



## Module 16

# The Vietnam War



### Essential Question

Should the United States have gotten involved in the conflict in Vietnam?

**About the Photograph:** This photograph shows U.S. troops on patrol with helicopter support in Vietnam in 1965.






In this module you will learn how the United States used its military to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. You will also examine how the Vietnam War ultimately brought down a president and bitterly divided the nation.

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#### VIDEOS, including...

- America Is Drawn into the Vietnam Conflict
- Congress Passes the Tonkin Gulf Resolution
- Operation Rolling Thunder
- Search-and-Destroy Missions
- Cambodia
- Coming Home

-  Document-Based Investigations
-  Graphic Organizers
-  Interactive Games
-  Image with Hotspots: Tunnels of the Vietcong
-  Carousel: Jungle Warfare

### What You Will Learn . . .

#### Lesson 1: Moving Toward Conflict . . . . . 780

**The Big Idea** To stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the United States used its military to support South Vietnam.

#### Lesson 2: U.S. Involvement and Escalation . . . . . 787

**The Big Idea** The United States sent troops to fight in Vietnam, but the war quickly turned into a stalemate.

#### Lesson 3: A Nation Divided . . . . . 795

**The Big Idea** Opponents of the government's war policy were pitted against those who supported it.

#### Lesson 4: 1968: A Tumultuous Year. . . . . 802

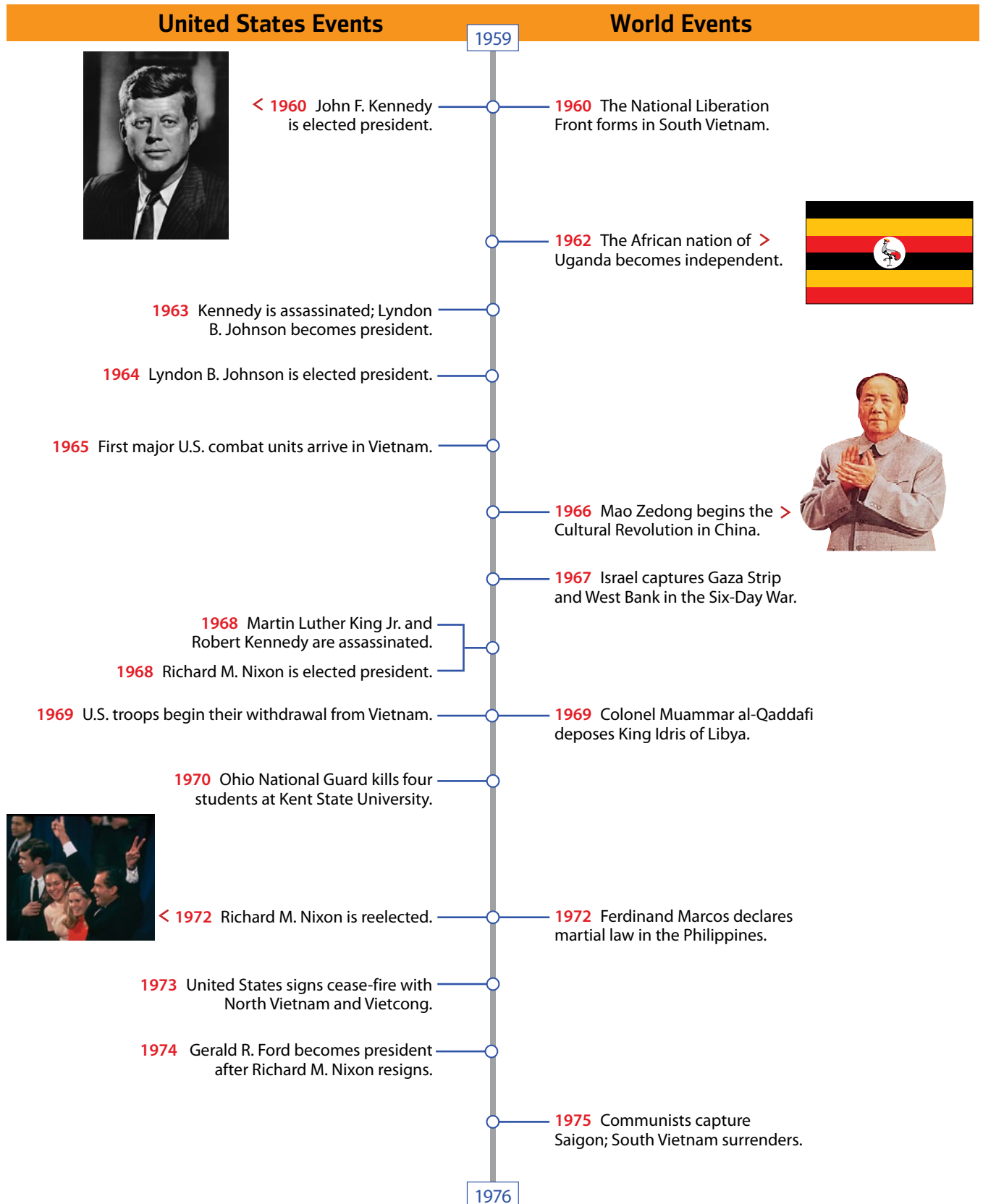
**The Big Idea** An enemy attack in Vietnam, two assassinations, and a chaotic political convention made 1968 an explosive year.

#### Lesson 5: The End of the War and Its Legacy . . . . . 809

**The Big Idea** President Nixon instituted his Vietnamization policy, and the long war finally came to an end.

# Timeline of Events 1959–1976

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# Moving Toward Conflict

## The Big Idea

To stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the United States used its military to support South Vietnam.

## Why It Matters Now

The United States' support role in Vietnam began what would become a long and controversial war.

## Key Terms and People

Ho Chi Minh

Vietminh

domino theory

Dien Bien Phu

Geneva Accords

Ngo Dinh Diem

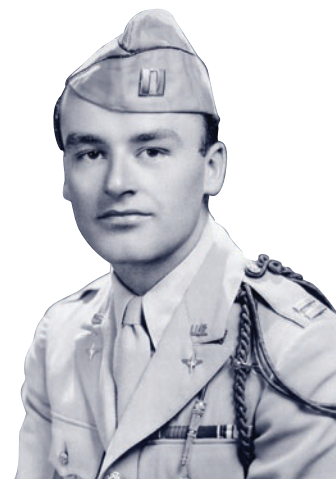
Vietcong

Ho Chi Minh Trail

Tonkin Gulf Resolution

## One American's Story

On the morning of September 26, 1945, Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey was on his way to the Saigon airport in Vietnam. Only 28, Dewey served in the Office of Strategic Services, the chief intelligence-gathering body of the U.S. military and forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency. Dewey was sent to assess what was becoming an explosive situation in Vietnam, a Southeast Asian country that had recently been freed from Japanese rule.



Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey

Before World War II, France had ruled Vietnam and the surrounding countries. Now it sought—with British aid—to regain control of the region. The Vietnamese had resisted Japanese occupation. Now they were preparing to fight the French. Dewey saw nothing but disaster in France's plan. "Cochinchina [southern Vietnam] is burning," he reported, "the French and British are finished here, and we [the United States] ought to clear out of Southeast Asia." On his way to the airport, Dewey encountered a roadblock staffed by Vietnamese soldiers and shouted at them in French. Presumably mistaking him for a French soldier, the guards shot him in the head. Thus, A. Peter Dewey, whose body was never recovered, was the first American to die in Vietnam.

Unfortunately, Dewey would not be the last. As Vietnam's independence effort came under Communist influence, the United States grew increasingly concerned about the small country's future. Eventually, America would fight a war to halt the spread of communism in Vietnam. The war would claim the lives of almost 60,000 Americans and more than 2 million Vietnamese. It also would divide the American nation as no other event since the Civil War.



### Vocabulary

**peasant** a member of the class of agricultural laborers

## America Supports France in Vietnam

America's involvement in Vietnam began in 1950, during the French Indochina War, the name given to France's attempt to reestablish its rule in Vietnam after World War II. Seeking to strengthen its ties with France and to help fight the spread of communism, the United States provided the French with massive economic and military support.

**FRENCH RULE IN VIETNAM** From the late 1800s until World War II, France ruled most of Indochina. This included Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. French colonists, who built plantations on peasant land and extracted rice and rubber for their own profit, encountered growing unrest among the Vietnamese peasants. French rulers reacted harshly by restricting freedom of speech and assembly and by jailing many Vietnamese nationalists. These measures failed to curb all dissent, and opposition continued to grow.

Many of the nationalists came to believe that a Communist revolution was a way for Vietnam to gain freedom from foreign leaders. The Indochinese Communist Party, founded in 1930, staged a number of revolts under the leadership of **Ho Chi Minh**. Although the French condemned Ho Chi Minh to death for his rebellious activity, he fled Vietnam and orchestrated Vietnam's growing independence movement from exile in the Soviet Union and later from China.

In 1940 the Japanese took control of Vietnam. The next year, Ho Chi Minh returned home and helped form the **Vietminh**, an organization whose goal it was to win Vietnam's independence from foreign rule. When the Allied defeat of Japan in August 1945 forced the Japanese to leave Vietnam, that goal suddenly seemed a reality. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh stood in the middle of a huge crowd in the northern city of Hanoi and declared Vietnam an independent nation.

### — BIOGRAPHY —

#### Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969)

Born Nguyen Tat Thanh to a poor Vietnamese family, Ho Chi Minh (which means “He Who Enlightens”) found work as a cook on a French steamship. This allowed him to visit such cities as Boston and New York.

Although he was a Communist, Ho Chi Minh preferred the United States to the Soviet Union as an ally. He even based the phrasing of the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence on the U.S. Declaration of Independence. But his admiration for the United States eventually turned to disappointment. In enforcing its containment policy, the United States chose to support France rather than his nationalist movement.



The Communist ruler's name lived on after his death in 1969. In 1975 the North Vietnamese Army conquered South Vietnam and changed the name of the South's capital from Saigon to Ho Chi Minh City.



**FRANCE BATTLES THE VIETMINH** France, however, had no intention of relinquishing its former colony. French troops moved back into Vietnam by the end of 1945, eventually regaining control of the cities and the country's southern half. Ho Chi Minh vowed to fight from the North to liberate the South from French control. "If ever the tiger pauses," Ho had said, referring to the Vietminh, "the elephant [France] will impale him on his mighty tusks. But the tiger will not pause, and the elephant will die of exhaustion and loss of blood."

The struggle against communism shaped Truman's perspective regarding the situation in Indochina. The policy of containment, which held that the United States should attempt to prevent the spread of communism to other nations, shaped the foreign relations of his administration. Truman decided to support France, a key ally in the effort to block Communist expansion in Europe, rather than the Vietminh—many of whom were themselves Communists. Events in Asia soon revealed the extent of Communist expansion. The Communist army of Mao Zedong seized China in 1949. The next year, Communist North Korea invaded South Korea. These events strengthened the U.S. commitment to contain communism in Southeast Asia.

In 1950 the United States entered the Vietnam struggle—despite A. Peter Dewey's warnings. That year, President Truman sent nearly \$15 million in economic aid to France. Over the next four years, the United States paid for much of France's war. America pumped nearly \$1 billion into the effort to defeat a man it had once supported. Ironically, during World War II, the United States had forged an alliance with Ho Chi Minh, supplying him with aid to resist the Japanese. But by 1950 the United States had come to view its one-time ally as a Communist aggressor.

**THE VIETMINH DRIVE OUT THE FRENCH** Upon entering the White House in 1953, President Eisenhower continued the policy of supplying aid to the French war effort. By this time, the United States had settled for a stalemate with the Communists in Korea. This only stiffened America's resolve to halt the spread of communism elsewhere. During a news conference in 1954, Eisenhower explained the **domino theory**, which had its roots in the containment policy. He warned that if Vietnam fell to communism, other Southeast Asian countries would soon follow, just like dominoes toppling. "You have a row of dominoes set up," the president said. "You knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly."

Despite massive U.S. aid, however, the French could not retake Vietnam. They were forced to surrender in May 1954, when the Vietminh overran the French outpost at **Dien Bien Phu**, in northwestern Vietnam.

From May through July 1954, the countries of France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, China, Laos, and Cambodia met in Geneva, Switzerland, with the Vietminh and with South Vietnam's anti-Communist nationalists to hammer out a peace agreement. The **Geneva Accords** temporarily divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel. The Communists and their leader, Ho Chi Minh, controlled North Vietnam from the capital of Hanoi. The anti-Communist nationalists controlled South Vietnam from the capital and southern port city of Saigon. An election to unify the country was called for in 1956.

### Reading Check

Synthesize How and why did the United States support France's Vietnam War efforts?

The Vietcong saw the United States and South Vietnam as oppressors. This propaganda poster reads, "Vietnam will surely be victorious and America will surely be defeated."



### Background

The Buddhist religion is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, also known as Shakyamuni. The Indian mystic believed that spiritual enlightenment could be obtained through right conduct, meditation, and wisdom.

## The United States Steps In

In the wake of France's retreat, the United States took a more active role in halting the spread of communism in Vietnam. Wading deeper into the country's affairs, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations provided economic and military aid to South Vietnam's non-Communist regime.

**DIEM CANCELS ELECTIONS** Although he directed a brutal and repressive regime, Ho Chi Minh won popular support in the North by breaking up large estates and redistributing land to peasants. Moreover, his years of fighting the Japanese and French had made him a national hero. Recognizing Ho Chi Minh's widespread popularity, South Vietnam's president, **Ngo Dinh Diem** (ngô' dīn' dē-ēm'), a strong anti-Communist, refused to take part in the countrywide election of 1956. The United States also sensed that a countrywide election might spell victory for Ho Chi Minh and supported canceling elections. The Eisenhower administration promised military aid and training to Diem in return for a stable reform government in the South.

Diem, however, failed to hold up his end of the bargain. He ushered in a corrupt government that suppressed opposition of any kind and offered little or no land distribution to peasants. In addition, Diem, who was a devout Catholic, angered the country's majority Buddhist population by restricting Buddhist practices.

By 1957 a Communist opposition group in the South, known as the **Vietcong**, had begun attacks on the Diem government. Group members assassinated thousands of South Vietnamese government officials. Although the political arm of the group would later be called the National Liberation Front (NLF), the United States continued to refer to the fighters as the Vietcong.

Ho Chi Minh supported the group. In 1959 he began supplying arms to the Vietcong via a network of paths along the borders of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia that became known as the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**. As the fighters stepped up their surprise attacks, or guerrilla tactics, South Vietnam grew more unstable. The Eisenhower administration took little action, however, deciding to "sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem."

**KENNEDY AND VIETNAM** The Kennedy administration, which entered the White House in 1961, also chose initially to "swim" with Diem. Wary of accusations that Democrats were "soft" on communism, President Kennedy increased financial aid to Diem's teetering regime. He also sent thousands of military advisers to help train South Vietnamese troops. By the end of 1963, 16,000 U.S. military personnel were in South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Diem's popularity plummeted because of ongoing corruption and his failure to respond to calls for land reform. To combat the growing Vietcong presence in the South's countryside, the Diem administration initiated the strategic hamlet program. This meant moving all villagers to protected areas. Many Vietnamese deeply resented being moved from their home villages where they had lived for generations and where ancestors were buried.



## Indochina, 1959

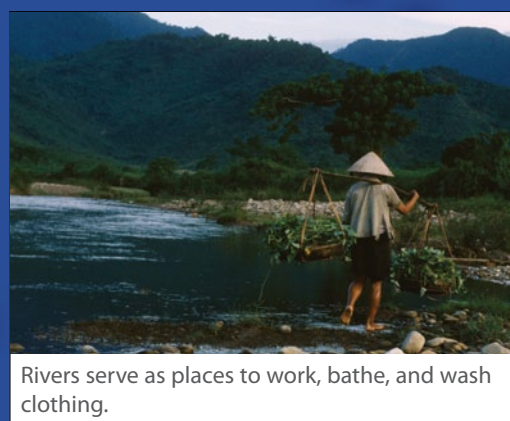
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After parachuting into the mountains north of Dien Bien Phu, South Vietnamese troops await orders from French officers in 1953.



The swampy terrain of South Vietnam made for difficult and dangerous fighting. This 1961 photograph shows South Vietnamese Army troops in combat operations against Vietcong.



Rivers serve as places to work, bathe, and wash clothing.

### Interpret Maps

- 1. Movement** Through which countries did the Ho Chi Minh Trail pass?
- 2. Location** How might North Vietnam's location have enabled it to get aid from its ally, China?



### Vocabulary

coup a sudden appropriation of leadership; a takeover

### Reading Check

#### Analyze Motives

Why did the United States not support the Geneva Accords?

Diem also intensified his attack on Buddhism. Fed up with continuing Buddhist demonstrations, the South Vietnamese ruler imprisoned and killed hundreds of Buddhist clerics. He also destroyed their temples. To protest these actions, several Buddhist monks and nuns publicly burned themselves to death. Horrified, American officials urged Diem to stop the persecutions. But Diem refused.

It had become clear that for South Vietnam to remain stable, Diem would have to go. On November 1, 1963, a U.S.-supported military coup toppled Diem's regime. Against Kennedy's wishes, Diem was assassinated. A few weeks later, Kennedy, too, fell to an assassin's bullet. The United States presidency—along with the growing crisis in Vietnam—now belonged to Lyndon B. Johnson.

## President Johnson Expands the Conflict

Shortly before his death, Kennedy had announced his intent to withdraw U.S. forces from South Vietnam. "In the final analysis, it's their war," he declared. Whether Kennedy would have withdrawn from Vietnam remains a matter of debate. However, Lyndon Johnson escalated the nation's role in Vietnam. He eventually began what would become one of America's longest wars.

**THE SOUTH GROWS MORE UNSTABLE** Diem's death brought more chaos to South Vietnam. A string of military leaders attempted to lead the country. But each regime was more unstable and inefficient than Diem's had been. Meanwhile, the Vietcong's influence in the countryside steadily grew.

President Johnson believed that a Communist takeover of South Vietnam would be disastrous. Johnson, like Kennedy, was particularly sensitive to being perceived as "soft" on communism. "If I . . . let the communists take over South Vietnam," Johnson said, "then . . . my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would . . . find it impossible to accomplish anything . . . anywhere on the entire globe."

**THE TONKIN GULF RESOLUTION** On August 2, 1964, a North Vietnamese patrol boat fired a torpedo at an American destroyer, the USS *Maddox*. The ship was patrolling in the Gulf of Tonkin off the North Vietnamese coast. The torpedo missed its target, but the *Maddox* returned fire and inflicted heavy damage on the patrol boat.

Two days later, the *Maddox* and another destroyer were again off the North Vietnamese coast. In spite of bad weather that could affect visibility, the crew reported enemy torpedoes. The American destroyers began firing. The crew of the *Maddox* later declared, however, that they had neither seen nor heard hostile gunfire.

The alleged attack on the U.S. ships prompted President Johnson to launch bombing strikes on North Vietnam. He asked Congress for powers to take "all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces

of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” Congress approved Johnson’s request, with only two senators voting against it, and adopted the **Tonkin Gulf Resolution** on August 7. While not a declaration of war, the resolution granted Johnson broad military powers in Vietnam. Some felt it altered the U.S. Constitution’s system of checks and balances by allowing the executive branch to wage war without a formal declaration of war from the legislative branch.

Johnson did not tell Congress or the American people that the United States had been leading secret raids against North Vietnam. The *Maddox* had been in the Gulf of Tonkin to collect information for these raids. Furthermore, Johnson had prepared the resolution months beforehand. He was only waiting for the chance to push it through Congress.

In February 1965 President Johnson used his newly granted powers. In response to a Vietcong attack that killed eight Americans, Johnson unleashed “Operation Rolling Thunder.” This was the first sustained bombing of North Vietnam. In March of that year, the first American combat troops began arriving in South Vietnam. By June more than 50,000 U.S. soldiers were battling the Vietcong. The Vietnam War had become Americanized.

### Reading Check

Summarize What authority did the Tonkin Gulf Resolution give to President Johnson?

## Lesson 1 Assessment

1. **Organize Information** In a table, cite the Vietnam policy for each of the following presidents: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson.

President	Vietnam Policy

Choose one of the four presidents, explain his policies in Vietnam, and evaluate the extent to which he achieved his goals.

2. **Key Terms and People** For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Evaluate** Do you think Congress was justified in passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution? Use details from the text to support your response.

### Think About:

- the questionable report of torpedo attacks on two U.S. destroyers
- the powers that the resolution would give the president and how that action could affect the constitutional system of checks and balances
- the fact that the resolution was not a declaration of war

4. **Evaluate** How was the Vietnam conflict seen as a Cold War struggle?

5. **Form Opinions** Do you think the Geneva Accords eased American concerns about a domino effect in Southeast Asia? Why or why not?

6. **Analyze Motives** Do you believe that Eisenhower’s decision to send U.S. troops to Vietnam was wise? Why or why not?

# U.S. Involvement and Escalation

## The Big Idea

The United States sent troops to fight in Vietnam, but the war quickly turned into a stalemate.

## Why It Matters Now

Since Vietnam, Americans are more aware of the positive and negative effects of using U.S. troops in foreign conflicts.

## Key Terms and People

Robert McNamara

Dean Rusk

William Westmoreland

Army of the Republic of  
Vietnam (ARVN)

napalm

Agent Orange

search-and-destroy mission

credibility gap

## One American's Story

Drafted at the age of 21, Tim O'Brien was sent to Vietnam in August 1968. He later wrote several novels based on his experiences there. In one book, O'Brien described the nerve-racking experience of walking through the fields and jungles of Vietnam, many of which were filled with land mines and booby traps.

*"You look ahead a few paces and wonder what your legs will resemble if there is more to the earth in that spot than silicates and nitrogen. Will the pain be unbearable? Will you scream and fall silent? Will you be afraid to look at your own body, afraid of the sight of your own red flesh and white bone? . . . It is not easy to fight this sort of self-defeating fear, but you try. You decide to be ultra-careful—the hard-nosed realistic approach. You try to second-guess the mine. Should you put your foot to that flat rock or the clump of weeds to its rear? Paddy dike or water? . . . You trace the footprints of the men to your front. You give up when he curses you for following too closely; better one man dead than two."*

—Tim O'Brien, quoted in *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam 1965–1972*



U.S. soldiers faced treacherous jungles and rivers in Vietnam.

Deadly traps were just some of the obstacles that U.S. troops faced. As the infiltration of American ground troops into Vietnam failed to bring about a quick victory, a mostly supportive U.S. population began to question its government's war policy.



## Johnson Increases U.S. Involvement

Much of the nation supported Lyndon Johnson's determination to contain communism in Vietnam. In the years following 1965, President Johnson began sending large numbers of American troops to fight alongside the South Vietnamese.



Lyndon B. Johnson celebrates his victory in the 1964 presidential election.

**STRONG SUPPORT FOR CONTAINMENT** Even after Congress had approved the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, President Johnson opposed sending U.S. ground troops to Vietnam. Johnson's victory in the 1964 presidential election was due in part to charges that his Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater, was an anti-Communist who might push the United States into war with the Soviet Union. In contrast to Goldwater's heated, war-like language, Johnson's speeches were more moderate, yet he spoke determinedly about containing communism. He declared he was "not about to send American

boys 9 or 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."

However, in March 1965 that is precisely what the president did. Working closely with his foreign-policy advisers, particularly Secretary of Defense **Robert McNamara** and Secretary of State **Dean Rusk**, President Johnson began dispatching tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers to fight in Vietnam. Some Americans viewed Johnson's decision as contradictory to his position during the presidential campaign. However, most were of the opinion that the president was protecting national security by following an established and popular policy of confronting communism anywhere in the world. Congress, as well as the American public, strongly supported Johnson's strategy. A 1965 poll showed that 61 percent of Americans supported the U.S. policy in Vietnam, while only 24 percent opposed.

There were dissenters within the Johnson administration, too. In October 1964 Undersecretary of State George Ball had argued against escalation, warning that "once on the tiger's back, we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount." However, the president's closest advisers strongly urged escalation, believing the defeat of communism in Vietnam to be of vital importance to the future of America and the world. Dean Rusk stressed this view in a 1965 memo to President Johnson.

*"The integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world. If that commitment becomes unreliable, the communist world would draw conclusions that would lead to our ruin and almost certainly to a catastrophic war. So long as the South Vietnamese are prepared to fight for themselves, we cannot abandon them without disaster to peace and to our interests throughout the world."*

—Dean Rusk, quoted in *In Retrospect*

## William Westmoreland

(1914–2005)

General Westmoreland retired from the military in 1972, but even in retirement, he could not escape the Vietnam War.

In 1982 CBS-TV aired a documentary entitled *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*. The report, viewed by millions, asserted that Westmoreland and the Pentagon had deceived the U.S. government about the enemy's size and strength during 1967 and 1968 to make it appear that U.S. forces were winning the war.

Westmoreland, claiming he was the victim of "distorted, false, and specious information . . . derived



by sinister deception," filed a \$120 million libel suit against CBS. The suit was eventually settled, with both parties issuing statements pledging mutual respect. CBS, however, stood by its story.

### Reading Check

**Contrast** What differing opinions did Johnson's advisers have about Vietnam?

**THE TROOP BUILDUP ACCELERATES** By the end of 1965, the U.S. government had sent more than 180,000 Americans to Vietnam. The American commander in South Vietnam, General **William Westmoreland**, continued to request more troops. Westmoreland, a West Point graduate who had served in World War II and Korea, was less than impressed with the fighting ability of the South Vietnamese Army, or the **Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)**. The ARVN "cannot stand up to this pressure without substantial U.S. combat support on the ground," the general reported. "The only possible response is the aggressive deployment of U.S. troops." Throughout the early years of the war, the Johnson administration complied with Westmoreland's requests for additional forces; by 1967 the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam had climbed to about 500,000.

## Fighting in the Jungle

The United States entered the war in Vietnam believing that its superior weaponry would lead it to victory over the Vietcong. However, the jungle terrain and the enemy's guerrilla tactics quickly turned the war into a frustrating stalemate.

**AN ELUSIVE ENEMY** Because the Vietcong lacked the high-powered weaponry of the American forces, they used hit-and-run and ambush tactics, as well as a keen knowledge of the jungle terrain, to their advantage. Moving secretly in and out of the general population, the Vietcong destroyed the notion of a traditional frontline by attacking U.S. troops in both the cities and the countryside. Because some of the enemy lived amidst the civilian population, it was difficult for U.S. troops to discern friend from foe. A woman selling soft drinks to U.S. soldiers might be a Vietcong spy. A boy standing on the corner might be ready to throw a grenade.

Adding to the Vietcong's elusiveness was a network of elaborate tunnels that allowed them to withstand airstrikes and to launch surprise attacks and then disappear quickly. Connecting villages throughout the countryside, the tunnels became home to many guerrilla fighters. "The more the Americans tried to drive us away from our land, the more we burrowed into it," recalled Nguyen Quoc, a major in the Vietcong army.

In addition, the terrain was laced with countless booby traps and land mines. Because the exact location of the Vietcong was often unknown, U.S. troops laid land mines throughout the jungle. The Vietcong also laid their own traps and disassembled and reused U.S. mines. American soldiers marching through South Vietnam's jungles and rice paddies not only dealt with sweltering heat and leeches but also had to be cautious of every step. In a 1969 letter to his sister, Specialist Fourth Class Salvador Gonzalez described the tragic result from an unexploded U.S. bomb that the North Vietnamese Army had rigged.

*"Two days ago 4 guys got killed and about 15 wounded from the first platoon. Our platoon was 200 yards away on top of a hill. One guy was from Floral Park [in New York City]. He had five days left to go [before being sent home]. He was standing on a 250-lb. bomb that a plane had dropped and didn't explode. So the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] wired it up. Well, all they found was a piece of his wallet."*

—Salvador Gonzalez, quoted in *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*

**A FRUSTRATING WAR OF ATTRITION** Westmoreland's strategy for defeating the Vietcong was to destroy their morale through a war of attrition, or the gradual wearing down of the enemy by continuous harassment. Introducing the concept of the body count, or the tracking of Vietcong killed in battle, the general believed that as the number of Vietcong dead rose, the guerrillas would inevitably surrender.

However, the Vietcong had no intention of quitting their fight. Despite the growing number of casualties and the relentless pounding from U.S. bombers, the Vietcong—who received supplies from China and the Soviet Union—remained defiant. Defense Secretary McNamara confessed his frustration to a reporter in 1966: "If I had thought they would take this punishment and fight this well, . . . I would have thought differently at the start."

General Westmoreland would say later that the United States never lost a battle in Vietnam. Whether or not the general's words were true, they underscored the degree to which America misunderstood its foe. The United States viewed the war strictly as a military struggle; the Vietcong saw it as a battle for their very existence, and they were ready to pay any price for victory.

**THE BATTLE FOR "HEARTS AND MINDS"** Another key part of the American strategy was to keep the Vietcong from winning the support of South Vietnam's rural population. Edward G. Lansdale, who helped found the fighting unit known as the U.S. Army Special Forces, or Green Berets, stressed the



### War or Peace?

This photograph of a U.S. soldier wearing symbols of both war and peace illustrates how many U.S. soldiers struggled with their role in Vietnam. They were required to serve, but many wanted peace, not war.

#### Analyze Historical Sources

1. What symbols of war and peace is the soldier wearing?
2. How does the photograph reflect Americans' feelings about the war in Vietnam?



plan's importance. "Just remember this. Communist guerrillas hide among the people. If you win the people over to your side, the communist guerrillas have no place to hide."

The campaign to win the "hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese villagers proved more difficult than imagined. For instance, in their attempt to expose Vietcong tunnels and hideouts, U.S. planes dropped **napalm**, a gasoline-based bomb that set fire to the jungle. They also sprayed **Agent Orange**, a leaf-killing toxic chemical. The saturation use of these weapons often wounded civilians and left villages and their surroundings in ruins. Years later, many would blame Agent Orange for cancers suffered by Vietnamese civilians and American veterans.

U.S. soldiers conducted **search-and-destroy missions**, uprooting civilians with suspected ties to the Vietcong, killing their livestock, and burning villages. Many villagers fled into the cities or refugee camps, creating by 1967 more than 3 million refugees in the South. The irony of the strategy was summed up in February 1968 by a U.S. major whose forces had just leveled the town of Ben Tre: "We had to destroy the town in order to save it."

**SINKING MORALE** The frustrations of guerrilla warfare, the brutal jungle conditions, and the failure to make substantial headway against the enemy took their toll on the U.S. troops' morale. Philip Caputo, a marine lieutenant in Vietnam who later wrote several books about the war, summarized the soldiers' growing disillusionment: "When we marched into the rice paddies . . . we carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Vietcong could be quickly beaten. We kept the packs and rifles; the convictions, we lost."

As the war continued, American morale dropped steadily. Many soldiers turned to alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs. Low morale even led a few

soldiers to murder their officers. Morale worsened during the later years of the war when soldiers realized they were fighting even as their government was negotiating a withdrawal.

Another obstacle was the continuing corruption and instability of the South Vietnamese government. Nguyen Cao Ky, a flamboyant air marshal, led the government from 1965 to 1967. Ky ignored U.S. pleas to retire in favor of an elected civilian government. Mass demonstrations began, and by May 1966 Buddhist monks and nuns were once again burning themselves in protest against the South Vietnamese government. South Vietnam was fighting a civil war within a civil war, leaving U.S. officials confused and angry.

**FULFILLING A DUTY** Most American soldiers, however, firmly believed in their cause—to halt the spread of communism. They took patriotic pride in fulfilling their duty, just as their fathers had done in World War II.

Most American soldiers fought courageously. Particularly heroic were the thousands of soldiers who endured years of torture and confinement as prisoners of war. In 1966 navy pilot Gerald Coffee's plane was shot down over North Vietnam. Coffee spent the next seven years—until he was released in 1973 as part of a cease-fire agreement—struggling to stay alive in an enemy prison camp.

*"My clothes were filthy and ragged. . . . With no boots, my socks—which I'd been able to salvage—were barely recognizable. . . . Only a few threads around my toes kept them spread over my feet; some protection, at least, as I shivered through the cold nights curled up tightly on my morguelike slab. . . . My conditions and predicament were so foreign to me, so stifling, so overwhelming. I'd never been so hungry, so grimy, and in such pain."*

—Gerald Coffee, quoted in *Beyond Survival*

**Reading Check**  
Make Inferences In what way did the United States underestimate the Vietcong?

## The Early War at Home

The Johnson administration thought the war would end quickly. As it dragged on, support began to waver, and Johnson's domestic programs began to unravel.

**THE GREAT SOCIETY SUFFERS** As the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam continued to mount, the war grew more costly, and the nation's economy began to suffer. The inflation rate, which was less than 2 percent through most of the early 1960s, more than tripled to 5.5 percent by 1969. In August 1967 President Johnson asked for a tax increase to help fund the war and to keep inflation in check. Congressional conservatives agreed but only after demanding and receiving a \$6 billion reduction in funding for Great Society programs. Vietnam was slowly claiming an early casualty: Johnson's grand vision of domestic reform.

**THE LIVING-ROOM WAR** Through the media, specifically television, Vietnam became America's first "living-room war." During previous wars, the military had imposed tight restrictions on the press. In Vietnam, however, reporters and television crews often accompanied soldiers on patrol. The combat footage that appeared nightly on the news in millions of homes showed stark pictures that seemed to contradict the administration's optimistic war scenario.

Quoting body-count statistics that showed large numbers of Communists dying in battle, General Westmoreland continually reported that a Vietcong surrender was imminent. Defense Secretary McNamara backed up the general, saying that he could see "the light at the end of the tunnel."

The repeated television images of Americans in body bags told a different story, though. While Communists may have been dying, so too were

## American Literature

### Literature of the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War, which left a deep impression on America's soldiers and citizens alike, has produced its share of literature. In contrast to the tales of pride and glory that came out of previous wars, much of this literature expresses disillusionment and doubt. In the short story "How to Tell a True War Story" from *The Things They Carried*, Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien reflects on the difficulty of telling the truth about the horror of war.

#### How to Tell a True War Story

In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed. When a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes and duck and float outside yourself. When a guy dies, like Curt Lemon, you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed.

In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be skeptical. It's a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness.

In other cases you can't even tell a true war story. Sometimes it's just beyond telling.

—Tim O'Brien, from "How to Tell a True War Story"  
in *The Things They Carried* (1990)



TIM O'BRIEN

### Analyze American Literature

Why does O'Brien feel it is difficult to accurately describe the experiences of war?



Americans— more than 16,000 between 1961 and 1967. Some critics charged that a **credibility gap** was growing between what the Johnson administration reported and what was really happening.

One critic was Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Fulbright, a former Johnson ally, charged the president with a “lack of candor” in portraying the war effort. In early 1966 the senator conducted a series of televised committee hearings in which he asked members of the Johnson administration to defend their Vietnam policies. The Fulbright hearings delivered few major revelations, but they did contribute to the growing doubts about the war. One woman appeared to capture the mood of Middle America when she told an interviewer, “I want to get out, but I don’t want to give in.”

By 1967 Americans were evenly split over supporting and opposing the war. However, a small force outside of mainstream America, mainly from the ranks of the nation’s youth, already had begun actively protesting the war. Their voices would grow louder and capture the attention of the entire nation.

### Reading Check

#### Analyze Effects

How and why did public opinion about the conflict in Vietnam change?

## Lesson 2 Assessment

1. **Organize Information** Use a table to record key military tactics and weapons of the Vietcong and Americans.

	Vietcong	Americans
Tactics		
Weapons		

Which weapons and tactics do you think were most successful? Explain.

2. **Key Terms and People** For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Form Generalizations** What were the effects of the nightly TV coverage of the Vietnam War? How might Americans’ opinions about the war been different had there been no television reporting? Support your answer with examples from the text.

#### Think About:

- the impact of television images of Americans in body bags
- the Johnson administration’s credibility gap

4. **Draw Conclusions** Why did Americans fail to win the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese?
5. **Contrast** In a paragraph, contrast the morale of the U.S. troops with that of the Vietcong. Use evidence from the text to support your response.
6. **Analyze Effects** What effect did the Vietnam War have on President Johnson’s domestic agenda?

# A Nation Divided

## The Big Idea

Opponents of the government's war policy were pitted against those who supported it.

## Why It Matters Now

The painful process of healing a divided nation continues today.

## Key Terms and People

draft

New Left

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)

Free Speech Movement (FSM)

dove

hawk

## One American's Story

In 1969 Stephan Gubar, 22, was called for possible military service in Vietnam. Because he was a conscientious objector (CO), or someone who opposed war on the basis of religious or moral beliefs, he was granted 1-A-O status. While he would not be forced to carry a weapon, he still qualified for noncombatant military duty. As did many other conscientious objectors, Gubar received special training as a medic. He described the memorable day his training ended.

*"The thing that stands out most was . . . being really scared, being in formation and listening to the names and assignments being called. . . . Even though I could hear that every time a CO's name came up, the orders were cut for Vietnam, I still thought there was a possibility I might not go. Then, when they called my name and said 'Vietnam,' . . . I went to a phone and I called my wife. It was a tremendous shock."*



Stephan Gubar

—Stephan Gubar, quoted in *Days of Decision*

While many Americans proudly went off to war, some found ways to avoid the draft, and others simply refused to go. They opposed the war for a variety of reasons. Many believed that the U.S. military had no business fighting in Vietnam's civil war. Some said that the oppressive South Vietnamese regime was no better than the Communist regime it was fighting. Others argued that the United States could not police the entire globe and that war was draining American strength in other important parts of the world. Still others saw war simply as morally unjust.

## The Working Class Goes to War

The idea of fighting a war in a faraway place for what they believed was a questionable cause prompted a number of young Americans to resist going to Vietnam.

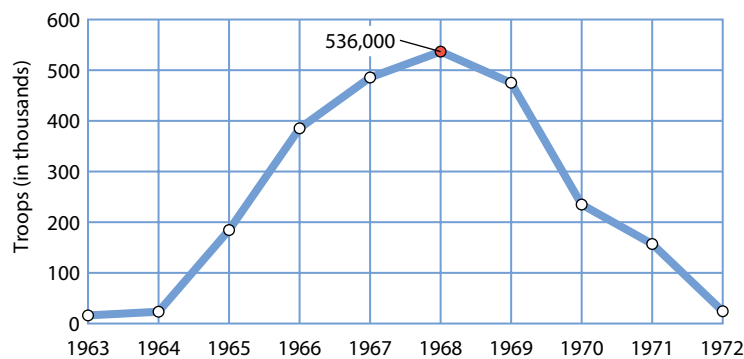
**A “MANIPULATABLE” DRAFT** Most soldiers who fought in Vietnam were called into combat under the country’s Selective Service System, or **draft**, which had been established during World War I. Under this system, all males had to register with their local draft boards when they turned 18. All registrants were screened, and unless they were excluded—such as for medical reasons—in the event of war, men between the ages of 18 and 26 would be called into military service.

As Americans’ doubts about the war grew, thousands of men attempted to find ways around the draft. One man characterized it as a “very manipulatable system.” Some men sought out sympathetic doctors to grant medical exemptions. Others changed residences in order to stand before a more lenient draft board. Some Americans even joined the National Guard or Coast Guard, which often secured a deferment from service in Vietnam.

One of the most common ways to avoid the draft was to receive a college deferment, by which a young man enrolled in a university could put off his military service. Because university students during the 1960s tended to be white and financially well-off, many of the men who fought in Vietnam were lower-class whites or minorities who were less privileged economically. With almost 80 percent of American soldiers coming from lower economic levels, Vietnam was a working-class war.

**AFRICAN AMERICANS IN VIETNAM** Large numbers of African Americans traditionally enlisted in the military. For this reason, a high percentage of soldiers in combat positions were African American during the war’s early years, when the fighting was done by volunteers. Therefore, the casualty rates

U.S. Military Personnel in Vietnam\*



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1985; Encyclopedia Americana

\*Year-end figures

### Interpret Graphs

What years signaled a rapid increase in the deployment of U.S. troops?

Despite racial tensions, black and white soldiers fought side by side in Vietnam.





Two U.S. nurses rest at Cam Ranh Bay, the major entry point in South Vietnam for American supplies and troops.

of black soldiers at first were disproportionately high. During the first several years of the war, blacks accounted for more than 20 percent of American combat deaths despite representing only about 10 percent of the U.S. population. Some civil rights activists, including Martin Luther King Jr., lashed out against the “cruel irony” of American blacks dying for a country that still treated them as second-class citizens. The Defense Department took steps to correct that imbalance by instituting a draft lottery system in 1969.

In spite of the changes to the draft system, racial tensions ran high in many platoons. In some cases, the hostility led to violence. The racism that gripped many military units was yet another factor that led to low troop morale in Vietnam.

**WOMEN JOIN THE RANKS** While the U.S. military in the 1960s did not allow females to serve in combat, 10,000 women served in Vietnam—most of them as military nurses. Thousands more volunteered their services in Vietnam to the American Red Cross and the United Service Organizations (USO), which delivered hospitality and entertainment to the troops.

As the military marched off to Vietnam to fight against Communist guerrillas, some of the men at home, as well as many women, waged a battle of their own. Tensions flared across the country as many of the nation’s youths began to voice their opposition to the war.

## The Roots of Opposition

Even before 1965, students were becoming more active socially and politically. Throughout the 1960s young people participated in the civil rights struggle, while others pursued public service. This spirit of social change expressed itself in antiwar activism, too. As America became more involved in the war in Vietnam, college students across the country became a powerful and vocal group of protesters.

**THE NEW LEFT** The growing youth movement of the 1960s became known as the **New Left**. The movement was “new” in relation to the “old left” of the 1930s. The old left had generally tried to move the nation toward socialism,

**Reading Check**  
Summarize How  
were U.S. forces  
mobilized for the war?



and, in some cases, communism. Although the New Left did not advocate socialism, the movement's followers did demand sweeping changes in American society.

Voicing these demands was one of the better-known New Left organizations, **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)**, founded in 1960 by Tom Hayden and Al Haber. The group charged that corporations and large government institutions had taken over America. The SDS called for a restoration of "participatory democracy" and greater individual freedom.

In 1964 the **Free Speech Movement (FSM)** gained prominence at the University of California at Berkeley. The FSM grew out of a clash between students and administrators over free speech on campus. Led by Mario Savio, a philosophy student, the FSM focused its criticism on what it called the American "machine," the nation's faceless and powerful business and government institutions.

**CAMPUS ACTIVISM** Across the country, the ideas of the FSM and SDS quickly spread to college campuses. Students focused mainly on campus issues, such as dress codes, curfews, and dormitory regulations, as well as mandatory Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs. At Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, students marched merely as "an expression of general student discontent."

With the onset of the Vietnam War, students across the country found a galvanizing issue and joined together in protest. By the mid-1960s, many youths believed the nation to be in need of fundamental change.

## The Protest Movement Emerges

Throughout the spring of 1965, groups at a number of colleges began to host "teach-ins" to protest the war. At the University of Michigan, where only a year before President Johnson had announced his sweeping Great Society program, teachers and students now assailed his war policy. "This is no longer a casual form of campus spring fever," journalist James Reston noted about the growing demonstrations. As the war continued, the protests grew and divided the country.

**THE MOVEMENT GROWS** In April 1965 SDS helped organize a march on Washington, DC, by some 20,000 protesters. By November of that year, a protest rally in Washington drew more than 30,000. Then, in February 1966 the Johnson administration changed deferments for college students. The government now required students to be in good academic standing in order to be granted a deferment. Campuses around the country erupted in protest. SDS called for civil disobedience at Selective Service centers and openly counseled students to flee to Canada or Sweden. By the end of 1969, SDS had chapters on nearly 400 campuses.

The antiwar movement grew beyond college campuses. Small numbers of returning veterans began to protest the war. Folk singers such as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, and the trio Peter, Paul, and Mary used music as a popular protest vehicle. The number one song in September 1965 was "Eve

### Reading Check

#### Make Inferences

What concerns about American democratic society did the New Left voice?

Protestors march down Fifth Avenue in New York City to demonstrate against the Vietnam War in October 1965.



of Destruction.” In this song, vocalist Barry McGuire stressed the ironic fact that young men could be drafted at age 18 but had to be 21 to vote. Another popular antiwar song of the time was “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” by Country Joe and the Fish. Written by bandleader Joe McDonald, a Vietnam veteran, this song sarcastically encouraged young men, politicians, businesses, and even parents to give their whole-hearted support to the war.

Not every Vietnam-era pop song about war was an antiwar song, however. At the top of the charts for five weeks in 1966 was “The Ballad of the Green Berets” by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler of the U.S. Army Special Forces, known as the Green Berets:

*Fighting soldiers from the sky,  
Fearless men who jump and die,  
Men who mean just what they say,  
The brave men of the Green Beret.*

The recording sold over a million copies in its first two weeks of release. It was *Billboard* magazine’s song of the year.

**FROM PROTEST TO RESISTANCE** By 1967 the antiwar movement had intensified, with no sign of slowing down. “We were having no effect on U.S. policy,” recalled one protest leader, “so we thought we had to up the ante.” In the spring of 1967, nearly half a million protesters of all ages gathered in New York City’s Central Park. Shouting “Burn cards, not people!” and “Hell, no, we won’t go!” hundreds tossed their draft cards into a bonfire. A woman from New Jersey told a reporter, “So many of us are frustrated. We want to criticize this war because we think it’s wrong, but we want to do it in the framework of loyalty.”

Others were more radical in their view. David Harris, who would spend 20 months in jail for refusing to serve in Vietnam, explained his motives.

*“Theoretically, I can accept the notion that there are circumstances in which you have to kill people. I could not accept the notion that Vietnam was one of those circumstances. And to me that left the option of either sitting by and watching what was an enormous injustice . . . or [finding] some way to commit myself against it. And the position that I felt comfortable with in committing myself against it was total non-cooperation—I was not going to be part of the machine.”*

—David Harris, quoted in *The War Within*

## DIFFICULT DECISIONS

### Resist the Draft or Serve Your Country?

As the fighting in Vietnam intensified, young men of draft age who opposed the war found themselves considering one of two options: register with the draft board and risk heading off to war, or find a way to avoid military service. Ways to avoid service included medical and educational deferments. But a great many men did not qualify for these. The choices that remained, such as fleeing the country, going to jail, or giving in and joining the ranks, came with a high price. Once a decision was made, there was no turning back.

1. Imagine you oppose the war and are called to serve in Vietnam. What decision would you make? Would you feel guilty if you avoided the draft? If you chose to serve, how would you view those who did not serve your country?
2. Do you think more young men would have been willing to serve had this been a different war? Explain.

Draft resistance continued from 1967 until President Nixon phased out the draft in the early 1970s. During these years, the U.S. government accused more than 200,000 men of draft offenses and imprisoned nearly 4,000 draft resisters. (Although some were imprisoned for four or five years, most won parole after 6 to 12 months.) Throughout these years, about 10,000 Americans fled, many to Canada.

In October 1967 a demonstration at Washington's Lincoln Memorial drew about 75,000 protesters. After listening to speeches, approximately 30,000 demonstrators locked arms for a march on the Pentagon in order "to disrupt the center of the American war machine," as one organizer explained. As hundreds of protesters broke past the military police and mounted the Pentagon steps, they were met by tear gas and clubs. About 1,500 demonstrators were injured and at least 700 arrested.

**WAR DIVIDES THE NATION** By 1967 it was clear that Americans were divided regarding the war. Those who strongly opposed the war and believed the United States should withdraw were known as **doves**. Feeling just as strongly that America should unleash much of its greater military force to win the war were the **hawks**.

Despite the visibility of the antiwar protesters, a majority of Americans in 1967 remained committed to the war. Others, while less certain about the proper U.S. role in Vietnam, were shocked to see protesters publicly criticize a war in which Americans were fighting and dying. A poll taken in December 1967 showed that 70 percent of Americans believed the war protests were "acts of disloyalty." A firefighter who lost his son in Vietnam articulated the bitter feelings a number of Americans felt toward the anti-war movement.

## Document-Based Investigation Historical Source

### Johnson Remains Determined

President Johnson faced criticism on both sides of the war debate. Doves criticized him for not withdrawing from Vietnam. Hawks accused him of not increasing military power rapidly enough. Johnson was dismissive of both groups and their motives. He defended his policy of slow escalation.

*"We made our statement to the world of what we would do if we had Communist aggression in that part of the world in 1954. . . . We said we would stand with those people in the face of common danger. . . . Every country that I know in that area that is familiar with what is happening thinks it is absolutely essential that Uncle Sam keep his word and stay there until we can find an honorable peace. . . .*

*There has always been confusion, frustration, and difference of opinion in this country when there is a war going on. . . . We are going to have these differences. No one likes war. All people love peace. But you can't have freedom without defending it."*

—Lyndon B. Johnson, from a press conference,  
November 17, 1967

### Analyze Historical Sources

What are Johnson's justifications for continuing his policy of escalating U.S. involvement in Vietnam?



*"I'm bitter. . . . It's people like us who give up our sons for the country. . . . The college types, the professors, they go to Washington and tell the government what to do. . . . But their sons, they don't end up in the swamps over there, in Vietnam. No sir. They're deferred, because they're in school. Or they get sent to safe places. . . . What bothers me about the peace crowd is that you can tell from their attitude, the way they look and what they say, that they don't really love this country."*

—A firefighter, quoted in *Working-Class War*

Responding to antiwar posters, Americans who supported the government's Vietnam policy developed their own slogans: "Support our men in Vietnam" and "America—love it or leave it."

**TURMOIL IN THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION** Despite the division that engulfed the country during the early years of the war, President Johnson continued his policy of slow escalation. By the end of 1967, Johnson's approach—and the continuing stalemate—had begun to create turmoil within his own administration. In November, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, a key architect of U.S. escalation in Vietnam, quietly announced he was resigning to become head of the World Bank. "It didn't add up," McNamara recalled later. "What I was trying to find out was how . . . the war went on year after year when we stopped the infiltration [from North Vietnam] or shrunk it and when we had a very high body count and so on. It just didn't make sense."

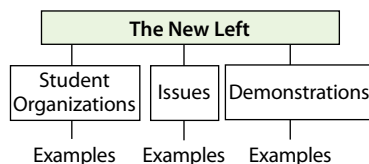
As it happened, McNamara's resignation came on the threshold of the most tumultuous year of the sixties. In 1968 the war—and Johnson's presidency—would take a drastic turn for the worse.

### Reading Check

**Summarize** For what reasons did the protesters oppose the Vietnam War?

## Lesson 3 Assessment

- 1. Organize Information** Use a tree diagram to record examples of student organizations, issues, and demonstrations of the New Left.



- 2. Key Terms and People** For each key term in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.
- 3. Develop Historical Perspective** Would you have allied yourself with the hawks or with the doves? Give reasons that support your position.

### Think About:

- the U.S. government's goals for fighting in Vietnam
- the concerns of the antiwar movement

- 4. Synthesize** Why did civil rights leaders call African Americans' fighting in Vietnam an "irony"?
- 5. Evaluate** Do you agree that antiwar protests were "acts of disloyalty"? Why or why not?
- 6. Analyze Primary**

**Sources** This antiwar poster is a parody of recruiting posters from World War I. Why might the artist have chosen Uncle Sam to express the antiwar message? Compare the impact of this image to the traditional portrayal of Uncle Sam.



# 1968: A Tumultuous Year

## The Big Idea

An enemy attack in Vietnam, two assassinations, and a chaotic political convention made 1968 an explosive year.

## Why It Matters Now

Disturbing events in 1968 accentuated the nation's divisions, which are still healing in the 21st century.

## Key Terms and People

Tet offensive

Clark Clifford

Robert Kennedy

Eugene McCarthy

Hubert Humphrey

George Wallace

## One American's Story

On June 5, 1968, John Lewis, the first chairman of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, fell to the floor and wept. Robert F. Kennedy, a leading Democratic candidate for president, had just been fatally shot. Two months earlier, when Martin Luther King Jr. had fallen victim to an assassin's bullet, Lewis had told himself he still had Kennedy. And now they both were gone. Lewis, who later became a congressman from Georgia, recalled the lasting impact of these assassinations.

*"There are people today who are afraid, in a sense, to hope or to have hope again, because of what happened in . . . 1968. Something was taken from us. The type of leadership that we had in a sense invested in, that we had helped to make and to nourish, was taken from us. . . . Something died in all of us with those assassinations."*

—John Lewis, quoted  
in *From Camelot to Kent State*



John Lewis

These violent deaths were but two of the traumatic events that rocked the nation in 1968. From a shocking setback in Vietnam to a chaotic Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the events of 1968 made it the most tumultuous year of a turbulent decade.

## The Tet Offensive Turns the War

The year 1968 began with a daring surprise attack by the Vietcong on numerous cities in South Vietnam. The simultaneous strikes, while ending in military defeat for the Communist guerrillas, stunned the American public. Many people with moderate views began to turn against the war.

**A SURPRISE ATTACK** January 30 was the Vietnamese equivalent of New Year's Eve, the beginning of the lunar new year festivities known in Vietnam as Tet.

Throughout that day in 1968, villagers—taking advantage of a week-long truce proclaimed for Tet—streamed into cities across South Vietnam to celebrate their new year. At the same time, many funerals were being held for war victims. Accompanying the funerals were the traditional fire-crackers, flutes, and, of course, coffins.

The coffins, however, contained weapons, and many of the villagers were Vietcong agents. That night, the Vietcong launched an overwhelming attack on over 100 towns and cities in South Vietnam, as well as 12 U.S. air bases. The fighting was especially fierce in Saigon and the former capital of Hue. The Vietcong even attacked the U.S. embassy in Saigon, killing five Americans. The **Tet offensive** continued for about a month before U.S. and South Vietnamese forces regained control of the cities.

[Explore ONLINE!](#)

### Tet Offensive, Jan. 30–Feb. 24, 1968





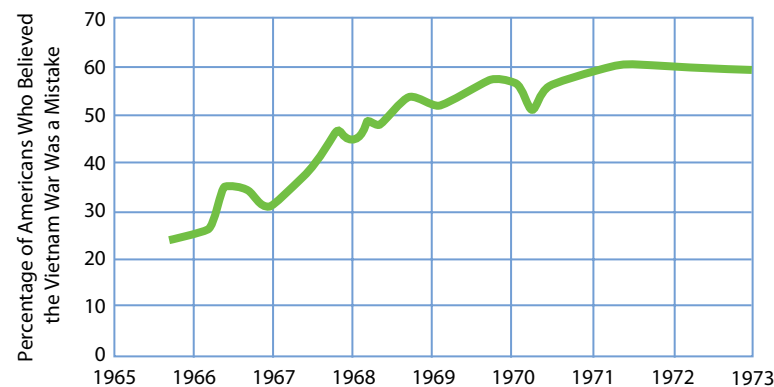
General Westmoreland declared the attacks an overwhelming defeat for the Vietcong, whose “well-laid plans went afoul.” From a purely military standpoint, Westmoreland was right. The Vietcong lost about 32,000 soldiers during the month-long battle. The American and ARVN forces lost little more than 3,000.

**TET CHANGES PUBLIC OPINION** From a psychological—and political—standpoint, Westmoreland’s claim could not have been more wrong. The Tet offensive greatly shook the American public, which had been told repeatedly and had come to believe that the enemy was close to defeat and that the United States would stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Now the Pentagon’s continued reports of favorable body counts—or massive Vietcong casualties—rang hollow. Daily, Americans saw the shocking images of attacks by an enemy that seemed to be everywhere.

In a matter of weeks, the Tet offensive changed millions of minds about the war. Despite the years of antiwar protest, a poll taken just before Tet showed that only 28 percent of Americans called themselves doves, while 56 percent claimed to be hawks. After Tet, both sides tallied 40 percent. The mainstream media, which had reported the war in a skeptical but generally balanced way, now openly criticized the war. One of the nation’s most respected journalists, Walter Cronkite, told his viewers that it now seemed “more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.”

Minds were also changing at the White House. To fill the defense secretary position left vacant by Robert McNamara’s resignation, Johnson picked **Clark Clifford**, a friend and supporter of the president’s Vietnam policy. However, after settling in and studying the situation, Clifford concluded that the war was unwinnable. “We seem to have a sinkhole,” Clifford said. “We put in more—they match it. I see more and more fighting with more and more casualties on the U.S. side and no end in sight to the action.”

## Changing Opinions About the War



Source: Pew Research Center

### Interpret Graphs

Between what two years did public opinion of the war change the most?

**Reading Check**  
**Analyze Issues** Why did American support for the war change after the Tet offensive?

Following the Tet offensive, Johnson's popularity plummeted. In public opinion polls taken at the end of February 1968, nearly 60 percent of Americans disapproved of his handling of the war. Nearly half of the country now felt it had been a mistake to send American troops to Vietnam.

War weariness eventually set in, and 1968 was the watershed year. Johnson recognized the change, too. Upon learning of Cronkite's pessimistic analysis of the war, the president lamented, "If I've lost Walter, then it's over. I've lost Mr. Average Citizen."

## Days of Loss and Rage

The growing division over Vietnam led to a shocking political development in the spring of 1968, a season in which Americans also endured two assassinations, a series of urban riots, and a surge in college campus protests.

**JOHNSON WITHDRAWS** Well before the Tet offensive, an antiwar coalition within the Democratic Party had sought a Democratic candidate to challenge Johnson in the 1968 primary elections. **Robert Kennedy**, John F. Kennedy's brother and a senator from New York, decided not to run, citing party loyalty. However, in November 1967, Minnesota senator **Eugene McCarthy** answered the group's call. He declared that he would run against Johnson on a platform to end the war in Vietnam. In the New Hampshire Democratic primary in March 1968, the little-known senator captured 42 percent of the vote. While Johnson won the primary with 48 percent of the vote, the slim margin of victory was viewed as a defeat for the president. Influenced by Johnson's perceived weakness at the polls, Robert Kennedy declared his candidacy for president. The Democratic Party had become a house divided.

The Vietnam War and the divisiveness it caused took its toll on President Johnson.



In a televised address on March 31, 1968, Johnson announced a dramatic change in his Vietnam policy—the United States would seek negotiations to end the war. In the meantime, the policy of U.S. escalation would end. The bombing would eventually cease, and steps would be taken to ensure that the South Vietnamese played a larger role in the war.

The president paused and then ended his speech with a statement that shocked the nation. Declaring that he did not want the presidency to become "involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year," Lyndon Johnson announced, "Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president." The president was stepping down from national politics. His grand plan for domestic reform was done in by a costly and divisive war. "That . . . war," Johnson later admitted, "killed the lady I really loved—the Great Society."

**VIOLENCE AND PROTEST GRIP THE NATION** The Democrats—as well as the nation—were in for more shock in 1968. On April 4, America was rocked by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee. In the weeks that followed, violence ripped through more than 100 U.S. cities as enraged followers of the slain civil rights leader burned buildings and destroyed neighborhoods.

Just two months later, a bullet cut down yet another popular national figure. Robert Kennedy had become a strong candidate in the Democratic primary, drawing support from minorities and urban Democratic voters. On June 4, Kennedy won the crucial California primary. Just after midnight of June 5, he gave a victory speech at a Los Angeles hotel. On his way out, he passed through the hotel's kitchen, where a young Palestinian immigrant, Sirhan Sirhan, was hiding with a gun. Sirhan, who later said he was angered by Kennedy's support of Israel, fatally shot the senator.

Jack Newfield, a speechwriter for Kennedy, described the anguish he and many Americans felt over the loss of two of the nation's leaders.

*“Things were not really getting better . . . we shall not overcome. . . . We had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce, and they had all been assassinated. And from this time forward, things would get worse: Our best political leaders were part of memory now, not hope.”*

—Jack Newfield, quoted in *Nineteen Sixty-Eight*

Meanwhile, students at the nation's college campuses continued to stage protests. During the first six months of 1968, almost 40,000 students on more than 100 campuses took part in more than 200 major demonstrations. Many of the demonstrations continued to target U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. But students also clashed with university officials over campus and social issues. A massive student protest at Columbia University in New York City held the nation's attention for a week in April. There, students protested the university's policies and its relationship to the community where it was located. Protesters took over several buildings, but police eventually restored order and arrested nearly 900 protesters.

Recalling the violence and turmoil that plagued the nation in 1968, the journalist and historian Garry Wills wrote, “There was a sense everywhere . . . that things were giving way. That [people] had not only lost control of [their] history, but might never regain it.”

## A Turbulent Race for President

The chaos and violence of 1968 climaxed in August, when thousands of antiwar demonstrators converged on the city of Chicago to protest at the Democratic National Convention. The convention, which featured a bloody riot between protesters and police, fractured the Democratic Party and thus helped a nearly forgotten Republican win the White House.

### Reading Check

#### Analyze Issues

Why was 1968 characterized as a year of “lost control” in America?



### Vocabulary

**platform** a formal declaration of the principles on which a political party makes its appeal to the public



Chicago police attempt to disperse antiwar demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic convention.

**TURMOIL IN CHICAGO** With Lyndon Johnson stepping down and Robert Kennedy gone, the 1968 Democratic presidential primary race pitted Eugene McCarthy against **Hubert Humphrey**, Johnson's vice-president. McCarthy, while still popular with the nation's antiwar segment, had little chance of defeating Humphrey, a loyal party man who had President Johnson's support. During the last week of August, the Democrats gathered at their convention in Chicago, supposedly to choose a candidate. In reality, Humphrey's nomination had already been determined. Many antiwar activists were upset by this decision.

As the delegates arrived in Chicago, so, too, did nearly 10,000 protesters. Led by men such as SDS veteran Tom Hayden, many demonstrators sought to pressure the Democrats into adopting an antiwar platform. Others came to voice their displeasure with Humphrey's nomination. Still others, known as Yippies (members of the Youth International Party), had come hoping to provoke violence that might discredit the Democratic Party. Chicago's mayor, Richard J. Daley, was determined to keep the protesters under control. With memories of the nationwide riots after King's death still fresh, Daley mobilized 12,000 Chicago police officers and over 5,000 National Guard. "As long as I am mayor," Daley vowed, "there will be law and order."

Order, however, soon collapsed. On August 28, as delegates cast votes for Humphrey, protesters were gathering in a downtown park to march on the convention. With television cameras focused on them, police moved into the crowd. Officers sprayed the protesters with Mace and beat them with nightsticks. Many protesters tried to flee, while others retaliated, pelting the riot-helmeted police with rocks and bottles. "The whole world is watching!" protesters shouted, as police attacked demonstrators and bystanders alike.

The rioting soon spilled out of the park and into the downtown streets. One nearby hotel, observed a *New York Times* reporter, became a makeshift aid station.

*"Demonstrators, reporters, McCarthy workers, doctors, all began to stagger into the [hotel] lobby, blood streaming from face and head wounds. The lobby smelled from tear gas, and stink bombs dropped by the Yippies. A few people began to direct the wounded to a makeshift hospital on the fifteenth floor, the McCarthy staff headquarters."*

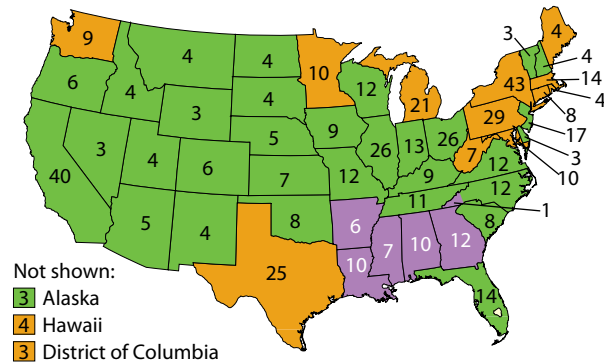
—J. Anthony Lukas, quoted in *Decade of Shocks*

Disorder of a different kind reigned inside the convention hall, where delegates bitterly debated an antiwar plank in the party platform. When word of the riot filtered into the hall, delegates angrily shouted at Mayor Daley, who was present as a delegate. Daley returned their shouts. The whole world was indeed watching—on their televisions. The images of the Democrats as a party of disorder became etched in the minds of millions of Americans.

**NIXON TRIUMPHS** One beneficiary of this turmoil was Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon. By 1968 Nixon had achieved one of the greatest political comebacks in American politics. After his loss to Kennedy

## Election of 1968

Party	Candidate	Electoral votes	Popular votes
Republican	Richard M. Nixon	301	31,785,480
Democratic	Hubert H. Humphrey	191	31,275,166
American Independent	George C. Wallace	46	9,906,473



### Interpret Charts

1. In what region did Wallace carry states?
2. By how many electoral votes did Nixon defeat Humphrey?

### Reading Check

Summarize How did the election of 1968 illustrate divisions in American society?

In addition, he attracted a surprisingly high number of northern white working-class voters disgusted with inner-city riots and antiwar protests.

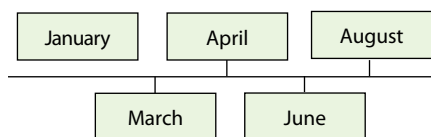
In the end, Nixon defeated Humphrey and inherited the quagmire in Vietnam. He eventually would end America's involvement in Vietnam, but not before his war policies created even more protest and further uproar within the country.

in the presidential race of 1960, Nixon tasted defeat again in 1962 when he ran for governor of California. His political career all but dead, Nixon joined a New York law firm. But he never strayed far from politics. In 1966 Nixon campaigned for Republican candidates in congressional elections, helping them to win back 47 House seats and 3 Senate seats from Democrats. In 1968 Nixon announced his candidacy for president and won the party's nomination.

During the presidential race, Nixon campaigned on a promise to restore law and order. This promise appealed to many middle-class Americans tired of years of riots and protests. He also promised, in vague but appealing terms, to end the war in Vietnam. Nixon's candidacy was helped by the entry of former Alabama governor **George Wallace** into the race as a third-party candidate. Wallace, a Democrat running on the American Independent Party ticket, was a longtime champion of school segregation and states' rights. Labeled the "white backlash" candidate, Wallace captured five southern states.

## Lesson 4 Assessment

1. **Organize Information** Create a timeline of major events that occurred in 1968.



Which event do you think was most significant? Explain.

2. **Key Terms and People** For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Analyze Events** Why do you think the Tet offensive turned so many Americans against the war? Do you agree that the Tet offensive was a turning point in the war? Why or why not?

### Think About:

- what American leaders had told the public about the war prior to Tet
- how public opinion changed after the Tet offensive

4. **Make Inferences** What do you think President Johnson meant when he said "If I've lost Walter [Cronkite], then it's over. I've lost Mr. Average Citizen"? Explain.

5. **Synthesize** What advice would you have given President Johnson about how to proceed with the war in 1968? Why?

# The End of the War and Its Legacy

## The Big Idea

President Nixon instituted his Vietnamization policy, and the long war finally came to an end.

## Why It Matters Now

Since Vietnam, the United States considers more carefully the risks to its own interests before intervening in foreign affairs.

## Key Terms and People

Richard Nixon

Henry Kissinger

Vietnamization

silent majority

My Lai

Kent State University

Pentagon Papers

War Powers Act

## One American's Story

Alfred S. Bradford served in Vietnam from September 1968 to August 1969. A member of the 25th Infantry Division, he was awarded several medals, including the Purple Heart, given to soldiers wounded in battle. One day, Bradford's eight-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, inquired about his experience in Vietnam. "Daddy, why did you do it?" she asked. Bradford recalled what he had told himself.

*"Vietnam was my generation's adventure. I wanted to be part of that adventure and I believed that it was my duty as an American, both to serve my country and particularly not to stand by while someone else risked his life in my place. I do not regret my decision to go, but I learned in Vietnam not to confuse America with the politicians elected to administer America, even when they claim they are speaking for America, and I learned that I have a duty to myself and to my country to exercise my own judgment based upon my own conscience."*

—Alfred S. Bradford, quoted in *Some Even Volunteered*



A U.S. soldier sits near Quang Tri, Vietnam, during a break in the fighting.

The legacy of the war was profound; it dramatically affected the way Americans viewed their government and the world. Richard Nixon had promised in 1968 to end the war, but it would take nearly five more years—and over 20,000 more American deaths—to end the nation's involvement in Vietnam.

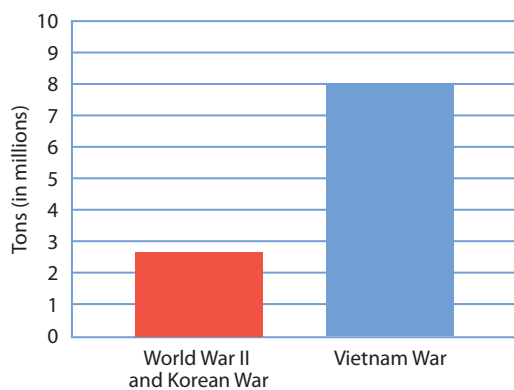
## President Nixon and Vietnamization

In the summer of 1969, newly elected president **Richard Nixon** announced the first U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam. “We have to get rid of the nightmares we inherited,” Nixon later told reporters. “One of the nightmares is war without end.” However, even as Nixon pulled out the troops, he continued the war against North Vietnam. This was a policy that some critics would charge prolonged the “war without end” for several more bloody years.

**THE PULLOUT BEGINS** As President Nixon settled into the White House in January 1969, negotiations to end the war in Vietnam were going nowhere. There were a number of complex issues to be resolved, and each party had different priorities. The United States and South Vietnam insisted that all North Vietnamese forces withdraw from the South. The Americans also wanted the government of Nguyen Van Thieu, then South Vietnam’s ruler, to remain in power. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong demanded that U.S. troops withdraw from South Vietnam. The Communists also wanted the Thieu government to step aside for a coalition government that would include the Vietcong.

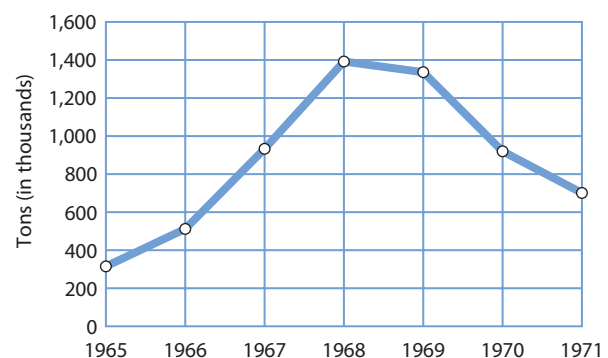
In the midst of the stalled negotiations, President Nixon conferred with National Security Advisor **Henry Kissinger** on a plan to end America’s involvement in Vietnam. Kissinger, a German emigrant who had earned three degrees from Harvard, was an expert on international relations. Their plan, known as **Vietnamization**, called for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops in order for the South Vietnamese to take on a more active combat role in the war. By August 1969 the first 25,000 U.S. troops had returned home from Vietnam. Over the next three years, the number of American troops in Vietnam dropped from more than 500,000 to less than 25,000.

Total U.S. Bomb Tonnage



Source: Vietnam War Almanac

U.S. Aerial Bomb Tonnage, 1965–1971



Source: The Air War in Indochina

### Interpret Graphs

1. Examine the line graph. How did the Vietnam conflict change over time?
2. Based on the bar graph, what type of war would you say was fought in Vietnam?



**Reading Check**  
Synthesize What  
was the impact of  
Vietnamization on the  
United States?

**“PEACE WITH HONOR”** Part of Nixon and Kissinger’s Vietnamization policy was aimed at establishing what the president called a “peace with honor.” Nixon intended to maintain U.S. dignity in the face of its withdrawal from war. A further goal was to preserve U.S. clout at the negotiation table. Nixon still demanded that the South Vietnamese government remain intact. With this objective—and even as the pull-out had begun—Nixon secretly ordered a massive bombing campaign against supply routes and bases in North Vietnam. The president also ordered that bombs be dropped on the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia, which held a number of Vietcong sanctuaries. Nixon told his aide H. R. Haldeman that he wanted the enemy to believe he was capable of anything.

*“I call it the madman theory, Bob. . . . I want the North Vietnamese to believe I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We’ll just slip the word to them that ‘for God’s sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communists. We can’t restrain him when he’s angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button’—and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.”*

—Richard M. Nixon, quoted in *The Price of Power*

## Trouble Continues on the Home Front

While many average Americans did support the president, the events of the war continued to divide the country. Antiwar activists opposed Nixon’s plan for Vietnamization because it did not immediately end the war. Yet Nixon was convinced that he had the firm backing of what he called the **silent majority**—moderate, mainstream Americans who he believed disapproved of antiwar protesters and quietly supported the U.S. efforts in Vietnam. Seeking to win support for his war policies, President Nixon spoke to the nation on November 3, 1969, urging Americans to help him uphold the nation’s responsibilities to defend and spread democracy.

*“Let historians not record that when America was the most powerful nation in the world we passed on the other side of the road and allowed the last hopes for peace and freedom of millions of people to be suffocated by the forces of totalitarianism.*

*And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support. . . . Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.”*

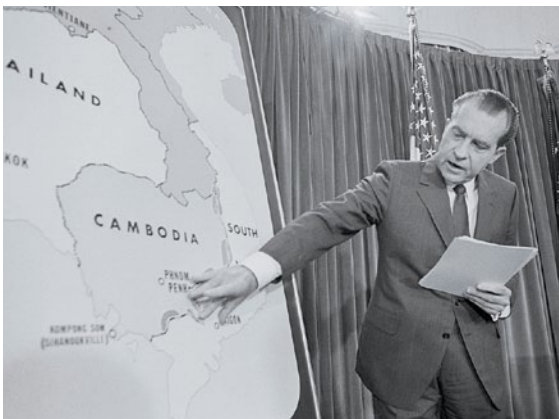
—Richard M. Nixon, from “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam,” November 3, 1969

### Background

Calley was imprisoned only a short time before President Nixon granted him house arrest. Calley was paroled in 1974, having served three years.

**THE MY LAI MASSACRE** In November 1969 Americans learned of a shocking event. That month, *New York Times* correspondent Seymour Hersh reported that on March 16, 1968, a U.S. platoon under the command of Lieutenant William Calley Jr. had massacred innocent civilians in the small village of **My Lai** (mé' li') in northern South Vietnam. Calley was searching for Vietcong rebels. Finding no sign of the enemy, the troops rounded up the villagers and shot more than 200 Vietnamese—mostly women, children, and elderly men. “We all huddled them up,” recalled 22-year-old Private Paul Meadlo. “I poured about four clips into the group. . . . The mothers was hugging their children. . . . Well, we kept right on firing.”

The troops insisted that they were not responsible for the shootings because they were only following Lieutenant Calley’s orders. When asked what his directive had been, one soldier answered, “Kill anything that breathed.” Twenty-five army officers were charged with some degree of responsibility. But only Calley was convicted and imprisoned.



President Nixon points to a map of Cambodia during a televised speech on April 30, 1970. His television appearances shaped public opinions about the war.

**INVADING CAMBODIA AND LAOS** Despite the shock over My Lai, the country’s mood by 1970 seemed to be less explosive. American troops were on their way home. It appeared that the war was finally winding down.

On April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced that U.S. troops had invaded Cambodia to clear out North Vietnamese and Vietcong supply centers. The president defended his action: “If when the chips are down, the world’s most powerful nation acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations . . . throughout the world.” The following year, the United States attacked Communist supply routes in Laos. The campaign did not disrupt North Vietnamese operations, but it destroyed some ARVN military units.

News of the events in Cambodia and Laos triggered more student protests. In what became the first general student strike in the nation’s history, more than 1.5 million students closed down some 1,200 campuses. The president of Columbia University called the month that followed the Cambodian invasion “the most disastrous month of May in the history of . . . higher education.”

**VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS** Disaster struck hardest at **Kent State University** in Ohio, where a massive student protest led to the burning of the ROTC building. In response to the unrest, the local mayor called in the National Guard. On May 4, 1970, the Guards fired live ammunition into a crowd of campus protesters who were hurling rocks at them. The gunfire wounded nine people and killed four. Two of the victims had not even participated in the rally.

Ten days later, similar violence rocked the mostly all-black college of Jackson State in Mississippi. National Guardsmen there confronted a group of antiwar demonstrators and fired on the crowd after several bottles were thrown. In the hail of bullets, 12 students were wounded and 2 were killed, both innocent bystanders.

## Kent State Shooting

Photographer John Filo was a senior at Kent State University when antiwar demonstrations rocked the campus. When the National Guard began firing at student protesters, Filo began shooting pictures, narrowly escaping a bullet himself. As he continued to document the horrific scene, a girl running to the side of a fallen student caught his eye. Just as she dropped to her knees and screamed, Filo snapped a photograph that would later win the Pulitzer Prize and become one of the most memorable images of the decade.

### Analyze Historical Sources

1. What do you think is the most striking element of this photograph? Explain.
2. Why do you think this photograph remains a symbol of the Vietnam War era today?



In a sign that America still remained sharply divided about the war, the country hotly debated the campus shootings. Polls indicated that many Americans supported the National Guard. Respondents claimed that the students “got what they were asking for.” The weeks following the campus turmoil brought new attention to a group known as “hardhats,” construction workers and other blue-collar Americans who supported the U.S. government’s war policies. In May 1970 nearly 100,000 members of the Building and Construction Trades Council of New York held a rally outside city hall to support the government.

**THE PENTAGON PAPERS** Nixon lost significant political support when he invaded Vietnam’s neighbors. By first bombing and then invading Cambodia without even notifying Congress, the president stirred anger on Capitol Hill. On December 31, 1970, Congress repealed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This resolution had given the president near independence in conducting policy in Vietnam.

Support for the war eroded even further when in June 1971 former Defense Department worker Daniel Ellsberg leaked a 7,000-page document that became known as the **Pentagon Papers**. Written for Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in 1967–1968, the Pentagon Papers revealed among other things that the government had drawn up plans for entering the war even as President Lyndon Johnson promised that he would not send American troops to Vietnam. Furthermore, the papers showed that there was never any plan to end the war as long as the North Vietnamese persisted.

**Reading Check**  
Analyze Issues How  
did the campus  
shootings  
demonstrate the  
continued divisions  
within the country?

The Nixon administration tried unsuccessfully to block the publication of the papers, citing national security concerns. They even charged Ellsberg with felony acts of revealing national security secrets. Murray Gurfein, a U.S. District Court judge, expressed his thoughts about the case.

*“The security of the Nation is not at the ramparts alone. Security also lies in the value of our free institutions. A cantankerous press, an obstinate press, an ubiquitous press, must be suffered by those in authority in order to preserve the even greater values of freedom of expression and the right of the people to know. These are troubled times. There is no greater safety valve for discontent and cynicism about the affairs of government than freedom of expression in any form.”*

—Murray Gurfein, from *United States v. New York Times Company*, 1971

In the end, the Supreme Court ruled that the press had a constitutional right to publish the classified information. For many Americans, the Pentagon Papers confirmed their belief that the government had not been honest about its war intentions. This led many to question the United States’ policy of supporting any and all anticommunist governments. The document, while not particularly damaging to the Nixon administration, supported what opponents of the war had been saying.

## The Long War Ends

In March 1972 the North Vietnamese launched their largest attack on South Vietnam since the Tet offensive in 1968. President Nixon responded by ordering a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnamese cities. He also ordered that mines be laid in Haiphong harbor, the North’s largest harbor. Soviet and Chinese ships used the harbor to supply North Vietnam. The Communists “have never been bombed like they are going to be bombed this time,” Nixon vowed. The bombings halted the North Vietnamese attack, but the grueling stalemate continued. It was after this that the Nixon administration took steps to finally end America’s involvement in Vietnam.

**“PEACE IS AT HAND”** By the middle of 1972, the country’s growing social division and the looming presidential election prompted the Nixon administration to change its negotiating policy. Polls showed that more than 60 percent of Americans in 1971 thought that the United States should withdraw all troops from Vietnam by the end of the year.

Henry Kissinger, the president’s adviser for national security affairs, served as Nixon’s top negotiator in Vietnam. Since 1969, Kissinger had been meeting privately with North Vietnam’s chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho. Eventually, Kissinger dropped his insistence that North Vietnam withdraw all its troops from the South before the complete withdrawal of American troops. On October 26, 1972, days before the presidential election, Kissinger announced, “Peace is at hand.”



## Henry Kissinger (1923– )

Henry Kissinger, who helped negotiate America's withdrawal from Vietnam and who later would help forge historic new relations with China and the Soviet Union, held a deep interest in the concept of power. "You know," he once noted, "most of these world leaders, you wouldn't want to know socially. Mostly they are intellectual mediocrities. The thing that is interesting about them is . . . their power."



At first, Kissinger seemed an unlikely candidate to work for Richard Nixon. Kissinger declared, "That man Nixon is not fit to be president." However, the two became trusted colleagues.

**THE FINAL PUSH** President Nixon won reelection. But the promised peace proved to be elusive. The Thieu regime, alarmed at the prospect of North Vietnamese troops stationed in South Vietnam, rejected Kissinger's plan. Talks broke off on December 16. Two days later, the president unleashed a ferocious bombing campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong, the two largest cities in North Vietnam. In what became known as the "Christmas bombings," U.S. planes dropped 100,000 bombs over the course of 11 straight days. The bombers paused only on Christmas Day.

At this point, calls to end the war resounded from the halls of Congress as well as from Beijing and Moscow. Everyone, it seemed, had finally grown weary of the war. The warring parties returned to the peace table. On January 27, 1973, the United States signed an "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam." Under the agreement, North Vietnamese troops would remain in South Vietnam. However, Nixon promised to respond "with full force" to any violation of the peace agreement. On March 29, 1973, the last group of U.S. combat troops left for home. For America, the Vietnam War had ended.

**THE FALL OF SAIGON** The war itself, however, raged on. Within months of the United States' departure, the cease-fire agreement between North and South Vietnam collapsed. In March 1975, after several years of fighting, the North Vietnamese launched a full-scale invasion against the South. Thieu appealed to the United States for help. America provided economic aid but refused to send troops. Soon thereafter, President Gerald Ford—who assumed the presidency after the Watergate scandal forced President Nixon to resign—gave a speech in which he captured the nation's attitude toward the war:

*"America can regain its sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned."*

—Gerald Ford, from a speech at Tulane University, April 23, 1975

On April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon and captured the city. Soon after, South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam.

### Reading Check

**Summarize** Explain what led to the agreement to end the war in Vietnam.

## The War Leaves a Painful Legacy

The Vietnam War exacted a terrible price from its participants. In all, 58,000 Americans were killed and some 303,000 were wounded. North and South Vietnamese deaths topped 2 million. In addition, the war left Southeast Asia highly unstable. This led to further war in Cambodia. In America, a divided nation attempted to come to grips with an unsuccessful war. In the end, the conflict in Vietnam left many Americans with a more cautious outlook on foreign affairs and a more cynical attitude toward their government.

**AMERICAN VETERANS COPE BACK HOME** While families welcomed home their sons and daughters, the nation as a whole extended a cold hand to its returning Vietnam veterans. There were no brass bands, no victory parades, no cheering crowds. Instead, many veterans faced indifference or even hostility from an America still torn and bitter about the war. Lily Jean Lee Adams, who served as an army nurse in Vietnam, recalled arriving in America in 1970 while still in uniform.

*"In the bus terminal, people were staring at me and giving me dirty looks. I expected the people to smile, like, 'Wow, she was in Vietnam, doing something for her country—wonderful.' I felt like I had walked into another country, not my country. So I went into the ladies' room and changed."*

—Lily Jean Lee Adams, quoted in *A Piece of My Heart*

Many Vietnam veterans readjusted successfully to civilian life. However, about 15 percent of the 3.3 million soldiers who served developed



Lieutenant Colonel Robert Stirm, a returning POW, receives a warm welcome from his family in 1973. The longest-held Vietnam POW was Lieutenant Everett Alvarez Jr. of California. He was imprisoned for more than eight years.



Each year, over 2 million people visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Many leave remembrances that are collected nightly by park rangers and stored in a museum. Inscribed on the memorial are over 58,000 names of Americans who died in the war or were then still listed as missing in action.

post-traumatic stress disorder. Some had recurring nightmares about their war experiences. Many others suffered from severe headaches and memory lapses. Other veterans became highly apathetic or began abusing drugs or alcohol. Several thousand even committed suicide.

In an effort to honor the men and women who served in Vietnam, the U.S. government commissioned the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. In 1981 the planners of the memorial held a competition to determine the memorial's design. Maya Ying Lin, a 21-year-old architecture student of Chinese descent, submitted the winning design. It consisted of two long, black granite walls on which are etched the names of the men and women who died or are missing in action. "I didn't want a static object that people would just look at," Lin said of her design, "but something they could relate to as on a journey, or passage, that would bring each to his own conclusions." Many Vietnam veterans, as well as their loved ones, have found visiting the memorial a deeply moving, even healing, experience.

**FURTHER TURMOIL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA** The end of the Vietnam War ushered in a new period of violence and chaos in Southeast Asia. In unifying Vietnam, the victorious Communists initially held out a conciliatory hand to the South Vietnamese. "You have nothing to fear," declared Colonel Bui Tin of the North Vietnamese Army.

However, the Communists soon imprisoned more than 400,000 South Vietnamese in harsh "reeducation," or labor, camps. As the Communists imposed their rule throughout the land, nearly 1.5 million people fled Vietnam. They included citizens who had supported the U.S. war effort, as well as business owners, whom the Communists expelled when they began nationalizing the country's business sector.



Also fleeing the country was a large group of poor Vietnamese, known as boat people because they left on anything from freighters to barges to rowboats. Their efforts to reach safety across the South China Sea often met with tragedy. Nearly 50,000 perished on the high seas due to exposure, drowning, illness, or piracy.

The people of Cambodia also suffered greatly after the war. The U.S. invasion of Cambodia had unleashed a brutal civil war in which a radical Communist group known as the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, seized power in 1975. In an effort to transform the country into a peasant society, the Khmer Rouge executed professionals and anyone with an education or foreign ties. During its reign of terror, the Khmer Rouge is believed to have killed at least 1 million Cambodians.

**THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM** Even after it ended, the Vietnam War remained a subject of great controversy for Americans. Many hawks continued to insist that the war could have been won if the United States had employed more military power. They also blamed the antiwar movement at home for destroying American morale. Doves countered that the North Vietnamese had displayed incredible resiliency and that an increase in U.S. military force would have resulted only in a continuing stalemate. In addition, doves argued that an unrestrained war against North Vietnam might have prompted a military reaction from China or the Soviet Union. As it was, the Vietnam War served as a proxy war. China and the Soviet Union provided money and weapons to the North Vietnamese. The United States directly supported the South Vietnamese.

As such, it did not improve relations between the United States and China or the Soviet Union. But the war did serve as a replacement for full-scale conflict among these global rivals, preventing an escalation of hostility.

The war resulted in several major U.S. policy changes. First, the government abolished the draft, which had stirred so much antiwar sentiment. Also, the war was the impetus for the ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment in 1971, which extended voting rights to Americans 18 years or older. During the war, young people had protested the unfairness of being drafted and sent to war without being allowed to vote.

After the war, the country also took steps to curb the president's war-making powers. Many thought both Johnson and Nixon had exceeded their constitutional powers by waging an undeclared war. So in November 1973 Congress passed the **War Powers Act**. It stipulated that a president must inform Congress within 48 hours of sending forces into a hostile area without a declaration of war. In addition, the troops may remain there no longer than 90

NOW

&

THEN

### U.S. Recognition of Vietnam

In July 1995, more than 20 years after the Vietnam War ended, the United States extended full diplomatic relations to Vietnam. In announcing the resumption of ties with Vietnam, President Bill Clinton declared, "Let this moment . . . be a time to heal and a time to build." Demonstrating how the war still divides Americans, the president's decision drew both praise and criticism from members of Congress and veterans' groups.

In an ironic twist, Clinton nominated as ambassador to Vietnam a former prisoner of war from the Vietnam War, Douglas Peterson, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Florida. Peterson, an air force pilot, was shot down over North Vietnam in 1966 and spent six and a half years in a Hanoi prison.



**Reading Check**  
Contrast Contrast  
the two viewpoints  
regarding the legacy  
of the Vietnam War.

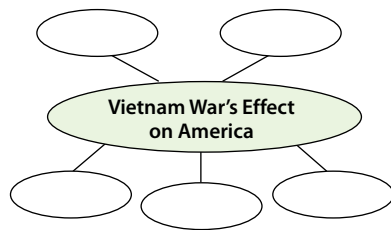
days unless Congress approves the president's actions or declares war. Since its passage, the resolution's constitutionality has been the subject of debate. Some observers believe that it misinterprets the intention of the founders in granting Congress the power to declare war, taking too much power from the executive branch. Others feel it simply serves to clarify the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches that the founders intended all along.

In a broader sense, the Vietnam War has significantly altered America's views on foreign policy. In what has been labeled the Vietnam syndrome, Americans now pause and consider possible risks to their own interests before deciding whether to intervene in the affairs of other nations. In part because of Vietnam, potential U.S. involvement in a foreign war comes under intense scrutiny today. Recent presidents have been pressured to present a case for a compelling national interest before sending U.S. forces to hostile overseas situations.

Finally, the war contributed to an overall cynicism among Americans about their government and political leaders that persists today. Americans grew suspicious of a government that could provide as much misleading information or conceal as many activities as the Johnson and Nixon administrations had done. Coupled with the Watergate scandal of the mid-1970s, the war diminished the optimism and faith in government that Americans felt during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years.

## Lesson 5 Assessment

1. **Organize Information** In a web diagram, list the effects of the Vietnam War on America.



Choose one effect to further explain in a paragraph.

2. **Key Terms and People** For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.
3. **Analyze Effects** In your opinion, what was the main effect of the U.S. government's deception about its policies and military conduct in Vietnam? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

### Think About:

- the contents of the Pentagon Papers
- Nixon's secrecy in authorizing military maneuvers

4. **Analyze Primary Sources** In his appeal to the "silent majority," what did President Nixon mean when he said that only Americans could "defeat or humiliate the United States"?
5. **Make Inferences** How would you account for the cold homecoming American soldiers received when they returned from Vietnam? Support your answer with reasons.
6. **Synthesize** In the end, do you think the United States' withdrawal from Vietnam was a victory for the United States or a defeat? Explain your answer.

# Module 16 Assessment

## Key Terms and People

For each key term or person below, write a sentence explaining its connection to the Vietnam War years.

1. Ho Chi Minh
2. Ngo Dinh Diem
3. Vietcong
4. William Westmoreland
5. napalm
6. Tet offensive
7. Robert Kennedy
8. Henry Kissinger
9. Vietnamization
10. Pentagon Papers

## Main Ideas

Use your notes and the information in the module to answer the following questions.

### Moving Toward Conflict

1. What was President Eisenhower's explanation of the domino theory?
2. What were the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords? What was the purpose of the proposed 1956 elections?
3. How did the Tonkin Gulf Resolution lead to greater U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

### U.S. Involvement and Escalation

4. Why did so much of the American public and many in the Johnson administration support U.S. escalation in Vietnam?
5. How was the Vietnam War different from previous wars for U.S. soldiers?
6. Why did the war begin to lose support at home? What contributed to the sinking morale of the U.S. troops?

### A Nation Divided

7. What race-related problems existed for African American soldiers who served in the Vietnam War?

8. What issues surrounding the war divided the nation? How did the hawks and doves demonstrate these differences of opinion?

### 1968: A Tumultuous Year

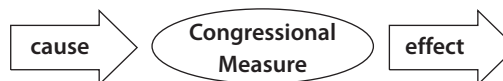
9. What circumstances set the stage for President Johnson's public announcement that he would not seek another term as president?
10. What acts of violence occurred in the United States during 1968 that dramatically altered the mood of the country?
11. How did the Tet offensive differ from previous fighting in Vietnam? How did it cause many Americans to doubt that the United States would soon win the war?

### The End of the War and Its Legacy

12. Briefly describe the military conflict in Vietnam soon after the last U.S. combat troops departed in 1973.
13. How well did Nixon's "Madman Theory" and Vietnamization strategy work? Explain.
14. Describe how and why the War Powers Act changed presidential power.
15. List the immediate effects and the more lasting legacies of America's involvement in the Vietnam War.

## Critical Thinking

1. **Analyze Effects** Create a cause-and-effect diagram for each of these congressional measures: **a.** Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1964), **b.** repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1970), **c.** War Powers Act (1973).



2. **Evaluate** Was the domino theory a good basis for American policy? Explain.
3. **Synthesize** In what ways was America's support of the Diem government a conflict of interest? Cite examples to support your answer.

# Module 16 Assessment, continued

4. **Analyze Motives** Do you think the United States was justified in supporting Ngo Dinh Diem over Ho Chi Minh? Why or why not?
5. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think so many young Americans became so vocal in their condemnation of the Vietnam War?
6. **Develop Historical Perspective** Do you think the antiwar movement had a significant effect on American opinion toward the war? How were the goals of the antiwar protesters similar to those of other activists in the 1960s, such as those who worked for civil rights for women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans?
7. **Analyze Events** Do you believe, as did General Westmoreland, that the Tet offensive was a defeat for the Communists?
8. **Compare** How did public support of the U.S. government and military during the Vietnam War compare with that of other conflicts?
9. **Analyze Effects** Of the lasting legacies of the Vietnam War, which do you think had the greatest impact on U.S. government? On the American people? Explain.

## Engage with History

Recall the issues that you explored at the beginning of the module. Then write a paragraph that describes the domestic revolution in the United States during the Vietnam War years from the perspective of a group on the home front. Use evidence from the module to evaluate how the war impacted that group. In your paragraph, consider the impact of the antiwar movement, the draft, and the media.

## Focus on Writing

Imagine you are a television news journalist. Write a script for a brief news report on the events of the Tet offensive or on the Democratic National Convention. Be sure to explain the significance of the event and to present multiple perspectives on it.

## Multimedia Activity

Organize two teams to debate the United States' involvement in Vietnam. One team should argue for the side of the hawks, and the other team should argue on behalf of the doves. Use the Internet and other sources to research the arguments put forth by both sides, as well as how hawks and doves affected the political development of the nation. Then debate the issue before the class.

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