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Liberalism, Civil Rights, and War in Vietnam

1960–1975



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (AP Images)

FACING THE NEARLY QUARTER of a million Americans who had come to Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963, to petition the government for civil rights, Martin Luther King, Jr., began by claiming that the appalling condition of African-Americans had barely changed in a century: “The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.... One hundred years later, the Negro is still not free.”

Blacks, King insisted, would not brook delay: “This sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality.” There would be no tranquility in the nation until blacks were satisfied with their rights.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro’s basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: “For Whites Only.” We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and the Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like the waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

In less than fifteen minutes, King had tapped into both Christian and American symbolism to transform a lobbying effort into the high-water mark of the black freedom struggle. Along with inspiring the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which sounded the death knell for Jim Crow, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which enfranchised millions of southern blacks, King would help redefine liberalism to embrace civil rights.

President John Kennedy launched the era with a promise to “pay any price, bear any burden” to win the Cold War and fulfill America’s destiny as the last best hope of mankind. While his failures matched his successes both at home and abroad, JFK’s rhetoric generated fervent hopes and lofty expectations. His assassination, at a time of peace and prosperity, would begin a long descent toward national disillusionment.

But first, his successor, Lyndon Johnson, brought forth the Great Society—the apex of liberalism, premised on the belief that an expanded state and democratic capitalism could end injustice and lift the economic and spiritual well-being of all. The Great Society promised health care for the aged and indigent, federal aid to education, urban development, environmental safeguards, immigration that welcomed new Americans

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. “I have dream 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.’” (Frances Miller/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images)

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"All at once you had something exciting."

regardless of skin color or national origin, an end to racial discrimination and segregation, the enfranchisement of southern blacks, and an end to poverty.

But the liberal hope to enhance liberty and equality throughout the entire world crashed against defeat in Vietnam. African-Americans and other minorities, demanding equality in fact as well as in law, became increasingly aggressive and less non-violent. The racial strife of the “long hot summers,” and the change from “Freedom Now” to “Black Power,” splintered the movement and provoked a growing conservative reaction.

Much as Presidents Truman and Eisenhower did, their successors—JFK, LBJ, and Richard Nixon—all saw the need to preserve a non-Communist South Vietnam. The war they waged to thwart the spread of communism in Southeast Asia would cost America dearly in lives and dollars. It damaged the economy, fomented internal dissent, eroded public faith in elected officials, and transformed the brief era of triumphant liberalism into a time of discord and despair.

FOCUS Questions

- To what extent did the Kennedy administration’s domestic record reflect its liberal rhetoric?
- What were the major successes and failures of the civil-rights movement from 1960 to 1968?
- How and why did the protest movements of minorities shift from the goals and tactics associated with Martin Luther King to those of Black Power?
- How did Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society program exemplify the new liberalism of the 1960s?
- How and why did Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon each deepen America’s involvement in the war in Indochina?

The Kennedy Presidency, 1961–1963

Projecting an image of youthful vigor, **John F. Kennedy** personified the self-confident liberal who believed that an activist state could improve life

at home and confront the communist challenge abroad. His wealthy father, Joseph P. Kennedy, seethed with ambition and instilled in his sons a passion to excel and to rule. Despite a severe back injury, John Kennedy served in the navy in World War II and came home a war hero. He then used his charm and his father’s connections to win election in 1946 to the House of Representatives from a Boston district where he had never lived. Although Kennedy earned no distinction in Congress, Massachusetts voters sent him to the Senate in 1952 and overwhelmingly reelected him in 1958.

By then, Kennedy had a beautiful wife, Jacqueline, and a Pulitzer Prize for *Profiles in Courage* (1956), written largely by a staff member. Despite the political liability of his Roman Catholic faith, he won a first-ballot victory at the 1960 Democratic convention. Just forty-three years old, he sounded the theme of a “New Frontier,” exhorting Americans to “get this country moving again.”

A New Beginning

“All at once you had something exciting,” recalled a University of Nebraska student. “You had a guy who had little kids and who liked to play football on his front lawn. Kennedy was talking about pumping new life into the nation and steering it in new directions.” But most voters, middle aged and middle class, wanted the stability and security of Eisenhower’s “middle way” promised by the Republican candidate, Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Although scorned by liberals for his McCarthyism, Nixon was better known and more experienced than Kennedy, identified with the still-popular Ike, and a Protestant.

Nixon fumbled his opportunity, agreeing to meet his challenger in televised debates. More than 70 million tuned in to the first televised debate between presidential candidates, a broadcast that secured the dominance of television in American politics. Nixon, sweating visibly, appeared haggard and insecure; in striking contrast, the tanned, telegenic Kennedy radiated confidence. Radio listeners judged the debate a draw, but the far more numerous television viewers declared Kennedy the victor. He shot up in the polls, and Nixon never recovered.

Kennedy also benefited from an economic recession in 1960, and from his choice of a southern Protestant, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson, as his running mate. Still, the election was the closest since 1884. Only 120,000 votes separated the two candidates. Kennedy’s religion cost him millions of popular votes, but his capture of 80 percent of the Catholic vote in the closely contested midwestern and northeastern states delivered crucial

Electoral College votes, enabling him to squeak to victory (see Map 28.1).

Kennedy's inauguration set the tone of a new era. Taking office in the pale sun and icy wind, he trumpeted that: "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans." In sharp contrast to Eisenhower's reliance on businessmen (see Chapter 27), Kennedy surrounded himself with liberal intellectuals. He seemed more a celebrity than a politician. Aided by his wife, he adorned his presidency with the trappings of culture and excellence, inviting distinguished artists to perform at the White House and studding his speeches with quotations from Emerson. Awed by his grace and taste, as well as by his wit and wealth, the media extolled him as a vibrant leader and adoring husband. The public knew nothing of his fragile health, frequent use of mood-altering drugs to alleviate pain, and extramarital affairs.

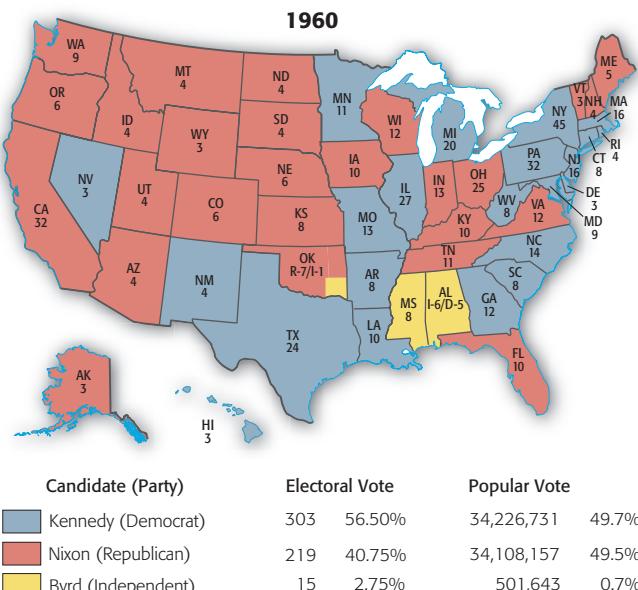
Kennedy's Domestic Record

Media images obscured Kennedy's lackluster domestic record. The conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats that had stifled Truman's Fair Deal similarly doomed the New Frontier. Lacking the votes, JFK rarely pressed Congress for social legislation.

JFK made stimulating economic growth his domestic priority; he combined higher defense expenditures with investment incentives for private enterprise. In 1961, he persuaded Congress to boost the defense budget by 20 percent. He vastly increased America's nuclear stockpile, strengthened the military's conventional forces, and established the Special Forces ("Green Berets") to engage in guerrilla warfare. By 1963, the defense budget reached its highest level as a percentage of total federal expenditures in the entire Cold War era. Kennedy also persuaded Congress to finance a "race to the moon," which Americans would win in 1969 at a cost of more than \$25 billion. Most importantly, Kennedy took his liberal advisers' Keynesian advice to call for a huge cut in corporate taxes, which would greatly increase the deficit but would presumably provide capital for business to invest, stimulating the economy and thus increasing tax revenues.

When the Kennedy presidency ended tragically in November 1963, the proposed tax cut was bottled up in Congress. But Kennedy's spending on technology and the military had already doubled the 1960 rate of economic growth and decreased unemployment, triggering the United States' longest uninterrupted economic expansion.

The boom would both cause further ecological damage and provide the affluence that enabled Americans to care about the environment. Environmental



MAP 28.1 THE ELECTION OF 1960

protection would build on an older conservation movement, emphasizing the efficient use of resources, a preservation movement (focusing on preserving "wilderness"), and the fallout scare of the 1950s, which raised questions about the biological well-being of the planet. The publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (see Chapter 27), documenting the hazards of pesticides, intensified concern. Additionally, postwar prosperity made many Americans less concerned with increased production and more concerned with the quality of life. In 1963, Congress passed a Clean Air Act, regulating automotive and industrial emissions. After decades of heedless pollution, Washington hesitantly began to address environmental problems.

Cold War Activism

Proclaiming in his inaugural address that "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship," to assure the "success of liberty," Kennedy launched a major military buildup and surrounded himself with Cold Warriors who shared his belief that American security depended on superior force and the willingness to use it. He also increased economic assistance to Third World countries to counter the appeal of communism. The Peace Corps, created in 1961, exemplified the New Frontier's liberal anticommunism. By 1963, five thousand Peace Corps volunteers were serving two-year stints as teachers, sanitation engineers, crop specialists, and

"We shall pay any price,
bear any burden, meet
any hardship."



A PRESIDENT GREETES A FUTURE PRESIDENT At the White House on January 1, 1963, President John F. Kennedy greets a group of student leaders that includes a young Bill Clinton. (*Arnold Sachs/Hulton Archive/Getty Images*)

health workers in more than forty Third World nations.

In early 1961, a crisis flared in Laos, a tiny nation in Southeast Asia where a civil war between American-supported forces and Pathet Lao rebels seemed headed toward a communist triumph. In July 1962, Kennedy agreed to a face-saving compromise that restored a neutralist government but left communist forces dominant in the countryside. The accord

stiffened Kennedy's resolve not to allow further communist gains in Asia, especially in South Vietnam.

Spring 1961 brought Kennedy's first major foreign-policy crisis. Despite his military advisers thinking it had little chance of success, he approved a CIA plan, drawn up in the Eisenhower administration, to invade Cuba. In April, fifteen hundred anti-Castro exiles, "La Brigada," stormed Cuba's Bay of Pigs, expecting their arrival to trigger a general

uprising to overthrow Fidel Castro and eliminate a communist outpost on America's doorstep. It was a fiasco. Deprived of air cover by Kennedy's desire to conceal U.S. involvement, the invaders had no chance against Castro's superior forces.

In July 1961, on the heels of the Bay of Pigs failure, Kennedy met with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, who threatened war unless the West retreated from Berlin (see Chapter 26). A shaken Kennedy returned to the United States and declared the defense of West Berlin essential to the Free World. He doubled draft calls, mobilized reservists, and called for vastly increased defense spending. The threat of nuclear war escalated until mid-August, when the Soviets constructed a wall to seal off East Berlin and end the exodus of brains and talent to the West. The Berlin Wall became a concrete symbol of communism's denial of personal freedom until it fell in 1989.

To the Brink of Nuclear War

In mid-October 1962, aerial photographs revealed that the Soviet Union had built bases for intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Cuba, capable of striking U.S. soil. Smarting from the Bay of Pigs disaster, fearing unchecked Soviet interference in the Western Hemisphere, and believing his credibility at stake, Kennedy responded forcefully. In a somber televised address, he announced that the United States would "quarantine" Cuba—impose a naval blockade—to prevent delivery of more missiles and would dismantle by force the missiles already in Cuba if the Soviets did not do so.

The world held its breath. The two superpowers appeared on a collision course toward nuclear war. Two thousand government officials eligible to go to the secret nuclear war relocation site, buried deep in a Virginia mountainside, were issued special badges of admission. (When Chief Justice Warren asked where was the pass for Mrs. Warren, and was told there was no provision for family, he returned his pass.)

Meanwhile, Soviet technicians worked feverishly to complete the missile launch pads, and Soviet missile-carrying ships steamed toward the blockade. B-52s armed with nuclear bombs took to the air, and nearly a quarter-million troops assembled in Florida to invade Cuba. Secretary of State Dean Rusk gulped, "We're eyeball to eyeball."

"I think the other fellow just blinked," a relieved Rusk remarked on October 25. Kennedy received a message from Khrushchev promising to remove the missiles if the United States pledged never to invade Cuba. As Kennedy prepared to respond positively, a second, more belligerent message arrived from Khrushchev insisting that American missiles be withdrawn from Turkey as part of the deal. Hours

later, an American U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba. Some of the president's advisers urged an immediate invasion, but the president, heeding Robert Kennedy's advice, decided to accept the first message and ignore the second one. The next morning, Khrushchev pledged to remove the missiles in return for Kennedy's noninvasion promise. Less publicly, Kennedy subsequently removed U.S. missiles from Turkey.

Only after the end of the Cold War did the Russians disclose that Soviet forces in Cuba had possessed thirty-six nuclear warheads as well as nine tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use, and that Soviet field commanders had independent authority to use these weapons. Moreover, the Soviets had already had the capability to launch a nuclear strike from Cuba. Speaking in 1992, former secretary of defense Robert McNamara recalled the pressure for an invasion: "No one should believe that U.S. troops could have been attacked by tactical nuclear warheads without the U.S.'s responding with nuclear warheads.... And where would it have ended? In utter disaster."

Chastened by coming to the brink of nuclear war, Kennedy and Khrushchev installed a telephone "hot line" so that the two sides could communicate instantly in future crises and then agreed to a treaty outlawing atmospheric and undersea nuclear testing. These efforts signaled a new phase of the Cold War, later called détente, in which the superpowers moved from confrontation to negotiation. Concurrently, the **Cuban missile crisis** escalated the arms race by convincing both sides of the need for nuclear superiority.

The Thousand-Day Presidency

On November 22, 1963, during a trip to Texas to shore up the president's reelection chances, John and Jackie Kennedy rode in an open car along Dallas streets lined with cheering crowds. Shots rang out. The president slumped, dying, his skull and throat shattered. Soon after, aboard Air Force One, Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as president.

Grief and disbelief numbed the nation, as most Americans spent the next four days in front of TV sets staring at replays of the murder of accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald; at the somber state funeral, with the small boy saluting his father's casket; at the grieving family lighting an eternal flame at Arlington National Cemetery. Few who watched would forget. Kennedy had helped make television central to American politics; now, in death, it made him the fallen hero-king of Camelot.

"We're eyeball to eyeball.... I think the other fellow just blinked."



JACK RUBY SHOOTING LEE HARVEY OSWALD Two days after Oswald's arrest for the assassination of President John Kennedy, as television cameras filmed his transfer to a different jail, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby stepped from a crowd of onlookers and fatally shot Oswald. (*JACK BEERS/The Dallas Morning News*)

More admired in death than in life, JFK ranked as one of the very few "great" presidents, in the view of a public that associated him with a spirit of energy and innovation. While Kennedy loyalists continue to stress his intelligence and his ability to change and grow, his detractors point to his lack of achievements, the discrepancy between his public image and his private philandering, his aggressive Cold War tactics, and his vast expansion of presidential powers.

Kennedy's rhetoric expressed the new liberalism, but he frequently compromised with conservatives and segregationists in Congress; economic expansion came from spending on missiles and the space race, not on social welfare and human needs. Partly because his own personal behavior made him beholden to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, JFK allowed the agency to infringe on civil liberties, even as the CIA plotted with the Mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro. (Scholars are still trying to untangle the plots and policies that enmeshed the Kennedy brothers, Hoover, organized crime, and the national security agencies.)

Internationally, Kennedy left a mixed record. He signed the world's first nuclear-test-ban treaty, yet initiated a massive arms buildup. He compromised

on Laos but deepened U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He came to question the need for confronting the Soviet Union yet insisted on U.S. global superiority and aggressively prosecuted the Cold War. Yet, JFK inspired Americans to expect greatness, aroused the poor and the powerless, and stimulated the young to activism. Dying during the calm before the storm, he left his successor soaring expectations at home and a deteriorating entanglement in Vietnam.

The Continuing Struggle for Black Equality, 1961–1968

Following the lunch-counter sit-ins and Freedom Rides, civil-rights activists eager to climb the next steps of racial justice pressed Kennedy to act; and the president continued to stall. Viewing civil rights as a thorny thicket to avoid, not as a moral issue, Kennedy feared it would split the Democratic Party, immobilize Congress in filibusters, and jeopardize his reelection. Yet the Movement persisted until it had achieved de jure, or legal, equality; made protest respectable; and become an inspiration and model of activism for aggrieved others.

The African-American Revolution

As television coverage of the struggle for racial equality brought mounting numbers of African-Americans into the movement, civil-rights leaders beseeched Kennedy to intervene. They realized it would take decades of blood and bravery to dismantle segregation piecemeal; only comprehensive national legislation, backed by the power of the federal government, could guarantee full citizenship for African-Americans. To achieve this goal, they needed a crisis that would outrage the conscience of the white majority and force the president's hand.

Determined to expose the violent extremism of southern racism and provoke a crisis, Martin Luther King launched nonviolent marches, sit-ins, and pray-ins in Birmingham, Alabama. In the most rigidly segregated big city in America, nicknamed "Bombingham" for the many past acts of violence against civil-rights protestors, few doubted Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor's pledge that "blood would run in the streets of Birmingham before it would be integrated."

When jailed for instigating a march that a local court had prohibited, King penned the "Letter from Birmingham Jail." It detailed the humiliations of racial discrimination and segregation; vindicated the nonviolent struggle against Jim Crow; and justified civil disobedience to protest unjust laws.

In May, thousands of schoolchildren, some only six years old, joined King's crusade. Connor lost his temper. He unleashed his men—armed with electric cattle prods, high-pressure water hoses, and snarling attack dogs—on the nonviolent youthful demonstrators. The ferocity of Connor's attacks, caught on camera and television, horrified the world.

"The civil-rights movement should thank God for Bull Connor," JFK remarked. "He's helped it as much as Abraham Lincoln." Connor's vicious tactics seared the nation's conscience and pushed Kennedy to help negotiate a settlement that ended the demonstrations in return for desegregating stores and hiring black workers. By mid-1963, the rallying cry "Freedom Now!" reverberated across the nation as the protests grew. Increasingly concerned about America's image abroad as well as the "fires of frustration and discord" raging at home, Kennedy feared that if the government did not act, blacks would turn to violence. When Governor George Wallace refused to allow two black students to enter the University of Alabama in June 1963, Kennedy forced Wallace—who had pledged "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!"—to capitulate to a court desegregation order.

On June 11, the president went on television to define civil rights as "a moral issue" and to declare that "race has no place in American life or law." A



BIRMINGHAM, 1963 The ferocious attempts by local authorities, led by Eugene "Bull" Connor, to repel nonviolent black protesters with fire hoses (capable of 100 pounds of water pressure per square inch), electric cattle prods, and snarling, biting police dogs—shown nightly on TV—made white supremacy an object of revulsion throughout most of the country and forced the Kennedy administration to intervene to end the crisis. (AP Images)

week later, Kennedy proposed a bill outlawing segregation in public facilities and authorizing the federal government to withhold funds from programs that discriminated. As the bill bogged down in Congress, civil-rights adherents planned to march on Washington to muster support for the legislation.

The March on Washington, 1963

The idea for a March on Washington had originally been proposed by A. Philip Randolph in 1941 to protest discrimination against blacks in the defense mobilization (see Chapter 25). Twenty-two years later, a quarter of a million people, including fifty thousand whites, converged on Washington, D.C. After a long, sweltering day of speeches and songs, Martin Luther King took the podium to remind Americans that the hopes generated by the Emancipation Proclamation had still not been fulfilled, and to reiterate his dream of true brotherhood, in which blacks would be an integral, equal part of American society, not embittered opponents of it.

With one of the greatest American speeches ever, portrayed at the beginning of this chapter, King turned a political rally into a historic event (see Beyond America). But not even

Bull Connor pledged that "blood would run in the streets of Birmingham before it would be integrated."



Beyond America

GLOBAL INTERACTIONS



The Black Freedom Movement

Most often discussed as an event in African-American history and as a catalyst for other social movements in the United States, the Black Freedom Movement, in its origins and consequences, was a global phenomenon. It owed much to the ideological battle of the Cold War, when race became a national security issue, threatening to undermine U.S. claims of the superiority of democracy over communism. Although the Cold War led civil rights proponents to shrink from a broader critique of the American economic and political system, they counted on America's need to appeal to people of color in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to gain governmental support for black rights. In turn, Washington was eager to counter Communist propaganda that emphasized American racism and keen to maintain its stature as the "leader of the free world." The federal government began to view civil rights for African-Americans as integral to its foreign policy mission.

For example, America's alleged mission to de-nazify and democratize West Germany took place amid separate, sub-standard accommodations for African-American soldiers, commanded almost exclusively by white officers, in the former heartland of Aryanism. Embarrassed, the Truman administration desegregated the military and broke precedent by

submitting friend of the court briefs on behalf of the African-American plaintiffs in the momentous *Brown v. Board of Education* cases. John Kennedy reversed course and submitted a civil rights bill to Congress after Bull Connors's televised fire-hosing of demonstrators in Birmingham prompted international condemnation. Similarly, the criticism from abroad following violence against demonstrators in Selma helped push Lyndon Johnson to propose voting rights legislation far sooner than he wished.

The movement also owed much to India's independence activist Mohandas Gandhi and to Africans struggling for their freedom and independence. Various African-American leaders had avidly followed Gandhi's struggle against British colonialism, and Martin Luther King, Jr., as he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, promoted the techniques and philosophy of Gandhian nonviolent civil disobedience. Often referred to in the press as "the American Gandhi," King made the strategy of nonviolent direct action his own, rooting his own Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Gandhian precepts of love, nonviolence, and reconciliation. His lead prompted activists in SNCC and CORE to apply Gandhian tactics in their own endeavors to end southern racism.



STUDENT PROTESTORS IN PARIS, MAY 1968 After the University Chancellor called in the police to arrest student protestors at the Sorbonne, continuing demonstrations and street battles with the police catalyzed the largest general strike in French history. (Image by © Jacques Haillot/Apis/Sygma/Corbis)



RUDI ("THE RED") DUTSCHKE One of the leaders of the West German SDS, Dutschke borrowed heavily from the U.S. antiwar movement and SNCC in his advocacy of militant direct action. (AP Images)

King had closely followed South African Albert Lutuli's efforts to make Gandhian nonviolence the keynote of the African National Congress struggle against apartheid, and like other African-Americans, he had been persuaded by African anticolonialists such as Kenya's Tom Mboya and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah that they were all part of a worldwide struggle by black people to control their own destiny. Seventeen African nations achieved independence between January and November 1960, and another seventeen freed themselves from colonial bondage by 1963. It was an embarrassment to some: "All of Africa will be free before we can get a lousy cup of coffee," sneered black author James Baldwin. It was an inspiration to others: "We could hardly miss the lesson for ourselves," said SNCC's John Lewis. "They were getting their freedom, and we still didn't have ours in what we believed was a free country."

Soon after, it would be the black freedom struggle in the United States that would inspire the oppressed around the globe. In South Africa, Steve Biko's Students' Organization patterned itself on SNCC, Bishop Desmond Tutu repeatedly quoted Martin Luther King, and the Black Consciousness movement owed much to the American Black Power movement. To protest discrimination, Australian aborigines conducted Freedom Rides, and called them that. The leaders who freed Surinam from Dutch rule in 1975 credited the African-American civil rights campaigns for their tactics and motivation. The New Beginning Movement in Trinidad adopted the ideology and language of late-1960s African-American militancy.

Trinidad, and most other Caribbean nations, also appropriated the protest music of African-Americans. Songs such as the Impressions' "Keep on Pushing," Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," and James Brown's "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud," along with many others, carried specifically African-American notions of dissent and self-esteem.

In Canada, the civil rights movement to the south raised the awareness and sense of liberation among that nation's 100,000 blacks. They too railed against the term "Negro" and condemned the disparities in income, health, occupation, and education between white and black Canadians. Young Native

Canadian militants, criticizing the "Uncle Tomahawks" among their own people, assumed the leadership of organizations like the National Indian Brotherhood to promote the betterment of Indians and the recognition of aboriginal rights.

Much like the segregation of buses in Montgomery, a specific local irritant spawned a more pervasive movement in Northern Ireland. In May 1963—when the black struggle in the United States was headline news around the world—a group of young Catholic housewives in Dungannon organized to protest discrimination in the allocation of public housing. Amid talk of a march on the town like the proposed March on Washington, the local Catholic newspaper insisted that the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland were "white negroes."

Catholic protests against similar discrimination in the Springfield area of Derry led to sit-ins at the local council chamber. The demonstrators sang American civil rights songs and vowed to fight for their rights "as the Blacks in America were fighting." The Derry civil rights protests attracted new participants, particularly youths, who supplied unsuspected reservoirs of energy and initiative. In 1964 some university students set up the Working Committee on Civil Rights in Northern Ireland, the first Irish organization to use the term "civil rights" in its name. The various protest organizations soon engaged together in direct-action civil disobedience to protest discrimination and demand constitutional equality.

By 1968, the banners at mass protests in Northern Ireland invariably included "Civil Rights," the sit-ins included singing "We Shall Overcome," and police reaction included violence that inevitably fueled the discontent. In October 1968, a Belfast to Derry march modeled on the Selma to Montgomery march produced a baton charge by the Royal Ulster Constabulary analogous to the Alabama State Police charge on black marchers.

Moreover, as in the United States, the endless television replays of police attacking peaceful demonstrators sparked dissatisfaction with the slow pace of reform. Increasingly, the Catholic minority engaged in provocative street marches likely to bring violence in full view of the media. And as in the United States, it worked. The Northern Ireland and United Kingdom governments implemented a series of reforms, including universal adult suffrage for local council elections and a Fair Employment Act and Equal Opportunities Commission.

The civil rights movement in Northern Ireland had brought change—but not enough. And again as in the United States, that shortcoming triggered a generational and ideological conflict. Young Irish militants, like their African-American counterparts, demanded a far more radical transformation than their moderate elders. As one, Bernadette Devlin, admitted in her autobiography: "What we really wanted to do was pull the carpet off the floor to show the dirt that was under it." Yet as increasingly combative, less politically sophisticated youths joined the protests, mounting mayhem brought a backlash. Unlike in the United States, however, in Northern Ireland, "the troubles" became a conflict of murder and terror that would last for decades.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- How did the Cold War affect the U.S. civil rights movement?
- How did the U.S. civil rights movement affect protest movements in other countries?

that quelled the rage of white racists. In September, the Ku Klux Klan bombing of a black church in Birmingham killed four girls attending Sunday school. (Not until 2002 was the last of the four main suspects brought to justice.) And southern obstructionism still kept the civil-rights bill stymied in Congress.

Civil Rights at High Tide

Kennedy's assassination, however, brought to the White House a southerner, Lyndon Johnson, who knew he had to prove himself on the race issue or the liberals "would get me....I had to produce a civil rights bill that was even stronger than the one they'd have gotten if Kennedy had lived."

wanted to register, to become first class citizens. If the Freedom Democratic party is not seated now, I question America." The MFDP was not seated. To stop a threatened walkout by southern white delegates, Johnson forged a compromise that the MFDP rejected. Within SNCC, the failure of the Democrats to support seating the MFDP delegates proved to be a turning point in their disillusionment with liberalism.

Most blacks still shared the optimism of Martin Luther King, and more than 90 percent of African-American voters cast their ballots for the Democrats in 1964, leaving Johnson and the liberals in firm control. Determined to win a strong voting-rights law, King and the SCLC organized mass protests in Selma, Alabama, in March 1965. Blacks were half the population of Dallas County, where Selma was located, but only 1 percent were registered to vote.

King knew he again had to create a crisis to pressure Congress to act. He masterfully provoked Selma's county sheriff, Jim Clark to brutally beat and arrest thousands of black protestors.

When civil-rights activists sought to march from Selma to Montgomery, to petition Governor George Wallace, Alabama state police stormed into the defenseless marchers, who were clubbed, shocked with cattle prods, and tear-gassed. Showcased on TV, the spectacle provoked national outrage and support for a voting rights bill.

Signed by the president in August 1965, the **Voting Rights Act** invalidated the use of any test or device to deny the vote and authorized federal examiners to register voters in states that had disfranchised blacks. The law dramatically expanded black suffrage, boosting the number of registered black voters in the South from 1 million in 1964 to 3.1 million in 1968, and transformed southern politics (see Map 28.2).

The number of blacks holding office in the South swelled from fewer than two dozen in 1964 to nearly twelve hundred in 1972, including half the seats on Selma's city council and the first two African-Americans elected to Congress from the former Confederacy since the nineteenth century. Electoral success brought jobs for African-Americans, contracts for black businesses, and improvements in facilities and services in black neighborhoods. Most importantly, as Fannie Lou Hamer recalled, when African-Americans could not vote, "white folks would drive past your house in a pickup truck with guns hanging up on the back and give you hate stares....Those same people now call me Mrs. Hamer."

Fire in the Streets

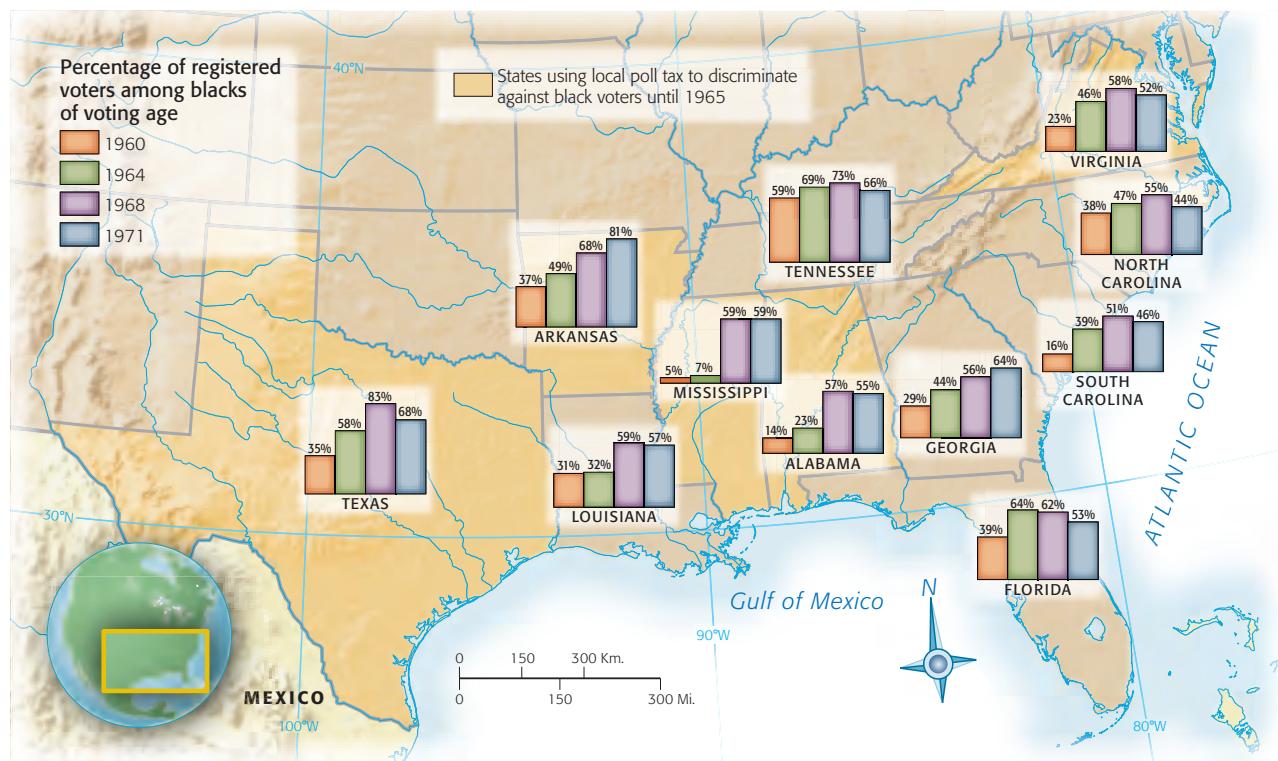
The civil-rights movement changed, but did not revolutionize race relations. It ended de jure racial

"White folks would drive past your house in a pickup truck with guns hanging up on the back and give you hate stares... Those same people now call me Mrs. Hamer."

funded programs; granted the federal government new powers to fight school segregation; and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce the ban on job discrimination.

The Civil Rights Act did not address the right to vote. So CORE and SNCC activists, believing the ballot held the key to power for southern blacks, mounted a major campaign to register black voters. They organized the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964 to focus on the state most hostile to black rights. Although 42 percent of Mississippi's population, blacks comprised only 5 percent of the registered voters. A thousand college-student volunteers assisted blacks in registering to vote and in organizing "Freedom Schools" that taught black history and emphasized African-American self-worth. Harassed by Mississippi law-enforcement officials and Ku Klux Klansmen, the volunteers endured the firebombing of black churches and of movement headquarters, as well as arrests and even murders.

The civil-rights workers enrolled nearly sixty thousand disfranchised blacks in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). In August 1964, they took their case to the national Democratic convention, seeking to be seated as the proper delegation. "I was beaten till I was exhausted," Fannie Lou Hamer, the twentieth child of poor sharecroppers, told the convention. "All of this on account we



MAP 28.2 VOTER REGISTRATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN THE SOUTH, 1960–1971 As blacks overwhelmingly registered to vote as Democrats, some former segregationist politicians, among them George Wallace, started to court the black vote, and many southern whites began to cast their ballots for Republicans, inaugurating an era of real two-party competition in the South.

discrimination and segregation, broke the white monopoly on political power in the South, and galvanized a new black sense of self-esteem. It raised hopes for the possibility of greater change and legitimated protest. But its inability to move beyond opportunity to achievement, to gain equality as a result, not just a right, underscored the limitations of liberal change, especially in the urban ghetto. The movement did little to change the deplorable economic conditions of many African-Americans, and the anger bubbling below the surface boiled over.

On August 11, 1965, five days after the signing of the Voting Rights Act, a scuffle between white police and blacks in Watts, the largest African-American district in Los Angeles, ignited the most destructive race riot in decades. For six days, blacks looted shops, firebombed white-owned businesses, and sniped at police officers and firefighters, leaving in their wake thirty-four dead, nine hundred injured, and four thousand arrested.

Watts proved to be just a prelude to a succession of “long hot summers.” In 1966, rioting erupted in more than a score of northern ghettos, forcing whites to heed the squalor of the slums and the brutal behavior of police in the ghetto—problems the civil-rights movement had ignored. Frustrated by the allure of America’s wealth portrayed on TV and by what seemed the empty promise of civil-rights laws, black mobs stoned passing motorists, ransacked

stores, torched white-owned buildings, and hurled bricks at the troops sent to quell the disorder.

The following summer, black rage at oppressive conditions and impatience with liberal change erupted in 150 racial skirmishes and forty riots—the most intense and destructive period of racial violence in U.S. history. In Newark, New Jersey, twenty-seven people died and more than eleven hundred were injured. The following week, Detroit went up in smoke in the decade’s worst riot. By the time the Michigan National Guard and U.S. army paratroopers quelled the riot, forty-three people had died, two thousand were injured, and seven thousand had been arrested. Then in 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King (discussed in Chapter 29), black uprisings flared in the ghettos of a hundred cities. The 1964–1968 riot toll included two hundred dead, seven thousand injured, forty thousand arrested, and at least \$500 million in property destroyed—mostly white-owned stores and tenements that exemplified exploitation in the ghetto.

A frightened, bewildered nation asked why rioting occurred just when blacks achieved many of their goals. Militant blacks saw the uprisings as revolutionary violence to overthrow a racist, reactionary society. The Far Right thought them evidence of a communist plot. Conservatives described them as senseless outbursts by troublemakers. The administration’s National Advisory Commission on Civil

**"If ballots won't work,
bullets will."**

police brutality. The commission recommended increased federal spending to create new jobs for urban blacks, construct additional public housing, and end de facto (existing in practice, but not in law) school segregation in the North. Johnson and Congress, however, aware of the swelling white backlash, ignored the advice, and most whites approved their inaction.

“Black Power”

For many young African-Americans, liberalism’s response to racial inequality proved “too little, too late.” The demand for **Black Power** sounded in 1966 paralleled the fury of the urban riots; it expressed the eagerness of young activists for militant self-defense and rapid social change. The slogan encapsulated both their bitterness toward a white society that blocked their aspirations and their rejection of

King’s commitment to nonviolence, racial integration, and alliances with white liberals.

Derived from a long tradition of black nationalism, autonomy, and race pride, Black Power owed much to the rhetoric and vision of Malcolm X. A former drug addict and street hustler, Malcolm X had converted to the Nation of Islam, or the Black Muslim faith, while in prison. Founded in Detroit in 1931 by Elijah Poole (who took the Islamic name Elijah Muhammad), the Black Muslims insisted that blacks practice self-discipline and self-respect, and they rejected integration. Malcolm X accordingly urged African-Americans to separate themselves from the “white devil” and to relish their African roots and their blackness. Blacks, he asserted, had to rely on armed self-defense and had to seize their freedom “by any means necessary.” “If ballots won’t work, bullets will,” he said. Malcolm X’s assassination by members of the Nation of Islam in February 1965, after he had broken with Elijah Muhammad, did not still his voice. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) became the main text for the rising Black Power movement.

Two days after winning the world heavyweight championship in 1964, boxer Cassius Clay shocked the sports world by announcing his conversion to the Nation of Islam and his new name, Muhammad Ali. Refusing induction into the armed services on religious grounds, Ali was found guilty of draft evasion, stripped of his title, and exiled from boxing for three and a half years during his athletic prime. Inspired by the examples of Ali and Malcolm X—and bitter at the failure of the established civil-rights organizations to achieve a fundamental distribution of wealth and power—young, urban African-Americans abandoned nonviolence and reform. In 1966, CORE and SNCC changed from interracial organizations committed to achieving integration nonviolently to all-black groups advocating racial separatism and Black Power “by any means necessary.”

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, founded in Oakland, California, in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, urged blacks to become “panthers—striking by night and sparing no one.” Despite sponsoring community centers and school breakfast programs, the Panthers attained national notoriety from their paramilitary style and shootouts with the police. A violent and often illegal campaign of repression by federal, state, and local authorities left some Black Panthers dead and more in prison, further splintering the black-white civil-rights alliance and contributing to the rightward turn in politics.

The Black Power movement failed to alleviate the poverty and racism afflicting African-Americans, and the concept remained amorphous—ranging from notions of black capitalism to local control of schools to revolutionary schemes to overthrow the American system. But Black Power celebrated black pride and



BOBBY SEALE AND HUEY NEWTON Founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in Oakland, California, in response to police brutality against African-Americans, the Black Panther Party was organized along semi-military lines and advocated fighting for black justice, in Newton’s words, “through the barrel of a gun.”
(AP Images)

stressed the importance of black self-determination as no mass movement had done before. Scores of new community self-help groups and self-reliant black institutions exemplified it, as did the establishment of black studies programs at colleges, the mobilization of black voters to elect black candidates, and the encouragement of racial self-esteem—"black is beautiful." As never before, African-Americans rejected skin bleaches and hair straighteners, gave their children Islamic names, and gloried in soul music. "I may have lost hope," SCLC leader Jesse Jackson had students repeating with him, "but I am...somebody...I am...black...beautiful...proud...I must be respected." This message, and Black Power's critique of American society, resonated with other marginalized groups, and helped shape their protests.

The Struggle Goes On

As a result of civil-rights activism, millions of blacks experienced significant upward mobility. In 1965, black students accounted for less than 5 percent of total college enrollment; by 1990, the figure had risen to 12 percent, close to their proportion in the general population. By 1990, some 46 percent of black workers held white-collar jobs. TV's *Cosby Show*, a late-1980s comedy in which Bill Cosby played a doctor married to a lawyer, portrayed this upwardly mobile world.

Outside this world lay the inner-city slums, inhabited by perhaps a third of the black population. Here, up to half the young people never finished high school, and the jobless rate soared as high as 60 percent, owing to suburbanization and deindustrialization. In 1980, the poverty rate among African-Americans stood at 32 percent, three times the rate for non-Hispanic whites.

Cocaine and other drugs pervaded the inner cities. Some black children recruited as lookouts for drug dealers eventually became dealers themselves. With drugs came violence. In the 1980s, a young black male was six times as likely to be murdered as a young white male. Drug abuse affected all social levels, including yuppies and show-business celebrities; but drug use and trafficking particularly devastated the inner cities. Serious social problems among those left behind in the inner cities, as well as upward mobility and educational advances by African-Americans, would continue into the twenty-first century (as discussed in Chapter 31).

To compensate for past racial discrimination in employment and education, some cities set aside a percentage of building contracts for minority businesses, industries adopted hiring goals and recruitment training program, and many educational institutions reserved slots for minority applicants. These so-called **affirmative action** programs

faced court challenges, however. In *University of California Regents v. Bakke* (1978), the Supreme Court declared racial quotas unconstitutional, yet also held that universities might consider race as a factor in admission "to remedy disadvantages cast on minorities by past racial prejudice."

The Expanding Movement for Equality

Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian-Americans were similarly affected by liberalism. They, too, were inspired by Kennedy's rhetoric, by Johnson's actions, and by the assertive outlook of Black Power. Each followed the black lead in challenging the status quo, demanding full and equal citizenship rights, and emphasizing group identity and pride. And like blacks, each group saw its younger members push for ever more radical action.

Native-American Activism

In 1961, representatives of sixty-seven tribes drew up a Declaration of Purposes criticizing the termination policy of the 1950s (see Chapter 27), and in 1964 hundreds of Indians lobbied in Washington for their inclusion in the War on Poverty (covered later in this chapter). Indians suffered the worst poverty, the highest disease and death rates, and the poorest education and housing of any American group. President Johnson responded by establishing the National Council on Indian Opportunity in 1965, which funneled more federal funds onto reservations than any previous program. Promising to erase "old attitudes of paternalism," Johnson advocated Indian self-determination, "the right of the First Americans to remain Indians while exercising their rights as Americans."

Militant Native Americans, meanwhile, began to organize. By 1968, younger Indian activists, calling themselves "Native Americans," demanded "Red Power." They protested the lack of protection for Indian land and water rights and the desecration of Indian sacred sites. They mocked Columbus Day and staged sit-ins against museums that housed Indian bones. They established reservation cultural programs to reawaken spiritual beliefs and teach native languages. The Navajo and Hopi protested strip-mining in the Southwest; the Taos Pueblo organized to reclaim the Blue Lake sacred site in northern New Mexico; and the Puyallup held "fish-ins" to assert old treaty rights to fish in the Columbia River and Puget Sound.

"I am...somebody...
I am...black...
beautiful...proud...
I must be respected."

The most militant group, the **American Indian Movement (AIM)**, was founded in 1968 by Chippewas, Sioux, and Ojibwa living in Minnesota. Among its goals was preventing police harassment of Indians in urban “red ghettos.” In November 1969, AIM occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, and held it for nineteen months. The occupation helped foster a new sense of identity among American Indians. As one participant glowed, “we got back our worth, our pride, our dignity, our humanity”

Building on their occupation of Alcatraz, AIM briefly occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington in 1972, and in 1973 took over a trading post at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, site of an 1890 Indian massacre by the U.S. army (see Chapter 17). In response to spreading protests, the

Indian Self-Determination Act of 1974 granted tribes control of federal aid programs on the reservations and oversight of their own schools.

AIM’s militancy aroused other Native-Americans to be proud of their heritage. Their members “had a new look about

them, not that hangdog reservation look I was used to,” Mary Crow Dog remembered, and they “loosened a sort of earthquake inside me.” Many of the eight hundred thousand who identified themselves as Indians in the 1970 census did so for the first time, and by 1990 their number had soared to 1.7 million. This upsurge reflected ethnic pride, as well as the economic advantages associated with tribal membership. Under a 1961 law permitting them to buy or develop land for commercial projects, tribes launched ventures ranging from gambling resorts to mining and logging operations. Many also reasserted long-ignored treaty rights, resulting in a gain of 40 million acres and nearly \$1 billion for Alaskan Indians in 1971 and a 1980 award of \$107 million to the Sioux for South Dakota lands taken from them illegally.

Although high rates of joblessness, alcoholism, and disease persisted among Indians, renewed pride and progress in asserting treaty rights offered hope. In the popular culture, movies such as *Little Big Man* (1970) and *Dances with Wolves* (1990), while idealizing Indians, represented an improvement over the negative stereotypes of earlier films.

Hispanic-Americans Organize

As earlier in American history, immigration swelled the ranks of minority groups in the second half of the twentieth century. Of enormous significance, President Johnson proposed and Congress enacted the **Immigration Act of 1965**, abolishing the national-

origins quotas of the 1920s. Annual legal immigration began an increase from 250,000 to well over a million, and the vast majority of new immigrants came from Asia and Latin America. The Latino, or Hispanic-American, population increased from 4.5 percent in 1970 to nearly 12 percent in 2000. Less than 1 percent of the U.S. population in 1960, Asian-Americans (discussed in the next section) comprised more than 4 percent in 2000. During the 1960s, these groups contributed to the general spirit of activism.

Like Native-Americans, Latinos—the fastest-growing minority—became impatient with their establishment organizations, which had been unable to better their dismal conditions: a median annual wage half the poverty level; a functional illiteracy rate of 40 percent among Mexican-American adults; and de facto segregation common throughout the Southwest. As they turned to the more militant tactics of the civil-rights movement, Latinos found a charismatic leader in **César Estrada Chávez**.

Born on an Arizona farm first cultivated in the 1880s by his grandfather, Chávez grew up a migrant farm worker, joined the U.S. navy in World War II, and then devoted himself to gaining union recognition and improved working conditions for the mostly Mexican-American farm laborers in California. A magnetic leader who, like Martin Luther King, blended religion with nonviolent resistance to fight for social change, Chávez led his followers in the Delano vineyards of the San Joaquin valley to strike in 1965. He and United Farm Workers (UFW) cofounder Dolores Huerta organized consumer boycotts of table grapes to dramatize the farm workers’ struggle, often referred to as *La Causa*.

Chavez and Huerta made *La Causa* part of the struggle of the entire Mexican-American community and of the larger national civil-rights movement. For the first time, farm workers gained the right to unionize to secure better wages; by mid-1970, two-thirds of California grapes were grown under UFW contracts. Just as the UFW flag featured an Aztec eagle and the Virgin of Guadalupe, Chávez combined religion, labor militancy, and Mexican heritage to stimulate ethnic pride and politicization.

Also in the mid-1960s, young Hispanic activists began using the formerly pejorative terms **Chicano** and **Chicana** to express a militant collective identity. “Our main goal is to orient the Chicano to think Chicano so as to achieve equal status with other groups, not to emulate the Anglo.” Rejecting assimilation, Chicano student organizations came together in 1967 in *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)*. MEChA demanded bilingual education and more Latino teachers in high schools as well as Chicano studies programs and organizations at colleges.

“We got back our worth,
our pride, our dignity,
our humanity.”

Similar zeal led poet Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales to found the Crusade for Justice in Colorado in 1965 to fight police brutality and foster Chicano culture. It led Reies Lopez Tijerina to form the *Alianza Federal de Mercedes* in New Mexico to reclaim land usurped by whites in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. It also led Jose Angel Gutierrez and others in Texas to create an alternative political party in 1967, *La Raza Unida*, to elect Latinos and instill cultural pride. Across the West, Hispanic-American activists created the “brown is beautiful” vogue and the paramilitary Brown Berets, with conceptual roots in the Black Panthers.

Similarly inspired, Puerto Ricans in New York City founded the Young Lords. Modeled on the Black Panthers, the Young Lords published a newspaper, started drug treatment programs, and even hijacked ambulances and occupied a hospital to demand better medical services in the South Bronx.

Meanwhile, a steady influx of immigrants, both legal and illegal, continued to arrive in the United States. Where most had once come from Europe, some 45 percent now came from the Western Hemisphere and 30 percent from Asia. As in the past, economic need drew these newcomers. Mexico’s chronic poverty forced many to seek jobs in the north. But life in the United States was often harsh. In 1980, some 26 percent of persons of Hispanic origin in the United States lived in poverty, twice the national rate. Despite adversity, Hispanic newcomers preserved their language and traditions, influencing U.S. culture in the process.

Millions of Hispanic immigrants lacked official documentation. Many sweated in the garment trades, cleaned houses, held low-paying service-sector jobs, and labored in agricultural fields. The **Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986**, an update of the 1965 Immigration Act, outlawed the hiring of undocumented immigrants but offered legal status to aliens who had lived in the United States for five years.

Asian-American Activism

Among the rapidly climbing number of immigrants from Asia some, like the Hmong (pronounced “mong”), the indigenous people of Indochina who had supported the United States in the Vietnam War, came mainly for political reasons; others, like those from South Korea and the Philippines, came primarily for economic betterment. Valuing education, many Asian immigrants advanced academically and economically. The younger generation, torn between new and old, sought to balance family and group loyalties with the appeal of the larger society beyond.

Like their counterparts, young activists with roots in East Asia rejected the term *Oriental* in favor of



CHAVEZ AND HIS HEROES ROBERT KENNEDY AND MOHANDAS GANDHI

Cesar Chavez, from a farm worker family, founded the United Farm Workers to help migrant Mexican farm hands, who worked long hours for meager pay. Utilizing nonviolent protests, consumer boycotts, and personal hunger strikes, Chavez and his followers won the enactment in 1975 of a California law requiring growers to bargain collectively with the elected representatives of the farm workers. (*Arthur Schatz//Time Life Pictures/Getty Images*)

Asian-American, to signify their ethnic consciousness. Formed at the University of California in 1968, the **Asian American Political Alliance** encouraged Asian-Americans to claim their own cultural identity and, in racial solidarity with their “Asian brothers and sisters,” to protest against the U.S. war in Vietnam.

As did other ethnic groups, Asian-American students marched, sat in, and went on strike to gain courses on Asian-American studies or to protest repressive dictatorships in their homeland. Others focused on improving the lives of Asian-Americans in need or on agitating to force the United States to make restitution for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

None of these movements for ethnic pride and power, in later decades, would sustain the fervent activism and media attention they attracted in the late sixties. But by elevating the consciousness and nurturing the confidence of the younger generation, each contributed to the empowerment of its respective group and to the politics of identity that would continue to grow in importance.

Liberalism Ascendant, 1963–1968

Although a New Dealer in the 1930s, **Lyndon Baines Johnson** came to be distrusted by liberals as “a Machiavelli in a Stetson” and regarded as a usurper by Kennedy loyalists. He had become the 36th President of the United States through the assassination of a popular president in his home

**Johnson declared
“unconditional war on
poverty in America.”**

state. Though just nine years older than JFK, he seemed a relic of the past, a back-room wheeler-dealer, as crude as Kennedy was smooth.

Yet Johnson had substantial political assets. He had served in

Washington almost continuously since 1932, accruing enormous experience and a close association with the Capitol Hill power brokers. He excelled at wooing allies, neutralizing opponents, forging coalitions, and achieving results.

Demonstrating his determination to prove himself to liberals, Johnson deftly handled the transition of power, won a landslide victory in 1964, and guided through Congress the greatest array of liberal legislation in U.S. history, surpassing the New Deal. Needing to outdo JFK, even FDR, LBJ had both great talents and glaring flaws. His swollen yet fragile ego could not abide the sniping of Kennedy

loyalists—and the press. Wondering aloud, “Why don’t people like me?” Johnson labored to make the American Dream a reality for everyone and to vanquish all foes at home and abroad. Ironically, in seeking consensus and adoration, Johnson divided the nation and left office repudiated.

Johnson Takes Over

Calling for quick passage of the tax-cut and civil-rights bills as a memorial to JFK, Johnson used his skills to win passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and a \$10 billion tax-reduction bill, which produced a surge in capital investment and personal consumption that further spurred economic growth and shrank the budget deficit. More boldly, Johnson declared “unconditional **war on poverty** in America.”

Largely invisible in an affluent America, according to Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962), some 40 million people lived in a “culture of poverty,” lacking the education, medical care, and employment opportunities that most Americans took for granted. To be poor, Harrington asserted, “is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates the society.”

LBJ championed a campaign to bring these “internal exiles” into the mainstream. Designed to offer a “hand up, not a handout,” the Economic Opportunity Act established the Office of Economic Opportunity to fund and coordinate such programs as a job corps to train young people in marketable skills; VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a domestic peace corps; Project Head Start, to provide compensatory education for preschoolers from disadvantaged families; an assortment of public-works and training programs; and a Community Action Program to encourage the “maximum feasible participation” of the poor in decisions that affected them.

Summing up his goals in 1964, Johnson offered his vision of the **Great Society**. First must come “an end to poverty and racial injustice.” In addition, it would be a place where all children could enrich their minds, where people would be in contact with nature, and where all would be “more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.”

The 1964 Election

Johnson’s Great Society horrified the “new conservatives,” such as William F. Buckley and the college students of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). The most persuasive criticism came from Arizona senator **Barry Goldwater**. A western outsider fighting the power of Washington and a fervent anti-communist, Goldwater advocated as little federal



THE LBJ TREATMENT Not content unless he could wholly dominate friend as well as foe, Lyndon Johnson used his body as well as his voice to bend others to his will and gain his objectives. (Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library)

governmental intervention in the economy as possible and opposed government efforts to expand and protect civil rights and liberties.

Johnson's jibe that civil rights leaders would have to wear sneakers to keep up with him evoked no laughter from southern segregationists or from blue-collar workers in northern cities who dreaded the integration of their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Their support of Alabama's segregationist governor George Wallace in the spring 1964 Democratic presidential primaries heralded a "white backlash" against the civil-rights movement.

Buoyed by this backlash, conservatives gained control of the GOP in 1964. They nominated Barry Goldwater for the presidency and adopted a platform totally opposed to liberalism. Determined to offer the nation "a choice not an echo," Goldwater lauded his opposition to civil-rights legislation, denounced the War on Poverty, and accused the Democrats of a "no-win" strategy in the Cold War, hinting that he might use nuclear weapons against Cuba and North Vietnam. His stance appealed most to those angered by the Cold War stalemate, by the erosion of traditional moral values, and by the increasing militancy of African-Americans. But his charge that the Democrats had not pursued total victory in Vietnam allowed Johnson to appear the apostle of restraint: "We are not going to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."

LBJ won a landslide victory, 43 million votes to Goldwater's 27 million. The GOP lost thirty-eight congressional and two Senate seats. Many proclaimed the death of conservatism. But Goldwater's coalition of economic, social, and religious conservatives, and anti-integrationist whites, presaged the Right's future triumph. It transformed the Republicans from a moderate, eastern-dominated party to one decidedly conservative, southern, and western. It built a national base of financial support for conservative candidates; catalyzed the creation of new conservative publications and think-tanks; energized volunteers like Phyllis Schlafly to campaign for Goldwater and stay involved in politics; and mobilized future leaders of the party, like Ronald Reagan. But in the short run, the liberals controlled all three branches of government.

The Great Society

"Hurry, boys, hurry," LBJ urged his aides. "Get that legislation up to the hill and out. Eighteen months from now ol' Landslide Lyndon will be Lame-Duck Lyndon." Johnson flooded Congress with liberal proposals, and got most of what he requested (see Table 28.1).

The Eighty-ninth Congress expanded the War on Poverty and passed the Voting Rights Act. It enacted

Medicare to provide health insurance for the aged under social security and a **Medicaid** health plan for the poor. By 1975, the two programs would be serving 47 million people and account for a quarter of the nation's health-care expenditures. The legislators also appropriated funds for public education and housing and for aid to Appalachia and inner-city neighborhoods. They created new cabinet departments of transportation and of housing and urban development as well as the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. The first president to send a special message on the environment to Congress, Johnson won the enactment of measures to control air and water pollution, protect endangered species, set aside millions of acres of wilderness, and preserve the natural beauty of the American landscape. As noted, Congress enacted the Immigration Act of 1965, abandoning the quota system enacted in the 1920s that had discriminated against Asians and southern and eastern Europeans, and transforming America's racial and ethnic kaleidoscope.

The Great Society improved the lives of millions. The proportion of the poor in the population dropped from 22 percent in 1960 to 13 percent in 1969, infant mortality declined, and African-American family income rose from 54 percent to 61 percent of white family income. The percentage of blacks living below the poverty line plummeted from 40 percent to 20 percent. Great Society programs gave those on the bottom reason to hope and a sense of entitlement to a fair share of the American Dream. But because Johnson oversold the Great Society and Congress underfunded it, rising expectations outdistanced results.

For many in need, the Great Society remained more a dream than a reality. The war against poverty, Martin Luther King, Jr., asserted, was "shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam." The Asian war diverted LBJ's attention from liberal reforms and devoured tax dollars that might have gone to the Great Society. Yet the perceived liberality of federal spending and the "ungratefulness" of rioting blacks, as well as the intrusive rulings of the Supreme Court, alienated many middle- and working-class whites. The Democrats' loss of forty-seven House seats in 1966 ended the sway of congressional liberalism.

"Hurry, boys, hurry. Get that legislation up to the hill and out."

The Liberalism of the Warren Court

The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, far more liberal than public opinion or Congress, supported an activist government to protect the disadvantaged and accused criminals and expanded individual rights to a greater extent than ever before in American history.

TABLE 28.1 MAJOR GREAT SOCIETY PROGRAMS

Law	Provisions	Purpose
Tax Reduction Act (1964)	Cuts by some \$10 billion the taxes paid to use deficit spending to stimulate primarily by corporations and wealthy economic growth individuals.	To use deficit spending to stimulate economic growth.
Civil Rights Act (1964)	Bans discrimination in public accommodations, prohibits discrimination in any federally assisted program, outlaws discrimination in most employment, and enlarges federal powers to speed school desegregation.	To end racial discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sex.
Economic Opportunity Act (1964)	Authorizes \$1 billion for a War on Poverty and establishes the Office of Economic Opportunity to coordinate Head Start, Upward Bound, VISTA, the Job Corps, and similar programs.	To end poverty in the United States.
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)	Provides more than \$1 billion to public and parochial schools for textbooks, library materials, and special-education programs.	To aid “educationally deprived children.”
Voting Rights Act (1965)	Suspends literacy tests and empowers “federal examiners” to register qualified voters in the South.	To end the disfranchisement of African-Americans.
Medical Care Act (1965)	Creates a federally funded program of hospital and medical insurance for the elderly (Medicare) and authorizes federal funds to the states to provide free health care for welfare recipients (Medicaid).	To provide health insurance for senior citizens and medical care for the poor.
Housing and Urban Development Act (1965)	Appropriates nearly \$8 billion for low- and middle-income housing and for rent supplements for low-income families, and creates the cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development.	To improve housing for the poor and urban beautification.
Appalachian Regional Development Act (1965)	Targets \$1 billion for highway construction, health centers, and resource development in Appalachia.	To stimulate economic growth in this depressed area.
Immigration Act (1965)	Ends the discriminatory system of national-origins quotas established in 1924.	To increase immigration to the U.S., especially from Asia and Latin America.
Higher Education Act (1965)	Appropriates \$650 million for scholarships and low-interest loans to needy college students and for funds for grants to college libraries.	To promote higher education for less-wealthy students.
National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities Act (1965)	Creates new federally funded endowments.	To promote artistic and cultural activities and development.
Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (1966)	Provides extensive subsidies for housing, recreational facilities, welfare, and mass transit to selected “model cities” and covers up to 80 percent of the costs of slum clearance and rehabilitation.	To improve the quality of life in urban America.
Motor Vehicle Safety Act (1966)	Sets federal safety standards for the Auto industry and a uniform grading system for tire manufacturers.	To reduce auto accidents.
Truth in Packaging Act (1966)	Broadens federal controls over the labeling and packaging of foods, drugs, cosmetics, and household supplies.	To protect consumers from misleading product claims.

In landmark cases (see Table 28.2), the Court prohibited Bible reading and prayer in public schools, limited local power to censor books and films, and overturned state bans on contraceptives. It ordered states to apportion legislatures on the principle of “one person, one vote,” increasing the representation of urban minorities.

The Court’s upholding of the rights of the accused in criminal cases, at a time of soaring crime rates, particularly incensed many Americans. Criticism of the Supreme Court reached a climax in 1966 when it ruled in *Miranda v. Arizona* that police must advise suspects of their right to remain silent and to have counsel during questioning. In 1968, presidential candidates Richard Nixon and George Wallace would win favor by promising to appoint judges who emphasized “law and order” over individual liberties.

The Vietnam Crusade, 1961–1967

The activist liberals who boldly tried to uplift the downtrodden also went to war to contain communism in Vietnam. The nation’s longest war, and most controversial, would shatter the liberal consensus and divide the United States as nothing had since the Civil War.

Origins and Causes

American involvement in Vietnam grew out of the containment policy to stop the spread of communism. First as a means of strengthening our anti-Soviet ally France, President Truman authorized U.S. aid for French efforts to reestablish its colonial rule in

TABLE 28.2 MAJOR DECISIONS OF THE WARREN COURT

Court Case	Ruling	Significance
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)	Racially segregated public schools violate the constitutional principle of equal treatment for all.	Outlawed segregation in public education.
Watkins v. U.S. (1957)	Congress’s investigatory power is limited to matters directly pertinent to pending legislation.	Prohibited HUAC and other congressional committees from going on witch-hunts.
Yates v. U.S. (1957)	The Smith Act prohibits only the advocacy of concrete revolutionary action and not the preaching of revolutionary doctrine.	Ended the legal persecution of the Communist Party.
Baker v. Carr (1962)	The federal courts possess jurisdiction over state apportionment systems to ensure that the votes of all citizens carry equal weight.	Reduced the power of rural voters.
Engel v. Vitale (1962)	Requiring children to recite a prayer in public schools violates the separation of church and state.	Ended praying, and Bible reading the next year, in public schools.
Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)	States are required to provide attorneys at public expense for indigent defendants in felony cases.	Expanded the constitutional rights of alleged criminals.
New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964)	Public figures must prove “actual malice” to win libel suits against the press.	Expanded the First Amendment freedoms of the press.
Miranda v. Arizona (1966)	The police must advise a suspect of his or her constitutional right to remain silent and to have a counsel present during interrogation.	Broadened the rights of criminal suspects.
Loving v. Virginia (1967)	State antimiscegenation laws, which prohibit marriage between persons of different races, are unconstitutional.	Ended bans on interracial marriage.
Katzenbach v. Morgan (1968)	Upheled federal legislation outlawing state requirements that a prospective voter must demonstrate literacy in English.	Allowed Congress great latitude to expand the civil rights of minorities.
Green v. County School Board of New Kent County (1968)	So-called freedom-of-choice plans violate the <i>Brown</i> ruling that segregation in education is unconstitutional.	Placed burden of proof on schools to propose workable plans to end segregation.

Indochina. After the outbreak of war in Korea, with all of Asia now viewed as a Cold War battleground, Truman ordered vastly increased assistance for the French army fighting the Vietminh, a broad-based Vietnamese nationalist coalition led by the communist Ho Chi Minh. By 1954, the United States was paying three-quarters of the French war costs in Vietnam.

But the French were losing. In early 1954, the Vietminh besieged twelve thousand French troops in the valley of Dienbienphu. France appealed for U.S. intervention, and some American officials toyed with the idea of a nuclear strike, which President Eisenhower flatly rejected. In May, the French surrendered at Dienbienphu. An international conference in Geneva arranged a cease-fire and divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, pending elections in 1956 to choose the government of a unified nation.

Although unwilling to go to war, Eisenhower would not accept a communist takeover of Vietnam.

Possibly 80 percent of the population would have voted for the communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader.

In what became known as the **domino theory**, Eisenhower warned that, if Vietnam fell to the communists, then Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, and ultimately all of Asia would follow. The United States refused to sign the Geneva Peace Accords and in late 1954 created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), a military alliance patterned on

NATO (see Chapter 26).

In June 1954, the CIA installed Ngo Dinh Diem, a fiercely anticommunist Catholic, as premier and then president of an independent South Vietnam. CIA agents helped him eliminate political opposition and block the election to reunify Vietnam specified by the Geneva agreements. As Eisenhower later admitted, “possibly 80 percent of the population would have voted for the communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader.” Washington pinned its hopes on Diem to maintain a noncommunist South Vietnam with American dollars rather than American lives.

But the autocratic Diem’s Catholicism alienated the predominantly Buddhist population, and his refusal to institute land reform and end corruption spurred opposition. In December 1960, opponents of Diem coalesced in the communist-led **National Liberation Front (NLF)**. Backed by North Vietnam, the insurgency soon controlled half of South Vietnam.

Kennedy and Vietnam

Following the 1962 compromise settlement in Laos, President Kennedy resolved, as had President Eisenhower, not to give further ground in Southeast Asia. Fearing the likely success of the NLF, which

sought to overthrow the American puppet government in Saigon and unify the country under communist rule, JFK ordered massive shipments of weaponry to South Vietnam. He stepped up clandestine operations against the North and increased the number of American forces stationed in Vietnam from less than seven hundred in 1960 to more than sixteen thousand by late 1963 (see Figure 28.1). Like Eisenhower, he believed that letting “aggression” go unchecked would lead to wider wars (the Munich analogy), and that the communist takeover of one nation would lead to others going communist (the domino theory). Kennedy resolved to prove that wars of national liberation were doomed to fail and to show the world that the United States was not the “paper tiger” that Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) mocked.

To counter Vietcong, or NLF gains in the countryside, the United States used both chemical defoliants to destroy vegetation and deprive the Vietcong of natural cover, and napalm bombs—whose petroleum jelly burned at 1,000 degrees and clung to whatever it touched, including human flesh. It also forcibly uprooted Vietnamese peasants and moved them into fortified villages, or “strategic hamlets,” to prevent infiltration by the Vietcong. But South Vietnamese president Diem rejected American pressure to gain popular support through reform measures, instead crushing demonstrations by students and Buddhists. By mid-1963, Buddhist monks were setting themselves on fire to protest Diem’s repression, and Diem’s own generals were plotting a coup.

Frustrated American policy makers concluded that only a new government could prevent a Vietcong victory and secretly encouraged the coup to overthrow Diem. On November 1, South Vietnamese military leaders captured and murdered Diem and his brother, the head of the secret police. Although the United States promptly recognized the new government (the first of nine South Vietnamese regimes in the next five years), it too made little headway against the Vietcong. JFK now faced two unpalatable alternatives: increase the combat involvement of American forces or withdraw and seek a negotiated settlement.

What Kennedy would have done remains unknown. Less than a month after Diem’s death, John Kennedy himself fell to an assassin’s bullet. His admirers contend that by late 1963 he favored the withdrawal of American forces after the 1964 election. “It is their war...it is their people and their government who have to win or lose the struggle,” he proclaimed. Yet the president then restated the domino theory and promised that America would not withdraw from the conflict. Indeed, the speech he was to give the day he was killed warned, specifically, about Vietnam, “We dare not weary of the task.” Virtually all his closest advisers held that an



ANTI-DIEM BUDDHIST PROTESTS After Diem's troops fired on Buddhists attempting to celebrate Buddha's 2,587th birthday, Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death in downtown Saigon in June 1963. It was the first of several self-immolations in South Vietnam. Photographs and videotapes of these horrific protests, shown around the world, helped convince the Kennedy administration that Diem's leadership of South Vietnam could no longer be supported. (AP Images)

American victory in Vietnam was essential to check communism in Asia. National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and Secretary of State Dean Rusk would counsel Kennedy's successor accordingly.

Lyndon Johnson's Endless War

Now Johnson had to choose between intervening decisively or withdrawing from a conflict that three previous presidents had insisted the communists must not win. Privately describing Vietnam as "a raggedy-ass fourth-rate country" undeserving of American blood and dollars, LBJ feared that an all-out American military effort might lead to World War III and foresaw that full-scale engagement in "that bitch of a war" would destroy "the woman I really loved—the Great Society." Yet Johnson also accepted the domino theory and Munich analogy and saw both the nation's and his own credibility as on the line. He worried that a pullout would make him appear cowardly, threaten his liberal agenda, and leave him vulnerable to conservative accusations that he was "soft" on communism.

Trapped between unacceptable alternatives, feeling like "a catfish who had just grabbed a big juicy worm with a right sharp hook in the middle of it," Johnson escalated a Vietnamese civil war into America's war, hoping that U.S. firepower would force Ho Chi Minh to the bargaining table. But the North Vietnamese and NLF calculated that they could gain more by outlasting the United States than by negotiating. In 1964, Johnson took steps to impress North Vietnam with American resolve and to block his opponent, Barry Goldwater, from capitalizing on Vietnam in the presidential campaign. He ordered the Pentagon to prepare for air strikes against North Vietnam; appointed General Maxwell Taylor, an advocate of escalation, as ambassador to Saigon; and had his advisers draft a congressional resolution authorizing an escalation of American military action. In early August, North Vietnamese patrol boats allegedly clashed with two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin (see Map 28.3). Privately surmising that the "navy might have been shooting at whales out there," Johnson publicly announced that Americans had been victims of Hanoi's "open aggression on the

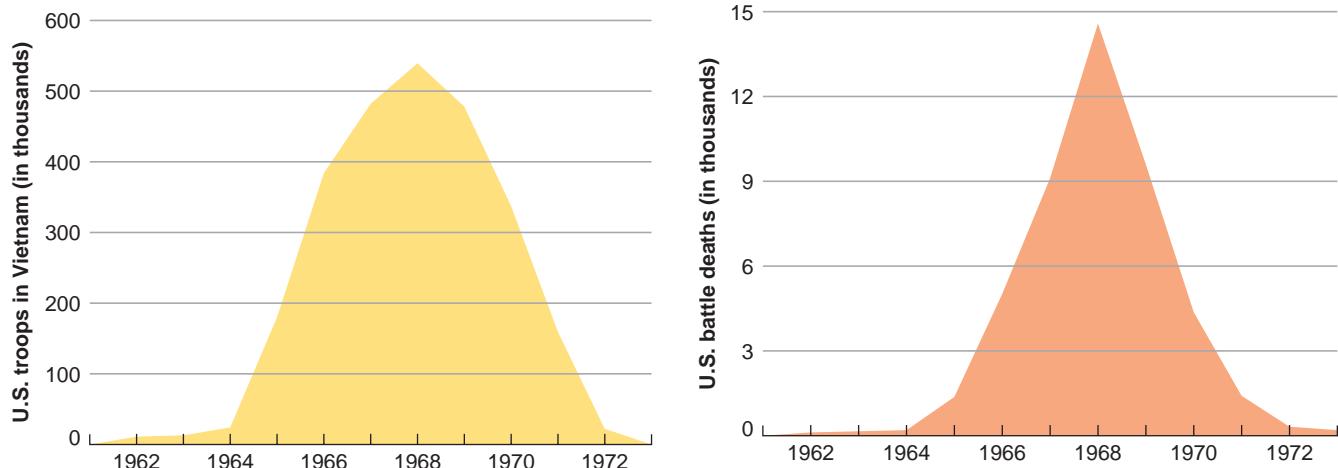


FIGURE 28.1 U.S. COMBAT IN VIETNAM After President Kennedy gradually increased the number of American advisers in Vietnam from less than a thousand to more than sixteen thousand, the continuing inability of South Vietnam to prevent the National Liberation Front, aided by North Vietnam, from winning led President Johnson to escalate the direct American involvement in the fighting—bringing a corresponding escalation of American combat fatalities. President Nixon then tried a policy of “Vietnamization,” substituting American aid and weapons for American military personnel. It reduced American combat deaths but failed to defeat the North Vietnamese.

Sources: American Journey: A History of the United States by Goldfield et al., © Pearson Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission of Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, NJ.

high sea.” Never admitting that the U.S. ships took part in covert raids against North Vietnam, Johnson ordered retaliatory air strikes on North Vietnamese naval bases and asked Congress to pass the prepared resolution giving him the authority to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack” on American forces “and to prevent further aggression.” Assured that this meant no “extension of the present conflict,” the Senate passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution 88 to 2, and the House 416 to 0.

Privately, LBJ called the resolution “grandma’s nightshirt—it covered everything.” Although it was initially designed to deflect Goldwater’s charge that he was weak on communism, Johnson also considered the resolution a blank check to commit U.S. forces if that became necessary. Yet he assured the public during the 1964 campaign that he would neither deploy American troops to fight in Vietnam nor extend the war by bombing North Vietnam.

Both assurances were short-lived. Early in 1965, Johnson ordered “Operation Rolling Thunder,” the sustained bombing of North Vietnam. It would lead to the dropping of eight hundred tons of bombs a day on North Vietnam between 1965 and 1968, three times the tonnage dropped by all the combatants in World War II. Yet it neither forced Hanoi to negotiate nor stopped the flow of soldiers and supplies coming from North Vietnam via the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail (see Map 28.3).

Unable to turn the tide by bombing, Johnson committed U.S. combat troops. Adopting a “meat-grinder” or attrition strategy, Johnson sought to inflict unacceptable casualties on the communists to force them to the peace table. Johnson sent 485,000 troops (a greater military force than the U.S. had deployed in Korea) to Vietnam by the end of 1967 (see Figure 28.1). But superiority in numbers and weaponry did not defeat an enemy that could choose when and where to attack and then melt back into the jungle. Determined to battle until the United States lost the will to fight, Hanoi matched each American troop increase with its own. No end was in sight.

First among pacifists and socialists, then on college campuses, and lastly in the wider society, a growing number of Americans opposed the war. In March 1965, students and faculty at the University of Michigan staged the first teach-in to raise questions about U.S. intervention. Later that spring, twenty-five thousand people, mainly students, rallied in Washington to protest the escalation. In 1966, large-scale campus anti-war protests erupted. Students demonstrated against the draft and university research for the Pentagon. They proved only a prelude to 1967’s massive Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam protests in New York and San Francisco, which drew half a million participants, and the October demonstrations at the Pentagon by another hundred thousand.

Intellectuals and clergy joined the chorus of opposition to the war. Some decried the massive bombing of an underdeveloped nation; some doubted the



MAP 28.3 THE VIETNAM WAR, TO 1975 Wishing to guarantee an independent, noncommunist government in South Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson remarked in 1965, “We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next.”



LBJ HAUNTED BY VIETNAM As each step up the escalation ladder led to the next, and then the next, President Johnson increasingly felt trapped—caught in a war that he could not win and that was destroying his dream of a Great Society. (*Courtesy Paul Szep/Library of Congress*)

United States could win at any reasonable cost; some feared the demise of the Great Society and liberalism. In 1967, prominent critics, including Senator Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, spurred hundreds of thousands to participate in antiwar protests.

Critics also noted that the war's toll fell most heavily on the poor. Owing to college deferments, the use of influence, and a military-assignment system that shunted the better-educated to desk jobs, lower-class youths were twice as likely to be drafted and, when drafted, twice as likely to see combat duty as middle-class youths. About 80 percent of the enlisted men

who fought in Vietnam came from poor and working-class families; only two of the twelve hundred men in

Harvard's class of 1970 served in Vietnam.

TV coverage of the war further eroded support. Scenes of children maimed by U.S. bombs and of dying Americans, replayed nightly, laid bare the horror of war and undercut the optimistic reports of government officials. Americans shuddered as they watched U.S. troops, supposedly winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese, burn villages and leave thousands of civilians mutilated or dead.

Yet for every protestor shouting "Hell No, We Won't Go!" many more war supporters affixed

"Hell No, We Won't Go!"

bumper stickers reading "America, Love It or Leave It!" Until 1968, most Americans either supported the war or remained undecided. "I want to get out, but I don't want to give up" expressed a widespread view. They were not prepared to accept a communist victory over the United States.

Equally disturbing was how polarized the nation had grown. **"Hawks"** would accept little short of total victory, whereas **"doves"** insisted on negotiating, not fighting. Civility vanished. As Johnson termed his critics "nervous Nellies" and refused to de-escalate, demonstrators paraded past the White House chanting, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" By 1968, the president had become a virtual prisoner in the White House, unable to speak in public without being shouted down. So ended an era of hope and liberalism.

The Tet Offensive and a Shaken President

In January 1968, liberal Democratic senator **Eugene McCarthy** of Minnesota, a Vietnam War critic, announced he would challenge LBJ for the presidential nomination. Pundits scoffed that McCarthy had no chance of unseating Johnson, who had won the presidency in 1964 by the largest margin in U.S. history. The last time such an insurgency had been attempted, in 1912, even the wildly popular Teddy Roosevelt had failed. Yet McCarthy persisted, determined that at least one Democrat should enter the primaries on an antiwar platform.

Suddenly, on January 31—the first day of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year—America's hopes for victory in Vietnam sank, and with them LBJ's political fortunes. NLF and North Vietnamese forces mounted a huge offensive, attacking more than a hundred South Vietnamese cities and towns, and even the U.S. embassy in Saigon. U.S. and South Vietnamese troops repulsed the offensive, inflicting a major military defeat on the communists, who failed to unleash a general uprising against the government in Saigon or to hold any South Vietnamese city. With the Viet Cong largely decimated, the brunt of the fighting now had to be borne by North Vietnamese troops.

Victory, however, came at an enormous psychological cost. The dramatic initial reports of the media, highlighting communist success and the immense scope of the Tet offensive, undercut Administration claims of imminent victory, of "light at the end of the tunnel." They deepened the growing mood of gloom about the war and intensified doubts that the United States could win at an acceptable cost. Public approval of the president's

conduct of the war fell to just 26 percent in the immediate aftermath of Tet.

After Tet, moreover, McCarthy's criticism of the war won many new sympathizers. *Time*, *Newsweek*, and influential newspapers published editorials urging a negotiated settlement. The nation's premier newscaster, Walter Cronkite of CBS, observed that, at best, the war would end in a stalemate. "If I've lost Walter," LBJ sighed, "then it's over. I've lost Mr. Average Citizen." The number of Americans who described themselves as prowar "hawks" slipped from 62 percent in January to 41 percent in March, while the antiwar "doves" jumped from 22 percent to 42 percent.

Beleaguered, Johnson pondered a change in American policy. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought 206,000 additional troops, he turned to old friends for advice. Former secretary of state and venerable Cold Warrior Dean Acheson told him, "the Joint Chiefs of Staff don't know what they're talking about." Clark Clifford, once a hawk and now secretary of defense, concluded "that the military course we were pursuing was not only endless but hopeless."

Meanwhile, nearly five thousand college students had swarmed to New Hampshire to stuff envelopes and ring doorbells for Eugene McCarthy in the nation's first primary contest. "Clean for Gene," they cut their long hair and dressed conservatively so as not to alienate potential supporters. McCarthy astonished the experts by winning nearly half the popular vote in a state usually regarded as conservative.

After this upset, twice as many students converged on Wisconsin to canvass its more liberal voters. Expecting Johnson to lose, Senator **Robert Kennedy**, also promising to end the war, entered the Democratic contest. Projecting the family's glamour and magnetism, Kennedy was the one candidate who Johnson feared could deny him renomination. Indeed, millions viewed Kennedy as the rightful heir to the White House. Appealing to minorities, the poor, and working-class ethnic whites, Kennedy became, according to a columnist, "our first politician for the pariahs, our great national outsider."

On March 31, Johnson surprised a television audience by announcing a halt to the bombing in North Vietnam. Adding that he wanted to devote all his efforts to the search for peace, LBJ then announced startlingly, "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president." Embittered by the personal abuse he had endured and reluctant to polarize the nation further, LBJ inaugurated peace negotiations and called it quits. Both physically and emotionally spent, LBJ lamented, "The only difference between the [John F.] Kennedy assassination and mine is

that I am alive and it has been more torturous." Two days later, pounding the final nail into Johnson's political coffin, McCarthy trounced the president in the Wisconsin primary.

Ignored and often forgotten in retirement, Johnson died of a heart attack in January 1973—on the same day the Paris Peace Accords ended America's combat role in Vietnam. In many ways a tragic figure, he had carried out Vietnam policies shaped by his predecessors and received little acclaim for his enduring domestic achievements, especially in civil rights and reducing poverty. Although he often displayed high idealism and generosity of spirit, the enduring image of LBJ remained that of a crude, overbearing politician with an outsized ego that masked deep insecurities.

Nixon's War

Following his election in 1968, President Richard Nixon plotted a strategy of détente—reduced tensions—with the USSR and China that hinged on ending the Vietnam War. He understood that the war had sapped American military strength, hurt the economy, hindered U.S. relations abroad, and devastated Lyndon Johnson. "I'm not going to end up like LBJ, holed up in the White House afraid to show my face on the street. I'm going to stop the war. Fast."

Announcing the Nixon Doctrine in August 1969, the president redefined America's role in the Third World as that of a helpful partner rather than a military protector. It reflected the president's recognition of war weariness by both the electorate and troops in Vietnam. Johnson's decision to negotiate rather than escalate had left American troops with the sense that little mattered except survival. Morale plummeted. Discipline collapsed. Racial conflict became commonplace. And the army reported hundreds of cases of "fraggings"—enlisted men killing officers and noncommissioned officers. By war's end, 20 percent of the Americans who served in Vietnam, nearly 500,000, had received less-than-honorable discharges—a measure of the desertion rate, soaring drug usage, antiwar sentiment in the military, and immaturity of the troops (the average U.S. soldier in Vietnam was just 19, seven years younger than the average GI in World War II).

The toll of atrocities against the Vietnamese also mounted. Instances of Americans dismembering enemy bodies, torturing captives, and murdering civilians came to light. In March 1968, an army unit led by an inexperienced lieutenant, William Calley, massacred several hundred South Vietnamese in the hamlet of My Lai. Soldiers gang-raped girls, lined up women and children in ditches and shot



THE MY LAI MASSACRE Under the command of First Lieutenant William Calley, the men of Charlie Company entered the small village of My Lai in March 1968 to attack the Vietcong believed to be there. Instead, they found unarmed civilians, mostly women and children, and massacred them. The military kept the incident secret for a year, but when news of the incident surfaced late in 1969, it became symbolic of the war's brutality and the futility of the U.S. effort in the Vietnam War. (Ron Haeberle/TimeLife Pictures/Getty Images)

them, and burned the village. Revelations of such incidents, and the increasing number of returned soldiers who joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War, undercut the already-diminished support for the war. At the same time, news coverage fed the strong and growing opposition to the war abroad (see Going to the Source).

Despite pressure to end the war, Nixon proved no more willing than his predecessors to accept defeat. Seeking “peace with honor,” he acted on three fronts. First: “Vietnamization,” replacing American troops with South Vietnamese. It was hardly a new idea; the French had tried *jaunissement* or “yellowing” in 1951, and it had not worked. By 1972, U.S. forces had been cut from half a million to thirty thousand. Second: bypassing South Vietnamese leaders, Nixon sent Kissinger to negotiate directly, and secretly, with North Vietnam’s foreign minister, Le Duc Tho. Third: to force the communists

to compromise despite the U.S. troop withdrawal, Nixon escalated the bombing of North Vietnam and secretly ordered air strikes on Cambodia and Laos. He told an aide,

I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that “for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button”—and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.

The secret B-52 raids neither made Hanoi beg for peace nor disrupted communist supply bases. They did, however, undermine the stability of Cambodia, and increase North Vietnam infiltration of troops into that tiny republic. “To show our enemy that we were still serious about our commitment

Images of Vietnam



(AP Images)



(AP Images)

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. These photographs show a crying, naked Vietnamese girl running down a road, her body burned by napalm, and a South Vietnamese police chief summarily executing a prisoner he believed to be a Vietcong. These images appeared on the front

pages of newspapers and on television broadcasts around the world within a day after they were taken. Subsequently they were reproduced and refashioned in an array of media. Note how they could be used as a means of persuasion, of judgment on the war, of critical reflection.

QUESTIONS

1. What makes these images so powerful and such successful examples of visual culture?
2. What do they expose—and what goes unstated?
3. How might they have affected public opinion regarding the war?



Go to the website at www.cengage.com/history/boyerenduring7e for additional primary sources on this period.

in Vietnam," Nixon ordered a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia at the end of April 1970. The invaders seized large caches of arms and bought time for Vietnamization. But the costs were high. It ended Cambodia's neutrality, widened the war throughout Indochina, and provoked massive American protests, culminating in student deaths at Kent State University and Jackson State (discussed in Chapter 29).

In February 1971, Nixon had South Vietnamese troops invade Laos to destroy communist bases there. The South Vietnamese were routed. Emboldened, North Vietnam mounted a major campaign in April 1972—the Easter Offensive—the largest since 1968. Nixon retaliated by mining North Vietnam's harbors and unleashing B-52s on its major cities: "The bastards have never been bombed like they are going to be bombed this time."

America's Longest War Ends

The 1972 bombing helped break the impasse in the Paris peace talks, stalemated since 1968. In late October, just days before the 1972 presidential election, Kissinger announced that "peace is at hand." The cease-fire agreement he had secretly negotiated with Le Duc Tho required the withdrawal of all U.S. troops, provided for the return of American prisoners of war, and allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam.

Kissinger's negotiation sealed Nixon's reelection, but South Vietnam's President Thieu refused to sign a cease-fire permitting North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South. An angry Le Duc Tho then pressed Kissinger for additional concessions, and Nixon retaliated with massive B-52 raids. The 1972 Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, the most destructive of the war, roused fierce opposition but broke the deadlock. Nixon's secret reassurance to Thieu that the United States would "respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam" ended Saigon's recalcitrance.

The Paris Accords, signed in late January 1973, essentially restated the terms of the October truce. The agreement ended hostilities between the United States and North Vietnam, but left unresolved the differences between North and South Vietnam, guaranteeing that Vietnam's future would still be

settled on the battlefield. After the "decent interval" that Kissinger and Nixon had insisted upon, North Vietnamese troops in the spring of 1975 overran South Vietnam, took control of Saigon, and forced American helicopters to airlift the last remaining officials out of the besieged U.S. embassy, (see Table 28.3).

America's longest war had ended in defeat. It had left fifty-eight thousand American dead and three hundred thousand wounded. The expenditure of at least \$150 billion (more than \$700 billion in 2009 dollars) had damaged the economy, diverted resources from reform, and triggered huge budget deficits and inflation. It shattered the liberal consensus and inflamed dissent and conflict, indelibly scarring a generation. The war also distanced the U.S. from its allies and alienated many in the world. "No more Vietnams" decided many in the military: the U.S. should not fight abroad unless its national security was clearly at stake, there was demonstrable public support, and it had the necessary means to accomplish the goal.

Virtually all who survived, wrote one marine veteran, returned "as immigrants to a new world. For the culture we had known dissolved while we were in Vietnam, and the culture of combat we lived in so intensely... made us aliens when we returned." Beyond media attention on the psychological difficulties of readjusting to civilian life, which principally fostered an image of them as disturbed and dangerous, the nation paid little heed to its Vietnam veterans—reminders of a war that Americans wished to forget.

Eager "to put Vietnam behind us," few gave much thought to the 2 million Vietnamese casualties, or to the suffering in Laos, or the price paid by Cambodia. In 1975, the fanatical Khmer Rouge (Cambodian communists), led by Pol Pot, took power and turned Cambodia into a genocidal "killing field," murdering some 2 million, an estimated third of the population.

"We've adjusted too well," complained Tim O'Brien, a veteran and novelist of the war. "Too many of us have lost touch with the horror of war.... It would seem that the memories of soldiers should serve, at least in a modest way, as a restraint on national bellicosity. But time and distance erode memory. We adjust, we lose the intensity. I fear that we are back where we started. I wish we were more troubled."

TABLE 28.3 THE VIETNAM WAR: A CHRONOLOGY

1945	Ho Chi Minh announces Declaration of Independence from France.
1950	French-controlled Vietnam receives U.S. financial aid and military advisers.
1954	Dienbienphu falls to Ho's Vietminh. Geneva Accords end Indochina War and temporarily divide Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. Ngo Dinh Diem becomes South Vietnam's premier.
1955	Diem establishes the Republic of Vietnam. U.S. advisers take over training of South Vietnamese army (ARVN).
1960	National Liberation Front (Vietcong) formed.
1961	President John Kennedy markedly increases military aid to South Vietnam.
1962	Strategic-hamlet program put in operation.
1963	Buddhist protests commence. ARVN coup overthrows and assassinates Diem. 16,000 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1964	General William Westmoreland takes charge of U.S. Military Assistance Command in South Vietnam. Gulf of Tonkin incident and subsequent U.S. congressional resolution. United States bombs North Vietnam. 23,300 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1965	First American combat troops arrive in South Vietnam, at Danang. 184,000 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1966	B-52s attack North Vietnam for first time. Senate Foreign Relations Committee opens hearings on U.S. in Vietnam. 385,000 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1967	Major antiwar demonstrations in New York and San Francisco; protest march on the Pentagon. 485,600 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1968	North Vietnamese forces surround Khesanh Tet offensive. My Lai massacre. President Lyndon Johnson announces partial bombing halt and decision not to run for reelection. Peace talks begin in Paris. General Creighton Abrams replaces Westmoreland as commander of American troops in Vietnam. 536,000 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1969	United States begins bombing North Vietnamese bases in Cambodia. Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) formed by Vietcong. First U.S. troop withdrawal announced after American military personnel in Vietnam reach peak strength of 543,400 in April. Ho Chi Minh dies. Nationwide antiwar protests in October. 475,200 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1970	United States and South Vietnamese forces join in Cambodian incursion. Student protests force 400 colleges and universities to close following Kent State killings. Cooper-Church amendment limits U.S. role in Cambodia. Senate repeals Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. 334,600 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1971	United States provides air support for South Vietnamese invasion of Laos. Antiwar rally of 400,000 in Washington. Daniel Ellsberg releases Pentagon Papers to the <i>New York Times</i> .
1972	North Vietnam launches first ground offensive since 1968. U.S. bombing and mining of North Vietnamese ports. Last U.S. ground troops leave South Vietnam. Preliminary peace agreement reached; National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger announces that "peace is at hand." South Vietnam rejects peace treaty. United States bombs Hanoi and Haiphong. 24,200 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1973	Peace agreement signed in Paris by North and South Vietnam, the Vietcong, and the United States. End of U.S. draft. Congress passes War Powers Act. First American POWs released in Hanoi. U.S. bombing in Southeast Asia ends. Fewer than 250 U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.
1974	South Vietnam announces new outbreak of war.
1975	North Vietnamese offensive captures Danang. Senate rejects President Gerald Ford's request for emergency aid for South Vietnam. South Vietnam surrenders following North Vietnam's capture of Saigon. Khmer Rouge takes control in Cambodia. Pro-Hanoi People's Democratic Republic established in Laos.

CHRONOLOGY 1960–1975

1960	John F. Kennedy elected president.	1965 (Cont.)	César Chávez's United Farm Workers strike in California. Teach-ins to question U.S. involvement in war in Vietnam begin. Voting Rights Act. Watts riot in Los Angeles.
1961	Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress created. Bay of Pigs invasion. Berlin Wall erected.		
1962	Cuban missile crisis.	1966	SNCC and CORE call for Black Power. Black Panthers formed. Massive antiwar demonstrations.
1963	Civil-rights demonstrations in Birmingham. March on Washington. Test-Ban Treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States. Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president.	1967	Race riots in Newark, Detroit, and other cities.
1964	Freedom Summer in Mississippi. Civil Rights Act. Gulf of Tonkin incident and resolution. Economic Opportunity Act initiates War on Poverty. Johnson elected president. Bombing of North Vietnam and Americanization of the war begin.	1968	Vietnam peace talks open in Paris. Richard Nixon elected president.
1965	Assassination of Malcolm X. Civil-rights march from Selma to Montgomery.	1970	United States invades Cambodia.
		1971	United States and South Vietnam invade Laos.
		1973	Vietnamese cease-fire agreement signed.
		1974	Indian Self-Determination Act.
		1975	South Vietnam surrenders following North Vietnam's capture of Saigon.

CONCLUSION

Kennedy's liberal rhetoric captivated the media and obscured a so-so domestic record. Stymied by the conservative coalition in Congress, Kennedy did more to stimulate hope than to achieve change. Others would force changes from the bottom up, and the next president, Lyndon Johnson, would persuade Congress to make a reality of the liberal ideal of an activist government promoting a fairer life for all Americans.

Fed up with the more legalistic, cautious strategy of the civil-rights movement in the past, young African-Americans in the 1960s initiated a new direct action phase in black America's struggle for equal rights. Their activism, bubbling up from the local level, and Martin Luther King's stirring oratory and leadership, led to the landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, which ended the legality of racial discrimination and black disfranchisement, provided greater equality of opportunity for African-Americans, and nurtured the self-esteem of blacks. However, the laws left untouched the maladies of the urban black ghetto. There, unfulfilled expectations and frustrated hopes exploded into rioting, which helped trigger a white backlash that undermined support for the liberal agenda.

For Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, that agenda meant Great Society legislation promoting health, education, voting rights, urban renewal, immigration reform, federal support for the arts and humanities, protection of the environment, and a war against poverty—the most sweeping liberal measures since the New Deal, and a significant enlargement in the role of the federal government in the lives of most Americans. Although the aggressiveness and violence of some blacks, and the Great Society's vast expansion of governmental powers and expenditures, helped shatter the liberal consensus, many liberal programs endured. Most Americans still supported Social Security and Medicare, favored a safety net of benefits for those truly in need, and did not want an unmanaged economy or a polluted environment.

Still, in the riot-torn streets of the “long hot summers,” and, above all, the rice paddies of Vietnam, the liberal consensus exploded. To prevent South Vietnam from being taken over by the communists, Kennedy significantly increased the number and fighting role of American advisers in Vietnam and gave the green light for a coup to overthrow Diem, the unpopular head of the government in Saigon. Inheriting a deteriorating limited war from Kennedy, LBJ also chose to escalate America's involvement,

hoping to force North Vietnam to negotiate a compromise. Three years later, a half-million American troops were stationed in Vietnam, and the United States was dropping more bombs on Vietnam than had been dropped in World War II. Still, the United States was no closer to achieving its objective, and Richard Nixon would fare no better. Although the nation had not been so deeply divided since the Civil War, Nixon's determination to prevent the United

States from appearing a "pitiful helpless giant," kept the war dragging on for four more years, with increasing American casualties and destruction in Indochina, until he accepted the limitations of U.S. power and bowed to the resolution of the North Vietnamese. Yet, the bitterness engendered by the war, and its unprecedented—and, for many, humiliating—defeat, would linger, and the liberal idealism articulated by King would remain a dream.

KEY TERMS

John F. Kennedy (p. 854)	César Estrada Chávez (p. 866)	Medicaid (p. 869)
Cuban missile crisis (p. 857)	<i>Chicano and Chicana</i> (p. 866)	<i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> (p. 871)
Civil Rights Act of 1964 (p. 862)	Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (p. 867)	domino theory (p. 872)
Voting Rights Act (p. 862)	Asian American Political Alliance (p. 867)	National Liberation Front (NLF) (p. 872)
Black Power (p. 864)	Lyndon Baines Johnson (p. 867)	"hawks" (p. 876)
affirmative action (p. 865)	war on poverty (p. 868)	"doves" (p. 876)
American Indian Movement (AIM) (p. 866)	Great Society (p. 868)	Eugene McCarthy (p. 876)
Indian Self-Determination Act of 1974 (p. 866)	Barry Goldwater (p. 868)	Robert Kennedy (p. 877)
Immigration Act of 1965 (p. 866)	Medicare (p. 869)	

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