During the Kennedy Administration, ongoing tensions with the Soviet Union led to crises over Cuba and West Berlin. To contain communism and stay ahead of the Soviet Union in technology, President Kennedy created aid programs for developing nations and expanded the space program.

**Containing Communism**

**MAIN Idea** President Kennedy developed new programs to combat the spread of communism.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Would you consider joining the Peace Corps and serving in a foreign country? Read on to learn about Kennedy’s diplomatic efforts in Latin America.

When John F. Kennedy entered the White House, he had to devote much of his time to foreign policy. The Cold War with the Soviet Union dominated all other concerns at the time, and Kennedy attempted to stop the spread of communism with a range of programs. These included a conventional weaponry program to give the nation’s military more flexibility, a program to provide economic aid to Latin America, and the creation of the Peace Corps to help developing nations worldwide.

**A More Flexible Response**

Kennedy took office at a time of growing global instability. Nationalism was exploding throughout the developing world, and the Soviet Union actively supported “wars of national liberation.”

Kennedy felt that Eisenhower had relied too heavily on nuclear weapons, which could be used only in extreme situations. To allow for a “flexible response” if nations needed help resisting Communist movements, the president pushed for a buildup of troops and conventional weapons. Kennedy also expanded the Special Forces, an elite army unit created in the 1950s to wage guerrilla warfare in limited conflicts, and allowed the soldiers to wear their distinctive “Green Beret” headgear.

**Aid to Other Countries**

Kennedy wanted to renew diplomatic focus on Latin America. Conditions in many Latin American societies were not good: Governments were often in the hands of the wealthy few and many
of their citizens lived in extreme poverty. In some countries, these conditions spurred the growth of left-wing movements aimed at overthrowing their governments.

When the United States became involved in Latin America, it usually did so to help existing governments stay in power and to prevent Communist movements from flourishing. Poor Latin Americans resented this intrusion, just as they resented American corporations, whose presence was seen as a kind of imperialism.

The Alliance for Progress To improve relations between the United States and Latin America, Kennedy proposed an Alliance for Progress, a series of cooperative aid projects with Latin American governments. The alliance was designed to create a “free and prosperous Latin America” that would be more stable and less likely to support Communist-inspired revolutions.

Over a 10-year period, the United States pledged $20 billion to help Latin American countries establish better schools, housing, health care, and fairer land distribution. The results were mixed. In some countries—notably Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Central American republics—the alliance did promote real reform. In others, local rulers used the money to keep themselves in power.
The Peace Corps  Another program aimed at helping less-developed nations fight poverty was the Peace Corps, an organization that sent Americans to provide humanitarian services in less-developed nations.

After rigorous training, volunteers spent two years in countries that requested assistance. They laid out sewage systems in Bolivia and trained medical technicians in Chad. Others taught English or helped to build roads. Today, the Peace Corps is still active and remains one of Kennedy’s most enduring legacies.

The Cold War in Space  

In 1961 Yuri Gagarin (YHOO•ree gah•GAHR•ihn), a Soviet astronaut, became the first person to orbit Earth. Again, as in 1957 when they launched Sputnik, the first satellite, the Soviets had beaten the United States in the space race. President Kennedy worried about the impact of the flight on the Cold War. Soviet successes in space might convince the world that communism was better than capitalism.

Less than six weeks after the Soviet flight, the president went before Congress and declared: “I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon.”

Kennedy’s speech set in motion a massive effort to develop the necessary technology. In 1962 John Glenn became the first American to orbit Earth. Three years later, the United States sent three men into orbit in a capsule called Apollo. Apollo was launched using the Saturn V, the most powerful rocket ever built. The Saturn V was able to give both Apollo and the lunar module—which astronauts would use to land on the moon—enough velocity to reach the moon.


Armstrong became the first human being to walk on the moon. As he set foot on the lunar surface, he announced: “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” The United States had won the space race and decisively demonstrated its technological superiority over the Soviet Union.

Space Technology  Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union fueled the space race. Both countries vied for superiority in aeronautical technology and dominance in space exploration.
Crises of the Cold War

MAIN Idea  President Kennedy faced foreign policy crises in Cuba and Berlin.

HISTORY AND YOU Do you think the embargo against Cuba should be lifted? Read on to learn about the crises President Kennedy faced over Cuba.

President Kennedy’s efforts to combat Communist influence in other countries led to some of the most intense crises of the Cold War. At times these crises left Americans and people in many other nations wondering whether the world would survive.

The Bay of Pigs

The first crisis occurred in Cuba, only 90 miles (145 km) from American shores. There, Fidel Castro had overthrown the corrupt Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Almost immediately, Castro established ties with the Soviet Union, instituted drastic land reforms, and seized foreign-owned businesses, many of which were American. Cuba’s alliance with the Soviets worried many Americans. The Communists were now too close for comfort, and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev was also expressing his intent to strengthen Cuba militarily.

Fearing that the Soviets would use Cuba as a base from which to spread revolution throughout the Western Hemisphere, President Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to secretly train and arm a group of Cuban exiles, known as La Brigada, to invade the island. The invasion was intended to set off a popular uprising against Castro.

When Kennedy became president, his advisers approved the plan. In office less than three months and trusting his experts, Kennedy agreed to the operation with some changes. On April 17, 1961, some 1,400 armed Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs on the south coast of Cuba. The invasion was a disaster. La Brigada’s boats ran aground on coral reefs; Kennedy canceled their air support to keep the United States’ involvement a secret; and the expected popular uprising never happened. Within two days, Castro’s forces killed or captured almost all the members of La Brigada.

The Bay of Pigs was a dark moment for the Kennedy administration. The action exposed an American plot to overthrow a neighbor’s government, and the outcome made the United States look weak and disorganized.

Analyzing VISUALS

1. Calculating  What analysis can you make about the size of the space capsules and modules used in space?
2. Describing  How does the Moon’s surface appear in these photos?
3. Identifying  What was the purpose of the Lunar Module?
The Berlin Wall Goes Up

Kennedy faced another foreign policy challenge beginning in June 1961, when he met with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna, Austria. Khrushchev wanted to stop the flood of Germans pouring out of Communist East Germany into West Berlin. He demanded that the Western powers recognize East Germany and that the United States, Great Britain, and France withdraw from Berlin, a city lying completely within East Germany. Kennedy refused and reaffirmed the West’s commitment to West Berlin.

Khrushchev retaliated by building a wall through Berlin, blocking movement between the Soviet sector and the rest of the city. Guards posted along the wall shot at many of those attempting to escape from the East. For nearly 30 years afterward, the Berlin Wall stood as a visible symbol of Cold War divisions.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

By far the most terrifying crisis of the Kennedy era occurred the next year. During the summer of 1962, American intelligence agencies learned that Soviet technicians and equipment had arrived in Cuba and that military construction was in progress. On October 22, President Kennedy announced on television that American spy planes had taken aerial photographs showing that the Soviet Union had placed long-range missiles in Cuba. Enemy missiles stationed so close to the United States posed a dangerous threat.

Kennedy ordered a naval blockade to stop the delivery of more missiles, demanded the existing missile sites be dismantled, and warned that if attacked, the United States would respond fully against the Soviet Union. Still, work on the missile sites continued. Nuclear holocaust seemed imminent.
Then, after a flurry of secret negotiations, the Soviet Union offered a deal. It would remove the missiles if the United States promised not to invade Cuba and to remove its missiles from Turkey near the Soviet border. The reality was that neither Kennedy nor Khrushchev wanted nuclear war. “Only lunatics . . . who themselves want to perish and before they die destroy the world, could do this,” wrote the Soviet leader. On October 28, the leaders reached an agreement. Kennedy publicly agreed not to invade Cuba and privately agreed to remove the Turkish missiles; the Soviets agreed to remove their missiles from Cuba. The world could breathe again.

The Cuban missile crisis forced the United States and the Soviet Union to consider the consequences of nuclear war. In August 1963, the two countries concluded years of negotiation by agreeing to a treaty that banned testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere.

In the long run, however, the missile crisis had ominous consequences. The humiliating retreat the United States forced on the Soviet leadership undermined the position of Nikita Khrushchev and contributed to his fall from power a year later. The crisis also exposed the Soviets’ military inferiority and prompted a dramatic Soviet arms buildup over the next two decades. This buildup contributed to a comparable military increase in the United States in the early 1980s.

**Death of a President**

Soon after the Senate ratified the test ban treaty, John F. Kennedy’s presidency ended shockingly and tragically. On November 22, 1963, Kennedy and his wife traveled to Texas. As the presidential motorcade rode slowly through the crowded streets of Dallas, gunfire rang out. Someone had shot the president twice—once in the throat and once in the head. Horrified government officials sped Kennedy to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead moments later.

Lee Harvey Oswald, the man accused of killing Kennedy, appeared to be a confused and embittered Marxist who had spent time in the Soviet Union. He himself was shot to death in police custody two days after the assassination. The bizarre situation led some to speculate that the second gunman, local nightclub owner Jack Ruby, killed Oswald to protect others involved in the crime. In 1964 a national commission headed by Chief Justice Warren concluded that Oswald was the lone assassin. The report of the **Warren Commission** left some questions unanswered, and theories about a conspiracy to kill the president have persisted, though none has gained wide acceptance.

In the wake of the assassination, the United States and much of the world went into mourning. Thousands traveled to Washington, D.C., and waited in a line several miles long outside the Capitol to walk silently past the president’s flag-draped casket.

Kennedy was president for little more than 1,000 days. Yet he made a profound impression on most Americans. Kennedy’s successor, Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson, set out to promote many of the programs that Kennedy left unfinished.

**Summarizing** How was the Cuban missile crisis resolved?
Eyewitness

On May 22, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson delivered a speech in Ann Arbor, Michigan, outlining his domestic agenda that would become known as “The Great Society.” Speechwriter and policy adviser Richard Goodwin watched the speech on videotape the next morning back in Washington. He recalls his reaction:

Then, with the cheers, at first muted as if the audience were surprised at their own response, then mounting toward unrestrained, accepting delight, Johnson concluded: “There are those timid souls who say . . . we are condemned to a soulless wealth. I do not agree. We have the power to shape civilization. . . . But we need your will, your labor, your hearts. . . . So let us from this moment begin our work, so that in the future men will look back and say: It was then, after a long and weary way, that man turned the exploits of his genius to the full enrichment of his life.”

Watching the film in the White House basement, almost involuntarily I added my applause to the tumultuous acclaim coming from the sound track. . . . I clapped for the President, and for our country.

WHAT IS A PIP, ANYWAY?

Match these rock 'n' roll headliners with their supporting acts.

1. Paul Revere and
2. Martha and
3. Gary Puckett and
4. Gladys Knight and
5. Smokey Robinson and
6. Diana Ross and

a. the Union Gap
b. the Supremes
c. the Miracles
d. the Vandellas
e. the Raiders
f. the Pips

VERBATIM

“Is there any place we can catch them? What can we do? Are we working 24 hours a day? Can we go around the moon before them?”

President John F. Kennedy, to Lyndon B. Johnson, after hearing that Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had orbited the Earth, 1961

“It was quite a day. I don't know what you can say about a day when you see four beautiful sunsets. . . . This is a little unusual, I think.”

Colonel John Glenn, in orbit, 1962

“There are tens of millions of Americans who are beyond the welfare state. Taken as a whole there is a culture of poverty . . . bad health, poor housing, low levels of aspiration and high levels of mental distress. Twenty percent of a nation, some 32,000,000.”

Michael Harrington, The Culture of Poverty, 1962

“I have a dream.”

Martin Luther King Jr., 1963

“I don't see an American dream . . . . I see an American nightmare . . . . Three hundred and ten years we worked in this country without a dime in return.”

Malcolm X, 1964

“The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice.”

Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964

“In 1962, the starving residents of an isolated Indian village received 1 plow and 1,700 pounds of seeds. They ate the seeds.”

Peace Corps Ad, 1965
Milestones

PERFORMED IN ENGLISH, 1962.

THE CATHOLIC MASS, following Pope John XXIII’s Second Vatican Council. “Vatican II” allows the Latin mass to be translated into local languages around the world.

ENROLLED, 1962. JAMES MEREDITH, at the University of Mississippi, following a Supreme Court ruling that ordered his admission to the previously segregated school. Rioting and a showdown with state officials who wished to bar his enrollment preceded Meredith’s entrance to classes.

BROKEN, 1965. 25-DAY FAST BY CÉSAR CHÁVEZ, labor organizer. His protest convinced others to join his nonviolent strike against the grape growers; shoppers boycotted table grapes in sympathy.

STRIPPED, 1967. MUHAMMAD ALI, of his heavyweight champion title, after refusing induction into the army following a rejection of his application for conscientious objector status. The boxer was arrested, given a five-year sentence, and fined $10,000.

PICKETED, 1968. THE MISS AMERICA PAGEANT in Atlantic City, by protesters who believe the contest’s emphasis on women’s physical beauty is degrading and minimizes the importance of women’s intellect.

NUMBERS

7% Percentage of African American adults registered to vote in Mississippi in 1964 before passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

67% Percentage of African American adults in Mississippi registered to vote in 1969

70% Percentage of white adults registered to vote in 1964, nationwide

90% Percentage of white adults registered to vote nationwide in 1969

57 Number of days senators filibustered to hold up passage of the Civil Rights Bill in 1964

14½ Hours duration of all-night speech delivered by Senator Robert Byrd before a cloture vote stopped the filibuster

72% Percentage of elementary and high school teachers who approved of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure in 1961

$80–90 Weekly pay for a clerk/typist in New York in 1965

CRITICAL THINKING


2. Speculating Why do you think President Kennedy was eager to best the Soviets in space?