The United States was comfortable and confident as the 1960s began. There was a basic consensus about the responsibility of the government to help those who could not help themselves. Then that consensus fragmented in the turbulence that accompanied the Vietnam War. (Romare Bearden, The Dove, 1964. Digital Image Photo Credit: The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Art © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY)

American Stories

Paul Cowan was an idealist in the 1960s. Like many students who came of age in these years, he believed in the possibility of social change and plunged into the struggle for liberal reform. He shared the hopes and dreams of other members of his generation, who felt that their government could make a difference in people’s lives.
Cowan's commitment had developed slowly. He was a child of the 1950s, when most Americans were caught up in the consumer culture and paid little attention to the problems of people less fortunate than themselves. His grandfather had sold used cement bags in Chicago, but his father had become an executive at CBS television, and Cowan grew up in comfortable surroundings. He graduated from the Choate School (where John Kennedy had gone) in 1958, and then from Harvard University (where Kennedy had also been a student) in 1963.

When he entered college, Cowan was interested in politically conscious writers such as John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, and James Agee and folk singers such as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. They offered him entrance, he later recalled, into a “nation that seemed to be filled with energy and decency,” one that lurked “beneath the dull, conformist facade of the Eisenhower years.” While at Harvard, he was excited by antinuclear campaigns in New England and civil rights demonstrations in the South.

After college, he made good on his commitment to civil rights by going to Mississippi to work in the Freedom Summer Project of 1964. He was inspired by the example of John Kennedy, the liberal president whose administration promised “a new kind of politics” that could make the nation, and the world, a better place. During that summer, he wrote, “it was possible to believe that by changing ourselves we could change, and redeem, our America.”

The Peace Corps came next. Paul and his wife, Rachel, were convinced that this organization, the idea of the young president, “really was a unique government agency, permanently protected by the lingering magic of John F. Kennedy’s name.” They were assigned to the city of Guayaquil, in Ecuador, in South America. Their task was to serve as mediators between administrators of the city hall and residents of the slums. They wanted to try to raise the standard of living by encouraging local governments to provide basic services such as garbage disposal and clean water.

But the work proved more frustrating than they had imagined. They bristled at the restrictions imposed by the Peace Corps bureaucracy. They despaired at the inadequate resources local government officials had to accomplish their aims. They wondered whether they were simply new imperialists, trying to impose their values on others who had priorities of their own. “From the day we moved into the barrio,” Cowan later recalled, “the question we were most frequently asked by the people we were supposed to be organizing was whether we would leave them our clothes when we returned to the States.”

Cowan came home disillusioned. “I saw that even the liberals I had wanted to emulate, men who seemed to be devoting their lives to fighting injustice, were unable to accept people from alien cultures on any terms but their own.” He called his account of his own odyssey The Making of an Un-American.

Paul Cowan’s passage through the 1960s mirrored the passage of American society as a whole. Millions of Americans shared his views of the possibilities of democracy as the period began. Mostly comfortable and confident, they supported the liberal agenda advanced by the Democratic party of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. They endorsed the proposition that the government had responsibility for the welfare of all its citizens and accepted the need for a more active government role to help those of its diverse peoples who were unable to help themselves. That commitment lay behind the legislative achievements of the “Great Society,” the last wave of twentieth-century reform that built on the gains of the Progressive era and the New Deal years before.

Then political reaction set in as the nation was torn apart by the ravages of the Vietnam War. The escalation of the war, which led to charges that the United States was engaging in an imperialistic crusade like those of other nations in the past, sent more than half a million American soldiers to fight in a
far-off land and provoked a protest movement that ripped apart the society. Young Americans, espousing different values and a different version of the American dream, challenged the priorities of their parents. At the same time, they paraded their sexuality more openly, experimented with different forms of mystical religious faith, and enjoyed readily available drugs. In the end, their challenges helped reverse the course of the war. But in the process, liberal assumptions eroded as conservatives argued that an activist approach was responsible for the social and political chaos that consumed the country.

This chapter describes both the climax of twentieth-century liberalism and the turbulence that led to its decline. It focuses on the effort of the government, begun in the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, to help those caught short by the advances of industrial capitalism. It first examines the democratic commitment in the 1960s to provide necessary assistance to the less fortunate members of American society and then describes the turmoil that undermined the possibility of such aid. In pondering the possibilities of reform, this chapter outlines the various attempts to devise an effective political response to the major structural changes in the post–World War II economy described in Chapter 26. And then it shows how the Cold War assumptions outlined in Chapter 27 led to the rifts that ripped the nation apart.
The commitment to an American welfare state reached its high-water point in the 1960s. As the left-wing Labour Party in Great Britain played a more and more influential role and occasionally assumed power, and social democratic coalitions were equally active in other European nations, Americans took note. Democrats wanted to follow their example and broaden the role of government even further than Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman had done in the 1930s and 1940s, in an effort to address the problems of poverty, unemployment, and racism. John F. Kennedy, a senator from Massachusetts, demanded that the United States move in the direction of what he called a “New Frontier.”

**The Election of 1960**

In the 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy argued that the government in general, and the president in particular, had to play an even more active role than they had in the Eisenhower years. He charged that the country had become lazy as it reveled in the prosperity of the 1950s. There were, in fact, serious problems that needed to be solved. 

Kennedy ran against Vice President Richard Nixon, who had served as second-in-command to Eisenhower for eight years and who clearly had more executive experience than Kennedy. The two candidates squared off against one another in the first televised presidential debates. Seventy million Americans tuned in to watch the two men in the first contest. Kennedy appeared tanned and rested. Nixon, who had recently been hospitalized with an infection, looked tired and gaunt. Even worse, the makeup he applied to hide his heavy beard growth only accentuated it and gave him a swarthy complexion on screen. The debates made a major difference in the campaign (see the “Recovering the Past” essay, pp. 940–941). Kennedy himself admitted, “It was TV more than anything else that turned the tide.” From this point on, television would play a major role in the political process and reshape its character.

Kennedy overcame seemingly insuperable odds to become the first Catholic in the White House. Al Smith had gained the Democratic nomination in 1928 but had then lost to Herbert Hoover, and the conventional wisdom held that a Catholic could not be elected. Yet Kennedy’s victory was razor-thin. The electoral margin of 303 to 219 concealed the close popular tally, in which he triumphed by fewer than 120,000 of 68 million votes cast. If only a few thousand people had voted differently in Illinois and Texas, the election would have gone to Nixon. While Kennedy had Democratic majorities in Congress, many members of his party came from the South and were less sympathetic to liberal causes.

**JFK**

John Kennedy served as a symbol of the early 1960s. He was far younger than his predecessor; at age 43, he was the youngest man ever elected to the presidency. He came from an Irish Catholic family from Massachusetts that saw politics as a means of acceptance in Protestant America. Raised in comfort, he graduated from Harvard University and went on...
An Energetic Young Leader  John Kennedy’s energy and enthusiasm captured the imagination of Americans and people around the world, though few were aware of the physical ailments that affected him. He was fond of using this rocking chair in the White House, which he found comfortable for his ailing back. How did Kennedy’s appearance contribute to his popularity and appeal?

(Bettmann/CORBIS)

to serve heroically in the navy during World War II, saving the lives of a number of his men when his boat—PT 109—was hit. He was elected first to the House of Representatives in 1946, then to the Senate in 1952, and was re-elected six years later by the largest majority in the history of the state.

The new president had a charismatic public presence. He was able to voice his aims in eloquent yet understandable language that motivated his followers. During the campaign, he pointed to “uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus” that Americans must confront, for “the New Frontier is here whether we seek it or not.” He made the same point even more movingly in his inaugural address: “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.” Many Americans, like Paul Cowan, whom we met at the start of the chapter, were inspired by Kennedy’s concluding call to action: “And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

For Kennedy, strong leadership was all-important. The president, he believed, “must serve as a catalyst, an energizer.” He must be able and willing to perform “in the very thick of the fight.” Viewing himself as “tough-minded” and “hard-nosed,” he was determined to provide firm direction and play a leading role in creating the national agenda, just as Franklin Roosevelt had done.

Kennedy surrounded himself with talented assistants. On his staff were 15 Rhodes scholars and several famous authors. The secretary of state was Dean Rusk, a former member of the State Department who had then served as president of the Rockefeller Foundation. The secretary of defense was Robert S. McNamara, the highly successful president of the Ford Motor Company.

Further contributing to Kennedy’s attractive image were his glamorous wife, Jacqueline, and the glittering social occasions the couple hosted. Nobel Prize winners, musicians, and artists attended White House dinners. The Kennedys and their friends played touch football on the White House lawn and charged off on 50-mile hikes. Energy, exuberance, and excitement filled the air. The administration seemed like the Camelot of King Arthur’s day, popularized in a Broadway musical in 1960.

The New Frontier in Action

In office, Kennedy was committed to extending the welfare state. He sought to maintain an expanding economic system and to enlarge social welfare programs. In particular, he wanted to end the lingering recession that began in Eisenhower’s last year by working with the business community while controlling price inflation.

These two goals conflicted when, in the spring of 1962, the large steel companies decided on a major price increase after steel unions had accepted a modest wage package. The angry president termed the price increases unjustifiable and pressed for executive and congressional action to force the steel companies to their knees. The large companies capitulated, but they disliked Kennedy’s heavy-handed approach and decided that this Democratic
In the last 50 years, television has played an increasingly important part in American life, providing historians with another source of evidence about American culture and society in the recent past. Television's popularity by the 1950s was the result of decades of experimentation dating back to the nineteenth century. In the 1930s, NBC installed a television station in the new Empire State Building in New York. Wearing green makeup and purple lipstick to provide better visual contrast, actors began to perform before live cameras in studios. At the end of the decade, *Amos 'n' Andy*, a popular radio show, was telecast, and as the 1940s began, Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first president to appear on television. World War II interrupted the development of television, and Americans relied on radio to bring them news. After the war, however, the commercial development of television quickly resumed. Assembly lines that had made electronic implements of war were now converted to consumer production, and thousands of new sets appeared on the market. The opening of Congress could be seen live in 1947; baseball coverage improved that same year owing to the zoom lens; children’s shows such as *Howdy Doody* made their debut; and *Meet the Press*, a radio interview program, made the transition to television.

Although sports programs, variety shows hosted by Ed Sullivan and Milton Berle, TV dramas, and episodic series (*I Love Lucy* and *Gunsmoke*, for example) dominated TV broadcasting in the 1950s, television soon became entwined with politics and public affairs. Americans saw Senator Joseph McCarthy for themselves in the televised Army–McCarthy hearings in 1954; his malevolent behavior on camera contributed to his downfall. The 1948 presidential nominating conventions were the first to be televised, but the use of TV to enhance the public image of politicians was most thoroughly developed by the fatherly Dwight D. Eisenhower and the charismatic John F. Kennedy.

In November 1963, people throughout the United States shared the tragedy of John Kennedy’s assassination, sitting stunned before their sets trying to understand the events of his fateful Texas trip. The shock and sorrow of the American people was repeated in the spring of 1968 as they gazed in disbelief at the funerals of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. A year later, a quarter of the world’s population watched as Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon. In that same era, television played an important part in shaping impressions of the war in Vietnam. More and more Americans began to understand the nature and impact of the conflict from what they saw on TV.
This combination of visual entertainment and enlightenment made owning a television set virtually a necessity. By 1970, fully 95 percent of American households owned a TV set, a staggering increase from the 9 percent only 20 years earlier. In fact, fewer families owned refrigerators or indoor toilets.

**Reflecting on the Past** The implications of the impact of television on American society are of obvious interest to historians. How has television affected other communications and entertainment industries, such as radio, newspapers, and movies? Look at the “Television Tonight” listings shown here. What does the content of TV programming tell us about the values, interests, and tastes of the American people?

Perhaps most significant, what impact has TV had on the course of historical events like presidential campaigns, human relations, and wars? The pictures shown here are from the Kennedy–Nixon debates in the presidential campaign of 1960. The first picture shows the two candidates in the studio. The second picture shows a relaxed and energetic Kennedy staring directly into the TV camera. The third picture shows a taut and tense Nixon challenging the points made by his opponent. Which candidate seems to be speaking directly to the American people? Which candidate makes the better impression? Why? Polls of radio listeners taken after the first debate showed Nixon the winner; surveys of television viewers placed Kennedy in front. How do you account for this discrepancy?

### Television Tonight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>WTTV 4</td>
<td>Leave It to Beaver. Beaver tries to help a friend who has run away from home. Repeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>WLTW-I 13</td>
<td>Cheyenne has a Laramie adventure in which Slim, Jess, and Jonesy work on a cattle drive. Repeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>WTTV 4</td>
<td>The Untouchables. Eliot Ness tries to deal with a late gangster’s niece who has a record of the murdered hood’s career. Repeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>WLW-I 13</td>
<td>Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea presents “Mutiny,” in which Admiral Nelson shows signs of a mental breakdown during the search for a giant jellyfish which supposedly consumed a submarine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>WFBM-TV 6</td>
<td>Members of the Indianapolis Rotary Club discuss the 1965 business outlook with former U.S. Sen. Homer Capehart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>WFBM-TV 6</td>
<td>The Man from UNCLE is in at a new time and night. Thrush agents try to recapture one of their leaders before Napoleon Solo can deliver him to the Central Intelligence Agency. Ralph Taeger is guest star.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>WISH-TV 8</td>
<td>I’ve Got a Secret welcomes the panel from To Tell the Truth: Tom Poston, Peggy Cass, Kitty Carlisle, and Orson Bean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>WLW-I 13</td>
<td>Basketball, I.U. vs. Iowa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>WISH-TV 8</td>
<td>Andy Griffith’s comedy involves Goober’s attempts to fill in at the sheriff’s office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>WFBM-TV 6</td>
<td>Andy Williams is visited by composer Henry Mancini, Bobby Darin, and Vic Damone. Musical selections include “Charade,” “Hello Dolly,” and “Moon River.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>WTTV 4</td>
<td>Lloyd Thaxton welcomes vocal group Herman’s Hermits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>WISH-TV 8</td>
<td>Many Happy Returns. Waltzer’s plan for currying favor with the store’s boss hits a snag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>WFBM-TV 6</td>
<td>Alfred Hitchcock presents Margaret Leighton as a spinster who goes mad when she cannot cope with the strain of rearing an orphaned niece in “Where the Woodbine Twineth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>WLW-I 13</td>
<td>Ben Casey gets help in diagnosing a boy’s illness from an Australian veterinarian with terminal leukemia. The vet’s knowledge of bats provides the key.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>WISH-TV 8</td>
<td>“Viet Nam: How We Got In—Can We Get Out?” is the topic of CBS Reports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

administration, like all the others, was hostile to business. In late May, six weeks after the steel crisis, the stock market plunged in the greatest drop since the Great Crash of 1929. Kennedy received the blame. "When Eisenhower had a heart attack," Wall Street analysts joked, "the market broke. If Kennedy would have a heart attack, the market would go up."

It now seemed doubly urgent to end the recession. Earlier a proponent of a balanced budget, Kennedy began to listen to his liberal advisers who proposed a Keynesian approach to economic growth. Budget deficits had promoted prosperity during the Second World War and might work in the same way in peacetime, too. A tax cut could put money in people's pockets, and their spending could stimulate the economy. In early 1963, the president called for a $13.5 billion cut in corporate taxes over the next three years. While that cut would cause a large deficit, it would also provide capital that business leaders could spend to revive the economy and ultimately increase tax revenues.

Opposition mounted. Conservatives refused to accept the basic premise that deficits would stimulate economic growth and argued, in Eisenhower's words, that "no family, no business, no nation can spend itself into prosperity." Some liberals claimed that it would be better to stimulate the economy by spending money to improve society rather than by cutting taxes and putting money in people's pockets. What good would it do, economist John Kenneth Galbraith wondered, to have "a few more dollars to spend if the air is too dirty to breathe, the water is too polluted to drink, the commutes are losing out in the struggle to get in and out of cities, the streets are filthy, and the schools are so bad that the young, perhaps wisely, stay away?" Congress pigeonholed the proposal in committee, and there it remained.

On other issues on the liberal agenda, Kennedy met similar resistance. Though he proposed legislation increasing the minimum wage and providing for federal aid for education, medical care for the elderly, housing subsidies, and urban renewal, the results were meager. His new minimum-wage measure passed Congress in pared-down form, but Kennedy did not have the votes in Congress to achieve most of his legislative program.

His inability to win necessary congressional support was most evident in the struggle to aid public education. Soon after taking office, Kennedy proposed a $2.3 billion program of grants to the states over a three-year period to help build schools and raise teachers' salaries. Immediately, a series of prickly questions emerged. Was it appropriate to spend large sums of money for social goals? Would federal aid bring federal control of school policies and curriculum? Should assistance go to segregated schools? Should it go to parochial schools? The administration proved willing to allow assistance to segregated schools, thereby easing white southern minds. On the Catholic question, however, it stumbled to a halt. Kennedy at first insisted, as he had throughout the campaign, that he would not allow his religion to influence his actions, and he opposed aid for parochial schools. But as Catholic pressure mounted and the administration realized that Catholic votes were necessary for passage, Kennedy began to reconsider. In the end, compromise proved impossible and the school aid measure died in committee.

Kennedy was more successful in securing funding for the exploration of space. The space program was caught up in the competition of the Cold War, and with the Soviet launching of Sputnik and then shots with first dogs, then astronauts, the USSR clearly had the lead. Finally, the American space program got off the ground. As first Alan Shepard and then John Glenn flew in space, Kennedy proposed that the United States commit itself to landing a man on the moon and returning him to earth before the end of the decade. Congress, caught up in the glamour of the proposal and worried about Soviet space achievements, assented and increased funding of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Kennedy also established the Peace Corps, which sent young men and women overseas to assist developing countries. According to Kennedy aide Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., the Peace Corps was an effort "to replace protocol-minded, striped-pants officials by reform-minded missionaries of democracy who mixed with the people, spoke the native dialects, ate the food, and involved themselves in local struggles against ignorance and want." Paul Cowan, introduced at the start of this chapter, was one of thousands of volunteers who hoped to share their liberal dreams.

If Kennedy's successes were modest, he had at least made commitments that could be broadened later. He had reaffirmed the importance of executive leadership in the effort to extend the boundaries of the welfare state. And he had committed himself to using modern economics to maintain fiscal stability. The nation was poised to achieve liberal goals.

Civil Rights and Kennedy's Response
So it was with civil rights. The pressures that had mounted in the decade and a half after World War II
had brought significant change in eliminating segregation in American society. As the effort continued, a spectrum of organizations, some old, some new, carried the fight forward. The NAACP, founded in 1910, remained committed to overturning the legal bases for segregation in the aftermath of its victory in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954 (see Chapter 26). The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an interracial group established in 1942, promoted change through peaceful confrontation. In 1957, after their victory in the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization of southern black clergy. Far more militant was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “snick”), which began to operate in 1960 and recruited young Americans who had not been involved in the civil rights struggle.

Confrontations continued in the 1960s. On January 31, 1960, four black college students from the Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, North Carolina, protested continuing patterns of segregation, despite the Supreme Court’s important rulings. Frustrated that they were permitted to shop but not to eat at a Woolworth’s, a popular department store chain specializing in household goods, they sat down at the lunch counter and refused to leave. When a reporter inquired how long they had been planning the protest, the students responded, “All our lives!” They left at the end of the day, but the next day more students showed up, and the following day still more. The sit-ins, which spread to other cities, captured media attention and eventually included as many as 70,000 participants. Those protesting often met with a brutal response. John Lewis, an African American activist who participated in a sit-in in Nashville, Tennessee, described his experience:

A group of young white men came in and they started pulling and beating primarily the young women. They put lighted cigarettes down their backs, in their hair, and they were really beating people. In a short time police officials came in and placed all of us under arrest, and not a single member of the white group, the people that were opposing our sit-in, was arrested.

The following year, sit-ins gave rise to freedom rides, aimed at testing southern transportation facilities that recently had been desegregated by a Supreme Court decision. Organized initially by CORE and aided by SNCC, the program sent groups of blacks and whites together on buses heading south and stopping at terminals along the way. The riders, peaceful themselves, anticipated confrontations that would publicize their cause and generate political support. In Anniston, Alabama, a mob of white men attacked a bus that was preparing to leave, slashing tires and throwing a firebomb inside a window they smashed. In Birmingham, police made an agreement with the Ku Klux Klan to give Klansmen 15 minutes alone to beat the Freedom Riders. Although the FBI knew...
James Meredith refused to be driven from the University of Mississippi, despite the opposition of the governor and a campus riot. His perseverance paid off, as he ultimately earned his degree. What do you think it would have felt like to be black at the university during that time? (Bettmann/CORBIS)

about the plan, the federal agency did nothing to stop it. Individual blacks and whites did work together to eliminate racial barriers, however, as the civil rights movement became the most powerful moral campaign since the abolitionist crusade before the Civil War.

Anne Moody, who grew up in a small town in Mississippi, personified the awakening of black consciousness. As a child, she had watched the murder of friends and acquaintances who had somehow transgressed the limits set for blacks. Overcoming the hardships of growing up poor and black in the rural South, Moody became the first member of her family to go to college, enrolling at Tougaloo College, near Jackson, Mississippi. Once there, she found her own place in the civil rights movement. She joined the NAACP and became involved in the activities of SNCC and CORE. Slowly, she noted, “I could feel myself beginning to change. For the first time I began to think something would be done about whites killing, beating, and misusing Negroes. I knew I was going to be a part of whatever happened.” Participating in sit-ins, where she was thrashed and jailed for her activities, she remained deeply involved in the movement.

Many whites also joined the movement in the South. Mimi Feingold, a white student at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, helped picket the Woolworth’s in Chester, Pennsylvania, and worked to unionize Swarthmore’s black dining-hall workers. In 1961, after her sophomore year, she headed south to join the freedom rides sponsored by CORE. Like many others, Feingold found herself in the midst of often-violent confrontations and went to jail as an act of conscience.

In 1962, the civil rights movement accelerated. James Meredith, a black air force veteran and student at Jackson State College, applied to the all-white University of Mississippi, only to be rejected on racial grounds, although the Supreme Court affirmed his right to attend. Governor Ross Barnett, an adamant racist, announced defiantly that Meredith would not be admitted, and on one occasion personally blocked the way. A major riot followed; tear gas covered the

The March on Washington The 1963 march on Washington was a high point in the civil rights movement. Several hundred thousand demonstrators lined the reflecting pool leading out from the Washington Monument and heard Martin Luther King, Jr., shown here, and other black leaders eloquently plead for racial equality. How might such a march on the nation’s capital advance the cause? (AP/Wide World Photos)

university grounds; and by the riot’s end, two men lay dead and hundreds were hurt.

Other governors were equally aggressive. In his 1963 inaugural address, George C. Wallace of Alabama declared boldly, “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” as he voiced his opposition to integration.

Alabama became a national focus that year as a violent confrontation unfolded in Birmingham. Local black leaders encouraged Martin Luther King, Jr., to launch another attack on southern segregation in the city. Though the demonstrations were nonviolent, the responses were not. City officials declared that protest marches violated city regulations against parading without a license, and, over a five-week period, they arrested 2,200 blacks, some of them schoolchildren. Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor used high-pressure fire hoses, electric cattle prods, and trained police dogs to force the protesters back. As the media recorded the events, Americans watching television and reading newspapers were horrified.

Kennedy claimed to be sickened by the pictures from Birmingham but insisted that he could do nothing, even though he had sought and won black support in 1960. The narrowness of his electoral victory made him reluctant to press white southerners on civil rights when he needed their votes on other issues. Kennedy initially failed to propose any civil rights legislation and ignored a campaign promise to end housing discrimination by presidential order. Not until November 1962, after the midterm elections, did he take a modest action—an executive order ending segregation in federally financed housing.

Events finally forced Kennedy to act more boldly. In the James Meredith confrontation, the president, like his predecessor in the Little Rock crisis, had to send federal troops to restore control and to guarantee Meredith’s right to attend the university. The administration also forced the desegregation of the University of Alabama and helped arrange a compromise that eased discrimination in Birmingham’s municipal facilities and hiring practices. And when white bombings aimed at eliminating black leaders in Birmingham caused thousands of blacks to abandon nonviolence and rampage through the streets, Kennedy readied federal troops to intervene.

He also spoke out more forcefully than before. In a nationally televised address, he called the quest for equal rights a “moral issue” and asked, “Are we to say to the world, and, much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes.” Just hours after the president spoke, assassins killed Medgar Evers, a black NAACP official, in his own driveway in Jackson, Mississippi.

Kennedy sent Congress a new and stronger civil rights bill, outlawing segregation in public places, banning discrimination wherever federal money was involved, and advancing the process of school integration. Polls showed that 63 percent of the nation supported his stand.

To lobby for passage of this measure, civil rights leaders, pressed from below by black activists, arranged a massive march on Washington in August 1963. More than 200,000 people gathered from
across the country and demonstrated enthusiastically. Celebrities present included diplomat Ralph Bunche, writer James Baldwin, entertainers Sammy Davis, Jr., Harry Belafonte, and Lena Horne, and former baseball player Jackie Robinson. The folk music artists of the early 1960s were there as well. Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary led the crowd in songs associated with the movement, such as “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “We Shall Overcome.”

The high point of the day was the address by Martin Luther King, Jr., the nation’s preeminent spokesman for civil rights and proponent of nonviolent protest. King proclaimed his faith in the decency of his fellow citizens and in their ability to extend the promises of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence to every American. With all the power of a southern preacher, he implored his audience to share his faith.

“I have a dream,” King declared, “that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’ I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood.” It was a fervent appeal, and one to which the crowd responded. Each time King used the refrain “I have a dream,” thousands of blacks and whites roared together. King concluded by quoting from an old hymn: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!”

Not all were moved. Anne Moody, who had come up from her activist work in Mississippi to attend the event, sat on the grass by the Lincoln Memorial as the speaker’s words rang out. “Martin Luther King went on and on talking about his dream,” she said. “I sat there thinking that . . . we never had time to sleep, much less dream.” Nor was Congress prompted to do much. Despite large Democratic majorities, strong white southern resistance to the cause of civil rights continued, and the bill was bottled up in committee.
Kennedy knew he faced a difficult re-election battle in 1964. He wanted not only to win the presidency for a second term but also to increase liberal Democratic strength in Congress. Instead, an assassin’s attack took his life and brought a new leader to the helm.

Change of Command
In November 1963, Kennedy traveled to Texas, where he hoped to unite the state's Democratic
party for the upcoming election. Dallas, one of the stops on the trip, was reputed to be hostile to the administration. Four weeks before, a conservative mob had abused Adlai Stevenson, ambassador to the United Nations. Now, on November 22, Kennedy had a chance to feel the pulse of the city for himself. Arriving at the airport, Henry González, a congressman accompanying the president in Texas, remarked jokingly, “Well, I’m taking my risks. I haven’t got my steel vest yet.” As the party entered the city in an open car, the president encountered friendly crowds. Suddenly shots rang out, and Kennedy slumped forward as bullets ripped through his head and throat. Mortally wounded, he died a short time later at a Dallas hospital. Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin, was shot and killed a few days later by a minor underworld figure as he was being moved within the jail.

Americans were stunned. For days, people stayed at home and watched endless television replays of the assassination and its aftermath. The images of the handsome president felled by bullets, the funeral cortege, and the president’s young son saluting his father’s casket as it rolled by on the way to final burial at Arlington National Cemetery were all imprinted on people’s minds. United around the event, members of an entire generation remembered where they had been when Kennedy was shot, just as an earlier generation recalled Pearl Harbor.

Vice President Lyndon Johnson succeeded Kennedy as president. Though less polished, Johnson was a more effective political leader than Kennedy and brought his own special skills and vision to the presidency.

**LBJ**

Johnson had taken a different road to the White House. He came from a far more humble background than Kennedy. He had begun his public career as a legislative assistant in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., then served as a New Deal official in Texas. He won election first to the House in 1937 and then to the Senate in 1948. Eager to be president, he accepted the vice presidential nomination when it became clear in 1960 that Kennedy was going to win.

Johnson was a man of elemental force. Always manipulative, he was often difficult to like. There was a streak of vulgarity that contributed to his earthy appeal but was frequently offensive. Those qualities notwithstanding, he was successful in the passion of his life—politics. Schooled in Congress and influenced by FDR, Johnson was the most able legislator of the postwar years. As Senate majority leader, he became famous for his ability to get things done. Ceaseless in his search for information, tireless in his attention to detail, he knew the strengths and weaknesses of everyone he faced. When he approached someone in the hall, one senator remarked, he was like a “great overpowering thunderstorm that consumed you as it closed in on you.” He could flatter and cajole, and became famous for what came to be called the “Johnson treatment.” According to columnists Rowland Evans, Jr., and Robert Novak, he zeroed in, “his face a scant millimeter from his target, his eyes widening and narrowing, his eyebrows rising and falling.” He grabbed people by the lapels, made them listen, and usually got his way (see the series of illustrations on this page).
Johnson ran the Senate with tight control and later tried to broaden his own appeal in his quest for the presidency. When that proved unsuccessful, he helped Kennedy win the election by serving in the second slot on the ticket, then went into a state of eclipse as vice president. He felt uncomfortable with the Kennedy crowd, useless and stifled in his new role. He told friends that he agreed with John Nance Garner, a vice president under FDR, who once observed that the vice presidency “wasn’t worth a pitcher of warm spit.”

Despite his own ambivalence about Kennedy, Johnson sensed the profound shock that gripped the United States after the assassination and was determined to utilize Kennedy’s memory to achieve legislative success. Even more than Kennedy, he was willing to wield presidential power aggressively and to use the media to shape public opinion in pursuit of his vision of a society in which the comforts of life would be more widely shared and poverty would be eliminated once and for all.

The Great Society in Action

Lyndon Johnson had an expansive vision of the possibilities of reform. Using his considerable political skills, he succeeded in pushing through Congress the most extensive reform program in American history. Johnson began to develop the support he needed the day he took office. In his first public address, delivered to Congress and televised nationwide, he sought to dispel the image of impostor as he embraced Kennedy’s liberal program. He began, in a measured tone, with the words, “All I have, I would have given gladly not to be standing here today.” He asked members of Congress to work with him, and he underscored the theme “Let us continue” throughout his speech.

As a first step, Johnson resolved to secure the measures Kennedy had been unable to extract from Congress. Bills to reduce taxes and ensure civil rights were his first and most pressing priorities, but he was interested too in aiding public education, providing medical care for the aged, and eliminating poverty. By the spring of 1964, he began to use the phrase “Great Society” to describe his expansive reform program.

Johnson’s landslide victory over conservative Republican challenger Barry Goldwater of Arizona in the 1964 election validated LBJ’s Great Society program. The 1964 race marked the first time in recent history that a conservative had gained the Republican nomination. Goldwater, however, frightened even members of his own party by proclaiming that “extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice,” and by speaking out against such popular programs as social security. LBJ received 61 percent of the popular vote and 486 electoral votes to Goldwater’s 52. Democrats controlled both the Senate (68–32) and the House (295–140). Despite his defeat, Goldwater’s candidacy reflected the growing power of conservatism within the Republican party and the ability of a grassroots group to organize a successful campaign in party primaries. It also drove moderate Republicans to vote for the Democratic party this time and gave Johnson a far more impressive mandate than Kennedy had ever enjoyed.

Johnson knew how to get laws passed. He appointed task forces that included legislators to study problems and suggest solutions, worked with them to draft bills, and maintained close contact with congressional leaders through a sophisticated liaison staff. Not since the FDR years had there been such a coordinated effort.

Civil rights reform was LBJ’s first legislative priority and an integral part of the Great Society program, but other measures were equally important. Following Kennedy’s lead, Johnson pressed for a tax cut. He accepted the Keynesian theory that deficits, properly managed, could promote prosperity. If people had more money to spend, then their purchases could stimulate the economy. Soon the tax bill passed.

With the tax cut in hand, the president pressed for the antipoverty program that Kennedy had begun to plan. Such an effort was bold and unprecedented in the United States, even though social democracy had a long history in European nations and other countries around the world. During the Progressive era at the turn of the century, some legislation had attempted to alleviate conditions associated with poverty. During the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt had proposed programs to assist the one-third of the nation that could not help itself. Now Johnson took a step that no president had taken before; in his 1964 State of the Union message, he declared an “unconditional war on poverty in America.”

The center of this utopian effort to eradicate poverty was the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. It created an Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to provide education and training through programs such as the Job Corps for unskilled young people trapped in the poverty cycle. VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), patterned after the Peace Corps, offered assistance to the poor at home, while Head Start tried to give disadvantaged
children a chance to succeed in school. Assorted community action programs gave the poor a voice in improving housing, health, and education in their own neighborhoods. Two agencies responded to Native American pressure by allowing Indians to devise programs and budgets and then administer programs themselves.

Aware of the escalating costs of medical care, Johnson also proposed a medical assistance plan. Both Truman and Kennedy had supported such an initiative but had failed to win congressional approval. Johnson succeeded. To head off conservative attacks, the administration tied the Medicare measure to the social security system and limited the program to the elderly. The new Medicaid program met the needs of those on welfare and certain other groups who could not afford private insurance. The Medicare-Medicaid initiative was the most important extension of federally directed social benefits since the Social Security Act of 1935. By the middle of the next decade, the two programs were paying for the medical costs of 20 percent of the American people.

Johnson was similarly successful in his effort to provide aid for elementary and secondary schools. Kennedy had met defeat when Catholics had insisted on assistance to parochial schools. Johnson, a Protestant, was able to deal with the ticklish religious question without charges of favoritism. His legislation allocated education money to the states based on the number of children from low-income families. Those funds would then be distributed to assist deprived children in public as well as private schools.

In LBJ’s expansive vision, the federal government would ensure that everyone shared in the promise of American life. Under his prodding, Congress passed a new housing act to give rent supplements to the poor and created a Cabinet Department of Housing and Urban Development. The federal government provided new forms of aid, such as legal assistance for those who could not afford to pay for it themselves. It moved further in funding higher education, including colleges and universities in its financial grants. Congress also provided artists and scholars with assistance through the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, created in 1965. Not since the Works Progress Administration in the New Deal had such groups been granted government aid.

At the same time, Johnson’s administration provided much-needed immigration reform. The Immigration Act of 1965 replaced previously restrictive policy, in place since 1924, with a measure that vastly increased the ceiling on immigration and opened the door to immigrants from Asia and Latin America. By the late 1960s, some 350,000 immigrants were entering the United States annually, compared to the average of 47,000 per year between 1931 and 1945. This new stream of immigration created a population more

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The National Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964 set aside 9.1 million acres of wilderness, and Congress passed other measures to limit air and water pollution. In addition, Lady Bird Johnson, the president’s wife, led a beautification campaign to eliminate unsightly billboards and junkyards along the nation’s highways.

Achievements and Challenges in Civil Rights

Lyndon Johnson was enormously successful in advancing the cause of civil rights. Seizing the opportunity provided by Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson told Congress, “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill.” He pushed the bill through Congress, heading off a Senate filibuster by persuading

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his old colleague, minority leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois, to work for cloture—a two-thirds vote to cut off debate.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed racial discrimination in all public accommodations and authorized the Justice Department to act with greater authority in school and voting matters. In addition, an equal-opportunity provision prohibited discriminatory hiring on grounds of race, gender, religion, or national origin in firms with more than 25 employees.

Although the law was one of the great achievements of the 1960s, Johnson realized that it was only a starting point, for widespread discrimination still existed in American society. Even with the voting rights measures of 1957 and 1960, African Americans in large areas of the South still found it difficult to vote. Freedom Summer, sponsored by SNCC and other civil rights groups in 1964, focused attention on the problem by sending black and white students to Mississippi to work for black rights. Early in the summer, two whites, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, and one black, James Chaney, were murdered. By the end of the summer, 80 workers had been beaten, 1,000 arrests had been made, and 37 churches had been bombed.

Early in 1965, another confrontation made national headlines. Alabama police clubbed and tear-gassed demonstrators in an aborted march from Selma to the state capital at Montgomery. President Johnson sent the National Guard to protect another march to Montgomery and then asked Congress for a voting bill that would close the loopholes of the previous two acts.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, perhaps the most important law of the decade, singled out the South for its restrictive practices and authorized the U.S. attorney general to appoint federal examiners to register voters where local officials were obstructing the registration of blacks. In the year after passage of the act, 400,000 blacks registered to vote in the Deep South; by 1968, the number reached 1 million.

Despite passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, racial discrimination remained throughout the country. Still-segregated schools, wretched housing, and inadequate job opportunities were continuing problems. As the struggle for civil rights moved north, dramatic divisions within the movement emerged.

Initially, the civil rights campaign had been integrated and nonviolent. Its acknowledged leader was Martin Luther King, Jr. But now tensions between blacks and whites flared within organizations, and younger black leaders began to challenge King's nonviolent approach. They were tired of beatings, jailings, church bombings, and the slow pace of change when dependent on white liberal support and government action. Anne Moody, the stalwart activist in Mississippi, voiced the doubts so many blacks harbored about the possibility of real change. Discouraged after months of struggle, she boarded a bus taking civil rights workers north to testify about the abuses that still remained. As she listened to the others singing the movement's songs, she was overwhelmed by the suffering she had so often seen. “We Shall Overcome” reverberated around her, but all she could think was, “I wonder. I really wonder.”

One episode that contributed to many blacks' suspicion of white liberals occurred at the Democratic national convention of 1964 in Atlantic City. SNCC, active in the Freedom Summer project in Mississippi, had founded the Freedom Democratic party as an alternative to the all-white delegation that was to represent the state. Testifying before the credentials committee, black activist Fannie Lou Hamer reported that she had been beaten, jailed, and denied the right to vote. Yet the committee's final compromise, pressed by President Johnson, who worried about losing southern support in the coming election, was that the white delegation would still be seated, with two members of the protest organization offered seats at large. That response hardly satisfied those who had risked their lives and families to try to vote in Mississippi. As civil rights leader James Forman observed, “Atlantic City was a powerful lesson, not only for the black people from Mississippi, but for all of SNCC. . . . No longer was there any hope . . . that the federal government would change the situation in the Deep South.” SNCC, once a religious, integrated organization, began to change into an all-black cadre that could mobilize poor blacks for militant action. “Liberation” replaced civil rights as a goal.

Increasingly, angry blacks argued that the nation must no longer withhold the rights pledged in its founding credo. Black author James Baldwin wrote in one of his eloquent essays that unless change came soon, the worst could be expected: “If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, recreated from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!”

Even more responsible for channeling black frustration into a new set of goals and tactics was Malcolm X. Born Malcolm Little and reared in ghettos
Anne Moody grew up in a poor black family in Mississippi. A bright student, she graduated from high school and won a scholarship to Natchez College, then went on to Tougaloo College. While in secondary school, she became aware of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and then in college, she did volunteer work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Things didn’t seem to be coming along too well in the Delta. On Saturdays we would spend all day canvassing and often at night we would have mass rallies. But these were usually poorly attended. Many Negroes were afraid to come. In the beginning some were even afraid to talk to us. Most of these old plantation Negroes had been brainwashed so by the whites, they really thought that only whites were supposed to vote. There were even a few who had never heard of voting. The only thing most of them knew was how to handle a hoe. For years they had demonstrated how well they could do that. Some of them had calluses on their hands so thick they would hide them if they noticed you looking at them.

As the work continued that summer, people began to come around. I guess they saw that our intentions were good. But some began getting fired from their jobs, thrown off plantations and left homeless. They could often find somewhere else to stay, but food and clothing became a problem. SNCC started to send representatives to Northern college campuses. They went begging for food, clothing and money for the people in Mississippi, and the food, clothing and money started coming in. The Delta Negroes still didn’t understand the voting, but they knew they had found friends, friends they could trust.

That summer I could feel myself beginning to change. For the first time I began to think something would be done about whites killing, beating, and misusing Negroes. I knew I was going to be a part of whatever happened.

- Why were some African Americans afraid to become too friendly with the civil rights workers, black or white?
- Why were some Mississippi blacks afraid to vote?
- What gave Anne Moody a sense of confidence that conditions could change?

from Detroit to New York, he hustled numbers and prostitutes in the big cities. Arrested and imprisoned, he became a convert to the Nation of Islam and a disciple of black leader Elijah Muhammad. He began to preach that the white man was responsible for the black man’s condition and that blacks had to help themselves.

Malcolm was impatient with the moderate civil rights movement. He grew tired of hearing “all of this non-violent, begging-the-white-man kind of dying . . . all of this sitting-in, sliding-in, wading-in, eating-in, diving-in, and all the rest.” Espousing black separatism and black nationalism for most of his public career, he argued for black control of black communities, preached an international perspective embracing African peoples in diaspora, and appealed to blacks to fight racism “by any means necessary.”

Malcolm X became the most dynamic spokesman for poor northern blacks since Marcus Garvey in the 1920s. Though he was assassinated by black antagonists in 1965, his African-centered, uncompromising perspective helped shape the struggle against racism.

One man influenced by Malcolm’s message was Stokely Carmichael. Born in Trinidad, he came to the United States at age 11, where he grew up with an interest in political affairs and black protest. While at Howard University, he participated in pickets and demonstrations and was beaten and jailed. Frustrated with the strategy of civil disobedience as he became active in SNCC, he urged fieldworkers to carry weapons for self-defense. It was time for blacks to cease depending on whites, he argued, and to make SNCC into a black organization. His election as head of the student group reflected SNCC’s growing radicalism.

The split in the black movement was dramatized in June 1966 when Carmichael’s followers challenged those of Martin Luther King, Jr., during a march in Mississippi. King still adhered to nonviolence and
Malcolm X at the Lectern  “The day of nonviolence is over,” Malcolm X proclaimed, as many African Americans listened enthusiastically. A compelling speaker, Malcolm made a powerful case for a more aggressive campaign for black rights. What image does Malcolm X convey in this photograph? (Bettmann/CORBIS)

interracial cooperation. Just out of jail after being arrested for his protest activities, Carmichael jumped onto a flatbed truck to address the group. “This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested—and I ain’t going to jail no more!” he shouted. “The only way we gonna stop them white men from whippin’ us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years and we ain’t got nothing. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!” Carmichael had the audience in his hand as he repeated, and the crowd shouted back, “We . . . want . . . Black . . . Power!”

Black Power was a call to build independent institutions in the African American community and to end the physical and sexual abuse of black women. It also fostered a powerful sense of black pride. The movement included a wide variety of different figures: cultural nationalists such as Maulana Ron Karenga, an activist scholar and early authority on Black Studies; advocates of black capitalism such as Nathan Wright, Jr., chairman of the 1967 and 1968 National and International Conferences on Black Power; and revolutionary nationalists such as Huey P. Newton, a proponent of aggressive liberation measures. Its most enduring legacy was political and cultural mobilization at the grassroots level, even if it only partially realized its goals.

Black Power led to demands for more drastic action. The Black Panthers, radical activists who organized first in Oakland, California, and then in other cities, formed a militant organization that vowed to eradicate not only racial discrimination but capitalism as well. H. Rap Brown, who succeeded Carmichael as head of SNCC, became known for his statement that “violence is as American as cherry pie.”

Violence accompanied the more militant calls for reform and showed that racial injustice was not a southern problem but an American one. Riots erupted in Rochester, New York City, and several New Jersey cities in 1964. In 1965, in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, a massive uprising lasting five days left 34 dead, more than 1,000 injured, and hundreds of structures burned to the ground. Violence broke out again in other cities in 1966, 1967, and 1968.

A Sympathetic Supreme Court

With the addition of four new liberal justices appointed by Kennedy and Johnson, the Supreme Court supported and promoted the liberal agenda. Under the leadership of chief justice Earl Warren, the Court followed the lead it had taken in Brown v. Board of Education outlawing school segregation by moving against Jim Crow practices in other public establishments.

The Court also supported civil liberties by beginning to protect the rights of individuals with radical political views. Similarly, the Court sought to protect accused suspects from police harassment. In Gideon v. Wainwright (1963), the justices decided that poor defendants in serious cases had the right to free legal counsel. In Escobedo v. Illinois (1964), they ruled that a suspect had to be given access to an attorney during questioning. In Miranda v. Arizona (1966), they argued that offenders had to be warned that statements extracted by the police could be used against them and that they could remain silent.

Other decisions similarly broke new ground. Baker v. Carr (1962) opened the way to reapportionment of state legislative bodies according to the standard, defined a year later in Justice William O. Douglas’s words, of “one person, one vote.” This
crucial ruling helped break the political control of lightly populated rural districts in many state assemblies and made the U.S. House of Representatives much more responsive to urban and suburban issues. Meanwhile, the Court outraged conservatives by ruling that prayer could not be required in the public schools and that obscenity laws could no longer restrict allegedly pornographic material that might have some “redeeming social value.”

The Great Society Under Attack

Supported by healthy economic growth, the Great Society worked for a few years as Johnson had hoped. The tax cut proved effective, and the consumer and business spending that it promoted led to a steady increase in the gross national product (GNP) of 7.1 percent in 1964, 8.1 percent in 1965, and 9.5 percent in 1966. As the economy improved, the budget deficit dropped just as predicted. Unemployment fell, and inflation remained under control. Medical programs provided basic security for the old and the poor. Education flourished as schools were built, and teachers’ salaries increased as a result of the influx of federal aid.

Yet Johnson’s dream of the Great Society proved illusory. Some programs promised too much; others were simply ill conceived or were underfunded. Factionalism was also a problem. Lyndon Johnson had reconstituted the old Democratic coalition in his triumph in 1964, with urban Catholics and southern whites joining organized labor, the black electorate, and the middle class. But diverse interests within the coalition soon clashed. Conservative white southerners and blue-collar white northerners felt threatened by the government’s support of civil rights. Local urban bosses, long the backbone of the Democratic party, objected to grassroots participation of the urban poor, which threatened their own political control.

Criticisms of the Great Society and its liberal underpinnings came from across the political spectrum. There had never been widespread popular enthusiasm for much of the effort. Conservatives disliked the centralization of authority and the government’s increased role in defining the national welfare. They also questioned involving the poor in reform programs, arguing that poor people lacked a broad vision of the nation’s needs. Even middle-class Americans, generally supportive of liberal goals, sometimes grumbled that the government was paying too much attention to the underprivileged and neglecting the needs of the middle class.

Radicals, meanwhile, attacked the Great Society for not going far enough. They challenged its assumption that the American system was basically sound. “The welfare state is more machinery than substance,” activist Tom Hayden declared, in suggesting that it was just a warmed-over version of the New Deal. It made no real effort to redistribute income which, in the radicals’ view, was the only way to transform American life.

The Vietnam War dealt the Great Society a fatal blow. LBJ wanted to maintain both the war and his treasured domestic reform programs, but his effort to pursue these goals simultaneously produced serious inflation. The economy was already booming as a result of the tax cut and the spending for reform. As military expenditures increased, the productive system of the country could not keep up with demand. When Johnson refused to raise taxes, in an effort to hide the costs of the war, inflation spiraled out of control. Congress finally got into the act and slashed Great Society programs. As hard economic choices became increasingly necessary, many decided the country could no longer afford social reform on the scale that Johnson had proposed.
CONTINUING CONFRONTATIONS WITH COMMUNISTS

The Cold War continued throughout the 1960s. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson were both aggressive cold warriors who subscribed to the policies of their predecessors. Their commitment to stopping the spread of communism kept the nation locked in the same bitter conflict that had dominated foreign policy in the 1950s and led to continuing global confrontations that sometimes threatened the stability of the entire world.

The Bay of Pigs Fiasco and Its Consequences

Kennedy was intensely interested in foreign affairs. In his ringing inaugural address, his major focus was on diplomacy, and he barely mentioned domestic issues. In the midst of the Cold War, he was determined to stand firm in the face of Russian power. During the campaign, he had declared: “The enemy is the communist system itself—implacable, insatiable, unceasing in its drive for world domination.” In his inaugural address, he eloquently described the dangers and challenges the United States faced. “In the long history of the world,” he
cried out, “only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger.” The United States would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty.”

Kennedy perceived direct challenges from the Soviet Union almost from the beginning of his presidency. The first came at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in the spring of 1961. Cuban–American relations had been strained since Fidel Castro’s revolutionary army had seized power in 1959. A radical regime in Cuba, leaning toward the Soviet Union, could provide a model for upheaval elsewhere in Latin America and threaten the venerable Monroe Doctrine. One initiative to counter the Communist threat was the Alliance for Progress, which provided social and economic assistance to the less-developed nations of the hemisphere. But other, more aggressive, responses were deemed necessary as well.

Just before Kennedy assumed office, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Cuba. The CIA, meanwhile, was covertly training anti-Castro exiles to storm the Cuban coast at the Bay of Pigs. The American planners assumed the invasion would lead to an uprising of the Cuban people against Castro. While some top officials resisted the scheme, Kennedy approved the plan.

The invasion, which took place on April 17, 1961, was an unmitigated disaster. When an early air strike failed to destroy Cuban air power, Castro was able to hold off the troops coming ashore. Urged to use American planes for air cover, Kennedy refused, for by that time failure was clear. Rather than supporting the exiles, the Cubans had followed Castro instead, and the predicted popular uprising never materialized. The United States stood exposed to the world, attempting to overthrow a sovereign government. It had broken agreements not to interfere in the internal affairs of hemispheric neighbors and had intervened clumsily and unsuccessfully.

Although chastened by the debacle at the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy remained determined to deal sternly with the perceived Communist threat. Germany became the next battleground. For more than a decade, the nation had been divided (see Chapter 27). The Western powers had promoted the industrial development of West Germany, which was prospering and which stood in stark contrast to the drab, Soviet-controlled East Germany. Berlin, likewise divided, remained an irritant to the Russians, particularly since some 2.6 million East Germans had fled to West Germany, many of them making their escape through the city. Following a hostile meeting with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna in June 1961 (where discussion centered on the question of a permanent settlement for the bifurcated city of Berlin to prevent the flow of East Germany refugees), Kennedy reacted aggressively. He asked Congress for $3 billion more in defense appropriations, for more personnel in the armed forces, and for funds for a civil defense fallout-shelter program, explicitly warning of the threat of nuclear war. The USSR responded in August by erecting a wall in Berlin to seal off its section of the city entirely. The concrete structure, topped by barbed wire, was 96 miles long and an average of 11.8 feet high. Menacing machine-gun emplacements made escape difficult. People who were caught scaling the wall were shot. Families were separated as the wall became a dramatic symbol of the division between East and West.

The Cuban Missile Face-Off
The next year, a new crisis arose. Understandably fearful of the American threat to Cuban independence after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel Castro sought and secured Soviet assistance. American aerial photographs taken in October 1962 revealed that the USSR had begun to place what Kennedy considered offensive missiles on Cuban soil, although Cuba insisted they were defensive. The missiles did not
change the strategic balance significantly, for the Soviets could still wreak untold damage on American targets from more distant bases. But with Russian weapons installed just 90 miles from American shores, appearance was more important than reality. This time Kennedy was determined to win a confrontation with the Soviet Union over Cuba.

Top administration officials discussed various alternatives. Some members of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council wanted an air strike to knock out the sites; others, including Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the president's brother, opposed such a move. Still, the United States moved to a state of full alert. Bombers and missiles were armed with nuclear weapons and readied to go. The fleet prepared to move toward Cuba, and troops geared up to invade the island.

Kennedy went on nationwide television to tell the American people about the missiles and to demand their removal. He declared that the United States would not shrink from the risk of nuclear war and announced what he had decided to do: impose a naval "quarantine"—not a blockade, which would have been an act of war—around Cuba to prevent Soviet ships from bringing in additional missiles.

As the Soviet ships steamed toward the blockade and the nations stood "eyeball to eyeball" at the brink, the world held its breath. After several days, the tension broke, but only because Khrushchev called the Soviet ships back. Khrushchev then sent a long letter, transmitted by teletype, to Kennedy pledging to remove the missiles if the United States lifted the quarantine and promised to stay out of Cuba altogether. A second letter demanded that America remove its missiles from Turkey as well. The United States agreed to the first letter, ignored the second, and said nothing about its intention, already voiced, of removing its own missiles from Turkey. With that, the crisis ended. Secretary of State Dean Rusk observed, "We have won a considerable victory. You and I are still alive."
The Cuban missile crisis was the most terrifying confrontation of the Cold War. The world was closer than it had ever been to nuclear war. Yet the president emerged from it as a hero who had stood firm. His reputation was enhanced, and his party benefited a few weeks later in the congressional elections. As the relief began to fade, however, critics charged that what Kennedy saw as his finest hour was in fact an unnecessary crisis. One consequence of the affair was the installation of a Soviet–American hotline to avoid similar episodes.
in the future. Another consequence was the USSR's determination to increase its nuclear arsenal so that it would never again be exposed as inferior to the United States. Despite the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, which prohibited atmospheric testing, the nuclear arms race continued.

Confrontation and Containment Under Johnson

Johnson shared many of Kennedy's assumptions about the threat of communism. His understanding of the onset of World War II led him to believe that aggressors had to be stopped before they committed more aggression, for "if you let a bully come into your front yard one day, the next day he'll be up on your porch and the day after that he'll rape your wife in your own bed." Like Eisenhower and Kennedy, Johnson believed in the domino theory: if one country in a region fell, others were bound to follow. He assumed he could treat foreign adversaries just as he treated political opponents in the United States, and he was frustrated with what he called "piddly little piss-ant" countries that caused trouble.

In 1965, Johnson dispatched more than 20,000 troops to the Dominican Republic to counter "Castro-type elements" that were, in fact, engaged in a democratic revolution. His credibility suffered badly from the episode.

In the Middle East, the United States sought to use its influence to temper the violence that erupted in the area. In 1967, Israeli forces defeated the Egyptian army in the Six-Day War and seized the West Bank and Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. Americans pressed for a quick end to the fighting to maintain regional equilibrium and uninterrupted supplies of oil.

WAR IN VIETNAM AND TURMOIL AT HOME

The commitment to stopping the spread of communism led to the massive U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The roots of the conflict, described in Chapter 26, extended back to the early post–World War II years, but American participation remained relatively limited until Kennedy took office. Then the United States became increasingly engaged in the effort to resist a Communist takeover. That struggle wrought enormous damage in Southeast Asia, tore the United States apart, and finally forced a full-fledged re-evaluation of America's Cold War policies.

Escalation in Vietnam

JFK's commitment to Cold War victory led him to expand the American role in Vietnam, the country


Invasion of Cambodia
April–June 1970

Bombing and defoliation
Feb.–March 1969

Ho Chi Minh Trail

Invasion of Laos
Feb.–March, 1971

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

July 1954

Mekong Delta

Gulf of Thailand

Cam Ranh Bay

South China Sea

Gulf of Tonkin

Hanoi

U.S. air raids
1966–1968

1972

Haiphong harbor mined 1972

Gulf of Tonkin incident Aug. 1964

Demarcation line July 1954

17th parallel

Dien Bien Phu

This map shows the major campaigns of the Vietnam War. The North Vietnamese Tet offensive of early 1968, pictured with red arrows, turned the tide against U.S. participation in the war and led to peace talks. The U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970, pictured with blue arrows, provoked serious opposition. Reflecting on the Past: What role did North Vietnam play in the war? How far did American air power penetrate? Why did the United States and South Vietnam attack neighboring nations, such as Cambodia?

Reflecting on the Past:

What role did North Vietnam play in the war? How far did American air power penetrate? Why did the United States and South Vietnam attack neighboring nations, such as Cambodia?
The Vietnam War

The war in Vietnam consumed both soldiers and resources. The rapid escalation was accompanied by a mounting protest movement back in the United States that peaked when the troop involvement was greatest. Meanwhile, American planes and helicopters did devastating damage to the rice paddies and palm groves of this faraway land.

Reflecting on the Past Why did the rapid buildup cause such intense protest at home? What effects did the bombs have on the Vietnamese? Why did the number of troops diminish after 1968?

The United States launched a massive bombing campaign aimed at targets in both North and South Vietnam. Note how the tonnage dropped in the Vietnam War compared to the tonnage dropped in World War II.

The number of American troops in Vietnam increased quickly once escalation began. By the time there were more than half a million U.S. soldiers involved, many Americans were actively engaged in protesting the war.
he once called the “cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia.” Now resolved to resist the spread of communism, Kennedy and his closest associates were confident of success. As Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara observed, “North Vietnam will never beat us. They can’t even make ice cubes.” During the Kennedy administration, the number of advisers rose from 675 to more than 16,000, and American soldiers were already losing their lives.

Despite American backing, South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic, was rapidly losing support in his own country. Buddhist priests burned themselves alive in the capital of Saigon to protest the corruption and arbitrariness of Diem’s regime. With the approval of the United States, South Vietnamese military leaders assassinated Diem and seized the government. Kennedy understood the importance of popular support for the South Vietnamese government if that country was to maintain its independence. But he was reluctant to withdraw and let the Vietnamese solve their own problems.

Lyndon Johnson shared the same reservations and, soon after assuming the presidency, he made a fundamental decision that guided policy for the next four years. South Vietnam was more unstable than ever after the assassination of Diem. Guerrillas, known as Viet Cong, challenged the regime, sometimes covertly and sometimes through the National Liberation Front, their political arm. Aided by Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese, the insurgent Viet Cong slowly gained ground, but Johnson chose to stand firm. “I am not going to lose Vietnam,” he said. “I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”

In the 1964 election campaign, Johnson posed as a man of peace. “We don’t want our American boys to do the fighting for Asian boys,” he declared. “We are not going to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.” He criticized those who suggested moving in with American bombs. But secretly he was planning to escalate the American role.

In August 1964, Johnson cleverly obtained congressional authorization for the war by announcing that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had made unprovoked attacks on American destroyers in the international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin, 30 miles from North Vietnam. Only later did it become clear that the American ships had violated the territorial waters of North Vietnam by assisting South Vietnamese commando raids in offshore combat zones. With the details of the attack still unclear, Johnson used the episode to obtain from Congress a resolution giving him authority to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” The Gulf of Tonkin resolution gave Johnson the leverage he sought. As he noted, it was “like grandma’s nightshirt—it covered everything.”

Military escalation began in earnest in February 1965, after Johnson’s landslide electoral victory, when Viet Cong forces killed 7 Americans and wounded 109 in an attack on an American base at Pleiku. In response, Johnson authorized retaliatory bombing of North Vietnam to cut off the flow of supplies and to ease pressure on South Vietnam. He personally authorized every raid, boasting that the air force “can’t even bomb an outhouse without my approval.” A few months later, the president sent American ground troops into action. This marked the crucial turning point in the Americanization of the Vietnam War. Only 25,000 American soldiers were in Vietnam at the start of 1965; by the end of the year, there were 184,000. The number swelled to 385,000 in 1966, to 485,000 in 1967, and to 543,000 in 1968.

As escalation occurred, Johnson recognized his dilemma. He understood that the war was probably unwinnable, but he feared the loss of both American power and personal prestige if he pulled out. “Vietnam is getting worse every day,” he told his wife in mid-1965. “It’s like being in an airplane and I have to choose between crashing the plane or jumping out. I do not have a parachute.”

And so American forces became direct participants in the fight to prop up a dictatorial regime in faraway South Vietnam. Although a somewhat more effective government headed by Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky was finally established, the level of violence increased. Saturation bombing of North Vietnam continued. Fragmentation bombs, killing and maiming countless civilians, and napalm, which seared off human flesh, were used extensively. Similar destruction wreaked South Vietnam. And still, despite the repeatedly expressed contention of military commander William Westmoreland that there was “light at the end of the tunnel,” the violence continued without pause.
Part 6 A Resilient People, 1945–2005

The Horror of Napalm
Napalm, a jellylike chemical dropped by American planes, stuck to people as it burned. In this picture, widely circulated throughout the world, a small girl whose skin was seared off by napalm tries unsuccessfully to escape the ravages of war. Why was this image so powerful? What do you feel when you look at it? (AP/Wide World Photos)

Student Activism and Antiwar Protest

Americans began to protest U.S. involvement in the war. Their protest had roots in a deeper disaffection, based in large part on post–World War II demographic patterns. Members of the baby boom generation came of age in the 1960s, and many of them, especially from the large middle class, moved on to some form of higher education. Between 1950 and 1964, the number of students in college more than doubled. By the end of the 1960s, college enrollment was more than four times what it had been in the 1940s. College served as a training ground for industry and corporate life; more important, it gave students time to experiment and grow before they had to make a living. In college, some students joined the struggle for civil rights. Hopeful at first, they gradually became discouraged by the gap between Kennedy’s New Frontier rhetoric and the government’s actual commitment.

Out of that disillusionment arose the radical spirit of the New Left. Civil rights activists were among those who in 1960 organized Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In 1962, SDS issued a manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, written largely by Tom Hayden of the University of Michigan, which outlined both complaints and goals for a participatory democracy.

The first blow of the growing student rebellion came at the University of California in Berkeley. There, civil rights activists became involved in a confrontation soon known as the Free Speech Movement. It began in September 1964 when the university refused to allow students to distribute protest material outside the main campus gate. The students, many of whom had worked in the movement in the South, argued that their tables were off campus and therefore not subject to university restrictions on political activity. When police arrested one of the leaders, students surrounded the police car and kept it from moving all night. The university regents brought charges against the student leaders, and when the regents refused to drop the charges, the students occupied the administration building. The police stormed in and arrested the students. A strike, with faculty aid, mobilized wider support for the right to free speech.

The Free Speech Movement at Berkeley was basically a plea for traditional liberal reform. Students sought only the reaffirmation of the long-standing right to express themselves as they chose, and they aimed their attacks at the university, not at society as a whole. Later, in other institutions, the attack broadened. Students sought greater involvement in university affairs, argued for curriculum reform, and demanded admission of more minority students. Their success in gaining their demands changed the governance of American higher education.
AMERICAN VOICES

Tom Hayden and Other Members of Students for a Democratic Society, Port Huron Statement

Tom Hayden was a leader of the radical group, Students for a Democratic Society, one of the major New Left organizations of the 1960s. This manifesto, issued in 1962, summed up the critique of modern American society and outlined the kind of approach to government the students wanted.

We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.

When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world. . . .

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract “others” we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time. . . .

Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. . . .

We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation. . . .

■ According to Tom Hayden, what issues troubled young people as they grew up in the 1950s and 1960s?

■ Why does Hayden suggest that isolation and estrangement are such powerful forces?

■ What does Hayden mean by a “democracy of individual participation”?

The mounting protest against the escalation of the Vietnam War fueled and refocused the youth movement. The first antiwar teach-in took place in March 1965 at the University of Michigan. Others soon followed. Initially, both supporters and opponents of the war appeared at the teach-ins, but soon the sessions became more like antiwar rallies than instructional affairs. Boxer Muhammad Ali legitimated draft resistance when he declared, “I ain’t got no quarrel with them Viet Cong,” and refused military induction. Working through SDS and other organizations, radical activists campaigned against the draft, attacked ROTC units on campus, and sought to discredit firms that produced the destructive tools of war. “Make love, not war,” students proclaimed.

The antiwar movement expanded. Women Strike for Peace, the most forceful women’s antiwar organization, mobilized support by saying, “Stop! Don’t drench the jungles of Asia with the blood of our sons. Don’t force our sons to kill women and children whose only crime is to live in a country ripped by civil war.” Students became even more shrill. “Hey, hey, LBJ. How many kids did you kill today?” they chanted. In 1967, some 300,000 people marched in New York City. In Washington, D.C., 100,000 tried to close down the Pentagon.

Working-class and middle-class Americans began to sour on the war at the time of the Tet offensive, celebrating the lunar new year in early 1968. The North Vietnamese mounted a massive attack on provincial capitals and district towns in South Vietnam. In Saigon, they struck the American embassy, Tan Son Nhut air base, and the presidential palace. Though beaten back, they won a psychological victory. American audiences watched the fighting on television, as they had for several years, seeing images of burning huts and wounded soldiers each evening as they ate dinner. During the Tet offensive, American television networks showed scenes of a kind never screened before. One such clip, from NBC News, appears here in still photograph form. Viewers who watched the television clip saw the corpse drop to the ground, blood spouting from his head. Gazing at such graphic representations of death and destruction, many Americans wondered about their nation’s purposes and actions—indeed, about whether the war could be won.

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Protest became a way of life. Between January 1 and June 15, 1968, hundreds of thousands of students staged 221 major demonstrations at more than 100 educational institutions. One of the most dramatic episodes came in April 1968 at Columbia University, where the issues of civil rights and war were tightly intertwined. A strong SDS chapter urged the university to break ties with the Institute of Defense Analysis, which specialized in military research. The Students’ Afro-American Society tried to stop the building of a new gymnasium, which it claimed encroached on the Harlem community and disrupted life there. Whites occupied one building, blacks another. Finally, the president of the university called in the police. Hundreds of students were arrested; many were hurt. A student sympathy strike followed, and Columbia closed for the summer several weeks early.

The student protests in the United States were part of a worldwide wave of student activism. French students demonstrated in the streets of Paris. In Germany, young radicals such as Rudi Dutschke and Ulrike Meinhof were equally vocal in challenging conventional norms. In Japan, students waged armed battles with police.

The Counterculture

Cultural change accompanied political upheaval. In the 1960s, many Americans, particularly young people, lost faith in the sanctity of the American system.

Pop Art Andy Warhol's painting of a Campbell's soup can was one of the best-known examples of "pop" art in the 1960s. Warhol and other artists drew on advertising images, comic strips, and other elements of popular culture in their painting and sculpture. What does this image tell you about the changing art world?

"There was," observed Joseph Heller, the irreverent author of Catch-22 (1961), "a general feeling that the platitudes of Americanism were horseshit." Many Americans—some politically active, some not—found new ways to assert their individuality and independence. As in the political sphere, the young led the way, often drawing on the example of the Beats of the 1950s as they sought new means of self-gratification and self-expression.

Surface appearances were most visible and, to older Americans, most troubling. The "hippies" of the 1960s carried themselves in different ways. Men let their hair grow and sprouted beards; men and women both donned jeans, muslin shirts, and other simple garments. Stressing spontaneity above all else, some rejected traditional marital customs and gravitated to communal living groups. Their example, shocking to some, soon found its way into the culture at large, both in the United States and among young people around the world.

Sexual norms underwent a revolution as more people separated sex from its traditional ties to family life. A generation of young women came of age with access to "the pill"—an oral contraceptive that was effortless to use and freed sexual experimentation from the threat of pregnancy. In 1960, the Food and Drug Administration approved Enovid, the first oral contraceptive available on the market. Within three years of its introduction, more than 2 million women were on the pill, and as the cost dropped, millions more began to use it.

Americans of all social classes became more open to exploring, and enjoying, their sexuality. Scholarly findings supported natural inclinations. In 1966, William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson published Human Sexual Response, based on intensive laboratory observation of couples engaged in sexual activities. Describing the kinds of response that women, as well as men, could experience, they destroyed the myth of the sexually passive woman.

Author and editor Nora Ephron summed up the sexual changes in the 1960s as she reflected on her own experiences. Initially she had "a hangover from the whole Fifties virgin thing," she recalled. "The first man I went to bed with, I was in love with and wanted to marry. The second one I was in love with, but I didn't have to marry him. With the third one, I thought I might fall in love."

The arts reflected the sexual revolution. Federal courts ruled that books like D. H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover and other suppressed works could not be banned. Nudity became more common on stage and screen. In Hair, a rock musical, one scene featured the disrobing of performers of both genders in the course of an erotic celebration.

Paintings reflected both the mood of dissent and the urge to innovate, apparent in the larger society. "Op" artists painted sharply defined geometric figures in clear, vibrant colors, starkly different from the flowing, chaotic work of the abstract expressionists. "Pop" artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jasper Johns broke with formalistic artistic conventions as they made ironic comments on American materialism and taste with their representations of everyday objects such as soup cans, comic strips, and pictures of Marilyn Monroe.

Hallucinogenic drugs also became a part of the counterculture. One prophet of the drug scene was Timothy Leary, a scientific researcher experimenting with LSD at Harvard University. Fired for violating a pledge not to use undergraduates as subjects, Leary aggressively asserted that drugs were necessary to free the mind. Working through his group, the League for Spiritual Discovery, he dressed in long robes and preached his message, "Tune in, turn on, drop out."

Another apostle of life with drugs was Ken Kesey. While writing his first novel, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, he began participating in medical experiments at a hospital where he was introduced to...
Chaos in Chicago
Policemen attacked demonstrators and bystanders alike at the turbulent Democratic convention of 1968. The senseless violence, pictured in graphic detail on national television, revealed serious rifts in the Democratic party and underscored the inability of political leaders to bridge the gaps. The horrifying chaos destroyed support for Democratic candidates and helped Nixon win the election. What reactions do you think people had to this image of the police clubbing protesters?
(Bettmann/CORBIS)
black soldiers serving in combat roles and losing their lives. King knew he was a target. On April 3, 1968, he spoke eloquently at a church service, making reference to threats on his life. “We’ve got some difficult days ahead,” he said. “But it doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountain top . . . and I’ve seen the promised land.”

The next day, as King stood on the balcony of his motel in Memphis, Tennessee, a bullet from a high-powered rifle ripped through his jaw and killed him. King’s assassination sparked a wave of violence throughout the United States. In a spontaneous outburst of rage, African Americans in 124 cities rioted, setting fires and looting stores. For all Americans, King’s death eroded faith in the possibility of nonviolent change.

Several months later, Robert F. Kennedy was also assassinated. Elected to the Senate from New York in 1964, he was running for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination. Kennedy had spoken out eloquently to the poor and had persuaded antiwar activists that he could bring the Vietnam conflict to an end. In June, he had just finished delivering his victory speech after winning the California primary when he was shot by an assassin. Civil rights leader John Lewis, working on Kennedy’s campaign, said, “Something was taken from us. The type of leadership that we had in a sense invested in, that we had helped to make and to nourish, was taken from us.” Kennedy’s death ended many people’s hopes for reconciliation or reform.

The Chaotic Election of 1968

The turbulent 1968 Democratic convention, held in Chicago, undermined any hopes the party had for victory. The city’s mayor, Richard Daley, was incensed at the radicals, peace activists, and hippies who had come to Chicago to protest the war and ordered law enforcement officers to clear out the demonstrators. Confrontations turned violent as police attacked protesters in the streets. Much of the violence took place in front of television cameras as crowds chanted, “The whole world is watching.” Hubert Humphrey, Johnson’s vice president, who ran for the Democratic nomination after Johnson refused to do so in the face of mounting antiwar protest, won what most people viewed as a worthless nomination. Humphrey faced former vice president Richard Nixon, who had long dreamed of holding the nation’s highest office. He had failed in his first bid in 1960 and later lost a race for governor of California. Written off by most politicians, he staged a comeback after the Goldwater debacle of 1964, and by 1968, he seemed to have a good shot at the presidency again.

Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama, a third-party candidate, exploited social and racial tensions in his campaign. Appealing to northern working-class voters as well as southern whites, Wallace characterized those who wanted to reform American life as “left-wing theoreticians, briefcase-toting bureaucrats, ivory-tower guideline writers, bearded anarchists, smart-aleck editorial writers and pointy-headed professors.” He hoped to ride into office on blue-collar resentment of social disorder and liberal aims.

Nixon addressed the same constituency, calling it the “silent majority.” Capitalizing on the dismay these Americans felt over campus disruptions and inner-city riots and appealing to latent racism, he promised law and order if elected. He also called the Great Society a costly mistake, declaring that it was “time to quit pouring billions of dollars into programs that have failed.” Heeding the advice of public-relations advisers, Nixon took the high ground and avoided shrill criticism himself. He gave Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland, his

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Popular Vote</th>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JOHN F. KENNEDY</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>34,227,096 (49.9%)</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard M. Nixon</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>34,108,546 (49.6%)</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry F. Byrd</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>501,643 (0.7%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LYNDON B. JOHNSON</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>43,126,584 (61.1%)</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry M. Goldwater</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>27,177,838 (38.5%)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICHARD M. NIXON</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>31,783,783 (43.4%)</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubert M. Humphrey</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>31,271,839 (42.7%)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George C. Wallace</td>
<td>American Independent</td>
<td>9,899,357 (13.5%)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Winners’ names appear in capital letters.
vice presidential running mate, the task of leading the attack, just as he had done for Eisenhower in 1952. Agnew, much like the Nixon of old, responded aggressively, calling Hubert Humphrey “squishy soft on communism” and declaring that “if you’ve seen one city slum, you’ve seen them all.”

Nixon received 43 percent of the popular vote, not quite 1 percent more than Humphrey, with Wallace capturing the rest. But it was enough to give the Republicans a majority in the Electoral College and Nixon the presidency at last. Sixty-two percent of all white voters (but only 12 percent of black voters) had cast their votes for either Nixon or Wallace, suggesting that the covert racial appeal had worked. Because many Americans split their tickets, the Democrats won both houses of Congress.

Continuing Protest
Meanwhile, protests continued. In October 1969, the Weathermen, a militant fringe group of SDS, sought to show that the revolution had arrived with a frontal attack on Chicago, scene of the violent Democratic convention of 1968. The Weathermen, taking their name from a line in a Bob Dylan song—“You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows”—came from all over the country. Dressed in hard hats, jackboots, work gloves, and other padding, they rampaged through the streets with clubs, pipes, chains, and rocks. They ran into the police, as they had expected and hoped, and continued the attack. Some were arrested, others were shot, and the rest withdrew to regroup. For the next two days, they plotted strategy, engaged in minor skirmishes, and prepared for a final thrust. It came on the fourth day, once again pitting aggressive Weathermen against hostile police.

Why had the Weathermen launched their attack? “The status quo meant to us war, poverty, inequality, ignorance, famine and disease in most of the world,” Bo Burlingham, a participant from Ohio, reflected. “To accept it was to condone and help perpetuate it. We felt like miners trapped in a terrible poisonous shaft with no light to guide us out. We resolved to destroy the tunnel even if we risked destroying ourselves in the process.” The rationale of the Chicago “national action” may have been clear to the participants, but it convinced few other Americans. Citizens around the country were infuriated at what they saw.

### Timeline

| 1960     | John F. Kennedy elected president  
|          | Birth control pill becomes available  
|          | Sit-ins begin  
|          | Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) founded  
| 1961     | Freedom rides  
|          | Joseph Heller, Catch-22  
|          | Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest  
|          | Bay of Pigs invasion fails  
|          | Khruutschev and Kennedy meet in Berlin  
|          | Berlin Wall constructed  
|          | JFK confronts steel companies  
| 1962     | Cuban missile crisis  
|          | James Meredith crisis at the University of Mississippi  
|          | SDS’s Port Huron Statement  
|          | Rachel Carson, Silent Spring  
| 1963     | Buddhist demonstrations in Vietnam  
|          | Birmingham demonstration  
|          | Civil rights march on Washington  
|          | Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president  
|          | Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique  
| 1964     | Economic Opportunity Act initiates War on Poverty  
|          | Gulf of Tonkin resolution  
|          | Johnson elected president  
|          | Civil Rights Act  
|          | Free Speech Movement, Berkeley  
| 1965     | Department of Housing and Urban Development established  
|          | Elementary and Secondary Education Act  
|          | Medicare established  
|          | Martin Luther King, Jr., leads march from Selma to Montgomery  
|          | Voting Rights Act  
|          | United Farm Workers grape boycott  
|          | Malcolm X assassinated  
|          | Riot in Watts section of Los Angeles  
|          | Ralph Nader, Unsafe at Any Speed  
|          | Vietnam conflict escalates  
|          | Marines sent to Dominican Republic  
| 1966     | Stokely Carmichael becomes head of SNCC and calls for “Black Power”  
|          | Black Panthers founded  
|          | Masters and Johnson, Human Sexual Response  
| 1967     | Urban riots in 22 cities  
| 1967–1968 | Antiwar demonstrations  
| 1968     | Student demonstrations at Columbia University and elsewhere  
|          | Tet offensive in Vietnam  
|          | Martin Luther King, Jr., assassinated  
|          | Robert F. Kennedy assassinated  
|          | Police and protesters clash at Democratic national convention  
|          | Richard Nixon elected president  
| 1969     | Woodstock and Altamont rock festivals  
|          | Weathermen’s “Days of Rage” in Chicago  

**TIMELINE**

Conclusion

Political and Social Upheaval

The 1960s were turbulent years. In the first part of the decade, the United States was relatively calm. Liberal Democrats went even further than Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman as they pressed for large-scale government intervention to meet the social and economic problems that accompanied the modern industrial age. They were inspired by John Kennedy’s rhetoric and saw the triumph of their approach in Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, as the nation strengthened its commitment to a capitalist welfare state. Then the Democratic party became impaled on the Vietnam War, and opposition to the conflict created more turbulence than the nation had known since the Civil War.

American society was in a state of upheaval. Young radicals challenged basic assumptions about how the government worked. They railed against social injustice at home, and they protested a foreign policy that they regarded as wrong. Their efforts faltered at first but then succeeded when they seized on the war in Vietnam as a primary focus and began to attack the Cold War policy that led to massive American military involvement in that far-away land. Student leaders, who often came from politically active families, soon found hundreds of thousands of followers who joined in the marches and demonstrations that finally forced the nation to reconsider its aims. Meanwhile, members of the counterculture promoted their own more fluid values, challenged the patterns of conformity so important in the 1950s, and led millions of other Americans, some politically active, some not, to dress and act differently than in the past. The two strands of political activism and countercultural action were independent but intertwined, and they left the nation at the end of the decade very different than it had been before.

Most Americans, like Paul Cowan who was introduced at the start of this chapter, embraced the message of John Kennedy and the New Frontier in the early 1960s and endorsed the liberal approach. But over time, they began to question the tenets of liberalism as the economy faltered, as hard economic choices had to be made, and as the country became mired in an unwinnable war in Vietnam. Conservatives deplored the chaos, while disillusioned liberals like Paul Cowan wondered if their approach could ever succeed.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. How did John F. Kennedy represent the hopes and ideals of Americans in the early 1960s?
2. How successful was Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society?
3. What impact did the war in Vietnam have on protest at home?
4. What were the most important changes experienced by the United States in the late 1960s?
5. What was the lasting impact of the protest that rocked America in the 1960s?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Richard Fariña’s Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me (1966) is a novel about hallucinatory life in the 1960s. Barbara Garson’s MacBird (1966), a play patterned loosely after Macbeth, pokes fun at the overarching ambitions of Lyndon Johnson. Vaughn Meader’s two record albums about The First Family (1962 and 1963—reissued on CD) provide a fictional glimpse at the Kennedy family. Bao Ninh’s The Sorrow of War (1991) is a North Vietnamese novel (English version by Frank Palmos, from the original
translation by Phan Thanh Hao) about the impact of the war; Tim O’Brien’s *Going After Cacciato* (1978) is a novel about Vietnam in which one soldier simply decides to lay down his gun and walk home. O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (1990) is a collection of short stories about the war. Robert Stone’s *Dog Soldiers* (1974) is an older novel about the military side of the war in Vietnam.

*Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) is a film that tells Ron Kovic’s story about being wounded in Vietnam and then returning home; Oliver Stone’s film *The Doors* (1991) deals with Jim Morrison and his rock group in the 1960s. *Eyes on the Prize* (1987) is a superb, multipart documentary about the civil rights movement. *The Graduate* (1967) became a cult film as it challenged the values of the 1950s and mocked the priorities of the world in which “plastics” were most important. *JFK* (1991) is Oliver Stone’s film about the Kennedy assassination, in which he suggests a conspiracy killed the president. *Malcolm X* (1992) is Spike Lee’s movie about the dramatic and outspoken black rights spokesman. *Mississippi Burning* (1988) is a film about three civil rights volunteers killed in Mississippi in 1964. Oliver Stone’s movie *Platoon* (1986) deals with soldiers in the field in the war in Vietnam. *Thirteen Days* (2001) is a feature film about the Cuban missile crisis.