

# JOHN F. KENNEDY'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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*John F. Kennedy is still remembered for the idealistic call he sounded in his 1961 inaugural address, condensed below.*

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.

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 success of liberty.

To those nations who would make themselves our adversary [enemy], 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 used.

But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course.

Both sides are overburdened by the cost of modern weapons. Both are rightly alarmed

by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both are racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war.

So let us begin anew.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate [eliminate] 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 [in the Bible] – to “undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free.”

All this will not be finished in the first 100 days, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

Now the trumpet summons us again – not as a call to bear arms – but to a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself.

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.

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.

**Group Discussion:** *What warning does Kennedy have about the dangers of the Cold War and arms race? What does he call on America's enemies and Americans themselves to do?*