



The Vietnam War



Essential Questions

- Was it possible for the United States to have definitively won the Vietnam War?
- What experiences did American soldiers undergo in Vietnam?
- How did the American public feel about the war in Vietnam, and how did these feelings change over time?
- What different perspectives did young people take regarding the Vietnam War at the time? What might have been some of the reasons for these opinions?
- In what ways was the Vietnam War a defining event for an entire generation of Americans?

Indochina

- Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia
- Mountainous terrain
- Deltas:
 - Red River (north)
 - Mekong (south)
- Tropical rainforests



Vietnam in the Mid-20th Century



Ho Chi Minh in 1945

- French colony from late 19th century to WWII
- Japan invaded in WWII
- Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh led independence movement
- Democratic Republic of Vietnam
- Power vacuum

The First Indochina War

- Ho Chi Minh declared independence in 1945; received U.S. support
- War with France broke out in 1947
- Vietnam received assistance from communist China
- U.S. supported France



French soldiers in combat in Indochina, 1953

Eisenhower and J.F. Dulles



Eisenhower and Dulles

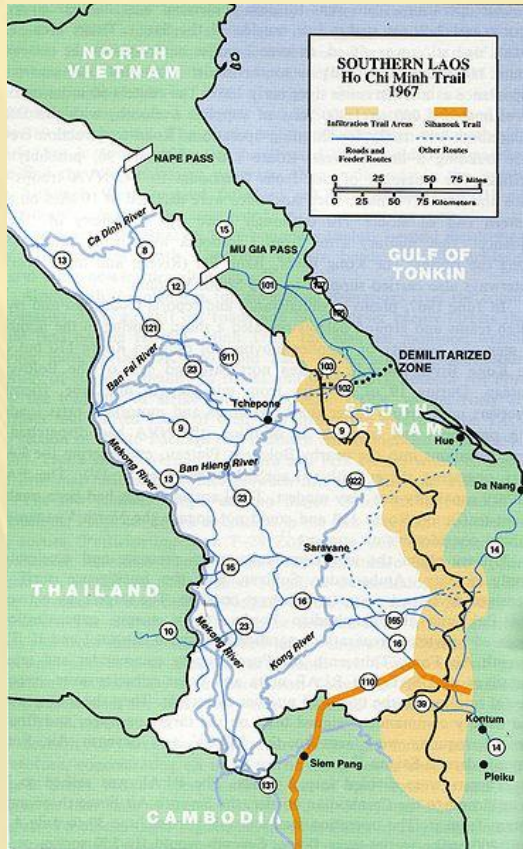
- Eisenhower took office in 1953
- Pressured France for a more aggressive strategy and a timetable for victory
- France agreed in exchange for financial assistance
- Dulles predicted victory by the end of 1955

Dien Bien Phu and the End of French Colonial Rule

- The American and French plan failed
- Viet Minh attacked French forces at Dien Bien Phu
- U.S. did not provide military assistance to the French
- Major victory for Viet Minh



The Geneva Accords and Aftermath



The Ho Chi Minh Trail (A supply line through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam appears in orange at the bottom of this map

- Treaty officially ended French foreign involvement in Indochina
- Vietnam divided:
 - Communist North
 - U.S.-supported, Catholic South
- Elections to unite the country will be held in 2 years.

The Geneva Accords and Aftermath (continued)

- Ngo Dinh Diem took power in 1955
- Viet Cong threatened to overthrow Diem
- U.S. opposed mandated unification election



Ngo Dinh Diem

The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese

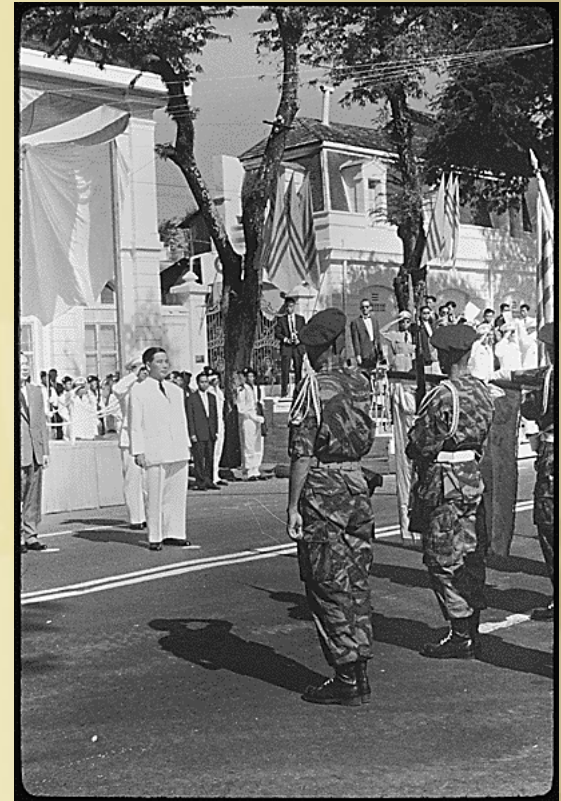


A Viet Cong soldier

- Viet Cong: communist revolutionaries in South Vietnam
- North Vietnam: Ho's communist government
- North Vietnamese Army (NVA)
- North Vietnam wanted the Viet Cong to appear as if fighting independently
- Tactics

Instability in South Vietnam

- Kennedy expanded aid to South Vietnam
- Protests by Buddhists
- U.S. supported overthrow and assassination of Diem
- Popular support for communists in South increased after the assassination of President Diem



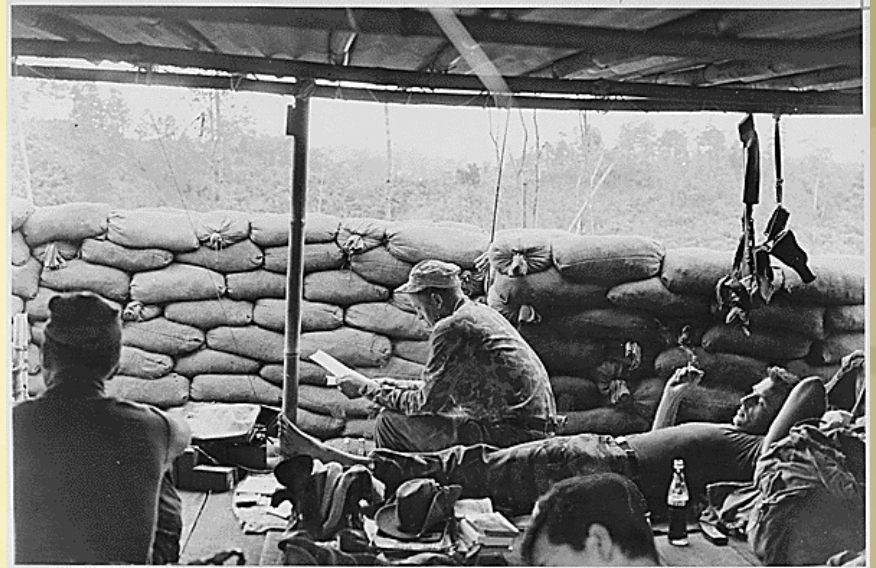
During ceremonies at Saigon in 1962, the Vietnamese Air Force pledged its support for Diem after a political uprising and an attempt on his life

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the U.S. end its support for Ho Chi Minh and back France in the First Indochina War? Do you think this was a good strategy? Why or why not?
2. What were the Geneva Accords, and what impact did they have on Vietnam?
3. What was the relationship between the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese government? Why did North Vietnam want to keep this relationship a secret?

Containment and the “Domino Theory”

- Kennedy began to call for limited withdrawal of advisors
- Johnson wanted escalation
- The domino theory of communism’s spread
- U.S. policy of containment



U.S. advisors in Vietnam, 1964

LBJ: Why Escalation?

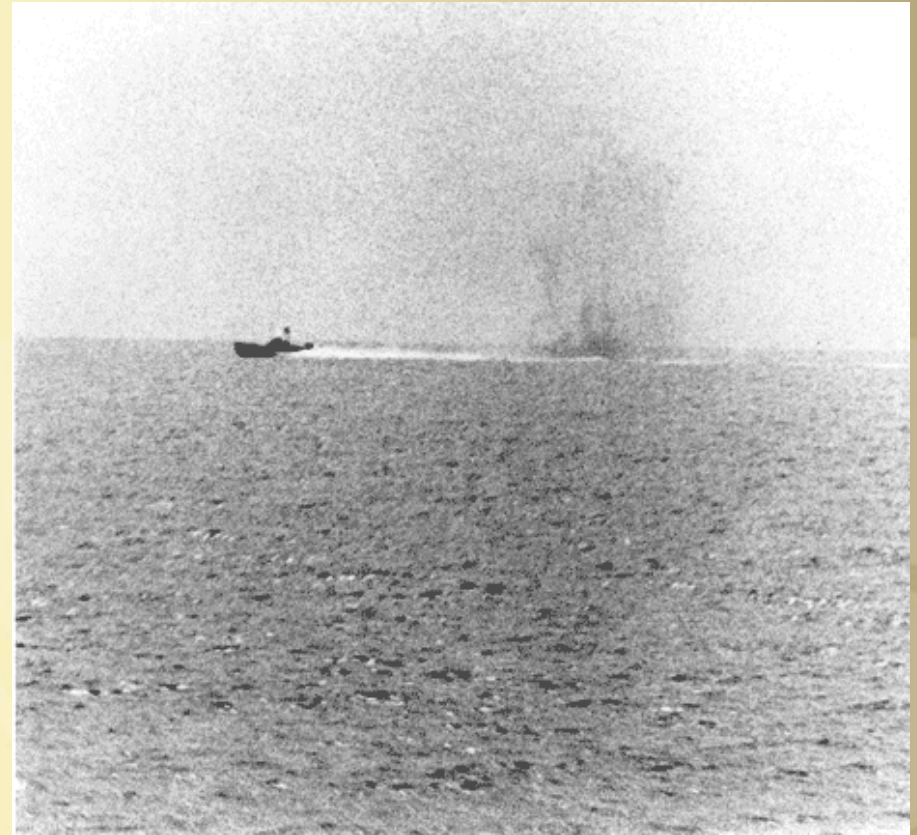


Secretary of State Dean Rusk (left) and President Johnson

- U.S. wanted to maintain its international respect and reputation
- Hoped to prevent communist China's expansion
- Johnson's political concerns and ego
- Believed North Vietnam would give up its goals with gradual escalation

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

- Top-secret missions against North Vietnam from 1961
- August 2, 1964: Attack on U.S destroyer by NVA torpedo boats; U.S. fired first
- August 4: Alleged second NVA attack against U.S. destroyer



Photograph of action viewed from the U.S.S. *Maddox* during the Gulf of Tonkin Incident

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident (continued)



President Johnson signing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

- Based on second “attack,” Johnson ordered retaliatory airstrikes
- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowed military action without declaration of war
- Recent evidence shows that second attack never happened

Aerial Bombing Begins

- Aerial bombing campaign began in March 1965 (“Operation Rolling Thunder”)
- U.S. wanted to end North Vietnam’s support for the Viet Cong
- Bombing campaigns not effective toward this goal



The Ground War



U.S. troops during a
“search and destroy” mission

- Number of ground troops grew rapidly
- “Search and destroy” missions
- Caused difficulties for the South Vietnamese: loss of farmland, inflation, refugees
- Many South Vietnamese came to see the U.S. as the enemy

Westmoreland's Strategy

- Gen. William Westmoreland
- War of attrition
- Large-scale ground and air attacks
- Viet Cong and NVA fought a smaller-scale guerilla war; difficult for U.S. to counter
- Attrition did not work
- “Logistical miracle”



General Westmoreland with
President Johnson

American Allies' Views of the War

- Traditional European allies did not contribute; France openly opposed the war
- Pacific Rim allies included Australia, S. Korea, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines
- All small and reluctant contributions
- Support waned as the war went on

American Soldiers in Vietnam

- Terrible conditions in the Vietnamese jungle and swamps
- Constant vigilance
- Hard to distinguish Viet Cong from South Vietnamese villagers
- Some turned to drug abuse
- Low morale



U.S. Marines march through the Vietnamese jungle

Weaponry



Phantom and Corsair fighters release bombs during a strike mission

- Bombers and fighters
- Tanks and armored personnel carriers
- Troops' individual weapons: rifles, mortars, grenades, mines
- “People sniffers”

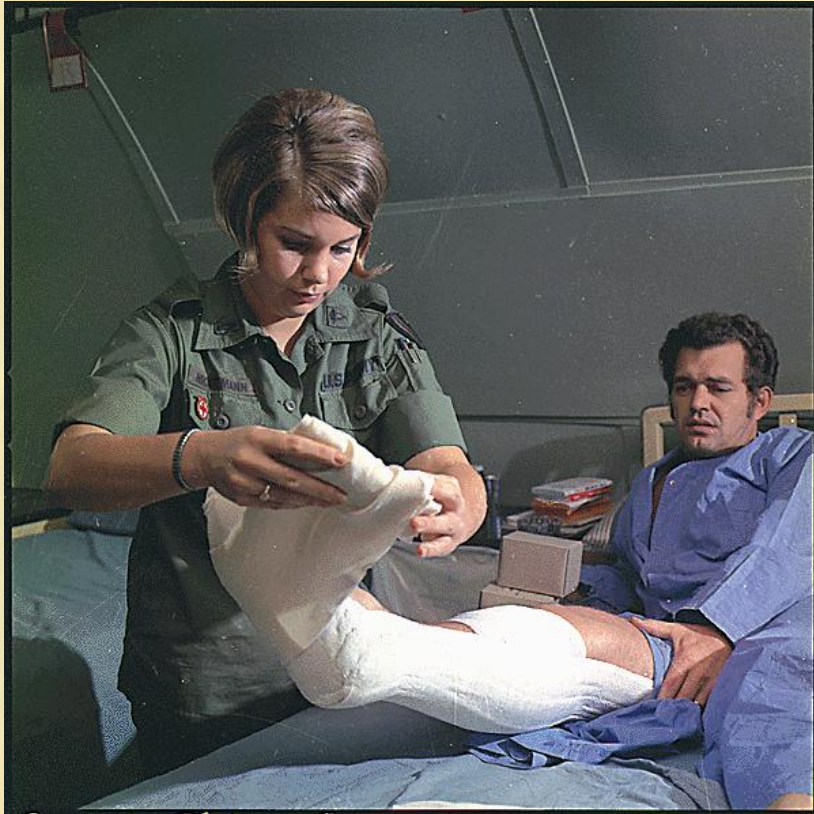
Weaponry (cont.)

- Chemical incendiary devices (e.g., napalm)
- Agent Orange:
 - Killed jungle foliage
 - Caused genetic defects
- Agent Blue:
 - Destroyed crops
 - Peasants more affected than Viet Cong



A napalm strike

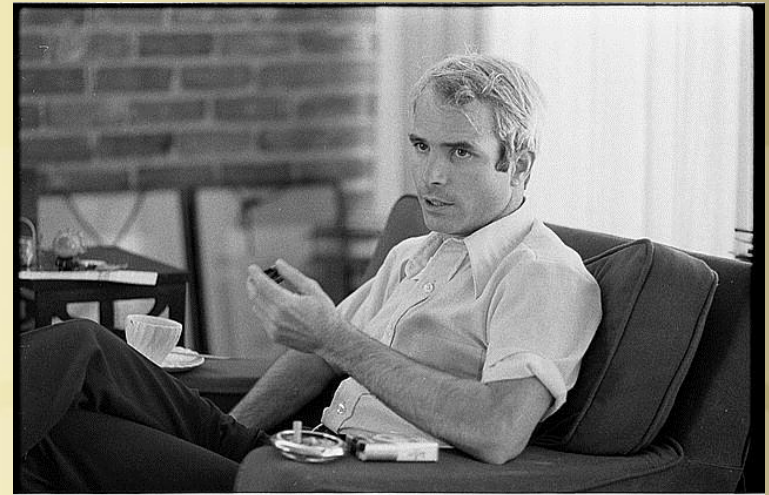
Women in the Vietnam War



- Thousands served in various military and civilian roles
- Noncombat roles
- Witnessed the same types of atrocities as men
- Woman's efforts not highly recognized
- Vietnam Women's Memorial Project

Prisoners of War

- Kept in North Vietnamese prisons in or near Hanoi
- Horrendous conditions
- Interrogation and torture increased after failed escape attempt
- U.S. began to publicize prison conditions
- Improvements after Ho's death
- Continued controversy over some POWs' fate



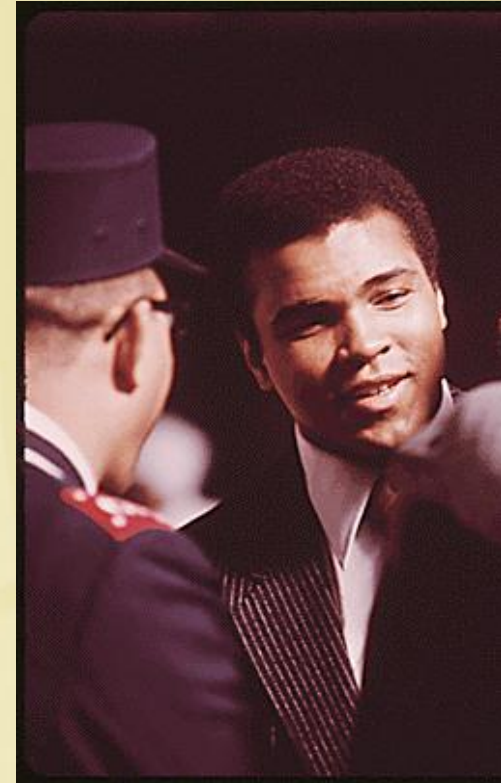
Former POW John McCain, shortly after his release in 1973

Discussion Questions

1. What was the domino theory, and how did it affect the U.S. government's decisions regarding Vietnam?
2. Why do you think that the U.S.'s European allies refused to support its actions in Vietnam? Were they justified in doing so? Explain.
3. Why did American ground troops have such a difficult time fighting in Vietnam?
4. What was the flaw in General Westmoreland's strategy of a war of attrition with the NVA?

Public Opinion in the U.S.

- Most Americans supported the war early on
- Opposition began to spread more widely in 1966
- Many still remained supportive
- “Hawks” and “doves”



Boxer Muhammad Ali, convicted for refusing to report for induction into the military during the Vietnam War, appealed his case to the Supreme Court and won

The Antiwar Movement: Ideologies

- Three general categories
 - Pacifists
 - Radicals
 - Antiwar liberals
- Did not always agree on the best protest strategies

The Antiwar Movement: Protests

- Individual acts of protest:
 - Burning draft cards
 - Self-immolation
 - Antiwar entertainment
- Group protests:
 - Government and associated buildings
 - Draft boards, recruiters
 - Weapons manufacturers



The Antiwar Movement: Protests (cont.)



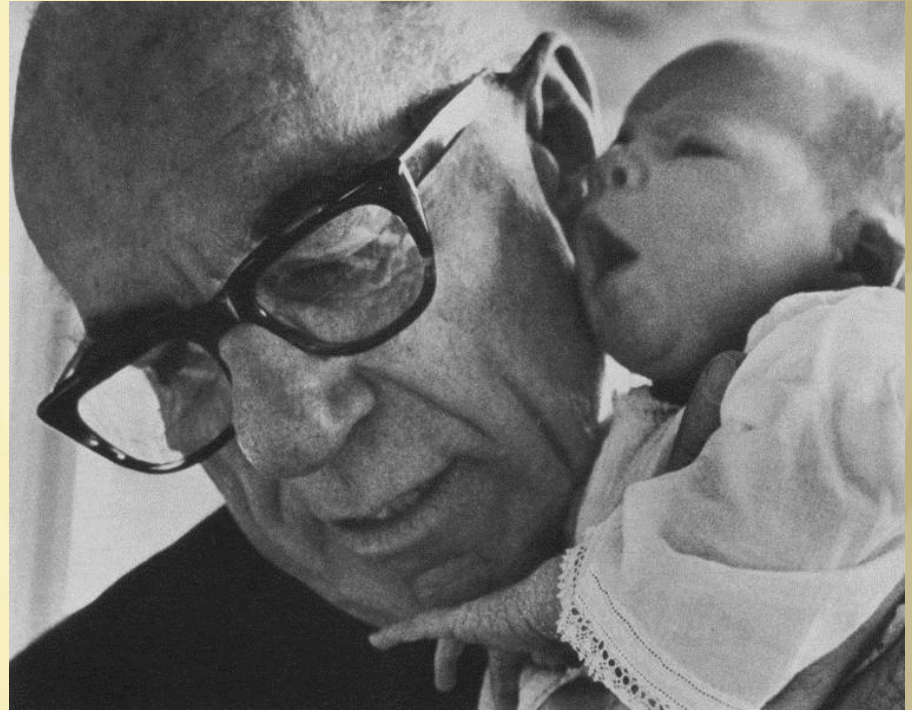
- Group protests:
 - March on the Pentagon (1967)
 - “Teach-ins” and “sit-ins” on college campuses

Federal marshals drag away a protester after the march on the Pentagon

The Antiwar Movement: Leaders and Organizations

Pacifist movement:

- Often Quakers or Unitarians
- Dr. Benjamin Spock and SANE



Famous “baby doctor” Benjamin Spock was a vocal opponent of the war

The Antiwar Movement: Leaders and Organizations (cont.)

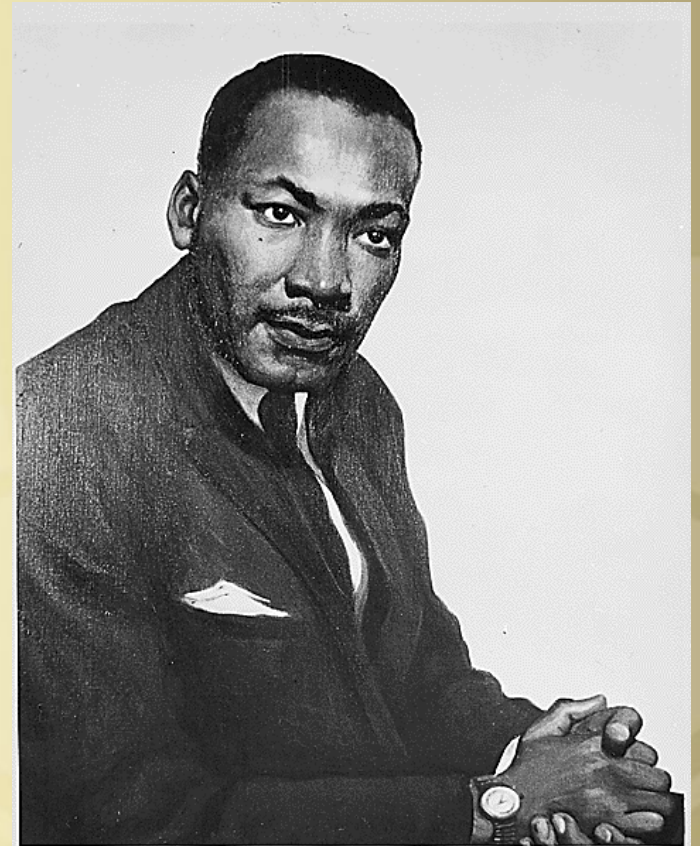


Mario Savio, a leader of the Free Speech Movement, at a protest at the University of California, Berkeley, 1966

- Some grew out of the civil rights movement:
 - Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
 - Free Speech Movement
- The “New Left”

Martin Luther King Jr.

- Hesitated to speak out because of LBJ's War on Poverty
- Became a vocal critic of the war:
 - Felt it morally irresponsible
 - It diverted money from antipoverty programs
- “Beyond Vietnam” speech
- Criticized for antiwar position



The Antiwar Movement: Impact



- Protests did little to change public opinion about the war (or may have increased support for the war)
- Brought the war more closely into the public eye
- Kept Johnson from drastically escalating the war

1960s Counterculture and the War

- Mainly young people, but did not represent all youth
- Not all hippies protested; not all protesters were hippies
- Late 1960s to early 1970s
- Dissatisfaction with 1950s conservatism
- Musical influences and cultural experimentation



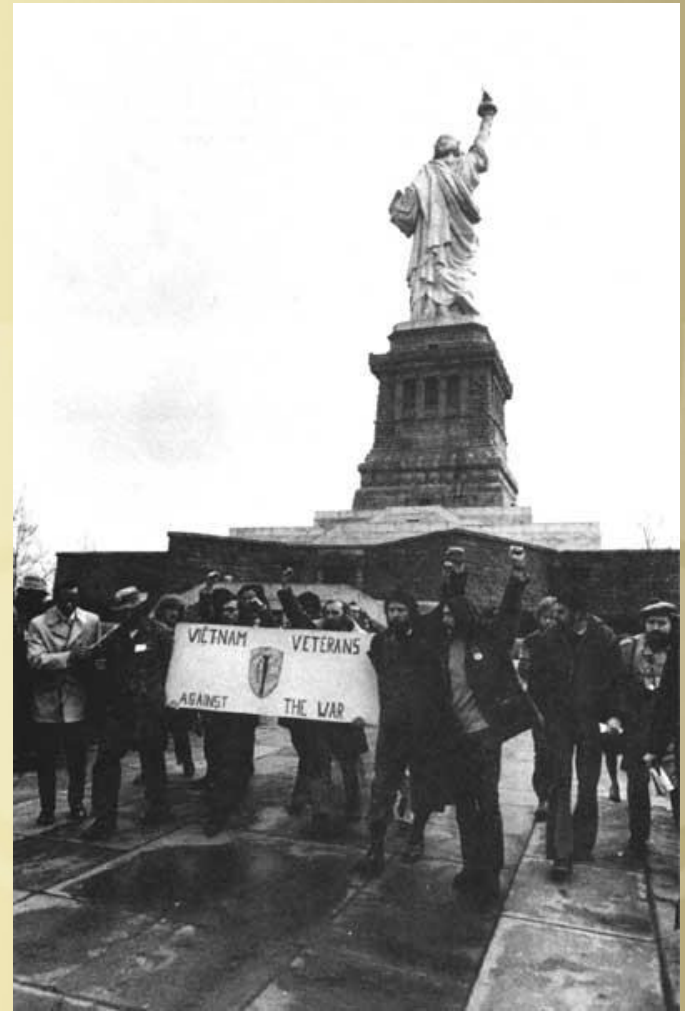
Coming Home



- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Veterans tended to resent antiwar protesters
- Sometimes blamed for the government's mistake
- Faced a nation that wanted to forget about the war
- Most did well upon their return

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

- Organized in 1967
- Support groups and health-care assistance for veterans
- Membership and prominence grew after U.S. invasion of Cambodia
- Operation RAW



The Draft: Lotteries



The first draft lottery,
December 1st, 1969

- Selective Service System
- Draft lottery in 1969
- Some men received deferments
- Many enlisted rather than be drafted
- Draft ended in 1973

The Draft: Avoidance and Evasion

- Conscientious objectors
- Illegally burning draft cards
- Fleeing the country, usually to Canada



The Draft: Race and Class Issues



- The war drew attention to class and racial tensions
- More poor men and minorities had to serve in Vietnam
- African Americans tended to strongly oppose the war

Discussion Questions

1. What led Martin Luther King Jr. to oppose the Vietnam War?
2. Why do you suppose that some antiwar organizations arose from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s?
3. Do you think that the draft lottery was a fair way of determining who was sent to fight in Vietnam? Why or why not?

The Tet Offensive

- Tet: Vietnamese New Year
- North Vietnam launched offensive despite cease-fire
- Focused on South Vietnamese cities and towns
- North Vietnam lost militarily
- Major psychological effect on American public
- Destruction in South Vietnam



Tet: The American Public Reacts

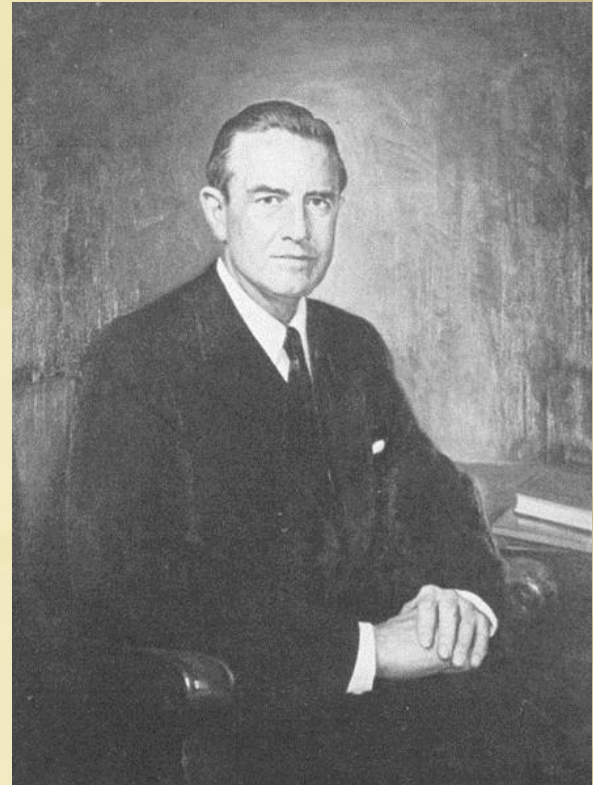


U.S. soldiers in the city of Hue during the Tet Offensive

- Reduced confidence that the United States was winning the war
- Johnson considered adding 200,000 troops
- *New York Times* leaked article about troop increase; Johnson failed to respond
- Johnson reduced troop increase and bombing of North Vietnam

The Paris Peace Talks

- LBJ concerned about his political reputation
- Suspended some bombing and encouraged North Vietnam to negotiate
- Slow pace, with contradictory demands
- Talks languished until 1972



U.S. Ambassador-at-Large
Averell Harriman

The Election of 1968



LBJ announcing his decision
not to run

- Johnson announced he wouldn't seek reelection
- Assassination of Robert Kennedy
- Democratic National Convention in Chicago
- Humphrey, Nixon, and Wallace
- Nixon won the election

The My Lai Massacre

- Charlie Company entered My Lai on search-and-destroy mission
- Brutally massacred over 300 villagers
- Covered up for a year and a half
- Fueled the antiwar movement
- Led more Americans to question the war strategy



Villagers killed in the My Lai massacre

Nixon's War Leadership



Nixon shaking hands with a soldier in Vietnam

- Nixon's "secret plan"
- Nixon Doctrine
- "Vietnamization"
- Bombing under Nixon far exceeded LBJ's
- Increased devastation under Nixon's watch

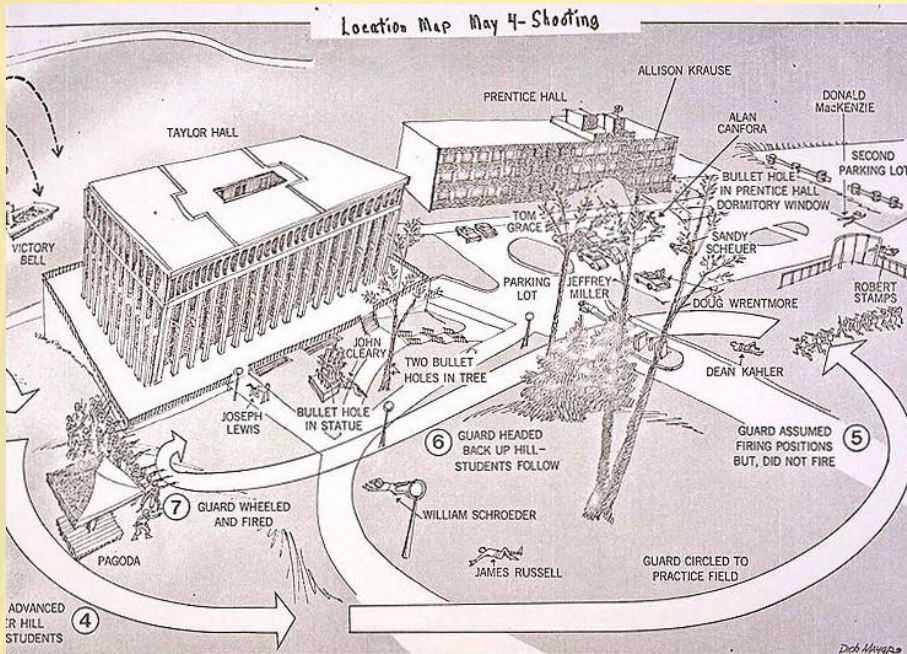
The Secret War in Cambodia

- Secret bombing attacks against Cambodia
- Cambodia officially neutral
- Attacked Viet Cong and NVA sanctuaries
- Nixon wanted to send a message of support to South Vietnam
- American public initially unaware



Nixon announcing the bombing in Cambodia

The Kent State Massacre

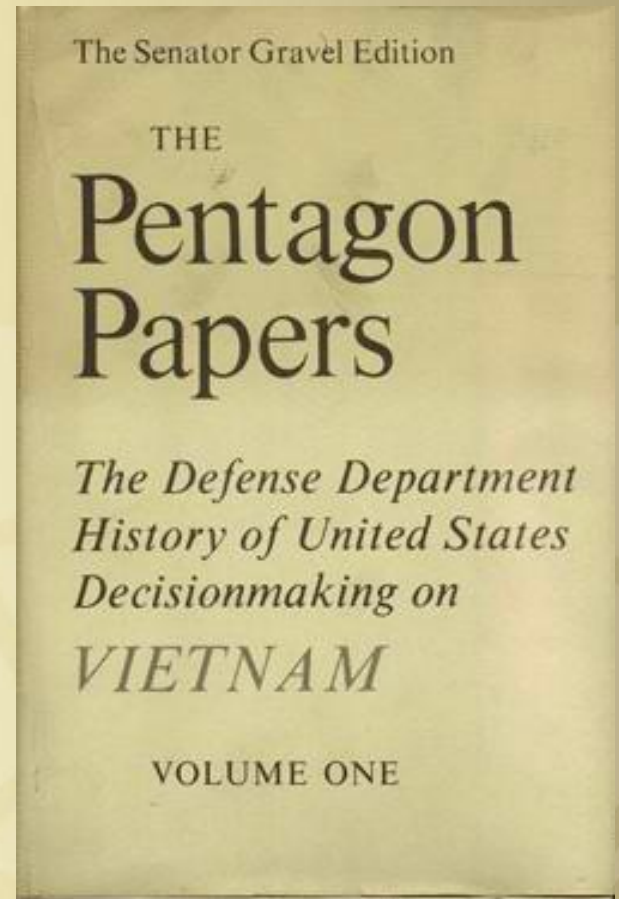


A map showing where the shootings occurred

- Protests against Nixon's war in Cambodia
- Four days of protests at Kent State University (OH)
- National Guard killed four students
- Photos widely published
- Antiwar sentiments increased

The Pentagon Papers

- Daniel Ellsberg leaked classified documents to the *New York Times*
- Revealed that the government had consistently misled the American public about the Vietnam War
- Nixon filed injunction
- Supreme Court overturned injunction
- Ellsberg tried for espionage; charges dismissed



The Easter Offensive

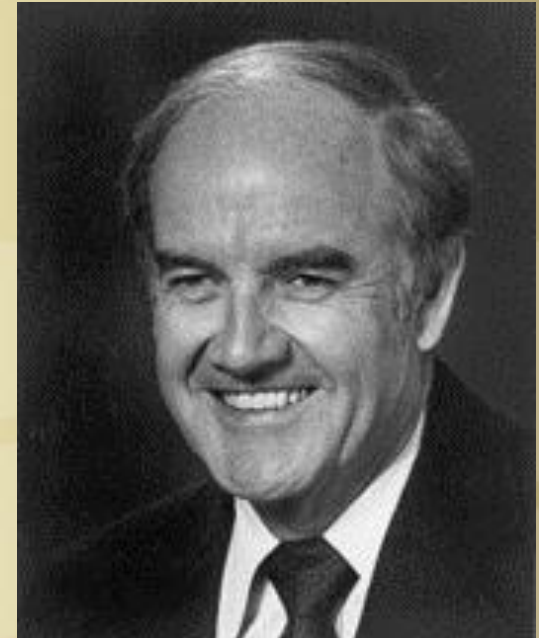


- March 1972
- NVA invasion nearly reached Saigon
- U.S. resumed bombing attacks against North Vietnam
- Ended in September
- Both sides claimed victory
- The North gained some bases in the South, and leverage at peace negotiations

The Election of 1972

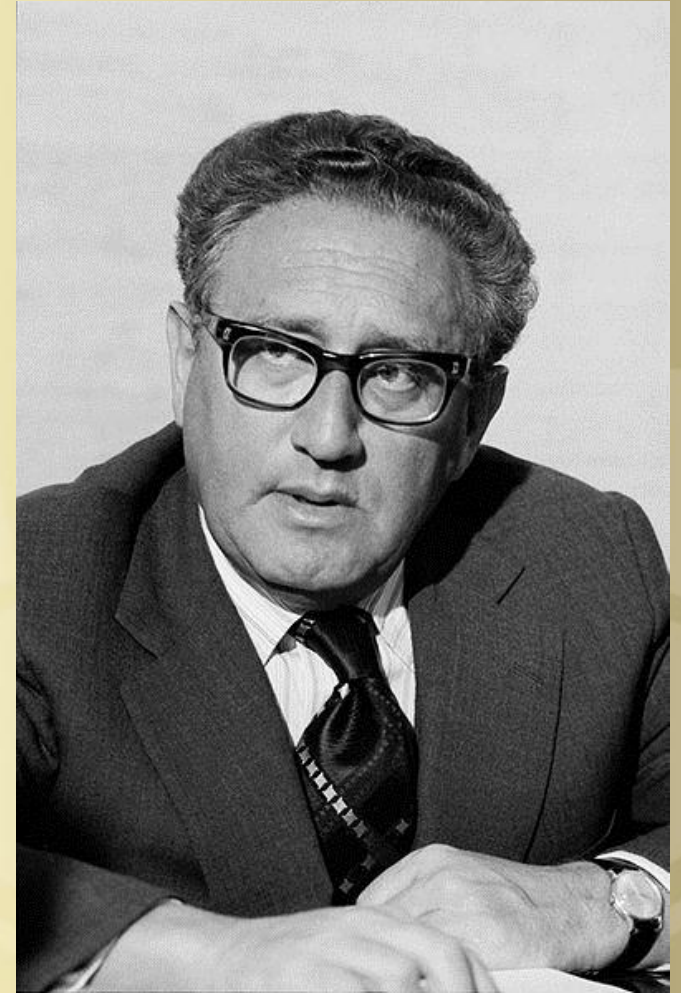


- Nixon vs. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota
- Nixon won by a landslide
- Nixon promised peace and portrayed the governor as a radical



The Paris Peace Accords

- Paris peace talks had stalled for over three years
- Kissinger began meeting secretly with Le Duc Tho in 1970
- Thieu rejected tentative agreement in 1972
- Talks broke off in December



Henry Kissinger

The Paris Peace Accords (cont.)

- Christmas Bombing of North Vietnam
- Peace accords signed on January 27, 1973
- Last American troops left Vietnam in March 1973



Signing the Paris
Peace Accords

The Fall of Saigon

- NVA and Viet Cong took Saigon in 1975
- U.S. military helped with evacuations but failed to rescue many South Vietnamese who had helped in the war effort
- South Vietnam came under communist rule
- North and South united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam



A soldier stands guard as a helicopter lands to evacuate U.S. personnel from Saigon, 1975

The Aftermath in the U.S.

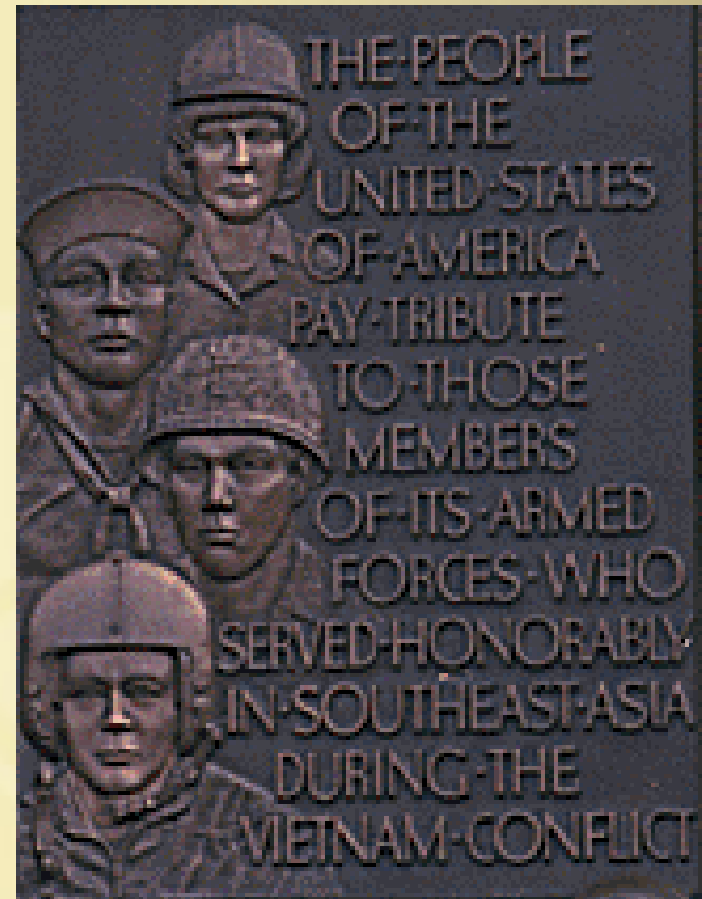


Dead soldiers (background)
receive a rifle salute

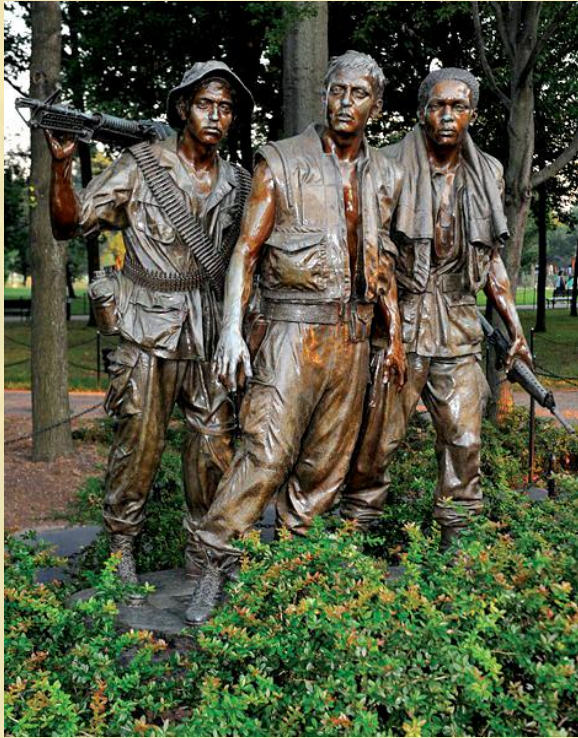
- More than 58,000 Americans killed; about 2000 missing
- Discussions concerning political miscalculations
- Military lessons learned
- U.S. had spent \$700 billion (today's dollars)
- Budget deficit

Veterans After the War

- Hundreds of veterans organizations
- Reunions
- Visits to Vietnam
- Some veterans prefer to avoid talking about the war



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial



“The Three Soldiers”

- Completed in 1982
- “The Three Soldiers”
- Vietnam Women’s Memorial
- Vietnam Memorial Wall



“The Wall,” with the Washington Monument in the background

Discussion Questions

1. How did the Tet Offensive affect public perceptions of the Vietnam War in the U.S.?
2. What was the Nixon Doctrine, and what effect did it have on U.S. conduct of the war?
3. Do you think that the *New York Times* was justified in publishing the Pentagon Papers? Why or why not?
4. What do you see as the most important result of the Vietnam War? Explain.