

Selected Timeline: Kennedy, Frost, and the Amherst College Class of 1964ⁱ

The focus is on the years 1960-1963

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1874	26 Mar	Robert Frost was born to William Prescott Frost, Jr., and Isabelle Moodie in San Francisco, CA.
1917	29 May	John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) was born to Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., and Rose Elizabeth Fitzgerald in Brookline, MA.
1959	Jan	Castro's revolutionary forces seized power in Cuba, President Batista fled.
	26 Mar	Press conference prior to Frost's 85 th birthday gala. In response to a question regarding the alleged decline of New England, Frost responded, "The next President of the United States will be from Boston. Does that sound as if New England is decaying? ... He's a Puritan named Kennedy. The only Puritans left these days are the Roman Catholics. There. I guess I wear my politics on my sleeve."
	April	JFK letter to Frost: "I just want to send you a note to let you know how gratifying it was to be remembered by you on the occasion of your 85th birthday."
1960	1 May	Gary Powers' U2 spy plane was shot down over USSR.
	Feb	Sit-ins by African-Americans at segregated lunch counters began and spread to 65 cities in 12 southern states.
	7 May	USSR established diplomatic relations with Cuba.
	13 Sept	An Act of Congress, Public Law P.L. 86-747, 74 Stat. 883, awarded Frost a Congressional Gold Medal, "In recognition of his poetry, which has enriched the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world." There apparently was no public award ceremony until JFK took the initiative in March 1962.
	Oct	Martin Luther King (MLK) was arrested in Atlanta, GA. JFK phoned his concern to Coretta Scott King. Robert Kennedy phoned the jurisdictional judge to secure MLK's safe release.
	8 Nov	PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. Popular vote: JFK won by 112, 827 votes, 49.72% to Nixon's 49.55%. Nixon carried 26 states, JFK 22. Electoral vote: JFK 303, Nixon 219. More than 70% of African-Americans voted for JFK and provided the winning edge in several key states.
1961	20 Jan	INAUGURATION. At Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall's suggestion, JFK had invited Frost to be the nation's first inaugural poet. In the glaring sunlight and wind, Frost had difficulty reading the poem he composed for the occasion, <i>Dedication</i> ; instead, he recited <i>The Gift Outright</i> from memory, "The land was ours before we were the land's ..."
	Later	Frost later presented JFK with a manuscript copy of <i>Dedication</i> . Excerpt: "The glory of a next Augustan age, Of a power leading from its strength and pride ... A golden age of poetry and power, Of which this noonday's the beginning hour." JFK's thank-you includes the note: "It's poetry and power all the way!"
	1 Mar	JFK signed the Executive Order that established the Peace Corps and asked his brother-in-law Sargent Shriver to be its first Director.
	17 April	US-backed Cuban rebels landed at the Bay of Pigs and were defeated in three days.

	4 May	First Freedom Ride. Seven blacks and six whites left Washington, DC on two public buses to test Supreme Court ruling that declared segregation in interstate bus and rail stations unconstitutional. In Alabama the Freedom Riders were severely beaten and one of the buses was burned.
	4 June	Vienna Summit. Khrushchev met JFK for discussion of international relations. JFK himself thought the meeting went badly and Khrushchev developed a low opinion of JFK. Kennedy later told New York Times reporter James Reston it was the "roughest thing in my life. He just beat the hell out of me. I've got a terrible problem if he thinks I'm inexperienced and have no guts. Until we remove those ideas we won't get anywhere with him."
	June-Nov	US and Soviet tanks faced off as Soviets constructed the Berlin wall.
	25 Jul	JFK signed bill doubling Federal effort to decrease water pollution.
	Oct	JFK established the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. His sister, Rosemary, was born with intellectual disabilities. His sister-in-law, Eunice Shriver Kennedy, was director of the family's foundation for advocating and supporting the identification of the causes, prevention, and treatment of intellectual disabilities.
	30 Nov	JFK authorized CIA to covertly kill Castro and remove the Communist government from power.
1962	8 Jan	In a Kremlin speech Khrushchev described the US policy he intended to pursue. It became known as the "meniscus speech" because he used the analogy of filling a glass to the rim, forming a meniscus, keeping the enemy on edge about whether it would spill over into nuclear war. He saw this brinkmanship as the only way for the Soviet Union, the weaker superpower, to keep the stronger superpower off balance. This critical speech and other documents were not known to US intelligence agencies and did not become available to historians until finally declassified in 2003.
	26 Mar	JFK presented the Congressional Gold Medal to Frost in a ceremony at the White House.
	13-20 May	Khrushchev decided to place nuclear missiles and bombers in Cuba, according to his memoirs.
	29 May	After meeting a Soviet delegation, Castro decided to accept the missiles and bombers.
	1 June	US installed intermediate-range nuclear ballistic missiles in Turkey targeted at the Soviet Union. The Kremlin feared US intentions because intermediate range missiles at close, fixed sites appeared to be intended for a first strike capability, rather than deterrence. If the missiles were not used first, they would be destroyed within minutes of the beginning of a conventional or nuclear war. The same could be said of the missiles in Cuba.
	23 July	Geneva. Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos attempted to end the civil war by creating a government coalition that included the pro-American, pro-Communist and neutral factions. However, the civil war resumed
	Summer	With JFK's blessing, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall organized a goodwill tour by Frost to the Soviet Union scheduled in September.
	6 Sept	Udall and Frost were invited to meet Khrushchev at his dacha on the Black Sea. Frost was too ill to make the 20-minute drive to the dacha. Neither Udall nor

	Frost knew that Soviet technicians were preparing missile launching sites in Cuba and the missiles were being crated for shipment by sea.
7 Sept	To Udall's surprise, Khrushchev arranged to come to Frost's bedside. The meetings with Udall and Frost lasted for a total of 5 ½ hours. The discussions were cordial, and Khrushchev listened intently to Frost elaborate on how the ideas and deeds of poets and political leaders shape the character of a country. Khrushchev gave explicit messages to each for JFK. Udall later reported that Kennedy's inevitable reaction to the missiles and bombers in Cuba was critical to Khrushchev. Khrushchev was gambling that the missiles would constitute a worldwide strategic breakthrough for the Kremlin, but they might precipitate a nuclear holocaust. Udall reported that after returning to his Moscow apartment, Frost hosted a news conference, and the story in the New York Times the next day accurately reflected the highlights of the Frost-Khrushchev conversation: "Frost and Premier Khrushchev had agreed on the need for rivalry and magnanimity in relations between the two countries."
9 Sept	Sick and exhausted from the 18-hour return flight to the US, Frost wearily blurted out to the reporters at the airport: "Khrushchev said . . . he thought that we're too liberal to fight--he thinks we will sit on one hand and then the other." Both Udall and the interpreter, Frank Reeves, reported that Khrushchev said no such thing, but the Washington Post headline was "Frost Says Khrushchev Sees U.S. as 'Too Liberal' to Defend Itself." When Udall returned to Washington, JFK said curtly, "Why did he have to say that?" There was no further communication from JFK to Frost.
15 Sept	Soviet freighter was photographed transporting missiles to Cuba.
20 Sept	JFK mobilized the National Guard to enable African-American Air Force veteran James Meredith to enroll and take classes at the University of Mississippi, after four unsuccessful attempts by Meredith and a riot that killed two people and injured dozens.
14 Oct	U2 photographed missile sites and nuclear-capable bombers in Cuba.
16 Oct	Most of the members of JFK's Executive Committee of the National Security Council favored a military strike on the bombers and missile sites in Cuba. JFK decided to try a blockade of Cuba before a military attack.
22 Oct	5 pm. Prior to the public broadcast of his plan, JFK briefed Senator Richard Russell (R, GA), Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Russell urged "stronger steps." 7 pm. Kennedy addressed the nation on TV and described the blockade. He also issued a warning: "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."
24 Oct	With US Navy blockade in place, Soviet ships reversed course. US subsequently allowed a few ships not carrying nuclear weapons to pass on to Cuba.
26 Oct	Khrushchev sent private letter to JFK stating that nuclear missiles would be removed from Cuba if US pledged never to invade Cuba.
27 Oct	Khrushchev's second, public letter added that Turkish missiles would have to be removed. Later the same day, Rudolf Anderson's U2 was shot down over Cuba while on a photographic mission.

	28 Oct	A Soviet commander in Cuba, without specific authorization, fired a SAM missile to bring down Col. Rudolf Anderson's U2 that was on a photographic mission. Khrushchev announced they accepted the US offer to never invade Cuba in exchange for removing nuclear weapons from Cuba. The US later removed the missiles in Turkey, but this was not publicly mentioned..
	6 Nov	Midterm Congressional elections. Republicans picked up four seats in the House, but Democrats retained strong majorities in both houses of Congress. In the Senate, Democrats had a net gain of four seats. Gains of liberal Democrats later allowed passage of the Clean Air Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
1963	29 Jan	Frost died of complications from prostate surgery at age 88.
	5 Feb	JFK delivers "Special Message to the Congress on Mental Illness and Mental Retardation" and recommendations for programs for maternity and prenatal care, community mental health centers, research, and special education.
	11 Jun	In a radio and TV address JFK proposed a Civil Rights Act.
	12 Jun	Medgar Evers, African-American Army veteran and Civil Rights leader was assassinated in Jackson, MS by Byron De La Beckwith of the White Citizens' Council, triggering civil rights protests. La Beckwith was not convicted until 1994.
	7 Aug	Patrick Bouvier Kennedy was born to President Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, 5 ½ weeks early. The infant suffered from the No. 1 killer of premature babies at that time, hyaline membrane disease, and died 39 hours after birth.
	24 Oct	JFK signed the Maternal and Child Health and Mental Retardation Planning Amendment to the Social Security Act—the first major legislation to combat mental illness and intellectual disabilities.
	26 Oct	JFK was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws in a Convocation at Amherst College. He then gave what Stewart Udall considered "the most majestic speech of his public career." He spoke of the relationship between poetry and power and of a view shared with Frost that power must be exercised, but wisely—tempered by a moral restraint inspired by the arts and a liberal arts education. He also spoke of the obligation of those "given a running start in life" to serve the public interest. In a very brief second address at the groundbreaking for the Robert Frost Library, he said Frost "... felt very strongly that the United States should be a country of power and force, but should use that power and force wisely." Of the library, JFK said, "... all the young men who come into this library will touch something of distinction in our national life, and, I hope, give something to it."
	31 Oct	In a special ceremony JFK signed legislation (separate from 24 Oct Amendment to the Social Security Act) that provided funding for construction of facilities for research, prevention, care, and treatment of intellectual disabilities.
	22 Nov	On the first swing of his reelection campaign JFK visits Texas, where he had carried both the popular vote (by 2%) and all 24 electoral votes in 1960. He was assassinated in Dallas. That evening Amherst President Calvin Plimpton delivered a brief memorial in Johnson Chapel, concluding, "Let us remember to advantage our late, great President's toughness in mind, body and soul. Let us stand a moment in silence, to honor him; then let us go and do the work he couldn't complete."
1964	June	Graduation of the Class of 1964 and commencement of varied careers.

FIFTY YEARS LATER		
2014	Jan	Amherst 64 alumni continued research and planning for 50 th Reunion. Theme: The World We Inherited; the World We Will Bequeath—and What We Can Still Do About It. Planning teams addressed four areas: The State of Our Democracy, the Environment, Healthcare, and Education.
	30 April— 2 May	Ten Amherst 64 alumni undertook a study trip to Washington DC to investigate the reasons for political dysfunction and what might be done about it.
	28 May— 1 June	50 th Reunion of the Class of 1964. Molly Fowler, documentary filmmaker and wife of deceased classmate, Jack Levine, filmed reunion activities and interviewed class members for a film with the working title <i>Reunion</i> . Over the next four years the working title changed several times (<i>The President and the Poet; The Last Speech; JFK—The Last Speech</i>).
2017	29 May	Official year of celebration of the centenary of JFK's birth began.
2018	6 May	Scheduled release of Amherst64/Northern Light Productions film: <i>JFK—The Last Speech</i> . A companion website, book, and teachers' guide are also planned.

ⁱ Rip Sparks, "Annotated Timeline," *JFK The Last Speech*, Mascot Books, 2018, pp 97-112. Footnotes and references for this Timeline may be found in the book.