

# TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

*A partnership between Portland State University, Portland Public Schools and the Beaverton School District, funded by the U.S. Department of Education*

## HISTORICAL TOPIC: Negotiating Conflict over Vietnam

The antiwar movement of the 1960s and '70s, directed against prosecution of the war in Vietnam, was a watershed in the nation's life. Its conduct, indeed the very fact of U.S. involvement, seemed to call into question the judgment of the nation's leaders and all of the nation's political, social, economic, and cultural institutions. For perhaps the first time since the Civil War, Americans, who thought following World War II and in the midst of the Cold War that they were bonded in deep consensus about the country's basic values and role in the world, found that they were, instead, a tense and divided people, at war at home and abroad.

President Lyndon B. Johnson had been forced out of the race for the Democratic nomination in the New Hampshire primary in early 1968. For that reason, the primary election in Oregon that year took on great significance, if only as a run-up to the prestigious California primary which it immediately preceded. With its solidly middle class character and famous political independence, the battle in Oregon between Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy was a microcosm of the battle for the soul of the nation. Although both were against the war, they contained within themselves the poles of iconoclasm and tradition in politics then fighting to control the country's destiny. At the same time, the tensions within the state were leading up to an urban-rural/liberal-conservative split that would be delineated in the election results and remain a feature of Oregon's politics for the rest of the century. Students can use this clash to understand how the political process worked in a severe crisis and the tensions in the state and the nation that threatened to rip apart the social fabric. Vietnam also illustrates the lingering effects of war, which may take shape long after peace accords are signed.

*The Negotiating Conflict over Vietnam topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text [resources] and notations indicating that additional support material is available for viewing and/or downloading including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data and websites. To access the material go to the TAHPDX: Teaching American History Website and use the links available on the **TOPIC AREAS [Negotiating Conflict: Vietnam]** page or the **QUICK NAVIGATION** pages.*

Search TAHPDX on the internet or access the website via the link on the Community Geography page at <http://www.pdx.edu/ims/comgeo.html>.

### SUBTOPICS:

1. Deadly Embrace
  - a. Introduction
  - b. The Diplomatic Background of America in Indochina
2. Into the Quagmire
  - a. The Kennedy Years
  - b. The Johnson Years
  - c. The Anti-War Movement Coalesces

3. 1968 – A Pivotal Year
  - a. In Vietnam
  - b. At Home: The 1968 Election
  - c. The Democratic Primaries
  - d. The Democratic Convention
  - e. The Republicans
  - f. The General Election of 1968
4. Opposition
  - a. Protesters – Official, Ordinary, and Counterculture
5. The Nixon Years
  - a. Nixon and Kissinger Take Over
  - b. Can of Worms – The Secret War in Cambodia
  - c. Kent State
6. Roosting Chickens
  - a. The Pentagon Papers
  - b. Watergate
7. The War and the Constitution
  - a. The Irony of Hugo Black
8. Making Peace
  - a. Negotiating
  - b. The End Game
9. The Long Goodbye
10. Vietnam Bibliography

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Curriculum Units prepared for this unit (download using the TAHPDX website):

1. Evaluating the Nature of the Vietnam War
2. Public Voice and the Vietnam War
3. Vietnam: A Cold War Case Study
4. The Vietnam War: Rich Man's War Poor Man's Fight
5. War, Survival and Healing: Stories of Vietnam and America

## **1. Deadly Embrace**

### ***Introduction***

The Vietnam era in American history can properly be said to have straddled three decades. It began in the 1950s, when U.S. diplomacy attempted to stem the tide of a seemingly advancing world communist movement through a series of treaties and understandings. The 1960s saw the beginnings as well as the apogee of American involvement, not only in the war, but in the affairs of the nation's client state, South Vietnam. The third decade was the 1970s, when the U.S. absorbed the lessons of roughly ten years of combat and failed diplomacy and wound up its entanglement in the country's affairs.

Although all wars are deceptively engrossing of a country's resources—it is never simply a matter of sending soldiers to fight on a battlefield—Vietnam is an exceptional example of the

profound impact a war can have on a society. This conflict tested almost all American assumptions about the nation's moral, social, ethical, and political values. If the war was a mirror, many in the society were shocked at the visage that stared back at them, because reflected in the harsh light of the Vietnam years were unsightly blemishes as well as the attractive features of the culture and society Americans had expected to see.

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**PDF Resource:** Vietnam Timeline

### ***The Diplomatic Background of America in Indochina***

U.S. involvement in Vietnam began inauspiciously enough. In 1946, George Kennan, then a minor U.S. diplomatic functionary in Moscow, sent a now famous note to his superiors in Washington which was signed "Mr. X" and became known as the ***Long Telegram*** [pdf resource]. It appeared one year later in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, under the title, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." In this brilliant analysis, Kennan elucidated his belief that the way to deal with the gathering threat posed by the Soviet Union lay not in direct confrontation, but in a policy of "containment" of its ambitions. A key sentence in his prescription for dealing with the Soviets was Kennan's dictum that "the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence."

In many ways, containment was a perfect policy for the U.S. to pursue following World War II. On one hand, it was predicated on hyper-vigilance, which suited most Americans who were frightened of the USSR and communism. On the other, it suggested to a war-weary public that it would not be necessary to mount a major conflict with yet another totalitarian state in the wake of the superhuman effort that had been necessary to bring the Axis powers to their knees during WWII.

The key to containment was that the battle against world communism was treated like a chess game: a move by the Soviets in a specific place was to be swiftly countered by a discrete checking action on the global game board. Such was the case in late June, 1950 when North Korea, a Soviet client state, invaded its neighbor, South Korea. The U.S. and its allies engaged in a limited war (unofficially and euphemistically dubbed a "police action" by the Truman administration) on behalf of South Korea. In 1953, with the conflict stalemated, a truce was negotiated and the Korean peninsula settled into an uneasy peace that has lasted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If Korea provided for American policy makers a vivid example of how containment could limit the advance of communism without a monumental expenditure of blood and treasure, the growing Indochina problem of the 1950s seemed like another candidate for its application. Re-colonizing Southeast Asia following the Japanese defeat in World War II, France had found itself battling an insurgency in its Vietnam holdings as soon as the war ended. The Viet Minh, a classic guerilla movement, were campaigning under the twin banners of nationalism and communism behind the leadership of the legendary Ho Chi Minh. They had fought the French army to a standstill using arms the vanquished Japanese left behind for the specific purpose of

causing mischief to white colonial powers. Then, in 1954, the French lost the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu and were forced to surrender. The exhausted patience of the French public forced France's fragile 4<sup>th</sup> Republic government to relinquish Indochina. U.S. decision-makers saw the defeat as a major disaster because, they believed, the Viet Minh would install a communist regime. The controlling metaphor for policy in the region now shifted from chess to dominoes. If Vietnam toppled, the conceit went, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma would fall to communism like a set of dotted tiles.

The United States and twenty-four other countries quickly convened a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in 1954 to deal with the crisis. Out of this conference came a declaration supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Indochina, which had gained its independence from France. The ***Geneva Conference Declaration*** [[pdf resource](#)] also called for the cessation of hostilities and removal of foreign troops from internal Indochina affairs. Vietnam was partitioned into northern and southern zones, pending unification on the basis of internationally supervised free elections to be held in July 1956. An International Control Commission was set up to oversee the implementation of the Geneva Accords, but it was basically powerless to ensure compliance.

The agreement was between Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam, DRV), France, Laos, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam, RVN), the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. However, only France and Ho Chi Minh's DRV signed the document. The former wanted to re-establish its colonial influence, while the latter was buying time to reinforce its position in the North.

The partition engendered a huge human migration, consisting of one million moving from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. Most of these migrants were Catholics. A smaller number went from South to North. Following a brief period of rule by the French puppet emperor, Bao Dai, the South Vietnamese government, in 1955, came under the control of a U.S.-backed Catholic and anti-communist exile, Ngo Dinh Diem. In 1955, Diem held a referendum on his leadership, which was affirmed.

The Geneva Conference had stipulated that national elections take place in two years, but Diem suppressed election advocates and none ever occurred. In fact, the outlook for democracy in South Vietnam was bleak. Diem contended that not being a signatory to the accords, RVN did not have to honor the agreement. The U.S., following its containment policy and always fearing communist subversion, supported Diem in evading the election mandate. Frustrated opponents of the regime therefore formed a dissident organization of a variety of political persuasions, including communism, called the National Liberation Front (NLF). Better known by the name of its military wing, the Vietcong, the NLF eventually went into armed revolt against the RVN government. Its chief aim was the reunification of Vietnam under the north's Ho.

In addition to increasing guerrilla activity in the South from the Vietcong, Diem was beset by subversion on other fronts, including two potent Buddhist sects, the *Cao Dai* and the *Hoa Hao*, as well as a mafia-like group known as the *Binh Xuyen*. Each of these organizations had a private army and controlled extensive territory in rural areas. The RVN could not, under the circumstances, establish a blanket of authority over the country. The resultant chronic internal

instability forced the U.S. to station military advisors in the country to assist the fledgling Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to gain control of the situation.

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**Map Resources:** Indochina Relief Map and North/South Vietnam Administrative Map from Library of Congress Map Collections (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html>).

**Web Resource:** PBS American Experience: Vietnam Online interactive map collection also provides an interesting time series of key places and changing borders for Southeast Asia (1945-1976) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/maps/index.html>).

## 2. Into the Quagmire

### *The Kennedy Years*

John F. Kennedy (JFK) won the U.S. presidency in 1960 as a muscular cold warrior. In his campaign against Vice President Richard Nixon, he had heavily criticized the Eisenhower administration for allowing a “missile gap” to grow between the US and the USSR. This attack was a shock to the voting public because Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had pursued an aggressive version of containment that kept tensions between the US and the USSR high. People generally assumed that an armaments deficit would be the least of the country’s problems. In any case, the supposed insufficiency in America’s capacity to defend itself against a hail of Soviet rockets was later revealed to be illusory. Kennedy had entered the campaign with little experience in foreign affairs, in contrast to Nixon’s high profile as a communist fighter. Feeling he had little choice but to outflank Nixon on the right in the defense debate, Kennedy locked himself into an aggressive stance against the Soviet threat that set the tone for his administration’s foreign policy as he prepared to take office.

Once in the White House, JFK surrounded himself with a staff of highly credentialed advisors and cabinet members, men utterly confident of their own intelligence and good intentions, the supreme importance of the US as the leader of the Free World, and the soundness of the containment orthodoxy. These included Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy, his Deputy Special Assistant Walt Whitman Rostow, and his closest advisor Robert F. Kennedy, the president’s brother and his Attorney General.

In the first two years of his administration, Kennedy was confronted by a veteran opponent of American aims, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who saw in the young president’s inexperience an opportunity for the USSR to gain an advantage in the global sparring between the superpowers. In June of 1961, JFK met with Khrushchev in Vienna where he held firm in the face of a Russian threat to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany, thereby compromising western access to Berlin. But Khrushchev countered by building the Berlin Wall. In October 1962, the two powers faced off over the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba. After prolonged tense negotiations, the Cuban Missile Crisis ended with the Soviets backing down and removing their weaponry from the island. The young president had avoided what the watching world believed was an all-but-certain nuclear holocaust.

But Kennedy also proved capable of creating his own difficulties. Thus, in April 1961, he approved the Eisenhower-era CIA plan for the invasion of Cuba, to liberate it from the communist dictator, Fidel Castro. The resultant debacle for the American-sponsored exile forces at the Bay of Pigs made clear that in the new president's circle judgment was not always steady, despite the members' acknowledged capabilities.

It was against this backdrop of chronic tensions over disputed lands – JFK viewed the first eleven months of his administration as one international crisis after another – that the Vietnam issue began to come into focus as yet another flashpoint. Much of Southeast Asia was poised for conflict. Indeed, a “secret war” was already being waged in Laos with the help of a small American contingent of advisors to the right wing *Boun Oum* government, the product of a coup initiated by the Eisenhower administration. By 1961, Laos was on the brink of a full fledged armed conflict between the *Pathet Lao*, a communist insurgent group, and the incumbent *Boun Oum* government. Two steps prevented the slide to total war: first, the US withdrew aid from *Boun Oum*, which forced the collapse of his regime; second, the 1954 Geneva Conference was reconvened. There, the powers agreed to neutralize Laos. A neutralist, *Souvanna Phouma*, was installed as the premier of a new government. Laos was effectively removed from play in the Cold War.

By 1962, the Kennedy administration was fully engrossed in Southeast Asia. The Laos experience suggested to many around JFK that communism was a real threat everywhere in the region, but that it could be managed by energetic diplomacy among the real players—the US and the Soviets—even with the threat of the awakening Red Chinese giant looming in the background. The indigenous politicians were seen as mere stand-ins for the actual decision makers.

This insight was immediately tested in South Vietnam, where the *Diem* regime had evolved into an intolerable tyranny, its insults to the population generating greater numbers of Vietcong guerillas with each passing day. This pushed the country ever closer to a crisis of the kind narrowly avoided in Laos. Kennedy himself seemed to realize that he was at a crossroads with Vietnam and, indeed, pressure mounted steadily for the US to do something decisive. Two key advisors, General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow, classic cold warriors, had traveled on a fact finding mission to the country in 1961. The “*Taylor-Rostow Report*” [web resource] urged him to give total support to *Diem*, including beefing up the contingent of military advisors serving with the ARVN. Meanwhile, many of his military and State Department advisors, more concerned about European than Asian affairs, warned against a greater commitment. Vice President Lyndon Johnson, returning from his own fact finding mission to South Vietnam in 1962, was joined by other highly placed counselors in exhorting Kennedy, as Johnson put it, to “make a fundamental decision” to address the communist challenge in Southeast Asia “or throw in the towel.” There was no question where Johnson stood on the matter; inexplicably, however, on returning he had pronounced *Diem* the Winston Churchill of Asia. Other advisors saw Vietnam as a strategically favorable place to halt the expansion of China.

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**Web Resource:** The Taylor-Rostow Mission. 2005 article in *Vietnam* magazine about this mission and the Kennedy response available at the History.net website ([http://www.historynet.com/wars\\_conflicts/vietnam\\_war/3033501.html?page=1&c=y](http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/vietnam_war/3033501.html?page=1&c=y)).

**PDF Resource:** Rusk-McNamara Report to Kennedy (Nov 11 1961) with recommendations in response to the Taylor-Rostow Mission (transcription from Vassar College Vietnam database at <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc7.html>).

A key debate among historians since the end of the Vietnam War has long been over what JFK's intentions really were in Vietnam. In 1962, JFK had a sophisticated understanding that Vietnam was not as simple as communists versus anti-communists. His view of the situation included disdain for the domino theory and awareness that SEATO, the Southeast Asia mutual defense signatories, would not commit to a serious effort on behalf of the *Diem* regime. Nevertheless, the historian Walter Lafeber asserts that JFK increasingly regarded Vietnam as a linchpin of the global communist menace and far from questioning the Eisenhower policies toward the region, including falling dominoes, actually began to embrace them. Moreover, Lafeber says JFK was interested in putting to rest perceptions in Europe and domestically that he was out of his depth in foreign policy after the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the well publicized bullying by Khrushchev at the Vienna summit.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a preeminent historian and, as it happens, a prior member of the Kennedy administration, has long taken a different view. He believes that despite Kennedy's apparent early commitment to a more extensive American association in Vietnam, the pattern of his decision making over the thousand days of his presidency suggests that, had he not been assassinated, he would have halted American involvement as the fruitlessness of the mission became more evident.

The fact remains that within 15 months of the Taylor-Rostow mission, Kennedy reinforced the 500-man group of American advisors with a contingent of 10,000, allowed them to engage in combat, and ordered the US Air Force to bomb Vietcong strongholds. As Lafeber says, Kennedy's foreign policy, despite his bellicose campaign rhetoric, had evolved from skepticism of the hard line of Ike and Dulles into a classically confrontational Cold War stance more like his predecessor's than the pragmatic realism with which he had purportedly entered office.

Whatever might have occurred in the months following this move, JFK next made the most fateful decision in his Vietnam adventure. The generals of the ARVN were unhappy with the RVN political leadership, which had lost the confidence of the nation's Buddhist population, a development symbolized by anti-government riots and the self-immolation of several monks on the streets of Saigon. The generals planned a coup as 1963 unfolded. The Kennedy administration, attempting to goad President Diem into domestic reforms, cut off small amounts of aid to the regime. Instead of encouraging the behavior the administration wanted, however, the cuts made Diem recalcitrant. The generals assumed that the cuts signaled US approval of their plan and they continued to develop it. In the end, the administration and the US ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, were made aware of and approved the coup, which occurred on 1 and 2 November 1963. Diem and his brother were shot and a military junta took power. Three weeks later JFK himself was felled by an assassin's bullet. In the meantime, America, by virtue of its meddling (whether active or passive) had become the "co-owner" of the war in Vietnam, even though JFK, on the eve of his death, said to Montana Senator Mike Mansfield, an opponent of American involvement, that he was seriously thinking of total withdrawal of American troops.

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**Web Resources for JFK:** John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Teaching resources and documents at <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Education+and+Public+Programs/For+Teachers/Teaching+Resources.htm>.

### *The Johnson Years*

In assessing the conduct of the Vietnam War by Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), it must be remembered that he inherited a cabinet and staff built by and for a radically different personality and temperament. His predecessor was a suave, supremely self-confident patrician who had grown up in the lap of luxury, moved in the rarefied atmosphere of the Ivy League and the drawing rooms of Georgetown, was at home with abstract thought, and viewed the world in subtle shades of gray. By contrast, the world of LBJ was the barren, impoverished hill country of Texas and the backrooms of Capitol Hill. Reverence for the New Deal, a hard edged pragmatism that harbored an instinct for the jugular, and contempt for complex thought were hallmarks of his personality. Rough hewn, direct, bullying, cunning, and perhaps most important, insecure—these were characteristics of LBJ that in an ordinary transition from president to president would have dictated a completely different set of advisors for the new chief executive.

Johnson, however, was stuck with JFK's staff, especially his brother, Robert (Bobby), the Attorney General. Robert Kennedy was to claim later that Johnson was chosen as running mate by his brother merely for his public relations value, implying in his later critique of the administration's Vietnam policy that Johnson was inadequate to the task of dealing with the war. But later historians have argued that JFK understood that he needed Johnson to win the presidency—both for his value in the Texas voting and as an experienced hand in dealing with Congress. At the same time, Bobby's eventual anti-war stance may not have resulted from his greater understanding of the issues, as some have claimed, but of his almost pathological hatred of Johnson. Whatever the case, the notion that Johnson was not up to the task of governing and botched the war as a result, is belied by his success in steering through a jittery Congress his Great Society programming and by the ease with which he established his agenda for Vietnam itself. In the latest Johnson biography, Randall B. Woods' *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*, moreover, the author finds the president unenthusiastic about the war, skeptical of the military's optimistic assessment of its performance, and aware of its destructive effects on the country. Johnson's embrace of the war, Woods asserts, rested on his certainty that a new wave of McCarthyism style anti-communism would grip the US if he withdrew the American commitment to South Vietnam.

Yet LBJ was, indeed, incapable of dealing with important truths about Vietnam. He could not, for example, see beyond the Cold War credo that the US must "win" every confrontation with communism or be damaged in the eyes of the world. Nor did he understand that popular world opinion, let alone public opinion in the US, could be such a potent force in the conduct of the war. This, however, was exactly what the Vietcong and North Vietnamese were certain of, there being little else they could rely on to see them through a struggle with a superpower. They adhered to the view, succinctly expressed by one of their commanders, that "strategy is the economy and public opinion. Tactics is what happens on the battlefield." They were also willing to wait any amount of time for the effects of that strategy to take effect. What Johnson

knew with certainty, meanwhile, was that there would be a significant political toll in abandoning Vietnam and so he chose to pursue the costly option of a clear cut victory. John Kennedy had died, as it were, politically intestate. His legacy was not at all clear, although his subsequent martyrdom obscured that reality. Measured against Johnson's accomplishments, particularly on the domestic front, his administration was not significant. LBJ's tragedy was in pursuing an uncertain foreign policy adventure that his predecessor had begun, only to find that it would obscure forever his own monumental achievements as president.

The first test of LBJ's leadership on Vietnam came within a year of his assumption of the presidency. On 2 August 1964, three North Vietnamese PT boats allegedly fired torpedoes at a US destroyer, the *Maddox*, which was patrolling the international waters of the Tonkin Gulf about 30 miles off the coast of North Vietnam. The attack came after six months of covert US and South Vietnamese naval operations. A second, even more highly disputed North Vietnamese attack, was supposed to have taken place on 4 August.

Had the administration staged the Tonkin Gulf incidents to sway public opinion in favor of war? This has been a topic of debate for decades. Regardless of the correct answer, a *Tonkin Gulf Resolution* [pdf resource] was hastily brought to Congress and approved on 7 August 1964. It authorized the President to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The resolution passed unanimously in the House and by a margin of 82-2 in the Senate, with two Democrats, *Wayne Morse of Oregon* [pdf resource], a legal scholar who believed the resolution unconstitutional, and Earnest Gruening of Alaska, in dissent. The Resolution allowed LBJ to wage all out war against North Vietnam without ever securing a formal Declaration of War from Congress.

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**Web Resource:** Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics housed in the School of Law at the University of Oregon – website provides a comprehensive history of Wayne Morse at <http://www.morsechair.uoregon.edu/>.

The second test of Johnson's leadership on Vietnam was the *election of 1964* [map resource] In some ways, the election results were a foregone conclusion. Johnson had carefully cast himself as the legate of a martyr (in fairness, he could have done no less in the wake of the popular Kennedy's shocking murder). Of Vietnam, Johnson during the campaign repeatedly observed, "We seek no wider war." Indeed, he seemed to favor diminution of the war effort. At the same time, his opponent, Barry Goldwater, a deeply conservative Republican senator from Arizona far to the right of the majority of the electorate, was not bashful about sharing his extreme views on the communist menace or any other topic, despite the obvious imprudence of doing so at a time when the still-grieving public was trying to cling to the illusion of normalcy. Of Vietnam, he said the enemy "ought to be bombed back into the Stone Age." In the event, Johnson won in a landslide.

By February 1965, LBJ's campaign statements about Vietnam seemed to be belied by his actions. He ordered sustained American bombing raids of North Vietnam, named "Operation Rolling Thunder," which began in that month. They continued for three years. In 1965 also, the first conventional battle of the Vietnam War occurred, as American forces clashed with North Vietnamese units in the *Ia Drang Valley* [web resource]. The U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division

defeated the North Vietnam Army with heavy casualties on both sides. U.S. troop levels in 1965 moved past 200,000. The next year, Johnson, trying to disrupt enemy movement along the Mugia Pass, the main route used by the NVA to send personnel and supplies through Laos and into South Vietnam, authorized American B-52s to bomb North Vietnam for the first time. However, by 1968 Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, appearing before a Senate subcommittee, testified that U.S. bombing raids against North Vietnam had not achieved their objectives. McNamara maintained that movement of supplies to South Vietnam had not been reduced, and neither the economy nor the morale of the North Vietnamese was broken.

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**Web Resources:** *la Drang Valley Battle*. There is a great flash animation of the la Drang Valley battle (LZ X-Ray) from the War Times Journal (not an academic source) at <http://www.wtj.com/articles/xray/> and detailed maps/photos of the battle at <http://www.lzxr.com/overview.htm>. This is a link through the promotional site for the book and movie "We Were Soldiers Once" which profiled this battle.

### ***The Anti-War Movement Coalesces***

Meanwhile, a fledgling protest movement against US policy in Vietnam was taking shape. Across the nation in colleges and universities, "*teach-ins*" [pdf resource] were mounted. The first, with seminars, rallies, and speeches, was staged at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in March 1965. In May, a nationally broadcast "teach-in" was heard by students and faculty at more than 100 campuses. The country's higher education institutions became the seat of a small, but growing body of dissenters from the war, who had come together not least because the administration's portrayal of its Vietnam policy and their results seemed chronically at odds with realities.

The anti-war movement continued to grow in the ensuing years. In 1966, veterans from World Wars I and II and the Korean War staged a protest rally in New York City. They burned discharge and separation papers in protest of US involvement in Vietnam. In the same year, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) released a report claiming that the US military draft put "a heavy discriminatory burden on minority groups and the poor." The group called for a withdrawal of all US troops from Vietnam. In 1967, Martin Luther King publicly castigated the administration for its Vietnam policy. He labeled the US "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world," and later encouraged draft evasion. He also called for a merger between antiwar and civil rights groups. In 1968, recruiters for Dow Chemical Company, makers of napalm, were boycotted by University of Wisconsin students who demanded that they not be allowed on campus.

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**Web Resource:** Information about the first "Teach-In" at the University of Michigan can be found at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pdenning/teachin/history.htm>. The site includes an article describing the first teach-in and a scan of the original notice.

**Web Resource for LBJ:** National Archives: Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum. Available at <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/>. Contains comprehensive online holdings of speeches, memorandums, photographs, etc.

### 3. 1968 – A Pivotal Year

#### *In Vietnam*

The year 1968 was a watershed in American political history. The events of 1968 were destined to shape the political culture for rest of the twentieth century. But they themselves were shaped in large measure by incidents and episodes far from American soil. Mostly they emanated from the war in Vietnam. The conduct of the war was becoming a topic of hot debate as much as the entire rationale of American involvement itself. In January, for example, the ruler of Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk, allowed the American military to pursue Vietcong into their sanctuaries in Cambodia.

As if to signal its critical nature, 1968 began with a bang in January. The North Vietnamese opened the so-called Tet Offensive. In an audacious display of military prowess that caught US forces unaware, the North Vietnamese and their Vietcong allies roared into several key cities and provinces in South Vietnam, including Saigon (the capital) at a time when the country was on a religious holiday. Within days, American forces turned back the onslaught and recaptured most lost ground. From a purely military perspective, Tet was a huge defeat for the Communists. However, the political and psychological impact of the action on US military planners, the administration, and most significant of all, the American public, cannot be underestimated. It was the equivalent of a victory for the North because, to everyone who was concerned about the conflict, the U.S. military's current assessment of battlefield progress that, in the famous phrase of the day, there was "a light at the end of the tunnel," suddenly seemed wishful thinking.

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**PDF Resource:** Walter Cronkite's "We are mired in stalemate" broadcast on February 27, 1968. Provides a focus on the Tet Offensive as a major turning point in public opinion about the Vietnam War.

Following on the heels of Tet, the battle for Hue came in February. In a 26-day campaign, the US and South Vietnamese forces tried to recapture the sacred city, which had been seized by the Communists during the Tet Offensive. Hue was almost totally leveled in a clash that left nearly all of its population homeless. Following the US and ARVN victory, mass graves containing the bodies of thousands of people, executed during the communist occupation, were discovered. Shortly thereafter, General William Westmoreland, the commander of US forces in Vietnam, requested 206,000 more troops.

Another hammer blow to the war effort was delivered in the next year, 1969. On 16 March 1968, tired, angry, frustrated soldiers of a unit of the Americal Division entered the village of My Lai [web resource] where they ran amok killing all the civilians in their path. When news of the atrocities came to light in 1969, it reverberated through the US political establishment, the military's chain of command, and an incredulous American public. The damage to military and civilian morale and the sense of mission of the country suffered immensely.

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**Web Resource:** *My Lai*. The University of Missouri-Kansas School of Law maintains a "Famous Trials" website. The site contains a comprehensive history of the My Lai massacre, bibliographies, photographs and transcripts of the court-martials (<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/MYLAI.HTM>).

## *At Home – The 1968 Election*

Perhaps in no election in American history, save 1860, had voters been so acutely aware of the nation's fate hanging in the balance. The election of 1860 promised war or peace, unity or disunion, depending on which of four candidates won. In 1968, the question was which of the two major candidates had the wisdom to lead the country out of the deepening Southeast Asian quagmire, either by finding a way toward an expeditious military victory or a dignified but quick and total retreat from the killing ground. The pressures of this campaign were such that it is reputed to be the dirtiest in American history.

### *The Democratic Primaries*

In contrast to today's campaigns when only a few primaries are of critical importance and others are bunched together on the so-called Super Tuesday in March, the 1968 campaign trail was studded with relatively widely spaced primary elections in various states. Each tested a candidate's appeal across a broad spectrum of demographic and political conditions, and they required tactical and strategic acumen. Although momentum accumulated in the early primaries was important, it was possible for a candidate to start slowly and gain power as the elections rolled along, whereas today early results seem to seal the fate of the contenders. Thus, as it is today, New Hampshire in late January was a critical beginning. But, in 1968 early primaries in states like West Virginia and Indiana played a role in weeding out true contenders from the merely unrealistically ambitious. The Oregon primary, which occurred in mid-May, meaningless in terms of the number of votes the winner could garner, was nonetheless important because it was a run-up to the all-important California primary in early June, from which the winner would take many of the delegate votes needed to win at the party convention later in the summer.

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**Article Resource:** Allman, Joseph M. The 1968 Elections in Oregon. *Western Political Quarterly* 22(3): 517-525, 1969.

In one of the great political upsets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an obscure Minnesota Senator, Eugene McCarthy, ran in the New Hampshire contest against the incumbent, Johnson, for the Democratic nomination. Expected to be swatted unceremoniously aside by the president, McCarthy campaigned on an anti-war platform supported by a phalanx of dedicated volunteers, mostly idealistic college students. He won a shocking 42% of the vote, compared to the president's 49%. Stunned, Johnson took the vote as a repudiation of his Vietnam policy and summarily announced that he would not seek re-nomination.

But the Democratic field was not simply abandoned to McCarthy. Johnson was replaced by two other establishment candidates, Johnson's Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, and Senator Robert Kennedy of New York. Kennedy, long known to be disdainful of Johnson, had been approached before McCarthy by the anti-war movement to carry its banner. Humphrey, perhaps the greatest liberal of the day, had been prepared to support his president. Both jumped into the race when it was clear that McCarthy was the only obstacle in the path to the nomination, but for both their presence in the campaign presented problems. Kennedy looked like a rank opportunist to some, waiting until Johnson was out to declare, instead of risking his career for his deeply felt anti-war views in a head-to-head contest. Humphrey, who began campaigning on 27 April, was in an

even weaker position. How could he continue to serve under Johnson and campaign against the war, which he was thought to oppose, while in the service of the imperious Lyndon Johnson? If he hewed too closely to the president's line on the war, on the other hand, he would seem to be just another cynical politician who would say anything to become president.

The subsequent primaries were comfortable for neither Humphrey, on the sidelines but an obvious contender, nor Kennedy, an active campaigner. Their perceived liabilities, framed by the vagaries of the war and the tragic assassination of Martin Luther King in early April, were, in fact, hurting them, while the McCarthy campaign rolled relentlessly along, fueled by the idealism and anger of the young people who followed the candidate. For McCarthy and Kennedy, who were going head-to-head for the first time, Oregon proved to be an interesting test. McCarthy arrived in the state with his usual contingent of ebullient student workers from all over the nation. His was a machine gaining momentum each day and it was funded by small donations from an unlikely coalition of liberal millionaires and ordinary middle class Americans. Kennedy, by contrast, had put together an organization run by a number of his late brother's retainers and some of the Democratic establishment, including Rep. Edith Green, of the 3<sup>rd</sup> District in Oregon, and the AFL and CIO. His campaign was buttoned up and professional; it had none of the grass roots, seat-of-the-pants, raffishness that clung to the McCarthy effort. The state swarmed with young men and women who had gotten "clean for Gene," (meaning they eschewed the unkempt look of the emergent counter culture for haircuts and neat apparel) earnestly going from door-to-door with a message about the multi-dimensional wrongness of the war—it was, they and their avatar said, bad morally, strategically, economically—and making converts throughout the state. Kennedy's campaign consisted in carefully chosen photo ops – usually with his spaniel, at the beach, or in some other setting connecting him to the outdoors – in an attempt to link him to what his handlers perceived as the main concerns of Oregonians. In the end, it was the McCarthyites' urgent appeal to middle class sensibilities that allowed them to pull off an audacious election win for their beloved candidate.

If McCarthy's performance in New Hampshire amounted to a moral victory, his clear cut win in Oregon was earth shaking. Nobody had ever before defeated a Kennedy in an election, but McCarthy accomplished it with an effort that featured the aid of no significant part of the Democratic establishment. As in New Hampshire, his message was unambiguous: the war was not only bad because it had no moral foundation, but because it impaired the American prosperity that had been carefully nurtured since the end of World War II. Draining the treasury to support the necessary troop and equipment build-up, he asserted, was also crippling the economy, especially the economic well being of the middle class. LBJ had adopted a "guns-and-butter" approach to the war, hoping that not calling for sacrifice from middle class Americans would assure their support for it. In the great historical tragedy of his presidency, he was actually trying to have it all ways at once: generating a huge military build-up, running his War on Poverty with its many social programs at full speed, and at the same time not calling for additional taxes to fund them – although by 1968 he had boxed himself in and had no choice but to raise taxes and cut back on Great Society programs. This move angered blacks, who saw it as a betrayal of the president's professed commitment to equality. Meanwhile, sucking the country's manufacturing capacity into the war machine was only generating a steady and damaging inflation that eroded middle class purchasing power and slowed economic growth. In the end, the economy entered a period of "stagflation," which felt to many like a grinding

recession. Oregon, a largely middle class state with an economy dependent on wood products that went into big ticket, interest-dependent items like housing, was an apt venue for McCarthy's message about these ills to be heard.

Kennedy was chagrined by the setback, but responded by redoubling his efforts in the next, infinitely more consequential, California primary of 6 June; he won handily. On the night of his triumph, however, he was killed in Los Angeles by Sirhan Sirhan. Hubert Humphrey now became the only hope of the Democratic Party establishment to counter the McCarthy machine. The party professionals had been content to let Kennedy fight it out with Humphrey, certain that the winner would represent the true preferences of the majority of Democratic voters, but uncertain of which of the contestants that might be.

### ***The Democratic Convention***

Humphrey now stepped into the role of the Party's anointed candidate. McCarthy was not seriously considered as an alternative by the Democratic establishment, to the chagrin of his loyal followers. He had served as a classic "stalking horse," plumbing the depths of anti-war sentiment, and allowing "more serious candidates" to emerge with appropriately adjusted messages. (In truth, Eugene McCarthy was among the most lackadaisical of all campaigners and probably far too cerebral a candidate for the vast majority of voters.) But the regular Democrats had reckoned without the intensity of the anti-war fervor in the country, especially among the young. The result of that miscalculation was that when the Democratic convention convened in Chicago in August formally to nominate Humphrey, they were confronted by thousands of angry and antic demonstrators who continuously disrupted the proceedings. Chicago's Mayor Daley, the last of the big city political bosses, orchestrated the convention and the management of the protesters. But, in a park by the convention site the police, who were supposed to keep order among the demonstrators and thus maintain decorum at one of the great exercises in American politics, were allowed essentially to riot [**web resource: Chicago 1968 Riots**]. They beat and manhandled the young people, playing into the hands of the very extremists they were supposed to control. Americans watching at home were treated to the spectacle of the Democratic Party devouring itself at what should have been a triumphant moment in the political process. Hubert Humphrey emerged from Chicago badly damaged by the fiasco. But he was the party's nominee, never having entered—let alone won—a single primary. He thus began the general election campaign in a deep hole.

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**Web Resource:** 1968 Democratic National Convention: A good series of photographs of the riots associated with the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago can be found at the New York Times website (<http://www.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/680830convention-dem-ra.html>).

**PDF Resource:** From History Matters. "Identify them by their garb!" Cartoons from the *Chicago American* referencing the attendees and protesters at the Democratic National Convention in 1968.

**Graphic Resource:** Photo Essay of the 1968 Democratic Convention contains graphics of posters and photos of the convention and the riots. Various online public sources.

## *The Republicans*

In the meantime, the Republicans were busy preparing the ground for the nomination of Richard M. Nixon. When that was achieved, the former vice president accomplished one of the most remarkable political resurrections in American history. Having lost the 1960 election, he had repaired to his home state, California, where, to keep his political career alive, in 1962 he ran for Governor of California. He subsequently lost the election and, in a remarkable farewell press conference, told the assembled reporters that they “wouldn’t have Nixon to kick around anymore.” Despite that ostensibly fate-sealing rant, he emerged as the favorite for the nomination in 1968 and secured it without any difficulty.

## *The General Election of 1968*

The general election campaign was easily the most bizarre in 20<sup>th</sup> century American political history. Four years after the Goldwater debacle, the Republican Party was putting up one of the most polarizing figures in politics, a man who had once been portrayed by the *political cartoonist Herblock* [web resource] crawling out of a sewer while wearing a mask of his own face to signify his duplicity, a man who had apparently uttered his own epitaph just a short time previously. The Democrats, for their part, were running the second in command of the discredited current administration, who had emerged from the primaries by a process of—one hesitates to say—elimination (but it is the most fitting word) and from the most chaotic convention in American history. Almost as icing on the cake, a third party candidate, George Wallace, the irrepressible segregationist governor of Alabama, jumped into the race. To add to the strangeness, Wallace appealed not only to those disaffected by the steady march of the civil rights and anti-war movements over the preceding decade or so, but to some of the same constituency which had supported Bobby Kennedy. These people were blue collar Americans, many were union members disturbed by what they perceived to be the erosion of patriotism, exemplified by the iconoclasm of the anti-war movement which relentlessly vilified the president. They were not at all comfortable with Johnson’s aggressive push for civil rights which, they believed, compromised their own position in the social and economic order. But he was the president, and they could not countenance criticism of the country’s war effort. In any case, they responded to Wallace’s passion and charisma the way they did to Kennedy’s, while hearing in their radically different messages the same concern for the direction of the country. In 1980, many of these same people would be characterized as Reagan Democrats.

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**Web Resource:** A collection of cartoons by Herbert Block (Herblock) can be found at the commemorative site from the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/>).

Nixon’s handlers designed a two-pronged plan for the election. One element was captured by the candidate’s constant refrain that he had “a secret plan to end the war.” The second was the so-called “Southern Strategy.” A Nixon staffer, Kevin Phillips, discerned that the American population was shifting to the South and West. The “Solid South,” long the preserve of the Democrats, was more patriotic and conservative than other parts of the country and certainly more than other factions in the party, so Phillips plotted a campaign that concentrated efforts and resources in the Sunbelt states below the Mason-Dixon Line and on to California. If Nixon could convince the voters in at least some of these states that he knew how to end the war

without admitting defeat, in addition to appealing to their conservative instincts on domestic policy, he might remove some of them from the Democratic fold and improve his chances of winning. In a sense, Phillips was counting on the possibility that potential Republican voters had self-gerrymandered themselves into conservative majorities in these states.

On the Democratic side, LBJ directed J. Edgar Hoover to watch Spiro Agnew, Nixon's running mate, hoping to find some dirt—there was a rumor that Agnew was in contact with South Vietnamese leaders—that could be used by the Humphrey campaign. The results were negligible, although, as later events were to prove, Agnew was worthy of surveillance for other reasons.

In the end, Nixon won 43.4% of the popular vote, Humphrey, 42.7%, and Wallace, 13.5%. As one pundit put it, Nixon almost succeeded in “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory,” but, in truth, he won the Electoral College with 301 votes to 191 for Humphrey and 46 for Wallace. In a development of later significance, Phillips had guessed right about the South. Wallace carried five states in the Deep South. Had he not been in the race, the majority no doubt would have gone to Nixon. In subsequent elections, the trend Phillips had spotted would become an ever more significant factor favoring the Republicans.

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**Map Resource:** 1968 Presidential Election Results Map.

## 4. Opposition

### *Protesters – Official, Ordinary, and Countercultural*

As the American commitment to the war escalated, the opposition to it became itself more intense and powerful. It emanated from a variety of sources. Much of it was generated by straightforward disagreement with the policy of containment, which seemed to many liberal intellectuals and, eventually, political leaders like Senator J. William Fulbright, to have outlived its usefulness as a way to deal with communism. (Indeed, George F. Kennan himself repudiated it—as it applied to Vietnam—in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1966. “I would know of no reason,” he said, “why we should wish to become so involved, and I could think of several reasons why we should wish not to.”) Other opponents were simply pacifists. Another large element of hostility toward the war came from a deep-seated unhappiness with American society in general and establishment politics in particular on the part of various components of the society. Some of this can be traced to the mid-twentieth century disillusionment with democracy of the western intellectual class that followed World War II. Those who harbored such negativity about democracy followed a European sense of the growing danger to the rest of the world of the United States itself. Vietnam was a symptom, they felt, of the defective functioning of mass democracy, in which demagogic leaders could legitimize their megalomania by having their agenda affirmed by easily led voters unqualified to pass judgment on their policies. This view was accompanied by alarm among European intellectuals and politicians over their perception of the US as a superpower out of control, obsessed with the spread of communism. The most articulate proponents of this attitude were

French and it was so similar to that of US intellectuals that one commentator remarked at a certain point that the leader of the American left appeared to be Charles De Gaulle.

However, by 1968 opposition to US involvement in Vietnam had become too pervasive an issue to be explained by the posturing of intellectuals. It had, because of its increasingly far reaching consequences for every segment of society, become a focus of dissent for others, especially some in the baby boom generation then coming to maturity at the nation's colleges and universities. These youths had for some time harbored doubts about the authenticity of American society. In 1962, some leading lights of the baby boom generation gathered at Port Huron, Michigan under the auspices of an organization called *Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)* [web resource], where they issued a manifesto known as the *Port Huron Statement* [pdf resource]. It began, "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit." At great length, the statement attacked middle class values, the state of civil rights for African Americans, the conduct of the Cold War, and what the authors saw as the smugness of an establishment which believed in the unshakeable goodness of the United States. Exhibiting the alienation, naïveté, petulance, and smugness of its authors, the Port Huron Statement nonetheless proved to be the taproot of the protest that grew in the Vietnam era.

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**Web Resource:** Students for a Democratic Society. Official website of this organization at <http://www.studentsforademocraticsociety.org/>. The organization was recently resurrected (2006). Website contains information about current activities.

Youths who were not necessarily ideologically inclined were none-the-less alienated in the 60s. Reacting to what they saw as the stifling conventions of the previous decade, their music, art, dress, and morality reflected a rebellion against the standards and practices of their parents. Long hair, beards, jeans, rock and roll as well as folk music, the copious use of marijuana and other drugs, contempt for authority, and an attraction to a footloose existence, in many cases fostered by novelist Jack Kerouac's beat classics, *Dharma Bums* and *On the Road*, were their signatures. The new "youth culture" morphed into a "counterculture" which, in questioning when it wasn't rejecting middle class values including patriotism and support for the government, gravitated inexorably toward vigorous opposition to the Vietnam adventure. The gulf between youth and elders was captured by one shibboleth, seemingly on the lips of every long haired kid: "Never trust anyone over thirty." This injunction hardened into a cultural artifact: the so-called "generation gap."

Other forces of dissent included women. In 1962, Betty Friedan wrote an instantly famous manifesto called *the Feminine Mystique*, which called into question the demure role of women in American culture. Friedan's militant call for reformation of the female role in society ridiculed the notion that a woman's "place" was circumscribed by the home and family and framed the vague discontent with their lives a growing number felt. Many women were, of necessity—a drop in real incomes owing to inflation had set in with a vengeance in 1959—in the throes of serious reexamination of the economic efficacy of the stay-at-home life, if not of the lack of fulfillment it offered. From countless strapped households, they were venturing into the workplace, only to find their way blocked by stereotypes about female capabilities and by discriminatory practices and policies with respect to pay and advancement. By 1970, when two

other seminal books, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, appeared, the women's movement had become a powerful force for change.

Various other movements reflecting the discontent of particular segments of the population were also swelling with growth, belying the superficial consensus on the national experience that America had presented to the world in the Cold War 50s. These included the American Indian Movement (AIM) which sprang into being in 1968 and, of course, the black civil rights movement. Each of these forces questioned, as did the women's movement, the values by which Americans supposedly lived and pointed out the shallowness of the picture of the country the US presented to the world. They asserted that even as politicians denounced communism for its totalitarian suppression of rights behind the Iron Curtain, millions of non-white Americans were disenfranchised; that while some lived in the vaunted affluence constantly held out in Cold War propaganda as the norm in the US, many others lived in poverty, deprived by discrimination of access to the American Dream. It was a short leap from believing that the political leadership was lying to the world about the advantages conferred by democratic capitalism on American society to believing it was lying to its own people about the course of the war.

Still, in the beginning, only a small percentage of Americans opposed the war. But as American involvement deepened and White House—and Pentagon-generated—facts about battlefield victories and the staunchness of the South Vietnamese seemed to be belied by nightly TV pictures, the numbers grew. The first march to Washington against the war occurred in December 1964. A mere 25,000 people took part, but it was the largest anti-war demonstration in American history.

In 1967, *Vietnam Veterans against the War* [web resource] was formed. The organization, a collection of ex-soldiers, disillusioned about the war by their first-hand experience of it, demonstrated across the country. Many of the demonstrators were confined to wheelchairs or used crutches. On TV, the public saw Vietnam heroes (including John Kerry) throw away the medals they won fighting. Between 1963 and 1973, 9,118 men were prosecuted for refusing to be drafted into the army. The most famous of these was Muhammad Ali, the world heavyweight boxing champion.

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#### **Web Resources:**

Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Official website of this organization at <http://www.vvaw.org/>. The website contains a history of the organization and a comprehensive photo gallery (1970+).

*Winter Soldier – The Film*: *Winter Soldier* documents the "Winter Soldier Investigation" conducted by Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in Detroit, Michigan in the winter of 1971. At the investigation, over 125 veterans representing every major combat unit to see action in Vietnam, gave eye-witness testimony to war crimes and atrocities they either participated in or witnessed. The purpose of the investigation was to bring to light the nature of American military policy in Vietnam.

For additional information about the counter-culture movement in the Sixties:

The Sixties Project: The Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia (Charlottesville) at <http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/>. See the "articles" subsection and the "Buttons of the Sixties" collection for interesting information on the antiwar counter-culture.

Though fragmented, heterogeneous, and often simply inchoate, these movements or forces in American life were combining by the end of the decade to create a powerful countervailing motif of deep skepticism about Vietnam to the generally pro-war mood of the country. Lyndon Johnson knew in 1968 as he mulled over his future in the presidency that to sustain the American commitment to fighting the war he would have to begin drafting young men of the middle class. The recognition that this would be a major cause of even more intense disaffection and protest was a powerful factor in his decision not to seek reelection.

It should be noted in passing that 1968 was in general a year of upheaval for young people in their relationships with authority throughout the world. Two examples: Intense student riots in Paris were fodder for headlines everywhere, as was the turbulence of the Prague Spring, when young Czechs and others took to the streets of the capital and achieved a brief period of liberalization of their Soviet dominated government and society.

## 5. The Nixon Years

### *Nixon and Kissinger Take Over*

Richard Nixon took office in January 1969 acutely aware that he had to proceed with extreme caution to liquidate the Vietnam problem, owing to the fissures in the U.S. over the war. His first major decision on the conflict thus did not come until June. Then, in a *letter to Ho Chi Minh* [**pdf resource**], he warned of “measures of great consequence and force,” if DRV did not make significant concessions in peace negotiations. These consequences would include the mining of North Vietnam’s ports and harbors coupled with massive bombing of both military and economic targets to begin after a deadline of 1 November 1969. But a huge protest in October, the *Vietnam Moratorium* [**web resource with video clip**], made clear to him that to go ahead with his threat would only lead to a more massive and intense rift in the country than it was already experiencing which could, in turn, embolden the enemy to ignore the threat in the hope that the antiwar movement would win out. Thus undercut, Nixon used the 1 November date, when he had hoped to announce to the nation either the implementation of his threat or the capitulation of the North, to make a speech in which he tried to rally the country behind him and give him leave to carry out a longer term strategy — “Vietnamization” [**pdf chart of Troop Withdrawal**] (in which American troops would be withdrawn in proportion to the growth in the numbers of capable ARVN soldiers). In the speech, the president appealed to what he labeled “*the Silent Majority*” [**pdf resource**] – those who supported the war but were not vocal about their views in contrast to the small but noisy groups of protesters whose assertiveness made it seem as if *they* were in the majority. The speech with its resonant catch-phrase struck a chord with the public and the favorable response, as reflected in opinion polls, gave Nixon the political cover to carry the war on for three more years.

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**Web Resource:** The BBC “On This Day” website contains an article and short video clip of the 1969 Vietnam (“Peace”) Moratorium focusing on the march on Washington DC. Article and video online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid\\_2533000/2533131.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid_2533000/2533131.stm).

This was by no means a trouble-free grant. In that same month, the My Lai Massacre (**see web resource above**), an unprovoked outrage against a defenseless village by a platoon of American soldiers led by Lieutenant William Calley, was exposed catalyzing outrage worldwide and turning a widening segment of the American public against the war. Then in December the administration announced the first draft lottery since World War II. Many young people, especially college students, ordinarily safe from conscription by virtue of student deferments, became concerned about the risk of being drafted. Opposition to the war intensified.

### *Can of Worms – The Secret War in Cambodia*

One of the unfortunate by-products of the “granting” of this extension was the expansion of the war to neighboring Cambodia by Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger. The North Vietnamese Army, which had been openly engaged in the combat since the Tet Offensive, and the Viet Cong were being supplied with materiel via the so-called ***Ho Chi Minh Trail*** [**pdf resource**], a makeshift highway running along the Vietnam-Cambodia border which, at certain points, clearly ran through neutral Cambodian territory. Moreover, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops used Cambodian border villages as sanctuaries when pursued by ARVN and US forces, secure in the knowledge that under international law they could not be followed. Neither they nor the scrupulously neutral Cambodians, however, could do anything about the “secret” campaign of bombing Cambodian targets by B-52s that the US undertook to cut off supplies and deny respite to the enemy, nor the cross-border raids that were being conducted in defiance of the law. On a ***30 April 1970 message*** [**pdf resource**] in a televised address to the nation, Nixon revealed the Cambodian campaign.

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**Map and PDF Resources:** Map of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and a detailed article of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the “secret war” in Cambodia – includes maps and photos. Source: The Journal of the Air Force Association at <http://www.afa.org/magazine/nov2005/1105trail.asp>.

### *Kent State*

The revamping of the draft in a way that imperiled middle class college students and the revelation of the Cambodian invasion even as the president was promising de-escalation through Vietnamization unleashed an immediate reaction on college and university campuses across the nation. What amounted to a national student strike swiftly took shape. Coming as it did near the end of the spring semester with its good weather and aura of relaxed commitment to school work, perhaps nobody should have been surprised that students at colleges and universities across the country felt free to abandon classes, take to the streets, and paralyze their campuses in protest. What was truly shocking, however, was the reaction of university, local, and state authorities.

Nobody was prepared for the sternness of the response of institutional administrators on many campuses, especially at state supported schools, who were under pressure from conservative legislators, governors, and their constituencies to bring unruly student protesters and brash faculty critics of the war under control. The symbolic—one could almost say pre-destined—clash between the establishment and the campus anti-war movement, which appeared to many to be the seat of anti-Vietnam protest, occurred on the weekend of 2-4 May 1970. On campuses

around the country, college presidents invited or were forced by politicians to invite the National Guard or local police onto campuses to quell the disturbances. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, at Kent State University in Ohio [**“May4” Kent State web resource**], troops opened fire indiscriminately and killed four students while wounding eight more. Lost in the magnitude of this tragedy was the fact that violence had erupted in confrontations between students and authorities on other campuses as well. At the University of New Mexico, for example, National Guardsmen bayoneted several students, although none died.

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**Web Resource:** The Kent May 4 Center (a non-profit educational resource center). Comprehensive online resources on the Kent State tragedy can be accessed online at <http://www.may4.org/>.

Kent State shocked the nation and left it with many unanswered, perhaps unanswerable, questions. Was government at all levels out of control? Were the protesters intent on ending the war or destroying the country? Was the gulf between the pro-war “hawks” and anti-war “doves” now so wide that it could only be bridged by violence? Could there, in fact, any longer be a civil debate on the war? The answers were not apparent as summer 1970 opened.

## 6. Roosting Chickens

The conduct of the war was a major problem for each administration charged with its management in their relations with critics and the general public. None went to greater lengths to manage the war, the opposition—official and otherwise—and the public than the White House under Richard Nixon. The consequences for the administration, the constitution, and the nation were traumatic.

### *The Pentagon Papers*

The various administrations saddled with the increasingly volatile yet delicate Vietnam issue—from Eisenhower to Johnson—had over time produced a subculture of extreme secrecy within the government. To many it seemed that that the routine and expected confidentiality employed in military and diplomatic affairs had given way, by the time Nixon took office, to an almost total and impenetrable penumbra of official secrecy, in particular surrounding Vietnam policy. This was frustrating because clear evidence abounded through dogged reporting, leaks, common sense, and empirical observation that what official press releases, reports, and utterances said about the conduct and progress of the war was often at odds with fact. There grew a powerful hunger in the press and public for forthright information about the war. Parallel to that hunger, however, there also grew a bunker mentality in the Nixon administration concerning the indiscriminate dissemination of war-related information and the potential to impair the White House’s ability to prosecute the war effectively. There was also, of course, political advantage to be gained by rationing information.

In any case, in this tense atmosphere, the controversy over the **“Pentagon Papers”** [**web resource**] erupted in 1971. This was the informal name given a government study of US involvement in Southeast Asia. Commissioned by Robert McNamara in June, 1967, the 47-volume, top secret study covered the period from World War II to May, 1968. The study was

written by a team of analysts with access to classified documents. It was completed in January 1969. The study exposed miscalculation, bureaucratic arrogance, and deception on the part of US policymakers. It was especially clear that the US government had continually resisted full disclosure of increasing military involvement in Southeast Asia—air strikes over Laos, raids along the coast of North Vietnam, and offensive actions by the marines had been conducted long before the American public was informed.

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**Web Resource:** *The Pentagon Papers: As Published by the New York Times.* Electronic Brief and archival material on the Pentagon Papers available from George Washington University's National Archives page at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB48/>.

On 13 June 1971, the *New York Times* initiated a series of articles based on the study. The report had been turned over to the editors by Daniel Ellsberg, a former Marine, Defense and State Department employee, and analyst at the Rand Corporation, a preeminent Cold War think tank. A committed Cold Warrior, Ellsberg had spent time in Vietnam and come to have serious doubts about the US role in Vietnam. Spurred by an attack of conscience, he had in effect stolen the papers, photocopying them feverishly at night over many months, then turning the copies over to the newspaper. The Nixon Justice Department quickly got an injunction against further publication on national security grounds, but the Supreme Court ruled (30 June 1971) that constitutional guarantees of a free press overrode other considerations and allowed further publication. The government indicted Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo, who had helped with the photocopying, on charges of espionage, theft, and conspiracy. In May 1973, a federal court judge dismissed all charges against them because of improper government conduct.

### ***Watergate***

If the Pentagon Papers fiasco was a severe embarrassment to the Nixon administration, its redoubled determination to stop further leaks and control its enemies in and out of the government, was to lead directly to its great catastrophe, the ***Watergate Scandal*** [**web resource with primary source material**].

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**Web Resources:**

The Washington Post's Commemorative website on the Watergate Scandal (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/watergate/front.htm>). Contains archival news articles, audio and photos.

Primary Source Documents on the Watergate Scandal can be found on the University of Texas Austin's Harry Ransom Center at <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/online/woodstein/post/>.

The president and his inner circle—men like White House counselors J. R. Haldeman and John Erlichman, and Attorney General John Mitchell—were convinced that the left was trying to undermine the administration's efforts to win the war and govern according to their principles. In response, a secret “dirty tricks” unit, known as “the Plumbers,” was set up to thwart the efforts of their enemies. On 17 June 1972, the Plumbers attempted to burgle the campaign headquarters of the Democratic Party at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D. C. (this was not their first

attempt at breaking-and-entering. They had previously burgled the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist seeking damaging information about him). They were thwarted by an alert security guard, arrested, and arraigned in the local criminal court. The news was sensational and inexplicable: the administration, well on its way to an easy victory in the November election, was apparently trying to sabotage the desultory campaign of the Democratic nominee, Senator George McGovern, an anti-war candidate who plainly could not marshal the swelling discontent in the country to mount a serious challenge to the incumbent. In fact, Nixon won in November in a landslide, with Watergate a non-factor in the minds of voters—if they recalled it at all.

But Watergate had not gone away. An independent Special Prosecutor, Archibald Cox, was appointed to oversee an investigation into possible presidential impropriety and on 18 May 1973, the Senate appointed an investigative committee to begin nationally televised hearings on the issue. At first the hearings made little headway; nevertheless pressure mounted on the administration and, as the investigation moved nearer to the inner ring of the White House, its wall of silence began to crack. On 3 June 1973, White House Counsel John Dean, realizing he was about to be made the scapegoat in the White House for the plumbers' activities, made a deal with the Senate committee to testify extensively about his involvement and that of the president in the scandal cover-up. He told committee investigators that he discussed the cover-up of the Plumbers' activities with Nixon at least 35 times. Ten days later, Alexander Butterfield, former presidential appointments secretary, casually revealed in an interview with investigators that all conversations and telephone calls in Nixon's office had been taped since 1971. Ten days after that, on 23 June, Nixon refused to turn over the presidential tapes to the Senate Watergate Committee or the special prosecutor.

Tensions between the White House and the Prosecutor eventually led on 20 October 1973 to Nixon's firing of Cox, in the infamous "Saturday Night Massacre," so named because two administration lawyers, Elliot Richardson and William French Smith, offered Cox's vacated position, declined and were also summarily fired.

The televised Watergate hearings amounted to daily hammer blows against the administration's standing in the country. Congress, its Republican minority included, eventually felt forced to act. In the summer of 1974, the House Judiciary Committee passed articles of impeachment. Because of subsequent revelations—for example, a previously unknown tape from June 23, 1972 (recorded a few days after the break-in) documented Nixon and Haldeman creating a plan to block investigations—the last holdouts were forced to conclude that nothing could save the president. At that point, key Republican Senators informed Nixon that enough votes existed to convict him.

In June 1974, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the two *Washington Post* investigative reporters assigned to cover the scandal, published their book, *All the President's Men*.

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**Book/Movie Resource:** Bernstein, Carl and Robert Woodward. 1974. *All The Presidents' Men: The Final Days*. Simon & Schuster Publishers. A movie came out shortly after the book release (1976) starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman (available in VHS/DVD).

On 9 August 1974 Richard Nixon resigned the presidency. Vice President Gerald Ford became President of the United States (Nixon's original vice president, Spiro Agnew, had resigned on 10 October 1973, over money laundering and tax evasion charges having no connection to Watergate). On 8 September 8, 1974, President Ford ended the Watergate era investigations by granting Nixon a pardon. In so doing, Ford sealed his own fate in the 1976 election. He lost to Jimmy Carter, thus becoming the only person to serve without having been elected president or vice president.

Watergate was a critical event in American political history. Its obvious importance to the history of the constitutional order obscures the fact that it was catalyzed and framed by the Vietnam War. It was a significant element of the pervasive impact of Vietnam on American life.

## 7. The War and the Constitution

### *The Irony of Hugo Black*

The activities of the anti-war movement raised many difficult questions about American society. World War II and Korea generally had been supported by the public. But the amount and passion of protest and civil disobedience associated with the opposition to US Vietnam policy was perhaps unprecedented in American history. Even during the Civil War, with its notorious draft riots, the dissent did not approach the level of Vietnam. What was more, the intensity of the anti-war agitation came from more directions than ever before—the student left, the middle class, religious communities, the poor—to name only a few of its constituencies. The protests opened up a plethora of constitutional issues that were hotly contested up to the level of the Supreme Court. A chief one was whether a demonstration and carrying placards was an exercise of the right of free speech. This was a problem that demonstrated the so-called “generation gap.” The icon of the conflicted nature of the constitutional debates that emerged in the course of the war is no doubt *Justice Hugo Black* [[web resource](#)], a foremost defender of civil liberties. The great irony of Black's career was that he had begun in politics as a member of the Ku Klux Klan who had converted along the way to steadfast defense of civil liberties.

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**Web Resource:** Companion website for the book “Hugo Black of Alabama” (by Steve Suits) at <http://www.hugoblack.com/index.html>. The website contains passages and quotations from the book as well as original documents and photos.

Black was, by the onset of the war, an elderly member of the Court and an “Absolutist” on the First Amendment. The Absolutist approach held that the First Amendment meant exactly what it says: that Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech. In this view, the only relevant question was whether the action in conduct was truly “speech” (and therefore protected) or “conduct” (and therefore subject to reasonable governmental regulation). Even absolutists such as Black recognized that words might be so closely linked to the production of a specific action (such as entering into a contract with a hit man or yelling “Fire!” in a crowded theater) as to be unprotected.

In the crucible of the Vietnam experience, Black refused to accept the doctrine that the freedom of speech could be curtailed on national security grounds. Thus, in *New York Times Co. v. United States* (1971) [**pdf resource**], he voted to allow newspapers to publish the Pentagon Papers despite the Nixon Administration's contention that publication would have negative security implications. In his concurring opinion, Black stated, "The word 'security' is a broad, vague generality whose contours should not be invoked to abrogate the fundamental law embodied in the First Amendment." He rejected the idea that the government was entitled to punish "obscene" speech. Likewise, he argued that defamation laws abridged the freedom of speech and were therefore unconstitutional. Most members of the Supreme Court rejected both of these views. However, he found an ally in Justice William O. Douglas.

Still, Black did not believe that individuals had the right to speak wherever they pleased. He delivered the majority opinion in *Adderley v. Florida* (1966) [**web resource**], controversially upholding a trespassing conviction for protestors who demonstrated on government property. He also dissented from *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) [**web resource**], in which the Supreme Court ruled that students had the right to wear armbands (as a form of protest) in schools writing, "While I have always believed that under the First and Fourteenth Amendments neither the State nor the Federal Government has any authority to regulate or censor the content of speech, I have never believed that any person has a right to give speeches or engage in demonstrations where he pleases and when he pleases."

Moreover, Black took a narrow view of what constituted "speech" under the First Amendment. For example, he did not believe that flag burning (a favored symbolic act of defiance by anti-war protestors at this time) was speech; in *Street v. New York* (1969) [**web resource**], he wrote: "It passes my belief that anything in the Federal Constitution bars a State from making the deliberate burning of the American flag an offense." Similarly, he dissented from *Cohen v. California* (1971) [**web resource**], in which the Court held that wearing a jacket emblazoned with the words "Fuck the Draft" was speech protected by the First Amendment. He agreed that this activity "was mainly conduct, and little speech."

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**Web Resources:** Sources for Hugo Black's Supreme Court cases (Justia.com):

Adderley v. Florida at <http://supreme.justia.com/us/385/39/case.html>.

Tinker v. Des Moines at <http://supreme.justia.com/us/393/503/case.html>.

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Cohen v. California at <http://supreme.justia.com/us/403/15/case.html>.

## 8. Making Peace

### *Negotiating*

On 4 August 1969, Henry Kissinger conducted his first secret meeting in Paris with North Vietnamese emissaries. Negotiations made scant progress. It was then that the military began to plan the bombing and invasion of Cambodia. Little was accomplished by the invasion, which, as we have seen, resulted in massive protests in the United States. Congress reacted by passing legislation compelling the removal of United States troops from Cambodia by the end of June 1970.

But the U.S. was not the only party facing serious problems in its operations. In 1971 and 1972, the communists confronted their own difficulties having nothing to do with American operations. The Saigon government had gradually begun to accumulate support in the Mekong Delta because of the implementation of a "land-to-the-tiller" reform program pressed on the Thieu government by Washington in 1970. Some 400,000 farmers received a total of 600,000 hectares, and by 1972 tenancy reportedly had declined from about 60 percent to 34 percent in some rural areas. Also, a People's Self-Defense Force Program, started at the point when American troops were gradually being sent home, was having a little success in freeing ARVN troops for combat duty. Nobody knew then if the withdrawal of US forces would lead to the collapse of the ARVN but early indications—a decisive defeat of an ARVN operation mounted against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos in March 1971, for example—were not positive. But the communists faced their own difficulties, including crumbling morale, dwindling numbers of troops tracing directly to rising desertion and tougher times in recruiting. The strength of opposition forces in 1971 had deteriorated from about 250,000 in 1968 to less than 200,000 in 1971.

From the perspective of both sides then, there was a stalemate on the battlefield and at the conference table by mid-1971. The US offered a unilateral withdrawal of United States forces if Hanoi stopped its infiltration of the South. In return, Hanoi agreed to a coalition government in Saigon along with a United States troop withdrawal and a cease-fire after the formation of a new government. The main sticking point was the position of President Thieu as head of the South Vietnamese government. Hanoi insisted he be removed. Encountering US resistance, the communist leadership in Hanoi reverted to its old strategy of a general offensive and uprising to break the deadlock. It launched the so-called Eastertide offensive on March 30, 1972. The intensive campaign, spreading throughout the South, seemed destined to cut the country in half. South Vietnam bent, but did not break. Still, the RVN government was severely destabilized and the offensive highlighted the Thieu regime's intrinsic weaknesses.

Ironically, the toll of Hanoi's ploy on each side was so great that by October both parties were more inclined to come back to the table. At the point when negotiations resumed in earnest, Hanoi was ready to accept Thieu as president of a future Saigon government in exchange for the removal of United States forces without evacuating its own forces. Thieu objected fruitlessly to the US failure to require the removal of North Vietnamese troops. Everyone well understood that this was a thinly disguised invitation to the demise of his government. The ***Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam*** [pdf resource] was signed in Paris on January 27, 1973.

### ***The End Game***

If the terms of the peace did not meet Hanoi's loftiest aspirations, they did allow the communists' legal participation in the new government and also recognized their control of specific parts of the South. More to the point, the departure of US troops gave them time to regroup militarily and concentrate on political activities in the South. As a result, they at first banned combat except in self-defense, so that the US would not be tempted to reintroduce its forces.

The Thieu government, on the other hand, embarked on pacification efforts along the central coast and in the Mekong Delta, successfully reducing the area under official communist control to about 20 percent of the South. But Thieu faced serious problems that included the adverse impact of the American withdrawal on the economy, as well as an enormous wave of refugees to be absorbed. Over the length of the war, millions of Vietnamese had been evacuated or had fled from their villages to find security and work in urban areas. Most of them, however, were chronically unemployed. At the same time, the militant Buddhist groups, the *Cao Dai* and the *Hoa Hao*, constituted a large continually restive element within South Vietnamese society.

In early 1974, the communists opened an offensive to regain the territory they had lost since the cease-fire, conducting raids on roads, airfields, and economic targets. By summer, they had advanced to the point that they nearly surrounded Saigon. Encountering no direct response from the US (then preoccupied with Nixon's resignation, which occurred in August), Hanoi was emboldened to tighten the screws, convinced that America was through with Vietnam. The ARVN forces, suffering high casualties in the fighting and handicapped by inadequate materiel, provided little resistance. Hanoi ordered a more assertive offensive for 1975 and it was executed with vigor, such that the ARVN was routed. As April opened, eight northern provinces had fallen to the communist forces, including the cities of Hue and Da Nang. Elated by their stunning success, Hanoi opened an offensive against Saigon. In early April, the communists encircled the city. On 20 April 1975, following ten days of hard fighting, the ARVN were defeated. Saigon was in disarray. Thieu resigned the next day, to be replaced by Vice President Tran Van Huong. Someone regarded as more palatable to the communists, Duong Van Minh, took over the presidency on 28 April. The communists ignored an invitation to negotiate, however, and fifteen People Army of Vietnam battalions began to move toward Saigon. On 30 April, communist forces entered the capital, and Duong Van Minh ordered ARVN troops to surrender.

## 9. The Long Goodbye

The Vietnam War was one of America's longest running conflicts. American involvement in World War II spanned about three and a half years. The Civil War was relatively short (roughly four years). But even short wars have a profound and ongoing impact on the societies that fight them. World War II wrought major social, economic, and cultural changes on America following its end. In many ways, most historians and political scientists would argue that the political changes brought about by the Civil War were still being played out in the US at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (indeed, only 2004, with the election of a majority of Republicans to Louisiana's congressional delegation, could it be definitively said that the Solid South, a relic of post-Civil War politics, disappeared). Vietnam by comparison to America's other major conflicts was a long war (about 16 years counting from the date the first Americans were killed in 1959 to the evacuation of the last soldiers and civilians from Saigon in April 1975). The implications for the social, political, and cultural history of the country in the war's aftermath were, however, just as profound, if not more so.

The deep split in the nation's political culture that was to become a prominent feature of post-Vietnam electoral calculations received a major boost with the election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency in 1977. In a gesture similar in its impact on the president's future election prospects

to Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, Carter, one day after moving into the Oval Office, gave full and unconditional pardons to approximately 10,000 men who had evaded the wartime draft. Carter had hoped that this gesture would begin a healing process that would eventually mend the strained relations between war supporters and dissenters. Many young men returned to the US from self-imposed exile in Canada and others who had been in hiding or using false identities inside the US turned themselves in, but deserters were excluded and had to remain under cover. Meanwhile, groups on both sides of the issue were unhappy with Carter's action. The Veterans of Foreign Wars were "displeased," as their leader characterized the group's reaction, believing that the pardon subverted the justice system. At the same time, amnesty groups thought the president had done too little. They pointed out that in excluding deserters—those who served in the war and left before their tour was completed—or soldiers who received a less-than-honorable discharge, a significant number of resisters had been left out. Civilian protesters, selective service employees and those who initiated any act of violence also were not covered by the pardon. Few doubted that a healing process had to get underway, but the poles of opinion that surfaced after Carter's action were indicative of the depths of animosity lingering in the country over the war as well as of the reduced possibility of reelection the president had dealt himself by his well-meant gesture.

The political meaning of the chronic split in the country over Vietnam was brought home by the 1980 election. A number of other negative issues, such as the poorly performing economy, the Iran hostage crisis, and budget-cutting Carter's estrangement from the more liberal leaders of his own party (the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called him the most conservative Democratic president since Grover Cleveland), masked the effect of the war on his defeat. But, there can be little doubt that its political effects were still at work in Ronald Reagan's victory. For one thing, it is clear that a large number of blue collar Democrats were offended by the president's handling of the amnesty issue and then migrated to the Republicans because of the party's muscular foreign policy. The Democrats meanwhile, gun shy after their role in the Southeast Asian adventure, eschewed tough talk even in the face of the humiliating and drawn-out hostage crisis, fearful of alienating their liberal base which rejected any hint of militancy in foreign policy following Vietnam. The Democrats' reticence contrasted with Reagan's exceedingly straightforward view of how to deal with such antagonists as the Soviet Union and America's other enemies which, boiled down, was to assert American power at all times. In negotiating over the diplomats being held hostage in Tehran, Carter was trying to avoid the appearance of bellicosity and, in so doing, appeared to many voters as weak and indecisive. Reagan, by contrast, as a candidate rather than an elected official, was free to outline a bold and vigorous response to the nation's perceived enemies, which he did articulately and with relish. As a captive of the Vietnam hangover in American life, Carter's bid for reelection was, in retrospect, doomed.

Yet another indication of the lingering and unremittingly intense anguish over Vietnam surfaced in 1982 in the form of a passionate debate about the appropriateness of the memorial to the fallen of the war. Designed by a young Yale architecture student, Maya Ying Lin, the low-slung, V-shaped wall of black granite on which the names of the war's dead were engraved, became the focus of a raging controversy. For many the unobtrusive design reflected the shocking lack of respect for the heroism of the Vietnam dead and lack of pride in their sacrifice that seemed to symbolize America's overall negative attitude toward the conflict. To others it was a powerful

and tasteful evocation of the ambiguous nature of the Vietnam experience, at once honoring the dead and, at the same time, refusing to glorify an unnecessary conflict. A compromise was reached with the addition of statuary called “Three Soldiers” to the site. Over the years, the wall became a mecca for those who lost loved ones or friends in the war and those who wanted to gain insight into the Vietnam experience. Still, the conflict over the design provided a window into the chronic wound that Vietnam continued to be in the American psyche, not just in politics but in the culture.

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**Mapping Vietnam Casualties:** Spreadsheet and GIS projects of Vietnam casualties for Oregon mapped by city (using a graduated symbol) and geocoded by name/city (use ID to look up individuals). Information mapped at a national level includes casualties by state (raw numbers and percent total population). ArcExplorer and ArcView GIS projects that show the increasing numbers of casualties can be used to provide a foundation of the broad impact of the war locally and nationally (particularly leading up to and including the 1968 events).

**Map Resource:** Number of Casualties from the Vietnam War (1957-1972) by City of Residence. Source: US Department of Defense.

**Web Resource:** The official *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* website (in Washington DC) is located at <http://thewall-usa.com/>. There is a photo gallery, a literary section, historical summary page and a search engine for the names on the wall.

Throughout the eighties and into the nineties, Vietnam was a story that would not end. Of special poignancy was the agonizing search for American servicemen missing-in-action (MIA). For the families of the MIAs, the war had never ended and President Reagan promised to assign the resolution of their status the highest priority. Some held on to the belief that some American soldiers and airmen remained in North Vietnamese prisons, hostage to Vietnamese spite. Some traveled to Vietnam to take custody of remains that had been identified as their MIA. This aspect of the unending tragedy of Vietnam War continues unresolved for some families (official sources list 1,948 remaining MIAs from the South Asia Theatre).

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**Web Resource:** The Library of Congress maintains a *MIA/POW* database and document repository at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pow/powhome.html>. The site contains a search engine to locate particular individuals missing-in-action as well as summary reports and other historical documents.

Perhaps the most pervasive and far reaching effect of the Vietnam War in American life remains its symbolism for the political culture. Three primary examples of this phenomenon illustrate just how important Vietnam is in the national narrative and how strangely it cuts in partisan politics. The first concerns the presidency of Bill Clinton. In the 1992 campaign, in the course of its opposition research, the Republicans unearthed Clinton’s draft record. After college at Georgetown University Clinton won a Rhodes Scholarship. He studied government at Oxford University beginning in October 1968. Eligible for the US draft, he was ordered to report home to Arkansas for induction in May 1969, but only returned home in July and managed to get a draft deferment after signing up for the ROTC program at the University of Arkansas with the promise that he would enroll later in the year. In the meantime, he returned to England where he attended demonstrations against the Vietnam War staged at the American Embassy in London.

In the US, a new draft lottery system based on birth dates was instituted. The lottery brought Clinton a high number, so high he was confident he would never be drafted. Clinton then sent a letter back to the Arkansas ROTC instructor stating that the idea of joining the ROTC had been an "objectionable compromise" and that he was no longer interested in joining. The letter was remarkable for both its candor about Clinton's long term political ambitions and its attempt to justify the writer's clear effort to avoid the draft. The Republican campaign apparatus made much of Clinton's unwillingness to serve his country in contrast to the demonstrated eagerness of his opponent, President George H. W. Bush, a certified World War II hero, to enlist as a young student. Despite what seemed to be the clear difference in patriotism between the two men, the incumbent president lost to the Vietnam slacker.

The second case involved the candidates in the 2000 election. One, the Democrat Al Gore, served in Vietnam as an Army enlisted man, despite the fact that his father was a US Senator. The other, the Republican George W. Bush, son of the former president, had been a pilot in the Texas and Alabama Air National Guard programs, but had mysteriously never finished his commitment. Although the Democrats attempted to stir up concern about Bush's war record, he won the election in the Electoral College. Once again, the apparent slacker triumphed, raising the question of how much and when a Vietnam War record mattered.

In the third case, which unfolded in the 2004 election, in one of the most remarkable campaign feats in American political history, John Kerry, the Democratic candidate, like his opponent's father a certified war hero, was actually defeated in large part by his Vietnam record, or, in any event, what his opponent said it was. As the commander of a so-called swift boat patrolling the Mekong River in South Vietnam, Kerry was responsible for saving his crew and at least one crewman of another boat from a Vietcong ambush, for which he won a number of citations. In the campaign, which was increasingly framed by the deepening Iraq conflict, Kerry had hoped to present himself as a patriot who had answered the call of duty and understood war, in contrast to the president, who had evaded duty and had, with no experience of war and thus little understanding of it, plunged the country into a Vietnam-like quagmire. To that end he began his nomination speech at the Democratic convention with the words "John Kerry reporting for duty," and made a great deal of his military service from that point on in the campaign. Instead of gaining an advantage, however, Kerry inadvertently created an opening for a group called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, ostensibly independent of the President's opposition campaign, to impugn the reliability of his version of his wartime experience and to plant a seed of doubt about his character among many in the electorate. The Kerry campaign subsequently became mired in a weeks-long effort to combat the Swift Boat Veterans' attack, draining away precious time and resources from other more productive issues for the candidate. The Democrats, for their part, reopened a parallel assault on the president's National Guard record, but because of faulty reporting in the press, the charges were discredited. In the end, the Republicans made the more powerful case, although it is impossible ultimately to say how damaging the Swift Boaters' assault was to Kerry's hopes. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that the attack drew much of its power from the unresolved anxiety about Vietnam in the American political imagination.

Of the many ironies of Vietnam in American history none is more potent than the one that juxtaposes the war's rank in importance among American conflicts with its impact on the nation's soul. Few conflicts have been as searing psychically, few as politically charged over the

course of decades, few as divisive of the polity, and yet few have been as ultimately insignificant in the great scheme of American policy objectives. Unlike World Wars I and II, the US role in Vietnam ultimately played little part in desired foreign policy outcomes. Unlike the Civil War or the War of 1812, Vietnam meant little to the preservation of the nation's life. Instead, its main function seems to have been to hold up a mirror to the very core of the nation's self-image, its ideals, and ambitions—and not just for a while, but possibly for decades after those who lived through it have been forgotten.

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Herr, Michael. 1968. *Dispatches*. New York: Random House. The same description applies to this book as to Emerson's above. Not a memoir, but the collected writings of a reporter with the troops in places like Khe Sanh. Nevertheless, it has the feel and immediacy of a personal account, while accurately reporting the war and how it diverged from earlier conflicts for soldiers.

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Rusk, Dean. *As I Saw It*.

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### Key Documents

Moscow Embassy Telegram #511 (the Long Telegram). *Foreign Relations of the United States*. The original version of Kennan's statement of the containment doctrine.

Hayden, Tom. *The Port Huron Statement: The Founding Manifesto of the Students for a Democratic Society*

Dohrn, Bernadine, Bill Ayres and Jeff Jones (contributors). *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiques of the Weather Underground 1970 – 1974*. Dohrn, Ayres and Jones were key figures in this radical offshoot of SDS.

*The Pentagon Papers: As Published by the New York Times*. Online Brief available from the George Washington University's National Archives page at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB48/>.

Porter, Gareth, ed. *Vietnam: A History in Documents*. An exhaustive compilation of often obscure, but valuable, letters, speeches, government papers, and so forth by both sides in the conflict—including Ho Chi Minh, General Giap, the Diems, President Thieu, JFK, LBJ, etc.

### Vietnam Movies

“Apocalypse Now” (Francis Ford Coppola). A surreal metaphorical tour de force of the American experience in Vietnam; possibly the indispensable cultural artifact of the war.

“Born on the Fourth of July” (Oliver Stone)

“Coming Home” (Hal Ashby)

“Easy Rider” (Peter Fonda). The full flavor of the Vietnam era counterculture is captured in this road movie.

“The Fog of War - Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara” (Errol Morris). A documentary about the Secretary of Defense for both JFK and LBJ and his unsettling views on his role in the Vietnam War.

“Full Metal Jacket” (Stanley Kubrick)

“Good Morning Vietnam” (Barry Levinson)

“Medium Cool” (Haskell Wexler)

“Platoon” (Oliver Stone). Possibly the best Vietnam combat movie.

PBS American Experience Series: Vietnam Online. Online resources available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/series/index.html>.

## Vietnam Novels

Heinemann, Larry. 1986. *Paco's Story: A Novel*. New York: Penguin Books (1987).

Mailer, Norman. 1994. *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History*. New York: Penguin Books. About the 1967 March on Washington in protest of the war; this is a strange conflation of novel, history, journalism, and Mailer's incredible ego, but well worth reading as a document of the times.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1967. *Why Are We in Vietnam? A Novel*. New York: Putnam.

O'Brien, Tim. 1990. *The Things They Carried*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. A brilliant collection of stories adding up to a novel of great power about the war.

Webb, James. 1978. *Fields of Fire*. New York: Pocket Books.