

## Why was Kennedy unsuccessful in changing America?

1. Struggles with Congress
  - a. Progressive from Massachusetts – Could not get votes from Southern Democrats to enact his legislative plans in his New Frontier program, including a major program for the elderly, tax cuts, and civil rights reform. Southern Democrats killed the proposal for a Department of Urban Affairs because they thought Kennedy would appoint an African American as its first secretary.
  - b. Young – did not have a lot of experience dealing with foreign affairs which made him look weak in comparison to other leaders and could have impacted his standing with Congress; he also did not have very much credit in congress in comparison to someone like LBJ, which also contributed to his inability to pass his legislation
2. Women
  - a. Equal Pay Act (1963) – allowed women to sue if they could find proof that their pay was less than that of males. However, the legal path was convoluted and many women affected by pay disparity were unable to pay for the legal proceedings. This meant it was very ineffective to making actual change for women.
  - b. Commission on Women (1961) -This Commission did provide a report that stated that women faced inequalities in daily life, but did not take any hard stance on what was to be done and ultimately resulted in no change.
3. Civil rights
  - a. Executive Order against housing discrimination was not enforced since agencies policed themselves, so those in the south were unlikely to comply with new rules.
  - b. In Freedom Rides, did not want to upset the governor or Southern Democrat voters, so he did not intervene directly and allowed Freedom Riders to be attacked.
  - c. In the riots following James Meredith's integration into Ole Miss, he instructed the National Guardsmen not to fire and attempted to negotiate with the governor instead of taking a more direct stance that would have been controversial but effective. Instead, people and reporters died.
4. Circumstances
  - a. Fear of alienating voters – He bent to the will of the Southern Democrats on many occasions, including his appointment of conservative southern federal judges who were ineffectual in civil rights.
    - i. He also did not want to alienate Protestant voters, which harmed his federal aid for education bill since he did not want to aid Catholic schools.
    - ii. He did not try to pass the Equal Rights Amendment for fear of alienating labor groups who wanted women to be protected versus given equal opportunity. This meant women did not see as much change as they could have.

- b. Death – he was killed before he could oversee the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which would have added a large, historic bill to his legacy. Instead he only had a multitude of smaller acts and executive orders, along with mixed success overseas which did not directly impact America.
5. Conclusion: One may surmise that, during his presidency, Kennedy’s successes were short-lived and his failure to make change was much more rememberable. The economy, recovering from an Eisenhower-era recession, was positively changed only until the Vietnam War started in full, and then it began to falter once more. His major policies were stalled in Congress and he was only able to pass a few small bipartisan bills and executive orders in his short time in the White House. Kennedy accomplished more for the country in his death than in his life; the guilt arisen by his passing allowed LBJ to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and bolstered the Space Race, along with uniting the country.

“Johnson’s presidency created great positive change.” How far do you agree?

- 1. Yes: Civil rights
  - a. 1964 Civil Rights Act: First major legislation since Reconstruction that protected the rights of African Americans. Banned segregation in public facilities and banned employment discrimination on basis of race, gender, or religion.
  - b. Voting Rights Act of 1965: Outlawed discriminatory practices in the south, including literacy tests and poll tax
  - c. 1968 Civil Rights Act: After MLK’s assassination, this bill barred house owners from discriminating against tenants based on race. This allowed African Americans to move to the suburbs.
- 2. Yes: Poverty
  - a. SNAP Food Stamps: Allowed low-income people greater access to food, recirculated money into economy due to higher purchase of goods. \$74 billion
  - b. Higher Education Act of 1965: Strengthened financial assistance to students (work studies, low interest loans, national teacher corps got higher credentials for teachers) \$11.5 million
  - c. Child Nutrition Act of 1965: Established school breakfast and lunch programs, plus milk program to guarantee nutrition. \$3.5 million
  - d. Medicare: Provided new medical care opportunities for those over 65 who may have been unable to support themselves with a job. Expanded into Medicaid, which covered health expenses for those under a certain salary cap
- 3. No: Vietnam
  - a. Americanization: 2.7 million served and got lasting trauma, almost 60,000 died.
  - b. 150 billion, harmed the economy extensively
  - c. Disasters such as My Lai, TET Offensive, Hamburger Hill.
  - d. Soldiers threw away medals (winter soldier investigation 1970, march in Washington 1969)
- 4. No: Vietnam

- a. Walter Cronkite: On his show (most trusted man in America), he stated he could no longer repeat his government's lies. This showed the American people that the govt was untrustworthy
- b. Pete Seager: Song that criticized LBJ for being a big fool in the big muddy
- c. Daniel Ellsberg, Pentagon Papers: Exposed speeches of the president and government were misleading and on field reports countered what officials said. Though this came out during Nixon, many contributions were from Johnson and this had long term impacts
- d. Protest, TV broadcast, public support for Johnson and his programs dropped