CHAPTER 29

Contesting Futures: America in the 1960s

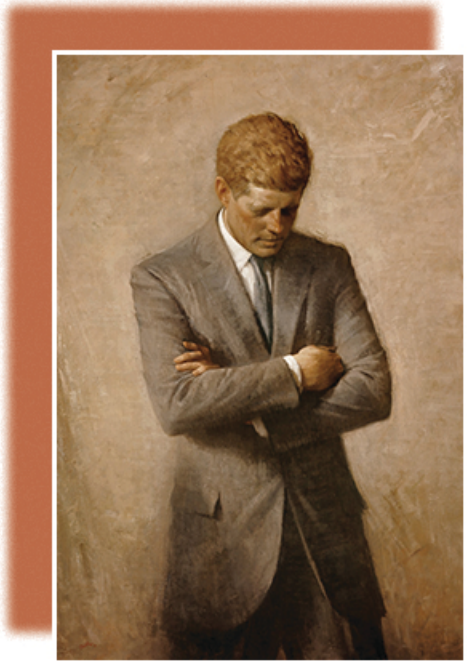

Figure 29.1 In Aaron Shikler's official portrait of *John Fitzgerald Kennedy* (1970), the president stands with arms folded, apparently deep in thought. The portrait was painted seven years after Kennedy's death, at the request of his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. It depicts the president with his head down, because Shikler did not wish to paint the dead man's eyes.

Chapter Outline

Introduction

The 1960s was a decade of hope, change, and war that witnessed an important shift in American culture. Citizens from all walks of life sought to expand the meaning of the American promise. Their efforts helped unravel the national consensus and laid bare a far more fragmented society. As a result, men and women from all ethnic groups attempted to reform American society to make it more equitable. The United States also began to take unprecedented steps to exert what it believed to be a positive influence on the world. At the same time, the country's role in Vietnam revealed the limits of military power and the contradictions of U.S. foreign policy. The posthumous portrait of John F. Kennedy (**Figure 29.1**) captures this mix of the era's promise and defeat. His election encouraged many to work for a better future, for both the middle class *and* the marginalized. Kennedy's running mate, Lyndon B. Johnson, also envisioned a country characterized by the social and economic freedoms established during the New Deal years. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, and the assassinations five years later of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, made it dramatically clear that not all Americans shared this vision of a more inclusive

democracy.

29.1 The Kennedy Promise

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Assess Kennedy's Cold War strategy
- Describe Kennedy's contribution to the civil rights movement

In the 1950s, President Dwight D. Eisenhower presided over a United States that prized conformity over change. Although change naturally occurred, as it does in every era, it was slow and greeted warily. By the 1960s, however, the pace of change had quickened and its scope broadened, as restive and energetic waves of World War II veterans and baby boomers of both sexes and all ethnicities began to make their influence felt politically, economically, and culturally. No one symbolized the hopes and energies of the new decade more than John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the nation's new, young, and seemingly healthful, president. Kennedy had emphasized the country's aspirations and challenges as a "new frontier" when accepting his party's nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, California.

THE NEW FRONTIER

The son of Joseph P. Kennedy, a wealthy Boston business owner and former ambassador to Great Britain, John F. Kennedy graduated from Harvard University and went on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1946. Even though he was young and inexperienced, his reputation as a war hero who had saved the crew of his PT boat after it was destroyed by the Japanese helped him to win election over more seasoned candidates, as did his father's fortune. In 1952, he was elected to the U.S. Senate for the first of two terms. For many, including Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., a historian and member of Kennedy's administration, Kennedy represented a bright, shining future in which the United States would lead the way in solving the most daunting problems facing the world.

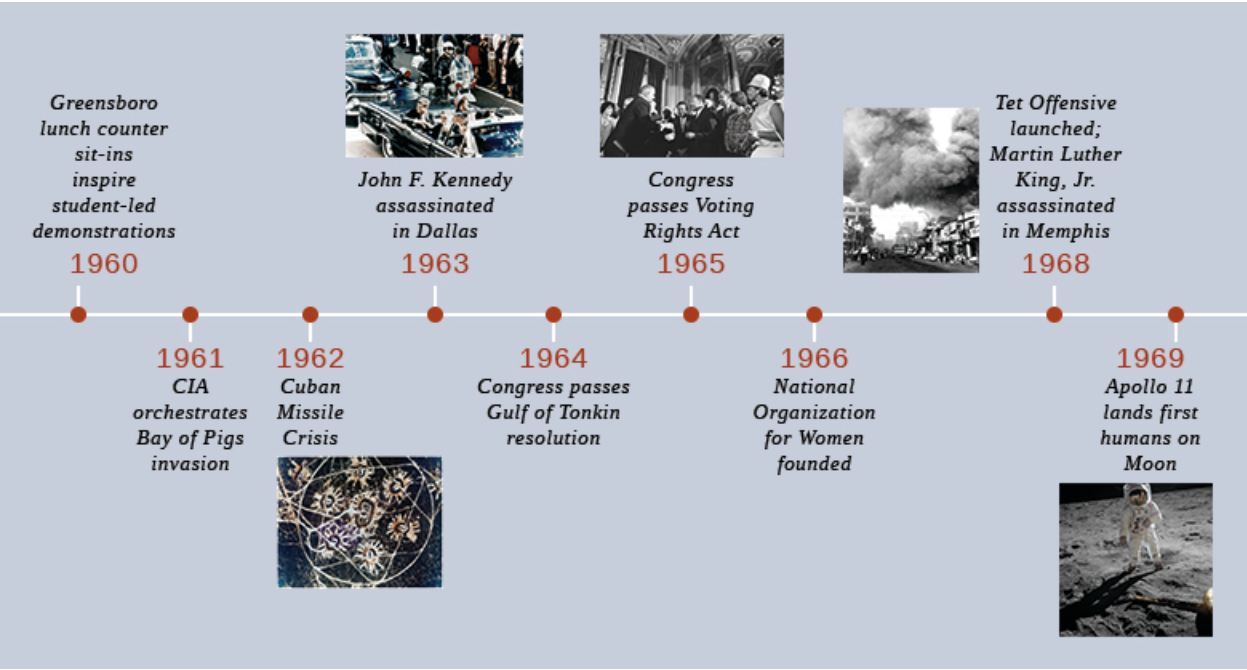

Figure 29.2

Kennedy's popular reputation as a great politician undoubtedly owes much to the style and attitude he personified. He and his wife Jacqueline conveyed a sense of optimism and youthfulness. "Jackie" was an elegant first lady who wore designer dresses, served French food in the White House, and invited classical musicians to entertain at state functions. "Jack" Kennedy, or JFK, went sailing off the coast of his family's Cape Cod estate and socialized with celebrities (**Figure 29.3**). Few knew that behind Kennedy's healthful and sporty image was a gravely ill man whose wartime injuries caused him daily agony.

(a) (b)

Figure 29.3 John F. Kennedy and first lady Jacqueline, shown here in the White House in 1962 (a) and watching the America's Cup race that same year (b), brought youth, glamour, and optimism to Washington, DC, and the nation.

Nowhere was Kennedy's style more evident than in the first televised presidential debate held on September 23, 1960, between him and his Republican opponent Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Seventy million viewers watched the debate on television; millions more heard it on the radio. Radio listeners judged Nixon the winner, whereas those who watched the debate on television believed the more telegenic Kennedy made the better showing.

Click and Explore

View television footage of the first **Kennedy-Nixon debate (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15JFKNixon)** at the JFK Presidential Library and Museum.

Kennedy did not appeal to all voters, however. Many feared that because he was Roman Catholic, his decisions would be influenced by the Pope. Even traditional Democratic supporters, like the head of the United Auto Workers, Walter Reuther, feared that a Catholic candidate would lose the support of Protestants. Many southern Democrats also disliked Kennedy because of his liberal position on civil rights. To shore up support for Kennedy in the South, Lyndon B. Johnson, the Protestant Texan who was Senate majority leader, was added to the Democratic ticket as the vice presidential candidate. In the end, Kennedy won the election by the closest margin since 1888, defeating Nixon with only 0.01 percent more of the record sixty-seven million votes cast. His victory in the Electoral College was greater: 303 electoral votes to

Nixon's 219. Kennedy's win made him both the youngest man elected to the presidency and the first U.S. president born in the twentieth century.

Kennedy dedicated his inaugural address to the theme of a new future for the United States. "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," he challenged his fellow Americans. His lofty goals ranged from fighting poverty to winning the space race against the Soviet Union with a moon landing. He assembled an administration of energetic people assured of their ability to shape the future. Dean Rusk was named secretary of state. Robert McNamara, the former president of Ford Motor Company, became secretary of defense. Kennedy appointed his younger brother Robert as attorney general, much to the chagrin of many who viewed the appointment as a blatant example of nepotism.

Kennedy's domestic reform plans remained hampered, however, by his narrow victory and lack of support from members of his own party, especially southern Democrats. As a result, he remained hesitant to propose new civil rights legislation. His achievements came primarily in poverty relief and care for the disabled. Unemployment benefits were expanded, the food stamps program was piloted, and the school lunch program was extended to more students. In October 1963, the passage of the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act increased support for public mental health services.

KENNEDY THE COLD WARRIOR

Kennedy focused most of his energies on foreign policy, an arena in which he had been interested since his college years and in which, like all presidents, he was less constrained by the dictates of Congress. Kennedy, who had promised in his inaugural address to protect the interests of the "free world," engaged in Cold War politics on a variety of fronts. For example, in response to the lead that the Soviets had taken in the space race when Yuri Gagarin became the first human to successfully orbit the earth, Kennedy urged Congress to not only put a man into space (**Figure 29.4**) but also land an American on the moon, a goal finally accomplished in 1969. This investment advanced a variety of military technologies, especially the nation's long-range missile capability, resulting in numerous profitable spin-offs for the aviation and communication industries. It also funded a growing middle class of government workers, engineers, and defense contractors in states ranging from California to Texas to Florida—a region that would come to be known as the Sun Belt—becoming a symbol of American technological superiority. At the same time, however, the use of massive federal resources for space technologies did not change the economic outlook for low-income communities and underprivileged regions.

Figure 29.4 On May 5, 1961, Alan Shepard became the first American to travel into space, as millions across the country watched the television coverage of his Apollo 11 mission, including Vice President Johnson, President Kennedy, and Jacqueline Kennedy in the White House. (credit: National Archives and Records Administration)

To counter Soviet influence in the developing world, Kennedy supported a variety of measures. One of these was the Alliance for Progress, which collaborated with the governments of Latin American countries to promote economic growth and social stability in nations whose populations might find themselves drawn to communism. Kennedy also established the Agency for International Development to oversee the distribution of foreign aid, and he founded the Peace Corps, which recruited idealistic young people to undertake humanitarian projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. He hoped that by augmenting the food supply and improving healthcare and education, the U.S. government could encourage developing nations to align themselves with the United States and reject Soviet or Chinese overtures. The first group of Peace Corps volunteers departed for the four corners of the globe in 1961, serving as an instrument of "soft power" in the Cold War.

Kennedy's various aid projects, like the Peace Corps, fit closely with his administration's **flexible response**, which Robert McNamara advocated as a better alternative to the all-or-nothing defensive strategy of mutually assured destruction favored during Eisenhower's presidency. The plan was to develop different strategies, tactics, and even military capabilities to respond more appropriately to small or medium-sized insurgencies, and political or diplomatic crises. One component of flexible response was the Green Berets, a U.S. Army Special Forces unit trained in **counterinsurgency**—the military suppression of rebel and nationalist groups in foreign nations. Much of the Kennedy administration's new approach to defense, however, remained focused on the ability and willingness of the United States to wage both conventional and nuclear warfare, and Kennedy continued to call for increases in the American nuclear arsenal.

Cuba

Kennedy's multifaceted approach to national defense is exemplified by his careful handling of the Communist government of Fidel Castro in Cuba. In January 1959, following the overthrow of the corrupt and dictatorial regime of Fulgencio Batista, Castro assumed leadership of the new Cuban government. The progressive reforms he began indicated that he favored Communism, and his pro-Soviet foreign policy frightened the Eisenhower administration, which asked the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to find a way to remove him from power. Rather than have the U.S. military invade the small island nation, less than one hundred miles from Florida, and risk the world's criticism, the CIA instead trained a small force of Cuban exiles for the job. After landing at the Bay of Pigs on the Cuban coast, these insurgents, the CIA believed, would inspire their countrymen to rise up and topple Castro's regime. The United States also promised air support for the invasion.

Kennedy agreed to support the previous administration's plans, and on April 17, 1961, approximately fourteen hundred Cuban exiles stormed ashore at the designated spot. However, Kennedy feared domestic criticism and worried about Soviet retaliation elsewhere in the world, such as Berlin. He cancelled the anticipated air support, which enabled the Cuban army to easily defeat the insurgents. The hoped-for uprising of the Cuban people also failed to occur. The surviving members of the exile army were taken into custody.

The Bay of Pigs invasion was a major foreign policy disaster for President Kennedy. The event highlighted how difficult it would be for the United States to act against the Castro administration. The following year, the Soviet Union sent troops and technicians to Cuba to strengthen its new ally against further U.S. military plots. Then, on October 14, U.S. spy planes took aerial photographs that confirmed the presence of long-range ballistic missile sites in Cuba. The United States was now within easy reach of Soviet nuclear warheads (**Figure 29.5**).

(a) (b)

Figure 29.5 This low-level U.S. Navy photograph of San Cristobal, Cuba, clearly shows one of the sites built to launch intermediate-range missiles at the United States (a). As the date indicates, it was taken on the last day of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Following the crisis, Kennedy met with the reconnaissance pilots who flew the Cuban missions (b). credit a: modification of work by National Archives and Records Administration; credit b: modification of work by Central Intelligence Agency)

On October 22, Kennedy demanded that Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev remove the missiles. He also ordered a **naval quarantine** placed around Cuba to prevent Soviet ships from approaching. Despite his use of the word "quarantine" instead of "blockade," for a blockade was considered an act of war, a potential war with the Soviet Union was nevertheless on the president's mind. As U.S. ships headed for Cuba, the army was told to prepare for war, and Kennedy appeared on national television to declare his intention to defend the Western Hemisphere from Soviet aggression.

The world held its breath awaiting the Soviet reply. Realizing how serious the United States was, Khrushchev sought a peaceful solution to the crisis, overruling those in his government who urged a harder stance. Behind the scenes, Robert Kennedy and Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin worked toward a compromise that would allow both superpowers to back down without either side's seeming intimidated by the other. On October 26, Khrushchev agreed to remove the Russian missiles in exchange for Kennedy's promise not to invade Cuba. On October 27, Kennedy's agreement was made public, and the crisis ended. Not made public, but nevertheless part of the agreement, was Kennedy's promise to remove U.S. warheads from Turkey, as close to Soviet targets as the Cuban missiles had been to American ones.

The showdown between the United States and the Soviet Union over Cuba's missiles had put the world on the brink of a nuclear war. Both sides already had long-range bombers with nuclear weapons airborne or ready for launch, and were only hours away from the first strike. In the long run, this nearly catastrophic example of nuclear brinksmanship ended up making the world safer. A telephone "hot line" was installed, linking Washington and Moscow to avert future crises, and in 1963, Kennedy and Khrushchev signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty, prohibiting tests of nuclear weapons in Earth's atmosphere.

Vietnam

Cuba was not the only arena in which the United States sought to contain the advance of Communism. In Indochina, nationalist independence movements, most notably Vietnam's Viet Minh under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, had strong Communist sympathies. President Harry S. Truman had no love for France's colonial regime in Southeast Asia but did not want to risk the loyalty of its Western European ally against the Soviet Union. In 1950, the Truman administration sent a small military advisory group to Vietnam and provided financial aid to help France defeat the Viet Minh.

In 1954, Vietnamese forces finally defeated the French, and the country was temporarily divided at the seventeenth parallel. Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh controlled the North. In the South, the last Vietnamese emperor and ally to France, Bao Dai, named the French-educated, anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem as his prime minister. But Diem refused to abide by the Geneva Accords, the treaty ending the

conflict that called for countrywide national elections in 1956, with the victor to rule a reunified nation. After a fraudulent election in the South in 1955, he ousted Bao Dai and proclaimed himself president of the Republic of Vietnam. He cancelled the 1956 elections in the South and began to round up Communists and supporters of Ho Chi Minh.

Realizing that Diem would never agree to the reunification of the country under Ho Chi Minh's leadership, the North Vietnamese began efforts to overthrow the government of the South by encouraging insurgents to attack South Vietnamese officials. By 1960, North Vietnam had also created the National Liberation Front (NLF) to resist Diem and carry out an insurgency in the South. The United States, fearing the spread of Communism under Ho Chi Minh, supported Diem, assuming he would create a democratic, pro-Western government in South Vietnam. However, Diem's oppressive and corrupt government made him a very unpopular ruler, particularly with farmers, students, and Buddhists, and many in the South actively assisted the NLF and North Vietnam in trying to overthrow his government.

When Kennedy took office, Diem's government was faltering. Continuing the policies of the Eisenhower administration, Kennedy supplied Diem with money and military advisors to prop up his government (**Figure 29.6**). By November 1963, there were sixteen thousand U.S. troops in Vietnam, training members of that country's special forces and flying air missions that dumped defoliant chemicals on the countryside to expose North Vietnamese and NLF forces and supply routes. A few weeks before Kennedy's own death, Diem and his brother Nhu were assassinated by South Vietnamese military officers after U.S. officials had indicated their support for a new regime.

Figure 29.6 Following the French retreat from Indochina, the United States stepped in to prevent what it believed was a building Communist threat in the region. Under President Kennedy's leadership, the United States sent thousands of military advisors to Vietnam. (credit: Abbie Rowe)

TENTATIVE STEPS TOWARD CIVIL RIGHTS

Cold War concerns, which guided U.S. policy in Cuba and Vietnam, also motivated the Kennedy administration's steps toward racial equality. Realizing that legal segregation and widespread discrimination hurt the country's chances of gaining allies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the federal government increased efforts to secure the civil rights of African Americans in the 1960s. During his presidential campaign, Kennedy had intimated his support for civil rights, and his efforts to secure the release of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., who was arrested following a demonstration, won him the African American vote. Lacking widespread backing in Congress, however, and anxious not to offend white southerners, Kennedy was cautious in assisting African Americans in their fight for full citizenship rights.

His strongest focus was on securing the voting rights of African Americans. Kennedy feared the loss

of support from southern white Democrats and the impact a struggle over civil rights could have on his foreign policy agenda as well as on his reelection in 1964. But he thought voter registration drives far preferable to the boycotts, sit-ins, and integration marches that had generated such intense global media coverage in previous years. Encouraged by Congress's passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1960, which permitted federal courts to appoint referees to guarantee that qualified persons would be registered to vote, Kennedy focused on the passage of a constitutional amendment outlawing poll taxes, a tactic that southern states used to disenfranchise African American voters. Originally proposed by President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, the idea had been largely forgotten during Eisenhower's time in office. Kennedy, however, revived it and convinced Spessard Holland, a conservative Florida senator, to introduce the proposed amendment in Congress. It passed both houses of Congress and was sent to the states for ratification in September 1962.

Kennedy also reacted to the demands of the civil rights movement for equality in education. For example, when African American student James Meredith, encouraged by Kennedy's speeches, attempted to enroll at the segregated University of Mississippi in 1962, riots broke out on campus (**Figure 29.7**). The president responded by sending the U.S. Army and National Guard to Oxford, Mississippi, to support the U.S. Marshals that his brother Robert, the attorney general, had dispatched.

Figure 29.7 Escorted by a U.S. marshal and the assistant attorney general for civil rights, James Meredith (center) enters the University of Mississippi over the riotous protests of white southerners. Meredith later attempted a "March against Fear" in 1966 to protest the inability of southern African Americans to vote. His walk ended when a passing motorist shot and wounded him. (credit: Library of Congress)

Following similar violence at the University of Alabama when two African American students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, attempted to enroll in 1963, Kennedy responded with a bill that would give the federal government greater power to enforce school desegregation, prohibit segregation in public accommodations, and outlaw discrimination in employment. Kennedy would not live to see his bill enacted; it would become law during Lyndon Johnson's administration as the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

TRAGEDY IN DALLAS

Although his stance on civil rights had won him support in the African American community and his steely performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis had led his overall popularity to surge, Kennedy understood that he had to solidify his base in the South to secure his reelection. On November 21, 1963, he accompanied Lyndon Johnson to Texas to rally his supporters. The next day, shots rang out as Kennedy's motorcade made its way through the streets of Dallas. Seriously injured, Kennedy was rushed to Parkland Hospital and pronounced dead.

The gunfire that killed Kennedy appeared to come from the upper stories of the Texas School Book Depository building; later that day, Lee Harvey Oswald, an employee at the depository and a trained sniper, was arrested (**Figure 29.8**). Two days later, while being transferred from Dallas police

headquarters to the county jail, Oswald was shot and killed by Jack Ruby, a local nightclub owner who claimed he acted to avenge the president.

Figure 29.8 Lee Harvey Oswald (center) was arrested at the Texas Theatre in Dallas a few hours after shooting President Kennedy.

Almost immediately, rumors began to circulate regarding the Kennedy assassination, and conspiracy theorists, pointing to the unlikely coincidence of Oswald's murder a few days after Kennedy's, began to propose alternate theories about the events. To quiet the rumors and allay fears that the government was hiding evidence, Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy's successor, appointed a fact-finding commission headed by Earl Warren, chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, to examine all the evidence and render a verdict. The Warren Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone and there had been no conspiracy. The commission's ruling failed to satisfy many, and multiple theories have sprung up over time. No credible evidence has ever been uncovered, however, to prove either that someone other than Oswald murdered Kennedy or that Oswald acted with co-conspirators.

29.2 Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the major accomplishments of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society
- Identify the legal advances made in the area of civil rights
- Explain how Lyndon Johnson deepened the American commitment in Vietnam

On November 27, 1963, a few days after taking the oath of office, President Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress and vowed to accomplish the goals that John F. Kennedy had set and to expand the role of the federal government in securing economic opportunity and civil rights for all. Johnson brought to his presidency a vision of a **Great Society** in which everyone could share in the opportunities for a better life that the United States offered, and in which the words "liberty and justice for all" would have real meaning.

THE GREAT SOCIETY

In May 1964, in a speech at the University of Michigan, Lyndon Johnson described in detail his vision of the Great Society he planned to create (**Figure 29.9**). When the Eighty-Ninth Congress convened the following January, he and his supporters began their effort to turn the promise into reality. By combatting racial discrimination and attempting to eliminate poverty, the reforms of the Johnson administration changed the nation.

(a) (b)

Figure 29.9 In a speech at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on May 22, 1964 (a), President Johnson announced some of his goals for the Great Society. These included rebuilding cities, preserving the natural environment, and improving education. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in his hometown of Johnson City, Texas, alongside his childhood schoolteacher, Kate Deadrich Loney (b). (credit a: modification of work by Cecil Stoughton)

One of the chief pieces of legislation that Congress passed in 1965 was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (**Figure 29.9**). Johnson, a former teacher, realized that a lack of education was the primary cause of poverty and other social problems. Educational reform was thus an important pillar of the society he hoped to build. This act provided increased federal funding to both elementary and secondary schools, allocating more than $1 billion for the purchase of books and library materials, and the creation of educational programs for disadvantaged children. The Higher Education Act, signed into law the same year, provided scholarships and low-interest loans for the poor, increased federal funding for colleges and universities, and created a corps of teachers to serve schools in impoverished areas.

Education was not the only area toward which Johnson directed his attention. Consumer protection laws were also passed that improved the safety of meat and poultry, placed warning labels on cigarette packages, required "truth in lending" by creditors, and set safety standards for motor vehicles. Funds were provided to improve public transportation and to fund high-speed mass transit. To protect the environment, the Johnson administration created laws protecting air and water quality, regulating the disposal of solid waste, preserving wilderness areas, and protecting endangered species. All of these laws fit within Johnson's plan to make the United States a better place to live. Perhaps influenced by Kennedy's commitment to the arts, Johnson also signed legislation creating the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, which provided funding for artists and scholars. The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 authorized the creation of the private, not-for-profit Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which helped launch the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR) in 1970.

In 1965, the Johnson administration also encouraged Congress to pass the Immigration and Nationality Act, which essentially overturned legislation from the 1920s that had favored immigrants from western and northern Europe over those from eastern and southern Europe. The law lifted severe restrictions on immigration from Asia and gave preference to immigrants with family ties in the United States and immigrants with desirable skills. Although the measure seemed less significant than many of the other legislative victories of the Johnson administration at the time, it opened the door for a new era in immigration and made possible the formation of Asian and Latin American immigrant communities in the following decades.

While these laws touched on important aspects of the Great Society, the centerpiece of Johnson's plan was the eradication of poverty in the United States. The **war on poverty**, as he termed it, was fought on

many fronts. The 1965 Housing and Urban Development Act offered grants to improve city housing and subsidized rents for the poor. The Model Cities program likewise provided money for urban development projects and the building of public housing.

The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 established and funded a variety of programs to assist the poor in finding jobs. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), first administered by President Kennedy's brother-in-law Sargent Shriver, coordinated programs such as the Jobs Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which provided job training programs and work experience for the disadvantaged. Volunteers in Service to America recruited people to offer educational programs and other community services in poor areas, just as the Peace Corps did abroad. The Community Action Program, also under the OEO, funded local Community Action Agencies, organizations created and managed by residents of disadvantaged communities to improve their own lives and those of their neighbors. The Head Start program, intended to prepare low-income children for elementary school, was also under the OEO until it was transferred to Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1969.

The EOA fought rural poverty by providing low-interest loans to those wishing to improve their farms or start businesses (**Figure 29.10**). EOA funds were also used to provide housing and education for migrant farm workers. Other legislation created jobs in Appalachia, one of the poorest regions in the United States, and brought programs to Indian reservations. One of EOA's successes was the Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo Reservation that, while respecting Navajo traditions and culture, also trained people for careers and jobs outside the reservation.

Figure 29.10 President Johnson visits a poor family in Appalachia in 1964. Government initiatives designed to combat poverty helped rural communities like this one by providing low-interest loans and housing. (credit: Cecil Stoughton)

The Johnson administration, realizing the nation's elderly were among its poorest and most disadvantaged citizens, passed the Social Security Act of 1965. The most profound change made by this act was the creation of Medicare, a program to pay the medical expenses of those over sixty-five. Although opposed by the American Medical Association, which feared the creation of a national healthcare system, the new program was supported by most citizens because it would benefit all social classes, not just the poor. The act and subsequent amendments to it also provided coverage for self-employed people in certain occupations and expanded the number of disabled who qualified for benefits. The following year, the Medicaid program allotted federal funds to pay for medical care for the poor.

JOHNSON'S COMMITMENT TO CIVIL RIGHTS

The eradication of poverty was matched in importance by the Great Society's advancement of civil rights. Indeed, the condition of the poor could not be alleviated if racial discrimination limited their access to jobs, education, and housing. Realizing this, Johnson drove the long-awaited civil rights act, proposed by Kennedy in June 1963 in the wake of riots at the University of Alabama, through Congress. Under

Kennedy's leadership, the bill had passed the House of Representatives but was stalled in the Senate by a filibuster. Johnson, a master politician, marshaled his considerable personal influence and memories of his fallen predecessor to break the filibuster. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the most far-reaching civil rights act yet passed by Congress, banned discrimination in public accommodations, sought to aid schools in efforts to desegregate, and prohibited federal funding of programs that permitted racial segregation. Further, it barred discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, or gender, and established an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Protecting African Americans' right to vote was as important as ending racial inequality in the United States. In January 1964, the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, prohibiting the imposition of poll taxes on voters, was finally ratified. Poverty would no longer serve as an obstacle to voting. Other impediments remained, however. Attempts to register southern African American voters encountered white resistance, and protests against this interference often met with violence. On March 7, 1965, a planned protest march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capitol in Montgomery, turned into "Bloody Sunday" when marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge encountered a cordon of state police, wielding batons and tear gas (**Figure 29.11**). Images of white brutality appeared on television screens throughout the nation and in newspapers around the world.

Figure 29.11 African American marchers in Selma, Alabama, were attacked by state police officers in 1965, and the resulting "Bloody Sunday" helped create support for the civil rights movement among northern whites. (credit: Library of Congress)

Deeply disturbed by the violence in Alabama and the refusal of Governor George Wallace to address it, Johnson introduced a bill in Congress that would remove obstacles for African American voters and lend federal support to their cause. His proposal, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, prohibited states and local governments from passing laws that discriminated against voters on the basis of race (**Figure 29.12**). Literacy tests and other barriers to voting that had kept ethnic minorities from the polls were thus outlawed. Following the passage of the act, a quarter of a million African Americans registered to vote, and by 1967, the majority of African Americans had done so. Johnson's final piece of civil rights legislation was the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, national origin, or religion.

(a) (b)

Figure 29.12 The Voting Rights Act (a) was signed into law on August 6, 1965, in the presence of major figures of the civil rights movement, including Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. (b).

INCREASED COMMITMENT IN VIETNAM

Building the Great Society had been Lyndon Johnson's biggest priority, and he effectively used his decades of experience in building legislative majorities in a style that ranged from diplomacy to quid pro quo deals to bullying. In the summer of 1964, he deployed these political skills to secure congressional approval for a new strategy in Vietnam—with fateful consequences.

President Johnson had never been the cold warrior Kennedy was, but believed that the credibility of the nation and his office depended on maintaining a foreign policy of containment. When, on August 2, the U.S. destroyer USS *Maddox* conducted an arguably provocative intelligence-gathering mission in the gulf of Tonkin, it reported an attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Two days later, the *Maddox* was supposedly struck again, and a second ship, the USS *Turner Joy*, reported that it also had been fired upon. The North Vietnamese denied the second attack, and Johnson himself doubted the reliability of the crews' report. The National Security Agency has since revealed that the August 4 attacks did not occur. Relying on information available at the time, however, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reported to Congress that U.S. ships had been fired upon in international waters while conducting routine operations. On August 7, with only two dissenting votes, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and on August 10, the president signed the resolution into law. The resolution gave President Johnson the authority to use military force in Vietnam without asking Congress for a declaration of war. It dramatically increased the power of the U.S. president and transformed the American role in Vietnam from advisor to combatant.

In 1965, large-scale U.S. bombing of North Vietnam began. The intent of the campaign, which lasted three years under various names, was to force the North to end its support for the insurgency in the South. More than 200,000 U.S. military personnel, including combat troops, were sent to South Vietnam. At first, most of the American public supported the president's actions in Vietnam. Support began to ebb, however, as more troops were deployed. Frustrated by losses suffered by the South's Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), General William Westmoreland called for the United States to take more responsibility for fighting the war. By April 1966, more Americans were being killed in battle than ARVN troops. Johnson, however, maintained that the war could be won if the United States stayed the course, and in November 1967, Westmoreland proclaimed the end was in sight.

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To hear one soldier's story about his time in Vietnam, listen to **Sergeant Charles G. Richardson's recollections (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15VietnamVet)** of his experience on the ground and his reflections on his military service.

Westmoreland's predictions were called into question, however, when in January 1968, the North Vietnamese launched their most aggressive assault on the South, deploying close to eighty-five thousand troops. During the Tet Offensive, as these attacks were known, nearly one hundred cities in the South were attacked, including the capital of Saigon (**Figure 29.13**). In heavy fighting, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces recaptured all the points taken by the enemy.

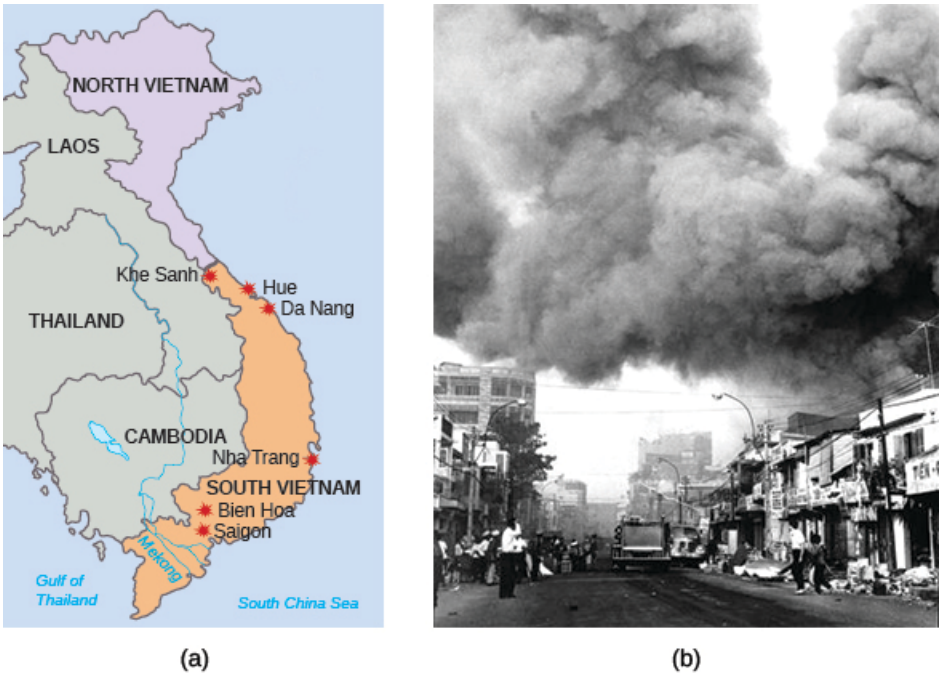

Figure 29.13 During the 1968 Tet Offensive, North Vietnamese and South Communist rebel armies known as Viet Cong attacked South Vietnamese and U.S. targets throughout Vietnam (a), with Saigon as the focus (b). Tet, the lunar New Year, was an important holiday in Vietnam and temporary ceasefires usually took place at this time. (credit a: modification of work by Central Intelligence Agency)

Although North Vietnamese forces suffered far more casualties than the roughly forty-one hundred U.S. soldiers killed, public opinion in the United States, fueled by graphic images provided in unprecedented media coverage, turned against the war. Disastrous surprise attacks like the Tet Offensive persuaded many that the war would not be over soon and raised doubts about whether Johnson's administration was telling the truth about the real state of affairs. In May 1968, with over 400,000 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, Johnson began peace talks with the North.

It was too late to save Johnson himself, however. Many of the most outspoken critics of the war were Democratic politicians whose opposition began to erode unity within the party. Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy, who had called for an end to the war and the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, received

nearly as many votes in the New Hampshire presidential primary as Johnson did, even though he had been expected to fare very poorly. McCarthy's success in New Hampshire encouraged Robert Kennedy to announce his candidacy as well. Johnson, suffering health problems and realizing his actions in Vietnam had hurt his public standing, announced that he would not seek reelection and withdrew from the 1968 presidential race.

THE END OF THE GREAT SOCIETY

Perhaps the greatest casualty of the nation's war in Vietnam was the Great Society. As the war escalated, the money spent to fund it also increased, leaving less to pay for the many social programs Johnson had created to lift Americans out of poverty. Johnson knew he could not achieve his Great Society while spending money to wage the war. He was unwilling to withdraw from Vietnam, however, for fear that the world would perceive this action as evidence of American failure and doubt the ability of the United States to carry out its responsibilities as a superpower.

Vietnam doomed the Great Society in other ways as well. Dreams of racial harmony suffered, as many African Americans, angered by the failure of Johnson's programs to alleviate severe poverty in the inner cities, rioted in frustration. Their anger was heightened by the fact that a disproportionate number of African Americans were fighting and dying in Vietnam. Nearly two-thirds of eligible African Americans were drafted, whereas draft deferments for college, exemptions for skilled workers in the military industrial complex, and officer training programs allowed white middle-class youth to either avoid the draft or volunteer for a military branch of their choice. As a result, less than one-third of white men were drafted.

Although the Great Society failed to eliminate suffering or increase civil rights to the extent that Johnson wished, it made a significant difference in people's lives. By the end of Johnson's administration, the percentage of people living below the poverty line had been cut nearly in half. While more people of color than whites continued to live in poverty, the percentage of poor African Americans had decreased dramatically. The creation of Medicare and Medicaid as well as the expansion of Social Security benefits and welfare payments improved the lives of many, while increased federal funding for education enabled more people to attend college than ever before. Conservative critics argued that, by expanding the responsibilities of the federal government to care for the poor, Johnson had hurt both taxpayers and the poor themselves. Aid to the poor, many maintained, would not only fail to solve the problem of poverty but would also encourage people to become dependent on government "handouts" and lose their desire and ability to care for themselves—an argument that many found intuitively compelling but which lacked conclusive evidence. These same critics also accused Johnson of saddling the United States with a large debt as a result of the deficit spending (funded by borrowing) in which he had engaged.

29.3 The Civil Rights Movement Marches On

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the strategies of the African American civil rights movement in the 1960s
- Discuss the rise and philosophy of Black Power
- Identify achievements of the Mexican American civil rights movement in the 1960s

During the 1960s, the federal government, encouraged by both genuine concern for the dispossessed and the realities of the Cold War, had increased its efforts to protect civil rights and ensure equal economic and educational opportunities for all. However, most of the credit for progress toward racial equality in the Unites States lies with grassroots activists. Indeed, it was campaigns and demonstrations by ordinary people that spurred the federal government to action. Although the African American civil rights

movement was the most prominent of the crusades for racial justice, other ethnic minorities also worked to seize their piece of the American dream during the promising years of the 1960s. Many were influenced by the African American cause and often used similar tactics.

CHANGE FROM THE BOTTOM UP

For many people inspired by the victories of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the glacial pace of progress in the segregated South was frustrating if not intolerable. In some places, such as Greensboro, North Carolina, local NAACP chapters had been influenced by whites who provided financing for the organization. This aid, together with the belief that more forceful efforts at reform would only increase white resistance, had persuaded some African American organizations to pursue a "politics of moderation" instead of attempting to radically alter the status quo. Martin Luther King Jr.'s inspirational appeal for peaceful change in the city of Greensboro in 1958, however, planted the seed for a more assertive civil rights movement.

On February 1, 1960, four sophomores at the North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College in Greensboro—Ezell Blair, Jr., Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, and Franklin McCain—entered the local Woolworth's and sat at the lunch counter. The lunch counter was segregated, and they were refused service as they knew they would be. They had specifically chosen Woolworth's, because it was a national chain and was thus believed to be especially vulnerable to negative publicity. Over the next few days, more protesters joined the four sophomores. Hostile whites responded with threats and taunted the students by pouring sugar and ketchup on their heads. The successful six-month-long Greensboro sit-in initiated the student phase of the African American civil rights movement and, within two months, the sit-in movement had spread to fifty-four cities in nine states (**Figure 29.14**).

Figure 29.14 Businesses such as this one were among those that became targets of activists protesting segregation. Segregated businesses could be found throughout the United States; this one was located in Ohio. (credit: Library of Congress)

In the words of grassroots civil rights activist Ella Baker, the students at Woolworth's wanted more than a hamburger; the movement they helped launch was about empowerment. Baker pushed for a "participatory Democracy" that built on the grassroots campaigns of active citizens instead of deferring to the leadership of educated elites and experts. As a result of her actions, in April 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed to carry the battle forward. Within a year, more than one hundred cities had desegregated at least some public accommodations in response to student-led demonstrations. The sit-ins inspired other forms of nonviolent protest intended to desegregate public spaces. "Sleep-ins" occupied motel lobbies, "read-ins" filled public libraries, and churches became the sites of "pray-ins."

Students also took part in the 1961 "freedom rides" sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and SNCC. The intent of the African American and white volunteers who undertook these bus rides

south was to test enforcement of a U.S. Supreme Court decision prohibiting segregation on interstate transportation and to protest segregated waiting rooms in southern terminals. Departing Washington, DC, on May 4, the volunteers headed south on buses that challenged the seating order of Jim Crow segregation. Whites would ride in the back, African-Americans would sit in the front, and on other occasions, riders of different races would share the same bench seat. The freedom riders encountered little difficulty until they reached Rock Hill, South Carolina, where a mob severely beat John Lewis, a freedom rider who later became chairman of SNCC (**Figure 29.15**). The danger increased as the riders continued through Georgia into Alabama, where one of the two buses was firebombed outside the town of Anniston. The second group continued to Birmingham, where the riders were attacked by the Ku Klux Klan as they attempted to disembark at the city bus station. The remaining volunteers continued to Mississippi, where they were arrested when they attempted to desegregate the waiting rooms in the Jackson bus terminal.

Figure 29.15 Civil rights activists Bayard Rustin, Andrew Young, Rep. William Fitts Ryan, James Farmer, and John Lewis (l to r) in a newspaper photograph from 1965.

FREE BY ’63 (OR ’64 OR ’65)

The grassroots efforts of people like the Freedom Riders to change discriminatory laws and longstanding racist traditions grew more widely known in the mid-1960s. The approaching centennial of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation spawned the slogan “Free by ’63” among civil rights activists. As African Americans increased their calls for full rights for all Americans, many civil rights groups changed their tactics to reflect this new urgency.

Perhaps the most famous of the civil rights-era demonstrations was the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, held in August 1963, on the one hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Its purpose was to pressure President Kennedy to act on his promises regarding civil rights. The date was the eighth anniversary of the brutal racist murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi. As the crowd gathered outside the Lincoln Memorial and spilled across the National Mall (**Figure 29.16**), Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his most famous speech. In “I Have a Dream,” King called for an end to racial injustice in the United States and envisioned a harmonious, integrated society. The speech marked the high point of the civil rights movement and established the legitimacy of its goals. However, it did not prevent white terrorism in the South, nor did it permanently sustain the tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience.

(a) (b)

Figure 29.16 During the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (a), a huge crowd gathered on the National Mall (b) to hear the speakers. Although thousands attended, many of the march's organizers had hoped that enough people would come to Washington to shut down the city.

Other gatherings of civil rights activists ended tragically, and some demonstrations were intended to provoke a hostile response from whites and thus reveal the inhumanity of the Jim Crow laws and their supporters. In 1963, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Martin Luther King, Jr. mounted protests in some 186 cities throughout the South. The campaign in Birmingham that began in April and extended into the fall of 1963 attracted the most notice, however, when a peaceful protest was met with violence by police, who attacked demonstrators, including children, with fire hoses and dogs. The world looked on in horror as innocent people were assaulted and thousands arrested. King himself was jailed on Easter Sunday, 1963, and, in response to the pleas of white clergymen for peace and patience, he penned one of the most significant documents of the struggle—"Letter from a Birmingham Jail." In the letter, King argued that African Americans had waited patiently for more than three hundred years to be given the rights that all human beings deserved; the time for waiting was over.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

Letter from a Birmingham Jail

By 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. had become one of the most prominent leaders of the civil rights movement, and he continued to espouse nonviolent civil disobedience as a way of registering African American resistance against unfair, discriminatory, and racist laws and behaviors. While the campaign in Birmingham began with an African American boycott of white businesses to end discrimination in employment practices and public segregation, it became a fight over free speech when King was arrested for violating a local injunction against demonstrations. King wrote his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in response to an op-ed by eight white Alabama clergymen who complained about the SCLC's fiery tactics and argued that social change needed to be pursued gradually. The letter criticizes those who did not support the cause of civil rights:

> In spite of my shattered dreams of the past, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership in the community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, serve as the channel through which our just grievances could get to the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed. I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshippers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother. In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, "Those are social issues with which the Gospel has no real concern," and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular.

Since its publication, the "Letter" has become one of the most cogent, impassioned, and succinct statements of the aspirations of the civil rights movement and the frustration over the glacial pace of progress in achieving justice and equality for all Americans.

What civil rights tactics raised the objections of the white clergymen King addressed in his letter? Why?

Some of the greatest violence during this era was aimed at those who attempted to register African Americans to vote. In 1964, SNCC, working with other civil rights groups, initiated its Mississippi Summer Project, also known as Freedom Summer. The purpose was to register African American voters in one of the most racist states in the nation. Volunteers also built "freedom schools" and community centers. SNCC invited hundreds of white middle-class students, mostly from the North, to help in the task. Many volunteers were harassed, beaten, and arrested, and African American homes and churches were burned. Three civil rights workers, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, were killed by the Ku Klux Klan. That summer, civil rights activists Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and Robert Parris Moses formally organized the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) as an alternative to the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party. The Democratic National Convention's organizers, however, would allow only two MFDP delegates to be seated, and they were confined to the roles of nonvoting observers.

The vision of whites and African Americans working together peacefully to end racial injustice suffered a severe blow with the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee, in April 1968. King had gone there to support sanitation workers trying to unionize. In the city, he found a divided civil rights movement; older activists who supported his policy of nonviolence were being challenged by younger African Americans who advocated a more militant approach. On April 4, King was shot and killed while standing on the balcony of his motel. Within hours, the nation's cities exploded with violence as angry African Americans, shocked by his murder, burned and looted inner-city neighborhoods across the country (**Figure 29.17**). While whites recoiled from news about the riots in fear and dismay, they also criticized African Americans for destroying their own neighborhoods; they did not realize that most of the

violence was directed against businesses that were not owned by blacks and that treated African American customers with suspicion and hostility.

Figure 29.17 Many businesses, such as those in this neighborhood at the intersection of 7th and N Streets in NW, Washington, DC, were destroyed in riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

BLACK FRUSTRATION, BLACK POWER

The episodes of violence that accompanied Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder were but the latest in a string of urban riots that had shaken the United States since the mid-1960s. Between 1964 and 1968, there were 329 riots in 257 cities across the nation. In 1964, riots broke out in Harlem and other African American neighborhoods. In 1965, a traffic stop set in motion a chain of events that culminated in riots in Watts, an African American neighborhood in Los Angeles. Thousands of businesses were destroyed, and, by the time the violence ended, thirty-four people were dead, most of them African Americans killed by the Los Angeles police and the National Guard. More riots took place in 1966 and 1967.

Frustration and anger lay at the heart of these disruptions. Despite the programs of the Great Society, good healthcare, job opportunities, and safe housing were abysmally lacking in urban African American neighborhoods in cities throughout the country, including in the North and West, where discrimination was less overt but just as crippling. In the eyes of many rioters, the federal government either could not or would not end their suffering, and most existing civil rights groups and their leaders had been unable to achieve significant results toward racial justice and equality. Disillusioned, many African Americans turned to those with more radical ideas about how best to obtain equality and justice.

Click and Explore

Watch "Troops Patrol L.A." to see how the **1965 Watts Riots (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15WattsRiot)** were presented in newsreel footage of the day.

Within the chorus of voices calling for integration and legal equality were many that more stridently demanded empowerment and thus supported **Black Power**. Black Power meant a variety of things. One of the most famous users of the term was Stokely Carmichael, the chairman of SNCC, who later changed his name to Kwame Ture. For Carmichael, Black Power was the power of African Americans to unite as a

political force and create their own institutions apart from white-dominated ones, an idea also espoused in the 1920s by political leader and orator Marcus Garvey. Like Garvey, Carmichael became an advocate of **black separatism**, arguing that African Americans should live apart from whites and solve their problems for themselves. In keeping with this philosophy, Carmichael expelled SNCC's white members. He left SNCC in 1967 and later joined the Black Panthers (see below).

Long before Carmichael began to call for separatism, the Nation of Islam, founded in 1930, had advocated the same thing. In the 1960s, its most famous member was Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little (**Figure 29.18**). The Nation of Islam advocated the separation of white Americans and African Americans because of a belief that African Americans could not thrive in an atmosphere of white racism. Indeed, in a 1963 interview, Malcolm X, discussing the teachings of the head of the Nation of Islam in America, Elijah Muhammad, referred to white people as "devils" more than a dozen times. Rejecting the nonviolent strategy of other civil rights activists, he maintained that violence in the face of violence was appropriate.

Figure 29.18 Stokely Carmichael (a), one of the most famous and outspoken advocates of Black Power, is surrounded by members of the media after speaking at Michigan State University in 1967. Malcolm X (b) was raised in a family influenced by Marcus Garvey and persecuted for its outspoken support of civil rights. While serving a stint in prison for armed robbery, he was introduced to and committed himself to the Nation of Islam. (credit b: modification of work by Library of Congress)

In 1964, after a trip to Africa, Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam to found the Organization of Afro-American Unity with the goal of achieving freedom, justice, and equality "by any means necessary." His views regarding black-white relations changed somewhat thereafter, but he remained fiercely committed to the cause of African American empowerment. On February 21, 1965, he was killed by members of the Nation of Islam. Stokely Carmichael later recalled that Malcolm X had provided an intellectual basis for Black Nationalism and given legitimacy to the use of violence in achieving the goals of Black Power.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

The New Negro

In a roundtable conversation in October 1961, Malcolm X suggested that a "New Negro" was coming to the fore. The term and concept of a "New Negro" arose during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and was revived during the civil rights movements of the 1960s.

> "I think there is a new so-called Negro. We don't recognize the term 'Negro' but I really believe that there's a new so-called Negro here in America. He not only is impatient. Not only is he dissatisfied, not only is he disillusioned, but he's getting very angry. And whereas the so-called Negro in the past was willing to sit around and wait for someone else to change his condition or correct his condition, there's a growing tendency on the part of a vast number of so-called Negroes today to take action themselves, not to sit and wait for someone else to correct the situation. This, in my opinion, is primarily what has produced this new Negro. He is not willing to wait. He thinks that what he wants is right, what he wants is just, and since these things are just and right, it's wrong to sit around and wait for someone else to correct a nasty condition when they get ready."

In what ways were Martin Luther King, Jr. and the members of SNCC "New Negroes?"

Unlike Stokely Carmichael and the Nation of Islam, most Black Power advocates did not believe African Americans needed to separate themselves from white society. The Black Panther Party, founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, believed African Americans were as much the victims of capitalism as of white racism. Accordingly, the group espoused Marxist teachings, and called for jobs, housing, and education, as well as protection from police brutality and exemption from military service in their Ten Point Program. The Black Panthers also patrolled the streets of African American neighborhoods to protect residents from police brutality, yet sometimes beat and murdered those who did not agree with their cause and tactics. Their militant attitude and advocacy of armed self-defense attracted many young men but also led to many encounters with the police, which sometimes included arrests and even shootouts, such as those that took place in Los Angeles, Chicago and Carbondale, Illinois.

The self-empowerment philosophy of Black Power influenced mainstream civil rights groups such as the National Economic Growth Reconstruction Organization (NEGRO), which sold bonds and operated a clothing factory and construction company in New York, and the Opportunities Industrialization Center in Philadelphia, which provided job training and placement—by 1969, it had branches in seventy cities. Black Power was also part of a much larger process of cultural change. The 1960s composed a decade not only of Black Power but also of **Black Pride**. African American abolitionist John S. Rock had coined the phrase "Black Is Beautiful" in 1858, but in the 1960s, it became an important part of efforts within the African American community to raise self-esteem and encourage pride in African ancestry. Black Pride urged African Americans to reclaim their African heritage and, to promote group solidarity, to substitute African and African-inspired cultural practices, such as handshakes, hairstyles, and dress, for white practices. One of the many cultural products of this movement was the popular television music program *Soul Train*, created by Don Cornelius in 1969, which celebrated black culture and aesthetics (**Figure 29.19**).

Figure 29.19 When the Jackson Five appeared on *Soul Train*, each of the five brothers sported a large afro, a symbol of Black Pride in the 1960s and 70s.

THE MEXICAN AMERICAN FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

The African American bid for full citizenship was surely the most visible of the battles for civil rights taking place in the United States. However, other minority groups that had been legally discriminated against or otherwise denied access to economic and educational opportunities began to increase efforts to secure their rights in the 1960s. Like the African American movement, the Mexican American civil rights movement won its earliest victories in the federal courts. In 1947, in *Mendez v. Westminster*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that segregating children of Hispanic descent was unconstitutional. In 1954, the same year as *Brown v. Board of Education*, Mexican Americans prevailed in *Hernandez v. Texas*, when the U.S. Supreme Court extended the protections of the Fourteenth Amendment to all ethnic groups in the United States.

The highest-profile struggle of the Mexican American civil rights movement was the fight that Caesar Chavez (**Figure 29.20**) and Dolores Huerta waged in the fields of California to organize migrant farm workers. In 1962, Chavez and Huerta founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). In 1965, when Filipino grape pickers led by Filipino American Larry Itliong went on strike to call attention to their plight, Chavez lent his support. Workers organized by the NFWA also went on strike, and the two organizations merged to form the United Farm Workers. When Chavez asked American consumers to boycott grapes, politically conscious people around the country heeded his call, and many unionized longshoremen refused to unload grape shipments. In 1966, Chavez led striking workers to the state capitol in Sacramento, further publicizing the cause. Martin Luther King, Jr. telegraphed words of encouragement to Chavez, whom he called a "brother." The strike ended in 1970 when California farmers recognized the right of farm workers to unionize. However, the farm workers did not gain all they sought, and the larger struggle did not end.

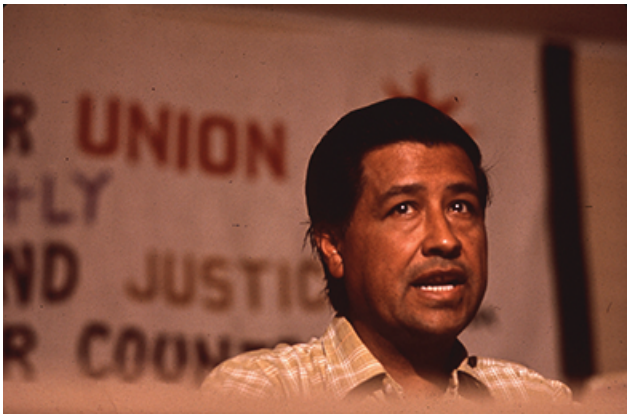

Figure 29.20 Cesar Chavez was influenced by the nonviolent philosophy of Indian nationalist Mahatma Gandhi. In 1968, he emulated Gandhi by engaging in a hunger strike.

The equivalent of the Black Power movement among Mexican Americans was the Chicano Movement. Proudly adopting a derogatory term for Mexican Americans, Chicano activists demanded increased political power for Mexican Americans, education that recognized their cultural heritage, and the restoration of lands taken from them at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. One of the founding members, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, launched the Crusade for Justice in Denver in 1965, to provide jobs, legal services, and healthcare for Mexican Americans. From this movement arose La Raza Unida, a political party that attracted many Mexican American college students. Elsewhere, Reies López Tijerina fought for years to reclaim lost and illegally expropriated ancestral lands in New Mexico; he was one of the co-sponsors of the Poor People's March on Washington in 1967.

29.4 Challenging the Status Quo

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the goals and activities of SDS, the Free Speech Movement, and the antiwar movement
- Explain the rise, goals, and activities of the women's movement

By the 1960s, a generation of white Americans raised in prosperity and steeped in the culture of conformity of the 1950s had come of age. However, many of these baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) rejected the conformity and luxuries that their parents had provided. These young, middle-class Americans, especially those fortunate enough to attend college when many of their working-class and African American contemporaries were being sent to Vietnam, began to organize to fight for their own rights and end the war that was claiming the lives of so many.

THE NEW LEFT

By 1960, about one-third of the U.S. population was living in the suburbs; during the 1960s, the average family income rose by 33 percent. Material culture blossomed, and at the end of the decade, 70 percent of American families owned washing machines, 83 percent had refrigerators or freezers, and almost 80 percent had at least one car. Entertainment occupied a larger part of both working- and middle-class leisure hours. By 1960, American consumers were spending $85 billion a year on entertainment, double the spending of the preceding decade; by 1969, about 79 percent of American households had black-and-white televisions, and 31 percent could afford color sets. Movies and sports were regular aspects of the weekly routine, and the family vacation became an annual custom for both the middle and working class.

Meanwhile, baby boomers, many raised in this environment of affluence, streamed into universities across the nation in unprecedented numbers looking to "find" themselves. Instead, they found traditional systems that forced them to take required courses, confined them to rigid programs of study, and surrounded them with rules limiting what they could do in their free time. These young people were only too willing to take up Kennedy's call to action, and many did so by joining the civil rights movement. To them, it seemed only right for the children of the "greatest generation" to help those less privileged to fight battles for justice and equality. The more radical aligned themselves with the New Left, activists of the 1960s who rejected the staid liberalism of the Democratic Party. New Left organizations sought reform in areas such as civil rights and women's rights, campaigned for free speech and more liberal policies toward drug use, and condemned the war in Vietnam.

One of the most prominent New Left groups was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Organized in 1960, SDS held its first meeting at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Its philosophy was expressed in its manifesto, the **Port Huron Statement**, written by Tom Hayden and adopted in 1962, affirming the group's dedication to fighting economic inequality and discrimination. It called for greater participation in

the democratic process by ordinary people, advocated civil disobedience, and rejected the anti-Communist position held by most other groups committed to social reform in the United States.

Click and Explore

Read the full text of the **Port Huron Statement (http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/exhibits/show/exhibit/item/128)** by Tom Hayden.

SDS members demanded that universities allow more student participation in university governance and shed their entanglements with the military-industrial complex. They sought to rouse the poor to political action to defeat poverty and racism. In the summer of 1964, a small group of SDS members moved into the uptown district of Chicago and tried to take on racism and poverty through community organization. Under the umbrella of their Economic Research and Action Project, they created JOIN (Jobs or Income Now) to address problems of urban poverty and resisted plans to displace the poor under the guise of urban renewal. They also called for police review boards to end police brutality, organized free breakfast programs, and started social and recreational clubs for neighborhood youth. Eventually, the movement fissured over whether to remain a campus-based student organization or a community-based development organization.

During the same time that SDS became active in Chicago, another student movement emerged on the West Coast, when actions by student activists at the University of California, Berkeley, led to the formation of Berkeley's Free Speech Movement in 1964. University rules prohibited the solicitation of funds for political causes by anyone other than members of the student Democratic and Republican organizations, and restricted advocacy of political causes on campus. In October 1964, when a student handing out literature for CORE refused to show campus police officers his student ID card, he was promptly arrested. Instantly, the campus police car was surrounded by angry students, who refused to let the vehicle move for thirty-two hours until the student was released. In December, students organized a massive sit-in to resolve the issue of political activities on campus. While unsuccessful in the short term, the movement inspired student activism on campuses throughout the country.

A target of many student groups was the war in Vietnam (**Figure 29.21**). In April 1965, SDS organized a march on Washington for peace; about twenty thousand people attended. That same week, the faculty at the University of Michigan suspended classes and conducted a 24-hour "teach-in" on the war. The idea quickly spread, and on May 15, the first national "teach-in" was held at 122 colleges and universities across the nation. Originally designed to be a debate on the pros and cons of the war, at Berkeley, the teach-ins became massive antiwar rallies. By the end of that year, there had been antiwar rallies in some sixty cities.

Figure 29.21 Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison protested the war in Vietnam in 1965. Their actions were typical of many on college campuses across the country during the 1960s. (credit: "Yarnalgo"/Flickr)

AMERICANA

Blue Jeans: The Uniform of Nonconformist Radicalism

Overwhelmingly, young cultural warriors and social activists of the 1960s, trying to escape the shackles of what they perceived to be limits on their freedoms, adopted blue jeans as the uniform of their generation. Originally worn by manual laborers because of their near-indestructibility, blue jeans were commonly associated with cowboys, the quintessential icon of American independence. During the 1930s, jeans were adopted by a broader customer base as a result of the popularity of cowboy movies and dude ranch vacations. After World War II, Levi Strauss, their original manufacturer, began to market them east of the Mississippi, and competitors such as Wrangler and Lee fought for a share of the market. In the 1950s, youths testing the limits of middle-class conformity adopted them in imitation of movie stars like James Dean. By the 1960s, jeans became even more closely associated with youthful rebellion against tradition, a symbol available to everyone, rich and poor, black and white, men and women.

What other styles and behaviors of the 1960s expressed nonconformity, and how?

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

On the national scene, the civil rights movement was creating a climate of protest and claiming rights and new roles in society for people of color. Women played significant roles in organizations fighting for civil rights like SNCC and SDS. However, they often found that those organizations, enlightened as they might be about racial issues or the war in Vietnam, could still be influenced by patriarchal ideas of male superiority. Two members of SNCC, Casey Hayden and Mary King, presented some of their concerns about their organization's treatment of women in a document entitled "On the Position of Women in SNCC." Stokely Carmichael responded that the appropriate position for women in SNCC was "prone."

Just as the abolitionist movement made nineteenth-century women more aware of their lack of power and encouraged them to form the first women's rights movement, the protest movements of the 1960s inspired many white and middle-class women to create their own organized movement for greater rights. Not all were young women engaged in social protest. Many were older, married women who found the traditional roles of housewife and mother unfulfilling. In 1963, writer and feminist Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in which she contested the post-World War II belief that it was women's destiny to

marry and bear children. Friedan's book was a best-seller and began to raise the consciousness of many women who agreed that homemaking in the suburbs sapped them of their individualism and left them unsatisfied.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, and religion, also prohibited, in **Title VII**, discrimination on the basis of sex. Ironically, protection for women had been included at the suggestion of a Virginia congressman in an attempt to *prevent* the act's passage; his reasoning seemed to be that, while a white man might accept that African Americans needed and deserved protection from discrimination, the idea that women deserved equality with men would be far too radical for any of his male colleagues to contemplate. Nevertheless, the act passed, although the struggle to achieve equal pay for equal work continues today.

Medical science also contributed a tool to assist women in their liberation. In 1960, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the birth control pill, freeing women from the restrictions of pregnancy and childbearing. Women who were able to limit, delay, and prevent reproduction were freer to work, attend college, and delay marriage. Within five years of the pill's approval, some six million women were using it.

The pill was the first medicine ever intended to be taken by people who were not sick. Even conservatives saw it as a possible means of making marriages stronger by removing the fear of an unwanted pregnancy and improving the health of women. Its opponents, however, argued that it would promote sexual promiscuity, undermine the institutions of marriage and the family, and destroy the moral code of the nation. By the early 1960s, thirty states had made it a criminal offense to sell contraceptive devices.

In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) formed and proceeded to set an agenda for the feminist movement (**Figure 29.22**). Framed by a statement of purpose written by Friedan, the agenda began by proclaiming NOW's goal to make possible women's participation in all aspects of American life and to gain for them all the rights enjoyed by men. Among the specific goals was the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (yet to be adopted).

Figure 29.22 Early members of NOW discuss the problems faced by American women. Betty Friedan is second from the left. (credit: Smithsonian Institution Archives)

More radical feminists, like their colleagues in other movements, were dissatisfied with merely redressing economic issues and devised their own brand of consciousness-raising events and symbolic attacks on women's oppression. The most famous of these was an event staged in September 1968 by New York Radical Women. Protesting stereotypical notions of femininity and rejecting traditional gender expectations, the group demonstrated at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, to bring attention to the contest's—and society's—exploitation of women. The protestors crowned a sheep Miss America and then tossed instruments of women's oppression, including high-heeled shoes, curlers, girdles, and bras, into a "freedom trash can." News accounts famously, and incorrectly, described the protest as a "bra burning."

Key Terms

Black Power a political ideology encouraging African Americans to create their own institutions and develop their own economic resources independent of whites

Black Pride a cultural movement among African Americans to encourage pride in their African heritage and to substitute African and African American art forms, behaviors, and cultural products for those of whites

black separatism an ideology that called upon African Americans to reject integration with the white community and, in some cases, to physically separate themselves from whites in order to create and preserve their self-determination

counterinsurgency a new military strategy under the Kennedy administration to suppress nationalist independence movements and rebel groups in the developing world

flexible response a military strategy that allows for the possibility of responding to threats in a variety of ways, including counterinsurgency, conventional war, and nuclear strikes

Great Society Lyndon Johnson's plan to eliminate poverty and racial injustice in the United States and to improve the lives of all Americans

naval quarantine Kennedy's use of ships to prevent Soviet access to Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis

Port Huron Statement the political manifesto of Students for a Democratic Society that called for social reform, nonviolent protest, and greater participation in the democratic process by ordinary Americans

Title VII the section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of gender

war on poverty Lyndon Johnson's plan to end poverty in the Unites States through the extension of federal benefits, job training programs, and funding for community development

Summary

29.1 The Kennedy Promise

The arrival of the Kennedys in the White House seemed to signal a new age of youth, optimism, and confidence. Kennedy spoke of a "new frontier" and promoted the expansion of programs to aid the poor, protect African Americans' right to vote, and improve African Americans' employment and education opportunities. For the most part, however, Kennedy focused on foreign policy and countering the threat of Communism—especially in Cuba, where he successfully defused the Cuban Missile Crisis, and in Vietnam, to which he sent advisors and troops to support the South Vietnamese government. The tragedy of Kennedy's assassination in Dallas brought an early end to the era, leaving Americans to wonder whether his vice president and successor, Lyndon Johnson, would bring Kennedy's vision for the nation to fruition.

29.2 Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society

Lyndon Johnson began his administration with dreams of fulfilling his fallen predecessor's civil rights initiative and accomplishing his own plans to improve lives by eradicating poverty in the United States. His social programs, investments in education, support for the arts, and commitment to civil rights

changed the lives of countless people and transformed society in many ways. However, Johnson's insistence on maintaining American commitments in Vietnam, a policy begun by his predecessors, hurt both his ability to realize his vision of the Great Society and his support among the American people.

29.3 The Civil Rights Movement Marches On

The African American civil rights movement made significant progress in the 1960s. While Congress played a role by passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the actions of civil rights groups such as CORE, the SCLC, and SNCC were instrumental in forging new paths, pioneering new techniques and strategies, and achieving breakthrough successes. Civil rights activists engaged in sit-ins, freedom rides, and protest marches, and registered African American voters. Despite the movement's many achievements, however, many grew frustrated with the slow pace of change, the failure of the Great Society to alleviate poverty, and the persistence of violence against African Americans, particularly the tragic 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Many African Americans in the mid- to late 1960s adopted the ideology of Black Power, which promoted their work within their own communities to redress problems without the aid of whites. The Mexican American civil rights movement, led largely by Cesar Chavez, also made significant progress at this time. The emergence of the Chicano Movement signaled Mexican Americans' determination to seize their political power, celebrate their cultural heritage, and demand their citizenship rights.

29.4 Challenging the Status Quo

During the 1960s, many people rejected traditional roles and expectations. Influenced and inspired by the civil rights movement, college students of the baby boomer generation and women of all ages began to fight to secure a stronger role in American society. As members of groups like SDS and NOW asserted their rights and strove for equality for themselves and others, they upended many accepted norms and set groundbreaking social and legal changes in motion. Many of their successes continue to be felt today, while other goals remain unfulfilled.

Review Questions

1. The term Kennedy chose to describe his sealing off of Cuba to prevent Soviet shipments of weapons or supplies was _____.

A. interdiction
B. quarantine
C. isolation
D. blockade

2. Kennedy proposed a constitutional amendment that would _____.

A. provide healthcare for all Americans
B. outlaw poll taxes
C. make English the official language of the United States
D. require all American men to register for the draft

3. What steps did Kennedy take to combat Communism?

4. _____ was Johnson's program to provide federal funding for healthcare for the poor.

A. Medicare
B. Social Security
C. Medicaid
D. AFDC

5. Many Americans began to doubt that the war in Vietnam could be won following _____.

A. Khe Sanh
B. Dien Bien Phu
C. the Tonkin Gulf incident
D. the Tet Offensive

6. How did the actions of the Johnson administration improve the lives of African Americans?

7. The new protest tactic against segregation used by students in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960 was the _____.

A. boycott
B. guerilla theater
C. teach-in
D. sit-in

8. The African American group that advocated the use of violence and espoused a Marxist ideology was called _____.

A. the Black Panthers
B. the Nation of Islam
C. SNCC
D. CORE

9. Who founded the Crusade for Justice in Denver, Colorado in 1965?

A. Reies Lopez Tijerina
B. Dolores Huerta
C. Larry Itliong
D. Rodolfo Gonzales

10. How did the message of Black Power advocates differ from that of more mainstream civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr.?

11. What was one of the major student organizations engaged in organizing protests and demonstrations against the Vietnam War?

A. Committee for American Democracy
B. Freedom Now Party
C. Students for a Democratic Society
D. Young Americans for Peace

12. Which of the following was *not* a founding goal of NOW?

A. to gain for women all the rights enjoyed by men
B. to ensure passage of the Equal Rights Amendment
C. to de-criminalize the use of birth control
D. to allow women to participate in all aspects of American life

13. In what ways did the birth control pill help to liberate women?

Critical Thinking Questions

14. Describe the changing role of the federal government in the 1960s. What new roles and responsibilities did the government assume? In your opinion, can the government effect permanent social change? Why or why not?

15. Discuss how and why various groups of people within American society began to challenge and criticize the nation's way of life in the 1960s. Were their criticisms valid? What were some of the goals of these groups, and how did they go about achieving them?

16. In your opinion, what is the most effective method for changing society—voting, challenges in the courts, nonviolent civil disobedience, or violence? What evidence can you provide from actual events in the 1960s to support your argument?

17. Were groups that advocated the use of violence in the 1960s justified in doing so? Why or why not?

18. Discuss how the United States became engaged in the Vietnam War. What were some of the results of that engagement?