

“Let’s get America moving again...”

John F. Kennedy and Containment

Topic I: The Television Debates

In August 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon ran neck and neck in the presidential polls. The first televised debates in presidential campaign history would change how Americans viewed their candidates. Kennedy and Nixon would participate in what were called the Great Debates; the first debate began with the topic of domestic issues. The young, handsome, and charismatic Kennedy stared into the camera while answering the journalists’ questions giving the appearance of a familiarity or intimacy with those watching the debates on television. He was able to make a connection with the American people. They felt as if he were talking to them personally. Nixon, looking pale and sickly after a two week illness, looked towards the journalists asking the questions and not into the camera. Nixon had missed his opportunity to captivate and engage the American public watching the debates. Polls taken after the first debate showed that those who watched it on television declared Kennedy the victor. “Overnight television had given Kennedy star quality (Bill Kurtis).”

Kennedy not only won the debates, he also won the presidency. He campaigned using the slogan, “Let’s get America moving,” and promises of closing the missile gap. He denounced the Eisenhower and Nixon administration for allowing the communist regime of Fidel Castro to come to power 90 miles from the southern tip of Florida in Cuba. He used the fears of the American people to gain an edge during the elections that would propel him into three years of tumultuous presidential history.

Documents

<http://www.museum.tv/debateweb/html/greatdebate/index.htm>

Questions

1. After watching the debates who do you believe won? Why?
2. Do you think Kennedy won because of the way he looked, his charisma or the way he answered the questions? Explain your answer.
3. What could Nixon have done differently in order to have been more competitive with Kennedy? You have been hired to advise Nixon regarding his next three debates. What suggestions do you have for him regarding improving his debate, his appearance, how he projects himself to his audience?

Topic II: The Bay of Pigs Invasion

In January of 1960, before Kennedy took office, the Eisenhower administration had reached the conclusion that the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, would have to be ousted in order to maintain the security of the United States. In a plan devised by both the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Eisenhower administration, 1400 Cuban exiles known as La Brigada, armed and trained by the CIA, would invade the shores of Cuba. They would attempt to ignite a popular uprising that would overthrow Fidel Castro, the communist leader of Cuba. When Kennedy took office all that remained to enable execution of the plan was Presidential approval.

On April 17, 1961, poorly trained, poorly equipped, and relatively uninformed Cuban exiles invaded Cuba at Bay of Pigs. They would attempt to establish a beachhead and begin a popular uprising that would lead to the toppling of Fidel Castro’s communist regime. These 1400 Cubans were led to believe that U.S. support would soon follow their landing in Cuba. It never came. La Brigada lacked

the ammunition and air support that had been promised to them by the CIA. Navy pilots flying on the outskirts of Cuban airspace, with their identification numbers obscured, could only contemplate why the U.S. was allowing the Cuban exiles defeat when help was so close at hand. U.S. ships, with their numbers also blacked out, lay near the invasion beach completely unable to offer aid to their Cuban colleagues.

Castro's tanks and soldiers held the invading La Brigada in place at the Bay of Pigs' beach head . They were unable to achieve their objectives, and after three days of fighting 1,100 survivors surrendered. After twenty months of negotiations and a payment of 53 million dollars in food and medicine, most of the men were released and sent back to the U. S. President Kennedy accepted full responsibility for the failure of the invasion at Bay of Pigs in Cuba.

Kennedy had refused direct engagement by the U.S. because he feared that Cuban knowledge of U.S. involvement in the invasion would lead to the Soviet Union attempting to overrun West Berlin. Kennedy regarded a Soviet invasion of West Berlin as a possible precursor to WWII. To Kennedy, this was an unacceptable possibility.

Audio

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/#audio>

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/#audio>

Documents

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/19611101.pdf>

<http://www.parascope.com/articles/1296/covertaction01.gif>

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/19630400b.pdf>

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/19640212.pdf>

Questions

1. Did the U.S. have the right to support an invasion of Cuba? Why or Why not? You are a citizen of Cuba. How do you feel about the invasion by the United States supported La Brigada?
2. Did Kennedy make a mistake when he didn't allow air support for La Brigada? Answer this question as if you were a pilot of a plane circling Cuba and could not intercede during the invasion.
3. How do you think the members of La Brigada felt after they were released from prison? Answer this question as if you had just been released from jail. Are you angry at Kennedy? What would have made the invasion a success? How do you feel about the loss of your fellow members of La Brigada?
4. Do you think the people of Cuba became more opposed or more supportive of Castro after the invasion? Why? Choose a side—are you more opposed or more supportive? Why?

Topic III: Vietnam

Under Kennedy's leadership, U.S. military advisors in Vietnam grew from less than 1000 to more than 16,000. However, he refused to commit combat forces. Many believe that Kennedy would have ended U.S. involvement in Vietnam after he was successfully re-elected in 1964. Others, including his brother, Bobby Kennedy, do not believe total withdrawal from Vietnam was an option for the President. Unfortunately, he was assassinated before a definitive answer to that question was realized. Kennedy stated, "In the final analysis it is their war," "...they are the ones who have to win or lose it. We can help them, we can give the equipment, we can send them, our men, out their as advisers, but they have to win it, the people of Vietnam against the communists."

Photos

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/slideshow/viet-show1.htm>

Undelivered Texas Speech

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/speech.txt>

Interview with Bobby Kennedy

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/vietnam.htm>

Documents

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/viet2.htm>

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/viet14.htm>

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/viet21.htm>

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/viet22.htm>

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/viet24.htm>

Question

1. If President Kennedy had lived, what course of action would he have chosen regarding Vietnam? Would he have withdrawn the troops or would he have maintained a status quo, or would he have committed combat troops and more advisers. Write a letter to his brother Bobby stating what he would have done regarding the Vietnam War. Use information from the above links to formulate your thoughts and write your letter.

Topic IV: The Berlin Wall

In August of 1961, East Germany erected a 12 foot wall separating East and West Berlin. Kennedy announced that he was willing to go to war to keep West Berlin free. The wall had been built entirely on the land of East Germany and it gave the appearance of being built to keep East Berliners from leaving. Kennedy felt it wasn't a threat to West Berlin, and so it was allowed to remain as a reminder of the conditions of isolation experienced by those living in West Berlin. It also was a symbol for the Iron Curtain and its inability to allow freedom for its people. Kennedy delivered an emotional speech during his visit to West Berlin. In part he stated, "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words, 'Ich bin ein Berliner.'"

Photos

<http://www.historyplace.com/kennedy/jfkpix/berlin2thp.jpg>

<http://www.historyplace.com/kennedy/jfkpix/berlinthp.jpg>

Audio

<http://www.historyplace.com/sounds/ichbinein.wav>

Documents

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/kennedy.html

Questions (choose one)

1. You are a journalist who has been assigned to cover President Kennedy's speech in Berlin. Write an article about what you see, hear and feel while you are there. Include your ideas on freedom for the people of East and West Berlin and what the building of the wall meant to them.
2. Draw a poster of the event as it occurred. Include the people attending the speech, the wall, Kennedy and anything else that might have occurred during Kennedy's speech.
3. With a partner, compile a list of questions you would like to ask Kennedy after the speech, search for information that would support how he would answer your questions and write a response. Be prepared to present your final product to the class-- Katie Couric/Tom Brokaw will interview President Kennedy.

Topic V: The Cuban Missile Crisis

In October of 1962 U.S. intelligence learned that the Soviet Union was constructing offensive nuclear missile bases in Cuba. On October 16, 1962, John F. Kennedy convened a meeting of his closest advisors to discuss the photos produced by the CIA. At first, the Soviet Union denied the existence of the missiles in Cuba. Aerial photographs showed that the Russians were not telling the truth. On October 22, 1962, Kennedy addressed the nation while condemning the Soviet Union for lying about the emplacement of nuclear missiles on Cuban soil. He ordered a quarantine of Cuba in which he said, "All ships of any kind bound for Cuba from whatever nation or port will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back." He warned Moscow, "It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union." He also called for the "...prompt dismantling and withdrawal of all offensive weapons in Cuba." Declassified documents and audio recordings have shed light on what may have been the most dangerous days in U.S. history.

Photographs

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/photos.htm

Audio

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/audio.htm

Newspaper

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/digitalarchive/index.html>

Documents

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/docs.htm

Website

The Submarines of October <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB75/>

Question

1. You have been chosen to provide the after actions report to President Kennedy. Using the documents and photos from the links above highlight the major moments of the Cuban Missile Crisis and what actions were taken by the U.S. in an attempt to deter war. Choose what you believe were the five most important moments when decisions were made that allowed for both sides to successfully back down without major loss of face. Conclude with a current analysis of relations between the U.S., Soviet Union, and Cuba and what to expect from all of the above in the weeks immediately after the Cuban Missile Crisis was successfully negotiated by all involved. Be prepared to present your findings to the President's Cabinet (teacher and students). PPT, overheads, maps, all media and visuals will be accepted for this project. However, outline your methods and presentation and have it approved prior to beginning this project.