

John F. Kennedy's New Frontier  
(Use with Section 2, textbook pages 695-699.)

In July 1960 the Democratic Convention nominated John F. Kennedy as its candidate for President. In his acceptance speech, Kennedy first used the phrase "the New Frontier," which became the name for his administration's domestic program. Excerpts from his speech follow.

Today our concern must be with [the] future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do. . . .

A technological revolution on the farm has led to an output explosion—but we have not yet learned to harness that explosion usefully, while protecting our farmers' right to full parity income.

An urban population revolution has overcrowded our schools, cluttered up our suburbs, and increased the squalor of our slums.

A peaceful revolution for human rights—demanding an end to racial discrimination in all parts of our community life—has strained at the leashes imposed by timid executive leadership.

A medical revolution has extended the life of our elder citizens without providing the dignity and security those later years deserve. And a revolution of automation finds machines replacing men in the mines and mills of America, without replacing their incomes or their training or their need to pay the family doctor, grocer, and landlord.

There has also been a change—a slip-page—in our intellectual and moral strength . . . a confusion between what is legal and what is right. Too many Americans have lost their way, their will and their sense of historic purpose.

It is a time, in short, for a new generation of leadership—new men to cope with new problems and new opportunities. . . .

We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960s—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats. . . .

But the New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises—it is a set of challenges. . . .

The New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. . . .

I believe the times demand invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be new pioneers on that New Frontier. My call is to the young in heart, regardless of age—to the stout in spirit, regardless of party—to all who respond to the Scriptural call: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed."

For courage—not complacency, is our need today—leadership—not salesmanship. And the only valid test of leadership is the ability to lead, and lead vigorously.

*Quoted in Speeches of the American Presidents, edited by Janet Podell and Steven Anzovin (H. W. Wilson Company, 1988).*

Comprehension

1. According to Kennedy, how had technology changed agriculture and industry in America?

2. How did these changes affect farmers and factory workers?

3. What did Kennedy see as the challenges of the New Frontier?

4. How did Kennedy propose to meet these challenges?