



JFK: A Presidency Revealed

More than forty years after his assassination, John F. Kennedy remains a towering figure in American life and politics. From his inaugural speeches and his meeting with the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev to the Cuban missile crisis and the standoff over integration at the University of Mississippi, he presided over a nation committed to democratic leadership but threatened by external forces and unresolved divisions at home. *JFK: A Presidency Revealed* shows that like the nation he served, he was a flawed giant. This special presentation traces key events in his life and career. Family members, associates, and historians offer personal and compelling glimpses into the life of this influential President.

CURRICULUM LINKS:

JFK: A Presidency Revealed can be used in history, politics, and social studies classes. This program is appropriate for middle and high school students.

OBJECTIVES:

After viewing this program, students should be able to identify John F. Kennedy as the leader of the United States between 1961 and 1963, and discuss the following topics: Kennedy's strengths and weaknesses as a leader; the Cold War and U.S. foreign policy in the 1960s; and the U.S. government's attitude toward and relationship with the Civil Rights movement.

STANDARDS:

JFK: A Presidency Revealed fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12: chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretations.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

- Discuss the background of the Cold War. When was it fought and how? What issues lay at the center of the conflict?
- Locate the United States, Cuba, Europe, and the Soviet Union on a globe or in an atlas. Also, locate the German city of Berlin. Where was the Cold War-era line dividing West and East Germany?
- Discuss the images that come to mind about JFK from popular culture, films, etc. Make a list of ten ideas to review after discussing *JFK: A Presidency Revealed*.

CRITICAL VIEWING QUESTIONS:

- JFK's White House was commonly known as "Camelot." What did this refer to, and what did this nickname say about the administration? Was it a positive or negative description? Why?
- What illnesses did JFK suffer from? How did this affect, and not affect, the way he sought elective office and pursued power? Why did he go to such great lengths to keep it a secret?
- JFK came from a famous and powerful political family. How did he benefit from family connections in his rise to power? How active a role did family members, such as his brother Robert and wife Jacqueline, play in his presidential administration?
- Three important milestones in the history of space exploration took place during the Kennedy administration. What were they, and what did Kennedy say about them? Why do you think the issue was so important to JFK and to the United States?
- While still a Senator, JFK said, "All of the things that you become interested in doing, the President can do and the Senate cannot, particularly in the area of foreign policy." What did he mean by this, and how accurate did it turn out to be?
- JFK's administration relied greatly on the advice of specialized experts drawn from universities and other places—"the best and the brightest," to advise key decisions about foreign and domestic policy. What kind of relationship did he have with these advisors? Did it help or hinder him as he made important decisions?
- Who was James Meredith? Why and how did his attempt to enter the University of Mississippi trigger a national crisis in 1962? What was JFK's response, and what did it reveal about his relationship with the civil rights movement and southern politicians over the course of his presidency? Why might JFK have been especially sensitive to press coverage about this subject outside of the U.S.?
- How would you describe the Kennedy administration's relationship with the press, specifically in terms of major scandals such as the Bay of Pigs invasion? How did it change over time? How can we compare it with more recent administrations, such as that of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- Some critics have argued that despite the mythic status of the Kennedy White House and its emphasis on decisive leadership, his presidency was filled more with statements of principles and photo opportunities than with concrete initiatives to address long-neglected domestic issues such as poverty and inequality. How would JFK respond, and what priorities did he bring to his role as President? What did he believe was the essence of good leadership?

- JFK's presidency took place at a time when many Americans believed that their country and its vital interests were under serious threat of an attack from abroad. How did JFK take advantage of this? How did it limit the kinds of actions he could take, and how did it influence important decisions about international involvements, such as the Vietnam conflict? How does JFK's handling of the Cold War crisis compare with President George W. Bush's handling of the attacks against the United States in 2001?
- JFK was famous for issuing ultimatums to the Soviets and negotiating at the raw edge of nuclear confrontation. Yet on some occasions, such as the Communists' construction of the Berlin Wall, he made the decision not to intervene. How did he choose his battles? How did he believe the United States could show the needed amount of strength without taking too great a risk of provoking a disastrous war with the Soviet Union?
- How did the U.S. and Soviet Union go from being working allies against Hitler to bitter rivals at the time of JFK? Create a timeline of key developments in the history of the Cold War between the mid 1940s and 1960.

VOCABULARY TERMS:

Addison's Disease
 Alan Shepard
 Bay of Pigs
 Berlin Wall
 Checkpoint Charlie
 Cuban Missile Crisis
 Embargo
 Freedom Rides
 James Meredith
 Lyndon B. Johnson
 Nikita Khrushchev
 Segregation
 U2
 Vienna Summit

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES:

- Draw two parallel timelines, one charting major international events during JFK's presidency and one charting events within the U.S. Rate each event on a scale of one to three, with three being the most intense or important. What do these concurrent timelines reveal? What don't they? This activity can be done together as a class, individually, or with the class broken into three groups (each one in charge of a different part of the timeline).
- Divide the class into several groups and have each choose a major speech by John F. Kennedy. Each group should research and analyze the speech and then recite it (or key portions of it, if time is limited) to the rest of the class. Presentations should begin with an explanation that will include information such as: where, when, and to whom the speech was originally given, a summary of the major events that came immediately before and after the speech, and if possible the reaction to the speech in major newspapers and magazines. After

the presentation, the class should come to their own conclusions: what was JFK's goal in giving the speech? Did he communicate this directly or indirectly? Do you think that he was successful?

- Divide the class into two groups and stage a recreation of the 1960 presidential debates, with one group representing Richard Nixon and the other John F. Kennedy. Have students define key issues such as the U.S.'s stance versus the Soviet Union, domestic policy, and each candidate's vision for the future, and assign small research projects to support their case.

RESOURCES - WEBSITES:

The website of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum is an established source for biographical information about Kennedy and his family, and offers full texts of his major speeches.

<http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/>

NASA website about the Apollo project and the Kennedy's decision to "go to the moon."

<http://history.nasa.gov/moondec.html>

One California secondary school's summary of Kennedy and the Civil Rights movement:

http://powayusd.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/sonline/worddoc/kennedy_and_civil_rights.htm

The Jackson Sun, a newspaper in Mississippi, produced this timeline of the Civil Rights Movement

http://www.jacksonsun.com/civilrights/sec1_timeline.shtml

Eyes on the Prize: The Civil Rights Struggle, 1954 to 1965, produced by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1992/1/92.01.03.x.html>

A brief history of the Berlin wall, including maps

http://www.plhs.esu3.org/hs/student/apspr00/jfk/JFK_Site/historyofwall.htm

A timeline produced in the United Kingdom of key events in the Cold War.

<http://learningcurve.pro.gov.uk/coldwar/G4/timeline.htm>

RESOURCES - BOOKS:

- Benjamin C. Bradlee, *Conversations with Kennedy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975, repr. 1984)
- John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964)
- Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. 2003)
- Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali. *One Hell of a Gamble: Krushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: Norton, 1997)
- Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993)