

## Publisher's Note

*Defining Documents in American History* series, produced by Salem Press, consists of a collection of essays on important historical documents by a diverse range of writers on a broad range of subjects in American history. This established series currently offers nineteen titles ranging from Colonial America to the present volume, *The 1960s*.

This volume, *Defining Documents in American History: The 1960s (1960-1969)*, offers in-depth analysis of a broad range of historical documents and historic events that shaped such pivotal themes as the nuclear arms race, antiwar sentiment, civil rights, privacy rights, and race to the moon, all taking place in the 1960s. Through the close study of 49 primary source documents, this text delivers a thorough examination of important political movements and societal trends in the U.S. from 1960 to 1969. The material is organized under three broad categories:

- **Visions of a New Era**
- **Confrontations with Communism**
- **Civil Rights, Social Justice, and Antiwar Activism**

Historical documents provide a compelling view of important aspects of American history. Designed for high school and college students, the aim of the series is to advance historical document studies as an important activity in learning about history.

### Essay Format

*The 1960s* contains 49 primary source documents—many in their entirety. Each document is supported by a critical essay, written by historians and teachers, that includes a Summary Overview, Defining Moment, Author Biography, Document Analysis, and Essential

Themes. Readers will appreciate the diversity of the collected texts, including speeches, treaties, leaflets, political and religious sermons, laws, government reports, Executive Orders, and court opinions, among other genres. An important feature of each essay is a close reading of the primary source that develops evidence of broader themes, such as the author's rhetorical purpose, social or class position, point of view, and other relevant issues. In addition, essays are organized by section themes, listed above, highlighting major issues of the period, many of which extend across eras and continue to shape life as we know it around the world. Each section begins with a brief introduction that defines questions and problems underlying the subjects in the historical documents. Each essay also includes a Bibliography and Additional Reading section for further research.

### Appendixes

- **Chronological List** arranges all documents by year.
- **Web Resources** is an annotated list of websites that offer valuable supplemental resources.
- **Bibliography** lists helpful articles and books for further study.

### Contributors

Salem Press would like to extend its appreciation to all involved in the development and production of this work. The essays have been written and signed by scholars of history, humanities, and other disciplines related to the essays' topics. Without these expert contributions, a project of this nature would not be possible. A full list of contributor's names and affiliations appears in the front matter of this volume.

## Editor's Introduction

During the 1960s Americans became increasingly outspoken in their demands for democratization and other basic changes to the American system. African Americans drew on their nascent protest movement in the late 1950s to expand their fight for equality. Members of other ethnic minorities, as well as women and young people, became more active in order to advance causes important to them. So did environmentalists, antiwar activists, consumers, and, perhaps surprisingly, political conservatives. That is, even as liberals favoring social reform gained strength in all branches of the federal government, a broad swath of the American public—a “silent majority,” as Richard Nixon dubbed them near the end of the decade—continued to adhere to more traditional values. And a small but vocal group of conservatives pushed for sharply limiting the reach of government.

### **A Reform Effort Takes Root**

In the congressional elections of 1958, Democrats won a lopsided victory as voters looked to a revival of liberalism in the waning years of the Eisenhower administration, partly as a way to escape the minor recession that was then affecting the economy. These voters were confident in the ability of the federal government to offer solutions to social and economic problems. Resisting Republican efforts to curtail government action and spending, liberals in Congress, including Senator John F. Kennedy, worked with Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson to begin tackling the problems of unemployment, unequal schools, and lack of affordable health care for the elderly. At the same time, calls for changes in the area of race relations continued to be met with strong resistance from white Southern legislators and their constituents. Earlier, President Eisenhower himself, no firm believer in civil rights goals, had to use the US Army to enforce a court order for the desegregation of schools in Little Rock, Arkansas (1957). He also signed modest voting rights measures (1957, 1960) into law.

In 1960 John F. Kennedy was elected president, narrowly defeating Richard Nixon. Kennedy sought to use the presidency to advance liberal social and economic reforms even as he understood the need to satisfy his Republican opponents—for example, by reducing taxes and maintaining a US military presence in Indochina,

where North and South Vietnam were at odds. Ultimately, however, Kennedy's domestic accomplishments were not extensive because his time in office was cut short by his assassination in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. (The shooter, Lee Harvey Oswald, is considered by most authorities to have acted alone, but conspiracy theorists, then as now, have refused to accept that conclusion.) Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon Johnson, took his place in the White House and continued to promote reform programs favored by liberals. Johnson obtained passage of unemployment measures and civil rights legislation that Kennedy, in his time, had promoted. Johnson launched a “war on poverty” that entailed research into the issue and led to a variety of remedial efforts, none of which, in the end, proved very effective.

By the time of the 1964 presidential election, Johnson had impressed a wide enough segment of the American populous to be returned to office—in a landslide. He was aided in his victory by the relatively narrow appeal of his Republican rival, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, who held conservative views that many, even many Republicans, found too extreme. One Goldwater supporter, Ronald Reagan, nevertheless came to national prominence by speaking on the Senator's behalf. The election results served to strengthen the Democrats' hold on Congress, allowing Johnson to move ahead with his reform programs. In 1965 Johnson realized a string of major legislative aims, including Medicare for the elderly, federal aid to education, and comprehensive civil rights and voting rights laws that greatly aided Southern blacks.

### **Continuation of the Cold War—and Vietnam**

Foreign affairs occupied much of Kennedy's agenda and then Johnson's as well, especially after 1965. It was certainly at the top of the agenda in the Nixon administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Kennedy sought to expand America's influence in the world, based on the country's strong economy, technological sophistication, and vibrant form of government. Kennedy believed in the policy of containment with respect to Communism. He expanded foreign aid programs and increased missile and bomber forces within the US military. He also launched a space program with the goal of eventually landing an astronaut on the moon.

Before all that, however, in one of his first major decisions as president, Kennedy approved an Eisenhower administration plan to topple the pro-Communist leader Fidel Castro in Cuba by means of a small-scale military invasion of the island nation. The disastrous Bay of Pigs operation (April 1961) might easily have derailed his presidency, yet Kennedy managed successfully to downplay its import and effects. In any case, by August of the same year, a continent away, a wall was going up in Berlin that divided the eastern (Communist) and western (Democratic) halves of the city. This was potentially a far more volatile situation, and Kennedy made it clear that he opposed the wall. Then, in what was surely the most tension-filled moment of the Cold War, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev took steps in October of 1963 to establish a nuclear missile base in Cuba, only to be checked by Kennedy and pressed to return the weaponry to Russia. (Kennedy, in turn, agreed not to invade Cuba and, behind the scenes, to expedite the scheduled removal of some outdated US missiles in Turkey.) The Cuban Missile Crisis proved a spectacular success for Kennedy, both diplomatically and politically. Subsequently, Kennedy spoke (June 1963) to a welcoming crowd in West Berlin, ensuring them that he would never allow the Soviets to take over their part of the city. And Berliners, and the rest of the world, believed him.

Meanwhile, America's role in South Vietnam, a country that had received US support since the French withdrew in 1954, became a military role, in part at least, when Kennedy sent in 11,000 advisers and Special Forces trainers in 1963. This was followed by a large-scale military build-up under Johnson beginning in 1965, after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1964) authorized presidential action in response to a largely trumped up naval incident involving US and North Vietnamese vessels. As American troops and materiel poured into Vietnam and caused vast disruptions in all spheres of life, the casualty figures grew and tensions inside the country intensified. The 1968 Tet Offensive, even though a loss for the Communists, severely challenged the US military presence and emboldened the opposition in both the North and the South. At home in the United States, the Vietnam War served to unravel a nation already suffering through racial and generational conflicts. Although some Americans strongly supported the war, protests mounted, particularly on college campuses.

### **Race, Resistance, and Reaction**

The struggle for black freedom in the 1960s relied on the method of nonviolent direct action, at least initially. Boycotts, sit-ins, and marches, some of them led by a young clergyman named Martin Luther King Jr., had the effect of drawing attention to the cause and advancing the goal of desegregation, even as Southern whites who opposed civil rights lashed out. The 1963 March on Washington represented a milestone in the evolution of this movement, serving to highlight the work of various black leaders and groups such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Congress of Racial Equality. The march, and the movement in general, contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Many blacks, however, remained dissatisfied. Rioting erupted in a number of urban black neighborhoods between 1964 and 1968, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, and Newark. A Black Power movement emerged that challenged the principles of nonviolence and political acquiescence, demanding instead black control of black communities and calling for confrontation with the white power structure. Rioting and Black Power demonstrated that much remained to be done to address black poverty and inequality. Although school desegregation and black participation in politics had improved significantly as a result of the civil rights movement, major discrepancies along racial lines continued to exist. In response, the Black Panthers, a black nationalist group founded in Oakland, California, in 1966, called for revolution by militant means, if necessary, along with self-help and community control. A number of Black Panthers died in police shootouts and others were imprisoned. For his part, Martin Luther King Jr., like Kennedy before him, fell victim to an assassin's bullet in April 1968. (Once again the gunman, a white ex-convict, acted alone.)

Persons of other racial or ethnic backgrounds spoke out in the 1960s, as well. American Indians and Latinos considered themselves victims of discrimination in much the same way that African Americans did. These groups also took the route of protest and confrontations with the authorities, as had African Americans. Some remedial legislation was eventually forthcoming from Washington.

The civil rights movement also contributed to the rise of a women's movement in the 1960s, led by inspiring activists and demonstrating that protest and provo-

cation could be successful tools in attaining a goal. The women's movement sought to challenge traditional conceptions of women's status in American life. Although it encountered some resistance from traditionalists, the movement effectively achieved change in such areas as job access, liberalization of abortion laws, and increased political participation. Near the end of the decade, an emerging gay and lesbian rights movement borrowed from and expanded on the women's and civil rights movements to make its own case for tolerance.

Perhaps the largest protest movement of the 1960s, however, was the antiwar movement aimed at US involvement in Vietnam. Based largely on college campuses, the antiwar movement combined a generalized hostility toward "establishment" institutions as well as the traditionalist mindset associated with the prior generation. "Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" became a rallying cry for 60s youth. One influential political voice in the first half of the decade came from the group Students for a Democratic Society, which sought participatory democracy. At the time, antiwar activism was primarily spontaneous and local, and only occasionally produced large-scale demonstrations in the nation's capital. Civil disobedience was a dominant strategy, as was the continued cultivation of countercultural symbols and activities, some of which were designed to make news while others were intended to affect public opinion and influence political leaders. More radical groups, such as the Weathermen (or Weather Underground), employed violent means to make their point; while other, somewhat more conventional groups, like Vietnam Veterans Against the War, used popular appeals and legislative pressure. Although loathed by the mainstream "silent majority" of the nation, the antiwar demonstrators and the youth counterculture had a profound impact on the course of the war and on American society in general.

### Decade's End

Despite the protests, the Vietnam War raged. In 1968, a presidential election year, saw the assassination of one of the Democratic frontrunners, Robert F. Kennedy, as well as an unruly Democratic National Convention in Chicago, during which Hubert Humphrey was eventually named as the party's nominee. Richard Nixon, the Republican candidate, won the election with more than twice the electoral college votes received by Humphrey but only .7 percent more of the popular vote. (The independent segregationist can-

didate George Wallace garnered 13.5 percent of the vote in 1968.) By then the war was causing increasing difficulties for the United States on the international scene and was a source of inflation at home. Although a long-time anti-Communist, Nixon was also a political realist who, together with his foreign affairs aide Henry Kissinger, understood the value of bringing the war to a close. A phased withdrawal of American troops was announced soon after Nixon took office, even as the administration continued heavy bombing activities in North Vietnam and the covert bombing of neighboring Cambodia. Nixon visited South Vietnam in mid-1969, and, amid continuing demands at home for an immediate pullout, shortly thereafter implemented the policy of "Vietnamization," or the replacement of US forces with Vietnamese forces. It was part of a larger effort by Nixon and Kissinger to adjust to new realities in international affairs—in particular, to play China and Russia off of each other. Even so, a formal end to US involvement in Vietnam would not come until early in 1973.

The meaning of the 1960s has been endlessly debated and marks something of a political divide to this day: those favoring the liberalism, activism, and cultural exploration of the era see the 1960s as a high water mark for progressive politics and a promise of what the future could hold; those put off by that same history, on the other hand, see the decade as one responsible for a defilement of American values, a turn toward anarchy and irrationality, and a loss of confidence. Ultimately, neither interpretation is completely "right" or "wrong." Rather, the historical truth of the matter holds parts of both views. Our understanding of the 1960s, moreover, will likely continue to evolve as the American nation itself evolves over time.

*Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD*

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## ■ EO 10924: Establishment of the Peace Corps

**Date:** March 1, 1961

**Author:** John F. Kennedy

**Genre:** legislation

### Summary Overview

John F. Kennedy, then a senator from Massachusetts, first came up with the idea of the Peace Corps in the last days of the 1960 presidential campaign. On October 14, 1960, at 2 a.m., in a speech to students at the University of Michigan, Senator Kennedy asked how many of them would be willing to work internationally in the service of the United States by serving in developing countries. The students responded enthusiastically and submitted a petition with hundreds of signatures of those who were ready to serve abroad. Kennedy's inspirational call to service continued throughout his campaign, and the nation as a whole also responded enthusiastically, with thousands of letters arriving from citizens willing to dedicate years of their lives to serving in developing countries. In his inaugural address in January 1961, President Kennedy once again famously called on the nation to "ask what you can do for your country." An executive order established the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, with Kennedy's brother-in-law, R. Sargent Shriver, leading the organization. Though the Peace Corps was a service organization, it was also meant to serve as a deterrent to Communist expansion, and aid and workers from the United States were to help developing nations to resist overtures from the Soviet Union and its allies.

### Defining Moment

When John F. Kennedy was elected president on November 8, 1960, the United States had been involved in a protracted Cold War with the Soviet Union for over a decade. The Cold War was a direct result of World War II, which had essentially ended the US belief that the best policy in international affairs was to remain isolated and neutral, positions that had been popular at the beginnings of both world wars. American public opinion and policy turned to a greatly expanded role in international affairs, and the president's influence and power over foreign policy steadily grew. The drivers

for this were largely the rise of aggressive Communism at the end of the war and the inability of a devastated European economy to recover on its own. US relations with the Soviet Union, an ally during the war, deteriorated rapidly, and another ally, Winston Churchill, had warned that there was an "Iron Curtain" drawing closed between Eastern and Western Europe. The ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States defined the next four decades in world history, as both sides endeavored to block the expansion and influence of the other.

The enormous destructive capacity of first nuclear and then thermonuclear technology was held by both the United States and the Soviet Union, and the two superpowers also possessed the rocket technology to fire weapons across the world. In proxy wars across the globe, the United States supported anti-Communist forces at war with pro-Communist forces aided by the Soviet Union and China. Though the United States and the Soviet Union did not ever directly confront each other in battle, the decades after World War II were marked by opposing military coalitions, the nuclear arms race, international maneuvering, spying, and propaganda efforts. Economic aid was used to leverage support for one side or the other. Though Kennedy believed that his administration would bring a new perspective to the fraught relationship with the Soviet Union, he also believed that the interests of the United States and international democracy would be well served by foreign aid and service around the globe. Just before the 1960 presidential election, Kennedy pointed out that the Soviet Union "had hundreds of men and women, scientists, physicists, teachers, engineers, doctors, and nurses . . . prepared to spend their lives abroad in the service of world Communism." The United States needed to demonstrate the same commitment to world democracy.

### Author Biography

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, on May 29, 1917. He was the second of nine children in a prominent Irish Catholic family. His father, Joseph P. Kennedy, was a successful banker who also served as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission and as the American ambassador to Great Britain. Kennedy attended the Choate School and graduated from Harvard University in 1940, joining the Navy after college. In 1943, he was seriously injured when a Japanese destroyer sunk his PT boat, but he famously helped to rescue the survivors. After returning

from war, he served in the US House of Representatives for six years and was elected to the US Senate in 1953. In 1955, he wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Profiles in Courage*. In 1960, he became the first Roman Catholic president of the United States and the youngest in US history. While in office, Kennedy took action on civil rights, combated poverty, and founded the Peace Corps. He also narrowly avoided confrontations with the Soviet Union in Berlin and Cuba. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Mutual Security Act of 1954, 68 Stat. 832, as amended (22 U.S.C. 1750 et seq.), and as President of the United States, it is hereby ordered as follows:

**SECTION 1.** Establishment of the Peace Corps. The Secretary of State shall establish an agency in the Department of State which shall be known as the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps shall be headed by a Director.

**SEC. 2.** Functions of the Peace Corps. (a) The Peace Corps shall be responsible for the training and service abroad of men and women of the United States in new programs of assistance to nations and areas of the world, and in conjunction with or in support of existing economic assistance programs of the United States and of the United Nations and other international organizations.

(b) The Secretary of State shall delegate, or cause to be delegated, to the Director of the Peace Corps such of the functions under the Mutual Security Act of 1954, as amended, vested in the President and delegated to

the Secretary, or vested in the Secretary, as the Secretary shall deem necessary for the accomplishment of the purposes of the Peace Corps.

**SEC. 3.** Financing of the Peace Corps. The Secretary of State shall provide for the financing of the Peace Corps with funds available to the Secretary for the performance of functions under the Mutual Security Act of 1954, as amended.

**SEC. 4.** Relation to Executive Order No. 10893. This order shall not be deemed to supersede or derogate from any provision of Executive Order No. 10893 of November 8, 1960, as amended, and any delegation made by or pursuant to this order shall, unless otherwise specifically provided therein, be deemed to be in addition to any delegation made by or pursuant to that order.

JOHN F. KENNEDY  
THE WHITE HOUSE,  
March 1, 1961.

### Document Analysis

Executive Order 10924 establishes the structure and administration of the Peace Corps. The first section of the order states that this will be an agency of the State Department, headed by a director. When the order was given, President Kennedy had already given his brother-in-law, R. Sargent Shriver, the directorship of the Peace Corps Task Force, which had studied the best way to

turn Kennedy's vision of an international service agency into reality. The second section of the order describes the function of the Peace Corps, which is to be the training of men and women who will then serve internationally, alongside existing economic aid programs administered by the United States and/or the United Nations. The director of the Peace Corps is to be given the appropriate amount of authority, as detailed in the

Mutual Security Act of 1954. The Mutual Security Act allowed for funds to be spent on international aid on a massive scale, and it gave the president and the secretary of state specific authority in determining how these funds would be allocated. The Peace Corps would be financed by funds made available to the State Department as well, at least initially.

The final section of this executive order deals with its relationship to Executive Order 10893, signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower just before he left office. This previous executive order clarified the chain of authority when determining and administering international aid funds. As Kennedy's order denotes, the Peace Corps would not supersede that structure, but be an addition to it.

### Essential Themes

On March 1, 1961, Executive Order 10924 established the Peace Corps, which became one of the greatest legacies of Kennedy's three short years in office. Shriver accepted the appointment as its first director. The Peace Corps received a flood of applications—more, according to Shriver, than any other government agency. Shriver began traveling abroad to build international support for his new agency and lost no time getting the first Peace Corps volunteers into training. By June 1961, the first teams of volunteers destined for Tanganyika (part of modern-day Tanzania) and Colombia began their training, and by the end of that month, the agency had eleven thousand completed applications. The Peace Corps held information and training sessions at colleges and universities throughout the country. Once accepted, volunteers were sent into field training in remote areas of the United States and Puerto Rico.

In order for the Peace Corps to become a permanent agency, it needed both the approval of Congress and permanent funding. Despite its popularity among young people, the Peace Corps was not universally applauded by lawmakers. Some believed it to be a waste of money and doubted the impact that volunteers could make in developing countries. Nevertheless, in September 1961, Congress passed Public Law 87-293, permanently establishing the Peace Corps.

President Kennedy was particularly fond of the Peace Corps, and its volunteers, known as “Kennedy's kids,” were welcomed to the White House on several occasions. By 1966, the end of Shriver's tenure as director, the Peace Corps had programs in fifty-five countries and more than 14,500 volunteers.

—Bethany Groff Dorau, MA

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