

Thinking Beyond the Text

9. Do FDR's four freedoms represent beliefs still held by Americans—beliefs about the world both nationally and internationally? Or do these four freedoms no longer make sense in a world at war with terror?
10. FDR argues that, from the beginning of its existence, America has “been engaged in change—in a perpetual peaceful revolution.” Is his characterization of American history accurate, or do you doubt the pacific and pastoral view of the past that he constructs?

For Writing & Discussion

11. Research the global situation in January of 1941, 11 months and one day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America's formal entrance into the Second World War. Who was at war with whom in January, and what was America's relationship to these other nations? In an essay, explain how the international situation in early 1941 led to FDR delivering this address to Congress.

**JOHN F. KENNEDY**

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) was a naval commander in World War II and a Massachusetts congressman before being elected president of the United States in 1960. Defeating Richard Nixon by a narrow margin, Kennedy, at 43, became the youngest person ever elected to the post. Soon after the inauguration, he kicked off his “New Frontier” domestic program, which included tax reform, action to further civil rights, aid for education, and acceleration of the space program. However, Congress did not pass many of his domestic reform proposals. In 1962, U.S. reconnaissance planes spotted missile bases in Cuba, and Kennedy ordered a blockade of the country and insisted the armaments be removed, leading to several days of tension when the world seemed on the brink of nuclear war before Cuba and the Soviet Union complied. Kennedy was praised for his stance during the crisis. Also during his presidency, Kennedy increased military involvement in South Vietnam, initiated the Peace Corps, and won praise as a civil rights activist by ordering the use of federal troops to quell problems caused by forced school desegregation. Kennedy was shot and killed on November 22, 1963, while riding in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas. The commission created to investigate the assassination found that

Lee Harvey Oswald committed the murder. While his legend has been lessened somewhat over time, he is remembered as a youthful, determinedly idealistic president who strove to make great changes.

This speech was delivered at Kennedy's inauguration on January 20, 1961. At the time, Cold War tensions were increasing, and political divisions in America had begun to harden, as Kennedy's narrow margin of victory showed. In his speech, he called for a new generation of Americans to make their place in the world.

Ask Not What Your Country Can Do for You

∞ Prereading Question

Consider the value Americans place on giving, on supporting one another (and citizens of other nations) in times of need—on September 11, 2001; after the tsunami that devastated parts of southeast Asia in December of 2004; in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. To what degree do you see Americans as a giving, charitable people? Or is the public display of giving in part self-interested as well?

January 20, 1961

Vice President Johnson, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, reverend clergy, fellow citizens, we observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning—signifying renewal, as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans, born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge and more.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do—for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

To those new States whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom—and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

To those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required, not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge—to convert our good words into good deeds in a new alliance for progress—to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.

To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support—to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective—to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run.

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request—that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.

We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.

But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course—both sides overburdened by the cost of modern weapons, both rightly alarmed by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war.

So let us begin anew, remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us. Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce.

Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah—to “undo the heavy burdens . . . and let the oppressed go free.”

And if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavor, not a new balance of power, but a new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved.

All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need—not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation”—a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

Textual Questions

1. JFK opens his address with the statement that “The world is very different now.” Why? What changes have occurred/are occurring in America, at this point, since President Eisenhower took office in January of 1953?
2. How does JFK address his speech to the various nations of the Earth—old and new, free and enslaved? How does he tailor his message to each?
3. Where does JFK most clearly articulate his vision of America at home? Of America in the larger world?

Rhetorical Questions

4. How can JFK's speech be seen as a speech about social justice, both at home and abroad? Which sections of his speech specifically concern themselves with this topic?
5. How/where does JFK use repetition to emphasize some of his points? Which of these uses is most effective?
6. Mark the passages where JFK refers to either his generation of Americans or American history. What purpose does each of these references serve in his argument about America's actions as the nation moves forward? Why appeal to both the current generation and to history?

Intertextual Questions

7. How does JFK's message to the world, beginning in paragraph 3, compare to President Bush's arguments in “We Have Seen the State of Our Union” (in the introduction to this book)?
8. According to JFK, who/what are the “common enemies of man”? How do these “common enemies” compare to those in FDR's “Four Freedoms” (earlier in this chapter)?

Thinking Beyond the Text

9. In his inaugural address, JFK makes references to America's enemies, just as President Bush does in “We Have Seen the State of Our Union.” Do you believe that such warnings are effective in curbing violence? Or are they simply a rhetorical show of force, bark without (necessarily) any bite?