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Geography and History Activity

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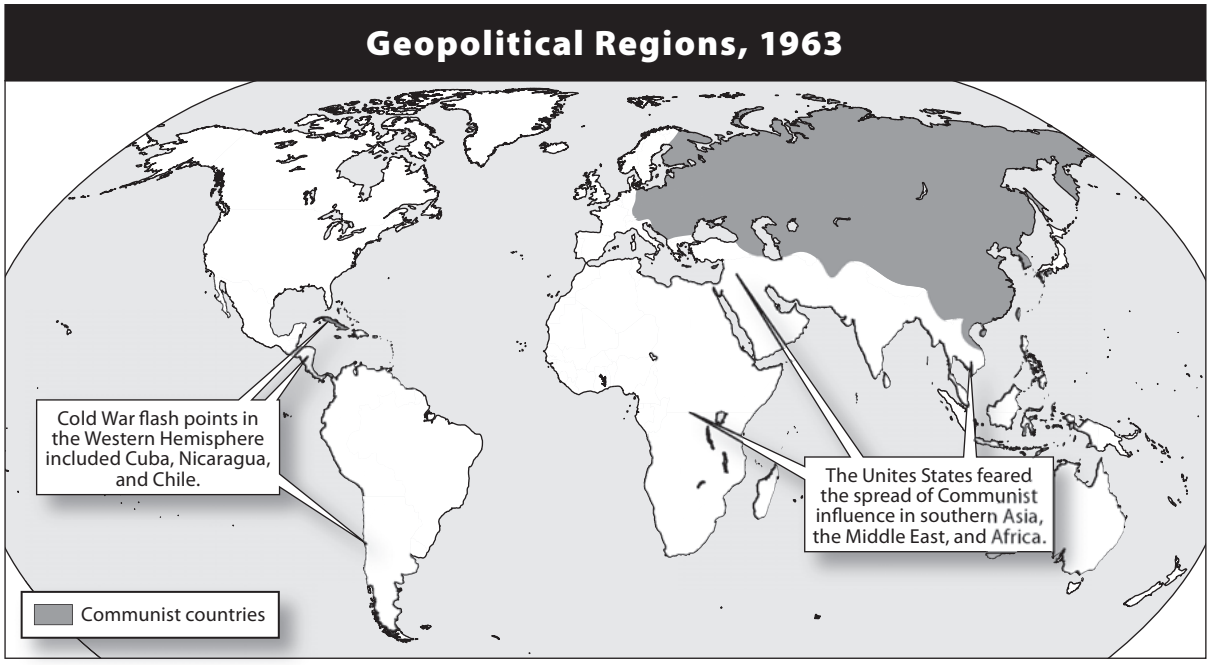
The Cold War

A Bipolar World

When the Berlin Wall went up in 1961, it divided families, a city, and a country. Symbolically, it cut the world in two as well. Berlin represented the global **competition** and struggle between two political systems—communism and democracy—or, as Westerners saw it, between tyranny and freedom. In 1963 U.S. president John F. Kennedy stood outside the Brandenburg Gate of the Berlin Wall and told a cheering throng, *"Ich bin ein Berliner"* (I am a citizen of Berlin). People cheered and wept. Kennedy's words implied that as long as the wall remained, every free person lived in its shadow and became a "citizen" of Berlin.

Like most Westerners, Kennedy valued democracy, freedom, and a capitalist economic system—even though, as he acknowledged in his speech, "[f]reedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect." Communist leaders like Nikita Khrushchev rejected Kennedy's principles. They believed that he represented capitalist wealth and privilege, which they saw as decadent and unfair. Each side fully expected that its values would ultimately triumph, converting the world.

The Cold War is an example of how people's values and principles shaped **political geography**, which is the spatial expression of political ideals. The Iron Curtain was an imaginary political line that divided communist and democratic nations. But it also divided the world in terms of two geographic **regions**: East and West. In fact, during the Cold War, **geopolitics**—the interaction of politics and geography—influenced the U.S. policy of containment.



Caption: Communism had spread to a large area of the globe by 1963. However, that area would begin to recede in the 1980s, as the problems Kennedy noted in Berlin contributed to the downfall of Communist regimes in most countries.

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The Cold War

For half a century, many people saw the globe as divided into these two geopolitical regions. Some countries, however, rejected this bipolar, or two-sided, view of the world. They noted the existence of a "third world" of nonaligned countries whose values and goals differed from those of the superpowers.

Later, this idea of three world regions—two powerful regions, East and West, and a weaker class of developing nations—faded as well. Countries such as Japan, once a part of this so-called third world, showed how a country's place in this organization can change as its economy grows and becomes part of the larger global economy. Meanwhile, a decline in the Eastern bloc weakened that region's influence. The world's political regions may shift in future years, as countries develop and their values and alliances change.

Directions: Answer the questions below in the space provided.

Understanding Concepts

1. **Interpreting** According to the map, which areas in the Western Hemisphere were especially problematic for the United States during the Cold War?

_____

_____

_____

2. **Analyzing** Explain what John F. Kennedy meant when he said *"Ich bin ein Berliner,"* and comment on how his statement reflects the geopolitics of the time.

_____

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3. **Explaining** What are geopolitical regions?

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The Cold War

Applying Concepts

4. **Cause and Effect** How did people's values during the Cold War help to create a bipolar view of the world?

_____

_____

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_____

_____

5. **Synthesizing** Pick a foreign country and describe how your values shape your perception of that country. Write your answer in the following graphic organizer.

Foreign Country	My Perception of It	How My Values Shape That Perception

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