**Chapter 26 – The Sixties - Your Questions … My Answers**

Keep in mind: my answers are not the “final, right” answers – there’s always more to learn & explore

**The transfer from Eisenhower to Kennedy.**

One way to get at this question is to watch Eisenhower’s televised farewell speech in 1961 and compare it to JFK’s inaugural speech. You’ll see a sense of their personalities, their approaches to American domestic and foreign policy, and the contrast between Eisenhower’s wise, grandfatherly persona with Kennedy’s fresh youthful push for change. In his inaugural, JFK stated “the torch has been passed” to those born in the 20th century. I’ve posted links to both of those on the course website.

**What mistakes did JFK make? What were some of his shortcomings as president? Why was Kennedy so romanticized?**

Lots of people asked this question, so my remark that Kennedy wasn’t perfect and there’s a lot to critique about his presidency must have surprised many of you. Aside from the Bay of Pigs (a disastrous foreign policy blunder), one could point to Kennedy’s reluctance to get involved in the civil rights movement, which only shifted after the 1963 March on Washington and was still incomplete when he died. He was hardly a champion of black civil rights, though his sympathies were evolving during his presidency. One could also point to his lack of interest in domestic policy – he was far more interested in America’s role in the world and in foreign policy, wasn’t that involved in the day-to-day politics of getting legislation passed; this is in part because he was relatively politically inexperienced when he was elected. He was, after all, the junior Senator from Massachusetts at the time.

One difference between JFK’s time and our own is the degree to which the press / media scrutinize a president’s private life (this is a post-Watergate and especially post-Clinton phenomenon). In JFK’s time the “gentlemen” (and yes, they were all men) of the White House press corps didn’t write about things that might have been rumored or even openly known, like Kennedy’s extramarital affairs. The Kennedys weren’t the picture-perfect happy family they seemed to be. I think the romanticizing comes in part from having his public image “frozen” in time because of his death, and therefore very much defined by the favorable media coverage during his lifetime and around his assassination and funeral.

This is not to say he doesn’t have an admirable legacy in many ways, just to say – it’s best to see him as a flawed leader, not a perfect one.

**Did LBJ run for president after finishing JFK’s term?**

Yes, he ran as the Democratic nominee in 1964. See the election maps I posted to the course website. He was also eligible to run in 1968, but chose not to.

**Why is liberalism such a key concept of the 1960s?**

Because so many of the overlapping, interlocking movements adopted its sentiment or agreed with its basic ideas. One of the best statements of the liberal center is the 1962 manifesto of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the “Port Huron Statement”. Its idealistic faith in what American society could accomplish, in partnership with government, is a clear example of liberalism’s contribution to that decade. I’ve linked to it on the course website, and it’s still relevant reading, even 57 years later. I would even go so far as to say it’s required reading for all college students, whether you agree with it or not.

**How people can be in the Republican Party and still be Democrat?**

I must not have been clear. What I was trying to say was that in the 1960s someone could be a liberal or a conservative and still be in either party. At the time, there were conservative and moderate and liberal Republicans; there were conservative and moderate and liberal Democrats. These days, the parties are much more polarized, meaning that political moderates have fewer options if they want a political party that actually represents them.

**How did South go from being Democratic to Republican and the North go from being Republican to Democratic?**

Great question. This had begun under FDR, and it accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. See the election maps for the raw data on the electoral college voting in the 1960, 1964, 1968, and 1972 elections and you’ll see a dramatic shift. That doesn’t fully explain WHY that happened, but the Democratic Party’s commitment to racial equality and civil rights, which started in 1948, is part of the reason. White people who couldn't agree that blacks should be treated equally under the law left the party and eventually started voting Republican, a pattern that largely continues to this day. That wasn’t the only issue, of course, but it was the main one.

**The role of the counterculture.**

Our textbook identifies the roots of the 1960s counterculture back in the 1950s, with the Beats, the beginnings of a sexual revolution, and social non-conformists. This accelerated in the 1960s, as many people (often young people) openly rejected their parents’ generation’s values and choices, and protested, or “dropped out” of society in some way. Some joined communes or other radical social rearrangements; some used drugs; some joined new religious movements; some resisted the war; etc. While this was only ever a small movement, it loomed large in popular culture, getting a lot of media coverage. And the music of the counterculture was hugely popular and defined that generation, even if not all its fans were challenging society with equal fervor.

**If employment was made equal, how did that lead to the Civil Rights movement?**

The other way around: the civil rights movement led to the creation of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which (finally!) gave the federal government an enforcement mechanism to prosecute those who discriminated. In other words, one (though not the only) achievement of the civil rights movement was that Congress finally made it a federal crime to discriminate in employment, education, and housing loans and therefore defined equal treatment as a Constitutional right.

**Vietnam War – what happened, what is it about?**

Coming up! See rest of Chapter 26 and the first half of Chapter 27

**How the Cold War ended**

Coming up! See Chapter 28