture as the 1960s. In our shared national imagination, hippies with long hair and tie-die shirts dance barefoot to psychedelic rock, the nation’s university students march in protest with political manifestos in hand, black urban residents challenge police on city boulevards, and suited men with thick-rimmed glasses monitor rocket launches on bulky black-and-white monitors. The sixties also invoke political images for most Americans: John F. Kennedy in an open limousine moments before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. in the midst of a speech at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial, American G.I.s disembarking from a helicopter in the jungles of Vietnam. As is true for all memories, these fragments both mislead us about the historical trends of the time and at the same time speak to essential truths about the sixties.

On the one hand, our popular imagination of the sixties captures the decade’s overarching theme of change and transformation. In national politics, lawmakers enacted significant reforms shaping most aspects of life; the United States Supreme Court facilitated a constitutional revolution the likes of which the country had not seen since Reconstruction; and the turbulent administrations of three presidents changed not just domestic politics, but the nation’s place in the world. Economically, mass-production and consumer capitalism reached a post-war peak. Just as importantly, Americans pushed for social and political change. Not everyone engaged in activism, but activists took on an array of causes and came in all forms—liberals and conservatives, men and women, students and older adults, whites and people of color. One black organizer remembered, “All I wanted to do was live in a free country.” In a way, such faith in the ability to realize the freedom promised with the nation’s founding drove other movements of change in the 1960s as well. From diverse backgrounds,

with diverse views on social justice, cultural expression, the role of government, and the nation’s place in the world, Americans in the 1960s pursued change, even if they did not always agree on what the future should look like.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, much of American life in the 1960s stayed the same as it had been before—and much of it continued in the same vein afterward. Historians typically hesitate to organize the past by decades since clear turning points are hard enough to come by and rarely coincide with round dates on the calendar. Like any historical period, the sixties reflected the trends and events that preceded it. Only if we understand what came before can we hope to see how transformative this decade really was. Similarly, finding an endpoint for the sixties is more complicated than closing the book at the end of 1969. Many of the events and trends we associate with “the sixties” occurred or continued in the 1970s. Most historians see the sixties ending with Richard Nixon’s Watergate scandal and the withdrawal from Vietnam, and that is where this resource guide ends as well. Yet, the changes of the sixties linger into our present. It is one of the rewards for the history student to discover the linkages between our own time and historical transformations such as those of the sixties. With any luck, this guide will not only transform the way you understand the sixties, but also the way you understand your world today.

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***NOTE TO STUDENTS:*** You will notice as you read through the resource guide that some key terms and phrases are boldfaced. While many of these terms are defined and/or explained in the text of the guide, you can also find explanations of these terms in the glossary at the end of the Resource Guide.



# Section I

## The Days of Camelot

### AMERICA IN THE 1950s: THE ORIGINS OF TRANSFORMATION

#### PROSPERITY AND LIBERALISM

##### *Legacies of the New Deal State*

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s shaped the United States' economic and social structures in the 1950s. First, the policy responses to the Great Depression had changed the role of the federal government in American life. In contrast to his predecessors, Roosevelt remade the American presidency from a distant, even aloof, figurehead with limited powers over people's daily lives to that of an advocate and guardian of the American people. During Roosevelt's tenure, Americans increasingly associated the federal government with the president, and many came to expect the president to initiate reforms, provide a social safety net, and bring about prosperity and opportunity.

Roosevelt and the New Deal altered not only expectations of the federal government, but the dynamics of the national economy as well. The National Labor Relations Act—or Wagner Act—of 1935 guaranteed workers the right to freely form labor unions. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 banned most child labor and established basic rights, such as minimum wages and maximum hours for workers, except for those in domestic service and agriculture. The Social Security Act of 1935 protected the elderly, disabled, and unemployed from extreme poverty and destitution. Importantly, the New Deal put Americans to work building roads, airports, hydro-electric dams, hospitals, and schools. Postwar Americans were able to commute on these roads, and had a higher standard of living thanks to the supply of electricity and the new buildings paid for during the New Deal.

Due to these reforms, many Americans after World War II enjoyed more stable jobs because of labor contracts negotiated by unions, especially the largest unions, the American Federation of Labor [AFL] and the Congress of



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act in 1935.

Industrial Organizations [CIO]. Employee pension funds felt confident enough to invest in the stock market, and their investments helped create stable growth on Wall Street. Job security, and a stable market in turn made it easier for many Americans to commit to a mortgage and become homeowners. Significantly, Social Security helped Americans to economically survive the blows of a lay-off, disability, or retirement far more easily than previous generations. For these reasons, scholars have often referred to these New Deal reforms as economic stabilizers: New Deal policies provided steadier incomes as well as relief in times of need. As a result, Americans experienced less hardship during recessions, and because of regulation, economic boom periods took the form of modest, steady growth, rather than quick, risky bubbles.

The New Deal thus redefined liberalism: unlike "classical liberalism" of the late nineteenth century, liberty no longer meant freedom from an intrusive government. Now, American liberalism meant looking to the federal government to intervene in the economy and provide





*President Roosevelt signs the G.I. Bill into law in 1944. The bill aimed to help World War II veterans return to domestic life.*

opportunities for Americans.

Roosevelt's presidency also reorganized the nation's political landscape, setting the stage on which the transformations of the 1960s would unfold. The New Deal coalition—the groups of Americans who came together to vote for the Democrats during and after FDR's presidency—included workers and farmers, northern blacks, southern whites, Catholics, immigrants, liberal professionals, and urban intellectual elites. The Democrats gained working-class supporters by not only advocating for urban working people with slogans, but putting in place policies that helped them. African Americans in the South were not part of this coalition because most could not vote in southern states, but African Americans in the North, who had largely voted for Republicans (the party of Lincoln) since the Civil War, began voting for the Democratic party because Roosevelt's policies helped disadvantaged Americans—even though the president refused to tackle civil rights issues, such as lynching. Roosevelt failed to take a stand on civil rights because he needed the votes of southern

whites—who ever since the Civil War had voted for the Democrats and wanted to maintain the South's Jim Crow policies of black disfranchisement, segregation, and racial violence. Although there were tensions in the New Deal coalition, the coalition was nonetheless significant because rarely in American history had a party drawn so many constituencies under one political tent.

### **THE FRUITS OF WAR**

Americans' experiences in World War II amplified many of the legacies of the New Deal. Whereas many of Roosevelt's initiatives provided essential relief, instituted necessary reforms, and restored Americans' faith in their political system and economy, it was the demand for war materiel that restored the nation to full employment. Federal contracts for airplanes, tanks, food supplies, and new technologies (such as radar, jet engines, transistors, and atomic energy) revived dormant factories in the Midwest, led to industrial growth in California and the South, and pulled millions of Americans out of unemployment. The



war prompted an unprecedented surge in technological innovation and development that would transform the way Americans worked, built homes, ate, and entertained themselves for decades to come.

Employment in government offices, airplane assembly plants, and shipyards pulled the United States out of the Depression, but the costs of war meant that individual Americans didn't immediately get to enjoy their earnings. The federal government needed to deduct income tax from paychecks. While this cut into Americans' earnings, they grew accustomed to paying taxes as a civic responsibility necessary to achieve a common good—victory in war. In addition, wartime rations and shortages prevented families from enjoying new clothing or more expensive meals. Since there was little to spend money on, many Americans bought war bonds, essentially lending money to the federal government to pay for the war effort. After the war, the government paid back these bonds with interest, which gave Americans cash for a better future. When soldiers, nurses, and other war workers returned home, and families reunited after the war, they were able to spend their earnings and bond savings on consumer goods, like appliances, homes, and cars. Economists call this pattern of saving for future consumption "**pent-up demand.**"

As Americans fought in WWII, they hoped that the postwar era would mean a better future—not a return to the Great Depression. Nearly a year before the United States joined the war, President Roosevelt gave a [speech](#) that explained the nation's mission was to preserve "**four freedoms.**" Freedom of speech and freedom of worship renewed commitments to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Freedom from fear, on the other hand, committed the nation to the defeat or containment of aggressor nations that jeopardized peace. More than a simple commitment to national self-defense, this freedom obliged the U.S. government to attempt to shape world affairs in order to prevent wars. Finally, freedom from want reiterated the promise of the New Deal and sent the message to Americans in uniform that they would not return home to soup kitchens and breadlines. These four freedoms remained central themes in American life, culture, and political disagreements throughout the 1960s.

Passed in 1944 near the war's end, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or **G.I. Bill of Rights**, had an enormous impact on postwar America. It was designed to fulfill Roosevelt's promise of freedom from want by helping World War II veterans re-enter American domestic life. The G.I. Bill established a Veteran's Affairs (VA) office that helped

veterans return to their prewar jobs, thereby avoiding huge numbers of unemployed veterans. The G.I. Bill also allowed the VA to issue its own unprecedented benefits, which included paying for veterans to go to college or to be retrained at a trade school. This funneled millions of veterans and billions of dollars into higher education, expanding the number of American universities and making college accessible to a generation of American men.

The VA also provided loans for veterans to start small businesses or farms, and it took care of veterans' medical needs. The VA, thanks to the G.I. Bill, was also able to facilitate low-cost home mortgages. This made homeownership an option for working-class veterans. Years of Depression meant that there was overcrowding in cities, and the pent-up demand of the war years meant that men and women were eager to make big purchases, such as household appliances. Because of the G.I. Bill's home mortgage guarantee and this pent-up demand, veterans and their families moved to new, mass-produced suburbs that proliferated with particular speed in the "**sunbelt**" states from California to Texas to Florida, where military industries continued to provide jobs. Men with a service record enjoyed such a significant set of federally secured privileges that some historians have described the United States after World War II as a "**military welfare state.**"

The G.I. Bill offered the most benefits to veterans of combat operations, which disadvantaged women and African-American GIs who were segregated to engineering and logistics units. In addition, many veterans were educated about their G.I. Bill benefits through organizations like the American Legion, which did not welcome African Americans or women. However, the G.I. Bill technically applied to veterans regardless of race, color, or creed, so, even though their benefits were slim, black veterans now had some measure of federal support for enrollment in college, job training, and homeownership (although postwar suburbs often excluded African Americans). Women in particular were disadvantaged by sections of the G.I. Bill; for example, women could not get VA loans in their own name, and the nine-year limit on using benefits, such as education, meant that women who wanted to raise a family and then go to college ran out of time to do both.

During the war, millions of African Americans had left the rural South for industrial employment in southern cities, on the West coast, or in the industrial belt across the Midwest and Northeast. Although many African Americans now lived outside the Jim Crow South and could legally vote in the North, they continued to encounter the



old roadblocks of segregation and exclusion in housing and job opportunities. Soon, new members—many of them veterans who had experienced less discrimination in Western Europe and returned home to find that the four freedoms did not always apply to them—joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP, the nation’s most respected civil rights organization, was committed to securing access to education and equal housing for African Americans. Thus, wartime legislation and societal changes not only set the course for postwar suburbanization and middle-class prosperity, but for the struggle over civil rights as well.

## THE POSTWAR ECONOMY

The new opportunities Americans encountered in the postwar years were not entirely the work of presidential leadership and congressional legislation. Unique economic realities in the United States and around the world fueled the postwar American boom. Outside of the United States, World War II had destroyed much of the world’s industrial capacity, and even victorious Allied nations suffered incredible damage to their infrastructure, including roads, factories, and farms, making it difficult to immediately produce consumer goods for their civilians. American industry, in contrast, had flourished during the war, providing war materiel to the Allies, and the U.S. had not endured any mainland wartime attacks. As a result, American businesses had plenty of capital to invest in the production of consumer goods. American businesses therefore enjoyed a unique advantage as consumers—at home and abroad—sought to buy cars, appliances, clothes, and other manufactured goods.

During and after the war, “American-made” became a label that signified success and prosperity, and the simple goods soldiers carried around the world grew into symbols of a better life—from Coca Cola to Lucky Strike Cigarettes to Wrigley’s Chewing Gum. The Monetary and Financial Conference at **Bretton Woods** fixed the dollar’s value in gold and pegged all other currencies to the U.S. currency. Global trade policies also benefited the American economy, particularly the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1947), which lowered barriers to trade. The U.S.-led reorganization of the world economy deliberately steered against the economic nationalism that had fed the Great Depression and World War II, but in lowering barriers to trade and investment, it also benefited the American economy because the United States was uniquely positioned to invest and sell its goods abroad.

In addition to the resurgence of the private sector, the

postwar economy boomed because government spending for military goods and services did not fall back to prewar levels. Instead, the government employed millions of Americans and fostered the growth of metropolitan areas, particularly in the sunbelt, as the Cold War with the Soviet Union developed after World War II. Suspicions and ideological differences between the Soviet Union and the United States led to the dissolution of their wartime alliance soon after victory in Europe. The American decision to detonate secretly developed nuclear bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945—without informing the Soviets, who were still U.S. allies—launched the two largest military powers into a global power struggle—the Cold War—waged with military threats, propaganda, espionage, massive military buildups, and eventually proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam. From an economic perspective, Cold War military spending sustained the careers and lives of millions of American families in the years following World War II.<sup>2</sup>

## A CONSUMERS’ REPUBLIC

At the end of the war, Americans feared a return of the Depression, but after a brief period of uncertainty and shortages of goods, the nation ushered in a new era of economic growth driven by domestic consumer spending. Between 1945 and 1960, the nation’s gross domestic product grew 250 percent, and income per capita by 35 percent, even as Americans settled in on the five-day, forty-hour workweek.<sup>3</sup> While jobs in industrial manufacturing offered reasonably good wages and benefits, white-collar employment in the bureaucracies of large companies helped sustain high employment levels and earnings. By the



*A U.S. serviceman watches television with his family in the mid-1950s. New technologies were crucial for the postwar economic boom, and the most important one was television.*



mid-1950s, nearly sixty percent of the population enjoyed a middle-class income.

In addition to pent-up demand and high wages, banks, stores, and car dealers offered easy credit. Diner's Club introduced the first credit card in 1950. After twelve years of deprivation and four years of war and rationing, families bought refrigerators, furniture, washing machines, kitchen appliances, and cars, as well as fast food meals at new drive-through restaurants. New technologies were crucial for this boom, and the most important one was television. A novelty for rich people in 1946, 7 million households had a television set in 1951, and by 1960 virtually every American home had one. Advertisers spent about \$10 billion a year by the middle of the 1950s selling their wares on TV.<sup>4</sup> Macy's board chair Jack Straus explained the new mass consumer economy this way: "Our economy keeps growing because our ability to consume is endless. The consumer goes on spending regardless of how many possessions he has. The luxuries of today are the necessities of tomorrow."<sup>5</sup>

### *The Suburban Middle Class*

This new affluence was centered in the suburbs. In the immediate aftermath of the war, veterans typically returned to the small apartments, flats, and small houses of inner cities where their families lived. Eager to get married, raise families, and start their civilian lives, many had to camp in the living rooms of relatives. With housing shortages and so many young couples wanting to start families, new suburban developments seemed like the best solution. Using the mass production techniques of factories with assembly lines, developers like **Levitt & Sons** rapidly turned farm fields into new communities. These quickly assembled houses had only minor variations in style; couples could choose their home from a brochure for just \$8,000 a unit. In 1949, builders began construction on 1.4 million such homes, and almost two million in 1950. The rate of home ownership increased from 53 percent to 62 percent between 1945 and 1960 as nearly one-third of Americans moved to (or were born in) new suburban developments.<sup>6</sup> American entrepreneurs equipped new neighborhoods with drive-thru restaurants and shopping centers that promised to save suburban dwellers the hassle of visiting crowded urban centers. The suburbs—which sprang up outside the reach of urban public transportation—mandated the regular use of cars. By 1956, American roads accommodated an estimated 75 million cars and trucks, and the federal government in the 1950s supported highway development with the **Federal Aid**



A 1950s-era advertisement promotes life in the suburbs. Using the mass production techniques of factories with assembly lines, developers rapidly turned farm fields into new communities.

**Highway Act of 1956** that spent \$27 billion on the construction of 42,000 miles of fast motorways.<sup>7</sup>

Economic security and affordable housing made it easier for young people to start families right away. After the turmoil of war, millions of young people rushed eagerly into home life. Throughout the 1950s, advertising, television and movies, magazines, churches, and public officials encouraged Americans to enjoy the comforts of home and the joys of parenthood. Both the government and American companies wanted Americans to spend money (for the sake of the economy) and not focus on the anxieties and dangers of the Cold War. As a result of this encouragement, Americans married early and bore more children than their parents or grandparents had. The average age of a first marriage dropped from twenty-two to twenty years old for women, and from twenty-four to twenty-two for men. Between 1946 and 1964, American women bore approximately 78.3 million babies.<sup>8</sup> At the height of this **baby boom**, a child was born in the United States every seven seconds.

### **CONFORMITY AND DISCONTENT**

For Americans who had endured the hardships of the Great Depression and for men and women who had made bitter sacrifices during World War II, the new consumer culture of the American suburbs often felt like a long-delayed reward. Access to the benefits of middle-class life had been the goal of labor unions and the promise of the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s. This "American way of life" set the United States apart from the troubles and traditions of Europe, and it seemed to represent American freedom. Yet many Americans felt that much was amiss in their mass consumer society. Still others were shut out of the new prosperity entirely.





*Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin was the most virulent anti-communist in Congress.*

### *The Vital Center*

Social critics lamented the uniformity of suburban life and the cultural monotony that emerged as Americans increasingly lived in similar looking houses, watched the same TV shows, ate the same foods, wore similar clothes, and got stuck in traffic on the same roads leading to the same corporate jobs. They cringed at the hokey family sitcoms and variety shows and looked in vain for cultural achievements that symbolized the nation's engagement with not only prosperity, but also ongoing inequality and injustice.

The political climate of the 1950s was also relatively uniform. Anti-communist rhetoric that resulted from the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union escalated into outright hysteria after 1949. Within less than a year, the Soviet Union detonated its own nuclear bomb, Communist forces under Mao Zedong ended decades of Chinese civil war with the creation of the People's Republic, and Communist-run North Korea (aided by Chinese and Soviet soldiers) invaded U.S. ally South Korea. Relentless accusations of communist sympathies and a flurry of charges of espionage and treason marked the first half of the 1950s. The most virulent anti-communist in Congress, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, lent his name to this fervor, which became known as **McCarthyism**. This anti-communist paranoia not only did nothing to protect the U.S. from actual spies, but it also stifled political dissent and diversity in political debate. Fearful of being dismissed as "soft" on communism because many of its members had worked in organizations alongside communists in the 1930s, the Democratic Party moved close to the political center.<sup>9</sup> Labor unions, clubs, and civic organizations purged their

ranks of active and former communists as well as people who were sympathetic to communism. In addition, states, federal government offices, and universities demanded anti-communist loyalty oaths, and Democratic party leaders kept their policy agendas and proposals clean of any idea or word that could trigger "**red-baiting**"—accusations of being "soft on communism." Anything other than the promise to be "tough" on communism became a political dead-end.<sup>10</sup>

### *Suburban Womanhood*

Pressures of conformity in the 1950s reached from national and international politics all the way into the home. White, middle-class women in the suburbs faced a dilemma. Governments, husbands, employers, and virtually every channel of popular culture urged women to leave or forego careers in order to devote their lives to nurturing their husbands and raising their children. Those who rejected or postponed motherhood attracted negative attention, and prominent psychologists proclaimed that women who were committed to careers harmed themselves by refusing to follow their maternal instincts, reinforcing the notion that unhappy women could find happiness only in marriage and motherhood. Many women embraced their role as "housewives," but discovered that working in their suburban homes was an isolating experience. This generation of women lacked the help, social contacts, and family support that homemakers and mothers of previous generations enjoyed in cities and large multi-generational



*In the 1950s, white, middle-class women in the suburbs were urged to leave or forego careers in order to devote their lives to nurturing their husbands and raising their children.*



households. The sense of isolation and intellectual starvation filled them with guilt. Activist Betty Friedan later explained that many women believed they were the only ones who were unhappy being suburban mothers. "Other women were satisfied with their lives," Friedan explained. "What kind of a woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor?"<sup>11</sup>

Women who pursued careers were made to feel like social pariahs, and millions of married women and mothers who did work outside the home in order to contribute to the family income suffered the guilt of compromising the glorified role of homemaker as well as discrimination and judgement in the workplace. Protections against sexual harassment, abuse, or lesser pay were nonexistent, and even though more American women returned to the workforce by 1955 than had worked in World War II, by the end of the 1950s, women still only earned 60 percent of men's incomes.

Although white men were the primary beneficiaries of the trends in the 1950s, they, too, lamented the social and economic pressures of middle-class life. This theme was reinforced in popular fiction and non-fiction of the time, such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, William Whyte's **Organization Man**, and Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Men did their share of feigning contentment. Many veterans of the war struggled with readjustment into civilian life and experienced jarring contrasts between their troubling memories and emotional traumas on the one hand, and domestic familial bliss on the other. The responsibilities of fatherhood and homeownership combined with a lack of purpose in large corporate bureaucracies steered many to excessive alcohol consumption and adultery, while others rebelled vicariously in the pages of Hugh Hefner's **Playboy** magazine, which was launched in 1953. A handful of young writers and poets who became known as **Beatniks** defied mainstream expectations in their lives and their artwork, refusing the pursuit of careers, monogamous family life, homeownership, and fatherhood. These beatniks lived in neighborhoods like New York's Greenwich Village and wrote novels and poetry that sharply criticized the conformity of the 1950s.

### Youth Culture and Sexuality

Suburban children and teenagers growing up in the 1950s enjoyed unprecedented comforts and opportunities. Comic books with sometimes startlingly vivid themes of violence and sexual innuendos offered youngsters the first taste of

rebellion. **Rock 'n' roll** music violated 1950s adult norms with its sexually suggestive lyrics (and, in the case of singers like hip-swiveling [Elvis Presley](#), its performance), and as African-American singers gained popularity, its challenge to the color line in music and entertainment. Rock 'n' roll grew so popular that it became the backbone of a new youth culture. A growing number of entry-level service jobs in shopping malls and restaurants paid teenagers enough to make them a hotly contested market segment for record companies, movie studios, magazines, and the overall economy. Thanks to the G.I. Bill and the expansion of the middle class, the college system had expanded and was within economic reach for a growing number of middle-class Americans. This was another way that this generation stimulated the national economy.

Although many later cultural critics looked back on 1950s youth culture as an example of wholesome conduct, teenagers at the time worried experts and parents. Juvenile delinquency had remained a permanent theme for reformers since World War II. The realities of youth sexuality, on the other hand, remained in the shadows. Teenage birthrates reached a high in 1957 (a record that still stands today). Pregnancies were often concealed and covered up through adoption or terminated by illegal abortion. In many cases, teenage pregnancies led to equally early teenage marriages.<sup>12</sup>

The failure to reckon with the actual sexual behaviors of youth was similar to the broader patterns of denial of sexual diversity and orientation in the 1950s. Research on male and female sexual behaviors by Alfred Kinsey (published in 1948 and 1953, respectively) shocked and outraged Americans with claims that homosexuality, adultery, and sexual experimentation were not uncommon in the United States. Although many scholars have questioned Kinsey's methodologies since then, the **Kinsey Reports** highlighted the contrast between what appeared on the surface to be widespread sexual conformity and the reality of hidden sexual identities.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Other America: African Americans, Latinos, and the Poor*

Suburban communities offered Americans of European descent an unprecedented opportunity to mingle and intermarry, leaving their urban, ethnic enclaves of "Little Italy" or "Germantown" behind for a new white identity. But racial differences remained as important as ever. Whereas 95 percent of suburbs were white in 1950, African Americans continued to move from the rural South





*Soldiers from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division escort the first African-American students to attend the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957.*

into bigger cities, and by 1960 more than half of the nation's black population lived in urban areas. Barred from white neighborhoods by **racial covenants**, African Americans also saw their loan applications for construction and renovations in urban neighborhoods rejected by most of the nation's banks, which used 1930s government maps that identified non-white and mixed-race neighborhoods as poor credit risks. Deliberate disinvestment in urban centers was the counterpart to investments in the nation's suburbs.

Inequality and segregation in education and public accommodations matched the conditions in housing. Whereas college rapidly became part of the middle-class experience for white Americans, African Americans had to fight for equal access to primary and secondary public education. In 1954, the NAACP won a landmark decision when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously against school segregation in ***Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas***. Yet, just three years later, troops had to force the state of Arkansas to stand down and let nine black

students enter Central High School in Little Rock. In 1956, the black community of Montgomery, Alabama, finally secured the desegregation of its public bus system after a yearlong boycott, but hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, public parks, sports venues, stores, and businesses still had the right to segregate African Americans to inferior places.

African Americans experienced the most extreme segregation and exclusion, but discrimination and poverty shaped the experience of other Americans as well. By 1960, almost 900,000 Puerto Ricans had moved to the mainland United States from the island territory, and two-thirds settled in the East Harlem neighborhood of New York City. In the Southwest, federal policies had encouraged the immigration of Mexican farm laborers—or ***braceros***—during the labor shortage of World War II, and farmer lobbies secured extensions of the program every year until 1964. Making a sojourn to California, Texas, and Florida farms became a routine experience for about five million Mexican workers in the postwar years. Regular and illegal immigration grew



alongside the federal program, prompting aggressive sweeps of migrant communities and the repatriation of about 4 million immigrants and citizens to Mexico well into the 1950s.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, by 1960, 3.5 million Americans of Mexican ancestry lived in the United States, the vast majority of whom were native-born Americans.

Native Americans witnessed changing federal policies that accentuated their isolation from mainstream American society. In 1953, Congress terminated American Indians' special legal status as sovereign groups, dissolving traditional rights and some reservations. Facing new tax responsibilities but having no new economic opportunities, one in five took part in Voluntary Participation Programs, which offered some assistance with their relocation to cities. Whether they remained on reservations or moved to cities, however, about 250,000 Native Americans continued to endure the same poverty and neglect they had endured before.<sup>15</sup>

Not all Americans of color in the 1950s lived in poverty, but their representation below the poverty line was disproportionately large. There were also millions of poor whites in isolated rural regions of the Appalachians and elsewhere, predominantly the South. Altogether, **Michael Harrington** estimated in *The Other America* (1962), about forty to fifty million Americans lived in poverty out of a total population of 185 million.<sup>16</sup> It was not that these Americans did not work. In fact, working-class and rural women by and large worked throughout the 1950s.

## EISENHOWER'S COLD WAR

In 1952, Americans voted enthusiastically for the Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower, a celebrated World War II General and mastermind of the D-Day landing. Although Eisenhower's experience was reassuring to Americans when Eisenhower was elected during the Korean War in 1952, and although his administration guided steady economic expansion in the 1950s, by 1960 many Americans would be ready for a change in leadership and outlook.

### Massive Retaliation

Eisenhower's predecessor, Harry S. Truman, had practiced a policy of containment with the Soviet Union. Truman believed that the Soviet Union—with its communist ideology and its postwar takeovers of Eastern European countries—would continue to expand unless the United States took a firm stand and prevented Soviet takeovers of smaller countries. In 1947 Truman announced the "Truman Doctrine," which stated that the United States would



President Eisenhower (left) and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (right) viewed the U.S. nuclear program as a fiscally responsible tool for containment.

provide assistance to any democratic country fending off an authoritarian threat. This doctrine fundamentally changed U.S. foreign policy, tying the United States militarily to allies around the world, even if the United States itself was not directly attacked or threatened. As a result, the United States under Truman committed itself as a military ally to various countries (especially through NATO, a military alliance with Canada and Western European countries). The U.S. also gave aid to countries like Greece and Turkey where Communists seemed likely to take over, and the U.S. intervened in South Korea when Communist North Korea (a Soviet ally) invaded its southern neighbor.

On the one hand, Eisenhower was committed to Truman's policy of containment. On the other hand, Eisenhower worried about an escalating federal budget. As a result, his administration ended up using three methods for fighting the Cold War. First, Eisenhower used non-military—or soft power—methods, such as foreign aid (which helped allies fend off communism) as well as cultural ambassadors and propaganda, to make the United States appear superior to the Soviet Union. The goal with cultural ambassadors (such as jazz musicians) and propaganda was to reassure allies, win the "hearts and minds" of people in non-aligned countries, and demoralize the Soviet people and their allies. Second, Eisenhower had the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) conduct clandestine operations and espionage in order to covertly effect regime change in places like Iran and Guatemala, helping American allies get in power. Third, Eisenhower relied on nuclear deterrence. Rather than spending on a huge military,



Eisenhower and his Secretary of State **John Foster Dulles** viewed the nation’s nuclear program as a fiscally responsible tool for containment. They named the nation’s official policy “massive retaliation.” This meant that instead of spending on constantly updating personnel and gear for proportionate, conventional military responses, the United States announced to the world that any attack on U.S. allies could result in a massive nuclear response by the United States. While this policy was more cost-effective than keeping the entire military up-to-date, it was a gamble: if any country attacked a U.S. ally, Eisenhower had few options other than nuclear retaliation, which might start a nuclear war.

### *Stalling in the Arms Race?*

Eisenhower’s fiscally conservative military strategy became particularly vulnerable to criticism on October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, **Sputnik**, into space. Both Cold War foes had been feverishly working on satellite technology since satellites were crucial steps in the development of rocket and guided-missile technology. The Russian victory in this leg of the space race had limited consequences for actual defense technologies—the United States soon had a number of viable satellites—but it shook domestic politics and rattled public opinion. Television news and actual sightings of the Soviet satellite instilled fear of an invasion among U.S. citizens. Pundits and political opponents of Eisenhower argued that the United States was “falling behind” in the arms race. Congress established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**) and passed the National Defense Education Act to funnel billions of dollars into boosting education in math and science.

Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy joined in sounding the alarm when he claimed that the U.S. was losing the satellite-missile race with the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup> Inflated counts and uncritical acceptance of Soviet claims about their mass production of a vast intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) arsenal made the “**missile gap**” an effective campaign talking point for Kennedy, a Democrat, as he eyed a run for the presidency. President Eisenhower could not correct Kennedy’s claims publicly without revealing the CIA’s airborne intelligence capabilities in the form of U2 spy planes. Kennedy continued to use the missile gap as one of his key campaign talking points even after he and his vice-presidential running mate, Texas Senator Lyndon Johnson, had been briefed on the actual numbers, which revealed that the Soviets’ ICBM capabilities were minimal and that the United States held a significant lead.

### *The Military Industrial State*

A moderate but persistent recession from 1959 to 1960 added fodder to Kennedy’s criticism that the Eisenhower administration was tired and lacked innovation. When the president gave his [farewell address](#) to the nation on January 17, 1961, he warned against building the nation’s institutions of government, education, research, and innovation on the shoulders of permanent defense and military preparedness. Despite his efforts to shrink the military, Eisenhower acknowledged that:

*We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security alone more than the net income of all United States corporations. Now this conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet, we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications... In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex... Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.<sup>18</sup>*

Eisenhower thus warned the American people that a “military-industrial complex” existed—meaning an alliance between the government and large companies producing military weapons. He worried that the financial interests of these companies (and the states and cities where they employed Americans) would influence policymakers and wanted to make sure that the American people remained vigilant against too much influence being wielded by these industrialists, who might rather see America go to war than work for peace. Opponents of the Vietnam War and critics of the escalating arms race would invoke Eisenhower’s warning against the influence of a military-industrial complex repeatedly over the course of the 1960s.



## A NEW FRONTIER: KENNEDY AND THE WORLD

If Eisenhower delivered an ominously grave farewell address, his successor, John F. Kennedy, stirred the nation with an impassioned plea for public service for a national common purpose. Appearing vigorous, energetic, and youthful, his presidency came to represent a young generation of liberals eager to tackle the challenges of their time—the Cold War and anti-colonialism abroad, and civil rights and economic opportunity at home. The image of Kennedy’s presidency would prove far more lasting in public memory than the actual work of the man himself.

### THE RISE OF JOHN F. KENNEDY

John F. “Jack” Kennedy was born on May 29, 1917, into a wealthy and powerful political family in Massachusetts. A moderately successful student at a variety of private schools in Massachusetts and New York, Kennedy faced his first emergency health crisis at seventeen when doctors had to hospitalize him for a serious bout of colitis. Although ill health and hospitalizations continued to plague Kennedy, he attended Harvard, graduating in 1940, after writing an honor’s thesis that criticized the British government’s isolationism while Germany built up its forces before WWII. Kennedy strongly supported U.S. intervention in World War II. With the help of his father’s friend, Kennedy got accepted to the U.S. Naval Reserves despite his gastric and lower back problems and ill health. Kennedy served in the navy and began his command of a Motor Torpedo Squadron in the Pacific in 1943. In August of 1943, his boat was rammed and sunk by a Japanese vessel. Kennedy led his crew to a safe island and later that year rescued about fifty stranded marines in a gunboat operation, but service-related back injuries forced him out of the service before war’s end.

Back in the United States, Kennedy entered politics with his father’s help. Along with Richard M. Nixon and Joseph McCarthy, he became one of several veterans to win seats in the House of Representatives in the midterm election of 1946. Kennedy quickly became a typical Cold War Democrat: supported public housing and unions but also the forced registration of communists. In 1952, Kennedy won a seat in the U.S. Senate, and following his reelection in 1958, he began to plan his presidential race.<sup>19</sup>

### Nixon vs. Kennedy

Republicans entered the presidential race of 1960 with a strong candidate in Eisenhower’s vice president—Richard



The second of four televised debates between John F. Kennedy (left) and Richard Nixon (right) leading up to the 1960 election.

Nixon. A seasoned politician with a history of red-baiting his opponents in previous elections, Nixon now campaigned as an experienced, world-savvy statesman, based on his years as vice president. Kennedy won the Democratic nomination and quickly selected Senate majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson—his closest primary competitor—as his vice-presidential running mate.

Kennedy’s campaign focused on foreign affairs and the Cold War, charging Eisenhower and Nixon with allowing a missile gap with the Soviet Union that, according to Kennedy, damaged the nation’s reputation and prestige (even though Kennedy knew that no missile gap existed). He also criticized the Eisenhower administration for permitting the establishment of a pro-Soviet government in Cuba in 1959 under the leadership of the young and charismatic Fidel Castro. In a tight national competition, the decisive moment was probably the first-ever televised [presidential-candidate debate](#). Kennedy, who wisely relaxed that day, looked healthy and seemed confident and calm, while Nixon, who campaigned all day and refused to wear TV make-up, looked pale and stressed. Americans who listened on the radio told pollsters that they thought Nixon won the debate, but the larger TV audience thought that Kennedy won—a testament to Kennedy’s good looks and calm demeanor. In the final vote, Kennedy secured a comfortable margin in the Electoral College with 303 votes to 219, but his edge over Nixon in the popular vote was a razor-thin 118,574 votes out of more than 68 million cast. Considering widespread reports of election fraud in Texas and Chicago and the significant financial influence of his father, Kennedy’s victory may well have been due the efforts of electoral officials rather than his appeal with voters.<sup>20</sup>



## A Catholic President

John F. Kennedy came from a wealthy and privileged background and had no intention of campaigning as an outsider. However, Kennedy's Catholicism raised longstanding questions for some Americans: could a Catholic president put country before Church and heed the Constitution even if that meant he would be going against the commands of the pope? Bigotry in the Protestant Bible Belt South fractured the typically solidly Democratic turnout for Kennedy, delivering Mississippi and some electors from Alabama to third-party challengers and Segregationists Harry Byrd and Strom Thurmond. "I fear Catholicism more than I fear communism," observed a Baptist minister from North Carolina.

Kennedy countered the smear campaign effectively. He denied that the pope held more authority for Catholics than the nation's laws, pointed to his service in Congress, and asked whether 40 million Catholics in the United States had to accept second-class citizenship. Kennedy's choice of running mate, a beloved Texas Senator, helped deliver Texas for the Democrats. In the end, the election of a Catholic to the presidency marked a turning point in United States presidential history.

## The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy's [inaugural address](#) stirred the national audience with its invigorating message, rhetoric, and delivery. The first president born in the twentieth century and the youngest man ever elected president, he also steered one of the youngest cabinets ever assembled, which included his thirty-five-year-old brother **Robert F. Kennedy** as Attorney General. On the day of his inauguration, Kennedy stood in the twenty-two-degree chill of the national capital in a suit without a hat or coat, speaking energetically.<sup>21</sup> His announcement of a "**new frontier**" harked back to traditions of pioneering while at the same time Kennedy spoke to a younger generation—including those who had been children in the 1950s, and now were entering their teens or adulthood. He credited young Americans with courage, determination, and resolve, and called on them to tackle the challenges of the day:

*Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness*

*or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.*

His speech posited the young generation at a vital turning point in world history. With an exclusive focus on foreign affairs, he characterized the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union as the nation's "twilight struggle," and cast the United States as an ally to and supporter of democratic values in the independence movements of Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Young Americans, he proclaimed, had the world's fate in their hands:

*In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world. And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.<sup>22</sup>*

## Kennedy and the Image of Vitality

Kennedy's image of youth and vitality went beyond his own person to that of his cabinet and his wife Jacqueline "Jackie" Kennedy. With her youthful attractiveness and charm, Jackie and her husband resembled Hollywood celebrities and drew much attention from journalists and photographers. When they moved into the White House with their two young children Caroline (born 1957) and John Jr. (born 1960), they could not have set a starker contrast to the retiring seventy-year-old Eisenhower and his sixty-four-year-old wife.

Yet, the carefully nurtured image of John F. Kennedy stood in contrast to his real health and marital life. Aside from his severe back pain that forced him to wear heavy back braces and at times rendered him immobile, Kennedy suffered from Addison's disease, high fevers, high cholesterol, a condition called hypothyroidism, and colon, prostate, and stomach issues. The heavy medications for these conditions and the excruciating back pains may have affected his temper and cognitive abilities.<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, the youngest president, so beloved for his apparent vigor and healthfulness, was quite possibly the sickest and most disabled.





*John F. Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline Kennedy campaigning in New York prior to the 1960 election. Jackie and her husband resembled Hollywood celebrities and drew much attention from journalists and photographers.*

The Kennedys' image as the nation's dream couple and perfect family also belied Jack Kennedy's lengthy record of extramarital affairs, including those with Hollywood bombshell Marilyn Monroe, a White House intern, his wife's press secretary, German actress and 1930s sex symbol Marlene Dietrich, and several other starlets, artists, and acquaintances. His staff and close contacts in the press guarded his secrets and indiscretions from public view. Jackie Kennedy had no illusions about her husband's fidelity, comparing him to a hunter who relished the pursuit but grew tired with the conquest. Like many married women in the 1950s, she kept up appearances for the sake of her husband's reputation and her own.<sup>24</sup>

## **KENNEDY AND THE COLD WAR**

In contrast to the confidence and determination John F. Kennedy conveyed in his inaugural address, events overseas forced the president to react to, rather than direct, the course of events. In the nation's relationship with the Soviet Union, in the deepening divisions between East and West Germany in Europe, in Africa, and in Latin America, Kennedy faced unexpected challenges.

### *Racing the Soviets to Space*

Kennedy's youthful determination and hunger for new challenges was on full display in his approach to the Cold War arms race. Kennedy was convinced that Sputnik had caused the U.S. irreparable harm, and the first manned space flight by Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin in April

1961 only entrenched a popular conviction that the United States had to redeem itself. In May 1961, Kennedy called for a multi-billion-dollar investment in "landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to earth." Acknowledging the importance and the difficulty of this goal, Kennedy told Americans, "No single space project will be more impressive to mankind or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish."<sup>25</sup>

In public debate, Kennedy's lofty rhetoric about pushing the frontiers of human possibilities trumped the critics who soberly pointed out that plenty of challenges right here on Earth could benefit from those funds instead. Of course, the hi-tech prestige project also promised significant returns for the computer guidance and propulsion technologies in national defense. For example, **Robert Noyce** and Fairchild Semiconductor, which had developed the small and light silicon integrated circuit for guided missile systems, would reach new milestones in microcomputer technology on behalf of NASA's Apollo mission.<sup>26</sup> Nine years and \$24 billion later, two U.S. astronauts finally took the first steps on the moon in July 1969.

### *The Berlin Wall*

Back on Earth, Kennedy found Cold War diplomacy more challenging. In June 1961, he met with Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev** in Vienna, Austria, where Kennedy was taken aback by his counterpart's combative tone regarding Berlin. After World War II, the former German capital had been divided into different sectors under the governance of the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, similar to the way in which the former Allies had divided all of Germany into separate occupied zones. West Germans and residents of West Berlin (which was a Western island in the Eastern, Soviet zone) enjoyed a new constitutional democracy and rising living standards in a mixed market economy. East Germans and East Berliners, on the other hand, endured a socialist regime under Soviet control with a sluggish command economy, few constitutional rights or democratic practices, and an oppressive surveillance state that stifled all dissent. East Germans fled to the West—through West Berlin—in growing numbers. This drain on the East German population angered Khrushchev, who blamed West Germany and the United States. He threatened to cut off all traffic to West Berlin, which would isolate the city from Western Europe and make it difficult for the U.S. to aid and support West Berliners.

Convinced he had to take a stand, Kennedy mobilized





*President Kennedy delivers a speech in Berlin, reaffirming American support for West Berlin.*

*Photo Credit: Associated Press*

the reserves, asked for additional defense spending from Congress, and even hinted at the possibility of a pre-emptive nuclear strike. On August 13, 1961, the East German government erected a barbed wire barrier around West Berlin, which it quickly began to replace with brick, and then with a high concrete wall. The city would remain divided by the **Berlin Wall** for the next twenty-eight years. East Germans could no longer escape to the West through West Berlin—which was Khrushchev’s concern—but Western allies could still travel in and out of West Berlin. Kennedy visited the beleaguered city two years later, reaffirming American support for West Berlin with the famous line “*Ich bin ein Berliner* [I am a Berliner].” Despite the pain and hardship of the forced division for East and West Berliners, the wall resolved a crisis that could have escalated into war.

Because of these threatening developments, Kennedy ordered substantial increases in American intercontinental ballistic missile forces. He also added five new army divisions and increased the nation’s air power and military reserves. The Soviets meanwhile resumed nuclear

testing, and President Kennedy responded by reluctantly reactivating American tests in early 1962.

### *Nuclear Proliferation in Europe*

The Berlin crisis soured U.S.-Soviet relations and revived Soviet and American atmospheric nuclear testing in 1962. Nuclear weapons development also impinged on U.S. relations with Western Europe. There, funding under the Marshall Plan of 1948 had stimulated economic recovery and the formation of the **European Economic Community**—the predecessor to the European Union. In 1962, Kennedy initiated a significant cut in tariffs that stimulated Euro-American trade so robustly that it brought a new term into use, “globalization.”<sup>27</sup> Yet in France, President Charles de Gaulle worried about the further loss of status for his nation. He not only vetoed British membership in the EEC, but also spearheaded France’s development of its own nuclear weapons, with atmospheric tests in the desert of the French colony Algeria, to avoid any dependence on the United States.





*President and Mrs. Kennedy greet members of the Cuban Invasion Brigade in December 1962 in Miami, Florida.*

*Photograph by Cecil Stoughton, White House, in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.*



*President Kennedy meets with General Curtis LeMay and the reconnaissance pilots who found the missile sites in Cuba.*

## *The Bay of Pigs Invasion*

As in Europe, the rest of the world also seemed to become a more dangerous place. Even before his inauguration, President Kennedy had learned about Dwight D. Eisenhower's scheme to train Cuban exiles for an invasion of their homeland and victory over Fidel Castro's revolutionary regime. The United States had maintained a close relationship with the Caribbean island's land-owning junta ever since Cuban independence in 1898 and benefitted from its significant influence over the island's sugar economy and political and social affairs. Fidel Castro's guerilla troops successfully toppled the junta-friendly Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, who left Cuba on January 1, 1959.<sup>28</sup>

Although Castro sought a cordial relationship with the United States and was reluctant to embrace the political label of Marxism, the two nations soon found themselves at odds, and the Eisenhower administration grew eager to direct a regime change in Cuba the way it had done elsewhere in Latin America. Accordingly, the CIA prepared a force of 1,400 Cuban anti-communist exiles for an invasion at the island's **Bay of Pigs**. Faced with a plan inherited from his predecessor, Kennedy let the operation take place on April 17, 1961, but did not intervene with aid when the landing stalled and the expected popular support from locals failed to materialize. The disastrous invasion attempt was the first major crisis of Kennedy's presidency. The new president took full responsibility for the invasion—even though it had been planned under Eisenhower's watch. The surviving troops surrendered and were allowed to return to the U.S. the following year.<sup>29</sup>

## *The Cuban Missile Crisis*

Along with a number of other covert American attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro or topple his regime, the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961 helped push Cuba and the Soviet Union closer together. A target for the U.S. and in need of a friend, Castro welcomed overtures from Khrushchev, who liked the idea of an ally just about a hundred miles off the coast of Florida. In October 1962, American spy-planes documented the installation of a nuclear missile site on the Caribbean island. Alarmed, Kennedy imposed a naval blockade on Cuba and demanded the removal of all Soviet missiles and the destruction of the launching facilities. As Soviet ships hovered near U.S. Navy patrols off Cuba's coast, the president and his advisors debated their strategy toward Khrushchev, wavering between a preemptive nuclear attack, an ultimatum, or continued negotiations. Although most of Kennedy's advisors counselled the more aggressive options of attack or ultimatum, Kennedy resisted these options. On October 28, 1962, when the Soviet leader agreed to remove the missile facility in exchange for an American commitment not to invade Cuba and to remove its similarly closely installed missile facilities in Turkey, most observers agreed that the world had just stepped back from a thermonuclear war.

## *The Turn Toward Non-Proliferation*

The severity of the crisis worried both Kennedy and Khrushchev, who soon began talks aimed at eventually limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. They reached an agreement in 1963 that prohibited atmospheric nuclear



tests. That year, Kennedy seemed to encourage a step back from the ideological fanaticism of the Cold War in a speech at American University in Washington, D.C., urging Americans not to think of the Soviet Union as a malicious empire and to bear in mind that nation's tremendous sacrifice during World War II. These modest steps introduced the idea that there could be something like a "peaceful coexistence" of the United States and the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's concessions on Cuba and the test-ban treaty, however, marked the beginning of his political end. In 1964, he found himself ousted from the Kremlin and replaced by Alexei Kosygin and Leonid Brezhnev.

## **A NEW APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

That John F. Kennedy focused first and foremost on international affairs became apparent not only in his dealings with the Soviet Union and immediate Cold War crises, but also in his strong interest in the developing world. Observers often described this as the "**Third World**," based on their identification of capitalist democracies as the first and communist regimes allied with the Soviet Union as the second. In the early months of his presidency, Kennedy focused more on starting the **Peace Corps** than on civil rights reform and met with more leaders from Africa than members of the African-American community.

### *America Volunteers: The Peace Corps*

No program projected the youthful vigor of the Kennedy administration and the president's faith in the moral superiority of the American way of life more powerfully to the developing world than the Peace Corps. Just two years before his election, the book ***The Ugly American*** by William Lederer and Eugene Burdick illustrated the sinister manipulations by which U.S. agents and spies had been collaborating with European colonial powers in the developing world since World War II—not for the sake of liberation, but for American commercial advantages and strategic interests. Young American volunteers with the mission of aiding and assisting economic development and infrastructure overseas were supposed to change this reputation. Still in operation today, the Peace Corps was Kennedy's most personal mission and his most enduring legacy. From 6,646 volunteers in 1963 and a budget of \$59 million, past its peak of 15,556 at \$107 million in 1966, the organization still sent out 5,754 volunteers in 2015.<sup>30</sup>

Peace Corps volunteers discovered that it was difficult to achieve economic improvements. Although the actual results were sometimes less grand than volunteers hoped,



*President Kennedy greets Peace Corps volunteers on August 28, 1961.*

these idealistic Americans improved the United States' image around the world. Peace Corps volunteers returned home with a heightened appreciation of the cultures and humanity of people in developing countries as well as the obstacles they faced.

### *Kennedy and the African Post-Colonial Movement*

Of particular interest to President Kennedy was the African continent, which he understood as one of the most important frontiers of American foreign policy. A growing number of newly independent nations emerged from the loosening grips of European colonizers in the decades after World War II. Between the end of the 1960 presidential primaries in June and election day in November alone, twelve new African nations gained independence, and in September, the United Nations in New York welcomed seventeen new African delegations. On the one hand, Kennedy sought to court these new nations as allies in a diplomatic world divided between the Eastern "Communist" bloc and the Western "free" world. On the other hand, Kennedy shared the desire of many Americans to improve lives on the long-oppressed continent—a desire that would also work in the United States' favor. He was convinced that economic aid and improved educational opportunities for Africans would strengthen the continent's ties to the U.S. in the same way the European Marshall Plan did after World War II.

Many African Americans first warmed to John F. Kennedy because of his support for black nationalism in Africa—and Kennedy soon recognized the benefits African-American



support at home would have for his foreign policy on the African continent. After all, it would be difficult to court the allegiance of new African nations while the oppression, discrimination, and disfranchisement of black Americans—the African diaspora—continued unabated at home.<sup>31</sup>

## *An Alliance for Progress: Kennedy and Latin America*

Given Kennedy's intense interest in the developing world, it is not surprising that he promoted the idea of an economic agreement between the United States and Central and South American countries in the **Alliance for Progress** (*Alianza para el Progreso*). Kennedy genuinely hoped to promote industrialization, diversify Latin American exports (away from a singular reliance on raw agricultural materials like sugar or coffee), improve sometimes desperate living conditions, and in the process, strengthen democratic governments and ward off revolutions like the kind that had happened in Cuba. The key tool for this was American loans for industrial production.<sup>32</sup>

In practice, the Alliance for Progress delivered mostly disappointing results. The Kennedy administration's uncompromising promotion of modernization of infrastructure and technology without regard to social or political conditions in the respective nations—sometimes implemented through armed force—provoked opposition and protest and often the rise of oppressive regimes. For example, U.S. insistence on restructuring the state-owned Mining Company of Bolivia, the firing of 5,000 miners, and an aggressive austerity program turned Bolivian President Víctor Paz Estenssoro into an authoritarian ruler who was later toppled by his own second-in-command.<sup>33</sup> In the end, the Alliance for Progress nourished rather than erased the stereotype of the “ugly American” in South America.

## *Flexible Response and Counterinsurgency*

Kennedy recognized that worldwide decolonization created strategic challenges that could not simply be forced into line with the threat of massive retaliation. For example, sparsely populated Laos had freed itself from colonial rule in 1954 but was now chafing under the threat of an overbearing Communist guerilla force. The Kennedy administration feared that Laos would become the floodgate through which Chinese Communist influence would infiltrate all of Southeast Asia. This assumption was a continuation of the **domino theory**. Eisenhower, Kennedy, and most of their contemporaries believed that if one country in that region “fell” to communism, surrounding countries would soon fall

as well. Although Kennedy used the C.I.A. to arm around nine thousand members of the Hmong ethnic group to fight against North Vietnamese incursions into Laos, in the end he had to secure a shaky peace in the Laotian civil war at a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1962.

Kennedy realized that he needed more options in responding to global threats. Under the leadership of his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, the Kennedy administration increased its spending on conventional military forces and significantly strengthened the capabilities of its Special Forces, also known as the **Green Berets**. The Green Berets were particularly useful for **counterinsurgency** operations—countering an insurgent, or rebel, force. By expanding the military in various ways, Kennedy departed from Eisenhower's policy of relying largely on massive retaliation. Under Kennedy, U.S. defenses came to be characterized by “flexible response”—meaning that the military could respond to various crises, not just events that could justify a nuclear response. These new tools would allow President Kennedy—and all his successors since—to engage in low-level military operations wherever U.S.-friendly regimes seemed to be on the brink of succumbing to an insurgency.

## *Kennedy and Indochina: Stepping into the Quagmire*

As sound as the rationale for a “flexible response” was, it had unforeseen implications. Diplomatic efforts could give way to—or be undermined by—military tactics far more quickly now. The belief that military solutions were available without an open commitment to war could lead to endless accelerations of military efforts, as would be the case in Vietnam. Vietnam had been part of the French colony of Indochina. In 1954, Vietnam, led by Vietnamese nationalist Ho Chi Minh, defeated the French. The nation had been temporarily divided into North and South regions at the Geneva Conference of 1954 in order to allow French forces to evacuate. A national election to reunify the country was supposed to take place in 1956.

Meanwhile, the forces that defeated the French remained largely in the North. There, Ho Chi Minh became the leader, and under his direction land reforms addressed economic inequality by redistributing land to impoverished peasants. The South, which had always been more pro-French, formed its own government and embraced American aid. The U.S. continued to prop up the Southern regime and permitted corrupt South Vietnamese leaders to ignore the national election promise in the Geneva Treaty. American



policymakers feared that Ho and the Communists would win the popular vote. Despite enormous financial support, the unpopular South Vietnamese dictator **Ngo Dinh Diem** was in danger of being toppled. With the stated goal of providing “political stability,” Kennedy ordered the deployment of several hundred additional “military advisors” to join the seven hundred U.S. troops already stationed there in May 1961. When that did not help, the president dispatched additional troops, and by November 1963, South Vietnam’s army had over 16,000 U.S. military “advisers” at its disposal. At that point, the C.I.A. concluded that the idea of stabilizing the governing regime with reforms was no longer feasible and tacitly consented to a coup in which their former ally, Diem, was assassinated.

Kennedy recognized the dilemma of flexible response in a conversation with his adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.: more troops would only lead to the demand for more troops because South Vietnamese insurgents and their North Vietnamese allies would escalate in return. As Kennedy said, “It’s like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another.” Kennedy agonized over the right approach toward Vietnam until his death in November 1963, but whether he would have resisted the pressure for additional troops is impossible to know.<sup>34</sup>

## NEW FRONTIERS AT HOME

Kennedy entered the Oval Office not only with a preference for foreign affairs, but also with a fragile Democratic majority in Congress—making domestic reform both a low priority and a political risk. The old New Deal coalition could easily lose its southern white members if the president’s reform proposals did too much to empower southern blacks. At the same time, a grassroots movement for civil rights put pressure on Kennedy, and in the context of the Cold War, Kennedy felt the need to substantiate the nation’s claim that it was, in fact, the “leader of the free world.”<sup>35</sup>

### CIVIL RIGHTS: FROM THE COURTS, TO THE STREETS, TO THE BALLOT BOX

#### *A Lackluster Leader in the White House*

Kennedy had appealed to African-American voters in the 1960 presidential race, and African Americans overwhelmingly voted for the Democratic ticket—the continuation of a pattern that had emerged with the New Deal coalition in the 1930s. Yet, the importance of southern Democrats for his majority on important legislation, such as healthcare and education, prompted Kennedy to avoid

the civil rights issue at first. Having promised to eliminate racial discrimination in housing “with a stroke of the pen,” for example, he delayed any action for two years—during which civil rights groups sent him thousands of pens as part of an “Ink for Jack” protest against Kennedy’s inaction.

As in foreign affairs, however, Kennedy entered a set of complicated currents that had begun before his inauguration. Dealing with the Civil Rights Movement’s nonviolent resistance strategies was one example.

### *Going Public: The Sit-Ins of 1960*

In February 1960, four black college students sat down at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, that was part of the national department store chain Woolworth’s. They asked for coffee, knowing that the lunch counter refused service to African Americans. They waited patiently until the store closed and returned the next day—with more students willing to challenge segregation by asking for service at the whites-only lunch counter. By the end of the first week, the students had still not been served. Many sympathizers joined their cause, but thousands of angry white counter-protesters also descended on the local Woolworth’s where they screamed abuse at the peaceful activists, threatened them, and poured ketchup and mustard over their heads to humiliate them. Police only arrested the participants in the sit-down strike, not the whites who attacked them, however.

The sit-in tactic had first been put to the test in the North (which practiced informal segregation) during World War II. In Chicago, pacifist students from the University of Chicago had founded the **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)** in 1942 to expose racial segregation in the North. James Farmer, George Houser, Bernice Fisher, and others were well versed in the teachings of Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi, who practiced nonviolent civil disobedience—which consists of a demonstrative but peaceful refusal to obey certain laws—against the British colonial regime. In 1960, the sit-in movement faced a tougher challenge in the South where segregation and exclusion of black Americans was not illegal as it had been in wartime Chicago. Yet, by the end of April 1960, **lunch counter sit-ins** had spread to seventy-eight cities and drew over 70,000 participants, including white students who sat alongside their black peers to show support for integration.<sup>36</sup>

Four factors explained the size and successes of the 1960 sit-in movement and subsequent nonviolent civil rights campaigns. The new medium of television transmitted live footage of the students’ peaceful protests and the





*On the second day of the Greensboro sit-in, Joseph A. McNeil and Franklin E. McCain are joined by William Smith and Clarence Henderson at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina.*

*Photo Courtesy of the Greensboro News and Record.*

cruel responses of angry whites directly into Americans' living rooms. With its moving images, television was more powerful than photographs or radio reporting, and the nature of television—in the family home—made it hard to avoid. The contrast between peaceful patience and violent intimidation (as seen on television) delivered the civil rights activists a clear moral victory.

Second, by 1960, American public discourse—at least in the North—had shifted when it came to racial difference and inequality. The horrors of Hitler's white supremacist regime made racial prejudice unacceptable in many parts of the country. Whereas before the war racist views were seen as acceptable in the North, by 1960 racist individuals felt more pressure to conceal such beliefs, and more Americans found it impossible to defend blatant displays of injustice.

Third, improved economic prospects in southern cities had also made African-American customers into an economic force that merchants had to reckon with. An economic boycott by the African-American community could make a huge dent in profits, making white, southern merchants more willing to make concessions. Woolworth's, for example, allowed African Americans to shop in the department store, but not to eat alongside whites at the lunch counter. Woolworth's stores across the South conceded to integration at lunch counters in part because they did not want to lose the profits of African-American shoppers. Finally, the postwar surge in college education had also swept hundreds of thousands of African

Americans into higher education where they had the time and social environment for political activism. This was nowhere more apparent than in the establishment of the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**. SNCC was founded by college students in the midst of the sit-ins of 1960 and became one of the four major civil rights organizations of the 1960s, along with the NAACP, CORE, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

### *Hitting the Road: The Freedom Riders*

Building on the momentum of the sit-ins, on May 4, 1961, members of CORE and other groups decided to bring nonviolent resistance to a different industry—one that would force the federal government to act. Groups of black and white students, as well as some sympathetic adults, would travel together on two buses through the Deep South to test the Supreme Court's rulings from 1946 (*Morgan v. Virginia*) and 1960 (*Boynton v. Virginia*), which held that interstate transportation could no longer be segregated. This meant that long-distance buses traveling from the North through the South could not be segregated onboard, and that facilities like bus rest-stops also had to be integrated. In practice, once buses entered the South, riders were segregated on buses and in bus station restrooms. The riders knew they would face resistance and violence as they traveled through the South. Their goal was to gain media attention and force the federal government to enforce the law, thereby integrating travel for subsequent travelers.

The first bus of riders faced opposition when they arrived in Anniston, Alabama, on May 14. James Farmer, organizer of the **Freedom Rides**, remembered "a mob of white men standing there at the bus terminal" with "pistols, guns, blackjacks, clubs, chains, knives—all in plain evidence." Before the bus could back out of the terminal, the men slashed its tires, and when the bus finally broke down just outside town, the mob caught up with it and, Farmer remembers, "held the door closed ... and threw a firebomb into the bus."<sup>37</sup> As freedom riders fled the burning bus, choking on smoke, they were attacked by the mob. Although they sustained serious injuries, no one was killed. The second bus made it to Birmingham, where riders were attacked by another mob, including KKK members. Another group of freedom riders, organized by SNCC, reached the state capital, Montgomery, where they, too, were attacked by angry whites and arrested. Members of SNCC and CORE continued the Freedom Rides, with hundreds of black and white riders traveling south to Alabama and Mississippi, many of whom were arrested for violating local





*A mob beats freedom riders in Birmingham, Alabama. Many of the freedom riders were arrested for violating local segregation ordinances and served time in jail.*

segregation ordinances and served time in jail.

President Kennedy initially dismissed the Freedom Riders as unpatriotic since footage of the attacks and arrests traveled around the world, causing the administration considerable embarrassment. Attorney General Robert Kennedy angered activists when he claimed that the Justice Department could not take a position on the constitutional dispute between southern states and activists—a stand that translated into a refusal to enforce the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings. When President Kennedy sought compromise by asking the riders for a “cooling-off period” in which they would stop the rides, James Farmer replied, “We have been cooling off for 350 years, and if we cooled off any more, we’d be in a deep freeze.”<sup>38</sup> As the Freedom Riders languished in southern jails, their supporters maintained protests and launched legal challenges. Finally, in November 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission, which had been refusing to enforce the law under white, southern Democratic leadership, at last began to enforce desegregation.

The success of the sit-ins and freedom rides showed that nonviolent resistance worked—but at a high price. In addition to individual activists facing extreme violence and jail time, the movement as a whole took risks in ruffling establishment feathers by refusing to back down to the Kennedy White House. However, civil rights activists were willing to pursue alternate strategies. When Attorney General Robert Kennedy, hoping to lead the movement away from further public spectacles and into less headline-grabbing grassroots work, urged SNCC to focus on registering the South’s historically disfranchised black citizens, activists embraced the suggestion, flooding

Mississippi with volunteers in the summer of 1964. This method would secure long-lasting change and a larger future voter turnout for the Democratic Party, whose support among southern whites was slipping as the national party increasingly embraced civil rights.

### *Blood on the Pavement: Facing Bull Connor in Birmingham*

John F. Kennedy did not like to have his hand forced by civil rights activists, but he resented southern white intransigence even more. Thus, when Mississippi governor Ross Barnett defied a federal court order mandating the admission of **James Meredith** to the previously whites-only University of Mississippi in the fall of 1962, Kennedy ordered federal marshals to escort the young African-American student onto the campus. Even then, the president had to mobilize additional troops to stop a white riot at “Ole Miss” that killed two people and wounded more than one hundred marshals.

The following year, in April 1963, the struggle over civil rights intensified in Alabama, where Martin Luther King Jr. and the SCLC had long tried to desegregate the city of Birmingham, which was under the iron-fisted rule of the city’s chief police officer Eugene “Bull” Connor. Unconcerned about the news coverage he would generate, Connor arrested hundreds of protesters, and, when they defied court orders against further public marches, he used fire hoses, police dogs, and officers armed with clubs to attack the protestors—including children. Arrested and in solitary confinement, Martin Luther King Jr. received a letter from three local clergymen asking him to be more patient. In reply, King wrote an open letter that became known as his **Letter from a Birmingham Jail**, in which he argued that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” Kennedy’s Justice Department arranged a solution that ended the protests as well as segregation and discrimination in hiring in Birmingham.

### *White Backlash: Civil Rights Opposition*

Before the campaign in Birmingham, King warned his fellow activists to expect southern white violence, saying, “some of the people sitting here will not come back alive from this campaign.” Indeed, the Ku Klux Klan soon marched again outside the city, and bombs went off at SCLC headquarters and at the home of King’s brother. Alabama Governor George Wallace put himself in the way of two black students to prevent them from enrolling at the University of Alabama, declaring his commitment to “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation





*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addresses the crowd from the Lincoln Memorial at the "March for Jobs and Freedom" in Washington, D.C., in August 1963.*

forever" (although the students were subsequently admitted after Kennedy mobilized the Alabama National Guard). On June 12, 1963, a southern Klansman assassinated **Medgar Evers**, a local NAACP activist and World War II combat veteran, in Jackson, Mississippi. Three months later, white supremacist terrorists struck Birmingham's 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church with a bomb, injuring at least fourteen and killing four little girls who had just finished their Sunday school lesson "The Love That Forgives." In short, while millions of Americans—and millions of viewers abroad—watched police and mob violence against peaceful protesters in horror, many southern whites did not relent.

Identifying "a moral crisis," in the nation, Kennedy called for sweeping civil rights legislation. The president went on television to explain to Americans the need for a civil rights bill. While the bill would not pass Congress in Kennedy's lifetime, his televised appeal signaled to Americans that the White House was now committed to moving forward on civil rights issues.

### *Still a Dream: The March for Jobs and Freedom*

On August 28, 1963, as Kennedy continued to face congressional opposition from southern Democrats on his civil rights bill, Martin Luther King Jr. led more than 200,000 demonstrators in a peaceful "March for Jobs and Freedom" in Washington, D.C. At the final gathering at the Lincoln Memorial in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, demonstrators joined hands and sang the protest spiritual "We Shall Overcome." King captured the nation's imagination with his [speech](#) about the possibilities of racial equality. "I have a dream," he said, "that one day. . . little black boys and black girls will be able to join with little white boys and white girls as sisters

and brothers." King looked forward to, "that day when... black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'" However, King and his audience would have to wait for the next president to take a major step toward that dream by pushing Congress to pass Kennedy's bill, which became the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**.

## **DOMESTIC POLICIES: ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Kennedy not only faced opposition from white, southern Democrats on his civil rights agenda, but on economic policy as well.

### *Economic Policy: Keynesian Fine-Tuning*

Kennedy relied on the **Council of Economic Advisers (CEA)** to advise him on economic policy. Adherents to the "new economics" of the time, the president's CEA argued that as long as the economy was not operating at full employment, a tax cut would keep more income in the hands of the public and thus create more demand for goods and services. This thinking built on the theories of the British economist John Maynard Keynes who had contended that people's lack of consumption and purchasing power was a cause of the Great Depression. This economic insight became an accepted standard in the Western industrialized world after the war. In this Keynesian spirit, the White House economists planned a tax cut for 1964, brimming with confidence that they could fine-tune the economy toward full employment, and that the savings in unemployment benefits, plus rising tax revenues from increased economic activity, would compensate for the loss in federal revenue; the tax cut, they argued, would not increase the federal deficit.<sup>39</sup> For a few years, their predictions seemed to come true, but by 1968 additional national expenditures on the war in Vietnam changed the economic balance significantly.

The CEA experts, like most of Kennedy's cabinet and advisers, were confident in their abilities to shape developments in America and the world. These men tended to have Ivy League backgrounds, and some, like Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, had extensive experience in the private sector. Sometimes referred to as "whiz kids," these experts were extremely confident in their abilities and ideas.

Economic policy, however, could be messy, especially when Kennedy sought to mitigate conflicts in capital/labor relations. Early in 1962, Kennedy helped negotiate a modest



wage agreement in the steel industry on the condition that it would not trigger higher prices. Yet, almost immediately after the negotiations were finalized, steel management announced major hikes in the price of steel. Kennedy summoned the heads of the steel industry and unleashed his anger. The industrialists complied and withdrew the price hikes but complained bitterly afterward about the anti-business tendencies of Kennedy's policy proposals. They were relieved to learn about Kennedy's plan for a tax cut in one of his [speeches](#), which one observer called "the most Republican speech since McKinley."

Kennedy thus embodied early-1960s liberalism. Like Roosevelt in the 1930s, he accepted that the government had a role to play in improving the economy, but like Republicans before and after his presidency, Kennedy hoped that cutting taxes would solve unemployment and spur economic growth. Especially considering Kennedy's hesitance when it came to civil rights, the president was, like many northern Democrats at the time, a moderate. Already in the early 1960s, some young people were moving past the president, toward a more radical position. Many youths who had been inspired by Kennedy in the early 1960s became much more radical as the decade wore on and became increasingly critical of moderate liberal politicians—politicians who shared Kennedy's views on domestic and foreign policies.

### *Kennedy's Domestic Reform Efforts*

Kennedy's domestic ambitions resembled those of Harry S. Truman although in some respects Kennedy was more timid than his Democratic predecessor. The new president called for medical insurance for the elderly, aid to education, and more federal funds for housing and "urban renewal" (roads and rebuilding in America's cities). He secured an expansion of Social Security, increases in the minimum wage for more workers, and a modest budget for public housing. Yet his more important welfare measures—medical care for the elderly and federal aid to public schools—were defeated by a coalition of Republicans and conservative southern Democrats who did not share the president's liberal-moderate view of government spending.

## **THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY**

*November 22, 1963*

In an effort to smooth strained relations between liberal Democrats and the conservative, southern wing of the party, Kennedy traveled to Dallas on November 22, 1963.



*President Kennedy, with Texas Governor John Connally and his wife Nellie and Jackie Kennedy, shortly before Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963.*

To maximize exposure to his southern constituents, his motorcade traveled slowly through town to a luncheon with civic and business leaders. There, an assassin hidden on the upper floor of a book depository fired two bullets into the president's head and neck, killing him almost instantly. The killer, **Lee Harvey Oswald**, fled the scene, but later panicked and killed a police officer across town. Soon after, police arrested him. The quiet Marine veteran had spent time in the Soviet Union, a fact that later raised suspicions of a larger plot behind the assassination. Oswald himself denied being the shooter, and two days later a night-club owner named Jack Ruby joined a crowd gathered outside a local jail, where Oswald was being transferred from. Ruby shot and killed the suspect, making it impossible for investigators to learn anything more from Oswald.

### *The Warren Commission*

The assassination left Americans in disbelief and shock. Little more than a thousand days long, Kennedy's presidency left liberal Democrats and civil rights supporters with a painful sense of squashed hope and unfulfilled promise. Expectations and hypotheses about what a full four years—or two terms—under Kennedy could have looked like only grew over the years, as American involvement in Vietnam and protests at home defined the second half of the decade.

The popular belief that the assassination marked the end of a historic opportunity for change, combined with the bizarre circumstances surrounding Lee Harvey Oswald's capture and death, created a fertile ground for conspiracy theories. Kennedy's successor Lyndon B. Johnson sought to allay fears that a sinister and wide-ranging conspiracy



had led to the assassination by appointing a special commission—chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Earl Warren—to review the circumstances of the killing. The commission published its report in September 1964, finding that Oswald had acted alone, as had Ruby.

Later studies confirmed the Warren Commission’s findings although unfounded conspiracy theories about the assassination continue to exist. Some conspiracy theorists pointed to a hastily-written four-hundred-page report from the FBI that appeared too eager to deny all suspicions of a conspiracy. Only in 2013 did Americans learn the truth behind that document; J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI at the time, had sought to cover up the fact that the Bureau had been investigating Oswald and had considered him a danger to the president. Hoover concealed this information not because of any broader plot, but to protect the FBI from embarrassment.<sup>40</sup>

## SECTION I SUMMARY

- ✦ The Great Depression and New Deal policies as well as the nation’s experiences during World War II created a unique political environment, social dynamics, and cultural trends after 1945.
- ✦ On the eve of the 1960s, American life at home was marked by economic growth and a prosperous and conformist middle class on the one hand and persistent patterns of racial segregation, inequality, and poverty on the other.
- ✦ Cold War tensions and anticolonial movements in the “Third World” shaped American foreign affairs.
- ✦ A peaceful Civil Rights Movement changed the national conversation in the early years of the 1960s and forced John F. Kennedy to drive a domestic reform agenda at a time of heightened tensions with the Soviet Union.



## Section II

# The Apex of American Liberalism

## INDOMITABLE WILL: THE JOHNSON PRESIDENCY

### PRESIDENT JOHNSON

Many Americans who placed their hopes for a liberal agenda in President Kennedy were at first disheartened to see an old-school Texas politician like Lyndon Johnson take Kennedy's place. However, Johnson brought valuable leadership experience, a strong commitment to welfare and civil rights reform, as well as an exceptional talent at political deal-making to the White House. His long record of legislative accomplishments during his years in office could have made him one of the most popular presidents of modern times. However, his commitment of U.S. troops to the war in Vietnam left his record and reputation among his liberal Democratic constituency deeply tarnished. At the same time, conservatives deeply disliked his social policies. This left President Johnson unpopular with liberals on foreign policy and unpopular with conservatives on domestic policy.

### Texas Roots

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born in 1908 on a farm in rural Texas. Unlike Kennedy, who attended Harvard, Johnson enrolled in 1927 at the relatively obscure Southwest Texas State Teachers College. At age twenty, he spent a year teaching Mexican-American children at a segregated school in an impoverished county ninety miles south of San Antonio. He later credited that experience with forming his political vision:

*I remember even yet the pain of realizing and knowing then that college was closed to practically every one of those children because they were too poor. And I think it was then that I made up my mind that this nation could never rest while the door to knowledge remained closed to any American.<sup>41</sup>*

### Mastering the Ropes of D.C.

At a young age, Johnson was obsessed with politics. He began working on political campaigns in 1930 and soon became a legislative aide in Washington, D.C., where he quickly cultivated the necessary political relationships for a quick ascent to power. After serving as the Texas Director of the National Youth Administration, a New Deal administrative branch, he successfully ran as a Democrat to represent Texas in the House of Representatives in 1937.<sup>42</sup> During World War II, as a sitting member of Congress, Johnson served on a fact-finding mission in the South Pacific as a Lieutenant Commander of the Naval Reserves. In 1948, he successfully ran for the U.S. Senate, although allegations of election fraud were prevalent and earned Johnson the facetious nickname "Landslide Lyndon." Courting senior senators in the party, Johnson quickly ascended to Senate majority whip in just two years. In 1953, he became the first freshman Senate minority leader, and following the 1954 midterm election, he became the Senate majority leader, arguably the most powerful member of Congress in the nation.

### Dreams of a new New Deal

Johnson was a committed New Dealer, determined to improve the lives of his constituents. His years as a representative during the Roosevelt era taught him that, in the words of his biographer Robert Dallek, "a sound economy, social justice, and national security depended in large measure on a wise use of federal power by the White House and the Congress." Johnson believed that liberal economic reforms and racial justice policies had the most impact in the South, which lagged behind the North economically and in terms of racial equality.<sup>43</sup> Johnson also believed that transformations in the South could be replicated in the developing world.<sup>44</sup> His ambition was to pick up where Franklin D. Roosevelt had left off and expand prosperity, open doors of opportunity to the poor, and deliver on the nation's promising rhetoric about equal treatment under the law.





President Lyndon Johnson (left) meets with Senator Richard Russell in 1963. Johnson's personal style of pressuring senators, known as the "Johnson Treatment," became legendary.

## The Johnson Treatment

A power-conscious politician constantly striving for influence, Johnson understood that success was the result of preparation and hard work, and in his political calculations, he never left anything to chance. He built alliances and relationships with both Democrats and Republicans. When Johnson needed senators to vote a certain way, he was able to sway his colleagues because he knew what each senator wanted. His solid preparation and hard work—one biographer called him "the greatest intelligence gatherer Washington has ever known"—helped Johnson become a master majority leader, securing every single vote he could get in the House or the Senate.

In addition to making promises and deals to get votes, Johnson's personal style of pressuring senators became legendary. It was called the "**Johnson Treatment**," and involved Johnson physically intimidating and emotionally wearing down his colleagues. Two journalists described the "Johnson Treatment" as follows:

*The Treatment could last ten minutes or four hours.... It came, enveloping its target, at the Johnson Ranch swimming pool, in one of Johnson's offices, in the Senate cloakroom, on the floor of the Senate itself... Its tone could be supplication, accusation, cajolery, exuberance, scorn, tears, complaint, and the hint of threat.... Its velocity was breathtaking, and it was all in one direction. Interjections from the target were rare. Johnson anticipated them before they could be spoken. He moved in close, his face a scant millimeter from his*

*target, his eyes widening and narrowing, his eyebrows rising and falling.... The Treatment was an almost hypnotic experience and rendered the target stunned and helpless.*<sup>45</sup>

Johnson was unique in American history as an incredibly skillful Senate majority leader—with an arsenal of information on members of Congress—who became president, and thus could use his skills and relationships with Congress to get his legislation passed.

## A Vice President in the Wings

Johnson entered the presidential contest in the 1960 Democratic primary and sought to weaken his opponent, Kennedy, with attacks on his inexperience and poor health (something that the president's brother Robert never forgave). At the time, Johnson underestimated the appeal of Kennedy and his wife, as well as his Ivy League background and glamorous, photogenic, wealthy family. Johnson's humble southern origins and reputation as an arm-twisting, shady politician contrasted sharply with Kennedy's image. After the 1960 Democratic National Convention chose Kennedy on the first ballot, however, the Senator from Massachusetts calculated that he would need Electoral College votes from the South, especially Texas. Therefore, Kennedy, the elite northeasterner, reached out to the most effective southern Democrat—Johnson—for the vice presidency.

At first, the Vice Presidency was an uncomfortable position for Johnson since that post included relatively little influence and virtually no responsibilities—Johnson was much less powerful as vice president than he had been as majority leader. His efforts to transform the position into a more central post in the administration failed, but Kennedy kept his second-in-command as involved and informed as possible, if only to avoid rumors of disunity. Johnson led a few diplomatic missions and chaired the National Aeronautic Space Council that urged Kennedy to counter the Soviet manned space flight with the promise of a moon landing.

Most importantly, Johnson took command of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities where the Texan pushed the issue of civil rights much further than the President had expected. Put on the ticket to secure the support of southern Democrats, Johnson quickly became the person in the White House advancing the cause of African Americans.<sup>46</sup> Johnson honored the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation with unusual candor:

*The Negro today asks justice. We do not*





Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath of office aboard Air Force One at Love Field Airport in Dallas, Texas, approximately two hours after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Jackie Kennedy (right) looks on.

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*answer him—we do not answer those who lie beneath this soil—when we reply to the Negro by asking, ‘Patience.’ It is empty to plead that the solution to the dilemmas of the present rests on the hands of the clock.<sup>47</sup>*

Although Johnson’s role in the administration was unfulfilling for a politician accustomed to hectic schedules and high stakes politicking, his time as vice president set the stage for a presidency that would continue Kennedy’s agenda—and surpass it in the area of civil rights.

### **LEGISLATING THE KENNEDY LEGACY**

Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in on Air Force One on the flight back to Washington, D.C., approximately two hours after Kennedy’s assassination. Given the central role of the president as commander-in-chief in the midst of the Cold War, Johnson and the Secret Service decided to conduct the swearing-in ceremony as quickly as possible. Combined with the rushed move of Kennedy’s body back to the nation’s capital, these events nurtured some suspicions that Johnson himself had been involved in the murder plot. While the Warren Commission’s efforts did little to allay any of the dozen or so conspiracy theories, Johnson signaled in every way possible that his leadership would honor his predecessor. A week after Kennedy’s death, Johnson issued an executive order renaming the NASA launch station at Cape Canaveral in Florida the John F. Kennedy Space Center. He retained virtually all of Kennedy’s appointments and staff, except those who chose to leave. Most importantly,

he sent a clear message that he was going to pursue Kennedy’s legislative agenda. In fact, Johnson used his political skill to enact Kennedy’s agenda—including bills that had lingered in Congress while Kennedy was alive.

### *The Kennedy-Johnson Tax Cut*

Johnson was determined to get Kennedy’s civil rights bill passed. However, southern Democrats were keeping both the civil rights bill and Kennedy’s tax bill in committee, preventing either from becoming law. The southern senators hoped that by holding the tax bill hostage, they would convince Kennedy to give up on the civil rights bill. Strategically, Johnson focused first on getting the tax bill passed, even bargaining and working closely with southern Democrat and segregationist Harry F. Byrd from Virginia (who led a campaign of “massive resistance” against school desegregation in 1956). Johnson won overwhelming support for the **1964 Revenue Act**, which cut income tax rates by an average of about 20 percent, introduced a minimum standard deduction, and lowered corporate tax rates. As Kennedy’s economic advisers had predicted, unemployment continued to fall due to the added spending power of consumers and increased capital gains for investors—from 5.2 percent in 1964 to 4.5 percent in 1965, and 3.8 percent in 1966. Increased economic activity meant greater tax revenue for the federal government and fewer expenditures on unemployment benefits, off-setting the effect of tax cuts on the federal budget in the short-term.<sup>48</sup>

### *The Civil Rights Act*

After the passage of the tax cut, Johnson immediately pushed for a vote on the civil rights bill, employing his thorough knowledge of congressional rules and procedures. In the House, although a majority favored the bill, Johnson and his aides leaned on every representative—Democrat and Republican—to secure their “yes” vote without amendments or dilutions. “We let them, the Congressmen, know that for every negative vote, there was a price to pay,” remembered a staffer.<sup>49</sup> The House passed the bill 289 to 126. Now, with no tax cut to hold hostage, Senate opponents of civil rights could only resort to a **filibuster**—a political tactic in which members who oppose legislation hold off the vote by continuously speaking on the Senate floor.

Recognizing the moral weight of the occasion as well as the opportunity to capitalize legislatively on Kennedy’s tragic death, Johnson suggested that supporting Kennedy’s





President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Martin Luther King Jr. stands behind him.

civil rights bill was a test of Congress members' decency, patriotism, and Christian values. "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long," he told the nation shortly after taking office.<sup>50</sup> The moral pressure worked, and the Senate passed the bill 73 to 27, with the majority vote coming from northern liberal Democrats and Republicans; some conservative Republicans and most conservative southern Democrats remained in opposition. Johnson knew that his firm stand on the morality of federal civil rights legislation would come at a price. "We have lost the South for a generation," he murmured to an aide after he put his signature on the law on July 2, 1964.<sup>51</sup> The South's rejection of Democrats after Johnson's strong endorsement of civil rights would have long-term political consequences. Since Reconstruction the South had voted for Democrats, making white southerners a key part of the New Deal coalition. Beginning in 1968, the electoral map would change dramatically.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 responded to many of the most urgent demands of the Civil Rights Movement. Relying on the equal protections clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and federal authority to regulate interstate commerce, the law barred the unequal application of voter registration requirements and outlawed racial segregation in schools or public accommodations such as restaurants, motels, swimming pools, public transportation, or employment. It furthermore prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

## Women and the Civil Rights Act

One of the few amendments house members voted on came from an outspoken critic of the bill, Virginia Democrat Howard Smith. When he proposed that sex be included with the categories in which employers, governments, schools, and businesses could no longer discriminate, he was met with laughter. Historians disagree whether Smith sought to derail the bill and embarrass his northern colleagues whose commitments to male-dominated labor unions had them balk at gender equality, or whether Smith genuinely found sex discrimination worthy of action if government were to be so bold as to weigh in on civil rights at all.<sup>52</sup> Either way, almost half of the text of the Civil Rights Act was devoted to Title VII which addressed employment discrimination and, after the Senate vote, included the word "sex." Following his election as president in 1964, Johnson used Title VII as a mandate for supervising and enforcing equal employment opportunities for racial minorities—a policy that would cost him dearly among northern white men.<sup>53</sup> Although Johnson anticipated that Title VII would help African Americans in the workforce, women were equally quick to lodge complaints of gender discrimination.

## The Election of 1964: Johnson vs. Goldwater

Johnson faced numerous civil rights-related challenges as he ran for president in 1964. After years of painstaking and dangerous voter registration drives—and an entire summer in Mississippi focused on registering African Americans to vote, activists were frustrated that the president's party in Mississippi excluded blacks and held a whites-only primary. These SNCC activists formed the **Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)**, an integrated political party that demonstrated that African Americans wanted to register to vote but were blocked by Mississippi Democrats. When the MFDP asked to be seated at the national Democratic convention instead of the white-only Democratic Party, Johnson and party leaders attempted a compromise: they would not seat the entire MFDP, as this would likely drive Mississippi (and countless other states) out of the convention and cause them to vote for a third-party ticket, likely costing Johnson the election. Instead, the convention offered two honorary seats and a promise that all future Mississippi primaries would be integrated. The MFDP representatives—who had worked hard for voter registration, risking their lives and running into endless roadblocks laid by segregationists—did not accept the compromise. When MFDP leader [Fannie Lou Hamer](#) spoke out about the conflict to a committee, Johnson called a sudden press conference in Washington to deflect





Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party leader Fannie Lou Hamer speaks at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

media attention. The President also used the FBI to monitor the Civil Rights Movement during the convention, fearing protests and disruptions.<sup>54</sup> These tactics alienated Johnson's allies in the Civil Rights Movement and planted the seeds for further divisions in the Democratic Party in 1968.

Johnson also faced the difficulty of choosing a running mate. JFK's brother Robert "Bobby" Kennedy was a popular national figure and an obvious choice, but Robert despised Johnson who, in turn, resented Kennedy's northeastern, elitist arrogance. Johnson also did not want to appear as if he needed a Kennedy on the ballot to win an election. At the very last minute, Johnson decided on Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey, a longtime progressive Democrat who enjoyed wide support among labor unions.

At the same time, a new conservative branch of the Republican Party was gaining momentum under the

leadership of Arizona Republican Senator and presidential nominee Barry Goldwater. Goldwater's libertarian wing of the party opposed any form of government intervention in the market, believing that the forces of supply and demand would settle into a natural balance. After World War II, these conservatives wed their free market ideology to a radical opposition to communism and sometimes an insistence that Christianity constituted the true American identity. Although they were marginalized during Eisenhower's presidency, with its popular mainstream Republicanism, a combination of factors revived their cause, including Eisenhower's retirement, the Civil Rights Movement (and the support it received from the federal government), new regulations, and continued Cold War tensions. In addition to opposing government economic intervention, Goldwater also opposed the Civil Rights Act and the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, arguing that desegregation was entirely the states' responsibility. Convinced that freedom of association trumped racial equality, he insisted that no government had the right to compel a private business to abstain from racial discrimination.

Goldwater's biggest handicap, however, was his talk about the need to move from a Cold War policy of "containment" to a "roll-back" of communist control in the world. Goldwater went so far as to declare, "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." Johnson made the most out of the threat this position implied, namely that the U.S. should use nuclear bombs in Vietnam. A Johnson campaign ad—which was so frightening to Americans it only aired once—featured a little girl picking petals of a daisy. As she counts, a voice in the background counts down from ten to one. The ad ends with a nuclear bomb detonating. The implication of the ad was that Goldwater posed a threat to peace, both at home and abroad. A Democratic bumper sticker of the time made a similar point; it spoofed Goldwater's slogan, which appealed to gut-level conservatism—"In your heart, you know he's right"—with the phrase, "In your heart, you know he might."<sup>55</sup>

In the end, a large share of voters elected Johnson in a landslide, with 61.05 percent of the vote—the highest-ever share of the popular vote. However, Goldwater's victory in five southern states, in addition to his home state of Arizona, proved what Johnson had feared: The Democratic Party had lost southern white voters.

## **THE GREAT SOCIETY**

Johnson had set out in his political career with a fervent desire to expand on the New Deal and make his mark on the nation's history by reviving FDR's political activism. After securing Kennedy's legislative agenda and winning



re-election for himself, he quickly got to work on his own ambitious agenda which he dubbed “The Great Society.”

## The War on Poverty

Johnson began building the Great Society soon after Kennedy’s assassination. Like many Americans at the time, he was impressed with Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, which described the hopelessness of the approximately nineteen percent of Americans who lived in poverty. Johnson decided to make poverty his agenda: “That’s my kind of program,” he told a colleague, “We should push ahead full-tilt on this project.”<sup>56</sup>

In early 1964, Johnson declared an, “unconditional war on poverty in America.” He chose his words carefully, using “war” to invoke a shared national purpose, determination, and a decimation of the enemy—poverty. The Johnson administration did not set out to simply aid in the redistribution of income and wealth. Michael Harrington’s work suggested that the *conditions* of the poor—not just low earnings—fostered habits and routines that kept these Americans poor. What Johnson’s policies had to tackle, therefore, were not methods of redistribution, but far-reaching policies and programs aimed at changing the nation’s “cultures of poverty.”<sup>57</sup>

Although the War on Poverty included regularly distributed aid, like the Federal **Food Stamp** program, most of Johnson’s efforts were more comprehensive. The key agency in charge of alleviating poverty was the **Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)** led by a member of the Kennedy family, Sargent Shriver. Its boldest and most controversial initiative was the **Community Action Program (CAP)**. Based on the assumption that the poor had to be involved in the process of reform, CAP pursued the principle of “maximum feasible participation” for impoverished Americans. Often, this meant aiding the poor in accessing their benefits from local and state support services, something that did not endear the program to local authorities. Community action struck Johnson and Shriver as interesting, but they were reluctant to embrace bolder plans to let the poor determine the shape of anti-poverty assistance themselves. “It will never fly,” muttered OEO head Shriver to one of his own staff.<sup>58</sup> Another component of the OEO was its Job Corps program, in which low-income youth could receive vocational training.

## Education

Education was a major component of the war on poverty. In addition to training youth in the Job Corps, the

administration also wanted to bring teachers into poor neighborhoods, as was the case with the **Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)** program—which functioned like a domestic Peace Corps. For pre-school children, the OEO introduced and oversaw the administration of **Head Start** daycare opportunities for urban residents, predominantly in African-American communities. The Johnson administration also channeled federal funding to states with the **1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act**, with the goal of closing the achievement gap among black and white students and creating more universal education standards.

President Johnson supported a broader federal role in education beyond the classroom as well. In 1965, he signed into law the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, which have supported public art projects, scholarly works, and educational initiatives in the humanities ever since. And in 1967, the creation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting made possible the public funding of National Public Radio and Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) without direct political influence from Washington, D.C.

## Housing and Urban Development

Another part of Johnson’s War on Poverty was the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, which greatly increased funding for public **housing projects** and subsidized loans. That year, the president elevated housing to a cabinet position, signifying his commitment to subsidized public housing. However, federal public housing efforts continued to face severe criticism from conservatives as well as progressives and community organizations. Conservatives dismissed public housing assistance as excessive welfare. Progressives and community organizations argued that low-cost housing concentrated the poor in large, uniform concrete housing “projects” that invited crime and further stigmatization.

## Medical Care

Possibly the most enduring legacy of Johnson’s War on Poverty was the introduction of **Medicare** for the elderly and **Medicaid** for the poor. Signed into law as an expansion of the Social Security Act, these reforms expanded the New Deal as Roosevelt had envisioned in 1935. Improved living conditions and medication over the first half of the twentieth century had helped change the demographics of the United States, allowing more Americans to live years into retirement, when they found





President Johnson signs the Social Security Act of 1965.

themselves on fixed incomes and without employer health insurance. As a result, by the 1960s a growing number of elderly Americans found themselves falling into bankruptcy due to medical costs.

Medicare offered Americans over age sixty-five insurance coverage for hospitalization as well as affordable supplemental insurance. Medicare remains today the largest public healthcare system in the United States, responsible for significant improvements in the quality of life of a steadily growing proportion of Americans—seniors. Medicaid also expanded Social Security, aiding Americans who could demonstrate their need for public assistance.

### *Immigration Reform*

The Johnson administration's **Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965** is possibly the reform that has most changed America since the 1960s. Widely supported by Republicans and Democrats outside the South, the law passed relatively easily. Even though it was not discussed as part of the debates over civil rights or economic opportunity, it embodied the principles of equal opportunity.

The law replaced the national origins quota system, which had been in place since the 1920s. The national origins system limited immigration from every country to a fraction of the people who lived in the United States from each country in 1890. Because many immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and other parts of the world outside Western Europe came to the United States after 1890, this system discriminated against non-Western European immigrants, greatly limiting their numbers. The 1965 law established new, global quotas that were not

tied to American demographics, which meant that long-excluded immigrants from non-European nations could now join the ranks of United States immigrants. Immigrants with particular skills needed in the United States also could secure permanent residence. Furthermore, the law prioritized family reunifications outside of the quota system.

One long-term effect of this law was a dramatic transformation of the demographics of the United States and the diversity and range of talents of its workforce. However, this act also had unintended consequences; its global quotas limited immigration from within the western hemisphere for the first time. As a result, long-standing immigration and migration patterns—especially from Mexico—became, overnight, illegal. In 1960, approximately 200,000 migratory workers and 35,000 immigrants entered the United States from Mexico. The 1965 act established a cap of 120,000 visas for the entire Western hemisphere (later, in 1976, a per country limit of 20,000 was established for all Western hemisphere countries). Mexican immigrants continued to enter the United States, although now many of them did so illegally.<sup>59</sup>

### *The 1965 Voting Rights Act*

Although activists nationwide had reasons to celebrate the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the defiance of southern whites and the persistence of restrictions on black voting rights in the South made it clear that for African Americans to access equal citizenship, the federal government would have to act on voting rights. The brutal suppression of voting rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, in early 1965 made national headlines and generated TV coverage, making racial discrimination at the polls a key issue for federal politicians.

Sponsored by Democratic as well as Republican leaders in the Senate, the **Voting Rights Act of 1965** banned any state or local law that restricted voting rights. Specifically, the law banned many of the exclusionary devices southern states had used to keep African Americans from the polls, such as literacy tests and grandfather clauses. (The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1964, already banned the use of poll taxes.) Finally, the law made particular jurisdictions subject to federal supervision if they had a verifiable record of racial discrimination in the past. By that rule, southern states were no longer allowed to make any changes to their election process without receiving prior clearance from the Justice Department. The law passed the Senate and the House with broad support from both parties, with only southerners opposing its passage.





Alabama state troopers assault participants in a civil rights voting march in Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 1965. The incident made national headlines and generated TV coverage, making racial discrimination at the polls a key issue for federal politicians.

Photo Credit: Associated Press

With the help of Congress, President Johnson's vision of the Great Society transformed the United States in many ways. However, Johnson was unable to accomplish all he wanted, and many of his programs were underfunded as a result of the increasing costs of the war in Vietnam. Johnson later noted (in the gendered language that was typical of politicians of his generation), "that [expletive] of a war [Vietnam] killed the lady I really loved—the Great Society." Although the Vietnam War did preoccupy Johnson in his second term, his programs and legislative achievements changed American society. To this day, Americans guard their Medicare and the protections of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and Medicaid and the benefits of the Voting Rights Act continue to enjoy fierce support among a majority of Americans. Regardless of one's political convictions, Johnson's Great Society had the impact of a second New Deal after all.<sup>60</sup>

## THE WARREN COURT

Historically, the United States Supreme Court was the most conservative branch of the federal government, stifling rather than promoting the expansion of civil rights to women and people of color. By the 1960s it was clear that the historical trend had shifted. During the New Deal, the Court shifted away from its long pattern of obstructing federal economic policies. After President Eisenhower's appointment of Earl Warren, a former Republican governor of California, to the position of Chief Justice, the "Warren Court" ruled on cases in ways that cemented the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. In the long run, the Warren Court galvanized a

conservative opposition against "activist judges."

## Civil Rights

Early on, the Warren Court reigned in the anti-communist crusades of local, state, and federal governments, securing the protections of the First Amendment against government investigations of political beliefs, party affiliation, and dissent. In the landmark case of **New York Times Co. v. Sullivan** in 1964, the Warren Court struck down the paper's conviction for libel by an Alabama jury, which had found the *Times* responsible for an advertisement criticizing local officials for their treatment of civil rights activists. This ruling effectively established our modern standards for freedom of the press, which southern authorities had long stifled. Among the many Jim Crow laws that the Supreme Court struck down in the 1960s was a law banning interracial marriage between black and white spouses, effective in sixteen states. Richard and Mildred Loving, a mixed-race couple, had married in Washington, D.C., and returned to their home state of Virginia where the sheriff raided their home in the middle of the night. The Lovings were given the option of serving jail time or leaving their home state. For civil rights supporters, **Loving v. Virginia** (1967) highlighted the absurdity of racism.

The court pursued a second dimension of civil rights that was particularly important for women. In **Griswold v. Connecticut** (1965) it established a right to privacy, especially a married couple's right to privacy in family planning, and overturned state prohibitions against the use of contraceptives. The court would soon guarantee access to contraception for unmarried adults and minors as well.

## The Rights of the Accused

The Supreme Court's "rights revolution" extended to criminal rights, through legal protections for the accused and greater scrutiny of due process in criminal investigations. Court proceedings also assisted people of color against police violence and profiling. The case of **Miranda v. Arizona** (1966), for example, highlighted abusive police practices against Mexican Americans in the Southwest and established the practice of informing suspects of their constitutional protections, such as the right to remain silent and to counsel. The "Miranda Warning" became a new standard in police practice.

## Preserving Democracy

Voting rights cases also reached the Supreme Court in the 1960s. In **Baker v. Carr** (1962), the court ended the



arbitrary sizing of congressional districts, requiring all voter districts to be equal in population size. Affirming the principle of one-person, one-vote significantly raised the number of representatives of voters in urban counties. Previously, urban areas often had the same electoral weight as rural counties, despite urban areas' much greater population.

In addition, the court reinforced the separation of church and state in public institutions. In **Engle v. Vitale** (1962) the justices found that prayer was unconstitutional in public education and public institutions.

## FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK POWER

The Civil Rights Movement had its origins in the South where segregation, voter disfranchisement, and the violence and intimidation of the Klan and lynch-mobs were prevalent. The desegregation of buses, lunch-counters, schools, and colleges was significant, but did not address all inequalities. Nor did access to the voting booth necessarily make black communities a priority in state politics or make black neighborhoods safer. Problems like insufficient housing and jobs affected African Americans throughout the country, including in the north, and especially in cities. These persistent problems caused the movement to expand from a campaign for rights to a call for power.

### THE LIMITS OF NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

Photographs in magazines and images on television had helped amplify Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy of nonviolent resistance and delivered shocking images of white bigotry and police violence across the South. The dignity and endurance of protesters, however, concealed the tremendous personal toll this strategy took on activists who endured threats, beatings, and other forms of terror. The murders of activists and the horrific violence that rained on peaceful marchers in Alabama in 1965 caused many people in the movement to ask whether the victories of nonviolent protests came at the expense of the protesters.

#### *The Mississippi Freedom Summer*

Since 1961, the civil rights organizations SNCC and CORE had been organizing voter registration drives in Mississippi, where at the beginning of the decade only about six percent of eligible African Americans had been registered to vote. The campaign culminated in the Mississippi **Freedom Summer** in 1964, when thousands of student volunteers,



*Freedom Summer activists sing before leaving training sessions at Western College for Women in Oxford, OH, to travel to Mississippi in June of 1964.*

*Photo Credit: Ted Polunbaum Collection / Newseum*

many from northern universities, traveled south to help register African Americans to vote. The involvement of white northern college students drew extra media attention, and the students in turn offered additional assistance to Mississippi children in about thirty freedom schools across the state. However, the Freedom Summer campaign became the target of white southern violence. Local authorities arrested more than a thousand volunteers, white mobs and police beat up over eighty participants, and thirty-seven black churches and thirty businesses were firebombed.

On June 21, 1964, three civil rights activists—Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney—were stopped by local deputies and later killed by the officer's fellow Klansmen. The event drew national attention and sympathy for the Civil Rights Movement, specifically for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a law that dealt with the very inequities that Freedom Summer was addressing. However, many African Americans also felt that the widespread attention to the murders was because two of the victims (Goodman and Schwerner) were white and from the northeast. In the past, African-American victims of southern terrorism had often been ignored.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Dead End in Selma*

The heavy price civil rights activists had to pay also became apparent in Alabama during the Selma to Montgomery March. Although Selma was half African American, only one percent of voters were registered to vote, and as a result African Americans also did not appear on juries. After months of protest, on March 7, 1965, SNCC leader John Lewis attempted to lead a march of six hundred protesters from Selma to the state capital Montgomery.



Once they stepped out of the city boundaries, state troopers and sheriff deputies attacked them with billy clubs, tear gas and horses, hospitalizing seventeen and injuring another fifty. John Lewis, who went on to become a long-serving Democratic Congressman, suffered a fractured skull. This day, which became known as **Bloody Sunday**, resulted in national media attention and calls for more protestors to finish the march.

Two days later, Dr. King attempted to continue the march, along with additional supporters who had reacted to the news. King marched to the city limits and requested federal protection from the Johnson administration. Finally, on March 21, a third and final march began as over three thousand marchers left Selma for Montgomery. Sleeping in the fields on the side of the road and protected by the national guard and the military, the marchers attracted more followers, and on March 25 a crowd of about 30,000 marched into Alabama's state capital. The moral weight of this moving demonstration put enormous pressure on Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act (which Johnson signed into law that August). Just one year after the march, the number of registered black voters in Selma was only four percent below the number of registered whites in the city. However, many activists were exhausted from years of nonviolent resistance—especially the constant threat of violence and enduring actual beatings—and were ready to move beyond King's leadership and nonviolent resistance.<sup>62</sup>

### *The Black Separatism of Malcolm X*

By spring 1965, members of SNCC indicated some misgivings about King's leadership of the movement by inviting **Malcolm X** to speak to them. Born Malcolm Little, he had moved frequently until, at age twenty, he was sentenced to prison for burglary. Behind bars, he joined the **Nation of Islam** (NOI), a black nationalist organization led by a man named Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm became a leading figure in the organization, which promoted messages of black supremacy, black male empowerment, and strict self-discipline. He also changed his name to Malcolm X, thereby shedding what he called his "white slave master name."

By 1964, he had become disillusioned with the NOI, left the organization, and converted to Sunni Islam.<sup>63</sup> Shedding some of the radical black supremacist concepts of the NOI, Malcolm X grew interested in the civil rights struggle and met Martin Luther King Jr. However, Malcolm X had little faith in the strategy of nonviolence and argued that the work of change should be the burden and sacrifice of white



*Martin Luther King Jr. (left) with Malcolm X (right) at the only meeting of the two men on March 26, 1964.*

Americans, not the self-sacrifice of African Americans. His murder by a group of NOI assassins just weeks before the Selma march cut short his evolving leadership within a growing part of the black community.

### **THE URBAN CRISIS**

When Lyndon Johnson launched the War on Poverty, he understood that he had to carry the model of the New Deal in a different direction. Rather than focusing his efforts primarily on the white, urban working class and farmers, as Franklin Roosevelt had done, Johnson placed considerable emphasis on urban poverty—without neglecting persistent pockets of rural poverty, such as Appalachia. Given Johnson's focus on urban poverty, it surprised the president and many other Democrats that an urban crisis erupted during his tenure.

### *The Black Urban Experience*

For most of the twentieth century, African Americans had been migrating out of the South to the industrial cities of the Northeast, Midwest, and West in search of better economic opportunities, access to schooling, and less rigid forms of segregation. The search for industrial employment during World War II gave black families a particular impetus to move to northern cities. By 1955 black urban migration constituted the nation's largest demographic shift; whereas ninety percent of African Americans lived in the rural South in the year 1900, only fifty-three percent lived there by 1970.<sup>64</sup>



At the same time, American cities in the Northeast and Midwest began to decline. Many industrial enterprises moved to towns and suburbs where taxes were lower than in cities. As with postwar housing, new economic development began to flow into suburbs, taking tax dollars away from urban areas and leaving inner cities with lower tax revenues; over time, city neighborhoods became less prosperous and eventually less desirable for residents. The **white flight** of white middle-class residents, businesses, and capital from the city to the many advantages of the suburbs laid the ground for the nation's racial tensions ever since.<sup>65</sup>

Black neighborhoods in postwar America not only suffered from a loss of revenue as wealthier residents and business moved to the suburbs, but also from the construction of highways that cut these neighborhoods off from suburban jobs rather than connect them with economic opportunities. In addition, black communities wrestled with deep generational divisions. Many of the older black urban residents originated from the South, where they had learned to maintain strong family ties, center community life on the church, and avoid the Jim Crow regime by sticking to their neighborhoods. Their city-raised children, however, found these southern traditions confining.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Watts Riots, August 1965*

The extent of the black urban crisis gained national attention in August 1965 when news about riots in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts stunned TV audiences. The trigger for the **Watts Riots** had been the arrest of a man named Marquette Frye on the suspicion that he was driving while intoxicated. The police's heavy-handed tactics stirred the community's deep resentment against police racial profiling. At the end of the week-long rampage, thirty-four people lay dead, with the majority of these deaths due to gun-shot wounds inflicted by the police or national guard.

California voters had pushed the African-American community to the edge with a repeal of the state's Rumford Equal Housing Act (1963). The act had outlawed racial discrimination in housing, which was at the core of the ghettoization, segregation, and exclusion from economic opportunity for black Angelinos. The state's realtor association rallied with state Republicans under the leadership of Ronald Reagan against the measure on the grounds that discrimination was part of a seller's property right. They secured the repeal in 1964 with a strong majority referendum although the repeal was later overturned by the California Supreme Court.



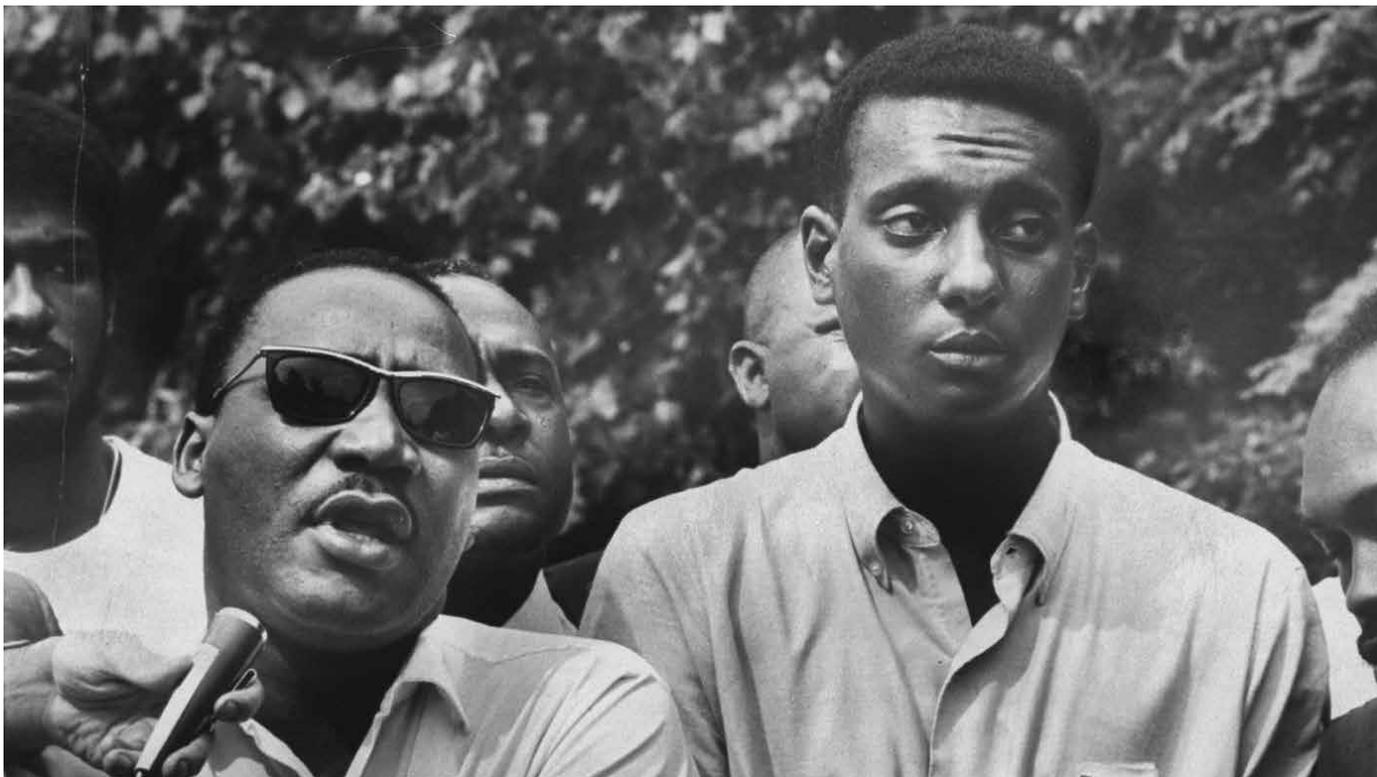
*Buildings burn during the Watts Riots in August 1965.*

### *Ghettos in Flames Nationwide*

The riots in Los Angeles were particularly shocking to observers, who considered the city a model in race relations.<sup>67</sup> In the following years, dozens of riots broke out in cities across the country, usually triggered by the arbitrary violence of local police. Wherever they erupted, they expressed a deep frustration and hopelessness over lack of housing, lack of access to jobs, and police discrimination. Few white Americans—especially those who lived in the comfort and security of the suburbs—understood the grievances of black urban residents. These white Americans reacted to the unrest with confusion and sometimes outrage and bitterness.

State and federal governments typically responded with tough law-and-order operations on the street. However, in 1967 riots in Detroit, Michigan, prompted President Johnson to order a commission to study the roots of black discontent in the nation's cities. The resulting **Kerner Report** condemned the lack of economic opportunity for African Americans and found that their economic prospects were declining—despite the efforts of Johnson's War on Poverty. The report stated, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." The commission placed the blame on white racism and called for an immediate end of not only legal (de jure) discrimination, but also de facto discrimination and segregation—meaning discrimination in practice. (An example of de facto segregation would be all-black city schools in the north that were segregated not by law, but because African Americans were concentrated in certain neighborhoods and unwelcome in others.) The report predicted that the U.S. would have to make massive investments in education, job-training, and housing reform





Stokely Carmichael (right) photographed with Martin Luther King Jr. (left) during a voter registration march in Mississippi in 1966.

Photo Credit: Lynne Pelham / TIME

to alter the urban and national landscape.<sup>68</sup>

Civil rights and Black Power advocates felt vindicated by the report, but many white working- and middle-class Americans expressed dismay at what they perceived as liberal Democrats' empathy for black lawlessness. As one California voter wrote to Governor Ronald Reagan, "It is far more important NOW to give our attention to these problems than it is to beat the Russians to the moon," adding that it was time to place "less emphasis on Civil Rights and more on Civil Obedience."<sup>70</sup>

For President Johnson, the problem was especially complicated. His popularity had sunk significantly in the months since he signed the Voting Rights Act, and he had little hope that he could sway Congress to approve the kind of massive spending package the Kerner Commission called for—even though he had long hoped to provide massive investment for urban renewal and the construction of ambitious, brand-new **Model Cities**. Just as problematic as the waning support in public and in Congress was the fact that the federal government was spending more and more in Vietnam. By 1968, the last year of Johnson's term, the U.S. would be spending far more

money on war overseas than reform at home. In the end, it was in Vietnam where the Great Society's most ambitious goals for America's inner cities were lost.

## **BLACK POWER**

### *Stokely Carmichael's Black Power*

Malcolm X was hardly alone in his beliefs that nonviolent resistance was too costly a path to equality and that the burden and responsibility was on white Americans to put racial equality into effect. In 1966, SNCC leader **Stokely Carmichael** coined the phrase "Black Power," which summarized the new direction of the movement. He explained, "It is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations."<sup>71</sup> Carmichael was a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement who had participated in the Freedom Rides, marched in Selma, organized voter registration drives, and been arrested at least thirty times and jailed.

White observers at the time often underlined the differences



between Black Power activists and the allegedly less “militant” nonviolent protesters under the leadership of Dr. King. Whereas the latter had demonstrated the humble dignity of a movement born out of southern black churches, advocates of Black Power were seen as confrontational as they snubbed middle-class Americans, embraced leftist-radical economic theories, and idealized the African-American community. However, King in fact had demonstrated as much “impatience” with southern white resistance to desegregation in Birmingham and Selma jails as Malcolm X had done in public. At the same time, Malcolm X increasingly rejected the notion of “white devils” after his departure from the Nation of Islam and acknowledged that legal rights secured in Congress were part of black progress.<sup>72</sup> What most differentiated King’s campaigns from subsequent Black Power groups was King’s unswerving commitment to nonviolent resistance, regardless of whether or not one was attacked.

### *The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense*

The idea of Black Power infused African-American culture and society, as well as local politics. In Oakland, California, the black community college students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale articulated their own ideals by combining the Marxist-Leninism critique of capitalism with the liberation ideology of the anti-colonial movement in Asia and Africa. Embracing armed self-defense, they called themselves the **Black Panther Party for Self-Defense**. They quickly drew attention to police violence by monitoring traffic stops. The Panthers would watch police during stops, standing nearby, armed with guns and the constitution—their finger on the second amendment. This prompted the state of California to take its first decisive step toward gun control—a ban on publicly carrying loaded firearms. The Panthers provocatively entered the California capitol building in Sacramento in their uniform of black leather, holding shotguns—a display of power and militancy that resulted in arrests and citations for misdemeanors.<sup>73</sup>

The confrontations between Panthers and the police soon escalated far beyond gestures. In addition to the Panthers’ display of militancy, the organization also recruited ex-felons and prisoners as they expanded with new chapters in cities nationwide. Everywhere, their martial appearance and criminal records made them targets of local police forces, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Calling the Panthers “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country,” FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover authorized a large covert campaign against the Panthers and other black nationalists executed by the **Counter**



*Black Panther Party founders Bobby Seale (left) and Huey P. Newton (right) stand in the street armed with guns.*

Photo Credit: <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28701635>

**Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO).** FBI agents conducted espionage, infiltrated organizations like the Panthers, framed people for crimes, and even undertook targeted killings—such as that of Panther Fred Hampton in Chicago in 1969.<sup>74</sup> By that time, a series of gun-fights with police killed some Panthers and put others behind bars, and fear of informants prompted Panthers to turn against each other. Huey Newton found himself in jail and on trial from 1967 to 1970 for the deadly shooting of a police officer, and by the end of the decade the organization had suffered a serious loss of leadership.<sup>75</sup>

While the Black Panthers believed in militant self-defense and police confrontation, they also believed in community self-help and organizing. Panthers organized breakfast programs for school children, after-school care, educational programs, and other community initiatives. Originally embracing traditional gender roles that diminished women in their organization, the Panthers explicitly opposed sexism by the mid-1970s. Under the leadership of its new leader Elaine Brown, the organization entered electoral politics, issuing endorsements of political candidates, supporting pregnant women’s right to choose abortion, and opposing prostitution.

### *Black Pride in Culture and Society*

The message of black pride also expressed itself in culture and society where African Americans embraced black





Athletes Tommie Smith (center) and John Carlos (right), the gold and bronze winners of the two-hundred-meter race at the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City, raise their fists in a black power salute during the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner.

names, as well as black heritage, art, and fashion—a black identity. Students demanded black history courses taught by black faculty; artists celebrated African visual themes; women and men let their hair grow long—a style they termed the **Afro**; musicians discovered African instruments; and families changed their names from those inherited from slave-owners to those that expressed an African heritage. Stressing the value of their African heritage led advocates of black pride to the political movement of **Pan-Africanism** that emphasized the shared experience of all people of African descent and called for the independence of all African nations as well as African solidarity.

### *Black Power's Global Influence*

The politics and culture of Black Power carried significant appeal to people of color across the United States and beyond. At the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City, the gold and bronze winners of the two-hundred-meter race, African Americans Tommy Smith and John Carlos, raised their fists in a Black Power salute during the

playing of the Star-Spangled Banner. The chairman of the International Olympic Committee forced the U.S. Olympic Committee to expel the two athletes from the team and from the Olympic village for their willful political act at a presumably apolitical sporting event.<sup>76</sup>

While Smith and Carlos were controversial in the United States, their message carried significant international support. Silver medalist Peter Norman from Australia carried a solidarity badge during the awards ceremony (a show of support that prompted his ousting from his athletic community at home). At the same time, a British Black Power Movement was emerging, as well as a London chapter of the Black Panthers. Mexican Americans in Southern California formed the Brown Berets, borrowing heavily from the racial pride theme of Black Power and the open militancy of the Black Panthers. Moreover, in 1972 the People's National Party in Jamaica won the election and chose a prime minister who openly endorsed Black Power. Thus, although many of the most outspoken advocates of Black Power found themselves persecuted and pushed to the margins by the 1970s, their ideas shaped perspectives on black culture and the meaning of community not only for Americans, but for people of color around the world.

## SECTION II SUMMARY

- ✦ Under President Johnson's leadership, the federal government endorsed civil rights legislation and attempted, with partial success, a "War on Poverty" with a new New Deal.
- ✦ The unequivocal support for the Civil Rights Movement of the Democratic Party outside the South ended the long-time coalition between working-class Americans, northern African Americans, and southern whites.
- ✦ Significant legislative reforms notwithstanding, the Civil Rights Movement's strategy of nonviolent resistance met severe limits across the country, prompting the embrace of a bolder push for Black Power.
- ✦ Untouched by most of the civil rights legislation, African Americans in cities across the country experienced racial inequality beyond disfranchisement and segregation, leading some to rise up in violent protests over the second half of the decade.



## Section III

# The Center Does Not Hold

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DISSENT IN THE EARLY 1960s

### THE NEW LEFT—AND RIGHT

Throughout the 1950s, some young Americans grew dissatisfied with the cultural monotony of consumer society, repressive sexual mores, and centrist party politics. In the early 1960s, dissatisfaction with the two major political parties brought about an important shift in the meaning of liberalism as well as conservatism among young people. Many young people found themselves at odds with those in power. Most of the older New Deal liberals had developed their priorities during the Great Depression and World War II and therefore focused on restoring and preserving prosperity for an expanding middle class and stressed military preparedness and intervention in foreign policy. Many of these liberals recognized that racial divisions posed grave domestic problems, and they viewed the federal government as the appropriate instrument for remedying racial inequality.

Young Americans in the 1960s offered a new left perspective on the challenges of their time. They were not shaped by the traumas of the Great Depression and World War II and were more willing to criticize the federal government and the consequences of prosperity. They stressed the damaging effects of prosperity on the environment, and they valued cultural diversity and self-expression. They eagerly embraced the view of a growing number of critics who did not understand large corporations, universities, and government agencies as safe and secure institutions, but rather as soulless and stifling bureaucracies.

### *Students for a Democratic Society*

No group articulated the priorities of the **New Left** more clearly than **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)**. During their national convention at Port Huron, Michigan, in 1962, they composed an “Agenda for a New Generation” in which they contrasted the nation’s comfort

in “superfluous abundance” with the “The worldwide outbreak of revolution against colonialism and imperialism, the entrenchment of totalitarian states, the menace of war, overpopulation, international disorder,” and a national democratic system that was apathetic and manipulated rather than “of, by, and for the people.” Disillusioned with the politics of liberalism, the advocates of the New Left understood true participatory democracy—meaning involvement in political issues beyond voting—as the only possible path to racial equality, disarmament, and peace—values that, in the midst of the Cold War, older liberals did not necessarily agree with or prioritize.<sup>77</sup>

### *The Berkeley Free Speech Movement*

These students backed up their calls for a more participatory democratic system by engaging in political activism. For example, students on the campus of the University of California **Berkeley** pushed for their right to campaign for off-campus causes at the university. In the fall semester of 1964, student activists returned to campus after working for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project—a huge participatory undertaking—and set up information tables on campus to solicit support for the Civil Rights Movement.

Existing university policy prohibited any political advocacy other than that of Democratic and Republican school clubs, and the arrest of a student activist that October set off a large protest on campus. Over the course of the next couple months, thousands of students took part in protests, and hundreds were arrested. However, the University gradually relaxed its rules on political advocacy on campus, and within a year Berkeley had a growing and vibrant student antiwar movement. On the other hand, the open protests of Berkeley students became a rallying cry for the conservative wing of the Republican Party. In 1966, California conservatives enthusiastically embraced Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan as a candidate for governor of California, as Reagan publicly denounced leftist student protests at Berkeley.





*Police restrain Mario Salvi, leader of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, at the University of California, Berkeley, on December 7, 1964.*

*Photo Credit: Robert W. Klein, AP*

## Young Americans for Freedom

In the nation's public memory, the 1960s seem dominated by protesting students associated with the New Left. Yet, young conservatives had their own movement that often matched the size of the New Left. Feeling shunned during the years of Roosevelt and Truman and overlooked by the moderate Eisenhower administration, a new cadre of conservatives under the intellectual leadership of William F. Buckley spoke out forcefully against the expanded federal government and in favor of a radical anti-communism. They passionately championed the notion of individual liberty and smaller government (whereas their liberal counterparts believed that individual liberty—such as that of workers and African Americans—was protected by a powerful federal government). These conservatives viewed Arizona Senator and Republican Barry Goldwater as their political hero. Goldwater was an outspoken critic of domestic federal powers, ranging from New Deal legislation to civil rights reform, but he favored a more aggressive federal foreign policy, especially against communist countries.

Young conservatives formed their own organization at

universities, the **Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)**. The organization issued its manifesto at William F. Buckley's home in Connecticut in 1960, which became known as the Sharon Statement. By the spring of 1962, a YAF rally at New York City's Madison Square Garden drew a crowd of 18,000 people—at a time when the SDS counted a membership of 2,500.<sup>78</sup>



*A YAF rally at New York City's Madison Square Garden in 1962 drew a crowd of 18,000 people.*



## THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

As young Americans became vocal about politics in the early 1960s, they also broke new ground in their personal and sexual lives. Americans in the previous decade had never been as chaste and proud as popular culture suggested, and record numbers of teenage pregnancies—hastily legitimized with teenage marriages—demonstrated that young people had sex much earlier than their parents or parenting guide books suggested. However, women in the 1950s had to endure a double standard for sexual behavior, which socially stigmatized women for premarital sex while the same behavior by men was condoned and expected.

### Birth Control

When the FDA approved a new oral contraceptive for women—known as “**the Pill**”—in 1960, it opened the door to a new way of thinking about sex. At first the availability of the **birth control pill** changed the sex lives of married couples. In some states lawmakers opposed contraception even for married couples, but in 1965 the U.S. Supreme Court declared in **Griswold v. Connecticut (1965)** that states could not block married couples’ access to contraception. The Court based its decision on the grounds that American citizens enjoyed a right to privacy and protection from governmental intrusion that emanated from other constitutional amendments. Although it was not until 1972 that access to oral contraception became a constitutional right for *unmarried* individuals, women in many states were able to legally acquire the pill in the 1960s.

Although the use of oral contraception continued to carry a stigma for unmarried women (because its use implied a woman’s interest in premarital sex, which remained controversial), the pill provided a source of stability and allowed women and couples to control their fertility. The pill made it easier for women to separate sex from the risk of pregnancy, something that many men took for granted, but that changed women’s lives. Eight years after its *Griswold* ruling, a new Supreme Court extended this right to privacy to individual women and their pregnancies. In **Roe v. Wade (1973)**, the court weighed a pregnant woman’s right to privacy against the state’s interest in the pregnancy and concluded that states could not limit or regulate abortions in the first trimester and could only regulate them in the interest of the mother’s health during the second.

### Cohabitation

By 1962, over 1 million American women used oral contraceptives, and by 1965 the pill was the most common form of birth control. Along with changes in popular culture, the pill facilitated a new dialogue about the sexual double standard between men and women, the right of couples to plan for children, their right not to have children, and women’s rights to sexual relationships without the prospect of motherhood. Thus, over the course of the 1960s, a growing number of young couples of different social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds began to live together (cohabit) without being married. While many cohabiting couples experienced discrimination by landlords, employers, family members, and local authorities, they also paved the way for new ways of thinking about domestic partnerships, a concept that became significant for lesbian and gay communities thereafter.<sup>79</sup>

### The Liberal Women’s Movement and Politics

The changing meaning of sex coincided with changes in American marriages. Longer life expectancies and access to family planning reduced the portion of women’s lives that was devoted to raising children. Even though 1950s popular culture suggested that women’s natural place was at home, a growing number of married women remained in the workplace while they had children, or returned to the workforce as their children aged. In 1950, only twelve percent of women with preschool children worked outside the home. By 1970, that share had risen to thirty percent. In addition, many women’s lives were changed because of the liberalization of divorce laws in many states. This made it easier for women to leave abusive spouses. Women also increased their commitment to higher education and opted to marry later than the previous generation. Whereas many young women had dropped out of college during the 1950s to marry and become mothers, between 1960 and 1970 the share of female college students increased from thirty-five to forty-one percent.

Women who were able to take advantage of opportunities outside the home benefited from greater national attention to women in the workforce. John F. Kennedy created a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. This commission reported on the many inequities women faced in the labor market and in education and helped bring about the **Equal Pay Act** of 1963, which required employers to pay men and women equal wages for equal work. A year later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned





Writer and feminist Betty Friedan. Friedan called for women's liberation from the confines of domestic life and equality in career opportunities.

discrimination on the basis of sex. Enforcing these laws has proven difficult, however.

At the same time that the federal government was drawing attention to women's lack of equality in the workforce, an author named **Betty Friedan** published her groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Friedan interviewed members of her college graduating class for a reunion and discovered that many women of her generation had experienced isolation and alienation as homemakers in the 1950s. Friedan's book allowed many women to understand that their feelings of unhappiness were shared by other women. Many readers had blamed themselves for failing to be happy, but now realized that their experiences might be due to unrealistic societal expectations that women should be content with cooking, cleaning, and raising children. Friedan called for women's liberation from the confines of domestic life and equality in career opportunities. However, many women in working-class and African-American communities already held jobs to help provide for their families. For them, Friedan's message did not address the exploitation they had experienced in wage

work. Women in the early 1960s had varied experiences, and not all women saw themselves in Friedan's book. For others, reading *The Feminine Mystique* was a first step to exploring outside careers and supporting work-related women's issues—later called "liberal feminism."

## THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD, 1964–68

The United States not only experienced significant changes at home during the mid-1960s—the world at large also posed challenges, some of which were the result of decades of American policy. Conflicts around the world confronted the United States in the 1960s; the largest of these was in Vietnam.

### VEXING VIETNAM: THE QUAGMIRE DEEPENS

Like his predecessor, President Lyndon Johnson felt no particular commitment to deepen the United States' involvement in Vietnam. At the same time, he feared that any caution in foreign policy might be misconstrued as weakness toward communism, which in turn might weaken Congressional support for his domestic policy agenda. To Johnson's dismay, the approximately 16,000 U.S. military advisors—sent by Kennedy—who directed and participated in South Vietnam's combat operations were not able to weaken the insurgents—the Viet Cong—in South Vietnam's rural provinces. Seeing no other option but to increase military efforts in the region, Johnson waited for the right political moment to escalate the Vietnam conflict with as much popular and political support as possible. An incident in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 offered him that political opportunity.

#### *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*

On August 2, 1964, North Vietnamese gunboats attacked a U.S. surveillance vessel off the coast of North Vietnam. A couple days later, a U.S. destroyer reported that it appeared to have been shot at with a torpedo. Even though neither ship was damaged, and even though the details of the second incident were murky, Johnson used the occasion to ask Congress for broad authority to expand military operations in Vietnam. Passed on August 7, the Congressional **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** allowed Johnson as Commander in Chief of the armed forces a blank check to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States."<sup>80</sup> Without an official declaration of war against North





President Johnson signs the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 10, 1964.

Vietnam, which would have drawn in the Soviet Union and China and escalated into a Third World War, Congress had thus empowered the Johnson administration with the legal means to wage an undeclared war.

### *The Policy of Gradual Escalation*

Johnson waited until after the presidential election of 1964 to escalate U.S. military campaigns in Vietnam. Due to North Vietnam aiding the South Vietnamese insurgents with troops and materiel, the president authorized “**Operation Rolling Thunder**.” This was a massive bombing campaign that would last for three years, as U.S. planes dropped more than a half million tons of bombs on North Vietnam. However, the impact of aerial bombardments on the largely agricultural region and undeveloped jungle was limited. Underground storage sites and the North’s ability to maintain operations with the most basic means meant that military supplies continued to travel south on concealed roads hours after an attack.

Recognizing that aerial warfare alone could not win the war, Johnson also deployed the first official combat troops to Vietnam under U.S. Commander **General William Westmoreland**, who urged the president to “put the finger in the dike.” On March 8, 1965, the first U.S. combat troops arrived in Vietnam, as a few thousand Marines waded ashore in Da Nang, and by the end of the year,

there were more than 180,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam. By 1966, 385,000 U.S. soldiers fought in Vietnam, and the numbers grew to 485,000 in 1967 and more than half a million by 1968. Originally, the architects of gradual escalation hoped that the insurgents would scale down their attacks rather than push the U.S. to deploy additional troops. This made sense at the time when most combat took place on the territory of the U.S.’s ally South Vietnam, where Americans hoped to win hearts and minds rather than lay the country to waste. However, in practice, gradual escalation allowed North Vietnam and the Viet Cong to gradually become accustomed to U.S. ground and bombing campaigns.<sup>81</sup>

### *The Best and the Brightest: Managing a War of Annihilation*

President Johnson, his defense secretary Robert McNamara, and their strategic advisors hoped that American technological superiority and economic might would help the United States win the war. Sustained by the largest military apparatus in history at the time, American forces had sophisticated weaponry such as helicopters that could easily fly troops into combat operations. The United States also dropped napalm bombs filled with jellied gasoline to destroy buildings and harm people. The jelly made the gasoline cling to skin, making napalm a deadly weapon. U.S. planes also dropped a toxin called Agent Orange, which denuded fields and forests and had lasting health effects, including cancer, on people who were exposed to it—including U.S. military personnel.

These chemical weapons operated in tandem with the nature of the war: the U.S. goal was never to conquer North Vietnam (which would have antagonized North Vietnam’s neighbor, China, and created a world war); instead, the U.S. sought to discourage the insurgents and their North Vietnamese allies, forcing them to accept the pro-U.S. South Vietnamese government. Similarly, the United States did not measure success by the amount of land that soldiers captured, but by how many Vietnamese insurgents they killed. The department of defense compiled weekly reports of “**body counts**”—the number of Vietnamese that U.S. troops killed on their **search and destroy** missions. This was how the Johnson administration documented its progress in Vietnam.

At the same time, however, American forces were supposed to separate insurgents from South Vietnamese civilians and win the hearts and minds of the latter. Leaflets dropped on “free fire zones” were supposed to warn innocent civilians



to leave the area so that U.S. bomber pilots could be sure to only kill enemy combatants—a tactic that rarely worked. (In free fire zones, the U.S. military was free to kill anything that moved.) In areas in which Viet Cong fighters were particularly active, U.S. troops forced entire villages to relocate into new fenced-in settlements called “**strategic hamlets**” that resembled prison camps. These efforts further alienated the local population, who experienced violence at the hands of both North Vietnamese troops and U.S. troops and their South Vietnamese allies.

In the end, even the so-called “best and the brightest” from Kennedy’s administration, along with military experts, found it impossible to fight a local communist and nationalist movement. The goal of winning hearts and minds while destroying anyone who might be Viet Cong was nearly impossible. An officer’s statement after the Tet offensive epitomized the U.S.’s dilemma in Vietnam: “We had to destroy the town in order to save it,” was a U.S. officer’s revealing explanation of one of his men’s operations in 1968.<sup>82</sup> Asked whether the large number of civilian casualties was a concern, a senior American general responded late in 1966: “Yes, it is a problem...but it does deprive the enemy of the population, doesn’t it?”<sup>83</sup>

### *The Draft: Race and Class*

Johnson’s defense experts and military advisors generally remained far away from the actual fighting. About two-thirds of American troops who fought in Vietnam volunteered, but one-third was selected through the **draft**. Until the Nixon administration transitioned the U.S. military to an all-volunteer force in 1973, all young men had to register with local representatives of the Selective Service System within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday. Local draft boards initially exercised considerable power over who was exempted from the draft and who was selected for one year of military service.

While some tried to feign physical or mental illnesses to be relieved of the draft for health reasons, deferments were the most common way to avoid the risk of conscription. Students of middle-class backgrounds had a much better chance at gaining admission to—and the funds for—college, where they would be exempted from the draft for the duration of their education. Working-class men who went to college were more likely to attend part-time and work part-time, and as a result were not exempt from the draft. Due to the exemption rules that favored upper- and middle-class Americans, roughly twenty-five percent of enlisted men in Vietnam came from homes below the

poverty line, fifty-five percent came from working-class homes, and twenty percent were middle class. Very few enlisted men came from the upper class.

In addition, the threat of getting drafted caused many young men to enlist because they found it difficult to get work because potential employers did not want to waste training on men who might be drafted at any point. These young men who were “draft-motivated” made up roughly half of all volunteers. In addition, because of racial inequalities in the United States at the time, racial minorities were over-represented in the Vietnam-era military. Inequities of race and class also existed among those who volunteered for military service since many more men of color, from rural communities, or with working-class backgrounds saw enlistment as a chance to benefit from an increasingly meager G.I. Bill. Lack of better economic prospects played a role for African-American enlistees who were more than twice as likely to join the Marines or the Army for—as the opinion survey termed it—“self-advancement.”<sup>84</sup>

In response to criticism of these inequities, in 1969 the United States adopted a national [lottery system](#) in Washington, D.C., where paper slips with birth dates were randomly pulled from a glass bowl and lined in numerical order. The lower the lottery number for the given birthday, the higher was the chance that all men registered for the draft with the particular birthday would be called for service.<sup>85</sup>

### *The American Soldier in Vietnam*

For those who did the fighting, Vietnam proved a confusing experience that had little resemblance to the “good war” their fathers had fought in World War II. Many U.S. forces received combat training from superiors whose experience came from the Pacific campaign or the invasion of Europe in World War II. Vietnam, however, was a different type of war. American soldiers were not pushing across territory against a foreign army. Instead, they often found themselves fighting guerilla troops that were difficult to identify and could either blend with the local population or enjoyed their support.

Although the U.S. military was technologically superior, American troops nonetheless kept fighting over the same territories over and over, failing to win the local population’s hearts and minds. This was because the U.S. goal was not to secure land against a rival army, but instead to kill enough Viet Cong (and gain enough civilian allies) that the South Vietnamese government could function. Additionally, heat, humidity, sickness, an utterly foreign language and culture,





*American troops on patrol in Vietnam.*

and American troops own racial stereotypes about Asian people made it difficult for many soldiers to acclimatize and think of Vietnam as a place worth saving. Sent overseas to liberate, they were received—and often acted like—an oppressive invader. Unsure of what they were fighting for, many troops lost faith in the U.S. mission, its military leaders, and even the administration back in Washington.

American soldiers in Vietnam enjoyed better logistical support and infrastructure than any military force in history at the time. While the official “K-rations” (packaged food eaten while out on a mission) were not known for their taste, U.S. infantrymen did not suffer hunger and deprivation like enemy troops or local civilians. On military bases, they enjoyed most comforts familiar from home. However, soldiers were still at risk of injury or death. The U.S. death toll grew from 216 in 1964 to almost 2,000 in 1965 and peaked at 16,899 in 1968. A total of 58,220 American soldiers died in Vietnam. More than 150,000 were wounded, over 700 became prisoners of war, and approximately 1,600 troops’ remains are missing.<sup>86</sup> The war’s toll on the Vietnamese population was even more devastating, however. Estimates for the number of deaths in the Vietnam War on all sides range from 1.45 to 3.6 million, which means that somewhere from over 1 million to over 3 million Vietnamese died during the war.<sup>87</sup>

### *The Tet Offensive and its Political Fallout*

By 1967 the growing death toll among American troops began to trouble many Americans. New technologies in broadcast journalism helped foster public skepticism about the nation’s purpose in the region, as footage of U.S. forces destroying villages and jet fighters dropping napalm bombs

flickered on millions of American TV screens. By October of that year, 46 percent of Americans believed that the U.S. presence in Vietnam was a mistake, and only 28 percent approved of President Johnson’s handling of the conflict. The majority of Americans were not so much morally opposed to the war as eager to see progress.

Public opinion was already wavering when, on the Vietnamese New Year of Tet on January 30–31, 1968, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese launched a powerful attack. The Viet Cong forces struck major U.S. military bases and population centers—including Saigon—the capital of South Vietnam—where American forces battled for six hours to defend the U.S. embassy.

The **Tet Offensive** stunned the American public. The Johnson administration had reported slow but steady progress toward victory in Vietnam, and with a few exceptions the press had dutifully reported on the hard but worthy efforts of American GIs. Now, heavy combat in Saigon during the Tet Offensive made it clear that the Viet Cong insurgency was not even defeated in South Vietnam’s capital. After years of fighting, thousands of casualties, and billions of dollars spent, the Viet Cong presence in Vietnam seemed to be as robust as ever. As a result of the Tet Offensive, American journalists became doubtful that the Vietnam War was winnable, and American public support dwindled even further. The most respected news anchor of the time, [Walter Cronkite](#) of CBS, concluded soberly: “To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory conclusion.”<sup>88</sup>

### *My Lai*

The Tet Offensive raised questions about whether the Vietnam War could be won, but new details of the nature of combat also raised doubts about whether Americans should have engaged in this war at all. The many difficulties American soldiers faced in identifying, engaging, and defeating enemy troops bred deep frustrations, resentment, and racism among American soldiers—a trend that only intensified with the unexpected Tet counteroffensive. The burning of villages and killings of noncombatant civilians became more common.

This type of conduct reached a high-point on March 16, 1968 in the village of **My Lai**. Members of Charlie Company of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division stormed through the hamlet, shooting at everything that moved. Not a single shot was fired at the American soldiers, and in the whole village only three weapons were recovered. Yet, in the hours that followed, members of Lt. William Calley’s platoon conducted





*A soldier burns a hut in My Lai. On March 16, 1968, members of a U.S. platoon conducted mass executions of women and children, killing as many as 504 unarmed civilians.*

mass executions of women and children, killing as many as 504 unarmed civilians. A helicopter pilot and other members of Charlie Company confronted the killing soldiers, and their stories were eventually picked up in the United States by the nation's major newspapers. The investigation that followed charged a series of officers in the chain of command with covering up the massacre and Lt. Calley with the murder of twenty-two civilians.<sup>89</sup> Calley was court-martialed and dismissed from the Army, but served only three and a half years under house arrest before having his life sentence commuted. His commanding officer was found not guilty, as were all twenty-two of the soldiers under him.

## **THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE, AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

### *The Dominican Republic*

Although preoccupied with the war, Johnson also had to contend with foreign policy developments outside of Vietnam. Like his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson maintained an official commitment to the Alliance for Progress with Latin America; yet like many Presidents before, he undermined American lip service to the right to self-determination with military intervention. Johnson sent Marines to the Dominican Republic in 1965 to suppress a violent political conflict there. The president hesitated with the invasion for several months. He feared that his political enemies on the right at home would use the occasion to call for a strike against Fidel Castro's Cuba. He also recognized, though, that liberal critics on the left would align his decision with the long history of U.S. military intervention in the Caribbean since the beginning of the century. In the end, the situation of about one thousand Americans trapped at a hotel near a

projected clashing point between rebels and military loyal to the regime prompted Johnson to send in helicopters for the evacuation of the hotel and to send in troops to forestall even the appearance of a Communist takeover. Notably, throughout this process, he never consulted with Latin American neighbors, as was required by treaty.<sup>90</sup>

### *Israel and the Six-Day War of 1967*

Two years later, Johnson grappled with diplomatic challenges in the Middle East that dated back to Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency. In 1956 Israel had attacked Egypt in a standoff over control of the Suez Canal. Egyptian forces then promptly prevented Israeli-bound ships from accessing the Gulf of Aqaba—a narrow strait of strategic and commercial importance between Sinai and Saudi Arabia. In 1967 United Nations troops withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula where they had kept peace between Egypt and Israel.

The Johnson administration urged Israel to wait for an international naval force to reopen the Gulf, but the United States' European allies did not get on board out of doubt that Johnson would prioritize the Middle East over Vietnam. Impatient, Israel attacked Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on June 5, 1967, and captured the Sinai and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank of the river Jordan and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria by June 10.<sup>91</sup> Israel eventually withdrew from the Sinai after signing a peace treaty with Egypt, but the other territories remained hotbeds of conflict between Israeli settlers and Arab neighbors. In particular, Palestinian displacement in the contested territories has proven contentious to this day.

### *The Long Road to Détente: U.S.-Soviet Relations*

The **Six-Day War** was the result of American overextension in Vietnam and a loss of cohesion between the United States and its European allies, but the Middle Eastern conflict in turn shaped Cold War confrontations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Following the U.N. Assembly's discussion of Israel's land grab, President Johnson met with Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin in Vienna in 1967, hoping to win his support for a peaceful end to the Vietnam War. Kosygin, however, found himself in a bitter rivalry with Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China over North Vietnam's allegiance and did not want to alienate the regime in Hanoi.

Johnson and Kosygin did, however, make progress by



agreeing to increase their efforts to end the intercontinental ballistic missile race. However, in 1968, as Johnson was about to announce a trip to the USSR for an arms control conference, Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia, where student protests threatened the local Communist regime. Whereas Soviet state news celebrated the invasion as a fight against “the process of antisocialist degeneration,” European and American newspapers decried this suppression of democratic movements in the Eastern Bloc, labeling the Soviet rationale the **Brezhnev Doctrine**, after Soviet Communist Party chairman Leonid Brezhnev. In this atmosphere, Johnson could not pursue peaceful talks with the Soviets. He canceled his visit, and the efforts to relax tensions with the Soviet Union once more failed.<sup>92</sup>

## THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

Early opposition to the Vietnam War was prominent within the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, where the



Anti-Vietnam War protesters march at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on October 21, 1967.

nuclear stand-off of the Cold War had caused concern for years. Until 1964, however, open opposition to the U.S. presence in Vietnam was confined to a small number of activists who protested the dangers of the nuclear arms race and American military expansion across the world more generally. Only the surge of regular troop deployments changed the size and nature of the antiwar movement. In 1965 antiwar protests in Washington, D.C., began attracting up to 30,000 demonstrators. These protesters argued that the war violated American ideals of self-determination and that its goal of an independent South Vietnam was both unattainable and against the wishes of a majority of Vietnamese people.

## Teach-Ins and Campus Protests

With the deployment of regular troops and the activation of the draft (which would capture some male students when they graduated), protests expanded. The deployment of significantly more soldiers in 1966 prompted a surge in campus activism. Universities themselves, student protesters realized, played a role in the war when their research budgets—like that of the University of California, Berkeley—relied heavily on funds from the Department of Defense. Dow Chemical, which produced napalm, became a popular target for protesters, and students nationwide—in an effort to show their disapproval of the war—demanded the removal of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) from their campuses.

While university administrators caught the ire of campus protests, many professors joined their students in the movement, conducting on-campus teach-ins and speaking at rallies. Looking at the devastation American military power and technology wrought on the world, they expressed doubts about conventional notions of progress. Thus, in 1968 the German-born Jewish-American philosopher Hannah Arendt who had described Nazi bureaucrats as “the banality of evil,” took American universities to task for their collaboration in the war.<sup>93</sup> European scholars, too, saw parallels between the Nazi ethnic cleansing campaigns during World War II and American search and destroy missions in South Vietnam. And, in 1967, an International Tribunal convened by philosophers Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre in Stockholm, Sweden, found the United States guilty of war crimes.

## Catholic Priests and Draft Resisters

Moral opposition to the war went beyond students on the New Left and academics. Some men of draft age fled to



Canada to avoid service in Vietnam, and others openly defied the government's authority to send them to war. A 1965 draft card-burning protest drew approximately 100,000 people across forty cities and involved many conscientious objectors and religiously inspired pacifists. They had the support of **Daniel and Philip Berrigan**, Roman-Catholic priests and peace activists who, like many other draft resisters, served time in federal prison for the destruction of draft cards, which was a violation of a 1965 amendment to the Selective Service Act.<sup>94</sup>

### *Opposition to the War comes to Congress*

The escalation of the war in Vietnam also began to concern Democrats and Republicans in Congress who had not expected the conflict to escalate so dramatically and make such large demands on the federal budget. In 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held televised hearings that raised questions about the administration's strategy in Indochina. The chair, Democratic **Senator J. William Fulbright**, felt that he had been misled by President Johnson's assurances that he would not abuse the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Described as a "**dove**" (which implied a preference for peace) for his skepticism about the war's expansion, Fulbright invited the testimony of George F. Kennan, architect of the containment doctrine, who criticized American involvement in Vietnam because it undermined U.S. alliances and foreign policy goals in Europe. Many Europeans and their political leaders opposed the Vietnam War, and therefore, U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a source of tension between the U.S. and its European allies. In contrast to Kennan, President Johnson's Secretary of State Dean Rusk spoke for the "**hawks**" on Capitol Hill when he described Vietnam as a "clear case of international communist aggression."

In 1967, the Fulbright Committee concluded that Congress had made a personal judgement in August 1964 when it should have made an *institutional* judgement as a constitutional check on presidential power. By 1967 the economic consequences of the war also became apparent. The federal deficit had grown significantly, and the cost of the war that year continued to grow. Congress approved President Johnson's request for a tax increase in order to pay for the war. Due to the enormous costs of the war, inflation began to pass the 4 percent mark in 1968.<sup>95</sup>

### *Vietnam Topples Johnson*

The Tet Offensive had revealed a gap between the progress reports of the Johnson administration and the stark realities of the Vietnam War on the ground. Public opinion

grew skeptical not only of the war, but also of the federal government in general, as a "credibility gap" emerged—meaning that Americans doubted the credibility of Johnson and federal officials. Johnson had hoped to make history with his Great Society program but instead came to represent to many Americans an untrustworthy politician. He faced even harsher criticism from antiwar protesters who carried posters that read, "Don't drop the bomb, drop Johnson" and chanted, "Hey, hey LBJ, how many kids did you kill today."<sup>96</sup> And so, on March 31, 1968, President Johnson ordered a halt to the bombings in Vietnam, called for peace negotiations, and announced that he would not seek reelection that year. Johnson believed that he did not have the time to pursue peace and run for president, and he was aware of his unpopularity as challengers within his own Democratic party did exceptionally well in early presidential primaries. For a politician with so much ambition, Johnson's decision not to run for re-election was a shocking moment in political history.

### *Student Protests and Antiwar Sentiments around the World*

The student protest movement of the 1960s was not an isolated incident in the United States. Middle-class students in Europe and many nations in Latin America and Asia also criticized the authority of governments and universities and demanded a bigger share in governance. Important sources of protest were the arms race of the Cold War and Vietnam War. In October 1965 and March 1966, antiwar rallies took place in several European capitals as part of the International Days of Protest. In Japan, where the experience of World War II and the massive suffering from U.S. nuclear bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had brought about a deep commitment to peace, a student group prevented the landing of a U.S. aircraft carrier in a Japanese port in 1968.

Elsewhere, opposition to the Vietnam War meshed with domestic grievances. French students went on strike in Paris and around France and, along with millions of workers, almost brought down the government. Student protests reached a climax in Germany, where antiwar protesters also challenged the older generation to take responsibility for their role in the Hitler regime and the Holocaust. Opposition to the Vietnam War also crossed the pervasive iron curtain that separated the West from Soviet-aligned countries. Many American teenagers and students found their own icon of rebellion in the charismatic Cuban revolutionary **Che Guevara** who called for "one, two... many Vietnams" because the conflict appeared to reveal





*Anti-Vietnam war protesters march in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1965.*

the moral bankruptcy of Western capitalist democracies. At the same time, student uprisings also took place on the other side of the iron curtain, inspiring a short-lived era of political freedom in Czechoslovakia known as the “Prague Spring” from January to August 1968.

These protesters shared an opposition to war and militarism and were opposed to modern bureaucracies that seemed to govern their societies and stunted their self-expression. However, young Western Europeans were not as disillusioned with the Old Left as American students, and protesters in Eastern Europe had notably less romantic notions about socialism. The results of their protests also differed sharply, most notably in the immediate consequences for protesters. Although police reacted with tear gas and water hoses in many places, Western European and American students by and large remained unharmed in 1968. There were exceptions to this trend, especially in Chicago that summer, and later, at Kent State and Jackson State Universities. In other countries, however, police conduct was more violent; in Mexico City, police shot down student protesters on the eve of the Olympic Games and killed over forty of them. In Eastern Europe, dissent could lead to long prison terms, surveillance, and torture.

## **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DISSENT IN THE LATE 1960s**

### **COUNTERCULTURE: SEX, DRUGS, AND ROCK ‘N’ ROLL**

In the mid-1960s civil rights marchers and antiwar protesters continued to practice nonviolent civil disobedience. However, a growing number of young

Americans came to disagree less with the politics of the liberal mainstream, than with the cultural practices of the middle class. They expressed this generational distrust of authority with the slogan “Don’t trust anyone over thirty.” By the second half of the 1960s, many of them looked at orderly political campaigns and civil acts of disobedience as sellouts to cultural conformity and understood civility and order as part of the nation’s culture of oppression. They did not seek to reform, but to transcend rules on campuses, for dinner table conversations, and in public spaces as well as in music, fashion, relationships, and consumption.

### *“Dropping Out”: Youth Culture and Drugs*

Next to music, fashion and drugs became the chief forms of cultural opposition for young Americans. Men rebelled against the short hair that draft boards demanded by growing their hair long and fought their parents’ narrow rules for proper male conduct and appearance with colorful shirts, scarves, and earrings. Tribal themes in hair bands, leather moccasins, and wide shirts gave teenagers and students a feeling of rebellion and suggested an allegiance with Native American culture and its traditional opposition to white American culture and aggressive expansionism. Altering appearance went along with a deliberate change in manners. For example, young people saw existing expectations about dating and sexuality as inhibiting natural expressions of love and desire. For young white people, their parents’ language was similarly suspect, and phrases and expressions such as “you dig” were appropriated from the African-American community to replace conventional, parental-approved language. The musical **Hair**, which opened on Broadway in 1968, captured these trends with its colorful costumes, exuberant music, bold nudity, and trendy language.

Teenagers of the 1960s did not necessarily use more drugs than their parents had if one considers the heavy drinking and smoking habits of the older generation or the frequent reliance on heavy doses of psychotropic drugs, anti-depressants, and stimulants (including methamphetamines) that crossed pharmacy counters. However, the youth culture of the 1960s deliberately embraced drugs considered socially unacceptable, either because they were associated with non-white users or because they had only recreational uses. More Americans began smoking marijuana, a drug associated with Mexican immigrants and their *barrios* (neighborhoods) as well as African Americans and jazz. And former Harvard psychology faculty member **Timothy Leary** promoted the use of the hallucinogenic lysergic acid diethylamide—or LSD—as a way to let the mind escape the





*The opening ceremony at Woodstock, August 1969. The music festival held in upstate New York drew an unexpected crowd of nearly half a million.*

straits of normal society, urging his young followers to “turn onto the scene, tune in to what is happening, and drop out.”<sup>97</sup>

### *The British Invasion: From San Francisco to Woodstock*

Given the prominent role rock ‘n’ roll had played in shaping youth culture in the 1950s, the central role of popular music in the 1960s was not surprising. American folk singers set a more openly political tone in their songs than the rock pioneers of the previous decade. Longtime socialist and activist Pete Seeger’s sing-along ballad “Where Have All the Flowers Gone” spoke to New Left concerns about the destruction of war and modern life. Joan Baez became a voice for Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement and for civil rights marchers with her rendition of “[We Shall Overcome](#).” Most prominent, however, were **Bob Dylan**’s poetic lyrics in songs like “[Blowin’ in the Wind](#),” which supported the goals of the civil rights and peace movements.

Early in 1964, American teenagers found themselves electrified by another style in popular music that was less political in its lyrics but more rebellious in its sound. The Beatles were four English working-class youths who transformed the Blues influences of African-American guitar players into danceable pop songs that took European and American youth audiences by storm. **Beatlemania** opened American markets to more aggressive English rock bands like the Rolling Stones and The Who. For a number of years, it appeared as if British bands delivered the most popular songs of the most quintessentially American music genre—rock.

Another center of musical innovation and commercial success was the West Coast. Seattle-born African-American guitarist **Jimi Hendrix** advanced the genre of acid rock dominated by powerful guitar solos and accompanied by psychedelic light shows. In San Francisco, bands like the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane provided the soundtrack to a growing community of cultural rebels in the **Haight-Ashbury** neighborhood, where resistance took the form of searching for alternatives to the American middle-class mainstream. These cultural rebels—dubbed “**hippies**” by the media and also known as the counterculture—sought alternatives to the mainstream in religion, food, clothing, sexuality, family life, and childrearing.

A musical festival in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park advertised as the “world’s first Human Be-In” in 1967 drew a crowd of more than 20,000. Two years later, the movement had grown into a national trend. In August 1969, a music festival in upstate New York, dubbed **Woodstock**, drew an unexpected crowd of nearly half a million. Despite torrential rain, numerous drug overdoses, and the total failure of local sanitation infrastructure, Woodstock became a touchstone of 1960s counterculture. However, most of the concert-goers merely dabbled in the counterculture and lived ordinary lives.

### *Flower Children: Communes and Alternative Societies*

Hippies expressed their faith in peace and love in various ways, including music and expressive—often naked—dances. Going even further, some members of the “counterculture” turned away entirely from society and political activism, seeking alternatives in commune experiments, non-Western religions, or cults. Some of these alternatives existed in New York’s East Village and San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury. Young runaways, dropouts, and drifters moved into empty houses, formed communal living arrangements, or tried to rebel against commerce and capitalism by bartering, begging, drug dealing, and hustling instead of working in conventional jobs. Others left the urban environment behind entirely to form authentic communes from scratch. There, they often discovered that rural life—with its hard work on the farm, the challenges of child-rearing, and men’s expectations of women’s traditional gender roles—proved less romantic than they had imagined.

The American counterculture never faced the massive violent repression that confronted youth in authoritarian regimes. Their movement remained small and can easily be exaggerated in public memory. The large majority



of young men and women during the 1960s were not hippies, but instead went to college or found work and then formed families. The more readily appealing aspects of the counterculture did find their way into the American mainstream through commercial adaptations. Record companies, fashion designers, magazines like **Rolling Stone**, and other sectors of the consumer economy identified the counterculture as a marketing tool and learned how to turn anti-establishment discontent into corporate profits. Nor was the counterculture free of its own corrupting tendencies. Despite their stated opposition to social pressures and formalities, hippies themselves had standards and conventions. Sexual openness often became a double-edged sword for young women who experienced liberation as well as sexual exploitation by male hippies practicing the same double-standards as their parents.

Cultural rebellion also offered no cure against loneliness, alienation, and violence. At a Rolling Stones concert in **Altamont**, California, members of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang served as a security detail and ended up beating and killing an audience member. In the counterculture at large, the drug experiments that were supposed to liberate users from the limitations of a rational mind ended up trapping more young people into addiction and drug dependency. In addition, curious cults and communal living experiments fell apart or—as in the case of the Charles Manson Family—became murderous. Not all groups of cultish, criminal youth sprang directly from the counterculture. Out of the straight-laced Students for a Democratic Society emerged a small and ineffective but nonetheless violent terrorist group called the Weathermen, which sought to overthrow the U.S. government in a violent revolution.

Historians continue to debate the significance of the counterculture. Some argue that the movement was simply the other (cultural) side to the coin of political protest movements of the 1960s. Others insist that the counterculture was at best a rejection of political discourse in favor of an inner-directed search for meaning and salvation and at worst a narcissistic exercise in hedonism—a trend that ended when the economic crisis of the 1970s forced young Americans to worry once more about jobs rather than cultural autonomy. But most agree that the counterculture has permanently challenged the notion of a cultural consensus and that its challenge to order and obedience has left a permanent mark on American culture, including popular music, education, and even the corporate world.<sup>98</sup>

## MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM

Discontent with postwar consumer society was also evident in the environmentalist movement. Organizations like the Sierra Club continued the fight for wilderness protection and successfully prevented Dinosaur National Monument (a national park) from being flooded for the hydroelectric Echo Park Dam project on the Upper Colorado River. The protection of wilderness and lands had originated with the early environmental movement at the turn of the century. The modern movement also rallied against environmental degradation for its impact on human health and safety. By the end of the 1950s, for example, the hazards of air pollution were hard to ignore in cities like Los Angeles that lay under a steady cloud of smog. In rural areas, suburban developments devoured open land—the very thing suburbanites wanted to be near to. Jane Jacobs' book *Death and Life of Great American Cities* connected the black struggle for equal rights in urban communities with the destructive environmental and health effects of highway construction and the abandonment of public transportation for the sake of automotive traffic. Oil and other industrial pollutants accumulated in the Great Lakes, killing fish and plant life. A slick of pollutants on the Cuyahoga River, a tributary to Lake Erie, caught fire on several occasions during the 1960s. Environmental destruction of the industrial age threatened the health of people everywhere and jeopardized the survival of mankind.<sup>99</sup>

### Silent Spring

The environmental movement of the 1960s began with the work of **Rachel Carson**, an aquatic biologist who worked for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. During the course of this work, she came to understand and explore the devastating impact of inorganic pesticides—particularly DDT—and herbicides on plants and animals, which she put together in her groundbreaking book *Silent Spring* in 1962. She was fiercely attacked by advocates of chemical industries, dismissed as a “hysterical woman,” or branded a communist because she was an unmarried woman in her fifties. However, she also had the support of many scientists. Most importantly, the arguments Carson advanced readily matched the experiences of readers in their rapidly diminishing natural world. Carson died of cancer two years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, by which time her work had received many awards and was validated by the President's Science Advisory Committee.<sup>100</sup>

The environmental movement's focus on chemical pollutants and the interaction of human beings and their environments





The environmental movement of the 1960s began with the work of Rachel Carson, who published *Silent Spring* in 1962.

led to a number of legislative changes in the 1960s. In 1963, President Johnson signed the **Clean Air Act**, which limited air pollution. He also signed the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Emissions Standards Act and the Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act in 1965, and the Air Quality Act of 1967.

## The Population Bomb

While some writers focused on the ways in which polluted environments hurt the people living in them, others focused on the ways in which people threatened the planet. In 1968, Professors Paul and Anne Ehrlich turned the public's attention to human beings as the essential threat to the future of the planet with their book ***The Population Bomb***. The authors discussed the growth of the world's human population and humans' use and exploitation of the globe's resources. They warned that an exploding population would lead to apocalyptic environmental devastation and the starvation of hundreds of millions of people. While the book was alarmist and sensationalist in its tone and its predictions were inaccurate, it nonetheless established overpopulation as a

permanent public concern.<sup>101</sup>

## Earth Day

The growing fears about environmental destruction prompted environmental organizations to broaden their focus and connect local environmental disasters—such as the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969—with global trends. In 1969, peace activist John McConnell launched a campaign to honor the earth and the importance of peace with a worldwide day of recognition on the first day of spring. Separately, a Democratic Senator, Gaylord Nelson, founded Earth Day, and activists formed the **Earth Day** organization to prepare for the first celebration in 1970. That year on April 22 more than 20 million Americans participated in Earth Day celebrations across the United States, promoting recycling and other environmentally responsible habits, such as the use of public transportation, that have become commonplace. Today, Earth Day is observed in 192 nations.<sup>102</sup>

## THE RIGHTS REVOLUTION

Just as the Civil Rights Movement had inspired students, women, and environmentalists to challenge the status quo, it also provided additional inspiration to a number of other movements that had existed well before the 1960s but only gained popular support and widespread attention in the second half of the 1960s.

## The Chicano Movement

Mexican Americans had been fighting for their own civil rights for decades. Living in Mexican *barrios* in Southern California, Texas, and other parts of the Southwest, Mexican Americans faced poverty, racial discrimination, virtually no political representation, language barriers, and a complicated legal status since their families often consisted of both U.S.-born citizens and immigrants. Following the Los Angeles Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, however, the new **Mexican American Political Association** (MAPA) began to strengthen their community's political voice with voter registration drives and the election of Mexican Americans Edward Roybal (California) and Henry Gonzalez (Texas) to Congress.

For young Mexican Americans, the day-to-day experiences in their *barrios* seemed unaffected by the actions of MAPA. Taking their cues from the Black Panthers, Mexican militant activists formed the *Brown Berets*, and students in Denver drafted a new nationalist and cultural agenda they described as *Chicano* rather than Mexican American. Their





Cesar Chavez (right) with Senator Robert F. Kennedy (left). The United Farm Workers' 1965 grape pickers' strike and national boycott campaign brought national attention to farmworkers and support from Senator Kennedy and the national labor organization the AFL-CIO.

organization, **La Raza Unida**, established in 1970, built on Mexicans' deep historical roots in ancient civilizations such as the Aztec, long predating the United States. The Chicano movement expanded across the Southwest, and by the 1970s, dozens of universities offered Chicano Studies programs.

The Chicano movement also took on economic issues. In California's fields, Cesar Chavez had struggled for years to organize Mexican migrant farmworkers, and when the end of the *bracero* guest-worker program in 1964 made the labor force less transitory, the **United Farm Workers** (UFW) became a viable organization. Its 1965 grape pickers' strike and national boycott campaign brought national attention to farmworkers and support from Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the national labor organization the AFL-CIO. Combining labor actions with consumer boycotts and civil rights marches, such as the march to the grape growers' headquarters in Delano, California, Cesar Chavez's UFW finally secured legitimate labor contracts with the state's grape growers.<sup>103</sup>

### *The American Indian Movement*

Native American rights also garnered new attention in the 1960s. Policies under the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s had removed much federal support from reservations and accelerated the breakdown of tribal life. Deep and persistent poverty there grew worse, and American Indians who ventured into the nation's cities—as Eisenhower's policies had urged them to—faced

harsh discrimination and scant access to opportunities. With unemployment rates ten times the national average, American Indians suffered the worst among all demographic groups when it came to life expectancy, disease, poverty, and lack of housing.

Embracing the concept of **Red Power** (inspired by Black Power), a group of Chippewa from Minnesota organized the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1968. In November 1969, a group that called itself "Indians of All Tribes" occupied the island of Alcatraz in the San Francisco Bay, an abandoned former federal prison. Turning the tables on the narrative of white settlement and expropriation of native lands, they offered to pay the government \$24 in trinkets—the amount the Dutch had allegedly paid for Manhattan in 1626. The occupation initially found plenty of supporters in the Bay Area, but after almost two years FBI agents raided the settlement in 1971. A year later, a thousand American Indians occupied the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., which had long been a hated symbol of white oppression and condescension.<sup>104</sup>

Native American activism alienated many white Americans, but it also established the legitimacy of their grievances. In the 1970s, a number of federal policies addressed tribal issues on reservations and their lack of economic opportunities.

### **SECOND WAVE FEMINISM**

Although women had been active participants in the Civil Rights Movement, the counterculture, and antiwar protests, most organizations and movements failed to incorporate any measure of gender equality in their program or their organizational structure. The Port Huron Statement from 1962 did not mention women or gender equality. In the antiwar movement, the phrase "Girls say yes to guys who say no," implied that it was the duty of antiwar women to sleep with men who said "no" to the draft. In the fight for civil rights, African-American sanitation workers on strike in Memphis, Tennessee, in April 1968 protested their discrimination with signs reading "I Am A Man!"—implying that their manhood was the reason they deserved equal pay. By the latter half of the 1960s, younger women from the various social movements of the early 1960s joined women like Betty Friedan in campaigning more forcefully for gender equality in society.

### **NOW**

In October 1966, Betty Friedan and a number of allies formed the **National Organization for Women** (NOW). Determined to advance the nation toward "true



equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes," NOW demanded that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, established in 1965, enforce women's employment rights more vigorously. Previously, the EEOC had focused on racial discrimination in employment and ignored women's complaints of gender inequality in the workforce. NOW pursued paid maternity leave for working women, childcare centers, unrestricted access to contraception, and legalized abortion. This program predominantly attracted white middle-class women, however, and attracted much criticism from conservative women and some working-class women. In addition, some women of color thought NOW was blind to the much larger obstacles African Americans faced on account of race.

## Women's Liberation Emerges

Women had begun to successfully challenge the reduction of their sexuality to motherhood at the beginning of the decade. By the end of the 1960s, many younger women—including many veterans of the civil rights, student, and antiwar movements—created a grassroots women's liberation movement, which was focused on issues that impacted women in their personal lives. They coined the phrase "the personal is political" to express the idea that personal issues (like domestic abuse, rape, and unequal household chores between husbands and wives) were not irrelevant to politics, but were inherently political. These women—sometimes called radical feminists and often dismissed as "women's lib" by skeptical or hostile media—took the lead in articulating women's ownership of their own sexuality and campaigning against various forms of objectification. Whereas liberal feminists (like Betty Friedan and the women of NOW) focused on workplace inequality, women's liberationists focused on issues in women's personal lives, including the sexism and objectification of women in mainstream media.

In 1968 a group of women's liberationists protested against the **Miss America Pageant**. They used a "freedom trash can" in which women were encouraged to toss the many contraptions they routinely used to make themselves attractive to men—fake eyelashes, hair curlers, brassieres, and corsets. To make their point that women (especially at beauty pageants) were treated like prized animals, protesters held up a photo of a woman's naked body, carved up into different sections of meat with the title "Welcome to the Miss America Cattle Auction." Women's liberation activists sought to raise public awareness and media attention through these campaigns, but, unlike televised civil rights campaigns



Women protest outside of the Miss America Pageant in 1968.

that had resulted in empathetic news coverage, these women endured mocking commentary by male reporters. Nevertheless, women's liberation spread. Women formed consciousness-raising groups where they discussed their experiences. They formed health collectives and shared medical information, opened women's bookstores, and created a network of women's shelters across the country. As Friedan's book had done for their mothers' generation, consciousness raising allowed these women to understand that their own individual experiences were part of a wide pattern in which women were treated—at work, in public, and at home—as second-class citizens.

By the end of the decade, the feminist movement began to splinter into different movements and campaigns. Some activists believed that their goals had to be pursued through political channels and legal processes while others abandoned the political fight for a cultural feminism that borrowed from the counterculture. For example, the **Redstockings** viewed all men as oppressors and formed separate female collectives to affirm their identities as women—a practice that made other feminists wonder if some women were excluded in this form of feminism. Divisions also emerged over the rights of lesbian women who some feminists feared would distract from the larger mission of women's liberation. However, most groups of women's liberationists would join their liberal feminist counterparts, like Friedan, in supporting a constitutional amendment for women's equality.

## The Resurgence of the Equal Rights Amendment

NOW revived the campaign for the constitutional Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which the women's movement had



first advanced in the 1920s. For both liberal and radical feminists—and many Americans today—the notion of an amendment stating that women are equal to men does not seem controversial. After its passage through Congress, the Amendment was ratified by a majority of states in the 1970s—most states in the South; Utah, Arizona, and Nevada in the West; and Missouri and Illinois in the Midwest did not ratify it.

However, as the nation debated ratifying the ERA, the complications of equality between men and women caused substantial controversy. Some working-class women sought explicit protections for women on the job, and other women objected to the possibility that women might be subject to a military draft. In addition, the ERA galvanized opposition to modern feminism. **Phyllis Schlafly** had been a conservative activist against federal social programs and an advocate of an aggressive Cold War. With the ERA before the states for ratification, she made antifeminism her main mission—and in the process helped form a movement of cultural conservatives who opposed sex education in schools, abortion rights, and equal rights for gays and lesbians. In the end, the Equal Rights Amendment fell short of securing three-fourths of the states' support.

## **THE STONEWALL RIOTS AND THE BIRTH OF GAY PRIDE**

As the women's liberation movement demanded equality for women, it also helped pave the way for homosexual men and women. Before the 1960s, organizations had unsuccessfully demanded the decriminalization of homosexuality. These groups emerged in the wake of World War II, when the armed forces brought single men and women together in vast numbers, enabling gay and lesbian Americans to meet each other and form new communities. The main organizations, the *Mattachine Society* (for gay men) and the *Daughters of Bilitis* (for women) remained on the fringe through most of the 1960s, when even a place as cosmopolitan as New York City punished crossdressing as a misdemeanor. Gay communities prospered in small pockets, such as New York's Greenwich Village, despite such discrimination and public stigma. There, the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street was a popular gay nightspot, and police arbitrarily

raided the bar to arrest and charge its patrons for minor offenses. One such raid in 1969 took a particularly brutal turn, however. The situation escalated when one of the arrestees jumped out of a window at the jail facility and impaled himself on the perimeter fence. Gay men in the community took to the streets in protest and fought police in what became known as the **Stonewall Rebellion**.

The event became a watershed moment for homosexual men and women. Gay communities nationwide began to honor "Christopher Street Liberation Day" in commemoration of the Stonewall Rebellion, a celebration that later became Gay Pride Day. Gays and Lesbians everywhere asked members of their communities too afraid to identify themselves to "come out" and embrace their sexual identities. Leaning on the Black Power slogan "I'm Black and I'm Proud," they declared "Gay is Good." Over the course of the 1970s, gay communities began to grow in American cities such as San Diego, Austin, and San Francisco, where they would eventually gain enough of a presence to elect California's first openly gay candidate to city council—Harvey Milk.

## **SECTION III SUMMARY**

- ✦ On the left and on the right, youthful political dissent emerged in the early 1960s, and women challenged sexual inequality in the workplace, before the law, and at home.
- ✦ Abroad, the Johnson administration escalated U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War—with a heavy price for American lives and treasure, grave consequences for American foreign relations elsewhere, and a surging antiwar movement at home.
- ✦ Over the second half of the decade, a variety of countercultures emerged with the goal of transcending middle-class norms.
- ✦ Political dissent broadened and deepened in the latter half of the 1960s, as a variety of movements homed in on civil and social inequalities and the environmental destruction brought about by the nation's industrial consumer society.



## Section IV

# The Rise and Undoing of a Law-and-Order President

## THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

### 1968: THE CONFLICT ERUPTS

The political, social, and cultural conflicts of the 1960s reached a climax in 1968 when a series of international events, political upsets, assassinations, and riots shook Americans' faith in their country and fellow citizens. The year began with the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Tet Offensive that surprised the U.S. military, crushed Americans' confidence in a U.S. victory, and compelled President Johnson to withdraw from the Democratic presidential primary. In 1968, the Democratic party found itself torn between the political establishment, which remained committed to the Cold War, younger followers of the New Left, and traditional Democratic voters—working-class Americans who, although they increasingly questioned the Vietnam War, were turned off by the New Left's antiwar tactics (like draft card burnings) and countercultural styles.

Hopes for a new age—as hippies imagined it, an “Age of Aquarius” of peace and harmony—were further eviscerated by violence at home. In February of 1968, South Carolina police shot indiscriminately into a civil rights protest at the state university in Orangeburg killing three students. A student protest at Columbia University also ended in violent clashes between New York City police and students. Over two hundred antiwar protests at approximately a hundred campuses put local communities on edge and suggested that the fight over Vietnam had indeed come home to them. The year, however, would keep getting worse.

### *The Crime of Memphis*

In early April, Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to support the strike of black garbage workers for equal wages and working conditions. The civil rights leader had expanded his critique of racial inequality to include not only segregation and voting rights, but also social and economic justice. Inspired by Black Power



*Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral procession. King was assassinated by white supremacist James Earl Ray on April 4, 1968.*

advocates who had pointed to the inequality urban African Americans experienced in the North, King launched a Poor People's Campaign that included Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. A supporter of the War on Poverty, he was disappointed to see Great Society programs wilt in the looming shadow of the Vietnam War, which he vehemently opposed.

King had already spoken out against the war, saying, “I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government.” With this quote, King explained that he believed it was hypocritical of him to speak out about violence within the United States, but not criticize the violence waged by the U.S. in Vietnam. King believed that the Vietnamese had the same desire for equality, self-determination, and freedom from white oppression as African Americans who struggled against the National Guard in the 1967 Detroit riots.



King's fight for economic justice for African Americans would end in Memphis. On the evening of April 4, 1968, white supremacist James Earl Ray assassinated King on the balcony of a Memphis motel. Ray was apprehended over two months later and sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison. The murder had deep repercussions across the nation. In more than one hundred cities across the country, African Americans took to the streets in protests and riots, robbed of their most inspiring leader and of the hope that the strategy of nonviolence could lead them to equality. Thirty-nine people died in the riots nationwide, which marked one of the greatest waves of social unrest in the United States since the Civil War.

### *Another Kennedy Assassination*

At the time news of Martin Luther King's assassination broke, Robert F. Kennedy, the brother of the slain president, arrived in Indianapolis where he was scheduled to deliver a speech in a predominantly black neighborhood. Acknowledging their anger and demonstrating his empathy, his words helped prevent that city from erupting into violence. The speech was one of many occasions when Kennedy (who by 1968 was a New York Senator) demonstrated his political appeal. Never close with President Johnson, Kennedy had decided to challenge the president in the Democratic primaries. However, Kennedy joined the primaries late—after another antiwar candidate, Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, had already shown surprising strength in early primary results. Kennedy's decision to enter the campaign thus split antiwar Democrats in two.

Running on a platform of social justice and change, the fight against urban poverty, and non-aggression in foreign affairs, Kennedy campaigned intensively and captured the imagination of young people while raising the suspicion of business interests and the ire of southern whites. However, on June 5, shortly after winning an important primary victory in California, an assassin shot Robert Kennedy in a Los Angeles hotel. The assailant, Sirhan Sirhan, was a Palestinian Arab who said he had targeted the Democratic candidate for his support of Israel after the Six-Days War.

### *Police Run Riot: The Democratic National Convention*

Kennedy's assassination threw the Democratic Party into turmoil. At a time when only a handful of states determined their delegation's choice of candidate through a primary, Kennedy's small number of victories—California, South Dakota, Nebraska—meant little for the possible outcome



*Protesters clash with police at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968.*

of the party's national convention scheduled for August in Chicago. Johnson's Vice President **Hubert Humphrey** seemed the most likely candidate to win a majority of delegates' votes and become the nominee at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Humphrey, a longtime Senator from Minnesota, had earned a reputation for his support for civil rights and liberal causes before his loyalty to Johnson tied him closely to the Vietnam War effort. Humphrey promised to pursue Johnson's plan for a partial halt of the bombings but coupled with a temporary further increase of U.S. troop deployments for the duration of peace negotiations. McCarthy (and Kennedy, while he was alive), on the other hand, demanded a full withdrawal from South Vietnam.

When the Democratic Party convened in Chicago late in August, the delegates supporting Humphrey dominated the proceedings inside the convention hall. Outside, however, about ten thousand young activists gathered to protest the party leadership. Representing a dozen different advocacy groups, their protests ranged from peaceful demonstrations to civil disobedience and random acts of vandalism. The Youth International Party, which went by the nickname "**Yippies**," had organized a youth festival to coincide with the convention and satirized the allegedly corrupt party politics inside the convention center with the mock nomination of a pig called "Pigasus." Police arrested Yippie leader Jerry Rubin and folksinger Phil Ochs for parading the pig at the Civic Center, turning the stunt into a nationally televised spectacle.

Chicago mayor Richard Daley, who was known for his heavy-handed tactics, deployed a large police force and Illinois National Guard troops to cordon off the convention from the protesters. When a protester lowered the national



flag at nearby Grant Park, police broke into the crowd for his arrest, triggering stone throws and protest chants like “Hell no, we won’t go.” In what observers later described as a “**police riot**,” officers proceeded to disperse the protesters, beating them with batons and indiscriminately spraying so much tear gas onto protesters and innocent bystanders that the biting effects of mace affected delegates inside the Hilton Hotel, including Hubert Humphrey.

The tensions and violence outside seeped into the convention, where the majority elected Hubert Humphrey and his running mate Edmund Muskie of Maine to head the Democratic ticket. Unnerved by the outside demonstrations, Democratic organizers tried to curb the appearance of division within the convention. When security personnel removed a Georgia delegate from the convention floor, TV reporter Dan Rather from CBS News tried to interview the man, asking, “what is your name, sir?” Although beyond the reach of the cameras, Rather could be heard via his headset, protesting “don’t push me,” and “get your hands off me.” Afterward he described how security had roughed him up and “put [him] on the deck,” leading the anchor Walter Cronkite to conclude, “I think we’ve got a bunch of thugs here, Dan.”<sup>105</sup>

### *The Chicago Seven*

The Democratic Convention of 1968 had a wide range of consequences. TV footage broadcast around the world showed the leading party of postwar liberalism in violent turmoil. The spectacle of protesters pushing the limit of civil disobedience and a police force driven with rage rather than restraint further suggested that the country was divided and that societal discord strained the fabric of society. By prohibiting almost all public demonstration permits and imposing an 11 PM curfew, Mayor Daley had limited the means of *legal* dissent from the outset. In the wake of the convention, however, a federal grand jury investigated further ways to prosecute the protest organizers. President Johnson opposed any prosecutions, but the new Nixon administration proceeded with the trial of eight defendants in 1969, based largely on the charge that they had crossed state lines for the purpose of inciting a riot. Protest organizers Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, and Lee Weiner—the **Chicago Seven**—stood trial together. The trial of the eighth defendant, Black Panther leader Bobby Seale, was held separately.

The lengthy trial pitted hostile prosecutors—and a judge who did not allow defense attorneys to screen jurors on

account of cultural or political bias—against leftist activists on the stand and in the witness box. The defendants routinely practiced contempt of court, provoking the judge into meting out excessive punishments that contributed to turning the trial into a farce. The jury agreed on convictions for contempt of court and the intent to incite riots that ranged from several months to four years in prison. However, all convictions were overturned on appeal due to the judge’s conduct.

### **THE ELECTION OF RICHARD NIXON**

The disturbances at the Democratic convention benefitted the Republican Party. Together with his running mate Spiro Agnew from Maryland, Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon touted strong police responses to civil disobedience and public protests, making “law and order” an important plank of his campaign platform. Although his nomination during the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach early in August was uneventful and uncontested, his return to political prominence was nonetheless one of the greatest comeback stories of twentieth-century American politics.

### *The Richard Nixon the Cold War Made*

Richard Nixon had forged his career in the tense political climate of the Cold War. A Southern California native who had served with the Naval Reserve during World War II, he won his first election to Congress by alleging that his Democratic opponent was supported by communists. Nixon rose to national prominence as a relentless anti-communist in 1948 with his work on the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was responsible for interrogating Americans about their political affiliations and encouraged blacklisting. In 1950, Nixon won the election for the U.S. Senate in California with another round of “red-baiting.” His distribution of a “pink sheet” that compared his rival Helen Gahagan Douglas’ congressional voting record with that of an allegedly communist Congressman from New York discredited her candidacy, provided him with a landslide victory, and earned him the nickname “**Tricky Dick**” for his tactics.<sup>106</sup>

### *Lessons in Media and Resentment*

Early in his career, Nixon learned the importance of public perception and control over narrative in the national media. Republican Party leaders had chosen the political newcomer as Eisenhower’s vice-presidential candidate in 1952 on account of his youth, strong anti-communist credentials, and appeal in his home state of California.



When news broke about a Nixon campaign fund run by wealthy donors, Nixon prevented Eisenhower from removing him from the ticket with a [direct appeal](#) to the public on national television. Rather than face the questions of his party or of reporters, he professed his innocence and humble financial means. He endeared himself to television viewers when he declared that the one gift he had received was the family's cocker spaniel—which he would never give back. Eisenhower did not appreciate this manipulation and never warmed to Nixon during the eight years they spent in the White House.

In 1960, Nixon met his match in John F. Kennedy whose own media-savvy campaign made Nixon appear awkward and pale in comparison to Kennedy's charm and apparent youthful vigor. After losing to Kennedy, Nixon ran for governor of California in 1962, and lost. Nixon took the defeat personally and rebuked the press for costing him the election. "[N]ow that all the members of the press are so delighted that I have lost," he complained in a [press conference](#), "you won't have Nixon to kick around anymore."<sup>107</sup> Indulging in self-pity, Nixon came across as a sore loser, a characteristic that most political observers at the time thought marked the end of Nixon's political career.

### *The Election of 1968*

To the surprise of many people, however, Nixon returned to politics in the Republican primaries of 1968, winning ten out of thirteen contests and placing second in total primary votes, trailing only his fellow Republican contestant at the time, Ronald Reagan. Nixon had learned from Barry Goldwater's defeat in 1964. Unlike Goldwater, whose bluntness and libertarian views had repelled the voters in the center of the political spectrum, Nixon's 1968 campaign tried to win back voters with more calming rhetoric and more centrist policies. Nixon's campaign also carefully prepared for television interviews and carefully vetted TV commercials. The negative campaigning he had practiced during his time in Congress he now left to his Vice-Presidential candidate who verbally assaulted Democratic candidate Humphrey and left-wing antiwar protesters.

Nixon's careful messaging was particularly important in the South where Democrats had lost the support of most whites with their passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. There, the former Democratic governor of Alabama and avowed segregationist **George Wallace** was running a successful third-party challenge with his running mate, the retired Air Force General Curtis LeMay. Wallace openly opposed civil rights for African Americans in



*Republican nominee Richard Nixon stands atop a vehicle in his motorcade in a tickertape parade in Chicago during the 1968 campaign.*

racially charged language that appealed to southern white supremacists, and LeMay's talk about the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam appealed to some Americans' pro-war sentiments. By contrast, Nixon spoke of the *urban crisis*, the need for the restoration of *law and order*, and a return to *states' rights*. Without repelling middle-class suburbanites with racially charged vocabulary, these key words sent southern white voters the message that Nixon and the Republican Party understood their politics and could be their new political home.<sup>108</sup>

This **Southern strategy**—so called by Republican political consultants at the time—secured the Republicans broad support among conservative white voters in the South and beyond. Thus, even though Hubert Humphrey received only about 500,000 fewer votes than Nixon's 31.8 million in November 1968, the latter's Electoral College margin was 301 to 191. Both Nixon and Wallace appealed not only to southern whites, but also to northern whites who disliked antiwar protesters and felt that the Democrats had gone too far with civil rights. Despite losing the southern states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi,





President Nixon meets with members of his cabinet.

Alabama, and Georgia to Wallace, Nixon received enough support from northern working-class whites to win in states like Wisconsin and Illinois. With a narrow margin in the popular vote—Nixon received only about 500,000 more votes than Humphrey—Nixon won the electoral college and became president in 1969.

## THE NIXON PRESIDENCY

### **NIXON AT HOME: THE ACCIDENTAL LIBERAL**

President Nixon's presidential campaign in 1968 had shrewdly exploited the deep divisions that the war, the Civil Rights Movement, and the counterculture had generated in the Democratic Party. Yet, during the campaign Nixon's answers to these problems were strategically vague. He had promised an end to the Vietnam War without offering any details and had called for Americans to "come together" without discussing the issues that divided them. As president, Nixon's domestic policies were geared primarily toward political gain—namely securing his popularity and a second term. As a result, Nixon's relatively moderate policies sometimes made him appear like an "accidental liberal"—to the surprise of his conservative constituency.

#### *Welfare and the Great Society*

Once in office, Nixon did pursue a number of policies that aligned with the tone of his campaign. For example, he overhauled the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the center of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Instead of trying to cut federal expenditures on welfare programs, he announced a **New Federalism** under which states received "block grants" they could spend as they saw fit.

This appealed conservatives calling for more states' rights and less federal interference on behalf of minorities and met the Congressional Democratic majority halfway, since they would rather agree to block grants than see social spending ended entirely.

Although he had dismantled Johnson's War on Poverty offices, in other ways Nixon enlarged the country's social welfare programs. He expanded the food stamp program and indexed Social Security payments to inflation, which meant the payments would rise automatically with increased costs of living. Most surprisingly for his conservative base, Nixon tried to settle the issue of how to address poverty once and for all with a **Family Assistance Plan (FAP)** that would replace Aid to Families with Dependent Children. AFDC, as the New Deal program was known, had originally provided welfare to mainly poor, white families based on local eligibility requirements. Over time, however, eligibility standards eased, thereby enlarging the number of recipients. In the 1960s, unemployment in deindustrializing cities rendered young families unstable and often broke them apart, generating a growing number of single mothers, a large proportion of them black. With the support of welfare rights groups, these single mothers applied for AFDC benefits. As a result, by 1970 about forty percent of all welfare recipients were African American, and most of them were single mothers. Conservative critics like Ronald Reagan translated this phenomenon into a narrative about "tax takers" shunning stable family life and hard work at the expense of "honest taxpayers."

Nixon had hoped that his FAP—a type of negative income tax that would guarantee every family a minimal income—would both appeal to black Democrats and end that party's demands for federal assistance to the poor. Liberals, however, thought that a guaranteed annual income of \$1,600 for a family of four (about \$12,500 in today's prices) was insufficient to end the debate over the role of the federal government in the fight against poverty. Many conservatives, by contrast, were aghast at the proposal in principle since it seemed to reward what they perceived as laziness rather than incentivize work.

#### *The Environment, Workers' Safety, and Consumer Protection*

Just as his predecessor Dwight D. Eisenhower had expanded on the New Deal rather than demolish it, Nixon understood that he could not fight the broad political consensus of his time. This was not only true with the Great Society, but with the need for environmental legislation as



well. Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which mandated a review of the environmental impact of the actions of federal agencies, and in 1970 he proposed the consolidation of these responsibilities in one agency. The **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) that emerged from this reorganization was popular among Democrats and with many Republicans at the time and established Nixon as a centrist president. That same year, he also endorsed a new Clean Air Act that set quality standards for carbon monoxide and other emissions from vehicles and factories, a change that brought about a significant improvement in the nation's air quality. Toward the end of his time in office in December 1973, Nixon signed the **Endangered Species Act** into law, which prohibited the use of federal funds in any contract that might erase an animal species.

Nixon also worked with Democrats in Congress on workplace safety. Signed into law in 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigated workplace safety procedures in factories and other workplaces. Of course, dangers not only lurked for workers, but for consumers, too, as Ralph Nader demonstrated in his 1965 report on the American automobile industry **Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile**. Nixon endorsed Democratic legislation creating the Consumer Products Safety Commission, which establishes safety standards and researches safety hazards in products.

### *Civil Rights and Affirmative Action*

President Nixon's record on civil rights proved far more mixed than his Southern strategy campaign had suggested. On the one hand, he did make overtures to the white South by nominating two avowed southern segregationists to the United States Supreme Court—nominations the Democratic Senate promptly blocked. The justices Nixon ultimately placed on the bench surprised observers with their liberal rulings. Warren Burger replaced Chief Justice Earl Warren; despite being a long-time critic of Warren's "judicial activism," Burger consolidated many of the constitutional rulings of the 1960s. In 1971, the Burger Court unanimously upheld a lower court's plan of forced bussing of black and white students from one segregated community to another in order to bring about the integration of schools. **Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education** (1971) laid the foundation for the proliferation of bussing programs across the nation, earning criticism from Nixon, conservative Republicans, and white working-class communities. Although the racial integration of communities



*The so-called "Hard Hat Riot" in New York, 1970.*

*Following this confrontation between antiwar demonstrators and hard-hat-wearing construction workers, it became clear that Nixon saw white, northern workers as a possible political base.*

and schools remained controversial, the share of African-American students in integrated schools in the South rose from thirty-two to seventy-seven percent during Nixon's first three years in office.

Nixon's second appointment to the United States Supreme Court, Harry Blackmun, helped consolidate a second trend in civil rights—reproductive and privacy rights for women. His opinion in the case of *Roe v. Wade* expanded on *Griswold v. Connecticut* from 1965 and declared that a woman's right to privacy included access to an abortion during the first two trimesters of pregnancy. Women's rights were also cemented by legislation that Nixon signed into law, including Congress's **Title IX** (1972), which prohibited discrimination based on gender in higher education. Title IX's impact was evident very quickly in women's sports. The number of high school females who played sports increased six-fold between 1970 and 1978, and university funding for women's sports increased dramatically.<sup>109</sup> The Nixon administration presided over these changes, but court cases—including *Roe v. Wade*—and calls for legislation that promoted women's equality came from women sympathetic to the women's movement, including female lawyers and members of Congress.

Women also benefitted significantly from affirmative action programs during the Nixon years, as became apparent in the landmark agreement between female employees and the corporate giant American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), which had to pay millions of dollars to workers for past discrimination and had to open previously gender-



segregated jobs to women. For a while, affirmative action had the support of President Nixon, whose **Philadelphia Plan** demanded that construction companies on federal projects hire a specified proportion of non-white workers. The mostly all-white building trades unions disliked the plan. Some historians argue that Nixon may have endorsed affirmative action in a cynical political gamble, hoping to weaken unions (whose negotiation powers he blamed for rising wages and thus rising prices across the country) and turn white workers against African Americans in the Democratic Party, leading them to vote Republican.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, Nixon found common ground with some civil rights and Black Power advocates with the promotion of “black capitalism” since it suggested that economic inequality could be alleviated with individual initiative rather than federal policy.

Following a widely publicized confrontation between antiwar demonstrators and hard-hat wearing construction workers in New York City in May 1970, it became clear that Nixon saw white, northern workers as a possible political base. In the aftermath of the riot, in which construction workers attacked antiwar demonstrators, Nixon hosted a delegation of union leaders at the White House and wore a hard hat, suggesting his sympathy for the violent, pro-war, hard-hat rioters. Subsequently, he abandoned the Philadelphia Plan in favor of local policies on minority hiring rather than touting federal standards. His two later Supreme Court nominations, Lewis Franklin Powell Jr. and William Rehnquist, helped turn the tide by the middle of the 1970s, when the court declared racial quotas an impermissible use of affirmation action.

### *Roots of Stagnation: The Seeds of the Seventies*

When Richard Nixon ran for president in 1968, he realized that he was going to inherit the nation’s recent history of racial conflict, youth protests, and the war in Vietnam. However, Nixon had not anticipated a growing economic challenge in the form of rising unemployment and slow economic growth, combined with steadily rising prices. Previously, countries experienced either inflation or economic slowdown and job loss—not both at the same time. Economists termed the new combination of stagnation and inflation **stagflation**, an economic dilemma that plagued Americans throughout the 1970s.

This new economic challenge had been long in the making: On the one hand, Johnson had enacted a major tax cut in 1964 and then to a certain extent proved unwilling to raise taxes to fund the Vietnam War—as presidents had

done to pay for both world wars and the Korean War. The enlarged money supply contributed to inflation by the end of the decade. Nixon had attempted to raise taxes, but was met with opposition in Congress. On the other hand, the nation’s Cold War economy carried its own inherent weaknesses. Since the beginning of the Cold War, ninety percent of American research funds had gone into the **military industrial complex**. This funding had sparked a number of new industries, such as computers, civilian jet planes, and satellites. Their full economic impact would only develop in the 1980s, however.

Meanwhile, the former enemies and newly reconstructing allies Japan and Germany spent ninety percent of their research funds on civilian enterprises. By the end of the 1960s, foreign companies like Nissan and Volkswagen offered better cars with better fuel economies, better machines for industrial production, and a range of other goods. Some of these U.S. companies tried to cut costs by moving production into southern states where unions were weak and wages low. Others began to move production facilities overseas to places like South Korea, Taiwan, or Mexico. Both of these strategies disrupted workers’ lives, pushed up unemployment, robbed Midwestern cities of their industries and associated tax revenues, and destabilized American working-class communities.

In 1971, for the first time in the twentieth century, the United States found itself importing more goods than it exported. A strong dollar made American products expensive abroad and foreign imports cheaper in the United States. In addition, American spending overseas had left foreign central banks with significant dollar reserves. This posed a problem, since under the Bretton Woods agreement from 1944 the Allies had fixed all currencies to the dollar, and the dollar to the value of gold. This was a sound decision at a time when only the U.S. dollar had any international value and when the United States had controlled a large portion of industrial production capabilities. By the beginning of the 1970s, foreign central banks could demand that the U.S. exchange their dollars for gold at any time—thereby weakening American gold reserves. Partly in response to these economic pressures, President Nixon took the United States off the Gold Standard. Nixon’s hopes that a weaker dollar would boost exports and discourage imports did not become reality.

By 1973, Americans also faced rising oil prices, which raised the cost of goods across the economy and slowed economic growth. An unwillingness to pay for the Vietnam War, combined with the United States’ inability to



control global oil prices, made it difficult for Nixon or his successors to combat stagflation. Finally, Nixon pursued another policy that had traditionally been anathema to Republicans; in an effort to combat inflation, he enacted wage and price controls. These policies worked temporarily but lost much of their impact once controls were lifted.

## **NIXON'S STRATEGY OF VIETNAMIZATION**

Despite the volume of consequential domestic legislation during his administration, Nixon—unlike Johnson—never thought of domestic affairs as his first priority. Foremost on his mind was the Vietnam War and international affairs. Nixon was committed to making the resolution of the Vietnam War his historical legacy.

### *Nixon and Kissinger: Traitors or Clever Politicians?*

During the 1968 election—long before Nixon became president, and thus before it was proper, or even legal, for him to get involved in international diplomacy—Nixon meddled in the Johnson administration's foreign policy in Vietnam. Johnson had been the architect of the massive escalation of the war effort in Vietnam with the purpose of gaining leverage in peace negotiations. In 1968, these negotiations bore the promise to end the war. This would have had important political repercussions at home, where Hubert Humphrey was catching up with Richard Nixon in the polls. If Johnson's negotiators had succeeded, Humphrey, as Johnson's vice-president, would likely have seen a bump in his popularity, possibly surpassing Nixon and winning the election.

When the well-connected foreign policy expert (and Nixon's future National Security Advisor) **Henry Kissinger** informed Nixon about the confidential peace talks, Nixon ordered his closest advisor, H.R. Haldeman, to find "any... way to monkey-wrench it." Haldeman asked Nixon fundraiser Anna Chennault to use her connections with political leaders in East Asia. Haldeman also had Nixon's personal secretary contact anti-communist Chinese nationalists, urging them to tell the U.S.-supported leader of South Vietnam, **Nguyen Van Thieu**, to hold off peace talks until Nixon ascended to the presidency. "Tell Him Hold Firm," were Haldeman's instructions. All of this subversive diplomacy was geared toward getting South Vietnam—which had to agree to any North Vietnam-U.S. peace agreement—to say no to any deal hammered out by Johnson's negotiators. By promising South Vietnam



*President Nixon (center) discusses Vietnam policy with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger (left) and Deputy Assistant Major General Alexander Haig (right) in 1972.*

that they would get a more favorable deal once Nixon was president, the candidate thwarted any chance that Johnson's team had of brokering a peace deal between the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam.

When President Johnson got word of Nixon's meddling, he ordered the F.B.I. to track the movements of Anna Chennault. She "contacted Vietnam Ambassador Bui Diem," one surveillance report stated, "and advised him that she had received a message from her boss ... to give personally to the ambassador. She said the message was... 'Hold on. We are gonna win.'" Nixon always denied any involvement, knowing that any private citizen's interference in official diplomacy was a federal crime. In the end, Van Thieu's opposition helped derail the talks. Johnson was fully aware of Nixon's interference but refused to go public without absolute proof of Nixon's direct involvement.<sup>111</sup>

### *Troop Withdrawals and the End of the Draft*

Once Nixon had assumed office, he revealed his long promised "secret plan" for ending the war—**Vietnamization**, meaning that the Vietnamese would take over the fighting. (Vietnamization received its name because it was the reversal of Americanization—when Americans took over the fighting in 1965.) The plan involved the gradual withdrawal of over 500,000 American troops and their replacement with South Vietnamese soldiers who were to continue to receive funding, weapons, training, and air support through U.S. bombing campaigns. From the U.S. perspective, with South Vietnamese troops in charge, any defeat on the grounds would be that of the Vietnamese. (This



allowed the U.S. to withdraw and, if the South Vietnamese later failed, claim that the U.S. had not technically “lost” the war.) At the same time that Nixon gradually withdrew troops, he increased bomb attacks on North Vietnam, hoping to induce them to negotiate a peace treaty in order to make the bombing stop.

Nixon figured that a reduced footprint of boots on the ground would reduce the number of American casualties and sap Americans’ opposition—and eventually attention—to the war. Nixon understood that the draft was a major factor for students protesting on campus. The transition away from the draft took time, however, and only in 1973 (when the U.S. signed a peace treaty) was the draft officially over. The United States had adopted an “All-Volunteer Force.”



*In a televised address on April 30, 1970, President Nixon announces the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, presenting it as necessary to counter North Vietnamese aggression.*

## *The Invasion of Cambodia*

By 1970, the Nixon administration realized that U.S. bombing campaigns on North Vietnam failed to disrupt the delivery of supplies to Communist forces in South Vietnam. North Vietnamese forces had secured territory in the eastern parts of Cambodia, thereby allowing them and the Viet Cong to evade American attacks. North Vietnamese supplies and troops traveled south, through Cambodia, along a supply line called the Ho Chi Minh trail. Nixon ordered a secret bombing campaign into Cambodia, but the *New York Times* received news of the operation, infuriating the president. Nixon then ordered U.S. troops to invade Cambodia and the Air Force to launch a massive bombing campaign.

The invasion could not permanently cut the supply line between the North and the Viet Cong in the South, but

the repercussions for Cambodia’s fragile government were significant. U.S. intervention fanned the flames of Cambodia’s local Communist insurgency, the **Khmer Rouge**, which toppled the government and installed the most brutal Communist regime in Southeast Asia. By the time a Vietnamese invasion toppled the dictator Pol Pot in Cambodia’s capital Pnom Penh in 1979, about one-quarter of the nation’s population had died as a result of the Khmer Rouge’s genocide.

## *Kent State and Jackson State*

In the United States, news about a further escalation of U.S. military involvement reignited the antiwar movement. Even before the invasion of Cambodia, antiwar protesters of diverse backgrounds staged a massive nationwide **Vietnam moratorium** in October 1969 during which nearly 100,000 people crowded on the Boston Common and approximately 50,000 protesters filed past the White House in Washington, D.C., with lit candles. Richard Nixon deeply detested these public displays of opposition. Although he had urged Americans of all political creeds to “stop shouting at one another” during his inaugural address in January 1969, he bitterly resented the liberal establishment of the East Coast, the expertise of academics—whom he called “eggheads”—and the politics of antiwar protesters—whom he referred to as “bums.” His vice president, Spiro Agnew, made the administration’s dislike of the youthful protesters even more explicit when he derided them as “nattering nabobs of negativism.”<sup>112</sup> To



*John Filo’s Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling by the body of Kent State student Jeffrey Miller. Miller was one of four students killed by Ohio National Guardsmen during a protest against the U.S. invasion of Cambodia.*



discount the voices of dissent, Nixon famously coined the term the “**silent majority**” to suggest that a majority of non-protesting Americans supported his policies.

When news of the Cambodia invasion broke, antiwar protests erupted across the nation, including many on college campuses. On May 4, 1970, the Ohio National Guard responded to student protesters at Kent State University, firing tear gas grenades and live rounds into the demonstration, killing four students. Ten days later, police shot and killed two demonstrators at Jackson State University in Mississippi. With protests and strikes on more than 350 college and university campuses nationwide in the spring of 1970, the antiwar movement had reached well beyond elite, coastal institutions like Berkeley and Columbia.

### *The Pentagon Papers*

Discontent went well beyond college campuses, as public support for the war effort continued to erode. Then, in 1971, the *New York Times* obtained a leaked copy of a classified official history of the Vietnam War from one of its authors, **Daniel Ellsberg**. A RAND corporation military analyst contracted with the Pentagon, Ellsberg had insider knowledge of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and the classified report laid out in unflattering terms how U.S. presidents from Harry S. Truman to Lyndon B. Johnson had misled the American public about the prospects of victory in Vietnam.

The report had been commissioned by Lyndon Johnson, and these so-called **Pentagon Papers** demonstrated that presidents—including Kennedy and Johnson—had lied to the American people. The *Pentagon Papers*, looking at policy between 1945 and 1967, did not contain any secret information on the Nixon White House. Nevertheless, Nixon was horrified that government documents were being leaked to the press. He asked the United States Supreme Court for an injunction to prevent the *New York Times* from releasing the report, but the court declined the request. In the end, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and fourteen other newspapers released the papers, and an antiwar Alaska Senator included the entire report in the public record of his (entirely unrelated) subcommittee, making the secret history of the war in Vietnam public knowledge.

Daniel Ellsberg evaded an FBI manhunt for a while but surrendered in June 1971 to face charges under the 1917 Espionage Act and a series of other federal laws that threatened to result in a prison sentence of up to 115 years. Gross misconduct of the FBI and the prosecution led to a dismissal of all charges in 1973.

There were many long-term political consequences to the publication of—and information in—the *Pentagon Papers*. The Foreign Affairs Committee under the leadership of Senator Fulbright recommended restrictions on the president’s powers to wage war, and in 1973 Congress passed the **War Powers Act**, which required the President to inform Congress within forty-eight hours of any military actions and limited the deployment of troops overseas to sixty days unless Congress provided authorization. Even though the *Pentagon Papers* primarily detailed the Kennedy and Johnson administrations’ deceit, Nixon and his staff considered the report deeply damaging to their administration. As the president’s chief of staff Harry Robbins Haldeman explained in an Oval Office Conversation: “[T]he implicit infallibility of presidents, which has been an accepted thing in America, is badly hurt by this.”<sup>113</sup>

### *Soldiers and Veterans against the Vietnam War*

American soldiers in Vietnam, too, increasingly turned against the war. Like their peers back home, many of them had lost faith in the virtue of their fight after the 1968 Tet Offensive. Drug experimentation became common among regular troops, and many of them began to wear peace symbols, decorate their jackets with Black Power symbols, disobey orders, desert, and assault or even kill unpopular officers. Back home, a growing group of **Vietnam Veterans against the War** participated in public protests. In January 1971, the group solicited veterans’ accounts of American war crimes in the Vietnam War in a proceeding they called the Winter Soldier Investigation. These veterans wanted to show that events like My Lai were not isolated incidents. By showing that war crimes were prevalent in Vietnam, they hoped to turn more Americans against the war and bring the war to a close more quickly. Most news outlets did not want to cover the event with its controversial topic, but testimonies from the investigation were read into the Congressional Record (by Republican Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon).

A protest march in April 1971, named “Operation Dewey Canyon III”—in recognition of two military incursions (Dewey I and II) into North Vietnam and neighboring Laos—ended with about eight hundred veterans tossing their medals and military decorations over a fence separating them from the steps of the U.S. Capitol. These veterans wanted to demonstrate that not all veterans supported the war, and that some even hated what they had done in Vietnam. They hoped that their public actions would undercut Nixon’s claims that a silent majority supported his policies that kept the U.S. in Vietnam.





At a protest march in April 1971, many veterans tossed their medals and military decoration over a fence separating them from the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

During the protest, future Secretary of State **John Kerry**—then an unknown Vietnam veteran—[testified before Congress](#) about the struggles of Vietnam veterans upon their return home and stated that many veterans disagreed with Nixon’s policy of ongoing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Kerry argued that it was inhumane to continue to place soldiers in harm’s way when the U.S. knew it was unable to win a conventional military victory in Vietnam. Famously, Kerry asked Congress, “how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?”<sup>14</sup>

## **NIXON’S FOREIGN POLICY**

When Nixon entered the White House, Vietnam was a top priority. However, Nixon’s interest in foreign policy extended beyond Vietnam and reflected his experiences in World War II and as a politician during the early Cold War. Few historians praise Nixon’s Vietnam policies, but they acknowledge that his diplomacy toward China and the Soviet Union significantly improved Cold War relations. At the same time, Nixon’s approach to smaller nations—such as Chile—revealed the same disregard for human rights that he displayed toward Vietnam.

### *Nixon’s Recognition of Beijing*

Vietnam was not the only place where the Nixon administration changed the course of American foreign policy. Together with his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, the president—very much in secret, without the involvement of the Departments of State or Defense—opened diplomatic channels to the Communist People’s Republic of China. Back in 1949, when Mao Zedong



Mao Zedong (left), Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, shakes hands with U.S. President Richard Nixon (right) in Beijing on February 21, 1972.

*Photo Credit: Nixon Presidential Library*

defeated Chiang Kai-Shek in the Chinese civil war, the latter’s nationalist faction had evacuated to the island of Fomosa and established a new Republic of China named Taiwan. All presidents since Harry Truman had refused to recognize the Communist People’s Republic on the mainland and assumed that the only relevant diplomatic point of contact for the Communist sphere was Moscow. In the process, however, this diplomatic strategy brought Chinese and Soviet Communists—deeply bitter foes and rivals—closer together and deprived the U.S. of the economic benefits of trading with China.

After a lifetime of fierce anti-communist rhetoric and a staunch refusal to distinguish between different forms of leftist regimes Richard Nixon surprised the world by visiting China in February 1972. Because Nixon had a reputation as a staunch anti-communist, he was able to open the door to relations with China because nobody would accuse him of being “soft” on communism. Together with Kissinger, he posed for photos, dined with officials, did a bit of sightseeing, and agreed to work toward better economic and cultural relations. He endorsed the admission of the People’s Republic to the United Nations, and with the signing of the **Shanghai Communiqué**, laid the groundwork for the official resumption of diplomatic relations between mainland China and the United States in 1979. By 1988, U.S. exports to China reached \$5 billion.



## *Détente with Moscow*

Nixon's efforts with China were not the product of some inner conversion that left Nixon regretting his former hard line on international communism, nor did he envision a future in which U.S.-China economic relations were as deep and expansive as they are today. Instead, the president saw that by recognizing China, he would gain leverage with the Soviet Union. Thus, after his visit to China, Nixon traveled to Moscow in May 1972. Nixon's new channel to the USSR's rival, China, made the Soviet delegates worry that they might lose influence (as the leader of the communist world) with the U.S. at a time when they were eager to secure American grain imports. Nixon ended up negotiating the sale of \$750 million worth of corn, wheat, and other grains, which benefited American farmers.

The USSR also negotiated the first **Antiballistic Missile (ABM) treaty**, which limited both sides to two types of defense missiles. Nixon also laid the groundwork for a series of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I and II) under future administrations that froze the number of long-range nuclear missiles for a period of time. These agreements formed the basis of a new Cold War policy of **détente**—a French word meaning relaxed tensions. Détente meant that the likelihood of another **Cuban Missile Crisis**, for example, was significantly reduced because the U.S. and the Soviet Union were slightly less distrustful of each other and had economic incentives to continue peaceful co-existence.

On the one hand, Nixon made a significant effort toward containing one of the key sources of the Cold War arms race that had heated up at the beginning of the 1960s with John F. Kennedy's talk of a "missile gap." On the other hand, Nixon had no intention of letting down the nation's guard. The U.S. development of missiles equipped with "multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles"—or MIRVs—sought to overcome any possible Soviet missile defense system. As Moscow followed suit, the two nations proceeded with the proliferation of nuclear warheads, keeping a total of about 16,000 at the ready on both sides by the end of the 1980s.

## *The Nixon Doctrine in South America*

In other foreign affairs, Richard Nixon left no doubt that he remained a staunch anti-communist—but one who understood the limits of American resources. Aware that the billions of dollars and tens of thousands of lives lost in Vietnam had brought no rewards but enormous costs, the **Nixon Doctrine** declared that developing nations

dealing with communist insurgencies had to man the fight themselves in the future.

That did not mean that the United States disengaged from the fight against communism in the developing world, only that its interference would not take the shape of open military intervention. When Chileans voted the outspoken Marxist Salvador Allende into office in 1970, national security advisor Henry Kissinger and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) worked diligently but covertly to undermine the new president.

Kissinger, now also Nixon's Secretary of State, expressed the administration's willingness to interfere in foreign countries, saying, "I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible." The U.S. spent \$20 million to boost Allende's political opposition and cut off all economic aid while Allende remained in power. When the country collapsed economically in 1973, the Chilean army killed Allende and put General Augusto Pinochet in charge. Pinochet's military regime arrested around 40,000 of Allende's supporters and executed thousands. Ignoring these human rights violations, the Nixon administration restored economic and military aid to Chile under Pinochet, who ran the country as a police state for seventeen years thereafter.

## **NIXON'S LANDSLIDE AND HIS PATH TOWARD RESIGNATION**

As the 1972 presidential election approached, Nixon had many reasons to be confident in his reelection. Yet, over the years Nixon had developed resentments of opponents and critics and a deep suspicion toward anyone but his close advisors. Carrying the political battles of the 1960s with him into the election cycle, the president's failure to come to terms with the transformations of the previous decade, his suspicion of opponents, and his desire to secure his reelection led Nixon down a path of criminal misconduct.

## *Nixon's Bombing Campaigns: "Peace Is at Hand"*

By the summer of 1972, Nixon could point to a number of political accomplishments that made him popular beyond the Republican Party. A gradual reduction of troops in Vietnam, the phasing out of the draft, and a shrinking death toll among U.S. soldiers helped weaken public attention to the war. Behind the scenes, President Nixon was working on another milestone in the conflict that would make his reelection all but certain. For most of the year, Henry Kissinger had been engaged in confidential peace talks



with his North Vietnamese counterpart in Paris. Although the Nixon administration officially continued to support South Vietnam, Nixon was eager to withdraw from the conflict. During these peace talks, bombings continued, including the mining of the port of Haiphong in North Vietnam with submerged bombs. Weeks before the election in October 1972, Kissinger announced that “peace is at hand” even though no deal had officially been reached. In December, after Nixon won re-election, the administration embarked on a final, massive bombing of the North—known as the “Christmas bombing” because of its timing. In early 1973, a peace treaty was finally signed.

## *The Election of 1972*

News of peace in Vietnam significantly improved the prospects for Nixon’s election victory in November. However, Nixon’s odds had been strong well before then, in part because of the weaknesses in the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party’s nominee, **George McGovern**, a Senator from South Dakota, suffered from his status as an outsider, his open embrace of the antiwar movement, his support for innovative but incomplete policy ideas on an immediate end to the war, amnesty for draft dodgers, women’s abortion rights, and the legalization of pot, as well as an unsupportive party organization. Republican organizations painted the soft-spoken McGovern as a radical and portrayed the president as a steady and experienced hand in foreign affairs.<sup>115</sup>

McGovern was a nominee who would have been popular with the protestors of 1968, but many more moderate Democrats (who supported Humphrey in 1968) disliked him. McGovern enjoyed the support of the antiwar movement, African Americans, social liberals (including many women’s movement activists), and intellectuals. However, he lacked the support of many traditionally Democratic voters, including many northern working-class whites, southern whites, and middle-class Americans who associated him with the New Left. Richard Nixon won in a landslide with over sixty percent of the popular vote and a stunning 520 out of 538 Electoral College votes. McGovern’s defeat and Nixon’s victory—especially in the South—further weakened the New Deal coalition that had fueled Democratic election victories from the 1930s through the Johnson years.

## *The Watergate Break-in: The Making of a National Crisis*

On the surface, Richard Nixon tried as well as he could to appear above the political mudslinging that had



*Nixon and his family leave the White House shortly before his resignation took effect on August 9, 1974.*

targeted Edmund Muskie and then George McGovern. In secret, however, the president had been scheming for his reelection since 1969. The efforts—not always legal—of the Nixon team began in earnest in 1970 when courts denied the administration’s injunction against the *New York Times* over the Pentagon Papers. Determined to hunt down “leaks” of information to the press, Nixon’s chief domestic policy advisor, John Ehrlichman, assembled a team of political operatives named the **White House “Plumbers.”** Their first mission involved a break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg’s (the whistle-blower who had released the Pentagon Papers) psychiatrist to find materials that would “destroy his public image and credibility.” In May 1972, the Plumbers expanded their illegal activity by installing wiretapping devices in the Democratic Party National headquarters (DNC), which were housed in a building complex known as “Watergate” in Washington, D.C., to learn the party strategy and find secrets to use against Democratic candidates.

On June 17, 1972, seven Plumbers (directed by G. Gordon Liddy, a Nixon campaign official) broke into the DNC offices to repair a listening bug. They were detected and arrested. Police found the phone number of E. Howard Hunt, a member of Nixon’s Committee to Re-Elect the President—or



as its critics abbreviated it, **CREEP**. Gordon Liddy briefed John Ehrlichman, the president, and chief of staff Haldeman, then proceeded to attempt to cover up any connection between the White House and the illegal wiretaps at the DNC. At first, the president had the CIA warn off the FBI, suggesting that it should not pursue any leads in the Watergate break-in for national security reasons. But early in 1973, a federal judge threatened the arrested burglars with long sentences unless they gave up their superiors. John Dean, the Nixon White House’s legal advisor, decided to cooperate with prosecutors. The president not only fired Dean, but also Ehrlichman and Haldeman. He then appointed a respected legal professor, Archibald Cox, as a special independent prosecutor to investigate Watergate.

Meanwhile, via televised Senate hearings, the public learned with dismay about the ways in which the Nixon campaign had raised millions, Nixon’s dirty tricks against his opponents, and the cover-up. When testimony in the hearings revealed the existence of a tape-recording system in the Oval Office, which the president had used to record conversations since 1970, investigators turned to the President for the release of his tapes. When a judge demanded the tapes at the request of Cox, the President ordered his Attorney General Richard Kleindienst to fire the special counsel. Both Kleindienst and his Assistant Attorney General refused to comply with what they saw as the president’s unconstitutional interference in the judicial process. Following their firing, a third acting Attorney General carried out the president’s order.

Public outrage over this mass firing—which became known as the “**Saturday Night Massacre**”—flooded Congress, along with demands that Congress impeach the president. In the first six months of 1974, the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives prepared the case against Nixon. In July, the committee recommended his impeachment on account of obstruction of justice, abuse of power, and illegal disregard of congressional subpoenas. Shortly thereafter, the Supreme Court ordered the President to release all tapes. Despite apparent efforts to eliminate the most incriminating evidence—there was a nine-minute gap in the most noteworthy tape—the recordings included a conversation in which Nixon and Haldeman discuss their plan to use the CIA in the cover-up. With an impeachment now certain, Nixon had no choice but to [resign](#). His presidency ended on August 9, 1974.<sup>116</sup>

The Watergate scandal had presented the nation with a grave constitutional crisis that tested the separation of powers. Ultimately, Nixon’s machinations significantly undermined the “Imperial Presidency” of the postwar years. The political drama that unfolded tainted the office of the President, especially since the investigation revealed the extent of disdain and resentment Nixon had felt toward antiwar protesters, Democrats, and African Americans. Vice President Spiro Agnew’s conviction for corruption and his resignation only added to the crisis. The new Vice President Gerald Ford from Michigan was not part of Watergate, but disappointed many Americans when, as a new president, he pardoned his predecessor for all crimes related to Watergate.

At first, it appeared that Republicans were significantly damaged by the Watergate scandal. In the short term, that proved correct with the election of the Democrat and Washington outsider Jimmy Carter in 1976. But in the long run, Watergate sent a message that hurt Democrats more than Nixon’s party: the federal government could not be trusted. Along with the bitter struggles, tensions, and violence of the sixties, Watergate contributed to the disappointments of a decade that had initially seemed to offer hope for a fairer society, a safer world, and a better government.

## SECTION IV SUMMARY

- ✧ A series of assassinations, riots, and antiwar demonstrations, as well as a tumultuous Democratic National Convention made 1968 the most volatile year in 1960s American life and politics.
- ✧ Richard M. Nixon’s presidency surprised many Americans with moderate policies and progress on some foreign policy fronts, but it also marked the end of a generation of Democratic national political dominance.
- ✧ Nixon’s policy of Vietnamization secured the withdrawal of American troops from war, but it did not end political and social upheaval over the war.
- ✧ New economic challenges, deep political divisions over the war and civil rights, and a constitutional crisis over the power of the president in the Watergate affair marked the end of the 1960s.



# Conclusion

Richard Nixon's resignation over the Watergate scandal was not the only event that ushered Americans into a new era. On March 29, 1973, just over two months after the United States signed the Paris Accords, the last American combat troops left Vietnam, and Hanoi released the last prisoners of war. The conflict that had defined the 1960s had ended. Soon after, American support for Israel against an alliance of Arab neighbors in the Yom Kippur War angered the members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that had warred with Israel. The subsequent oil embargo against the United States and its Western European allies not only left American drivers stranded, but surges in oil prices fed inflation and weakened the economy. Gone was the confidence and sense of global omnipotence of the early 1960s. In the global economy that emerged in the 1970s, foreign events would have more influence on American prosperity.

Within the U.S., not all movements for change ceased with

the end of the 1960s. Civil rights activism was not dead, as the struggle over affirmative action and bussing made clear. The women's movement reached its high point in the seventies, which was also when gays and lesbians made significant advances in the cause of equal rights for all Americans—regardless of sexual orientation—which continued for decades after. Like the LGBTQ rights movement, environmentalism continued to grow since the 1960s. Activists, however, encountered capable opponents. A surging number of Evangelicals and social conservatives among southern and working-class whites learned lessons in grassroots organization from the left and grew stronger in their push against the reforms of the 1960s. The result has been an ongoing **culture war**, pitting Americans against each other in a seemingly endless struggle over issues like abortion. The 1960s also echo through our contemporary life in many other ways. Understanding these echoes will remain the work of historians for years to come.



## TIMELINE

<b>April 7, 1954 -</b>	President Eisenhower commits the U.S. to an anti-Communist South Vietnam, invoking the “domino theory.”
<b>May 17, 1954 -</b>	The Supreme Court rules in <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas</i> , that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional and orders nationwide desegregation.
<b>February 1, 1960 -</b>	Black college student protesters stage the first sit-in at a Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth’s lunch counter.
<b>April 1960 -</b>	Ella Baker and other southern black student activists form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a civil rights group run by students.
<b>May 1960 -</b>	The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approves the first birth control pill.
<b>July 11, 1960 -</b>	Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, in a speech at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, speaks of a “New Frontier.”
<b>September 1960 -</b>	The new conservative group Young Americans for Freedom forms.
<b>November 8, 1960 -</b>	John F. Kennedy defeats Richard Nixon in a historically close presidential election.
<b>April 17, 1961 -</b>	The Bay of Pigs invasion by 1,500 U.S.-trained Cuban exiles fails.
<b>May 1961 -</b>	Activists launch a series of Freedom Rides to protest segregation on interstate buses.
<b>May 1961 -</b>	President John F. Kennedy announces to Congress that the United States plans to send a man to the moon before 1970.
<b>March 1962 -</b>	Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan releases his first album.
<b>August 1962 -</b>	The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) hold their first national convention at Port Huron, Michigan. They write the <i>Port Huron Statement</i> , which outlines SDS’s goals.
<b>September 27, 1962 -</b>	Rachel Carson’s <i>Silent Spring</i> draws large public attention to the dangers of pesticides.
<b>September 30, 1962 -</b>	President Kennedy sends federal troops to the University of Mississippi after that state’s governor refuses to admit black students to the state university.
<b>October 22, 1962 -</b>	The Cuban Missile Crisis is underway. Evidence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba prompts Kennedy to order a naval blockade of the island.
<b>November 20, 1962 -</b>	The Soviets remove missiles from Cuba, and the U.S. ends its naval blockade.
<b>February 1963 -</b>	Betty Friedan publishes <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> , fueling the women’s movement.
<b>April 1963 -</b>	Martin Luther King Jr. launches a major civil rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. After attack dogs and fire hoses target children, public outcry forces whites in Birmingham to desegregate the city.
<b>June 12, 1963 -</b>	Civil rights activist Medgar Evers is assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi.
<b>August 28, 1963 -</b>	Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.



<b>November 1–2, 1963 –</b>	A coup, encouraged by officials in the Kennedy administration, overthrows the South Vietnamese government and murders President Ngo Dinh Diem.
<b>November 22, 1963 –</b>	Lee Harvey Oswald assassinates John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath of office and becomes president of the United States.
<b>January 23, 1964 –</b>	The Twenty-fourth Amendment is ratified, barring poll taxes in federal elections.
<b>January 1964 –</b>	Lyndon Johnson, in his State of the Union address, announces a “War on Poverty.”
<b>July 1964 –</b>	The Civil Rights Act of 1964 bans discrimination in public facilities, voting, and education.
<b>August 1964 –</b>	The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenges the state’s all-white delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
<b>August 7, 1964 –</b>	Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which paves the way for escalating U.S. involvement in Vietnam.
<b>August 20, 1964 –</b>	President Johnson signs the Economic Opportunity Act, a key component of his Great Society program.
<b>September 1964 –</b>	The Free Speech Movement (FSM) begins at the UC Berkeley campus.
<b>November 3, 1964 –</b>	Lyndon Johnson wins in a landslide over Barry Goldwater in the presidential election.
<b>February 21, 1965 –</b>	Civil rights activist Malcolm X is assassinated by three members of the Nation of Islam.
<b>March 7, 1965 –</b>	Civil rights activists participating in the Selma-to-Montgomery March meet with brutal violence by police troopers on “Bloody Sunday.”
<b>March 8, 1965 –</b>	The first official U.S. combat troops enter the Vietnam War when three thousand marines arrive to defend the Da Nang airbase in South Vietnam.
<b>June 7, 1965 –</b>	In <i>Griswold v. Connecticut</i> , the Supreme Court declares that laws banning the use of contraceptives are unconstitutional.
<b>June 18, 1965 –</b>	American B-52 planes begin bombing in South Vietnam, striking Communist targets.
<b>July 1965 –</b>	The draft quota doubles when President Johnson significantly increases troop levels.
<b>July 30, 1965 –</b>	President Johnson signs the Medicare Amendment to the Social Security Act, a central component of his Great Society program.
<b>August 6, 1965 –</b>	The Voting Rights Act prohibits literacy requirements for voting and empowers federal officials to register qualified black voters in the South. The act makes it so that African Americans—long prohibited from voting in the South—can exercise the right to vote.
<b>August 11, 1965 –</b>	Major race riots begin in the Watts district of Los Angeles.
<b>February 1966 –</b>	Hearings of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the Vietnam War begin.
<b>June 1966 –</b>	Stokely Carmichael calls for “Black Power” at a Greenwood, Mississippi, rally.
<b>October 1966 –</b>	Huey Newton and Bobby Seale form the Black Panthers, in Oakland, California.



<b>April 15, 1967 -</b>	Antiwar demonstrations sweep the United States. Almost 500,000 people march from Central Park to the UN headquarters in New York City in protest of the Vietnam War.
<b>June 1967 -</b>	Businesses in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco promote the Summer of Love.
<b>June 5, 1967 -</b>	The Six Day War between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria begins.
<b>June 12, 1967 -</b>	The Supreme Court decision in <i>Loving v. Virginia</i> strikes down anti-miscegenation laws.
<b>July 1967 -</b>	Three of the most violent race riots to date occur in Newark, Detroit, and Cambridge.
<b>January 30, 1968 -</b>	Viet Cong forces attack U.S. bases, the American embassy, and strongholds in South Vietnam, beginning the Tet Offensive, which lasts for weeks and erodes U.S. support for the war.
<b>February 1968 -</b>	The Kerner Commission Report severely criticizes race relations in the U.S.
<b>February 1968 -</b>	A four-day race riot erupts at the South Carolina State College in Orangeburg and results in the deaths of three student protesters.
<b>March 16, 1968 -</b>	In the My Lai Massacre in South Vietnam, U.S. soldiers kill as many as 504 people.
<b>March 31, 1968 -</b>	President Lyndon B. Johnson announces that he will not seek reelection.
<b>April 4, 1968 -</b>	Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis. Race riots erupt across the country.
<b>June 5, 1968 -</b>	Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated in Los Angeles.
<b>August 26–29, 1968 -</b>	Outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, police riot against antiwar demonstrators. The Democrats nominate Hubert Humphrey for president.
<b>September 7, 1968 -</b>	Protests outside the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, draw attention to the women’s liberation movement.
<b>November 5, 1968 -</b>	Republican Richard M. Nixon defeats Democrat Hubert Humphrey for the presidency.
<b>July 1969 -</b>	U.S. astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin become the first men on the moon.
<b>August 9, 1969 -</b>	Cult leader Charles Manson and his associates commit mass murder.
<b>August 15, 1969 -</b>	The three-day Woodstock Festival begins in Bethel, New York. Featured artists include Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, and Santana.
<b>September 1969 -</b>	The trial of the Chicago Eight (later the Chicago Seven) for inciting uprisings at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago begins.
<b>October 15, 1969 -</b>	On Vietnam Moratorium Day, hundreds of thousands of Americans across the United States protest against the Vietnam War.
<b>November 1969 -</b>	Native Americans seize and occupy Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay.
<b>April 1970 -</b>	The environmental movement gains publicity and momentum with the first Earth Day.
<b>April 30, 1970 -</b>	Richard Nixon discloses that U.S. forces have invaded Cambodia, sparking antiwar protests across the U.S.



<b>May 4, 1970 -</b>	During a protest at Kent State University, the National Guard kills four students.
<b>May 15, 1970 -</b>	Police shoot at antiwar protesters at Jackson State University, Mississippi, killing two students and injuring twelve.
<b>December 2, 1970 -</b>	Congress establishes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
<b>January 31- February 2, 1971 -</b>	The <i>Vietnam Veterans Against the War</i> conduct the Winter Soldier Investigation to publicize American war crimes in Vietnam.
<b>April 20, 1971 -</b>	The Supreme Court unanimously upholds bussing in order to achieve school integration.
<b>June 13, 1971 -</b>	The <i>New York Times</i> publishes the <i>Pentagon Papers</i> .
<b>August 15, 1971 -</b>	To combat creeping inflation and instability in international money markets, President Richard Nixon announces his "New Economic Policy."
<b>February 21, 1972 -</b>	Richard Nixon travels to mainland China, the first U.S. president to acknowledge the Communist regime.
<b>May 22, 1972 -</b>	Richard Nixon makes the first peacetime visit by a president to the Soviet Union.
<b>June 17, 1972 -</b>	Washington, D.C., police arrest five burglars at the Democratic National Headquarters, which is located at the Watergate hotel.
<b>August 3, 1972 -</b>	The Senate votes to ratify a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, known as SALT, that President Nixon negotiated with the Soviet Union.
<b>November 7, 1972 -</b>	President Nixon easily wins re-election, defeating Democrat George McGovern in a landslide.
<b>December 18, 1972 -</b>	The "Christmas bombing" reopens U.S. bombing of North Vietnam.
<b>January 22, 1973 -</b>	The Supreme Court decision in <i>Roe v. Wade</i> limits states' rights to restrict abortion.
<b>January 27, 1973 -</b>	Belligerents in the Vietnam War sign the Paris Accords.
<b>May 17, 1973 -</b>	Under the direction of its chair, Senator Sam Ervin, the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities begins holding hearings on the Watergate conspiracy.
<b>October 10, 1973 -</b>	Vice President Spiro Agnew resigns after pleading "no contest" to tax evasion. President Richard Nixon selects House minority leader Gerald Ford to replace Agnew.
<b>October 20, 1973 -</b>	The "Saturday Night Massacre": President Nixon orders his attorney general to fire the special prosecutor Archibald Cox. Rather than fire Cox, the attorney general and his assistant resign.
<b>November 7, 1973 -</b>	The War Powers Act, which requires congressional approval for aggressive military action, passes over President Nixon's veto.
<b>July 24, 1974 -</b>	The Supreme Court orders President Nixon to turn over the tapes that the special prosecutor has subpoenaed.
<b>August 9, 1974 -</b>	President Richard Nixon's resignation becomes effective at noon.



# Glossary

**Afro** – The naturally curly long hair of African American men and women became a symbol of pride in heritage and black identity in the late sixties.

**Alliance for Progress** – Initiated by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, this international organization of Latin American nations sought to improve economic relations. Despite the public attention it received, the international body had effectively disbanded by 1973.

**Altamont** – the location of a 1969 Rolling Stones concert in California, where security guards from the biker gang *Hells Angels* beat and killed a concertgoer; the concert was marred by more accidental deaths and violence. Altamont showed a darker side of the counterculture's embrace of drugs and social outsiders.

**Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty** – This 1972 treaty limited the Soviet Union and the United States to two types of defense missiles and prepared a series of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I and II) under future administrations.

**Baby boom** – Between 1946 and 1964, American women married younger and bore more children on average than in the time period before or since. The babies born during these years were known as the “baby boom generation.”

**Baker v. Carr** – This 1962 ruling required all voter districts to be equal in size. Affirming the principle of “one-man, one-vote” significantly raised the relative weight of voters in urban counties.

**Bay of Pigs** – Cuban counterrevolutionaries failed in their CIA-supported attempt to topple the Castro regime in 1961 at this northern stretch of Cuban coastline. The mission was planned under Eisenhower, but President Kennedy gave the go-ahead, and thus Kennedy accepted the blame for the failed mission.

**Beatlemania** – The craze for the British pop quartet from Liverpool and their American-inspired songs in 1964 marked the beginning of a wave of British rock band

successes in the United States.

**Beatniks** – This name referred to a small group of artists and intellectuals in the late 1950s who defied expectations of homeownership, careers, and married life. Many lived in Greenwich village in New York City. Their views were expressed in novels like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and poetry like Allen Ginsburg's “Howl.”

**Berkeley** – The University of California, Berkeley—a leading research university in the 1960s—became the birth place of the Free Speech movement when the University of California sought to block political activism on campus.

**Berlin Wall** – Erected in August 1961, the structure divided Germany's former capital into East and West Berlin. It was built by the Soviet-aligned East German leaders to block East Germans from escaping the Communist regime.

**Berrigan, Daniel and Philip** – These two brothers were Roman Catholic priests and peace activists who helped organize draft card burning protests against the Vietnam War.

**Birth control pill** – The first contraceptive in pill form was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1960. This medication contributed to the sexual revolution in the 1960s by freeing women from the constant fear of pregnancy.

**Black Panther Party for Self Defense** – Borrowing from Marxist-Leninism and anti-colonial liberation ideology, Oakland college students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale organized this militant black organization in the fall of 1966 to strengthen community and push back against racist police violence.

**Bloody Sunday** – On March 7, 1965, SNCC leader John Lewis and fellow marchers were brutally attacked by state troopers and sheriffs outside Selma, Alabama, as they protested voter discrimination and pushed for the Voting Rights Act. These activists were later joined by other activists, including Martin Luther King Jr. in completing



this march, which became known as the Selma to Montgomery March.

**Body counts** – Under a new generation of data-driven managers, the Department of Defense used this measure as a way to chart its progress in defeating Vietnamese Communists.

**Braceros** – The Spanish slang word referred to a Mexican migrant worker program that provided Southwestern agriculture with cheap labor from 1943 to 1964.

**Bretton Woods** – This New Hampshire town hosted an Allied conference in 1944 on the postwar financial order that established the U.S. dollar as the “anchor” currency and founded the International Monetary Fund and the predecessor to the World Bank.

**Brezhnev Doctrine** – Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev explained the violent suppression of the student movement in Prague, Czechoslovakia, with the rationale that the process of “antisocialist degeneration” had to be prevented.

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas** – In the landmark case, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the old doctrine “separate but equal” in public education was not possible and thus in violation of the Constitution. This ruling provided the legal rationale for the integration of public schools during the 1960s.

**Carmichael, Stokely** – In 1966, the new SNCC leader popularized the phrase “Black Power” to summarize a new direction of the Civil Rights Movement. Civil rights activists who agreed with Carmichael had become disillusioned with the quest for white acceptance and reform and commitment to nonviolence.

**Carson, Rachel** – The aquatic biologist earned a reputation as a gifted writer with popular books on sea life and in 1962 popularized awareness of the devastating impact of inorganic pesticides and herbicides on flora and fauna in her book *Silent Spring*.

**Chicago Seven** – The Nixon administration prosecuted eight organizers of the Chicago protests of 1968. Seven of them stood trial together: Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, and Lee Weiner. Black Panther Bobby Seale stood trial separately. The convictions were eventually all overturned on account of the judge’s bias.

**Civil Rights Act of 1964** – The landmark law prohibited segregation in public accommodations and education

and prohibited discrimination on account of race, color, sex, or national identity.

**Clean Air Act** – The 1963 law was the first air quality control measure in the nation’s history, providing funding for research and setting standards for the reduction of emissions and pollution.

**Community Action Program** – One of the most controversial elements of Johnson’s war on poverty, this initiative aided the poor in securing local and state support services under the principle of “maximum feasible participation.”

**Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)** – Founded in Chicago in 1942, this civil rights organization helped expose continued racial segregation in the North and participated in major events of the Civil Rights Movement, including the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and the Mississippi Freedom Summer.

**Council of Economic Advisers (CEA)** – A body of experts established in 1946, the CEA under Kennedy and Johnson embraced the “new economics” of the time which saw public investments as a means of generating full employment.

**Counterinsurgency** – efforts to defeat an insurgency; the U.S. used covert operations, propaganda, and military operations to try to stem insurgencies in other countries, particularly Vietnam.

**Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO)** – The FBI program involved methods of espionage, infiltration, framing, and targeted killings of Black Panthers during a time of heightened fears of revolutionary violence in the late 1960s.

**CREEP** – Critics of the Nixon administration used this abbreviation to refer to the president’s Committee to Re-elect the President.

**Cuban Missile Crisis** – Alarmed at intelligence of Soviet ballistic missiles only about a hundred miles off Florida, Kennedy imposed a naval blockade on Cuba. Only after a month did the U.S. and the Soviet Union step back from the brink of nuclear war.

**Culture War** – The term describes the continued political conflict in the United States over social changes and rights movements that came to full bloom over the course of the 1960s.

**Détente** – This French word for relaxing tensions described a new Cold War policy of negotiations and diplomacy



between the United States and the Soviet Union beginning in 1972.

**Diem, Ngo Dinh** – Diem was the leader of South Vietnam from 1955 to 1963. Diem, a Catholic educated in France, failed to enact land reform and used brutal methods to suppress South Vietnamese who opposed him, including many Buddhists and students. He died in a coup in November 1963.

**Domino theory** – A theory, made popular by President Eisenhower in 1954, that nations would topple and fall to communist revolutions like dominos in a row. The domino theory underlined the importance of the U.S. not allowing even a single nation to turn communist, as others would theoretically follow.

**Doves** – The nickname applied to the opponents of the ongoing war in Vietnam.

**Draft** – Although roughly three-quarters of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam volunteered, about a quarter were selected through a national draft.

**Dulles, John Foster** – Dwight D. Eisenhower’s secretary of state was the chief architect of the U.S. Cold War policy of massive retaliation and nuclear brinkmanship.

**Dylan, Bob** – The songwriter’s popular songs like “Blowin’ in the Wind” became staples of Civil Rights Movement and antiwar movement protests, making Dylan the somewhat reluctant “voice of a generation.”

**Earth Day** – Activist Dennis Hayes organized the first Earth Day, which took place on April 22, 1970. More than 20 million Americans participated across the nation.

**1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act** – This Great Society law funneled federal funds to local school districts in the hope of closing the achievement gap between black and white students and creating more universal accountability standards.

**Ellsberg, Daniel** – In 1971, this RAND corporation military analyst working for the Pentagon released a classified official history of the Vietnam War—the Pentagon Papers—to the *New York Times*.

**Endangered Species Act** – President Nixon signed this law in December 1973, prohibiting the use of federal funds in any contract that might erase an animal species.

**Engle v. Vitale** – The Supreme Court reinforced the separation between church and state when it found, in 1962, that mandatory prayer and Bible readings had no

place in public education or at public institutions.

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** – This new federal agency was established in 1970 and had the support of Democrats and many Republicans for its new role in environmental policy.

**Equal Pay Act** – Based on the findings of Kennedy’s Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, this 1963 law required employers to pay men and women equal wages for equal work. The law failed for lack of enforcement.

**European Economic Community** – Stimulated by the Marshall Plan of 1948, this predecessor to the European Union was established in 1957 to integrate European market economies.

**Evers, Medgar** – On June 12, 1963, a southern Klansman assassinated Evers, a local NAACP activist and World War II combat veteran, in Jackson, Mississippi.

**Family Assistance Plan** – Rejected by conservatives and liberals for different reasons, this Nixon proposal tried to settle the issue of how to address poverty once and for all with a negative income tax that would guarantee every family a minimal income.

**Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956** – The law funded the nation’s biggest public works initiative to date, leading to the construction of more than 40,000 miles of freeways across the U.S.

**Filibuster** – A political tactic in which members who oppose legislation hold off the vote by speaking uninterruptedly on the Senate floor. Opponents of the Civil Rights Act used this tactic, but eventually the historic act passed.

**Food stamps** – Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty expanded food stamps. This was one of the War on Poverty’s few programs that provided direct material assistance to the poor.

**Four Freedoms** – To promote support on the homefront during World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called on Americans to fight for the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, freedom from fear, and freedom from want.

**Freedom Rides** – In 1961 members of CORE and SNCC traveled on buses in racially mixed groups through the South to test the Supreme Court ruling that interstate transportation could no longer be segregated. The Freedom Rides resulted in massive violence by southern whites and jail time for the riders before the federal



agency responsible for interstate travel finally began integrating bus terminals and buses.

**Freedom Summer** – In 1964, civil rights activists drew media attention to the South by launching voter registration efforts and freedom schools across Mississippi. The campaign became the target of a significant amount of southern white violence, including the murder of activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner near Philadelphia, Mississippi, in June.

**Friedan, Betty** – This writer-turned-activist explored the plight of middle-class housewives in the postwar suburbs in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and helped found the National Organization for Women (1966).

**Fulbright, Senator J. William** – The Democratic chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee began hearings on the conduct of the war in Vietnam in 1966, having felt misled by President Johnson with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

**G.I. Bill of Rights** – To prevent veterans' unemployment after WWII, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (or G.I. Bill) provided returning soldiers with home-loan guarantees, healthcare, college funds, small farm and business loans, unemployment assistance, and job training.

**Green Berets** – Named after their distinctive green headwear, these U.S. special forces helped train the South Vietnamese military beginning in 1961 and participated in counterinsurgency operations.

**Griswold v. Connecticut** – This 1965 ruling prohibited states from blocking married couples' access to contraception. The Supreme Court's opinion stated that "The right to be let alone...is the beginning of all freedom."

**Guevara, Che** – The charismatic Argentinian revolutionary and hero of the Cuban revolution became a popular symbol among America's antiwar youth for his critique of American power.

**Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** – Based on conflicting reports about events in the Gulf of Tonkin (off the coast of North Vietnam), Congress passed this resolution on August 7, 1964. The resolution gave President Johnson a blank check to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States."

**Haight-Ashbury** – This neighborhood in San Francisco, named for a busy intersection east of Golden Gate Park, was one of the centers of the 1960s counterculture.

**Hair** – This Broadway musical from 1968 celebrated the antiwar movement and counterculture, shocked audiences with its onstage profanity, nudity, drug use, and political message, and provided the young generation of the decade with a series of enduring anthems.

**Harrington, Michael** – The author of *The Other America* (1962) influenced the Kennedy and Johnson administrations with his study of persistent poverty even in America's age of prosperity.

**Hawks** – A nickname used to describe the advocates for the ongoing war in Vietnam.

**Head Start** – This Great Society program offered daycare opportunities for predominantly African-American urban residents to boost children's educational prospects and free parents for employment.

**Hendrix, Jimi** – This African-American guitarist advanced the genre of acid rock in the late 1960s, which was dominated by powerful guitar solos and accompanied by psychedelic light shows.

**Hippies** – These members of the counterculture rejected mainstream values and appearance and embraced communal living, new music, and drugs. They also expressed faith in peace and love. They first gained national attention during the "Summer of Love" in 1967 in San Francisco.

**Housing projects** – The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, part of the War on Poverty, channeled increased federal funds to public housing, but the low-cost developments ended up concentrating poverty and stimulating crime.

**Humphrey, Hubert** – The longtime Minnesota Senator served as Lyndon Johnson's Vice President and won the Democratic Party nomination for President during the tumultuous national convention of 1968. Humphrey lost in 1968 to Richard Nixon.

**Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965** – Widely supported by Republicans and Democrats outside the South, the law abolished the 1924 national origins quota system, lifting the bar on East Asian immigrants. Immigrants with particular skills needed in the United States also could secure permanent residence. However, this act limited immigration within the western hemisphere for the first time, leading to long-term effects for migrants from Mexico and the Americas.

**Johnson Treatment** – President Johnson used a mix of



charm, intimidation, his tall stature, and a willingness to get in other politicians' personal space to maximum effect in one-on-one conversations. His relentless pursuit rarely failed to deliver the response he wanted. Johnson perfected this tactic when he was in the Senate and continued to use it as president to get members of Congress to agree to his legislation.

**Kennedy, Robert F.** – The former attorney general and brother of the slain president entered the Democratic primary race in the spring of 1968 and quickly became a favorite among the nation's youth. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles during the primaries on June 5, 1968.

**Kerner Report** – In the wake of a series of deadly riots in 1967, notably in Detroit, this report condemned the lack of economic opportunities for the nation's black communities.

**Kerry, John** – This 1966 graduate of Yale University served a brief tour in Vietnam as a Naval Reserve officer and returned to serve as the spokesperson for the antiwar organization Vietnam Veterans against the War. He later served as Senator from Massachusetts from 1985 to 2013 and then as Secretary of State.

**Khmer Rouge** – In the wake of the U.S. invasion in 1970, this Cambodian local insurgency toppled the republican government and installed the most brutal Communist regime in Southeast Asia.

**Khrushchev, Nikita** – The leader of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964 led the USSR out of Stalin's terror regime and by the end of his tenure accepted the need for limiting the arms race. Khrushchev led the Soviet Union during the U2 spy plane incident and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

**Kinsey Reports** – Alfred Kinsey's 1948 and 1953 publications on male and female sexuality challenged popular assumptions about heterosexual norms by showing the prevalence of both premarital sex and homosexuality.

**Kissinger, Henry** – A foreign policy expert, Nixon's National Security Advisor and Secretary of State was chiefly responsible for the President's foreign policy, including détente and the administration's strategy in Vietnam.

**La Raza Unida** – Students in Denver formed this political party that built on Mexicans' deep historical roots in ancient southwestern American civilizations.

**Leary, Timothy** – Fired from the faculty at Harvard, the psychologist became a leading figure in the counterculture for his celebration of LSD as a way to escape the constraints of normal society.

**Letter from a Birmingham Jail** – Arrested and in solitary confinement after a public march in April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote an [open letter](#) in response to three local clergymen's request for patience.

**Levitt & Sons** – These builders pioneered mass-production techniques in suburban housing construction. Their developments—like Levittown—became synonymous with postwar middle-class communities.

**Loving v. Virginia** – In this case from 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Virginia law banning interracial marriage between black and white spouses, thereby also terminating similar anti-miscegenation laws in sixteen states.

**Lunch counter sit-ins** – Civil rights activists publicized discrimination at public accommodations by sitting at lunch counters and not leaving when they were refused service. The first sit-in began in February 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina. By the end of April, the practice had spread to seventy-eight cities, involving over 70,000 participants.

**Malcolm X** – Born Malcolm Little, the Black Power activist joined the Nation of Islam during a prison sentence for burglary in the late 1940s. By 1964, he left the NOI in disillusionment and became an advocate for black nationalism in his own right.

**McCarthyism** – Anti-communist fears in the United States reached a fever pitch between the late 1950s and mid-1950s, thanks in part to Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy's (R) unfounded accusations of disloyalty and treason. McCarthyism refers to the practice of charging people as communists without sufficient evidence.

**McGovern, George** – The 1972 Democratic presidential candidate from South Dakota suffered from his embrace of the antiwar movement, his support for innovative but not thought-out policy ideas, and an unsupportive party organization.

**Medicaid** – Passed with Medicare, this 1965 healthcare provision helped provide healthcare for families who could demonstrate the need for public assistance.

**Medicare** – This was a Great Society program that provided health insurance for all Americans over the



age of sixty-five.

**Meredith, James**– Riots erupted on the campus of the University of Mississippi when this African-American student became the first admitted to “Ole Miss” in 1962. In 1966 Meredith attempted a “March Against Fear” to raise awareness. During this march, he survived an assassination attempt, and thousands of activists finished his march.

**Mexican American Political Association** – Formed in Fresno, California, in 1960, this organization committed itself to aiding Mexican-American candidates in their efforts to get elected to public office.

**Military industrial complex** – Made famous by Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address in 1961, the term describes the deep connections between the weapons industry, research universities, and the Pentagon as a result of Cold War defense spending.

**Military welfare state** – This concept describes the many programs that the federal government extended to veterans and military institutions.

**Miranda v. Arizona** – This 1966 U.S. Supreme Court case established the new practice of informing suspects of their constitutional protections, such as the right to remain silent and to counsel, known as the “Miranda Warnings.”

**Miss America Pageant** – Women’s liberationists led a protest against this event in 1968, featuring a “freedom trash can” into which women were encouraged to toss the many contraptions they routinely endured for the benefit of men’s gaze—fake eyelashes, hair curlers, brassieres, and corsets.

**Missile gap** – Fears of a Soviet lead in nuclear ballistic missiles became a political lightning rod in the 1958 and 1960 election campaigns. (In fact, the U.S. had more missiles than the Soviet Union.)

**Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)**  
– After years of painstaking and dangerous voter registration drives in Mississippi, SNCC and other civil rights activists formed this integrated party to demonstrate that African Americans in Mississippi wanted to participate politically but were excluded by white southerners in the state’s Democratic Party.

**Model Cities** – Lyndon B. Johnson’s vision of brand-new ambitious housing projects as part of the war on poverty enjoyed some success before it was cancelled in the 1970s.

**My Lai** – This South Vietnamese village was where between as many as 504 unarmed civilians were massacred by the members of Charlie Company on March 16, 1968. The My Lai Massacre significantly contributed to Americans’ disillusionment with the war.

**NASA** – Established in 1958, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration became the nation’s chief agency for aerospace research.

**Nation of Islam** – A leading black nationalist organization after World War II under the leadership of Elijah Muhammed. The NOI, which held many beliefs that differentiated it from more widely accepted Muslim beliefs, advocated for black male empowerment and strict self-discipline.

**National Organization for Women (NOW)** – In 1966, Betty Friedan helped form this organization to promote “true equality for all women in America.”

**New Federalism** – Instead of trying to cut federal expenditures on welfare programs, Richard Nixon announced this new principle under which states received “block grants” they could spend as their legislatures saw fit.

**New frontier** – This slogan from John F. Kennedy’s acceptance speech at the 1960 Democratic National Convention described his political agenda.

**New Left** – Activists, students, and intellectuals formed this broad political movement during the 1960s in an effort to expand social justice reform beyond the traditional causes of the old left to include civil rights, women’s rights, cultural diversity, and demilitarization.

**New York Times v. Sullivan** – In 1964, the Warren Court struck down the newspaper’s libel conviction for an advertisement criticizing local officials for their treatment of civil rights activists. This ruling effectively established modern standards for freedom of the press in the U.S.

**Nixon Doctrine** – An extension of President Nixon’s Vietnamization plan in Southeast Asia, this new U.S. foreign policy guideline declared that developing nations beleaguered by communist insurgencies had to man the fight themselves.

**Noyce, Robert** – The co-founder of Fairchild Semiconductor (1957) and Intel (1968), Noyce played a key role in the development of the integrated circuit and the computer revolution.



**Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)** – Led by Sargent Shriver, this agency oversaw most of President Johnson’s War on Poverty.

**Operation Rolling Thunder** – President Johnson’s massive bombing campaign against North Vietnam lasted from 1965 until 1968 and sought, in vain, to demoralize the North and stop their flow of military support to southern insurgents.

**Organization Man** – William Whyte’s bestselling book on corporate culture in the 1950s criticized the conformity of a new generation of white-collar middle managers and executives.

**Oswald, Lee Harvey** – Oswald assassinated President Kennedy on November 22, 1963, only to himself be killed two days later. Oswald’s death at the hands of a man named Jack Ruby fueled suspicions of a conspiracy to kill the president, even though investigations found that Oswald acted alone.

**Pan-Africanism** – In the U.S. in the 1960s, this movement emphasized the shared experience of all people of African descent and (wrongly) anticipated broad solidarity among independent African nations.

**Peace Corps** – An important legacy of President Kennedy, this organization continues to send volunteers to developing countries for development work.

**Pentagon Papers** – This classified history of American involvement in Vietnam from the Truman through the Johnson administration revealed that American presidents had persistently lied to the American public about the nation’s involvement in the conflict.

**Pent-up demand** – Following four years of war on the heels of the Great Depression, Americans had stored up savings and a considerable demand for durable consumer goods at the end of World War II, which helped spur postwar economic growth.

**Philadelphia Plan** – President Nixon’s affirmative action policy required that construction companies on federal projects hire a specified proportion of non-white workers.

**Playboy** – First published in 1953 with a nude centerfold of Hollywood star Marilyn Monroe, Hugh Hefner’s magazine let men indulge in bachelor fantasies. Playboy, along with other institutions that objectified women, would become a target of second-wave feminism.

**Police riot** – The Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August 1968 was protested by thousands

of people. During the third day, police responded to provocative protesters by breaking into the crowd, beating them with batons, and indiscriminately spraying tear gas.

**The Population Bomb** – In 1968, this book by Professors Paul and Anne Ehrlich turned the public’s attention to human population growth as the essential threat to the future of the planet.

**Racial covenants** – These clauses in real estate purchasing contracts prohibited property sales to people of color.

**Red-baiting** – This political practice of the Cold War years involved smearing one’s opponent with vague charges of communist tendencies or sympathies, rendering them unelectable.

**Red Power** – This phrase, inspired by Black Power, was used by Native Americans. Beginning in 1968, organizations like the American Indian Movement embraced more assertive methods of protest, such as the occupation of Alcatraz.

**Redstockings** – This radical feminist organization viewed men as oppressors and formed separate female collectives to affirm their identities as women.

**1964 Revenue Act** – Proposed by Kennedy in 1963, the law cut income tax rates by an average of about 20 percent, introduced a minimum standard deduction, and lowered corporate tax rates.

**Rock ‘n’ roll** – Drawing from various African-American musical traditions, the electrifying new genre transformed popular music in the 1950s and was popular with both black and white youth.

**Roe v. Wade** – The Supreme Court used the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to extend the right to privacy to individual women and their pregnancies, concluding that abortion was a woman’s right of choice during the first two-thirds of a pregnancy—even if states could regulate abortions during the second trimester.

**Rolling Stone magazine** – The magazine, founded in 1967, represented a new niche in the consumer economy. It used the counterculture as a marketing tool and learned how to turn anti-establishment discontent into profits.

**Saturday Night Massacre** – This refers to Nixon’s dismissal of his attorney general and assistant attorney general over their refusal to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox at the president’s request. Cox had requested the Oval Office tapes, which escalated the



Watergate scandal and drove support for the president's impeachment.

**Schlafly, Phyllis** – This conservative activist against federal social welfare and gender equality made antifeminism her main mission in her Eagle Forum publication. Schlafly was influential in the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment.

**Search and destroy** – During search and destroy missions, U.S. ground troops combed through Vietnam's bush and countryside in the pursuit of Communist insurgents, often covering the same territory repeatedly. The measure of success of these missions was the body count.

**Shanghai Communiqué** – Signed at the end of Richard Nixon's groundbreaking visit to China in 1972, this document laid the groundwork for the official resumption of diplomatic relations between mainland China and the United States in 1979.

**Silent majority** – To discount antiwar protesters, President Nixon invoked this group of non-protesting Americans who, according to Nixon, supported his policies.

**Six-Day War** – In order to restore its access to the Gulf of Aqaba, Israel launched a surprise offensive against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on June 5, 1967, capturing significant territory and escalating the Palestinian refugee crisis.

**Southern strategy** – Richard Nixon pioneered new Republican political rhetoric that addressed white racial anxieties and animosities without repelling middle-class suburbanites with racially charged vocabulary. Nixon's goal in appealing to white southerners was to turn the formerly Democratic South into Republican voters.

**Sputnik** – Launched into orbit on October 4, 1957, the satellite gave the Soviet Union a lead in the space race and filled Americans with deep anxiety.

**Stagflation** – This term described the new combination of stagnation and inflation which became an economic dilemma that plagued Americans throughout the 1970s.

**Stonewall Rebellion** – After years of arrests and police harassment of gay men, patrons at a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York City, fought back against a violent raid. This 1969 "riot" marked the beginning of the gay liberation movement.

**Strategic hamlets** – Hoping to separate Communist infiltrators from the rural population in South Vietnam, U.S. troops built these fenced-in settlements for civilians, which only further alienated South Vietnam's population.

**Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** – Students formed this civil rights organization in 1960 to organize public nonviolent protests against racial discrimination. SNCC participated in the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and the Mississippi Freedom Summer.

**Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)** – Founded in 1960, this organization of idealist, democracy-minded university students captured the essence of the New Left in its Port Huron Statement from 1962. Many SDS members supported the Civil Rights Movement, and some females in SDS later joined the women's movement.

**Sunbelt** – This region, spanning Southern California through Florida, grew disproportionately after World War II thanks to military and other federal funds, low taxes, weak unions, and suburban housing.

**Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education** – This 1971 ruling of the Burger Court unanimously upheld a lower court's plan of forced busing to bring about the integration of schools.

**Tet Offensive** – North Vietnamese troops and the Viet Cong launched a powerful counteroffensive on January 30, 1968, against South Vietnam's population centers and U.S. military bases, including the U.S. embassy in Saigon.

**Thieu, Nguyen Van** – South Vietnam's president from 1967 to 1975, he was the chief Vietnamese ally of the Johnson and Nixon administrations but opposed Kissinger's separate peace talks with Hanoi.

**Third World** – As new independent nations emerged from old European colonial empires in Africa and Asia, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. competed for allies among these "third world" countries, not tied to the "first world" (the capitalist West) or the "second world" (the Soviet Union).

**Title IX** – Signed into law in 1972, this measure prohibited discrimination based on gender in any school receiving federal funding, including elementary and high schools as well as higher education. Title IX has had far-reaching effects on women's access to sports.

**Tricky Dick** – Richard Nixon earned this nickname at the beginning of his political career for his campaign tactics and redbaiting of opponents.

**The Ugly American** – This book by William Lederer and Eugene Burdick illustrated the sinister manipulations by which U.S. agents collaborated with European colonialists in the developing world.



**United Farm Workers** – Under its leader Cesar Chavez, this union’s 1965 grape pickers’ strike and boycott campaign brought national attention to farmworkers and resulted in labor contracts with the state’s grape growers.

**Unsafe at Any Speed** – Ralph Nader’s 1965 report on the American auto industry showed that car manufacturers were resistant to implementing safety technology, such as seat belts. This bestseller prompted new regulation of motor vehicles at the state and federal level.

**Vietnam moratorium** – Antiwar protesters of diverse backgrounds staged a massive nationwide protest in October 1969 with hundreds of thousands of protesters participating across the country.

**Vietnam Veterans against the War** – In January 1971, this antiwar group solicited veterans’ accounts of American war crimes in Vietnam War in a proceeding they called the Winter Soldier Investigation. Later that year, they traveled to Washington, where many of them protested the war by returning their military awards.

**Vietnamization** – President Nixon’s plan for deescalating the Vietnam War and sapping protests at home involved the gradual withdrawal of American troops and their replacement with South Vietnamese soldiers.

**Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)** – This volunteer service was similar to the Peace Corps, but volunteers worked in American communities. Part of the Great Society, it brought teachers into poor and underprivileged neighborhoods.

**Voting Rights Act of 1965** – The law banned any state or local law from racially discriminating in the election process, including the use of literacy tests and grandfather clauses. It also made particular jurisdictions subject to federal supervision if they had a verifiable record of racial discrimination in the past.

**Wallace, George** – The longtime governor of Alabama and avid segregationist and white supremacist mounted a third-party challenge in the 1968 presidential election, winning states in the Deep South but also gaining support among white workers in some northern states.

**War Powers Act** – This 1973 law required the President to inform Congress within forty-eight hours of any military

actions, and it limited the deployment of troops overseas to sixty days unless Congress provided authorization. This Act showed that, in the wake of the Vietnam War, Congress was determined to avoid another long-term undeclared war.

**Watts Riots** – Triggered by the heavy-handed arrest of an allegedly reckless African-American driver, the week-long unrest destroyed entire city blocks in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles in the summer of 1965. Thirty-four residents were killed, mostly by police or national guards.

**Westmoreland, General William** – The U.S. Commander in Vietnam oversaw the gradual escalation of American ground troop deployments to Vietnam.

**White flight** – With cheap and ample credit in suburbs, middle-class residents and businesses rapidly moved from cities to the suburbs in the postwar years and throughout the 1960s, exacerbating racial inequality as African Americans lacked access to capital in inner cities.

**White House Plumbers** – Determined to hunt down “leaks” to the press about the president’s activities, Nixon’s chief domestic policy advisor John Ehrlichman assembled this team of political operatives in 1971. The “Plumbers” became infamous for breaking into the Watergate building in 1972.

**Woodstock** – The music festival in upstate New York in August 1969 drew an unexpected crowd of nearly half a million and became synonymous with 1960s counterculture. It featured such musicians as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and the Grateful Dead.

**Yippies** – Led by the colorful Jerry Rubin, the Youth International Party combined the counterculture of the hippies with politics and humor. They organized a youth festival to coincide with the 1968 Democratic National Convention and satirized party politics with the mock nomination of a pig called “Pigasus.”

**Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)** – Established in 1960, espousing the philosophy of conservative author William F. Buckley, this youth organization drew considerable interest among conservative students with its advocacy for small government and anti-communism.



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