

SSUSH21 – Analyze U.S. international and domestic policies including their influences on technological advancements and social changes during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

c. Describe the impact of television on American culture including the presidential debates (Kennedy/Nixon, 1960), news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, the moon landing, and the war in Vietnam.

Although television predates World War II, it was not commercially feasible until after the production demands of the war subsided. Prior to World War II, radio and print were the dominant media by which news, entertainment, and marketing was delivered. By the late 1950s, **television** had replaced radio. The growth of television was dramatic. From 1939 to 1941, only an estimated 7,000 television sets had been purchased. By 1959, the number of television sets had grown to 67 million. Television had the same effect that radio had on the previous generation. Many Americans watched the same entertainment and news programming regardless of their location, which created a common national culture. Television news coverage impacted political and social events. Four events illustrate how television impacted modern American politics and social culture in the 1960s. The television coverage of the **Presidential debate** between candidates Kennedy and Nixon in 1960, the events of the Civil Rights Movement, reporting from the combat zones of Vietnam, and the moon landing were transformative.

Prior to 1960, Presidential campaigns were limited by time and distance. Candidates tended to go from campaign stop to campaign stop by rail or air. Mass audiences were reached via radio. In the 1960 Presidential campaign between the Republican Richard Nixon and the Democrat John F. Kennedy, four nationally televised debates were held. While the substance of both campaigns was very similar, the candidates were not. Physically, the men were very different. Kennedy was tanned, clean-cut, and physically fit. Nixon was not particularly handsome, prone to excessive sweating, had a perpetual five o'clock shadow, and looked weak after a recent illness. The first debate was broadcast on September 26, 1960. Television accentuated every bit of each candidate's physicality. According to ratings and polls, 74 million viewers watched and most deemed Kennedy to have been the debate's winner. Overnight, the Kennedy campaign picked up momentum as his appearance came across far more favorably than Nixon's. In contrast, voters who had listened to the debate over the radio reported that they felt Nixon had come across as the more experienced and knowledgeable of the two candidates. Television proved that image matters.

The events of the **Civil Rights Movement** were also captured on video for people to see for themselves on television. Nightly news programs provided a regular reminder of the on-going struggle for civil rights in the South. Civil rights leaders used media coverage to illuminate their issues. News footage of attack dogs biting demonstrators or fire hoses blasting children made for dramatic images and caused many viewers to question the equity of segregation laws. One of the most dramatic events broadcast was the Alabama State Patrol's attack of the Selma Marchers, which was shown right before a television drama on the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was broadcast live to a nation-wide audience in 1963, bringing more awareness to the social issue of segregation that had yet to be resolved.

Americans were also fascinated by the ingenuity of the space program, which was soon able to send a **man to the moon**. The lunar module carrying Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon July 20, 1969. The television broadcast showed the astronauts planting an American flag on the moon. The space race between the United States and the Soviet Union was symbolically complete with the planting of the American flag in space. The space race was yet another area where television had an impact on the public. Television news reporters were also imbedded with troops in **Vietnam**. They broadcast nightly from combat zones and involved Americans in what became known as the first "living room war." People were watching the events unfold in Vietnam and also watching the protest movements in the United States on television. It was difficult for the government to convince Americans that victory in the war was eminent when they were seeing otherwise on the nightly news. Television proved it could sway public opinion through the images of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War.

Define

Kennedy/Nixon, 1960 Presidential Debates

Civil Rights Movement

Vietnam War

- 1. What was the impact of television on the Kennedy/Nixon, 1960 Presidential Debate?**
- 2. What was the impact of television on the Civil Rights Movement?**
- 3. What was the impact of television on the Moon Landing?**
- 4. What was the impact of television on the Vietnam War?**
- 5. What were the influence and tactics of civil rights groups?**