

President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Speech

by John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President on January 21, 1961. At age 43, he was the youngest person to be elected President and the first President to be born in the 20th century. Below is part of his inaugural speech.

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.

Questions

Part A: One of the most famous lines from the President's speech is: "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans..."

1. Explain in your own words what he means. What is the torch?

2. How does the metaphor apply to President Kennedy?

Part B: President Kennedy reminds his audience that "those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside."

3. What does the tiger represent? What does "ended up inside" mean?

4. How does it relate to supporting freedom?