39

The Stormy Sixties

1960–1968

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.

JOHN F. KENNEDY, INAUGURAL 1961

Complacent and comfortable as the 1950s closed, Americans elected in 1960 a young, vigorous president who pledged "to get the country moving again." Neither the nation nor the new president had any inkling as the new decade opened just how action-packed it would be, both at home and abroad. The 1960s would bring a sexual revolution, a civil rights revolution, the emergence of a "youth culture," a devastating war in Vietnam, and the beginnings, at least, of a feminist revolution. By the end of the stormy sixties, many Americans would yearn nostalgically for the comparative calm of the fifties.

Kennedy's "New Frontier" Spirit

Hatless and topcoatless in the twenty-two-degree chill, John F. Kennedy delivered a stirring inaugural address on January 20, 1961. Tall, elegantly handsome, speaking crisply and with staccato finger jabs at the air, Kennedy personified the glamour and vitality of the new administration. The youngest president ever elected, he assembled one of the youngest cabinets, including his thirty-five-year-old brother, Robert, as attorney general. "Bobby," the president quipped, would find "some legal experience" useful when he began to practice law. The new attorney general set out, among other reforms, to recast the priorities of the FBI. The bureau deployed nearly a thousand agents on "internal security" work but targeted only a dozen against organized crime and gave virtually no attention to civil rights violations. Robert Kennedy's efforts were stoutly resisted by J. Edgar Hoover, who had served as FBI director longer than the new attorney general had been alive. Business whiz Robert S. McNamara left the presidency of the Ford Motor Company to take over the Defense Department. Along with other youthful, talented advisers, these appointees made up an inner circle of "the best and the brightest" men around the president.

From the outset Kennedy inspired high expectations, especially among the young. His challenge of a "New Frontier" quickened patriotic pulses. He brought a warm heart to the Cold War when he proposed the Peace Corps, an army of idealistic and mostly youthful volunteers to bring American skills to underdeveloped countries. He summoned citizens to service with his clarion call to "ask not what your country can do for you: ask what you can do for your country."

Himself Harvard-educated, Kennedy and his Ivy League lieutenants (heavily from Harvard) radiated confidence in their abilities. The president's personal grace and wit won him the deep affection of many of his fellow citizens. A journalist called Kennedy "the most seductive man I've ever met. He exuded a sense of vibrant life and humor that seemed naturally to bubble up out of him." In an unprecedented gesture, he invited white-maned poet Robert Frost to speak at his inaugural ceremonies. The old Yankee versifier shrewdly took stock of the situation. "You're something of Irish and I suppose something of Harvard," he told Kennedy—and advised him to be more Irish than Harvard.

Richard Goodwin (b. 1931), a young Peace Corps staffer, eloquently summed up the buoyantly optimistic mood of the early 1960s:

"For a moment, it seemed as if the entire country, the whole spinning globe, rested, malleable and receptive, in our beneficent hands."

The New Frontier at Home

Kennedy came into office with fragile Democratic majorities in Congress. Southern Democrats threatened to team up with Republicans and ax New Frontier proposals such as medical assistance for the aged and increased federal aid to education. Kennedy won a first round in his campaign for a more cooperative Congress when he forced an expansion of the all-important House Rules Committee, dominated by conservatives who could have bottled up his entire legislative program. Despite this victory, the New Frontier did not expand swiftly. Key medical and education bills remained stalled in Congress.

Another vexing problem was the economy. Kennedy had campaigned on the theme of revitalizing the economy after the recessions of the Eisenhower years. While his advisers debated the best kind of economic medicine to apply, the president tried to hold the line against crippling inflation. His

administration helped negotiate a noninflationary wage agreement in the steel industry in early 1962. The assumption was that the companies, for their part, would keep the lid on prices.

Almost immediately, steel management announced significant price increases, thereby seemingly demonstrating bad faith. The president erupted in wrath, remarking that his father had once said that "all businessmen were sons of bitches." He called the "big steel" men onto the Oval Office carpet and unleashed his Irish temper. Overawed, the steel operators backed down, while displaying "S.O.B." buttons, meaning "Sons of Business" or "Save Our Business."

The steel episode provoked fiery attacks by big business on the New Frontier, but Kennedy soon appealed to believers in free enterprise when he announced his support of a general tax-cut bill. He rejected the advice of those who wished greater government spending and instead chose to stimulate the economy by slashing taxes and putting more money directly into private hands. When he announced his policy before a big business group, one observer called it "the most Republican speech since McKinley."

For economic stimulus, as well as for military strategy and scientific prestige, Kennedy also promoted a multibillion-dollar project to land an American on the moon. When skeptics objected that the money could best be spent elsewhere, Kennedy "answered" them in a speech at Rice University in Texas: "But why, some say, the moon? . . . And they may well ask, why climb the highest mountain? Why, thirty-five years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?" Twenty-four billion dollars later, in 1969, two American astronauts triumphantly planted human footprints on the moon's dusty surface.

Rumblings in Europe

A few months after settling into the White House, the new president met Soviet premier Khrushchev at Vienna in June 1961. The tough-talking Soviet leader adopted a belligerent attitude, threatening to make a treaty with East Germany and cut off Western access to Berlin. Though visibly shaken, the president refused to be bullied.

The Soviets backed off from their most bellicose threats but suddenly began to construct the Berlin Wall in August 1961. A barbed-wire and concrete barrier, it was designed to plug the heavy population drain from East Germany to West Germany through the Berlin funnel. But to the free world, the "Wall of Shame" looked like a gigantic enclosure around a concentration camp. The Wall stood for almost three decades as an ugly scar symbolizing the post–World War II division of Europe into two hostile camps.

Kennedy meanwhile turned his attention to Western Europe, now miraculously prospering after the tonic of Marshall Plan aid and the growth of the American-encouraged Common Market, the free-trade area later called the European Union. He finally secured passage of the Trade Expansion Act in 1962, authorizing tariff cuts of up to 50 percent to promote trade with Common Market countries. This legislation led to the so-called Kennedy Round of tariff negotiations, concluded in 1967, and to a significant expansion of European-American trade.

But not all of Kennedy's ambitious designs for Europe were realized. American policymakers were dedicated to an economically and militarily united "Atlantic Community," with the United States the dominant partner. But they found their way blocked by towering, stiff-backed Charles de Gaulle, president of France. He was suspicious of American intentions in Europe and on fire to recapture the *gloire* of Napoleonic France. With a haughty "*non*," he vetoed British application for Common Market membership in 1963, fearing that the British "special relationship" with the United States would make Britain a Trojan horse for deepening American control over European affairs. He likewise dashed cold water on a U.S. proposal to develop a multinational nuclear arm within NATO. De Gaulle deemed the Americans unreliable in a crisis, so he tried to preserve French freedom of action by developing his own small atomic force ("farce," scoffed his critics). Despite the perils of nuclear proliferation or Soviet domination, de Gaulle demanded an independent Europe, free of Yankee influence.

Foreign Flare-ups and "Flexible Response"

Special problems for U.S. foreign policy emerged from the worldwide decolonization of European overseas possessions after World War II. The African

Congo received its independence from Belgium in 1960 and immediately exploded into violence. The United Nations sent in a peacekeeping force, to which Washington contributed much money but no manpower. The United States was picking up the tab for U.N. operations, while the organization itself was becoming dominated by the numerous nascent nations emerging in once-colonial Asia and Africa, which were often critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Sparsely populated Laos, freed of its French colonial overlords in 1954, was festering dangerously by the time Kennedy came into office. The Eisenhower administration had drenched this jungle kingdom with dollars but failed to cleanse the country of an aggressive communist element. A red Laos, many observers feared, would be a river on which the influence of Communist China would flood into all of Southeast Asia.

As the Laotian civil war raged, Kennedy's military advisers seriously considered sending in American troops. But the president found that he had insufficient forces to put out the fire in Asia and still honor his commitments in Europe. Kennedy thus sought a diplomatic escape hatch in the fourteen-power Geneva conference, which imposed a shaky peace on Laos in 1962.

These "brushfire wars" intensified the pressure for a shift away from Secretary Dulles's dubious doctrine of "massive retaliation." Kennedy felt hamstrung by the knowledge that in a crisis, he had the Devil's choice between humiliation and nuclear incineration. With Defense Secretary McNamara, he pushed the strategy of "flexible response"—that is, developing an array of military "options" that could be precisely matched to the gravity of the crisis at hand. To this end Kennedy increased spending on conventional military forces and bolstered the Special Forces (Green Berets). They were an elite antiguerrilla outfit trained to survive on snake meat and to kill with scientific finesse.

Stepping into the Vietnam Quagmire

The doctrine of "flexible response" seemed sane enough, but it contained lethal logic. It potentially lowered the level at which diplomacy would give way to shooting. It also provided a mechanism for a progressive, and possibly endless, stepping-up of the use of force. Vietnam soon presented grisly proof of these pitfalls.

The corrupt, right-wing Diem government in Saigon, despite a deluge of American dollars, had ruled shakily since the partition of Vietnam in 1954 (see p. 900). Anti-Diem agitators noisily threatened to topple the pro-American government from power. In a fateful decision late in 1961, Kennedy ordered a sharp increase in the number of "military advisers" (U.S. troops) in South Vietnam.

American forces had allegedly entered Vietnam to foster political stability—to help protect Diem from the communists long enough to allow him to enact basic social reforms favored by the Americans. But the Kennedy administration eventually despaired of the reactionary Diem and encouraged a successful coup against him in November 1963. Ironically, the United States thus contributed to a long process of political disintegration that its original policy had meant to prevent. Kennedy still told the South Vietnamese that it was "their war," but he had made dangerously deep political commit-

Vietnam and Southeast Asia, 1954–1975

ments. By the time of his death, he had ordered more than fifteen thousand American men into the far-off Asian slaughterpen. A graceful pullout was becoming increasingly difficult.

Cuban Confrontations

Although the United States regarded Latin America as its backyard, its southern neighbors feared and resented the powerful Colossus of the North. In 1961 Kennedy extended the hand of friendship with the Alliance for Progress *(Alianza para el Progreso)*, hailed as a Marshall Plan for Latin America. A primary goal was to help the Good Neighbors close the gap between the callous rich and the wretched poor, and thus quiet communist agitation. But results were disappointing; there was little alliance and even less progress. American handouts had little positive impact on Latin America's immense social problems.

President Kennedy also struck below the border with the mailed fist. He had inherited from the Eisenhower administration a CIA-backed scheme to topple Fidel Castro from power by invading Cuba with anticommunist exiles. Trained and armed by Americans and supported by American air power, the invaders would trigger a popular uprising in Cuba and sweep to victory—or so the planners predicted.

On April 17, 1961, some twelve hundred exiles landed at Cuba's Bay of Pigs. Kennedy had decided from the outset against *direct* intervention, and the ancient aircraft of the anti-Castroites were no match

for Castro's air force. In addition, no popular uprising greeted the invaders. With the invasion bogged down at the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy stood fast in his decision to keep hands off, and the bullet-riddled band of anti-Castroites surrendered. Most of the invaders rotted for two years in Cuban jails but were eventually "ransomed" for some $62 million worth of American pharmaceutical drugs and other humanitarian supplies. President Kennedy assumed full responsibility for the failure, remarking that "victory has a hundred fathers, and defeat is an orphan."

The Bay of Pigs blunder, along with continuing American covert efforts to assassinate Castro and overthrow his government, naturally pushed the Cuban leader even further into the Soviet embrace. Wily Chairman Khrushchev lost little time in taking full advantage of his Cuban comrade's position just ninety miles off Florida's coast. In October 1962 the aerial photographs of American spy planes revealed that the Soviets were secretly and speedily installing nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. The Soviets evidently intended to use these devastating weapons to shield Castro and to blackmail the United States into backing down in Berlin and other trouble spots.

Kennedy and Khrushchev now began a nerve-racking game of "nuclear chicken." The president flatly rejected air force proposals for a "surgical" bombing strike against the missile-launching sites. Instead, on October 22, 1962, he ordered a naval "quarantine" of Cuba and demanded immediate removal of the threatening weaponry. He also served notice on Khrushchev that any attack on the United States from Cuba would be regarded as coming from the Soviet Union and would trigger nuclear retaliation against the Russian heartland.

For an anxious week, Americans waited while Soviet ships approached the patrol line established by the U.S. Navy off the island of Cuba. Seizing or sinking a Soviet vessel on the high seas would unquestionably be regarded by the Kremlin as an act of war. The world teetered breathlessly on the brink of global atomization. Only in 1991 did the full dimensions of this nuclear peril become known, when the Russians revealed that their ground forces in Cuba already had operational nuclear weapons at their disposal and were authorized to launch them if attacked.

In this tense eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, Khrushchev finally flinched. On October 28 he agreed to a partially face-saving compromise, by which he would pull the missiles out of Cuba. The United States in return agreed to end the quarantine and not invade the island. The American government also quietly signaled that it would remove from Turkey some of its own missiles targeted on the Soviet Union.

Fallout from the Cuban missile crisis was considerable. A disgraced Khrushchev was ultimately hounded out of the Kremlin and became an "unper-

son." Hard-liners in Moscow, vowing never again to be humiliated in a nuclear face-off, launched an enormous program of military expansion. The Soviet buildup reached a crescendo in the next decade, stimulating, in turn, a vast American effort to "catch up with the Russians." The Democrats did better than expected in the midterm elections of November 1962—allegedly because the Republicans were "Cubanized." Kennedy, apparently sobered by the appalling risks he had just run, pushed harder for a nuclear test-ban treaty with the Soviet Union. After prolonged negotiations in Moscow, a pact prohibiting trial nuclear explosions in the atmosphere was signed in late 1963. Another barometer indicating a thaw in the Cold War was the installation (August 1963) of a Moscow-Washington "hot line," permitting immediate teletype communication in case of crisis.

Most significant was Kennedy's speech at American University, Washington, D.C., in June 1963. The president urged Americans to abandon a view of the Soviet Union as a Devil-ridden land filled with fanatics and instead to deal with the world "as it is, not as it might have been had the history of the last eighteen years been different." Kennedy thus tried to lay the foundations for a realistic policy of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union. Here were the modest origins of the policy that later came to be known as "détente" (French for "relaxation").

The Struggle for Civil Rights

Kennedy had campaigned with a strong appeal to black voters, but he proceeded gingerly to redeem his promises. Although he had pledged to eliminate racial discrimination in housing "with a stroke of the pen," it took him nearly two years to find the right pen. Civil rights groups meanwhile sent thousands of pens to the White House in an "Ink for Jack" protest against the president's slowness.

Political concerns stayed the president's hand on civil rights. Elected by a wafer-thin margin, and with shaky control over Congress, Kennedy needed the support of southern legislators to pass his economic and social legislation, especially his medical and educational bills. He believed, perhaps justifiably, that those measures would eventually benefit black Americans at least as much as specific legislation on civil rights. Bold moves for racial justice would have to wait.

But events soon scrambled these careful calculations. Following the wave of sit-ins that surged across the South in 1960, groups of Freedom Riders fanned out to end segregation in facilities serving interstate bus passengers. A white mob torched a Freedom Ride bus near Anniston, Alabama, in May 1961, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy's

personal representative was beaten unconscious in another anti–Freedom Ride riot in Montgomery. When southern officials proved unwilling or unable to stem the violence, Washington dispatched federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders.

Reluctantly but fatefully, the Kennedy administration had now joined hands with the civil rights movement. Because of that partnership, the Kennedys proved ultra-wary about the political associates of Martin Luther King, Jr. Fearful of embarrassing revelations that some of King's advisers had communist affiliations, Robert Kennedy ordered FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to wiretap King's phone in late 1963. But for the most part, the relationship between King and the Kennedys was a fruitful one. Encouraged by Robert Kennedy, and with financial backing from Kennedy-prodded private foundations, SNCC and other civil rights groups inaugurated a Voter Education Project to register the South's historically disfranchised blacks. Because of his support for civil rights, President Kennedy told a group of black leaders in 1963, "I may lose the next election . . . I don't care."

Integrating southern universities threatened to provoke wholesale slaughter. Some desegregated painlessly, but the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss") became a volcano. A twenty-nine-year-old air force veteran, James Meredith, encountered violent opposition when he attempted to register in October 1962. In the end President Kennedy was forced to send in 400 federal marshals and 3,000 troops to enroll Meredith in his first class—in colonial American history. He ultimately graduated, with a sheepskin that cost the lives of 2 men, scores of injuries, and some 4 million taxpayer dollars.

In his civil rights address of June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) said,

"If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public; if he cannot send his children to the best public school available; if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him; if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?"

In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., launched a campaign against discrimination in Birmingham, Alabama, the most segregated big city in America. Although blacks constituted nearly half of the city's population, they made up fewer than 15 percent of the city's voters. Previous attempts to crack the city's rigid racial barriers had produced more than fifty cross burnings and eighteen bomb

EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

Conflicting Press Accounts of the "March on Washington," 1963 The day after the March on Washington of August 28, 1963 (see p. 926), newspapers all over the country carried reports of this historic assembly of more than 200,000 people to demand civil rights and equal job opportunities for African-Americans. Although the basic outlines of the story were the same in most papers, ancillary articles, photographs, and editorials revealed deep-seated biases in coverage. Shown here are continuations from the front page stories in *The New York Times*, a bastion of northeastern liberalism (below), and *The Atlanta Constitution*, a major southern newspaper (right). While the *Times* called the march "orderly" in its headline, the *Constitution*'s story in its right columns highlighted the potential for violence and the precautions taken by police. The article read: "There was such a force of uniformed officers on hand to cope with any possible trouble that one senator was prompted to comment: 'It almost looks like we had a military coup d'état during the night.'" In addition to stressing the march's potential for disruption, the *Constitution* ran an advertisement right below the March on Washington story for a National Ku Klux Klan Rally two days hence, featuring prominent speakers and a cross burning. This comparison of newspaper coverage of a controversial event serves as a reminder that press reporting must always be scrutinized for biases when it is used as historical evidence. What other differences in coverage separated these two newspapers? What factors contribute to press biases?

attacks since 1957. "Some of the people sitting here will not come back alive from this campaign," King advised his organizers. Events soon confirmed this grim prediction of violence. Watching developments on television screens, a horrified world saw peaceful civil rights marchers repeatedly repelled by police with attack dogs and electric cattle prods. Most fearsome of all were the high-pressure water hoses directed at the civil rights demonstrators. They delivered water with enough force to knock bricks loose from buildings or strip bark from trees at a distance of one hundred feet. Water from the hoses bowled little children down the street like tumbleweed.

Jolted by these vicious confrontations, President Kennedy delivered a memorable televised speech to the nation on June 11, 1963. In contrast to Eisenhower's cool aloofness from the racial question, Kennedy called the situation a "moral issue" and committed his personal and presidential prestige to finding a solution. Drawing on the same spiritual traditions as Martin Luther King, Jr., Kennedy declared that the principle at stake "is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution." He called for new civil rights legislation to protect black citizens. In August King led 200,000 black and white demonstrators on a peaceful "March on Washington" in support of the proposed legislation. In an electrifying speech from the Lincoln Memorial, King declared, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Still the violence continued. On the very night of Kennedy's stirring television address, a white gunman shot down Medgar Evers, a black Mississippi civil rights worker. In September 1963 an explosion blasted a Baptist church in Birmingham, killing four black girls who had just finished their lesson called "The Love That Forgives." By the time of Kennedy's death, his civil rights bill was making little headway, and frustrated blacks were growing increasingly impatient.

The Killing of Kennedy

Violence haunted America in the mid-1960s, and it stalked onto center stage on November 22, 1963. While riding in an open limousine in downtown Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was shot in the brain by a concealed rifleman and died within seconds. As a stunned nation grieved, the tragedy grew still more unbelievable. The alleged assassin, a furtive figure named Lee Harvey Oswald, was himself shot to death in front of television cameras by a self-appointed avenger, Jack Ruby. So bizarre were the events surrounding the two murders that even

an elaborate official investigation conducted by Chief Justice Warren could not quiet all doubts and theories about what had really happened.

Vice President Johnson was promptly sworn in as president on a waiting airplane and flown back to Washington with Kennedy's body. Although he mistrusted "the Harvards," Johnson retained most of the bright Kennedy team. The new president managed a dignified and efficient transition, pledging continuity with his slain predecessor's policies.

For several days the nation was steeped in sorrow. Not until then did many Americans realize how fully their young, vibrant president and his captivating wife had cast a spell over them. Chopped down in his prime after only slightly more than a thousand days in the White House, Kennedy was acclaimed more for the ideals he had enunciated and the spirit he had kindled than for the concrete goals he had achieved. He had laid one myth to rest forever—that a Catholic could not be trusted with the presidency of the United States.

In later years revelations about Kennedy's womanizing and allegations about his involvement with organized crime figures tarnished his reputation. But despite those accusations, his vigor, charisma, and idealism made him an inspirational figure for the generation of Americans who came of age in the 1960s—including Bill Clinton, who as a boy had briefly met President Kennedy and would himself be elected president in 1992.

The LBJ Brand on the Presidency

The torch passed to craggy-faced Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Texan who towered six feet three inches. The new president hailed from the populist hill country of west Texas, whose people had first sent him to Washington as a twenty-nine-year-old congressman in 1937. Franklin D. Roosevelt was his political "Daddy," Johnson claimed, and he had supported New Deal measures down the line. But when LBJ lost a Senate race in 1941, he learned the sobering lesson that liberal political beliefs did not necessarily win elections in Texas. He trimmed his sails to the right and squeezed himself into a Senate seat in 1948 with a questionable eighty-seven-vote margin—hence the ironic nickname "Landslide Lyndon."

Entrenched in the Senate, Johnson developed into a masterful wheeler-dealer. He became the Democratic majority leader in 1954, wielding power second only to that of Eisenhower in the White House. He could move mountains or checkmate opponents as the occasion demanded, using what came to be known as the "Johnson treatment"—a flashing display of backslapping, flesh-pressing, and arm-twisting that overbore friend and foe alike. His ego and vanity were legendary. On a visit to the Pope, Johnson was presented with a precious fourteenth-century painting from the Vatican art collection; in return, LBJ gave the Pope a bust—of LBJ!

As president, Johnson quickly shed the conservative coloration of his Senate years to reveal the latent liberal underneath. "No memorial oration or eulogy," Johnson declared to Congress, "could more

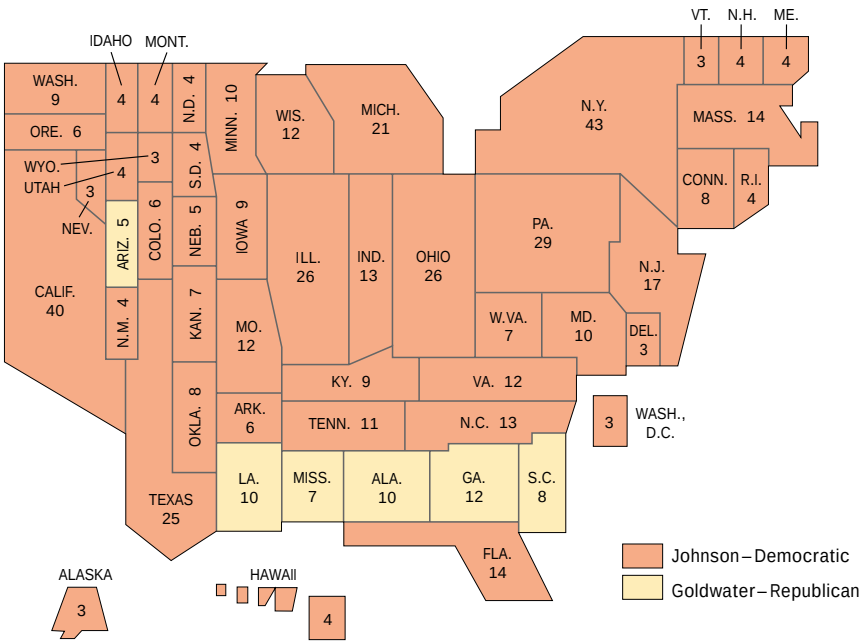
eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought so long." After a lengthy conservative filibuster, Congress at last passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. The act banned racial discrimination in most private facilities open to the public, including theaters, hospitals, and restaurants. It strengthened the federal government's power to end segregation in schools and other public places. It created the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to eliminate discrimination in hiring. When conservatives tried to derail the legislation by adding a prohibition on *sexual*, as well as racial, discrimination, the tactic backfired. The bill's opponents cynically calculated that liberals would not be able to support a bill that threatened to wipe out laws that singled out women for special protection because of their sex. But the act's Title VII passed with the sexual clause intact. It soon proved to be a powerful instrument of federally enforced gender equality, as well as racial equality. Johnson struck another blow for women and minorities in 1965 when he issued an executive order requiring all federal contractors to take "affirmative action" against discrimination.

Johnson also rammed Kennedy's stalled tax bill through Congress and added proposals of his own for a billion-dollar "War on Poverty." Johnson voiced special concern for Appalachia, where the sickness of the soft-coal industry had left tens of thousands of mountain folk on the human slag heap.

Johnson dubbed his domestic program the "Great Society"—a sweeping set of New Dealish economic and welfare measures aimed at transforming the American way of life. Public support for LBJ's antipoverty war was aroused by Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962), which revealed that in affluent America 20 percent of the population—and over 40 percent of the black population—suffered in poverty.

Johnson Battles Goldwater in 1964

Johnson's nomination by the Democrats in 1964 was a foregone conclusion; he was chosen by acclamation in Atlantic City as his birthday present. Thanks to the tall Texan, the Democrats stood foursquare on their most liberal platform since Truman's Fair Deal days. The Republicans, convening in San Francisco's Cow Palace, nominated box-jawed Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, a bronzed and bespectacled champion of rock-ribbed conservatism. The



Presidential Election of 1964
States are distorted according to the number of electoral votes indicated on each state. In New Orleans, toward the end of the campaign, a gutsy Johnson displayed his commitment to civil rights when he told a story about an old senator who once said of his Deep South constituents, "I would like to go back down there and make them just one more Democratic speech. . . . The poor old State, they haven't heard a Democratic speech in 30 years. All they hear at election time is Negro, Negro, Negro!" Johnson's open voicing of sentiments like this contributed heavily to his losses in the traditionally Democratic "solid South."

American stage was thus set for a historic clash of political principles.

Goldwater's forces had galloped out of the Southwest to ride roughshod over the moderate Republican "eastern establishment." Insisting that the GOP offer "a choice not an echo," Goldwater attacked the federal income tax, the Social Security system, the Tennessee Valley Authority, civil rights legislation, the nuclear test-ban treaty, and, most loudly, the Great Society. His fiercely dedicated followers proclaimed, "In Your Heart You Know He's Right," which prompted the Democratic response, "In Your Guts You Know He's Nuts." Goldwater warmed right-wing hearts when he announced that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And . . . moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."

Democrats gleefully exploited the image of Goldwater as a trigger-happy cowboy who would "Barry us" in the debris of World War III. Johnson cultivated the contrasting image of a resolute statesman by seizing upon the Tonkin Gulf episode early in August 1964. Unbeknownst to the American public or Congress, U.S. Navy ships had been cooperating with South Vietnamese gunboats in provocative raids along the coast of North Vietnam. Two of these American destroyers were allegedly fired upon by the North Vietnamese on August 2 and 4, although exactly what happened still remains unclear. Later investigations strongly suggested that the North Vietnamese fired in self-defense on August 2 and that the "attack "of August 4 never happened. Johnson later reportedly wisecracked, "For all I know, the Navy was shooting at whales out there."

Johnson nevertheless promptly called the attack "unprovoked" and moved swiftly to make political hay out of this episode. He ordered a "limited" retaliatory air raid against the North Vietnamese bases, loudly proclaiming that he sought "no wider war"—thus implying that the truculent Goldwater did. Johnson also used the incident to spur congressional passage of the all-purpose Tonkin Gulf Resolution. With only two dissenting votes in both houses, the lawmakers virtually abdicated their war-declaring powers and handed the president a blank check to use further force in Southeast Asia. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Johnson boasted, was "like grandma's nightshirt—it covered everything."

The towering Texan rode to a spectacular victory in November 1964. The voters were herded into Johnson's column by fondness for the Kennedy legacy, faith in Great Society promises, and fear of Goldwater. A stampede of 43,129,566 Johnson votes trampled the Republican ticket with its 27,178,188 supporters. The tally in the Electoral College was 486 to 52. Goldwater carried only his native Arizona and five other states—all of them, significantly, in the racially restless South. This cracking of the once solidly Democratic South afforded the Republicans about the only faint light in an otherwise bleak political picture. Johnson's record-breaking 61 percent of the popular vote swept lopsided Democratic majorities into both houses of Congress.

The Great Society Congress

Johnson's huge victory temporarily smashed the conservative congressional coalition of southern Democrats and northern Republicans. A wide-open legislative road stretched before the Great Society programs, as the president skillfully ringmastered his two-to-one Democratic majorities. Congress poured out a flood of legislation, comparable only to the output of the New Dealers in the Hundred Days Congress of 1933. Johnson, confident that a growing economy gave him ample fiscal and political room for maneuver, delivered at last on long-deferred Democratic promises of social reform.

Escalating the War on Poverty, Congress doubled the appropriation of the Office of Economic Opportunity to $2 billion and granted more than $1 billion to redevelop the gutted hills and hollows of Appalachia. A tireless Johnson also prodded the Congress into creating two new cabinet offices: the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to which he named the first black cabinet secretary in the nation's history, respected economist Robert C. Weaver. Other noteworthy laws established the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, designed to lift the level of American cultural life.

Even more impressive were the Big Four legislative achievements that crowned LBJ's Great Society program: aid to education, medical care for the elderly and indigent, immigration reform, and a new voting rights bill.

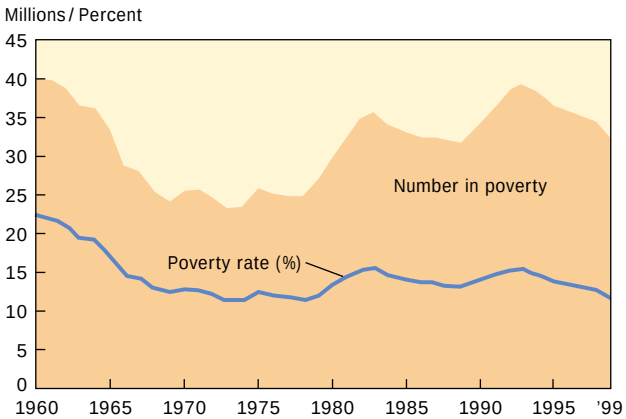
Johnson neatly avoided the thorny question of separation of church and state by channeling educational aid to students, not schools, thus allowing funds to flow to hard-pressed parochial institutions.

(Catholic John F. Kennedy had not dared to touch this prickly issue.) With a keen eye for the dramatic, LBJ signed the education bill in the humble one-room Texas schoolhouse he had attended as a boy.

Medicare for the elderly, accompanied by Medicaid for the poor, became a reality in 1965. Although they were bitter pills for the American Medical Association to swallow, the new programs were welcomed by millions of older Americans who had no health insurance (half of those over the age of sixty-five in 1965) and by the poor who could not afford proper medical treatment. Like the New Deal's Social Security program, Medicare and Medicaid created "entitlements." That is, they conferred rights on certain categories of Americans virtually in perpetuity, without the need for repeated congressional approval. These programs were part of a spreading "rights revolution" that materially improved the lives of millions of Americans—but also eventually undermined the federal government's financial health.

Immigration reform was the third of Johnson's Big Four feats. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished at last the "national-origins" quota system that had been in place since 1921 (see p. 731). The act also doubled (to 290,000) the number of immigrants allowed to enter annually, while for the first time setting limits on immigrants from the Western Hemisphere (120,000). The new law further provided for the admission of close relatives of United States citizens, outside those numerical limits. To the surprise of many of the act's architects, more than 100,000 persons per year took advantage of its "family unification" provisions in the decades after 1965, and the immigrant stream swelled beyond expectations. Even more surprising to the act's sponsors, the sources of immigration soon shifted heavily from Europe to Latin America and Asia, dramatically changing the racial and ethnic composition of the American population.

Great Society programs came in for rancorous political attack in later years. Conservatives charged that poverty could not be papered over with greenbacks and that the billions spent for "social engineering" had simply been flushed down the waste pipe. Yet the poverty rate declined measurably in the ensuing decade. Medicare made especially dramatic reductions in the incidence of poverty among America's elderly. Other antipoverty programs, among them Project Head Start, sharply improved the educational performance of underprivileged youth. Infant mortality rates also fell in minority communities as general health conditions improved. Lyndon Johnson was not fully victorious in the war against poverty, and he doubtless fought some costly and futile campaigns, but he did win several noteworthy battles.



Poverty in the United States, 1960–1999
The poverty rate for 1999 (11.8%) was the lowest since 1979. These figures refer to the number of people who live in families whose total income is lower than a set "poverty threshold," which is tied to the Consumer Price Index, so it varies with inflation. The "poverty rate" means the percentage of all Americans living below that threshold. (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.)

Battling for Black Rights

With the last of his Big Four reforms, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Johnson made heartening headway against one of the most persistent American evils, racial discrimination. In Johnson's native South, the walls of segregation were crumbling, but not fast enough for long-suffering African-Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave the federal government more muscle to enforce school-desegregation orders and to prohibit racial discrimination in all kinds of public accommodations and employment. But the problem of voting rights remained. In Mississippi, which had the largest black minority of any state, only about 5 percent of eligible blacks were registered to vote. The lopsided pattern was similar throughout the South. Ballot-denying devices like the poll tax, literacy tests, and barefaced intimidation still barred black people from the political process. Mississippi law required the names of prospective black registrants to be published for two weeks in local newspapers—a device that virtually guaranteed economic reprisals, or worse.

Beginning in 1964, opening up the polling booths became the chief goal of the black movement in the South. The Twenty-fourth Amendment, ratified in January 1964, abolished the poll tax in federal elections. (See the Appendix.) Blacks joined hands with white civil rights workers—many of them student volunteers from the North—in a massive voter-registration drive in Mississippi during the "Freedom Summer" of 1964. Singing "We Shall Overcome," they zealously set out to soothe generations of white anxieties and black fears.

But events soon blighted bright hopes. In late June 1964, one black and two white civil rights workers disappeared in Mississippi. Their badly beaten bodies were later found buried beneath an earthen dam. FBI investigators eventually arrested twenty-one white Mississippians, including the local sheriff, in connection with the killings. But white juries refused to convict whites for these murders. In August an integrated "Mississippi Freedom Democratic party" delegation was denied its seat at the national Democratic convention. Only a handful of black Mississippians had succeeded in registering to vote.

Early in 1965 Martin Luther King, Jr., resumed the voter-registration campaign in Selma, Alabama, where blacks made up 50 percent of the population but only 1 percent of the voters. State troopers with tear gas and whips assaulted King's demonstrators as they marched peacefully to the state capital at Montgomery. A Boston Unitarian minister was killed, and a few days later a white Detroit woman was shotgunned to death by Klansmen on the highway near Selma.

As the nation recoiled in horror before these violent scenes, President Johnson, speaking in soft southern accents, delivered a compelling address on television. What happened in Selma, he insisted, concerned all Americans, "who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice." Then, in a stirring adaptation of the anthem of the civil rights movement, the president concluded, "And we shall overcome." Following words with deeds, Johnson speedily shepherded through Congress the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, signed into law on August 6. It outlawed literacy tests and sent federal voter registrars into several southern states.

The passage of the Voting Rights Act, exactly one hundred years after the conclusion of the Civil War, climaxed a century of awful abuse and robust resurgence for African-Americans in the South. "Give us the ballot," said Martin Luther King, Jr., "and the South will never be the same again." He was right. The act did not end discrimination and

oppression overnight, but it placed an awesome lever for change in blacks' hands. Black southerners now had power and began to wield it without fear of reprisals. White southerners began to court black votes and business as never before. In the following decade, for the first time since emancipation, African-Americans began to migrate *into* the South.

Black Power

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked the end of an era in the history of the civil rights movement—the era of nonviolent demonstrations, focused on the South, led by peaceful moderates like Martin Luther King, Jr., and aimed at integrating blacks into American society. As if to symbolize the turn of events, just five days after President Johnson signed the landmark voting law, a bloody riot erupted in Watts, a black ghetto in Los Angeles. Blacks enraged by police brutality burned and looted their own neighborhoods for nearly a week. When the smoke finally cleared over the Los Angeles basin, thirty-one blacks and three whites lay dead, more than a thousand people had been injured, and hundreds of buildings stood charred and gutted. The Watts explosion heralded a new phase of the black struggle—increasingly marked by militant confrontation, focusing on northern and western cities, led by radical and sometimes violent spokespersons, and often aiming not at interracial cooperation but at black separatism.

The pious Christian moderation of Martin Luther King, Jr., came under heavy fire from this second wave of younger black leaders, who privately mocked the dignified Dr. King as "de Lawd." Deepening division among black leaders was highlighted by the career of Malcolm X. Born Malcolm Little, he was at first inspired by the militant black nationalists in the Nation of Islam. Like the Nation's founder, Elijah Muhammed (born Elijah Poole), Malcolm changed his surname to advertise his lost African identity in white America. A brilliant and charismatic preacher, Malcolm X trumpeted black separatism and inveighed against the "blue-eyed white devils." Eventually Malcolm distanced himself from Elijah Muhammed's separatist preachings and moved toward mainstream Islam. (By the 1990s Islam was among America's fastest-growing religions and counted some 2 million African-American converts—or "reverts" as Muslims described it—in its ranks.) Malcolm changed his name yet again, to El Haj Malik El-Shabazz, and began to preach a more conciliatory message. But in early 1965, he was cut down by rival Nation of Islam gunmen while speaking to a large crowd in New York City.

With frightening frequency, violence or the threat of violence raised its head in the black community. The Black Panther party openly brandished weapons in the streets of Oakland, California. The following year Trinidad-born Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick"), urged the abandonment of peaceful demonstrations and instead promoted "Black Power."

The very phrase "Black Power" unsettled many whites, and their fears increased when Carmichael was quoted as gloating that Black Power "will smash

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) and Malcolm X (1925–1965) not only differed in the goals they held out to their fellow African-Americans—King urging racial integration and Malcolm X black separatism—but also in the means they advocated to achieve them. In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech during the interracial March on Washington on August 28, 1963, King proclaimed to a quarter of a million people assembled at the Lincoln Memorial,

"In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. . . . We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force."

About three months later, Malcolm X angrily rejected King's "peaceful, turn-the-other-cheek revolution":

"Revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way. And you, sitting around here like a knot on the wall, saying, 'I'm going to love these folks no matter how much they hate me.' . . . Whoever heard of a revolution where they lock arms, . . . singing 'We shall overcome?' You don't do that in a revolution. You don't do any singing, you're too busy swinging."

everything Western civilization has created." Some advocates of Black Power insisted that they simply intended the slogan to describe a broad-front effort to exercise the political and economic rights gained by the civil rights movement and to speed the integration of American society. But other African-Americans, recollecting previous black nationalist movements like that of Marcus Garvey earlier in the century (see p. 748), breathed a vibrant separatist meaning into the concept of Black Power. They emphasized African-American distinctiveness, promoted "Afro" hairstyles and dress, shed their "white" names for new African identities, and demanded black studies programs in schools and universities.

Ironically, just as the civil rights movement had achieved its greatest legal and political triumphs, more city-shaking riots erupted in the black ghettoes of several American cities. A bloody outburst in Newark, New Jersey, in the summer of 1967, took twenty-five lives. Federal troops restored order in Detroit, Michigan, after forty-three people died in the streets. As in Los Angeles, black rioters torched their own neighborhoods, attacking police officers and even firefighters, who had to battle both flames and mobs howling, "Burn, baby, burn."

These riotous outbursts angered many white Americans, who threatened to retaliate with their own "backlash" against ghetto arsonists and killers. Inner-city anarchy baffled many northerners, who had considered racial problems a purely "southern" question. But black concerns had moved north—as had nearly half the nation's black people. In the North the Black Power movement now focused less on civil rights and more on economic demands.

Black unemployment, for example, was nearly double that for whites. These oppressive new problems seemed even less likely to be solved peaceably than the struggle for voting rights in the South.

Despair deepened when the magnetic and moderate voice of Martin Luther King, Jr., was forever silenced by a sniper's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968. A martyr for justice, he had bled and died against the peculiarly American thorn of race. The killing of King cruelly robbed the American people of one of the most inspirational leaders in their history—at a time when they could least afford to lose him. This outrage triggered a nationwide orgy of ghetto-gutting and violence that cost over forty lives.

Rioters noisily made news, but thousands of other blacks quietly made history. Their voter registration in the South shot upward, and by the late 1960s several hundred blacks held elected office in the Old South. Cleveland, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana, elected black mayors. By 1972 nearly half of southern black children sat in integrated classrooms. Actually, more schools in the South were integrated than in the North. About a third of black families had risen economically into the ranks of the middle class—though an equal proportion remained below the "poverty line." King left a shining legacy of racial progress, but he was cut down when the job was far from completed.

Combating Communism in Two Hemispheres

Violence at home eclipsed Johnson's legislative triumphs, while foreign flare-ups threatened his political life. Discontented Dominicans rose in revolt against their military government in April 1965. Johnson speedily announced that the Dominican Republic was the target of a Castrolike coup by "Communist conspirators," and he dispatched American troops, ultimately some 25,000, to restore order. But the evidence of a communist takeover was fragmentary at best. Johnson was widely condemned, at home and in Latin America, for his temporary reversion to the officially abandoned "gunboat diplomacy." Critics charged that the two-fisted Texan was far too eager to back right-wing regimes with rifle-toting troops.

At about the same time, Johnson was floundering deeper into the monsoon mud of Vietnam. Viet Cong guerrillas attacked an American air base at Pleiku, South Vietnam, in February 1965. The president immediately ordered retaliatory bombing raids against military installations in North Vietnam and for the first time ordered attacking U.S. troops to land. By the middle of March 1965, the Americans had "Operation Rolling Thunder" in full swing—regular full-scale bombing attacks against North Viet-

nam. Before 1965 ended, some 184,000 American troops were involved, most of them slogging through the jungles and rice paddies of South Vietnam searching for guerrillas clad in black pajamas.

Johnson had now taken the first fateful steps down a slippery path. He and his advisers believed that a fine-tuned, step-by-step "escalation" of American force would drive the enemy to defeat with a minimum loss of life on both sides. But the president reckoned without due knowledge of the toughness, resiliency, and dedication of the Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam and their North Vietnamese allies. Aerial bombardment actually strengthened the communists' will to resist. The enemy matched every increase in American firepower with more men and more wiliness in the art of guerrilla warfare.

The South Vietnamese themselves were meanwhile becoming spectators in their own war, as the fighting became increasingly Americanized. Corrupt and collapsible governments succeeded each other in Saigon with bewildering rapidity. Yet American officials continued to talk of defending a faithful democratic ally. Washington spokespeople also defended America's action as a test of Uncle Sam's "commitment" and of the reliability of his numerous treaty pledges to resist communist encroachment. If the United States were to cut and run from Vietnam, claimed prowar "hawks," other nations would doubt America's word and crumble under communist pressure (the so-called domino theory), which would ostensibly drive America's first line of defense back to Waikiki Beach, in Hawaii, or even to the coast of California. Persuaded by such panicky thinking, Johnson steadily raised the military stakes in Vietnam. By 1968 he had poured more than half a million troops into Southeast Asia, and the annual bill for the war was exceeding $30 billion. Yet the end was nowhere in sight.

Vietnam Vexations

America could not defeat the enemy in Vietnam, but it seemed to be defeating itself. World opinion grew increasingly hostile; the blasting of an underdeveloped country by a mighty superpower struck many critics as obscene. Several nations expelled American Peace Corps volunteers. Haughty Charles de Gaulle, ever suspicious of American intentions, ordered NATO off French soil in 1966.

Overcommitment in Southeast Asia also tied America's hands elsewhere. Capitalizing on American distractions in Vietnam, the Soviet Union expanded its influence in the Mediterranean area, especially in Egypt. Tiny Israel stunned the Soviet-backed Egyptians in a devastating Six-Day War in June 1967. When the smoke had cleared, Israel occupied new territories in the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank of the Jordan River, including Jerusalem (see the map on p. 983). Although the Israelis eventually withdrew from the Sinai, they refused to relinquish the other areas and even introduced Jewish settlers into the heavily Arab district of the West Bank. The Arab Palestinians already living in the West Bank and their Arab allies elsewhere complained loudly about these Israeli policies, but to no avail. The Middle East was becoming an ever more dangerously packed powder keg that the war-plagued United States was powerless to defuse.

Domestic discontent festered as the Vietnamese entanglement dragged on. Antiwar demonstrations had begun on a small scale with campus "teach-ins" in 1965, and gradually these protests mounted to tidal-wave proportions. As the long arm of the military draft dragged more and more young men off to the Southeast Asian slaughterpen, resistance stiffened. Thousands of draft registrants fled to Canada; others publicly burned their draft cards. Hundreds of thousands of marchers filled the streets of New York, San Francisco, and other cities, chanting, "Hell no, we won't go" and "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" Countless citizens felt the pinch of war-spawned inflation. Many Americans also felt pangs of conscience at the spectacle of their countrymen burning peasant huts and blistering civilians with ghastly napalm.

Opposition in Congress to the Vietnam involvement centered in the influential Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, headed by a former Rhodes scholar, Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas. A constant thorn in the side of the president, he staged a series of widely viewed televised hearings in 1966 and 1967, during which prominent personages aired their views, largely antiwar. Gradually the public came to feel that it had been deceived about the causes and "winnability" of the war. A yawning "credibility gap" opened between the government and the people. New flocks of antiwar "doves" were hatching daily.

Even within the administration, doubts were deepening about the wisdom of the war in Vietnam.

When Defense Secretary McNamara expressed increasing discomfiture at the course of events, he was quietly eased out of the cabinet. (Years later McNamara wrote that "we were wrong, terribly wrong," about Vietnam.) President Johnson did announce "bombing halts" in early 1966 and early 1967, supposedly to lure the enemy to the peace table. But Washington did not pursue its "peace offensive" with much energy, and the other side did not respond with any encouragement. Both sides used the bombing pauses to funnel more troops into South Vietnam.

By early 1968 the brutal and futile struggle had become the longest and most unpopular foreign war in the nation's history. The government had failed utterly to explain to the people what was supposed to be at stake in Vietnam. Many critics wondered if any objective could be worth the vast price, in blood and treasure, that America was paying. Casualties, killed and wounded, already exceeded 100,000. More bombs had been dropped on Vietnam than on all enemy territory in World War II.

The war was also ripping apart the fabric of American society and even threatening to shred the Constitution. In 1967 President Johnson ordered the CIA, in clear violation of its charter as a *foreign* intelligence agency, to spy on domestic antiwar activists. He also encouraged the FBI to turn its counterintelligence program, code-named "Cointelpro," against the peace movement. "Cointelpro" had been launched by J. Edgar Hoover in the 1950s to infiltrate communist organizations. Now under presidential directive, it sabotaged peace groups by conducting "black bag" break-ins. "Cointelpro" also subverted leading "doves" with false accusations

that they were communist sympathizers. These clandestine tactics made the FBI look like a totalitarian state's secret police rather than a guardian of American democracy.

As the war dragged on, evidence mounted that America had been entrapped in an Asian civil war, fighting against highly motivated rebels who were striving to overthrow an oppressive regime. Yet Johnson clung to his basic strategy of ratcheting up the pressure bit by bit. He stubbornly assured doubting Americans that he could see "the light at the end of the tunnel." But to growing numbers of Americans, it seemed that Johnson was bent on "saving" Vietnam by destroying it.

Vietnam Topples Johnson

Hawkish illusions that the struggle was about to be won were shattered by a blistering communist offensive launched in late January 1968, during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. At a time when the Viet Cong were supposedly licking their wounds, they suddenly and simultaneously mounted savage attacks on twenty-seven key South Vietnamese cities, including the capital, Saigon. Although eventually beaten off with heavy losses, they demonstrated anew that victory could not be gained by Johnson's strategy of gradual escalation. The Tet offensive ended in a military defeat but a political victory for the Viet Cong. With an increasingly insistent voice, American public opinion demanded a speedy end to the war. Opposition grew so vehement that President Johnson could feel the very foundations of government shaking under his feet. He was also suffering through hells of personal agony over American casualties. He wept as he signed letters of condolence, and slipped off at night to pray with monks at a small Catholic church in Washington.

American military leaders responded to the Tet attacks with a request for 200,000 more troops. The largest single increment yet, this addition would have swollen American troop strength in Vietnam to about the three-quarter-million mark. The size of the request staggered many policymakers. Former secretary of state Dean Acheson reportedly advised the president that "the Joint Chiefs of Staff don't know what they're talking about." Johnson himself now began to doubt seriously the wisdom of continuing on his raise-the-stakes course.

The president meanwhile was being sharply challenged from within his own party. Eugene McCarthy, a little-known Democratic senator from Minnesota, had emerged as a contender for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination. The soft-spoken McCarthy, a sometime poet and devout Catholic, gathered a small army of antiwar college students as campaign workers. Going "clean for Gene," with shaven faces and shortened locks, these idealistic recruits of the "Children's Crusade" invaded the key presidential primary state of New Hampshire to ring doorbells. On March 12, 1968, their efforts gave McCarthy an incredible 42 percent of the Democratic votes and twenty of the twenty-four convention delegates. President Johnson was on the same ballot, but only as a write-in candidate. Four days later Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York, the murdered president's younger brother and by now himself a "dove" on Vietnam, threw his hat into the ring. The charismatic Kennedy, heir to his fallen brother's mantle of leadership, stirred a passionate response among workers, African-Americans, Hispanics, and young people.

These startling events abroad and at home were not lost on LBJ. The country might explode in greater violence if he met the request of the generals for more troops. His own party was dangerously divided on the war issue. He might not even be able

to win renomination after his relatively poor showing in New Hampshire. Yet he remained committed to victory in Vietnam, even if the light at the end of the tunnel was vanishing. How could he salvage his blind-alley policy?

Johnson's answer came in a bombshell address on March 31, 1968. He announced on nationwide television that he would finally apply the brakes to the escalating war. He would freeze American troop levels and gradually shift more responsibility to the South Vietnamese themselves. Aerial bombardment of the enemy would be drastically scaled down. Then, in a dramatic plea to unify a dangerously divided nation, Johnson startled his vast audience by firmly declaring that he would not be a candidate for the presidency in 1968.

Johnson's "abdication" had the effect of preserving the military status quo. He had held the "hawks" in check, while offering himself as a sacrifice to the militant "doves." The United States could thus maintain the maximum *acceptable* level of military activity in Vietnam with one hand, while trying to negotiate a settlement with the other.

North Vietnam responded somewhat encouragingly three days later, when it expressed a willingness to talk about peace. After a month of haggling over the site, the adversaries agreed to meet in Paris. But progress was glacially slow, as prolonged bickering developed over the very shape of the conference table.

The Presidential Sweepstakes of 1968

The summer of 1968 was one of the hottest political seasons in the nation's history. Johnson's heir apparent for the Democratic nomination was his liberal vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey, a former pharmacist, college professor, mayor, and U.S. senator from Minnesota. Loyally supporting LBJ's Vietnam policies through thick and thin, he received the support of the party apparatus, dominated as it was by the White House. Senators McCarthy and Kennedy meanwhile dueled in several state primaries, with Kennedy's bandwagon gathering ever-increasing speed. But on June 5, 1968, the night of an exciting victory in the California primary, Kennedy was shot to death by a young Arab immigrant resentful of the candidate's pro-Israel views.

Surrounded by bitterness and frustration, the Democrats met in Chicago in late August 1968. Angry antiwar zealots, deprived by an assassin's bullet of their leading candidate, streamed menacingly into Chicago. Mayor Daley responded by arranging for barbed-wire barricades around the convention hall ("Fort Daley"), as well as thousands of police and National Guard reinforcements. Many demonstrators baited the officers in blue by calling them "pigs." Other militants, chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh," shouted obscenities and hurled bags and cans of excrement at the police lines. As people the world over watched on television, the exasperated "peace officers" broke into a "police riot," clubbing and manhandling innocent and guilty alike. Acrid tear gas fumes hung heavy over the city and even drifted up to candidate Humphrey's hotel suite. Hundreds of people were arrested and scores hospitalized, but there were no casualties—except, as cynics said, the Democratic party and its candidate.

Humphrey steamrollered to the nomination on the first ballot. The dovish McCarthyites failed even

to secure an antiwar platform plank. Instead the Humphrey forces, echoing the president, hammered into place their own declaration that armed force would be relentlessly applied until the enemy showed more willingness to negotiate.

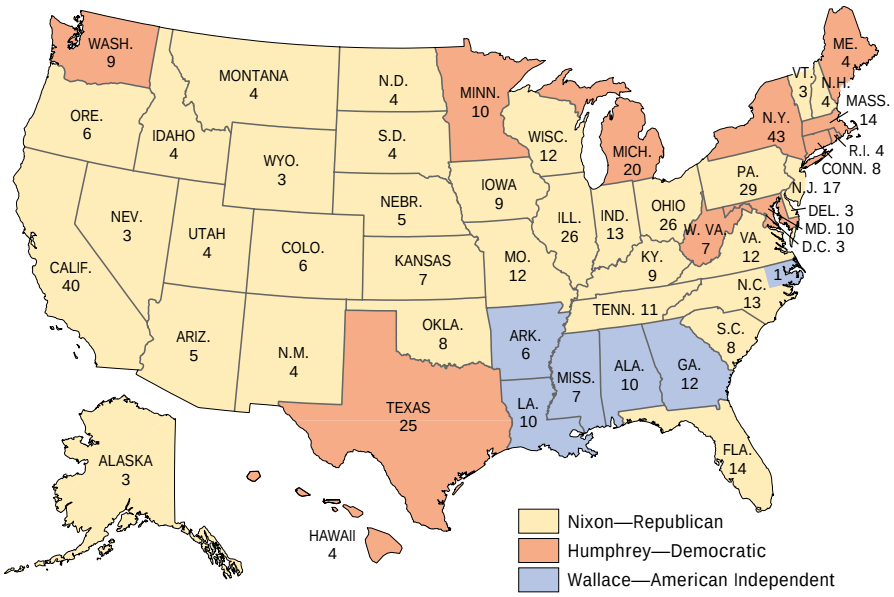
Scenting victory as the Democrats divided, the Republicans had jubilantly convened in plush Miami Beach, Florida, early in August 1968. Richard M. Nixon, the former vice president whom John F. Kennedy had narrowly defeated eight years earlier, arose from his political grave to win the nomination. As a "hawk" on Vietnam and a right-leaning middle-of-the-roader on domestic policy, Nixon pleased the Goldwater conservatives and was acceptable to party moderates. He appealed to white southern voters and to the "law and order" element when he tapped as his vice-presidential running mate Maryland's Governor Spiro T. Agnew, noted for his tough stands against dissidents and black militants. The Republican platform called for victory in Vietnam and a strong anticrime policy.

A "spoiler" third-party ticket—the American Independent party—added color and confusion to the campaign. It was headed by a scrappy ex-pugilist, George C. Wallace, former governor of Alabama. In 1963 he had stood in the doorway to prevent two black students from entering the University of Alabama. "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" he shouted. Wallace jabbed repeatedly at "pointy-headed bureaucrats," and he taunted hecklers as "bums" in need of a bath. Speaking behind a bulletproof screen, he called for prodding the blacks into their place, with bayonets if necessary. He and his running mate, former air force general Curtis LeMay, also proposed smashing the North Vietnamese to smithereens by "bombing them back to the Stone Age."

Victory for Nixon

Vietnam proved a less crucial issue than expected. Between the positions of the Republicans and the Democrats, there was little choice. Both candidates were committed to carrying on the war until the enemy settled for an "honorable peace," which seemed to mean an "American victory." The millions of "doves" had no place to roost, and many refused to vote at all. Humphrey, scorched by the LBJ brand, went down to defeat as a loyal prisoner of his chief's policies, despite Johnson's last-minute effort to bail him out by announcing a *total* bombing halt.

Nixon, who had lost a cliffhanger to Kennedy in 1960, won one in 1968. He garnered 301 electoral votes, with 43.4 percent of the popular tally (31,785,480), as compared with 191 electoral votes and 42.7 percent of the popular votes (31,275,166) for Humphrey. Nixon was the first president-elect since 1848 not to bring in on his coattails at least



Presidential Election of 1968 (with electoral vote by state) George Wallace won in five states, and he denied a clear majority to either of the two major-party candidates in twenty-five other states. A shift of some fifty thousand votes might well have thrown the election into the House of Representatives, giving Wallace the strategic bargaining position he sought.

one house of Congress for his party in an initial presidential election. He carried not a single major city, thus attesting to the continuing urban strength of the Democrats, who also won about 95 percent of the black vote. Nixon had received no clear mandate to do anything. He was a minority president who owed his election to divisions over the war and protest against the unfair draft, crime, and rioting.

Wallace did worse than expected. Yet he won an impressive 9,906,473 popular votes and 46 electoral votes, all from five states of the Deep South, four of which the Republican Goldwater had carried in 1964. Wallace remained a formidable force, for he had amassed the largest third-party popular vote in American history. Wallace had also resoundingly demonstrated the continuing power of "populist" politics, which appealed to voters' fears and resentments rather than to the better angels of their nature. His candidacy foreshadowed a coarsening of American political life that would take deep root in the ensuing decades.

The Obituary of Lyndon Johnson

Talented but tragedy-struck Lyndon Johnson returned to his Texas ranch in January 1969 and died there four years later. His party was defeated, and his "me-too" Hubert Humphrey was repudiated. Yet Johnson's legislative leadership for a time had been remarkable. No president since Lincoln had worked harder or done more for civil rights. None had shown more compassion for the poor, blacks, and the ill educated. LBJ seemed to suffer from an inferiority complex about his own arid cultural background, and he strove furiously to prove that he could be a great "people's president" in the image of his idol, Franklin Roosevelt. His legislative achievements in his first three years in office indeed invited comparison with those of the New Deal.

But by 1966 Johnson was already sinking into the Vietnam quicksands. The Republicans had made gains in Congress, and a white "backlash" had begun to form against the black movement. Great Society programs began to wither on the vine, as soaring war costs sucked tax dollars into the military machine. Johnson had promised both guns and butter but could not keep that promise. Ever-creeping inflation blighted the prospects of prosperity, and the War on Poverty met resistance that was as stubborn as the Viet Cong and eventually went down to defeat. Great want persisted alongside great wealth.

Johnson had crucified himself on the cross of Vietnam. The Southeast Asian quagmire engulfed his noblest intentions. Committed to some degree by his two predecessors, he had chosen to defend

the American foothold and enlarge the conflict rather than be run out. He was evidently persuaded by his brightest advisers, both civilian and military, that a "cheap" victory was possible. It would be achieved by massive aerial bombing and large, though limited, troop commitments. His decision not to escalate the fighting further offended the "hawks," and his refusal to back off altogether antagonized the "doves." Like the Calvinists of colonial days, luckless Lyndon Johnson was damned if he did and damned if he did not.

The Cultural Upheaval of the 1960s

The struggles of the 1960s against racism, poverty, and the war in Vietnam had momentous cultural consequences. The decade came to be seen as a watershed dividing two distinct eras in terms of values, morals, and behavior.

Everywhere in 1960s America, a newly negative attitude toward all kinds of authority took hold. Disillusioned by the discovery that American society was not free of racism, sexism, imperialism, and oppression, many young people lost their traditional moral rudders. Neither families nor churches nor schools seemed to be able to define values and shape behavior with the certainty of shared purpose that many people believed had once existed. The upheaval even churned the tradition-bound Roman Catholic church, among the world's oldest and most conservative institutions. Clerics abandoned their Roman collars and Latin lingo, folk songs replaced Gregorian chants, and meatless Fridays became ancient history. No matter what the topic, conventional wisdom and inherited ideas came under fire. "Trust no one over thirty" was a popular sneer of rebellious youth.

Skepticism about authority had deep historical roots in American culture, and it had even bloomed in the supposedly complacent and conformist 1950s. "Beat" poets like Allen Ginsberg and iconoclastic novelists like Jack Kerouac had voiced dark disillusion with the materialistic pursuits and "establishment" arrogance of the Eisenhower era. In movies like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), the attractive young actor James Dean expressed the restless frustration of many young people.

The disaffection of the young reached crisis proportions in the tumultuous 1960s. One of the first organized protests against established authority broke out at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, in the so-called Free Speech Movement. Leader Mario Savio, condemning the impersonal university "machine" more tied to corporate interests than humane values, urged his fellow students to "put your bodies upon the gears and upon the

wheels, . . . and you've got to make it stop." But in only a few years, the clean-cut Berkeley activists and their sober-minded sit-ins would seem downright quaint. Fired by outrage against the war in Vietnam, some sons and daughters of the middle class became radical political rebels, while others turned to mind-bending drugs, tuned in to "acid rock," and dropped out of "straight" society. Others "did their own thing" in communes or "alternative" institutions. Patriotism became a dirty word. Beflowered women in trousers and long-haired men with earrings heralded the rise of a self-conscious "counterculture" blatantly opposed to traditional American ways.

The 1960s also witnessed a "sexual revolution," though its novelty and scale are often exaggerated. Without doubt, the introduction of the birth-control pill in 1960 made unwanted pregnancies much easier to avoid and sexual appetites easier to satisfy. But as early as 1948, Indiana University sexologist Dr. Alfred Kinsey had published sensational revelations about American sexual habits in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,* followed five years later by *Sexual*

The alternative newspaper The Village Voice *captured the momentousness of one aspect of the sexual revolution on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in June 1969, the day when homosexuals had fought back against a police attack and thereby launched a new gay and lesbian liberation movement:*

"They stretched in a line, from Gimbels to Times Square, thousands and thousands and thousands, chanting, waving, screaming—the outrageous and the outraged, splendid in their flaming colors, splendid in their delirious up-front birthday celebration of liberation. . . . No one could quite believe it, eyes rolled back in heads, Sunday tourists traded incredulous looks, wondrous faces poked out of air-conditioned cars. My God, are those really homosexuals? Marching? Up Sixth Avenue?"

Behavior in the Human Female. Based on thousands of interviews, Kinsey's findings about the incidence of premarital sex and adultery caused a ruckus at the time and have been hotly debated ever since. Most controversial was Kinsey's estimate that 10 percent of American males were homosexuals. Whatever the exact number, by the 1960s gay men and lesbians were increasingly emerging from the closet and demanding sexual tolerance. The Mattachine Society, founded in Los Angeles in 1951, was a pioneering advocate for gay rights. A brutal attack on gay men by off-duty police officers at New York's Stonewall Inn in 1969 powerfully energized gay and lesbian militancy. Widening worries in the 1980s about sexually transmitted diseases like genital herpes and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) finally slowed, but did not reverse, the sexual revolution.

Launched in youthful idealism, many of the cultural "revolutions" of the 1960s sputtered out in violence and cynicism. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), once at the forefront of the antipoverty and antiwar campaigns, had by decade's end spawned an underground terrorist group called the Weathermen. Peaceful civil rights demonstrations had given way to blockbusting urban riots. What started as apparently innocent experiments with drugs like marijuana and LSD had fried many youthful brains and spawned a loathsome underworld of drug lords and addicted users.

Straight-laced guardians of respectability denounced the self-indulgent romanticism of the "flower children" as the beginning of the end of modern civilization. Sympathetic observers hailed the "greening" of America—the replacement of materialism and imperialism by a new consciousness of human values. The upheavals of the 1960s could be largely attributed to three *P*s: the youthful population bulge, protest against racism and the Vietnam War, and the apparent permanence of prosperity. As the decade flowed into the 1970s, the flower children grew older and had children of their own, the civil rights movement fell silent, the war ended, and economic stagnation blighted the bloom of prosperity. Young people in the 1970s seemed more concerned with finding a job in the system than with tearing the system down. But if the "counterculture" had not managed fully to replace older values, it had weakened their grip, perhaps permanently.

Chronology

1961 Berlin crisis and construction of the Berlin Wall
Alliance for Progress
Bay of Pigs
Kennedy sends "military advisers" to South Vietnam

1962 Pressure from Kennedy results in a rollback of steel prices
Trade Expansion Act
Laos neutralized
Cuban missile crisis

1963 Anti-Diem coup in South Vietnam
Civil rights march in Washington, D.C.
Kennedy assassinated; Johnson assumes presidency

1964 Twenty-fourth Amendment (abolishing poll tax in federal elections) ratified
"Freedom Summer" voter registration in the South
Tonkin Gulf Resolution

1964 Johnson defeats Goldwater for presidency
War on Poverty begins
Civil Rights Act

1965 Great Society legislation
Voting Rights Act
U.S. troops occupy Dominican Republic

1965-1968 Race riots in U.S. cities
Escalation of the Vietnam War

1967 Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt

1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam
Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy assassinated
Nixon defeats Humphrey and Wallace for presidency

1969 Astronauts land on moon

VARYING VIEWPOINTS

The Sixties: Constructive or Destructive?

The 1960s were convulsed by controversy, and they have remained controversial ever since. Conflicts raged in that turbulent decade between social classes, races, sexes, and generations. More than three decades later, the shock waves from the 1960s still reverberate through American society. The "Contract with America" that swept conservative Republicans to power in 1994 amounted to nothing less than a wholesale repudiation of the government activism that marked the sixties decade and a resounding reaffirmation of the "traditional values" that sixties culture supposedly trashed. Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, continue to press affirmative action for women and minorities, protection for the environment, an expanded welfare state, and sexual tolerance—all legacies of the stormy sixties.

Four issues dominate historical discussion of the 1960s: the struggle for civil rights, the Great Society's "War on Poverty," the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement, and the emergence of the "counterculture."

Although most scholars praise the civil rights achievements of the 1960s, they disagree over the civil rights movement's turn away from nonviolence and its embrace of separatism and Black Power. The Freedom Riders and Martin Luther King, Jr., find much more approval in most history books than do Malcolm X and the Black Panther party. But some scholars, notably William L. Van Deburg in *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (1992), argue that the "flank effect" of radical Black Power advocates like Stokely Carmichael actually enhanced the bargaining position of moderates like Dr. King. Deburg also suggests that the enthusiasm of Black Power advocates for African-American cultural uniqueness reshaped both black self-consciousness and the broader cul-

ture, as it provided a model for the feminist and multiculturalist movements of the 1970s and later.

Johnson's War on Poverty has found its liberal defenders in scholars like Allen Matusow (*The Unraveling of America,* 1984) and John Schwarz (*America's Hidden Success,* 1988). Schwarz demonstrates, for example, that Medicare and Social Security reforms virtually eliminated poverty among America's elderly. But the Great Society has also provoked strong criticism from writers such as Charles Murray (*Losing Ground,* 1984) and Lawrence Meade (*Beyond Entitlements,* 1986). As those conservative critics see the poverty issue, to use a phrase popular in the 1960s, the Great Society was part of the problem, not part of the solution. In their view the War on Poverty did not simply fail to eradicate poverty among the so-called underclass; it actually deepened the dependency of the poor on the welfare state and even generated a multigenerational "cycle" of poverty. In this argument Johnson's Great Society stands indicted of creating, in effect, a permanent welfare class.

For many young people of the 1960s, the antiwar movement protesting America's policy in Vietnam provided their initiation into politics and their introduction to "movement culture," with its sense of community and shared purpose. But scholars disagree over the movement's real effectiveness in checking the war. Writers like John Lewis Gaddis (*Strategies of Containment,* 1982) explain America's eventual withdrawal from Vietnam essentially without reference to the protesters in the streets. Others, like Todd Gitlin (*The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage,* 1987), insist that mass protest was the force that finally pressed the war to a conclusion.

Debate over the counterculture not only pits liberals against conservatives but also pits liberals against radicals. A liberal historian like William O'Neill (*Coming Apart,* 1971) might sympathize with what he considers some of the worthy values pushed by student activists, such as racial justice, nonviolence, and the antiwar movement, but he also claims that much of the sixties "youth culture" degenerated into hedonism, arrogance, and social polarization. In contrast, younger historians such as Michael Kazin and Maurice Isserman argue that cultural radicalism and political radicalism were two sides of the same coin. Many young people in the sixties made little distinction between the personal and the political. As Sara Evans demonstrates in *Personal Politics* (1980), "the personal *was* the political" for many women. She finds the roots of modern feminism in the sexism women activists encountered in the civil rights and antiwar movements.

While critics may argue over the "good" versus the "bad" sixties, there is no denying the degree to which that tumultuous time, for better or worse, shaped the world in which we now live.

For further reading, see page A26 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to **http://college.hmco.com.**