



THE MICHIGAN UNION AND THE PEACE CORPS

**CANDIDATE
JOHN F. KENNEDY
ON THE STEPS
OF THE UNION**



THOUSANDS OF UM STUDENTS WAITED FOR HOURS
IN FRONT OF THE UNION TO SEE KENNEDY.

At 2 a.m., October 14, 1960, three weeks before the election, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy addressed a densely packed crowd in front of the Michigan Union. In a three-minute impromptu speech, he challenged them to contribute a part of their lives to serve this nation by helping people in developing countries throughout the world. Kennedy asked, "How many of you who are going to be doctors are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service? On your willingness . . . to contribute

part of your life to this country, I think, will depend the answer whether a free society can compete. I think it can. And I think Americans are willing to contribute. But the effort must be far greater than we have ever made in the past."

Kennedy spent the night at the Union. In the morning, crowds followed his motorcade up State Street. Within days, UM students, supported by faculty and the *Michigan Daily*, held a mass meeting and mounted a campaign that obtained hundreds of signatures from students willing to serve overseas. Six days

before the election, encouraged by UM student enthusiasm, Kennedy proposed "a Peace Corps of talented young men and women, willing and able to serve their country . . . as an alternative or as a supplement to peacetime selective service."

On March 1, 1961, a few weeks after his inauguration, Kennedy created the Peace Corps through an executive order. Sargent Shriver, first director of the Peace Corps and JFK's brother-in-law, wrote in 1964, "It might still be just an idea but for the affirmative response of those Michigan students and faculty."



ON THE DAY BEFORE JFK'S ELECTION, JUDITH AND ALAN GUSKIN (AT LEFT) AND OTHER STUDENT MEMBERS OF A NEWLY FORMED UM CAMPUS GROUP, AMERICANS COMMITTED TO WORLD RESPONSIBILITY, PRESENTED KENNEDY WITH PETITIONS SUPPORTING HIS PROPOSAL FOR STUDENT FOREIGN SERVICE. KENNEDY AIDE TED SORESENEN HAD GREETED THEM AS "THE FIRST PLATOON OF THE PEACE CORPS."



UM WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PEACE CORPS TRAINING SITES. THE GROUP AT LEFT (BOTH GUSKINS CIRCLED) COMPLETED TRAINING IN LATE 1961 FOR THE FIRST THAILAND PROGRAM. IN THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS, ALMOST 2,500 UM GRADUATES SERVED ABROAD AS PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS. UM STUDENTS CONTINUE TO RESPOND TO KENNEDY'S CHALLENGE.

