

# The Liberal Era, 1960–1968

On the afternoon of February 1, 1960, four students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) College in Greensboro—Ezell Blair, Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond—entered the local Woolworth’s and sat down at the whites-only lunch counter. “We don’t serve colored here,” the waitress replied when the freshmen asked for coffee and doughnuts. The black students remained seated. They would not be moved. Middle class in aspirations, the children of urban civil servants and industrial workers, they believed that the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision of 1954 should have ended the indignities of racial discrimination and segregation. But the promise of change had outrun reality. Massive resistance to racial equality still proved the rule throughout Dixie. In 1960 most southern blacks could neither vote nor attend integrated schools. They could not enjoy a cup of coffee alongside whites in a public restaurant.

Impatient yet hopeful, the A&T students could not accept the inequality their parents had endured. They had been inspired by the Montgomery bus boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as by successful African independence movements in the late 1950s. They vowed to sit in until the store closed and to repeat their request the next day and beyond, until they were served.

On February 2 more than twenty A&T students joined them in their protest. The following day, over sixty sat in. By the end of the week, the students overflowed Woolworth’s and sat in at the lunch counter in the nearby

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

The Kennedy Presidency, 1960–1963

Liberalism Ascendant, 1963–1968

The Struggle for Black Equality, 1961–1968

Voices of Protest

The Liberal Crusade in Vietnam, 1961–1968

S. H. Kress store. Six months later, after prolonged sit-ins, boycotts, and demonstrations, and violent white resistance, Greensboro's white civic leaders grudgingly allowed blacks to sit down at restaurants and be served.

Meanwhile, the example of the Greensboro “coffee party” had inspired similar sit-ins throughout North Carolina and in neighboring states. By April 1960 sit-ins had disrupted seventy-eight southern communities. The black students endured beatings, tear-gassing, and jailing. Yet by September 1961 some seventy thousand students had sat in to desegregate eating facilities, as well as “kneeled in” in churches, “slept in” in motel lobbies, “waded in” on restricted beaches, “read in” at public libraries, “played in” at city parks, and “watched in” at segregated movie theaters.

The determination of the students transformed the struggle for racial equality. Their activism emboldened black adults to voice their dissatisfaction; their courage inspired other youths to act. Stokely Carmichael, a student at Howard University initially indifferent to the civil-rights movement, saw “those young kids on TV, getting back up on the lunch counter stools after being knocked off them, sugar in their eyes, ketchup in their hair—well, something happened to me. Suddenly I was burning.” Their assertiveness both desegregated facilities and generated a new sense of self-esteem and strength. “I possibly felt better on that day than I’ve ever felt in my life,” remembered Franklin McCain. “I myself desegregated a lunch counter, not somebody else, not some big man, some powerful man, but little me,” claimed another student. “I walked the picket line and I sat-in and the walls of segregation toppled.” Each new victory convinced thousands more that “nothing can stop us now.”

As well as beginning the 1960's stage of the freedom movement, the sit-ins helped redefine liberalism. In the liberal's management of the economy, greater emphasis was now placed on equalizing the possibilities of opportunity and targeting benefits to those who had earlier been ignored. In their concern for civil liberties and civil rights, liberals sought to expand individual freedoms and to free African Americans from the shackles of racial discrimination and segregation. Liberalism was also redefined by others, including Ralph Nader sounding the consumer alarm that many automobiles were “unsafe at any speed,” Betty Friedan writing *The Feminine Mystique* to denounce “the housewife trap” that caused educated women to subordinate their own aspirations to the needs of men, and students protesting against what they saw as an immoral war in Vietnam.

These endeavors symbolized a spirit of new beginnings. The impatience and idealism of the young would lead many to embrace John Kennedy's New Frontier and to rally behind Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Both liberal administrations advocated an active federal government, particularly an activist presidency, to attack domestic and international problems and to achieve economic and social justice. Both relied on expanding economic growth to increase the social-welfare responsibilities of the government and give greater government benefits to the disadvantaged. Both also pursued an assertive foreign policy, boldly intervening abroad in Cuba and Vietnam. The new era of liberal activism thus generated fervent hopes and lofty expectations for diverse Americans, and an intensification of Cold War conflicts that triggered a militant antiwar movement. Assassinations of cherished leaders, increasing racial strife, and a frustrating war in Vietnam would dampen optimism, and a reaction by the majority who opposed radical change would curtail reform. The liberal era that began with bright promise would end in discord and disillusionment.

**This chapter focuses on five major questions:**

- How liberal was the New Frontier in civil rights and economic matters?
- What was the new liberalism of the 1960s, and how did Lyndon Johnson's Great Society exemplify it?
- What were the major successes and failures of the black movements for civil rights and socioeconomic progress from 1964 to 1968?
- In what ways did 1960's liberalism affect other minorities and women, and how did minorities and women affect liberalism?
- How did the United States get involved in Vietnam, and to what extent was President Johnson responsible for the tragedy of Vietnam?

## THE KENNEDY PRESIDENCY, 1960–1963

Projecting an image of vigor and proposing new approaches to old problems, 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, had held appointive office under

Franklin D. Roosevelt until his outspoken isolationism ended his public career. Seething with ambition, he raised his sons to attain the political power that had eluded him. He instilled in each a passion to excel and to rule. Despite a severe back injury, John Kennedy served in the navy in World War II, and the elder Kennedy persuaded a popular novelist to write articles lauding John's heroism in rescuing his crew after their PT boat had been sunk in the South Pacific.

Esteemed as a war hero, John Kennedy used his charm and his father's connections to win election to the House of Representatives in 1946 from a Boston district in which he had never lived. Kennedy earned little distinction in Congress, but the voters of Massachusetts, captivated by his personality, sent him to the Senate in 1952 and overwhelmingly reelected him in 1958. By then he had a beautiful wife, Jacqueline, and a Pulitzer Prize for *Profiles in Courage* (1956), written largely by a staff member.

Despite the obstacle of his Roman Catholic faith, the popular Kennedy won a first-ballot victory at the 1960 Democratic convention. Just forty-two years old, he sounded the theme of a "New Frontier" to "get America moving again" by liberal activism at home and abroad.

## A New Beginning

"All at once you had something exciting," recalled Don Ferguson, 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 continuation 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, a Protestant, and identified with the still-popular Ike.

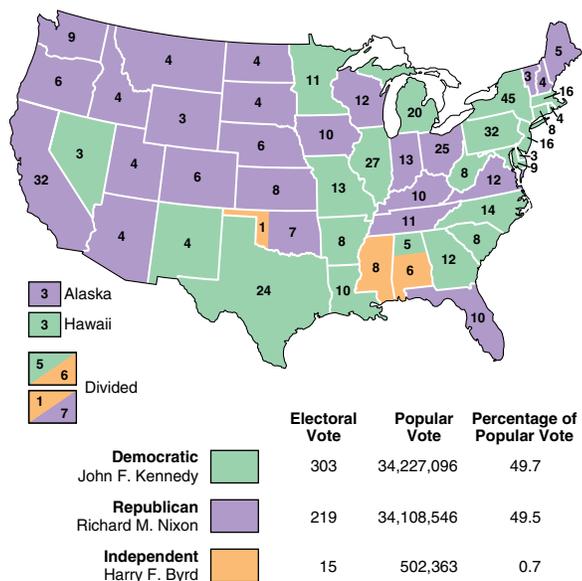
Nixon fumbled his opportunity, agreeing to meet his challenger in televised debates. More than 70 million tuned in to the first televised debate between presidential candidates, a broadcast that secured the dominance of television in American politics. The tanned,

dynamic Kennedy contrasted strikingly with his pale, haggard opponent. The telegenic Democrat radiated confidence; Nixon, sweating visibly, appeared insecure. 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 regained the lead.

Kennedy also benefited from an economic recession in 1960, as well as 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: "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans." In sharp contrast to Eisenhower's "eight millionaires and a plumber" (see Chapter 27), Kennedy surrounded himself with liberal intellectuals—the "best

**MAP 28.1**  
**The Election of 1960**



and brightest,” in author David Halberstam’s wry phrase. For attorney general he selected his brother Robert Kennedy. “I see nothing wrong with giving Robert some legal experience before he goes out to practice law,” JFK joked.

“America’s leading man,” novelist Norman Mailer called him. Kennedy seemed more a celebrity than a politician, and his dash played well on TV, highlighting his charisma and determination “to get America moving again.” 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 Kennedy years saw little significant social legislation. His narrow victory, and the conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats that had stifled Truman’s Fair Deal, doomed the New Frontier. Lacking the necessary votes, JFK rarely pressed Congress, maintaining that “there is no sense in raising hell, and then not being successful.”

JFK made economic growth the key to his liberal agenda. To stimulate the economy, 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. To further boost the economy as well as avoid "another *Sputnik*," Kennedy also persuaded Congress to finance a "race to the moon." The effort to land astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the lunar surface in 1969 would cost more than \$25 billion. Most importantly, to pay for the federal aid to education, medical care for the elderly, and urban renewal that he proposed, Kennedy accepted his liberal advisers' Keynesian approach to economic growth. He called for a huge cut in corporate taxes that would greatly increase the deficit but would presumably provide capital for business to invest in ways that would stimulate the economy and thus increase tax revenues. Economic growth, accordingly, was the way for the government to create a better life for all Americans.

When the Kennedy presidency ended suddenly in November 1963, the proposed tax cut was bottled up in Congress (symbolic of JFK's overall failure in domestic legislation). Military spending, continued technological innovation, heightened productivity, and low-cost energy, however, had already doubled the 1960 rate of economic growth, decreased unemployment, and held increases in inflation to 1.3 percent a year. The United States was in the midst of its longest uninterrupted boom ever. The boom would both cause further ecological damage and provide the affluence that enabled Americans to care about the environment.

Environmentalism had its roots in both the older conservation movement, emphasizing the efficient use of resources, and the preservation movement, focusing on preserving "wilderness." The fallout scare of the 1950s raised questions about the biological well-being of the planet. The publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (see Chapter 27), which described the devastating effects of pesticides on the environment, particularly birds, intensified concern. Additionally, postwar prosperity made large numbers of Americans less concerned with increased production and more concerned with the quality of life. Responding to the furor set off by Carson's documentation of the hazards of DDT, Kennedy appointed an advisory committee that warned against widespread pesticide use. In 1963 Congress passed a Clean Air Act, regulating automotive and industrial emissions. After decades of heedless pollution, hardly helped by the introduction of aluminum pop-top cans

in 1963, Washington hesitatingly began to deal with environmental problems.

### Cold War Activism

In his inaugural address Kennedy proclaimed, "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty." To back up that pledge he launched a major buildup of the military arsenal, made foreign policy his top priority, and surrounded himself with Cold Warriors who shared his belief that American security depended on superior force and the willingness to use it. At the same time, he gained congressional backing for liberal programs of 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 health workers in more than forty Third World nations. They were, according to liberal historian and Kennedy aide Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "reform-minded

missionaries of democracy who mixed with the people, spoke the native dialects, ate the food, and involved themselves in local struggles against ignorance and want.”

In early 1961 a crisis flared in Laos, a tiny, landlocked nation created by the Geneva agreement in 1954 (see Chapter 27). There a civil war between American-supported forces and Pathet Lao rebels seemed headed toward a communist triumph. Considering Laos strategically insignificant, 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.

Spring 1961 brought Kennedy’s first major foreign-policy crisis. To eliminate a communist outpost on America’s doorstep, he approved a CIA plan, drawn up in the Eisenhower administration, for anti-Castro exiles, “La Brigada,” to invade Cuba. In mid-April fifteen hundred exiles stormed Cuba’s Bay of Pigs, assuming that their arrival would trigger a general uprising to overthrow Fidel Castro. 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. Although Kennedy accepted blame for the failure, he neither apologized nor ceased attempting to topple Castro.

In July 1961, on the heels of the Bay of Pigs failure, Kennedy met Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna to try to resolve a peace treaty with Germany (see Chapter 26). Comparing the American troops in the divided city of Berlin to “a bone stuck in the throat,” Khrushchev threatened war unless the West retreated. 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 150,000 reservists, and requested an additional \$3 billion defense appropriation. 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, which could reach U.S. targets as far as twenty-two hundred miles away. Kennedy responded forcefully, fearing unchecked Soviet interference in the Western Hemisphere, still smarting from the Bay of Pigs disaster, and believing that his credibility was at stake. In a somber televised address he

denounced the Soviet “provocative threat to world peace” and demanded that the missiles be removed. The United States, he asserted, 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.

Kennedy’s ultimatum, and Khrushchev’s defiant response that the quarantine was “outright banditry,” rocked the world. More than ever before, the two superpowers appeared on a collision course toward nuclear war. Apprehension mounted as the Soviet technicians worked feverishly to complete missile launch pads and as Soviet missile-carrying ships steamed toward the blockade. Americans stayed glued to their radios and television sets as 180 U.S. naval ships in the Caribbean prepared to confront the Soviet freighters; 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 reported, “We’re eyeball to eyeball.”

“I think the other fellow just blinked,” a relieved Rusk announced on October 25. The Cuba-bound Soviet ships stopped dead in the water, and Kennedy received a message from Khrushchev promising to remove the missiles if the U.S. 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. It was “the blackest hour of the crisis,” recalled a Kennedy aide. Various presidential advisers urged an immediate invasion, but the president, heeding Robert Kennedy’s advice, decided to ignore the second Soviet message and accept the original offer. That night, October 27, the president’s brother met secretly with the Soviet ambassador to inform him that this was the only way to avoid nuclear war. 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.

The full dimensions of the crisis became known only after the end of the Cold War, when the Russian military disclosed that Soviet forces in Cuba had possessed thirty-six nuclear warheads as well as nine tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use. Soviet field commanders had independent authority to use these weapons. Worst of all, Kennedy had not known that the Soviets already had the capability to launch a nuclear strike from Cuba. “We do not need to speculate,” said a shaken McNamara in 1992, “about what would have

happened had the U.S. attack been launched, as many in the U.S. government—military and civilian alike—were recommending to the President on October 27th and 28th. We can predict the results with certainty. . . . 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.”

Staring over the brink of nuclear war chastened both Kennedy and Khrushchev. “Having come so close to the edge,” JFK’s national security adviser said, “the leaders of the two governments have since taken care to keep away from the cliff.” They agreed to install a Kremlin-White House “hot line” so that the two sides could communicate instantly in future crises. In June 1963 JFK advocated a relaxation of superpower tensions, and two months later the two nations 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. Ironically, the Cuban missile crisis also had the unintended consequence of accelerating the arms race for another twenty-five years. It confirmed American belief in the need for nuclear superiority to prevent war while convincing Russian leaders that they must overtake the American lead in nuclear missiles to avoid future humiliation.

### The Thousand-Day Presidency

On November 22, 1963, during a trip to Texas to improve his chances for victory in the 1964 presidential election, John and Jackie Kennedy rode in an open car along Dallas streets, smiling at the cheering crowds. As the motorcade slowed to turn, shots rang out. The president slumped, his skull and throat shattered. While the driver sped the mortally wounded president to a nearby hospital, where the doctors pronounced Kennedy dead, Secret Service agents rushed Lyndon Johnson to Air Force One to be sworn in as president.

Grief and disbelief numbed the nation. Millions of Americans sat stunned in front of TV sets during the next four days, staring at the steady stream of mourners filing by the slain president’s coffin in the Capitol rotunda; at the countless replays of the murder of Kennedy’s accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, in the Dallas city jail by a nightclub owner; 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 ever forget. Kennedy had helped make television central to

American politics, and now television, which made Kennedy a celebrity in life, made him, in death, the heroic king of Camelot.

The assassination made a martyr of JFK. More admired by the public in death than in life, he was now ranked with Washington, Lincoln, and Roosevelt as a “great” president. For decades after, despite revelations of character blemishes, JFK would loom large in the American imagination, his romantic aura a reminder of what seemed a better time. Emphasizing “might have beens,” Kennedy loyalists have stressed his intelligence, his ability to change and grow. His detractors, however, point to the gap between rhetoric and substance, the discrepancy between his public image and his compulsive, even reckless, private sexual behavior. Some deplore his aggressive Cold War tactics; others condemn him for raising unrealistic expectations and expanding presidential powers.

Kennedy’s rhetoric expressed the new liberalism, but he rarely made liberal ideas a reality. Economic expansion came from spending on missiles and the space race, not on social welfare and human needs. Constrained by the lack of a liberal majority, Kennedy frequently compromised with conservative and segregationist congressional leaders. Partly because his own personal behavior made him beholden to J. Edgar Hoover, JFK allowed the FBI unprecedented authority to infringe on civil liberties, even as the CIA was conniving with the Mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro. (The tangled web of plots and policies that enmeshed John and Robert Kennedy, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, organized

crime, and the national security agencies remains to be sorted out by scholars.) The New Frontier barely existed for environmental protection, for slowing corporate consolidation, or for women. (JFK appointed fewer women to high-level federal posts than had his predecessors and was the first president since Herbert Hoover not to have a woman in the cabinet.)

Internationally, Kennedy left a mixed record. He signed the world’s first nuclear-test-ban treaty, yet also initiated a massive nuclear-arms buildup. He compromised on Laos but deepened U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Despite gradually changing from a Cold Warrior to a leader who questioned the necessity of conflict with the Soviets, JFK nevertheless insisted on maintaining U.S. global superiority and halting the spread of international communism. He did so, moreover, by increasing the powers of the executive branch, particularly his own White House staff. As never before, a small group of aides, personally loyal to the president, secretly dominated policy making.

Yet JFK had fired the energies and imaginations of millions of Americans. He gave liberals new hope, aroused the poor and the powerless, and challenged the young, stimulating a flowering of social criticism and political activism. Like other heroes, Kennedy left the stage before his glory tarnished. He would leave his successor a liberal agenda as well as soaring expectations at home and a deteriorating entanglement in Vietnam. That legacy, as well as his assassination, would shatter illusions, leading an increasing number of Americans to lose confidence in their government and their future.

## LIBERALISM ASCENDANT, 1963–1968

Distrusted by liberals as “a Machiavelli in a Stetson” and regarded as a usurper by Kennedy loyalists, Lyndon Baines Johnson had achieved his highest ambition as a result of the assassination of a popular president in Johnson’s home state of Texas. 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, as insecure as his predecessor was self-confident.

Yet Johnson had substantial political assets. He had served in Washington almost continuously since 1932. No modern president came to office with more national political experience. He excelled in wooing allies, neutralizing opponents, building coalitions, and achieving results. He loved the political maneuvering and legislative detail that Kennedy loathed. He confided to an aide the day after JFK’s assassination, “Kennedy was a little too conservative to suit my taste.”

Johnson’s first three years as president demonstrated his determination to prove himself to liberals. He 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, fulfilling and surpassing the New Deal liberal agenda of the 1930s. But LBJ’s swollen yet fragile ego could not abide the sniping of Kennedy loyalists, and he frequently complained that the media did not give him “a fair shake.” Wondering aloud, “Why don’t people like me?” Johnson pressed to outdo the liberal FDR, to ensure that everyone shared in the promise of the American Dream, to enhance the quality of life for all Americans, to vanquish all foes at home and abroad. Ironically, in seeking consensus and affection, Johnson would divide the nation and leave office repudiated.

### Johnson Takes Over

Calling for quick passage of the tax-cut and civil-rights bills as a memorial to his slain predecessor, Johnson used his skills to win passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (discussed later) and a \$10 billion tax-reduction bill, which produced a surge in capital investment and personal consumption that 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 dwelled in substandard housing and subsisted on inadequate diets. Unaided or only mini-

mally assisted by a social-welfare bureaucracy, they lived with little hope in a “culture of poverty.” They lacked the education, medical care, and employment opportunities that most Americans took for granted. More than being deprived of material things, Harrington asserted, to be poor “is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates the society.”

LBJ proposed an array of training programs and support services to bring these “internal exiles” into the mainstream. Designed to promote greater opportunity, to offer a “hand up, not a handout,” the Economic Opportunity Act (1964) established the Office of Economic Opportunity to wage “unconditional war on

poverty.” Its arsenal of antipoverty programs included: the Job Corps to train young people in marketable skills; a domestic peace corps, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America); Project Head Start to provide free compensatory education for preschoolers from disadvantaged families; the Community Action Program to encourage the “maximum feasible participation” of the poor in decisions that affected them; and public-works and training programs.

Summing up his goals in 1964, Johnson offered a cheering crowd in Ann Arbor, Michigan, his vision of the Great Society. First must come “an end to poverty and racial injustice.” That would be just the beginning. The Great Society would also be a place where all children could enrich their minds and enlarge their talents, where people could renew their 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 conservatism” of the 1960s expressed in William F. Buckley’s *National Review* and by the college student members of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). The most persuasive criticism came from Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. A product of the twentieth-century West, Goldwater was an outsider fighting the power of Washington, a fervent anticommunist, a proponent of individual freedom. His opposition to big government, deficit spending, racial liberalism, and social-welfare programs found a receptive audience on Sunbelt golf courses and in working-class neighborhoods.

Johnson’s racial liberalism frightened southern segregationists and blue-collar workers in northern cities who dreaded the integration of their communities, schools, and workplaces. Their support of Alabama’s segregationist Governor George Wallace in the spring 1964 presidential primaries heralded a “white backlash” against the civil-rights movement.

Buoyed by the white backlash, conservatives took control of the GOP in 1964. They nominated Barry Goldwater and adopted a platform totally opposed to the new liberalism. Determined to offer the nation “a choice not an echo,” Goldwater lauded his opposition to the Civil Rights Act and the censure of McCarthy. He denounced the War on Poverty in Appalachia, called for the sale of the TVA to private interests in Tennessee, opposed high price supports for farmers in the Midwest, and advocated scrapping social security in St. Petersburg, Florida, a major retirement community. “We

have gotten where we are,” he declared, “not because of government, but in spite of government.” Goldwater also 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 candidacy appealed most to those angered by the Cold War stalemate, the erosion of traditional moral values, and the increasing militancy of African Americans. While his campaign slogan, “In your heart you know he’s right,” summed up the zeal of his followers, it allowed his liberal opponents to quip, “In your guts you know he’s nuts.”

Goldwater’s conservative crusade let LBJ and his running mate, Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, run as liberal reformers and still be the moderates. They depicted Goldwater as an extremist not to be trusted with the nuclear trigger. When the Arizonan charged that the Democrats had not pursued total victory in Vietnam, Johnson appeared 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 with 43 million votes to Goldwater’s 27 million. The GOP carried only Arizona and five southern states. It lost thirty-eight seats in the House of Representatives, two in the Senate, and five hundred in state legislatures. Many proclaimed the death of conservatism. But Goldwater’s coalition of antigovernment westerners, economic and religious conservatives, and whites opposed to racial integration presaged the Right’s future triumph. More a beginning than an end, the Goldwater candidacy launched the modern conservative movement in politics. 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; mobilized future leaders of the party, like Ronald Reagan; and led to the Republican “southern strategy” that would bring the election of Republican presidents in subsequent campaigns. But in the short run, the liberals had a working majority.

### Triumphant Liberalism

“Hurry, boys, hurry,” an exhilarated 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—sixty-three of them in 1965 alone. He got most of what he requested (see Table 28.1).

The Eighty-ninth Congress—“the Congress of Fulfillment” to LBJ, and Johnson’s “hip-pocket

**TABLE 28.1 Major Great Society Programs**

1964

**Tax Reduction Act** cuts by some \$10 billion the taxes paid primarily by corporations and wealthy individuals.

**Civil Rights Act** bans discrimination in public accommodations, prohibits discrimination in any federally assisted program, outlaws discrimination in most employment, and enlarges federal powers to protect voting rights and to speed school desegregation.

**Economic Opportunity Act** 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.

1965

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act**, the first general federal-aid-to-education law in American history, provides more than \$1 billion to public and parochial schools for textbooks, library materials, and special-education programs.

**Voting Rights Act** suspends literacy tests and empowers “federal examiners” to register qualified voters in the South.

**Medical Care Act** 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).

**Omnibus Housing Act** appropriates nearly \$8 billion for low- and middle-income housing and for rent supplements for low-income families.

**Immigration Act** ends the discriminatory system of national-origins quotas established in 1924.

**Appalachian Regional Development Act** targets \$1 billion for highway construction, health centers, and resource development in the depressed areas of Appalachia.

**Higher Education Act** appropriates \$650 million for scholarships and low-interest loans to needy college students and for funds for college libraries and research facilities.

**National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities** are created to promote artistic and cultural development.

1966

**Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act** 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.

**Motor Vehicle Safety Act** sets federal safety standards for the auto industry and a uniform grading system for tire manufacturers.

**Truth in Packaging Act** broadens federal controls over the labeling and packaging of foods, drugs, cosmetics, and household supplies.

Congress” to his opponents—enlarged the War on Poverty and passed another milestone civil-rights act. It enacted a Medicare program providing 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 at a cost of \$28 billion, a quarter of the nation’s total health-care expenditures. The legislators appropriated funds for public education and housing, for redevelopment aid to Appalachia, and for revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods. They also created new departments of transportation and of housing and urban development (the latter headed by Robert Weaver, the first African-American cabinet member) and the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities.

Of enormous future significance, Congress enacted a new immigration law, abolishing the national-origins quotas of the 1920s. It opened America’s gates to the world and shook up its ethnic kaleidoscope. Legal immigration would increase from about a quarter of a million a year before the act to well over a million annually, and the vast majority of new immigrants would come from Asia and Latin America. Between 1965 and 1970 nearly

four hundred thousand Cubans emigrated to the United States. In those five years the population of Chinese, Koreans, and Filipinos in the United States more than doubled, and twenty years after the act the number of Asian-Americans had risen from 1 million to 5 million. Less than 1 percent of the U.S. population in 1960, Asian-Americans would be more than 3 percent in 1990; and the Hispanic population would increase from 4.5 percent in 1970 to 9 percent in 1990. The so-called browning of America enormously expanded the nation’s culinary, linguistic, musical, and religious spectrum.

The Great Society battled what LBJ described as the problem “of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight.” In 1964 Congress passed the National Wilderness Preservation Act, setting aside 9.1 million acres of wilderness. It then established the Redwood National Park and defeated efforts to dam the Colorado River and flood the lower Grand Canyon; strengthened the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts; protected endangered species; preserved scenic rivers; and lessened the number of

junkyards and billboards. Responding to the uproar caused by Ralph Nader's revelations about unsafe cars, Congress set the first federal safety standards for automobiles (National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act) and required states to establish highway safety programs (Highway Safety Act).

The Great Society increased opportunity and 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 by a third; Head Start reached more than 2 million poor children; and African-American family income rose from 54 percent to 61 percent of white family income. The percentage of blacks living below the poverty plummeted from 40 percent to 20 percent. But in part because Johnson oversold the Great Society and Congress underfunded it, liberal aspirations outdistanced results.

For many in need, the Great Society remained more a dream than a reality. The war against poverty was, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam.” In 1966 Johnson spent twenty times more to wage war in Vietnam than to fight poverty in the United States. Yet the perceived liberality of federal programs and the “ungratefulness” of rioting blacks

alienated many middle- and working-class whites. Others resented liberal regulation of business and federal involvement in public education. Increasing numbers of Americans feared the growing intrusiveness of the liberal state in managing their daily lives. The Democrats' loss of forty-seven House seats in 1966 sealed liberalism's fate.

### The Warren Court in the Sixties

No branch of the federal government did more to support and promote the liberal agenda than the Supreme Court. A liberal majority on the court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, acted to expand individual rights to a greater extent than ever before in American history. Kennedy's appointment of two liberals to the Court, and Johnson's selection of the even more liberal Abe Fortas and Thurgood Marshall, the Court's first black justice, would result in rulings that changed the lives of Americans for decades to come.

In a series of 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. In *Baker v.*

**TABLE 28.2 Major Decisions of the Warren Court**

1954

*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* rejects the separate-but-equal concept and outlaws segregation in public education.

1957

*Watkins v. U.S.* restricts Congress's investigatory power to matters directly pertinent to pending legislation.

*Yates v. U.S.* limits prosecutions under the Smith Act to the advocacy of concrete revolutionary action and disallows prosecutions for the preaching of revolutionary doctrine.

1962

*Baker v. Carr* holds that the federal courts possess jurisdiction over state apportionment systems to ensure that the votes of all citizens carry equal weight.

*Engel v. Vitale* prohibits prayer in the public schools.

1963

*Abington v. Schempp* bans Bible reading in the public schools.

*Gideon v. Wainwright* requires states to provide attorneys at public expense for indigent defendants in felony cases.

*Jacobellis v. Ohio* extends constitutional protection to all sexually explicit material that has any “literary or scientific or artistic value.”

1964

*New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* expands the constitutional protection of the press against libel suits by public figures.

*Wesberry v. Sanders* and *Reynolds v. Sims* hold that the only standard of apportionment for state legislatures and congressional districts is “one man, one vote.”

1966

*Miranda v. Arizona* requires police to advise a suspect of his or her constitutional right to remain silent and to have a counsel present during interrogation.

1967

*Loving v. Virginia* strikes down state antimiscegenation laws, which prohibit marriage between persons of different races.

1968

*Katzenbach v. Morgan* upholds federal legislation outlawing state requirements that a prospective voter must demonstrate literacy in English.

*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* extends the *Brown* ruling to require the assignment of pupils on the basis of race, to end segregation.

*Carr* and related decisions, the Court ruled that “one person, one vote” must prevail in both state and national elections. This ended rural overrepresentation and increased the political power of cities and suburbs. 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 warn all suspects that anything they say can be used against them in court and that they can choose to remain silent. In 1968 both Richard Nixon and George Wallace would win favor by promising to appoint judges who emphasized “law and order” over individual liberties.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK EQUALITY, 1961–1968

Following the lunch-counter sit-ins, civil-rights activists tried to force President Kennedy to match his liberal rhetoric with action. Focusing mainly on foreign affairs and secondarily on the economy, JFK initially straddled the race issue, fearing it would divide the nation, split the Democrat party, immobilize Congress in filibusters, and jeopardize his reelection. He viewed civil rights as a thorny thicket to avoid, not a moral issue requiring decisive leadership. Thus he balanced his appointment of an unprecedented number of African-Americans to federal jobs with the nomination of white racists to judgeships. He stalled for two years before issuing the weakest possible executive order banning discrimination in federally financed housing. Steady pressure by those in the movement for black equality made “the responsibility of the federal government to advance the civil rights of African Americans” the top issue defining the new liberalism. Kennedy changed accordingly.

### Nonviolence and Violence

In spring 1961 the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an interracial protest group founded in 1942, organized a “freedom ride” through the Deep South. It was designed to dramatize the widespread violation of a 1960 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in interstate transportation. It succeeded by arousing white wrath. When the freedom riders were savagely beaten in Anniston, Alabama, and their bus burned, and when they were mauled by a white mob in Birmingham, the freedom rides became front-page news. Yet only after further assaults on the freedom riders in Montgomery did Kennedy, fearful that the violence would undermine American prestige

abroad, dispatch federal marshals to end the violence. Not until after scores more freedom rides and the arrest of over three hundred protesters did the president press the Interstate Commerce Commission to enforce the Supreme Court’s ruling. Clearly, only crisis, not moral suasion, forced Kennedy to act.

Many of the freedom riders were members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), formed in April 1960 by participants in the sit-ins. SNCC stressed both the nonviolent civil disobedience strategy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the need to stimulate local, grass-roots activism and leadership. In fall 1961 it chose Albany, Georgia, as the site of a campaign to desegregate public facilities. Despite King’s involvement, wily local authorities avoided the overt violence that won the freedom riders national sympathy. Without the national indignation that would bring a White House response, the Albany movement collapsed. But the lesson had been learned by civil-rights leaders.

It had not been learned by Mississippi whites. An angry mob rioted in fall 1962 when a federal court ordered the University of Mississippi to enroll James Meredith, a black air force veteran. Rallying behind Confederate flags, troublemakers laid siege to the campus, attacking the federal marshals who escorted Meredith to “Ole Miss.” The clash left two dead, hundreds injured, the campus shrouded in tear gas, and federal troops upholding the right of a black American to attend the university of his home state. Some five hundred soldiers and marshals would still be on guard at Meredith’s graduation.

### 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 applied increasing pressure on Kennedy to act decisively. They realized that it would take decades to dismantle segregation piecemeal; the only practical remedy would be comprehensive national legislation, backed by the power of the federal government, guaranteeing full citizenship for African-Americans. To get this they needed a crisis that would outrage the conscience of the white majority and force Kennedy’s hand.

Determined to provoke a confrontation that would expose the violent extremism of southern white racism, King and his advisers selected Birmingham as the stage for the next act in the civil-rights drama. The most rigidly segregated big city in America, Birmingham’s officials had even removed a book from the library that featured

white and black rabbits. Past violence by whites against civil-rights protestors had earned the city the nickname “Bombingham,” and the black neighborhood, “Dynamite Hill.” Few doubted Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor’s pledge that “blood would run in the streets of Birmingham before it would be integrated.”

In early April 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr., initiated a series of marches, sit-ins, and pray-ins that violated local laws and filled the jails with protestors. Commissioner Connor scoffed that King would soon “run out of niggers,” and various religious leaders criticized King, calling for an end to demonstrations. While imprisoned, King penned his eloquent “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” detailing the humiliations of racial discrimination and segregation and defending civil disobedience.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was “well-timed” in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This “Wait” has almost always meant “Never.” We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.”

In May thousands of schoolchildren, some only six years old, joined King’s crusade. The bigoted Connor grew impatient and tried to crush the black movement with overwhelming force. As the television cameras rolled, he unleashed his men—armed with electric cattle prods, high-pressure water hoses, and snarling attack dogs—on the nonviolent demonstrators. The ferocity of Connor’s attacks horrified the world.

“The civil-rights movement should thank God for Bull Connor,” JFK remarked. “He’s helped it as much as Abraham Lincoln.” Indeed, Connor’s vicious tactics seared the nation’s conscience. The combination of mounting white support for equal rights and African-American activism pushed Kennedy to arrange a settlement that ended the demonstrations in return for the desegregation of Birmingham’s stores and the upgrading of black workers. By mid-1963 the rallying cry “Freedom Now!” reverberated through the land as all the civil-rights groups became more militant, competing with each other in organizing marches, demonstrations, and lawsuits. The number and magnitude of protests soared. Concerned about America’s image abroad as well as the “fires of frustration and discord” raging at home, Kennedy acted. He believed that if the federal government did not lead the way toward “peaceful and con-

structive” changes in race relations, blacks would turn to violent leaders and methods. 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.” Describing the plight of blacks in the Jim Crow America of 1963, he asked, “Who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?” A week later Kennedy proposed the most comprehensive civil-rights measure in American history, outlawing segregation in public facilities and authorizing the federal government to withhold funds from programs that discriminated. Although House liberals moved to toughen Kennedy’s proposal, most members of Congress did not heed the president’s plea. To compel Congress to act, African Americans gathered in force in the Capitol.

### 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, Randolph revived the idea and convinced the major civil-rights leaders to support it.

A quarter of a million people, including some fifty thousand whites, converged on Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963. It was the largest political assembly to date. After a long, sweltering day of speeches and songs, Martin Luther King, Jr., took the podium to remind Americans that blacks “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.’” He told of his dream “of a day when the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. . . . when all of God’s children. . . will be able to join hands and sing . . . ‘Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.’”

King’s eloquence that day did not speed the progress of the civil-rights bill through Congress. It did not end racism or erase poverty and despair. It did not prevent the ghetto riots that lay ahead, or the white backlash that would ultimately smother the civil-rights movement and destroy King himself. But King had turned a political

rally into a historic event. In one of the great speeches of history, he recalled America to the ideals of justice and equality, proclaiming that the color of one's skin ought never be a burden or a liability in American life.

In 1963 King's oratory did not quell the rage of the bitterest opponents of civil rights. Medgar Evers, the head of the Mississippi branch of the NAACP, was murdered by a sniper in Jackson, Mississippi. 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.) Still others would have to die before civil rights for all could be achieved.

### The Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts

Kennedy himself was the first to die. As a southerner who had initially opposed civil rights for blacks, Lyndon Johnson knew that he either had to prove himself on this issue or the liberals "would get me. They'd throw up my background against me. . . . I had to produce a civil rights bill," he later wrote, "that was even stronger than the one they'd have gotten if Kennedy had lived." Johnson succeeded in doing just that, employing all his skills to toughen the bill's provisions and to break a southern filibuster in the Senate.

The most significant civil-rights law in U.S. history, the 1964 act banned racial discrimination and segregation in public accommodations. It also outlawed bias in federally funded programs; granted the federal government new powers to fight school segregation; and forbade discrimination in employment, creating the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce the ban on job discrimination by race, religion, national origin, or sex.

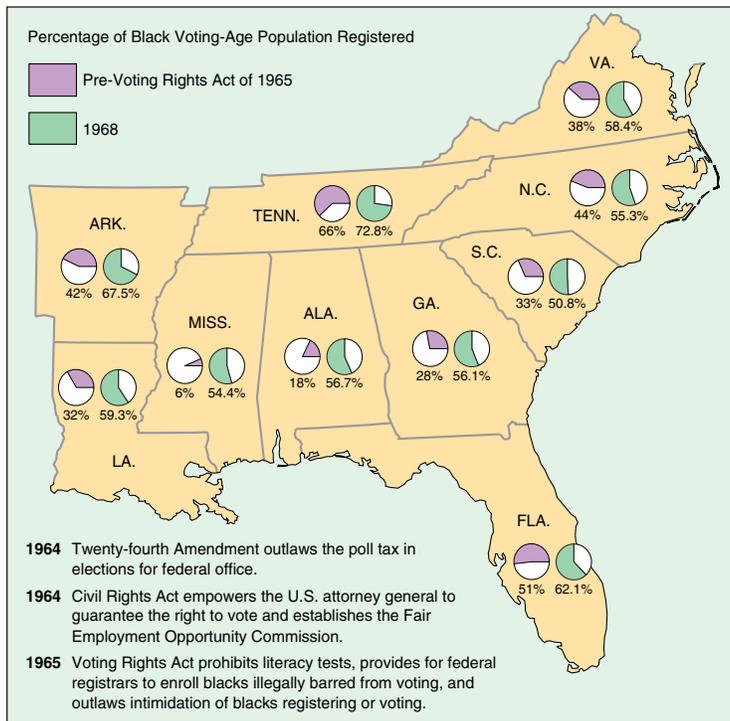
The Civil Rights Act did not address the right to vote in state and local elections. So CORE and SNCC activists, believing that the ballot box was the key to power for African Americans in the South, mounted a major campaign to register black voters. They organized the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964 to focus on the most racially divided state in the Union, where African Americans constituted 42 percent of the population but only 5 percent of the registered voters. About a thousand white students, from nearly two hundred colleges and universities, volunteered to help register black voters and to teach the practices of democracy and black history in "Freedom Schools." Harassed by Mississippi law-enforcement officials and Ku Klux Klansmen, the activists endured the firebombing of black churches and civil-rights headquarters, as well as arrests.

Although they registered only twelve hundred blacks to vote, 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. They insisted that since the MFDP was the only freely elected party in Mississippi, the convention should seat its delegates in place of the all-white delegation chosen by the segregationist Mississippi Democratic party. To head off a walkout by southern white delegates who threatened to bolt the convention if the party supported the MFDP, Johnson forged a compromise that offered two at-large seats to the MFDP and barred delegations from states that disfranchised blacks from all future conventions. The compromise angered southern segregationists and alienated the militants in the civil-rights movement. Within SNCC, the failure of the liberals to support seating the MFDP delegates proved to be a turning point in their disillusionment with the Democratic party and liberals.

Still, most blacks shared the optimism of Martin Luther King, Jr., and other mainstream civil-rights leaders, and over 90 percent of African-American voters cast their ballots for Democrats in 1964, leaving Johnson and the liberals in firm control. Both King and the liberal Democrats were eager to counter GOP gains in the South by opening the voting booths to increasing numbers of blacks. Determined to win a strong voting-rights law, the SCLC organized mass protests in Selma, Alabama, in March 1965. Blacks were half the population of Dallas County, where Selma was located, yet only 1 percent were registered to vote.

King knew he had to again create a crisis to arouse national indignation in order to pressure Congress to act. Selma's county sheriff, Jim Clark, every bit as violence-prone as Birmingham's "Bull" Connor, attacked the protesters brutally. Showcased on TV, the attacks increased support for a voting-rights bill. But not till SCLC and other activists sought to march from Selma to Montgomery, to petition Governor George Wallace, and were clubbed and tear-gassed by lawmen did they provoke national outrage. Many thousands marched in sympathy in northern cities. Johnson grasped the mood of the country and delivered a televised address urging Congress to pass a voting-rights bill, beseeching all Americans, "Their cause must be our cause, too." Because "it's not just Negroes, really, it's all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And," invoking the movement's anthem, "we *shall* overcome."

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

**MAP 28.2****Voter Registration of African-Americans in the South, 1964–1968**

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.

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).

From fewer than two dozen in the South in 1964, the number of blacks holding elective office swelled to almost five hundred in 1970. It mushroomed to nearly twelve hundred in 1972. That brought jobs for African Americans, contracts for black businesses, and improvements in the 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 profoundly changed, but did not revolutionize, race relations. It ended legal segrega-

tion by race, broke the monopoly on political power in the South held by whites, and galvanized a new black sense of self and of dignity. “Now if we do want to go to McDonald’s we can go to McDonald’s,” mused a black woman in Atlanta. “It’s just knowing! It’s a good feeling.” As much as any particular gain, the civil-rights movement had raised hopes for the possibility of change, legitimated protest, pointed the way Americans could redress grievances. But its inability to transform equality of opportunity into equality of results underscored the limitations of liberal change, especially in the urban ghetto. The anger bubbling below the surface soon boiled over.

On August 11, 1965, five days after the signing of the Voting Rights Act, a confrontation between white police and young blacks in Watts, the largest black district in Los Angeles, ignited the most destructive race riot in decades. For six days nearly fifty thousand blacks looted shops, firebombed white-owned businesses, and sniped at police officers and fire fighters. When the riot ended, thirty-four people were dead, nine hundred injured, and four thousand arrested. Blacks in Chicago and Springfield, Massachusetts, then took to the streets, looting, burning, and battling police.

In the summer of 1966 more than a score of ghetto outbreaks erupted in northern cities.

Blacks rioted to force whites to pay heed to the squalor of the slums and to the brutal behavior of police in the ghetto—problems that the liberal civil-rights movement had failed to solve. 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 40 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. As the fires spread, so did the looting. Children joined adults in racing from store to store to fill their arms with liquor and jewelry; cars pulled up to businesses so they could be stocked with appliances. 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 thou-

sand had been arrested. Then in 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (see Chapter 29), black uprisings flared in the ghettos of a hundred cities. Overall, the 1964–1968 riot toll would include some two hundred dead, seven thousand injured, forty thousand arrested, at least \$500 million in property destroyed, and King’s “beloved community” ashes in the fires.

A frightened, bewildered nation asked why such rioting was occurring just when blacks were beginning to achieve many of their goals. Militant blacks explained the riots as revolutionary violence to overthrow a racist, reactionary society. The Far Right saw them as evidence of a communist plot. Conservatives described the riots as senseless outbursts by troublemakers. The administration’s National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (known as the Kerner Commission) indicted “white racism” for fostering an “explosive mixture” of poverty, slum housing, poor education, and police brutality in America’s cities. Warning that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal,” the commission recommended increases in federal expenditures to assist urban blacks. Johnson, aware of the backlash against the War on Poverty as well as the cost of the war in Vietnam, ignored the advice. “Each war feeds on the other,” observed Senator William Fulbright, “and, although the President assures us that we have the resources to win both wars, in fact we are not winning either of them.”

### “Black Power”

For some African Americans, liberalism’s response to racial inequality proved “too little, too late.” The demand for Black Power sounded in 1966 expressed the eagerness of younger activists for confrontation 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, integration, and alliances with liberals.

Less an ideology than a cry of fury and frustration, Black Power owed much to the teachings of Malcolm X. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925, the son of a preacher active in the Garvey movement, Malcolm Little pimped and sold drugs before being arrested and jailed in 1946. In prison he converted to the Nation of Islam (NOI), the Black Muslim group founded by Wallace Fard and led by Elijah Muhammad (Elijah Poole). Released in 1952 and renamed Malcolm X, a symbolic repudiation of the “white man’s name,” he quickly became the Black Muslim’s most dynamic street orator and recruiter.

Building on separatist and nationalist impulses long present in the black community—racial solidarity and

uplift, self-sufficiency and self-help—Malcolm X insisted that blacks “wake up, clean up, and stand up” to achieve true independence. “I don’t see any American dream,” he often said. “I see an American nightmare.” He urged blacks to be proud of their blackness and their African roots. He wanted them to see themselves with their “own eyes not the white man’s,” and to separate themselves from the “white devil.” Critical of civil-rights leaders like King—“just a twentieth-century Uncle Tom”—for emphasizing desegregation instead of building black institutions, he insisted that blacks seize their freedom “by any means necessary”: “If ballots won’t work, bullets will,” he said. “If someone puts a hand on you, send him to the cemetery.” In February 1965, after he broke with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X was assassinated by three gunmen affiliated with the NOI. He was not silenced. His account of his life and beliefs, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) became the main text of 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 NOI 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, young African Americans—more insistent than their parents on immediate change and less willing to endure discrimination—abandoned civil disobedience and reformist strategies. 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 most notorious champion of self-determination for African-American communities was the Black Panther party. Founded in Oakland, California, in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, it urged black men to become “panthers—smiling, cunning, scientific, striking by night and sparing no one.” Although the Panthers also founded schools and engaged in peaceful community activism, they were mostly known for their shootouts with the police. “The heirs of Malcolm X,” claimed Newton, “have picked up the gun.” Confrontations with police and the FBI left many of its members dead or in prison, effectively destroying the organization and, together with the riots, galvanizing white opposition.

Although the concept remained imprecise and contested and included people ranging from businesspeople who used it to push black capitalism to revolutionaries who sought an end to capitalism, Black Power exerted a significant influence. It helped organize scores of community self-help groups and institutions that did not depend on whites. It was used to establish black studies programs at colleges, to mobilize black voters to elect black candidates, and to encourage greater racial pride and self-esteem—“black is beautiful.” James Brown sang, “Say it loud—I’m black and I’m proud,” and as never before African-Americans rejected skin bleaches and hair straighteners, gave their children African names and Kwanzaa gifts instead of Christmas presents, 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 reverberated with other marginalized groups as well, and helped shape their protest movements.

## VOICES OF PROTEST

The aura of liberalism in the 1960s markedly affected Native Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and women. They, too, were inspired by Kennedy’s rhetoric, by

Johnson’s actions, and by liberalism’s emphasis on government intervention to solve social problems. Each followed the black lead in challenging the status quo, demanding full and equal citizenship rights, emphasizing group identity and pride, and seeing 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. In 1964 hundreds of Indians lobbied in Washington for the inclusion of Native Americans in the War on Poverty. Indians suffered the worst poverty, the most inadequate housing, the highest disease and death rates, and the least access to education of any group in the United States. President Johnson responded by establishing the National Council on Indian Opportunity in 1965. It funneled more federal funds onto reservations than any previous program. Johnson also appointed the first Native American to head the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) since 1870, and promised to erase “old attitudes of paternalism.” He rejected the termination policy and advocated Indian self-determination, insisting in a special message to Congress in 1968 on “the right of the First Americans to remain Indians while exercising their rights as Americans.”

By 1968 younger Indian activists, calling themselves “Native Americans,” demanded “Red Power.” They voiced dissatisfaction with the accommodationist approach of their elders, the lack of protection for Indian land and water rights, the desecration of Indian graves and sacred sites, and legal prohibitions against certain Indian religious practices. 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 Puyallup held “fish-ins” to assert old treaty rights to fish in the Columbia River and Puget Sound. The Wampanoag in Massachusetts named Thanksgiving a National Day of Mourning. The Navajo and Hopi protested strip-mining in the Southwest, and the Taos Pueblo organized to reclaim the Blue Lake sacred site in northern New Mexico.

The most militant group, the American Indian Movement (AIM), was founded in 1968 by Chippewas, Sioux, and Ojibwa from the northern Plains. Its goals were to protect the traditional ways of Native Americans, prevent police harassment of Indians in urban “red ghettos,” and establish “survival schools” to teach Indian history and values. In late 1969 AIM executed a sustained protest, occupying Alcatraz Island. Citing a Sioux Indian

treaty that unused federal lands would revert to Indian control, an armed AIM contingent held the island for nineteen months before being dispersed.

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.

### Hispanic-Americans Organize

The fastest-growing minority, Latinos, or Hispanic-Americans, also grew impatient with their establishment organizations. The Mexican American Political Association and other organizations had been able to do little to ameliorate the dismal existence of most of the five million Hispanic-Americans. With a median annual wage half the poverty level, with 40 percent of Mexican-American adults functionally illiterate, and with de facto segregation common throughout the Southwest, Latinos like César Chávez turned to the more militant tactics and strategies of the civil-rights movement.

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 charismatic leader who, like Martin Luther King, Jr., used religion and nonviolent resistance to fight for social change, Chávez led his followers in the Delano vineyards of the

San Joaquin valley to strike in 1965. Similar efforts had been smashed in the past. But Chávez and United Farm Worker (UFW) cofounder Dolores Huerta organized consumer boycotts of table grapes to dramatize the farm workers' struggle. They made *La Causa* part of the common struggle of the entire Mexican-American community and part of the larger national movement for civil rights and social justice. For the first time, farm workers gained the right to unionize to secure better wages. 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 sense of collective identity and solidarity for all those of Mexican and Latin American descent. They insisted on a self-selected designation to highlight their insistence on self-determination: "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 *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA)* in 1967. They led Chicano high school students in Los Angeles, Denver, and San Antonio in boycotts of classes (called "blowouts") in 1968 to demand bilingual education and more Latino teachers, and demonstrated at their own colleges to obtain Chicano Studies programs and Chicana-only organizations. At the inaugural Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in 1969 they adopted *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan*, a manifesto of cultural and political nationalism, and, on September 16, Mexican Independence Day,

they led high school students in the First National Chicano Boycott of schools throughout the Southwest.

Similar zeal led poet Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales to found the Crusade for Justice in Colorado to fight police brutality and improve job opportunities for Chicanos. 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 (see Chapter 13). 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. As “brown is beautiful” came into vogue and young Chicanos grew *guerrillero* beards, David Sanchez organized the paramilitary Brown Berets in East Los Angeles.

Puerto Ricans in New York City founded the Young Lords, which they modeled on the Brown Berets. They published *Palante* (“forward in the struggle”), which, like the newspapers *La Raza* in Los Angeles and *El Papel* in Albuquerque, popularized movement strategies and aims. The Young Lords started drug treatment programs, and hijacked ambulances and occupied a hospital to demand better medical services in the South Bronx. They also blockaded the streets of East Harlem with trash to force the city to provide improved sanitation services for the six hundred thousand Puerto Ricans living there.

Like their counterparts, young activists rejected the term *Oriental* in favor of *Asian-American*, to signify a new ethnic consciousness among people with roots in the Far East. They too campaigned for special educational programs and for the election of Asian-Americans to office. Formed at the University of California in 1968, the Asian American Political Alliance encouraged Asian-American students 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 promote causes emphasizing their unique identity.

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

## A Second Feminist Wave

The rising tempo of activism in the 1960s also stirred a new spirit of self-awareness and dissatisfaction among educated women. A revived feminist movement

emerged, profoundly altering women’s view of themselves and their role in American life.

Several events fanned the embers of discontent into flames. John Kennedy, who exploited women in fleeting sexual encounters before and after his marriage, established the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. Its 1963 report documented occupational inequities suffered by women that were similar to those endured by minorities. Women received less pay than men for comparable work. They had less chance of moving into professional or managerial careers. Only 7 percent of doctors were women, and less than 4 percent of lawyers. The women who served on the presidential commission successfully urged that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibit gender-based as well as racial discrimination in employment.

Dismayed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s reluctance to enforce the ban on sex discrimination in employment, which was mandated by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug, Aileen Hernandez, and others formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. A civil-rights group for women, NOW sought liberal change through the political system. It lobbied for equal opportunity, filed lawsuits against gender discrimination, and mobilized public opinion against the sexism then pervasive in America.

NOW’s prominence owed much to the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Friedan deplored the narrow view that women should seek fulfillment solely as wives and mothers. Suburban domesticity—the “velvet ghetto”—left many women with feelings of emptiness, with no sense of accomplishment, afraid to ask “the silent question—’Is this all?’” Friedan wanted women to pursue careers and establish “goals that will permit them to find their own identity.” Her message rang true to many middle-class women who found the creativity of homemaking and the joys of motherhood exaggerated. It informed unfulfilled women that they were not alone, and gave them a vocabulary with which to express their dissatisfaction.

Still another catalyst for feminism came from the involvement of younger women in the civil-rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. These activists had gained confidence in their own potential, an ideology to understand oppression, and experience in the strategy and tactics of organized protest. Their activism made them conscious of their own second-class status, as they were sexually exploited and relegated to menial jobs by male activists. In 1965 civil-rights activists Mary King and Casey Hayden drew a parallel “between treatment

of Negroes and treatment of women in our society as a whole.”

Assumptions of male superiority are as widespread and deep-rooted and every much as crippling to the woman as the assumptions of white supremacy are to the Negro. . . . [We need to] stop the discrimination and start the slow process of changing values and ideas so that all of us gradually come to understand that this is no more a man's world than it is a white world.

The memo struck a responsive chord among female activists, and by 1967 they had created a women's liberation movement more critical of sexual inequality than was the liberal NOW.

### Women's Liberation

Militant feminists in 1968 adopted the technique of “consciousness-raising” as a recruitment device and a means of transforming women's perceptions of themselves and society. Tens of thousands of women assembled in small groups to share experiences and air grievances. They soon realized that others felt dissatisfaction similar to their own. “When I saw that what I always felt were my own personal hangups was as true for every other woman in that room as it was for me! Well, that's when my consciousness was raised,” a participant recalled. Women learned to regard their personal, individual problems as shared problems with social causes and political solutions—“the personal is political.” They came to understand the power dynamics in marriage, the family, and the workplace. Consciousness-raising opened eyes and minds. “It wasn't just whining, it was trying to figure out why, why we felt things and what we could do to make our marriages more equal and our lives better.” This new consciousness begot a commitment to end sexism and a sense that “sisterhood is powerful.”

Women's liberation groups sprang up across the nation. They employed a variety of publicity-generating and confrontational tactics. In 1968 radical feminists crowned a sheep Miss America to dramatize that such contests degraded women, and set up “freedom trash cans” in which women could discard high-heeled shoes, girdles, and other symbols of their subjugation. They insisted on being included in the Boston Marathon, no longer accepting the excuse that “it is unhealthy for women to run long distances.” They established health collectives and shelters for abused women, created day-care centers and rape crisis centers, founded abortion-

counseling services and women's studies programs. They demanded equality in education and the workplace, and protested the negative portrayals of women in the media and advertising. Terms like *male chauvinist pig* entered the vocabulary and those like *chicks* exited. Some feminists claimed patriarchy, the power of men, to be the main cause of all oppressions and exploitations. Most rejected the notion that women were naturally passive and emotional, and that they suffered from “penis envy” if they sought to do things beyond their “female dispositions.”

Despite a gulf between radicals and liberals, the quarreling factions set aside their differences in August 1970 to join in the largest women's rights demonstration ever. Commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage, the Women's Strike for Equality brought out tens of thousands of women nationwide to parade for the right to equal employment and safe, legal abortions. By then the women's movement had already pressured many financial institutions to issue credit to single women and to married women in their own names. It had filed suit against hundreds of colleges and universities to secure salary raises for women faculty members victimized by discrimination, and ended newspapers' practice of listing employment opportunities under separate “Male” and “Female” headings. Guidelines that required corporations receiving federal funds to adopt nondiscriminatory hiring practices and equal pay scales had been established. By 1970 more than 40 percent of all women held full-time jobs outside the home.

The right to control their own sexuality and decisions whether to have children also became a feminist rallying cry. In 1960 “the Pill” came on the market, giving women greater freedom to be sexually active without the risk of pregnancy (see Technology and Culture: The Pill). Many women, aware of the dangers of illegal abortions, pushed for their legalization. Some challenged demeaning obstetrical practices. Others explored alternatives to hospital births and popularized alternatives to radical mastectomy for breast cancer. Women had become aware, in historian Gerda Lerner's words,

that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination.

### The Pill

The pill to prevent conception had many fathers and at least two mothers. Most of them were initially concerned with world overpopulation, not women's sexual freedom. In Margaret Sanger (see Chapter 21) and Katharine McCormick, heir to the International Harvester Company fortune, the goals of the movements for birth control and for population control meshed. The two women wanted a safe, inexpensive contraceptive that would be easy to use in the poverty-stricken slums of the world. In the postwar climate that favored technological solutions to social problems, they recruited Gregory Pincus, a pharmaceutical scientist working in a small Massachusetts laboratory grandly called the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology. Pincus desperately needed money to keep his lab afloat. Assured of McCormick's support to the tune of \$2 million, he went to work in 1950 on Sanger's request for an oral contraceptive that would be as simple to use and as plentiful as aspirin.

Like most scientists, Pincus drew heavily on the earlier work of others. Chemists in the 1930s had synthesized estrogen, the female hormone that prevents ovulation (stopping the female body from forming and releasing an egg). Others had worked on progesterin, the hormone in the ovaries that keeps sperm from fertilizing an egg. Pincus utilized their experiments with rabbits, as well as Carl Djerassi's synthesis of steroids and the work of gynecologist Dr. John Rock. None of these scientists had birth control on their minds. Indeed, Rock, a Catholic was seeking an effective hormonal pill to help women get pregnant.

After years of experimenting with hundreds of combinations of substances, Pincus and his collaborator, Dr. M. C. Chiang, synthesized a mixture of estrogen and progesterin that they believed safe and effective in suppressing ovulation in most women. In dubiously ethical practices, Pincus set up field trials with psychiatric patients and male prisoners (thinking it might work on men). Puerto Rico was the site for his first large-scale clinical trial of the oral contraceptive—because he could “attempt in Puerto Rico certain experiments which would be very difficult in this country.” He followed that with tests in Haiti. Called Enovid, and produced by the G. D. Searle drug company, the pills were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1957, but for gynecological disorders—not as a contraceptive.

At the time, thirty states still had laws banning or restricting contraceptive use, and most drug companies feared the controversy such a pill would arouse. The other drug companies left it to G. D. Searle to ask the FDA to approve the drug as a contraceptive. In May 1960 the FDA approved Enovid for contraceptive use. It did so, in large part, because of widespread concern about overpopulation and the threat of communism. Many feared that a teeming nonwhite underclass was tailor-made for a communist takeover, and thought the likelihood of that threat could be minimized by controlling population and thus reducing hunger, poverty, and disease in the world.

Many American women embraced the new technology with enthusiasm, and Enovid, unexpectedly helped

to foster a sexual revolution in the United States. By 1965, despite being condemned as immoral by the Catholic Church and denounced as a technology of genocide by African-American militants, “the Pill” (as it was commonly called) had become the most popular form of birth control in the United States, used by 6.5 million married women (unmarried women were not counted in official reports). In 1968 Americans spent as much on the Pill as on all other contraceptive methods combined. By 1970 more than 10 million American women were “on the Pill.”

Pincus was deluged with fan letters. A grateful user in St. Paul kissed his picture in the newspaper, “for this is the first year in her eight years of marriage that she has not been pregnant.” And in a song named “The Pill,” Loretta Lynn sang, “All these years I’ve stayed at home while you had all your fun/ And ev’ry year that’s gone by another baby’s come/ There’s gonna be some changes made right here on Nurs’ry Hill/ You’ve set this chicken your last time, ‘cause now I’ve got the Pill.”

Although widespread use of the Pill and the sexual revolution occurred together, the former did not cause the latter. Primarily married women consumed the Pill in the 1960s. It would take larger social changes in the United States before doctors would readily prescribe it for unmarried women, before the young would claim sexual pleasure as a right, and before a woman’s liberation movement would be strong enough to insist on a woman’s right to control her own sexuality. Permissiveness resulted more from affluence and mobility, from changed attitudes and laws, than from the Pill. Still, the Pill disconnected fears of pregnancy from the pursuit of sexual pleasure, and breaking reproductive shackles made sexual freedom more likely. The greater degree of autonomy and choice in women’s sexual-reproductive lives changed the experience and meaning of sex, in and out of marriage.

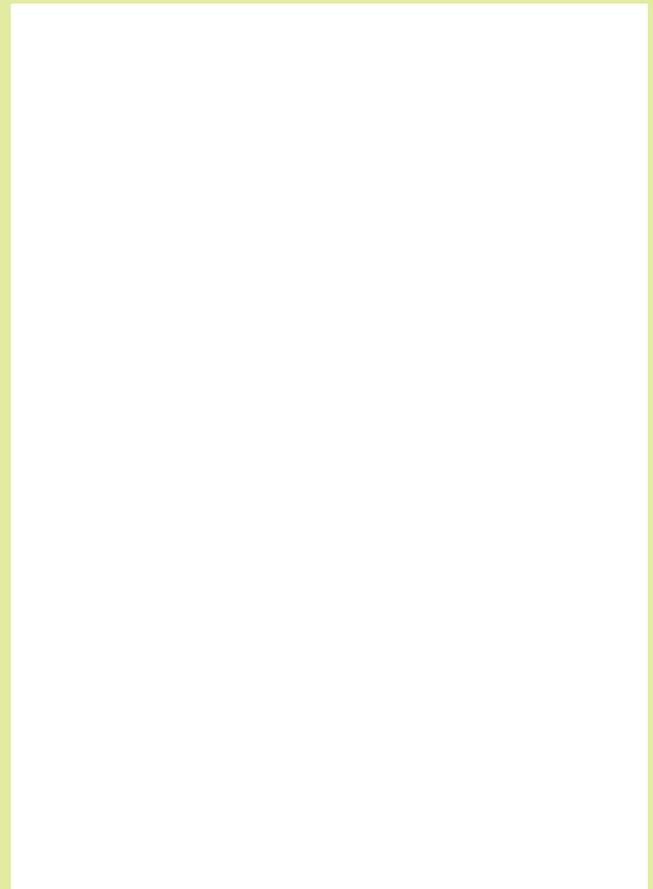
The Pill has not been a universal panacea. One woman’s medical miracle became another’s social concern and a third woman’s health problem. High amounts of estrogen in the early pills caused blood clots and strokes, disabling many women. Because the Pill was available only with a doctor’s prescription, the oral contraceptive increased doctors’ control over the sexual lives of women. While conservatives sought to stem the tide of promiscuity and pornography they blamed on the Pill, feminists charged that women bore the costs of contraception because men controlled the medical profession and pharmaceutical industry. At the same time, liberalized sexual behavior proved less emancipating and more exploitative than feminists first expected, and the disagreement about such issues as birth control, abor-

tion, premarital sex, and obscenity hastened the demise of the liberal consensus.

To date, the Pill has neither significantly limited population growth in the Third World nor ended the scourge of unwanted pregnancies in the United States. It has changed the dynamics of women’s health care and altered gender relations. The first medicine produced for a social, rather than therapeutic, purpose, it remains the pharmaceutical swallowed as a daily routine by more humans than any other prescribed medication in the world.

### Focus Questions

- To what extent is the Pill the cause of the sexual revolution?
- What have been the chief negative and positive consequences of the development of the Pill?



## THE LIBERAL CRUSADE IN VIETNAM, 1961–1968

The activist liberals who boldly tried to end poverty and uplift the downtrodden also went to war on the other side of the globe to contain communism and export liberty, democracy, and self-determination. Kennedy escalated Eisenhower's efforts in Vietnam in order to hold "the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike." Johnson resolved, "I am not going to lose Vietnam, I am not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went." They would make a stand. The war in Vietnam pursued by liberals ended the era of liberalism. By the time the nation's longest war ended, the liberal consensus would be a distant memory and the United States more divided than at any time since the Civil War.

### Kennedy and Vietnam

Following the compromise settlement in Laos, President Kennedy resolved not to give further ground in Southeast Asia. He ordered massive shipments of weaponry to South Vietnam and increased the number of American forces stationed there from less than seven hundred in 1960 to more than sixteen thousand by the end of 1963 (see Figure 28.1). JFK refused to stand by and

let Vietnam go communist. He feared it would lead to a Republican-led, anticommunist backlash, damaging him politically. 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 mean that others in the region would soon fall as well (the domino theory). Kennedy viewed international communism as a monolithic force, a single global enemy controlled by Moscow and Beijing. Seeing third-world conflicts as tests of America's, and his own, will, he wanted to show the world that the United States was not the "paper tiger" that Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) mocked.

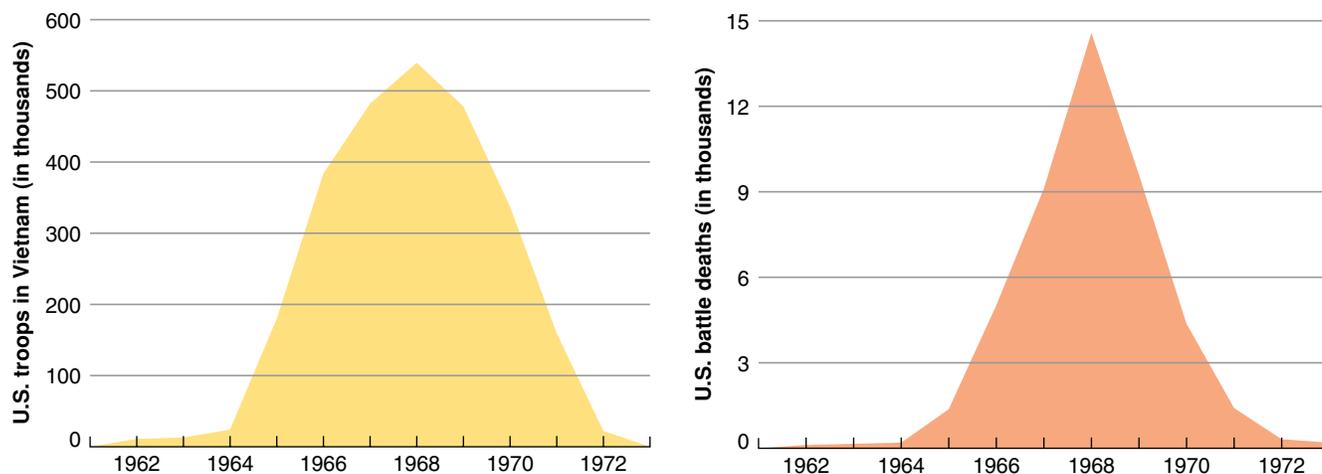
To counter the success of the National Liberation Front (NLF), or Vietcong, in the countryside, the United States uprooted Vietnamese peasants and moved them into fortified villages, or "strategic hamlets." But South Vietnamese president Diem rejected American pressure to gain popular support through liberal 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. They secretly backed the efforts of Vietnamese army officers planning Diem's overthrow. On November 1 the

**FIGURE 28.1**

### U.S. Combat in Vietnam

After President Kennedy gradually increased the number of American advisors in Vietnam from less than a thousand to more than 16,000, 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.



Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States; American Journey: A History of the United States* by Goldfield et al., © reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.

military leaders staged their coup, captured Diem and his brother, and shot them. The United States promptly recognized the new government (the first of nine South Vietnamese regimes in the next five years), but it too made little headway against the Vietcong. JFK would either have to 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, President Kennedy himself fell to an assassin's bullet. His admirers contend that by late 1963 a disillusioned Kennedy was favoring the withdrawal of American forces after the 1964 election. "It is their war," he said publicly. "We can help them, we can send them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but in the final analysis it is their people and their government who have to win or lose the struggle." Skeptics note that the president followed this comment with a ringing restatement of his belief in the domino theory and a promise that America would not withdraw from the conflict. Virtually all his liberal advisers, moreover, held that an American victory in Vietnam was essential to check the advance of 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.

### Escalation of the War

Now it was Johnson who had to choose between intervening decisively or withdrawing from Vietnam. 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 provoke Chinese or Soviet entry and lead to World War III. He foresaw that full-scale engagement in "that bitch of a war" would destroy "the woman I really loved—the Great Society." Yet Johnson did not want the United States to appear weak. Only American strength and resolve, he believed, would prevent a wider war. Like Kennedy, he worried that a pullout would leave him vulnerable to conservative attack. Johnson had no intention of allowing the charge that he was soft on communism to be used to destroy him or his liberal programs.

Trapped between unacceptable alternatives, Johnson widened America's limited 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. So the war ground on.

In 1964 Johnson took bold steps to impress North Vietnam with American resolve and to block his opponent, Barry Goldwater, from capitalizing on Vietnam in the presidential campaign. In February he ordered the Pentagon to prepare for air strikes against North Vietnam. In May his advisers drafted a congressional resolution authorizing an escalation of American military action. In July the president appointed General Maxwell Taylor, a proponent of greater American involvement in the war, as ambassador to Saigon.

In early August North Vietnamese patrol boats allegedly clashed with two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin (see Map 28.3). Evidence of the attack was unclear, yet Johnson announced that Americans had been victims of "open aggression on the high seas." Johnson condemned the attacks as unprovoked, never admitting that the U.S. ships had been aiding the South Vietnamese in secret raids against North Vietnam. He

ordered air strikes on North Vietnamese naval bases and asked Congress to pass the previously prepared resolution. It authorized him to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” The Senate passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution 88 to 2, and the House 416 to 0, assured by the president that this meant no “extension of the present conflict.”

Privately, LBJ called the resolution “grandma’s night-shirt—it covered everything.” He considered it a mandate to commit U.S. forces as he saw fit. The blank check to determine the level of force made massive intervention more likely; and having once used force against North Vietnam made it easier to do so again. But the res-

olution created an eventual credibility problem for Johnson, allowing opponents of the war to charge that he had misled Congress and lied to the American people. Thus, at the height of LBJ’s popularity and power, his political downfall began.

## The Endless War

Early in 1965 Johnson cashed his blank check, ordering “Operation Rolling Thunder,” the sustained bombing of North Vietnam. It accomplished none of its purposes: to inflict enough damage to make Hanoi negotiate, to boost the morale of the Saigon government, and to stop the flow of soldiers and supplies coming from North Vietnam via the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail (see Map 28.3). So LBJ escalated America’s air war. Between 1965 and 1968 the U.S. dropped eight hundred tons of bombs a day on North Vietnam, three times the tonnage dropped by all the combatants in World War II.

Unable to turn the tide by bombing, Johnson committed U.S. combat troops to Vietnam. They pursued a “meat-grinder” or attrition strategy, trying to force the communists to the peace table by inflicting unacceptable losses on them. This required 185,000 Americans in Vietnam by the end of 1965; 385,000 a year later; and 485,000 (a greater military force than the U.S. had deployed in Korea) after another year (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. Hanoi, determined to battle until the United States lost the will to fight, matched each American troop increase with its own. No end was in sight.

## Doves Versus Hawks

First on college campuses and then in the wider society, a growing number of Americans began to oppose the war. A week after marines splashed ashore at Danang, South Vietnam, in March 1965, students and faculty at the University of Michigan staged the first teach-in to raise questions about U.S. intervention. All-night discussions of the war followed at other universities. Some twenty-five thousand people, mainly students, attended a rally in Washington that

### MAP 28.3

#### The Vietnam War, to 1968

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.”



spring to demonstrate against the escalation. In 1966 large-scale campus protests against the war erupted. Students angrily demonstrated against the draft and against university research for the Pentagon. “Yesterday’s ivory tower,” observed the president of Hunter College, “has become today’s foxhole.”

Intellectuals and clergy joined the chorus of opposition to the war. Some decried the massive bombing of an underdeveloped nation; some doubted that the United States could win at any reasonable cost; some feared the demise of liberalism. In 1967 prominent critics of the war, including Democratic Senators William Fulbright, Robert Kennedy, and George McGovern, pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, and Martin Luther King, Jr., 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.

TV coverage of the war further eroded support. Scenes of children maimed by U.S. bombs and of dying Americans, replayed in living rooms night after night, laid bare the horror of the war and undercut the optimistic reports of government officials. Americans shuddered as they watched defoliants and napalm (a burning glue that adheres to skin and clothing) lay waste to Vietnam’s countryside and leave tens of thousands of civilians dead or mutilated. They saw American troops, supposedly winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese, burn their villages and desecrate their burial grounds.

Yet most Americans still 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 acknowledged that, in McNamara’s words, “the picture of the

world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring a thousand noncombatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward country into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one." But 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 lashed out at his critics as "nervous Nellies" and refused to de-escalate the conflict, demonstrators paraded past the White House chanting, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" A virtual prisoner in the White House, unable to speak in public without being shouted down, Johnson had become a casualty of the far-off war. So had an era of hope and liberalism. Few Americans still believed in Kennedy's confident assurance that the nation could "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe."

## CONCLUSION

The charming Kennedy style that captivated the media, and through them the public, combined an aura of "can-do" vigor with liberal rhetoric and youthful glamor. It obscured an unexceptional domestic record. Stymied by the conservative coalition in Congress, Kennedy did more to stimulate hope than to change the realities of

life. Not until Johnson became president did the liberal ideal of an activist government promoting a fairer and better life for all Americans come closer to reality. First came the Civil Rights Act and a tax cut. Then LBJ pushed and prodded Congress to enact his 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. They made the United States a more caring and just nation.

The landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, ending the legality of racial discrimination and black disfranchisement, provided greater equality of opportunity for African Americans and nurtured the self-esteem of blacks. However, causing many to question liberalism's faith in government action to solve social problems, the laws left untouched the maladies of the urban black ghetto. There, unfulfilled expectations and frustrated hopes exploded into rioting, swelling the white backlash that undermined support for the liberal agenda. Not poverty but the poor now seemed the enemy.

At the same time, the struggle for racial justice inspired other minorities to fight for equality and dignity. Native Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and women also took to the streets to demand their fair due. They too initially took heart from the new liberalism's optimistic promise of government intervention to assure full and equal rights for all. Yet the younger, more militant

## CHRONOLOGY, 1960–1968

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|--|---|
| <p><b>1960</b> Sit-ins to protest segregation begin.<br/>John F. Kennedy elected president.</p>  | <p>Gulf of Tonkin incident and resolution.<br/>Economic Opportunity Act initiates War on Poverty.<br/>Johnson elected president.</p>  |
| <p><b>1961</b> Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress created.<br/>Bay of Pigs invasion.<br/>Freedom rides.<br/>Berlin Wall erected.</p>  | <p><b>1965</b> Bombing of North Vietnam and Americanization of the war begin.<br/>Assassination of Malcolm X.<br/>Civil-rights march from Selma to Montgomery.<br/>César Chávez's United Farm Workers strike in California.<br/>Teach-ins to question U.S. involvement in War in Vietnam begin.<br/>Voting Rights Act.<br/>Watts riot in Los Angeles.</p> |
| <p><b>1962</b> Michael Harrington, <i>The Other America</i>.<br/>Cuban missile crisis.</p>   | <p><b>1966</b> Stokely Carmichael calls for Black Power.<br/>Black Panthers formed.<br/>National Organization for Women (NOW) founded.</p>  |
| <p><b>1963</b> Civil-rights demonstrations in Birmingham.<br/>March on Washington.<br/>Test-Ban Treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States.<br/>Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president.<br/>Betty Freidan, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i>.</p> | <p><b>1967</b> Massive antiwar demonstrations.<br/>Race riots in Newark, Detroit, and other cities.</p>   |
| <p><b>1964</b> Freedom Summer in Mississippi.<br/>California becomes most populous state.<br/>Civil Rights Act.</p>  |   |

members of these groups, like their black counterparts, ultimately parted ways with liberals over means and ends.

Most of all, the Vietnam War destroyed the liberal consensus as well as the Johnson presidency. Inheriting a deteriorating limited war from Kennedy, LBJ chose to escalate the pressure on North Vietnam, to force it to negotiate a compromise. Within three years a half-million American troops were stationed in Vietnam. Unable to win in the manner he chose to fight, and unwilling to quit and admit failure, Johnson sank deeper into the Vietnam quagmire, polarizing the country and fragmenting the Democratic party. While the administration claimed to see the light at the end of the tunnel, critics saw the light as a speeding train about to crash American society.

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<http://academicinfo.net/africanam.html>

A valuable site for primary materials on the civil-rights movement.

#### The Cuban Missile Crisis

<http://hyperion.advanced.org/11046>

<http://www.fas.org/irp/imint/cuba.htm>

Two comprehensive sites on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

#### The History Place

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam>

The History Place offers information and analysis of many specific events and topics relating to the Vietnam War and the 1960s.

#### JFK

<http://www.cs.umb.edu/~rwhealan/jfk/main.html>

A large collection of records from the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum.

#### The Vietnam War

<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/shwv/shvwvhome.html>

Many documents and personal narratives of the Vietnam War from the Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library.

**For additional readings please consult the bibliography at the end of the book.**