

## CHAPTER 26

# The Tumultuous Sixties, 1960–1968

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 26 examines the impact of the tumultuous 1960s on American society. President Kennedy's policies and actions in the field of foreign policy were shaped by his acceptance of the containment doctrine and his preference for a bold, interventionist foreign policy. In its quest for friends in the Third World and ultimate victory in the Cold War, the Kennedy administration adopted the policy of "nation building" that, through such agencies as the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps, would "help developing nations through the early stages of nationhood." The Kennedy administration also adopted the concept of "counterinsurgency," which was intended "to defeat revolutionaries who challenged pro-American Third World governments." Such policies perpetuated an idea that had long been part of American foreign policy: that other people cannot solve their own problems and that the American economic and governmental model can be transferred intact to other societies. Historian William Appleman Williams believed that such thinking led to "the tragedy of American diplomacy," and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. refers to it as "a ghastly illusion."

Although Kennedy's activist approach to foreign policy helped bring the world to the brink of nuclear disaster in the Cuban missile crisis, in the aftermath of that crisis steps were taken by both superpowers that served to lessen tension and hostility between them. However, the arms race accelerated during both the Kennedy and Johnson years, and the United States and the Soviet Union continued to vie for friends in the Third World.

Young African Americans, through sit-ins, reinvigorated the civil rights movement. Although African American civil rights leaders were committed to the philosophy of non-violence, violence was present as a resistance to Freedom Rides, the Freedom Summer of 1964, and the Birmingham Children's Crusade. In the face of violent challenges from southern segregationists to an expanding black civil-rights movement, the Kennedy administration gradually committed itself to a decisive stand in favor of black equality. Only after the March on Washington, continuing racial violence, and Kennedy's assassination did Congress finally pass civil rights legislation.

The section "Liberalism and the Great Society" covers the legislative accomplishments of the Johnson administration—the most sweeping reform legislation since 1935. This legislation comprised the Civil Rights Act of 1964, establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and legislation associated with Johnson's War on Poverty. The authors look closely at the legislation that constituted the War on Poverty and discuss the problems and successes of this program. The authors then turn to a discussion of the course of American involvement in Vietnam from deepening U.S. involvement during the Kennedy administration to the escalation of and Americanization of the war during the Johnson administration. This discussion is based on the thesis that disaster befell the United States in Vietnam because of fear in the Johnson administration that America's credibility would suffer in the eyes of friends and foes around the world if the nation failed to achieve its stated goals in Southeast Asia.

As the three branches of the federal government slowly began to deal with such long-standing American problems as poverty and minority rights, frustrations that had built up over generations of inaction manifested themselves. Events convinced civil-rights activists in the South that the "power structure" in American society was not to be

trusted. Northern blacks began to reach the same conclusions. Both the civil-rights movement and Johnson's antipoverty programs had offered African Americans hope for a better day in American society. However, as discussion of the social, economic, and political plight of urban blacks reveals, that hope had not been fulfilled. Among other factors, unfulfilled expectations and the continued display of wealth and possessions in the consumer-oriented American society led to the urban riots of the 1960s. Militant black leaders gained prominence and questioned Martin Luther King's philosophy of nonviolence as well as his goal of integration. Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and the Black Panther party called for "black power" within the context of Black Nationalism. César Chávez and Delores Huerta advocated for workers' rights for Mexican Americans.

Some whites involved in the civil rights movement began to become disillusioned with American society. Although their disillusionment stemmed from different sources than that of blacks, it led to the political and social activism associated with the New Left and the counterculture. The authors discuss the emergence, characteristics, and goals of both of these groups as well as the reaction of the middle class to their attacks on traditional values. The forces of frustration, rage, and anger born of racism, sexism, poverty, disillusionment, materialism, and the revolution of rising expectations practically ripped America apart in the tumult of 1968. As the Vietnam War escalated and the New Left and the counterculture found common cause in their antiwar stance, the middle class became more and more convinced that traditional society was under siege.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the divisive presidential election of 1968.

## SECTION-BY-SECTION IDENTIFICATIONS AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

### I. Introduction

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

Ezell Blair, Franklin McCain, Joe McNeil, David Richmond, and the Greensboro sit in

How successful was Kennedy at implementing his domestic agenda?

What developments prompted Kennedy to offer more active support for Civil Rights?

What was Johnson's Great Society?

What divisions emerged in American society in the 1960s?

What were the "long hot summers"?

What was the "generation gap"?

What happened to Soviet-American relations in Europe after the Cuban Missile crisis?

Did the Cold War similarly thaw in the rest of the world?

What happened to American involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s?

Why was 1968 such a tumultuous year?

## **II. Kennedy and the Cold War**

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

John F. Kennedy  
*Profiles in Courage*  
the presidential election of 1960  
the televised Kennedy-Nixon debates  
"the best and the brightest"  
Robert McNamara  
McGeorge Bundy  
Dean Rusk  
Robert Kennedy  
"wars of national liberation"  
the concept of nation building  
the Alliance for Progress  
the Peace Corps  
the doctrine of counterinsurgency  
the 1961 Berlin crisis  
the Berlin Wall  
the Bay of Pigs invasion  
Operation Mongoose  
Cuban Missile Crisis

ExComm  
the Soviet-American “hot line”  
the nuclear test ban treaty of 1963

Why does Kamensky claim that Kennedy’s public image was a ruse? Why do you think Kennedy and his handlers created that ruse?

What was Kennedy’s top priority in office?

What impression did Kennedy’s inaugural address give about the way he would fight the Cold War? Did Kennedy’s approach to the Cold War actually live up to that impression? If not, why not? What made him change his approach?

How did Kennedy’s approach to the Cold War differ from Truman’s and Eisenhower’s?

How did Kennedy fight the Cold War? How successful were his programs? What problems did they face?

What assumption was at the heart of Kennedy’s nation-building programs?

How did Cuba become part of the Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union?

While Kennedy was willing to initiate dialogue with the Soviets, how successful was he at reducing Soviet-American tensions? Think about Soviet-American competition in the Third World, the Vienna summit, developments in the arms race, the 1961 Berlin Crisis, the Bay of Pigs, Operation Mongoose, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the developments in Soviet-American relationships in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

### III. Marching for Freedom

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)  
the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

the Freedom Rides  
James Meredith  
“Project C”  
the Children’s Crusade  
Eugene “Bull” Connor  
George C. Wallace and his stand in the schoolhouse door  
Medger Evers  
the March on Washington (Aug. 1963)  
the Freedom Summer of 1964  
the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)

How extensive were segregation and disfranchisement in the South in 1960?

What were the costs of racial strife in America to Americans doing business in other countries and to American foreign policy?

Describe Kennedy’s rather conflicted response to attacks on Freedom Riders.

What was Kennedy’s attitude toward civil rights generally? What did he do to thwart the civil rights movement’s progress? Why was he initially ambivalent or even antagonistic toward the civil rights movement? What developments prompted Kennedy to offer more active support for Civil Rights?

What important schism began to develop in the Civil Rights Movement in 1963?

What methods did Americans who fought for civil rights adopt to challenge segregation and disfranchisement in the 1960s?

How did national media coverage of attacks on those struggling for equal rights affect the civil rights movement?

#### **IV. Liberalism and the Great Society**

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

the New Frontier

the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)/the Apollo  
program  
John Glenn  
*Friendship Seven*  
Lee Harvey Oswald  
Jack Ruby  
the Warren Commission  
Lyndon Johnson  
“The Great Society”  
Civil Rights Act of 1964  
the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)  
the National Organization for Women (NOW)  
Barry Goldwater  
the 1964 Democratic National Convention  
MFDP/Fannie Lou Hamer  
the Selma to Montgomery march  
the Voting Rights Act of 1965  
the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (see also p. 784)  
Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965)  
“Lady Bird” Johnson  
the War on Poverty  
Head Start  
Upward Bound  
Job Corps  
the Model Cities Program  
Community Action Programs  
Medicare  
Medicaid  
Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)

Why did Kennedy’s social policy agenda languish?

Why do the authors claim that Kennedy was more powerful in death than in life?

What did Johnson believe the role of the federal government must be?

Why was gender discrimination included in the 1964 Civil Rights Act?

How did conservatives respond to the Civil Rights Act of 1964? What candidate championed the conservative cause in the presidential election of 1964?

How was the tension between Johnson’s support of civil rights and his need for Southern support reflected at the 1964 Democratic National Convention?

What important group began switching its allegiance from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 1964? Why?

What was the outcome of the congressional and presidential election of 1964?

What criticisms were leveled against the War on Poverty? Was Johnson's War on Poverty a success? Why or why not?

How did Johnson's Great Society contribute to the health care crisis we face today?

## V. Johnson and Vietnam

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

Army of the Republic of Vietnam  
the Tonkin Gulf incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution  
Operation Rolling Thunder  
the "Americanizing" of the war  
*A Rumor of War*  
General William Westmoreland  
the "body count" measure of success  
carpet bombing  
napalm  
crop defoliants/Agent Orange\*  
teach-ins  
the Fulbright hearings

How did foreign affairs threaten Johnson's domestic ambitions?

What had Kennedy done in Vietnam? What was he likely to have done there had he lived?

Why was Diem so unpopular?

Between 1965 and 1968, how did American troop strength in Vietnam change? How did the North Vietnamese, the Soviets, and the Chinese respond?

What opposition was there to Johnson's interest in "Americanizing" the war in Vietnam? Why did America's leaders choose war in Vietnam in the face of that opposition?

Describe the makeup of the American fighting force in Vietnam. Why did it look this way?

Why was the fighting in Vietnam so frustrating and dangerous for American troops?

How did American tactics stalemate the war and alienate many South Vietnamese, further strengthening the Vietcong?

What sorts of divisions were developing within the American public over Vietnam?

What was Robert S. McNamara's appraisal of the war? How did Johnson respond?

Why was American diplomacy in Vietnam stymied?

## **VI. A Nation Divided**

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

the "long, hot summers" of urban unrest  
the Kerner Commission Report  
Malcolm X  
the Black Muslims  
Stokely Carmichael  
Black Power  
the Black Panthers  
The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)  
Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta



The United Farm Workers (UFW) and the “grape strike”  
Mexican American student “blowout”  
Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)  
the New Left  
the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)  
the Port Huron Statement  
the Free Speech Movement (FSM)  
the doctrine of *in loco parentis*  
parietals  
the youth culture of the 1960s  
the Beatles  
the *Ed Sullivan Show*  
Bob Dylan  
Janis Joplin  
James Brown  
Aretha Franklin  
the Jefferson Airplane  
the Grateful Dead  
the Woodstock Festival  
the counterculture  
“sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll”  
“hippies”/“freaks”  
the “British Invasion”  
Haight-Ashbury  
the “Summer of Love”  
“Free Love”  
the birth control pill

What sparked the urban riots of the mid-1960s? Where were most located?

Why did many black Americans begin to lose faith in the civil rights movement and the Great Society and start to radicalize their efforts to promote black rights in the mid- to late-1960s?

Why was Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s Black Power salute during the award ceremonies at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics so controversial?

How did Mexican American farm workers and students help create a broad-based national movement promoting respect for Mexican American rights and culture?

How did the demographics of America in the mid-1960s contribute to the youth activism of the era? What issues were the focus of student activism?

What percentage of male college students opposed the war in Vietnam in 1967? How did the student anti-war movement develop through the mid- to late-1960s?

How and why did the counterculture reject mainstream social norms, values, and responsibilities?

How and why did sexual mores change in the 1960s?

Why were many adults baffled by the behavior of youth in the 1960s?

## VI. 1968

**Identify** each of the following items. That is, give an explanation or description of the item. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When? Then **explain the historical significance** of each item. That is, establish the historical context of the item: establish the item as the result of other factors existing in the society under study (that is, answer the question, Why?) and establish the political, social, economic and/or cultural consequences of the item (that is, answer the question, So What?)

the Tet Offensive  
Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy  
Johnson's March 31, 1968, television address  
the assassination of Martin Luther King  
James Earl Ray  
the assassination of Robert Kennedy  
Sirhan Sirhan  
Mayor Richard Daley  
the 1968 Democratic National Convention  
Yippies  
"Prague Spring"  
the presidential election of 1968  
the "silent majority"  
*Apollo 8*

What divisions were evident in American society in 1968?

How did the Tet Offensive undermine American military leaders' predictions regarding the war's future course?

Why were Johnson's top advisers so critical of the war?

Why did so many uprisings occur in so many places during the late 1960s?

## **VIII. Final Review Questions**

What were the successes and failures of American liberalism in the 1960s?

Why did the United States expand its participation in the war in Vietnam and continue in the war for so long?

By 1968, many believed the fate of the nation hung in the balance. What did they think was at stake? What divided Americans, and how did they express their differences?