

The Kennedy Presidency

1961-1963

Introduction

In 1960, a young Senator from Massachusetts named John F. Kennedy was elected President. Kennedy told Americans that he represented a “new generation” and would bring a different and more youthful spirit to the nation.



Domestic Policy

Kennedy promised Americans a **New Frontier**. He meant that the nation had reached a dramatic turning point in which it faced important challenges and opportunities.

Like F.D.R, Kennedy **believed in using the powers of the federal government** to help solve the nation's problems.

He focused on creating **programs to help the cities, improve education, provide health care for the aged, and aid to the poor.**

Kennedy also gave his **support to civil rights leaders** like Dr. King and proposed a civil rights bill.

Although he was **often unable to get Congress to pass bills he introduced**, many became laws under the next President, Lyndon Johnson.

Kennedy also believed it was **important for America to win the "space race"** with the Soviet Union, and **proposed the Apollo Program to land the first person on the moon.**

First Inaugural Address

Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can for your country.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy under Kennedy, as under Truman and Eisenhower, was **dominated by the problems of the Cold War**. Kennedy saw the United States as the world's **defender of democracy and freedom**. He was especially troubled by the rise of a communist nation close to the United States.

In **1959, Fidel Castro** had established a **communist government in Cuba**, only 90 miles from Florida. This alarmed Kennedy, who believed that **communism might spread in Latin America**.





Foreign Policy cont.



- **Bay of Pigs (1961).** Anti-Castro Cubans, trained in the U.S., invaded Cuba to overthrow Castro. Kennedy refused to supply air support, and the rebels were defeated. This was a **major failure** for Kennedy.
- **Berlin Wall (1961).** When the communists built a **concrete wall dividing Berlin** (to prevent East Germans from escaping to the west), Kennedy pledged to support West Berlin's freedom.

Ich bin ein Berliner! I am a Berliner!





Foreign Policy cont.



- **Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).** The U.S. discovered the **Soviets secretly building missile bases in Cuba** and imposed a **blockade around Cuba.**

With nuclear war threatening, the two sides came to an **agreement.** The **Soviets withdrew the missiles** and the **US promised never to invade Cuba** and **secretly withdrew missiles from Turkey.**

- **Support for South Vietnam.** South Vietnam was under attack by communist forces supported by the North which was trying to unite Vietnam under communist rule. Kennedy sent advisors and military aid to South Vietnam.

Map of Cuban Missile Crisis



Kennedy cont.



Kennedy **believed in lending poorer nations a helping hand, to improve their living standards and to better resist the temptations of communism.**

In 1961, he created the **Alliance for Progress**, which offered **economic aid and promoted social reform among Latin American nations.**

Kennedy also created the **Peace Corps for American volunteers to go to developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and apply their skills to improve living conditions.**

The nation was shocked when **President Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.** Lyndon B. Johnson became the next President of the United States.