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AMERICA DURING THE KENNEDY, JOHNSON, AND NIXON ADMINISTRATIONS, 1961-1974

The 1960s and early 1970s were tumultuous times for the United States—so much so that they mark a turning point in America history. The Vietnam War, television, civil rights, the space race, protest movements, assassinations of public figures, liberalism, and the erosion of moral values were all a part of the 1960s and early 1970s. Coupled with these influences, the failure of a Vice President and a President shook America to its roots.

American society, which had never really been based on obedience to the Bible, took an even greater turn for the worse and has continued away from God ever since. The generation that grew up in the rebellion and anti-establishment mentality of the '60s and '70s has come of age and has produced a society without absolutes—nothing

that can be clearly called right or wrong. Since the '60s, the truth of Jesus' words about the end of the age has become more and more evident: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12).

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). His kingdom "cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28). God's Word has not changed. It will not change but will endure forever. Only by living in obedience to the Word can we have a sure foundation and a sure future. This world "passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. When you have finished this LIGHTUNIT, you should be able:

1. To identify strengths and weaknesses of John F. Kennedy's presidency.
2. To describe President Kennedy's influence on events in the United States.
3. To describe President Kennedy's influence on world events.
4. To explain the breakdown of morals, values, and respect in the '60s.
5. To describe the United States' domestic affairs during the Johnson Administration.
6. To list outstanding contributions of the Johnson Administration to American society.
7. To describe the United States' foreign affairs during the Johnson Administration.
8. To describe the Nixon Administration's domestic policies and affairs.
9. To describe the Nixon Administration's foreign policies and affairs.
10. To list outstanding contributions of the Nixon Administration.
11. To understand and describe the Watergate scandal and its results.

I. PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND THE NEW FRONTIER, 1961-1963

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who at the age of 43 became the youngest elected President, assumed the office from Dwight D. Eisenhower, who at 70 had been the oldest President. The first President born in the twentieth century, John F. Kennedy

and his 31-year-old wife, Jacqueline, inspired the imagination of America with their youthful zest, handsome poise, and witty intelligence. They brought all the glamour of wealth, elite education, and culture to the White House.

President Kennedy's Irish ancestors had come to America during the potato famine in the 1840s. His father, Joseph P. Kennedy, one of the wealthiest men in the United States, had made a fortune as an investor. JFK (as he came to be called in later years) graduated from Harvard University in 1940 and entered politics as a Democrat in 1946, first serving as a U.S. representative from Massachusetts, and later as a senator.

In his bid for the presidency, John F. Kennedy faced daunting odds. His Republican opponent, Vice President Richard M. Nixon, had the endorsement of the very popular President Eisenhower. Because Kennedy was a Roman Catholic, some feared the pope might be able to influence the presidency. During the campaign, much emphasis was placed on his youth and inexperience in foreign affairs.

Kennedy diffused many of these objections when he faced Nixon in a series of four debates, the first televised debates between presidential candidates. He displayed such command and charm that many questions about his immaturity and inexperience were laid to rest. He claimed that Republican policies had slowed economic growth, allowed the spread of communism, and caused a loss of American respect abroad. He promised a "New Frontier" that would, in his words, "get the country moving again." Even with this boost in popularity, he won the presidency by a slim margin of about 120,000 popular votes out of 69 million.

In his inaugural address, January 20, 1961, President Kennedy spoke with characteristic polish and youthful idealism. He noted that a new generation of Americans had come to leadership. Saying that America would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty," President Kennedy pledged that the United States would support democracy worldwide. In the most quoted part of his speech, he challenged each individual to "ask

not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

With a flurry of letters and messages asking Congress for reform legislation, President Kennedy excited the nation with a sense of momentum in dealing with the problems of the day. In these communications he targeted the slow economy, unemployment, racial tensions, the spread of communism, and the threat of nuclear war. But his narrow election victory weakened his influence with the 87th Congress and paralyzed his efforts to blaze his New Frontier. Both houses of Congress were controlled by Democrats, but the conservative House Rules Committee blocked much of his proposed legislation. At the time of President Kennedy's death two years and ten months later, much of his proposed legislation was still mired in Congress.



President John Fitzgerald Kennedy

SECTION OBJECTIVES

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2. To describe President Kennedy's influence on events in the United States.
3. To describe President Kennedy's influence on world events.
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VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning in this section.

Allies

astronaut

charter

civil rights

Cold War

cosmonaut

discrimination

exiles

holocaust

Marxist

partitioned

post-Christian age

quarantine

segregation

tariffs

ultimatum

Vietcong



Note: All vocabulary words in this LIGHTUNIT appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given in the glossary.

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

In his inaugural address, President Kennedy focused on foreign affairs and all but ignored domestic issues, knowing how divisive they could be. Likewise, as President, he never handled affairs at home with the same boldness he displayed in crises abroad.

Civil Rights. Blacks, hoping for a change, supported John F. Kennedy's campaign. JFK had once commented that President Eisenhower could have stopped government financing of segregated housing "with the stroke of his pen" by signing an executive order. But as President, Kennedy delayed signing such an order. President Kennedy wanted to end **discrimination** without eroding the support he needed from Congress for his other goals. As a result, most of his actions to further **civil rights** were taken as reactions to pressure.

In 1961, the Supreme Court ruled that restaurants and bus stations could not legally discriminate against interstate travelers. Both whites and blacks joined together in "freedom rides," boarding buses and riding through the South to test the ruling in travel facilities, waiting rooms, and restaurants. In Alabama, mobs burned a bus carrying freedom riders and seized a Montgomery bus terminal. President Kennedy rushed in federal marshals to restore order.

Encouraged by the President's response, blacks and whites took steps to end racial **segregation** by staging read-ins at libraries, pray-ins at churches, sit-ins at restaurants, sleep-ins at hotels, and wade-ins at beaches. Even though violence was at times used against the protesters, black leaders, notably Martin Luther King, Jr., insisted that the protests be kept peaceful.

As the pressure mounted, so did federal action.

In 1962, black Air Force veteran James Meredith enrolled at the all-white University of Mississippi. When the Governor barred Meredith at the door, President Kennedy sent 3,000 federal troops to restore order and to enforce the law that gave him the right to attend. James Meredith became the first black to attend the University.

With a "stroke of his pen," President Kennedy finally banned discrimination in federally funded housing. In 1963, the centennial of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the President submitted a civil rights bill that would cut off federal aid to any institution that practiced discrimination, outlaw discrimination in employment and voting, and guarantee equal access to all public accommodations. Blacks decided it was time to dramatize the importance of this bill and to gain support for it. In August Martin Luther King, Jr., spearheaded the "March on Washington." About 200,000 blacks and whites marched peacefully from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial. There Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his eloquent "I Have a Dream" speech where he visualized a time when all races and classes of people would be free and equal, where men would "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

The demand for equal rights grew. President Kennedy asked Congress for legislation that would require restaurants, motels, and hotels to accept customers regardless of race. To help those who could not bring private suits against segregated school districts, he asked that the U.S. Attorney General be given authority to bring court suits to desegregate schools.

President Kennedy said, "The time has come for the Congress of the United States to join with

the executive and judicial branches in making clear to all that race has no place in American life or law." President Kennedy died before his civil rights bill was passed. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, signed most of it into law.

As good as politicians' intentions were, the law could not change the bigotry and hatred in men's hearts. Only Christ could do that, and among sincere believers were those who throughout the time of the civil rights crusades, continued loving all of their neighbors, whatever their color. They recognized the truth of God's Word, knowing that God "made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

The Economy. In the fall of 1961, President Kennedy asked U.S. steel companies to refrain from increasing prices. But in the spring of 1962, the price of steel increased six dollars a ton. Kennedy denounced the increase as an "irresponsible defiance of the public interest." He ordered

the government to buy its steel from companies that did not raise prices. In four days, the proposed increases were canceled, but relations between business and the President were strained.

In May 1962, stock prices on Wall Street dropped more sharply than at any time since the crash in 1929. Critics blamed it on the President's clash with the steel companies. President Kennedy acted to boost business by increasing tax benefits, lowering **tariffs**, and increasing exports. He proposed a \$10 billion tax cut to promote spending. The spending, he argued, would boost business and bring in new tax money to make up for the cut. Congress approved his bill to increase the minimum wage from \$1.15 to \$1.25 per hour.

Kennedy died before the tax cut went into effect. Passed under President Johnson, this tax cut helped to create one of the longest economic booms in American history.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Cuba. When Congress opposes a President's leadership at home, he will often try to make his mark in foreign affairs. As Commander-in-Chief, the President can often bypass Congress and wield great influence as an international leader. But it was in the area of foreign affairs that President Kennedy made the greatest blunder of his presidency less than three months after taking office. It involved the nation of Cuba which had recently become communistic.

Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries had ousted the Batista government of Cuba in 1959. Relations between Cuba and the United States had soured when the new leaders seized Cuban industries owned by companies in the United States. In one of his last acts as President, Dwight D. Eisenhower had cut relations between the United States and Cuba.

When he came into office, President Kennedy asked Cuba to break its relations with **Marxist** nations. Castro refused. Secretly, Cuban **exiles** in the United States made plans to invade Cuba and overthrow Castro's communist regime. These Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs near Havana, the Cuban capital, on April 17, 1961. They had been promised U.S. air support. President Kennedy apparently had second thoughts about the invasion because he did not provide the

promised support. Castro's forces easily defeated the invaders. A week later, President Kennedy publicly took the blame for the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and the United States paid millions of dollars to have the defeated fighters returned.

Relations with Cuba worsened. In October 1962, U.S. surveillance planes detected that Cuba was building missile launching sites. The Soviet Union, partly in order to protect Cuba from another invasion, began sending missiles to Cuba that could strike American cities. President Kennedy ordered the U.S. navy to **quarantine** the island and stop all ships carrying missiles from the Soviet Union. He asked the Soviet Union to remove its missiles and warned that any Cuban attack would provoke a U.S. strike against the Soviet Union.

In a televised speech, he warned the nation of the crisis, and for a week, the world seemed to be on the brink of nuclear **holocaust**. For those who did not have the peace of God reigning in their hearts, it was a time of real fear. It was for many the tensest moment of the **Cold War**.

In the end, the Soviet Union removed the missiles, Cuba dismantled the missile sites, and President Kennedy called off the quarantine. His firm, decisive action in the Cuban missile crisis won him respect as a world leader.

The Alliance for Progress. Many of the United States' Latin American neighbors did not cheer during the crises with Cuba. For years their resentment had grown as what they regarded as "Big Brother" to the North meddled in their affairs. Some of the southwestern states of the U.S. had been taken from Mexico in 1848. Large U.S. companies in Latin America tended to exploit the poor and support the rich. In some Latin American countries, a small minority of wealthy people owned most of the land. Through the years, the United States had used its military to settle disputes and influence political issues in Latin America. The United States had even aided rebels in Panama to gain independence from Colombia in 1903 in order to gain the right to build the Panama Canal. The poor in Latin America distrusted the United States and were attracted by the promises of the communists to

redistribute the land and force equality for all.

With communism established in Cuba, the United States feared the rest of Latin America might follow suit. The United States needed a drastic change of image. Instead of force, it would use goodwill with its neighbors.

President Kennedy proposed an "Alliance for Progress." The plan promised U.S. aid to any Latin American country agreeing to take steps toward democracy. In August 1961, 19 countries (all the Latin American countries except Cuba) signed the Alliance for Progress **charter**. By strengthening its neighbors the United States hoped to stop the spread of communism in this hemisphere. But, the Alliance made little difference in the deep social problems of Latin America and was finally ended in 1974. The Alliance did signal a new attitude of the United States toward its American neighbors.



Match these items.

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 1.1 | _____ wanderers who had to leave their country | a. discrimination |
| 1.2 | _____ declare to be off limits | b. civil rights |
| 1.3 | _____ taxes on imports | c. fiasco |
| 1.4 | _____ a written contract or agreement | d. tariffs |
| 1.5 | _____ making a difference in favor or treatment | e. Marxist |
| 1.6 | _____ a godless theory for establishing equality in society | f. exiles |
| 1.7 | _____ personal liberties guaranteed by the Constitution | g. quarantine |
| | | h. charter |



Complete these statements.

- 1.8 John F. Kennedy was a member of the a. _____ Party from the state of b. _____.
- 1.9 Some people feared the influence of John F. Kennedy's _____ religion.
- 1.10 In his inaugural address, President Kennedy said practically nothing about _____.
- 1.11 Blacks emphasized the urgency of the a. _____ bill by organizing a "March on b. _____."
- 1.12 a. _____ was the first black to attend an all-white university in the South when he entered the University of b. _____.
- 1.13 The President weakened his relations with big business when he confronted the _____ companies.
- 1.14 Many of President Kennedy's domestic bills were finally signed into law by President _____.