



HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY 1109

CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

CONTENTS

I. AMERICA IN THE 1960s	2
America in the 1960s: Part 1	3
America in the 1960s: Part 2	7
The International Scene of the 1960s.....	10
II. AMERICA IN THE 1970s	16
America in the 1970s: Part 1	17
America in the 1970s: Part 2	20
The International Scene of the 1970s.....	23
III. AMERICA IN THE 1980s AND 1990s	30
America in the 1980s: Part 1	31
America in the 1980s: Part 2	34
America in the 1990s: Part 3	38
IV. THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE 1980-PRESENT.....	44

Author:	Alpha Omega Staff
Editor:	Alan Christopherson M.S.
Illustrations:	Alpha Omega Staff



Alpha Omega Publications®

804 N. 2nd Ave. E., Rock Rapids, IA 51246-1759

© MM by Alpha Omega Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.

LIFEPAC is a registered trademark of Alpha Omega Publications, Inc.

All trademarks and/or service marks referenced in this material are the property of their respective owners. Alpha Omega Publications, Inc. makes no claim of ownership to any trademarks and/or service marks other than their own and their affiliates', and makes no claim of affiliation to any companies whose trademarks may be listed in this material, other than their own.

HISTORY 1109

CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

The United States of America reached its 200th birthday in 1976 and thirteen years later celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Constitution. These milestones came amid decades of change. Technology put humans on the moon and gave us the ability to destroy our planet. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union alternated between icy coolness and thaw until it ended in the 1990s. America was torn apart by an overseas war and its own moral drift. The strong economy of the post-World War era was challenged by inflation and recession. It is these modern decades of change which you will study in this unit.

The history of any contemporary subject is always incomplete. Many of the issues and problems discussed in this unit are unresolved. Many will be the issues you and your friends will debate in your adult years. Contemporary history is where the stream of life that began with Adam touches you. Eventually, you will be a part of the history of America as it goes beyond your life into the future.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAAC®.

When you have finished this LIFEPAAC, you should be able to:

1. Describe, compare, and contrast the domestic policies of the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.
2. Describe, compare, and contrast the foreign policies of the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.
3. Trace the development of United States foreign policy from the cold war diplomacy of the 1960s to the diplomacy of détente.
4. Explain what actions were taken by black people to achieve social, political, and economic equality after 1954.
5. List the outstanding contributions of the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.
6. Outline United States involvement in the Vietnam War.
7. Describe the significance of the Watergate scandal for the nation, especially the way in which it tested the United States system of government.
8. Describe, compare, and contrast the domestic policies of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations.
9. Describe, compare, and contrast the foreign policies of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations.
10. Outline United States progress in space exploration.
11. List the outstanding contributions of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations.
12. Trace changes in United States foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.

Survey the LIFEPAAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

I. AMERICA IN THE 1960s

The United States in the 1960s was a nation of turbulence. Black Americans organized to challenge segregation laws and work for civil rights. Young Americans staged protests against the Vietnam War and the **draft**. America lost a President, a Presidential candidate and a civil rights leader to assassination. Internationally, this was the decade of the Vietnam War, America's longest and most controversial conflict. America remained committed to the policy of **containment** first established by President Eisenhower. Conflicts with Communism dominated American foreign policy as the Cold War continued.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Describe, compare, and contrast the domestic policies of the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.
2. Describe, compare, and contrast the foreign policies of the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.
3. Trace the development of United States foreign policy from the cold war diplomacy of the 1960s to the diplomacy of détente.
4. Explain what actions were taken by black people to achieve social, political, and economic equality after 1954.
5. List the outstanding contributions of the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

draft	To conscript for military service
containment	U.S. policy to keep communism restricted to where it already existed
civil rights	The rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution and the law, especially the protection of those for minorities
segregation	Separated from the majority
command module	The section that held the astronauts in Mercury to Apollo space ships
quarantine	A state of enforced isolation

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used.

AMERICA IN THE 1960s: PART 1

THE NATIONAL SCENE

The Kennedy administration. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the youngest man to be elected President of the United States, was inaugurated on January 20, 1961. Kennedy was the son of a wealthy businessman. He had a degree from Harvard University and was decorated for bravery for his service in the navy during World War II. At the time of his election to the Presidency, he was serving as a Senator from his home state of Massachusetts.

Kennedy's youth, wealth, good looks and poise gave an air of royalty to the Presidency. His tenure in office was often referred to as "Camelot" (a reference to the mythical court of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table). His public appearance served him well in the 1960 campaign against Vice President Richard Nixon. The campaign involved the very first televised debates between the national candidates. Kennedy shone against the more awkward and less handsome Nixon. This public image became forever locked in the public mind when Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963.

In his inaugural address, he reiterated that America would do anything to assure that liberty remained. His famous line, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," was the beginning of Kennedy's domestic program which he termed the "New Frontier." Very few of his proposals were actually passed by the Congress, although many were later passed under the Johnson Administration. Congress did approve an increase in the minimum wage and granted the President more power to reduce tariffs. His proposals for **civil rights** reforms bogged down in the Congress until after his death.

One success in Kennedy's program was the Peace Corps. This was a group of American volunteers sent to underdeveloped nations as teachers, agricultural advisors, technicians and mechanics. The program sent thousands of young people abroad to help other nations raise their standard of living. It continues to be a successful program as of the early 2000s.

One of Kennedy's greatest domestic achievements was the push he gave the American space program. In April of 1961 a Soviet cosmonaut became the first person to orbit the earth. On May 25, 1961 Kennedy challenged America to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Congress approved funding for the program and America's Cold War competitive spirit did the rest. Kennedy lived to see the first steps toward the moon. His death made the challenge almost a sacred trust to many Americans.

The promise and potential of Kennedy's administration abruptly and tragically came to an end in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. President Kennedy, accompanied by his wife, Jacqueline, and Vice President and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson flew to Dallas, Texas. While traveling in an open limousine from the airport, President Kennedy was shot in the head and neck by a sniper. Governor John Connally, riding in the car with President and Mrs. Kennedy, was critically wounded in the back. Kennedy was rushed to the hospital immediately and doctors worked frantically to save the President's life; however, he died without ever regaining consciousness. After returning to the airport and boarding the Presidential plane, Vice President Lyndon Johnson—flanked by his wife and Jackie Kennedy, still wearing her suit stained with her husband's blood—was sworn into office as the country's new President.

Radio and television announcers informed a shocked nation of the President's death. Lee Harvey Oswald, was arrested for the murder. The evidence against him was overwhelming, but to this day many people still believe he was part of a yet unproven conspiracy. These theories are based on the fact that Oswald did not live to testify about what he had done. Two days after the assassination, on November 24th, while Oswald was being transferred from



the Dallas city jail to the county jail. Jack Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner, stepped from the watching crowd and shot Oswald at point-blank range, killing him, while the nation watched on television.

President Kennedy's funeral—which received world-wide radio and television coverage—was attended by over ninety world leaders. The era of Camelot came to an end as the nation mourned the death of its young President.



The civil rights movement. Black Americans had been granted their freedom after the Civil War only to find themselves denied equal rights with their lighter-skinned fellow citizens. The right of black Americans to vote was hampered by literacy tests, poll taxes and intimidation by whites. By the 1960s blacks had long faced **segregation** in schools, public facilities, churches and even hospitals. An 1896 Supreme Court decision permitted the government to establish "separate but equal" facilities for whites and blacks. However, black facilities were invariably of poorer quality than those reserved for whites. In the case *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1955, the Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional in the schools and, by implication, elsewhere. In spite of the ruling, segregation laws remained in effect, especially in the South.

The civil rights movement, which fought to end segregation and inequality, was born the same year as the *Brown vs. Board* decision in Montgomery, Alabama. A black woman named Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat in the front of a city bus to a white man, as city law required. Black activists organized a boycott of the bus system and in 1956 the Supreme Court ordered Montgomery to integrate its public transportation system. The Montgomery boycott was organized and led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. King became the leading figure in the fight for equal rights for black Americans.



Martin Luther King, Jr. was the son of a Baptist pastor. He had a degree in divinity from Crozer Theological Seminary and a doctorate in theology from Boston University. He was himself an American Baptist pastor with a magnificent speaking style that he used to promote the cause of his people. He advocated non-violent resistance against the white authorities that opposed equal rights.

Using Dr. King's methods, blacks all over the South began to challenge segregation laws. They staged "sit-ins" at segregated restaurants, "pray-ins" at segregated churches and "wade-ins" at segregated beaches. They engaged in peaceful protests against racial discrimination and were all too often met with violence. In Birmingham, Alabama, protesters were attacked by fire hoses, dogs and police batons while the nation watched on television—but the violence did not stop them.

The high point of the movement came in August of 1963 at the "March on Washington" to urge more government action, especially passage of the stalled Civil Rights bill proposed by Kennedy. About 200,000 demonstrators peacefully marched and then heard Dr. King deliver a moving speech that defined the moral basis of the civil rights movement. His "I have a dream" speech called for the United States to fulfill the promises of its own Declaration of Independence and recognize that indeed all men are created equal, no matter what their skin color.