

## Bobbie Lou Pendergrass Letter to President John F. Kennedy, February 18, 1963

Dear President Kennedy,

My brother, Specialist James Delmas McAndrew, was one of the seven crew members killed on January 11 in a Viet Nam helicopter crash.

The Army reports at first said that communist gunfire was suspected. Later, it said that the helicopter tragedy was due to malfunction of aircraft controls. I've wondered if the "malfunction of aircraft controls" wasn't due to "communist gunfire." However, that's neither important now, nor do I even care to know.

My two older brothers entered the Navy and the Marine Corps in 1941 immediately after the war started. They served all during the war and in some very important battles. Then Jim went into the Marines as soon as he was old enough and was overseas for a long time. During those war years and even all during the Korean conflict we worried about all of them—but that was all very different. They were wars that our country were fighting, and everyone here knew that our sons and brothers were giving their lives for their country.

I can't help but feel that giving one's life for one's country is one thing, but being sent to a country where half our country never even heard of and being shot at without even a chance to shoot back is another thing altogether!

Please, I'm only a housewife who doesn't even claim to know all about the international situation—but we have felt so bitter over this—can the small number of our boys over in Vietnam possibly be doing enough good to justify the awful number of casualties? It seems to me that if we are going to have our boys over there, that we should send enough to have a chance—or else stay home. Those fellows are just sitting ducks in those darn helicopters. If a war is worth fighting—isn't it worth fighting to win?

Please answer this and help me and my family to reconcile ourselves to our loss and to feel that even though Jim died in Viet Nam—and it isn't our war—it wasn't in vain.

I am a good Democrat—and I'm not criticizing. I think you are doing a wonderful job—and God Bless You—

Very sincerely,  
Bobbie Lou Pendergrass

## President John F. Kennedy Letter to Bobbie Lou Pendergrass, March 6, 1963

Dear Mrs. Pendergrass,

I would like to express to you my deep and sincere sympathy in the loss of your brother. I can, of course, well understand your bereavement and the feelings which prompted you to write.

The questions which you posed in your letter can, I believe, best be answered by realizing why your brother—and other American men—went to Viet Nam in

From Andrew Carroll, ed., *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American*

the first place. When this is understood, I am sure that the other related questions will be answered.

Americans are in Viet Nam because we have determined that this country must not fall under Communist domination. Ever since Viet Nam was divided, the Viet Nameese have fought valiantly to maintain their independence in the face of the continuing threat from the North. Shortly after the division eight years ago it became apparent that they could not be successful in their defense without extensive assistance from other nations of the Free World community.

In the late summer of 1955, with the approval of President Eisenhower, an Advisory group was established in Viet Nam to provide them with adequate weapons and equipment and training in basic military skills which are essential to survival in the battlefield. Even with this help, the situation grew steadily worse under the pressure of the Viet Cong. By 1961 it became apparent that the troubles in Laos and the troubles in Viet Nam could easily expand. It is also apparent that the Communist attempt to take over Viet Nam is only part of a larger plan for bringing the entire area of Southeast Asia under their domination. Though it is only a small part of the area geographically, Viet Nam is the most crucial.

If Viet Nam should fall, it will indicate to the people of Southeast Asia that complete Communist domination of their part of the world is almost inevitable. Your brother was in Viet Nam because the threat to the Viet Nameese people is, in the long run, a threat to the Free World community, and ultimately a threat to us also. For when freedom is destroyed in one country, it is threatened throughout the world.

I have written to you at length because I know that it is important to you to understand why we are in Viet Nam. James McAndrew must have foreseen that his service could take him into a war like this; a war in which he took part not as a combatant but as an advisor. I am sure that he understood the necessity of such a situation, and I know that as a soldier, he knew full scale war in Viet Nam is at the moment unthinkable.

I believe if you can see this as he must have seen it, you will believe as he must have believed, that he did not die in vain. Forty-five American soldiers, including your brother, have given their lives in Viet Nam. In their sacrifice, they have earned the eternal gratitude of this Nation and other free men throughout the world.

Again, I would like to express to you and the members of your family my deepest personal sympathy.

Sincerely,  
John F. Kennedy

### QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. Which of Bobbie Lou Pendergrass's questions did President Kennedy address and which ones did he ignore or avoid?
2. When Kennedy stated that "Americans are in Viet Nam because we have determined that this country must not fall under Communist domination," what did he mean by "we have determined"? Who determined what and how? Did Pendergrass consider herself or her brother a participant in such a debate?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY 1

# Why We Are in Vietnam

Primary Source: Presidential Press Conference, 1965

*On July 28, 1965, after meeting with top foreign-policy and military advisers, President Johnson called a press conference at the White House to explain his policy on Vietnam. He announced that the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam would be increased from 75,000 to 125,000 and that the monthly draft call would rise from 17,000 to 35,000. In a poll taken the week of the press conference, 75 percent of the people questioned about Vietnam felt that "we have no other choice but to send in more troops." Read the following excerpt from Johnson's statement to the press, and think about why so many people agreed with the president's position at that time.*

Why must young Americans, born into a land exultant with hope and with golden promise, toil and suffer and sometimes die in such a remote and distant place?

The answer, like the war itself, is not an easy one, but it echoes clearly from the painful lessons of half a century. Three times in my lifetime, in two world wars and in Korea, Americans have gone to far lands to fight for freedom. We have learned at a terrible and brutal cost that retreat does not bring safety and weakness does not bring peace.

It is this lesson that has brought us to Vietnam. This is a different kind of war. There are no marching armies or solemn declarations. Some citizens of South Vietnam, at times with understandable grievances, have joined in the attack on their own government.

But we must not let this mask the central fact that this is really war. It is guided by North Vietnam, and it is spurred by Communist China. Its goal is to conquer the South, to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of communism.

There are great stakes in the balance.

Most of the non-Communist nations of Asia cannot, by themselves and alone, resist growing might and the grasping ambition of Asian communism.

Our power, therefore, is a very vital shield. If we are driven from the field in Vietnam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promise or in American protection.

In each land the forces of independence would be considerably weakened and an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would certainly imperil the security of the United States itself.

We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

Nor would surrender in Vietnam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

Moreover, we are in Vietnam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation. Three presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present president—over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Vietnam have fought for many long years. Thousands of them have died. Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Vietnam.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Johnson gave several reasons for continuing to support the South Vietnamese government. Which of those reasons do you find most persuasive? Why?
2. How did Johnson use historical events to support his policy?
3. What do you think Johnson meant when he said, "We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else"?
4. What do you think Stephan Gubar, an 18-year-old college student, and his father, a World War II veteran, might have said to each other after listening to Johnson's statement?

## Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Primary Source: Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1971

*Angered and disillusioned by what they had seen and done in Vietnam, some returning soldiers joined together in 1967 to form Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). From April 19 to April 23, 1971, the VVAW staged a series of antiwar protests on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and on April 22, John Kerry, representing the VVAW, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kerry had been awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster, and three Purple Hearts during his service in Vietnam, and 13 years after his appearance before the Senate committee, he would himself be elected to the U.S. Senate.*

... I want to relate to you the feeling that many of the men who have returned to this country express because we are probably angriest about all that we were told about Vietnam and about the mystical war against communism.

We found that not only was it a civil war, an effort by a people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever, but also we found that the Vietnamese whom we had enthusiastically molded after our own image were hard put to take up the fight against the threat we were supposedly saving them from.

We found most people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They wanted everything to do

with the war, particularly with this foreign presence of the United States of America, to leave them alone in peace, and they practiced the art of survival by siding with whichever military force was present at a particular time, be it Vietcong, North Vietnamese, or American.

We found also that all too often American men were dying in those rice paddies for want of support from their allies. We saw firsthand how moneys from American taxes were used for a corrupt dictatorial regime. We saw that many people in this country had a one-sided idea of who was kept free by our flag, and blacks provided the highest percentage of casualties. We saw Vietnam ravaged equally by American bombs and search-and-destroy missions, as well as by Vietcong terrorism, and yet we listened while this country tried to blame all of the havoc on the Vietcong. . . .

We learned the meaning of free-fire zones, shooting anything that moves, and we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of Orientals.

We watched the United States falsification of body counts, in fact the glorification of body counts. We listened while month after month we were told the back of the enemy was about to break. We fought using weapons against "oriental human beings." We fought using weapons against those people which I do not believe this country would dream of using were we fighting in the European theater. We watched while men charged up hills because a general said that

hill has to be taken, and after losing one platoon or two platoons they marched away to leave the hill for reoccupation by the North Vietnamese. . . .

Now we are told that the men who fought there must watch quietly while American lives are lost so that we can exercise the incredible arrogance of Vietnamizing the Vietnamese.

Each day to facilitate the process by which the United States washes her hands of Vietnam someone has to give up his life so that the United States doesn't have to admit something that the entire world already knows, so that we can't say that we have made a mistake. Someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, "the first president to lose a war."

We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Kerry, the returning veterans were angriest at having been misinformed about the war by their government. How did the soldiers' firsthand experience contrast with what they had been told?
2. In what way, according to Kerry, was the United States' conduct in the war racist?
3. What did Stephan Gubar's experience in Vietnam have in common with John Kerry's?

## Protesting Vietnam in Song

**Country Joe & the Fish**  
**Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag**  
Performed at Woodstock (1969)

Yeah, come on all of you, big strong men,  
Uncle Sam needs your help again.  
He's got himself in a terrible jam  
Way down yonder in Vietnam  
So put down your books and pick up a gun,  
We're gonna have a whole lotta fun.

**Chorus**

And it's one, two, three,  
What are we fighting for?  
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,  
Next stop is Vietnam;  
And it's five, six, seven,  
Open up the pearly gates,  
Well there ain't no time to wonder why,  
Whoopie! we're all gonna die.

Well, come on generals, let's move fast;  
Your big chance has come at last.  
Gotta go out and get those reds —  
The only good commie is the one who's dead  
And you know that peace can only be won  
When we've blown 'em all to kingdom come.

**Chorus**

Well, come on Wall Street,  
don't move slow,  
Why man, this is war au-  
go-go.  
There's plenty good money  
to be made  
By supplying the Army with  
the tools of the trade,  
Just hope and pray that if  
they drop the bomb,  
They drop it on the Viet  
Cong.

**Chorus**

Well, come on mothers  
throughout the land,  
Pack your boys off to Vietnam.  
Come on fathers, don't hesitate,  
Send 'em off before it's too late.  
Be the first one on your block  
To have your boy come home in a box.

**Chorus**



## E. The Politics of Protest in the 1960s

### I. Students for a Democratic Society Issues a Manifesto (1962)

*The civil rights struggle and the continuing Cold War inspired many young people who came of age in the 1960s to take a radically critical look at U.S. society—even before the worsening Vietnam imbroglio made radical disenchantment almost fashionable among the young. One of the earliest and most thoughtful expressions of this incipient youthful radicalism was the Port Huron Statement, drafted by Tom Hayden and adopted by the fledgling Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), then in a relatively moderate phase of development, at its national convention at Port Huron, Michigan, in 1962. This statement later proved enormously influential in shaping the political views of many young activists. What aspects of the U.S. situation does it find most deplorable? How truly “radical” are the sentiments it expresses?*

We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.

When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world; the only one with the atom bomb, the least scarred by modern war, an initiator of the United Nations that we thought would distribute Western influence throughout the world. Freedom and equality for each individual government of, by, and for the people—these American values we found good, principles by which we could live as men. Many of us began maturing in complacency.

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract “others” we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time. We might deliberately ignore, or avoid, or fail to feel all other human problems, but not these two, for these were too immediate and crushing in their impact, too challenging in the demand that we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution.

While these and other problems either directly oppressed us or rankled our consciences and became our own subjective concern, we began to see complicated and disturbing paradoxes in our surrounding America. The declaration “all men are created equal . . .” rang hollow before the facts of Negro life in the South and the big cities of the North. The proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo.

We witnessed, and continue to witness, other paradoxes. With nuclear energy whole cities can easily be powered, yet the dominant nation-states seem more likely to unleash destruction greater than that incurred in all wars of human history. Al-

<sup>1</sup>From the Port Huron Statement. Reprinted by permission of Tom Hayden, a founding member of Students for a Democratic Society and principal author of the Port Huron Statement. He was elected to the California legislature in 1982.

though our own technology is destroying old and creating new forms of social organization, men still tolerate meaningless work and idleness. While two-thirds of mankind suffers undernourishment, our own upper classes revel amidst superfluous abundance. Although world population is expected to double in forty years, the nations still tolerate anarchy as a major principle of international conduct and uncontrolled exploitation governs the sapping of the earth's physical resources. Although mankind desperately needs revolutionary leadership, America rests in national stalemate, its goals ambiguous and tradition-bound instead of informed and clear, its democratic system apathetic and manipulated rather than "of, by, and for the people."

Not only did tarnish appear on our image of American virtue, not only did disillusion occur when the hypocrisy of American ideals was discovered, but we began to sense that what we had originally seen as the American Golden Age was actually the decline of an era. The worldwide outbreak of revolution against colonialism and imperialism, the entrenchment of totalitarian states, the menace of war, overpopulation, international disorder, supertechnology—these trends were testing the tenacity of our own commitment to democracy and freedom and our abilities to visualize their application to a world in upheaval.

Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with living. But we are a minority—the vast majority of our people regard the temporary equilibriums of our society and world as eternally functional parts. In this is perhaps the outstanding paradox: we ourselves are imbued with urgency, yet the message of our society is that there is no viable alternative to the present. Beneath the reassuring tones of the politicians, beneath the common opinion that America will "muddle through," beneath the stagnation of those who have closed their minds to the future, is the pervading feeling that there simply are no alternatives, that our times have witnessed the exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures as well. Feeling the press of complexity upon the emptiness of life, people are fearful of the thought that at any moment things might be thrust out of control. They fear change itself, since change might smash whatever invisible framework seems to hold back chaos for them now. For most Americans, all crusades are suspect, threatening. The fact that each individual sees apathy in his fellows perpetuates the common reluctance to organize for change. The dominant institutions are complex enough to blunt the minds of their potential critics, and entrenched enough to swiftly dissipate or entirely repeal the energies of protest and reform, thus limiting human expectancies. Then, too, we are a materially improved society, and by our own improvements we seem to have weakened the case for further change.

Some would have us believe that Americans feel contentment amidst prosperity—but might it not better be called a glaze above deeply felt anxieties about their role in the new world? And if these anxieties produce a developed indifference to human affairs, do they not as well produce a yearning to believe there *is* an alternative to the present, not [that] something *can* be done to change circumstances in the school, the workplaces, the bureaucracies, the government? It is to this latter yearning, at once the spark and engine of change, that we direct our present appeal. The search for truly democratic alternatives to the present, and a commitment to social experimentation with them, is a worthy and fulfilling human enterprise, one which moves us and, we hope, others today. On such a basis do we offer this document of our convictions and analysis: as an effort in understanding and changing the conditions of humanity in the late twentieth century, an effort rooted in the ancient, still unfulfilled conception of man attaining determining influence over his circumstances of life.

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## "A No-Winner from the Beginning"

### **Policymaking and the Vietnam War**

*Richard Holbrooke*

After World War II, the Viet Minh, nationalist revolutionaries led by communist Ho Chi Minh, fought French colonial rule in Vietnam. When the French withdrew in defeat in 1954, an international conference divided the nation in half at the seventeenth parallel, to be reunified after elections were held in 1956. Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh ruled North Vietnam, and Ngo Dinh Diem ruled South Vietnam. Diem resisted holding elections to reunify Vietnam because he feared he would lose to Ho Chi Minh.

In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower argued in his "domino theory" that if one nation was taken over by communists, surrounding nations would soon fall as well. The United States supported Diem and began sending military advisers to South Vietnam in 1955. Under President John F. Kennedy, aid to South Vietnam increased, and by the end of 1963 more than 15,000 American military advisers were stationed there. President Lyndon Johnson escalated the Vietnam War dramatically. By 1968, U.S. forces in Vietnam had grown to more than 500,000.

Richard Holbrooke, a State Department staffer, participated in the growing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He also witnessed the persistent misinformation that sabotaged American policy there.

**W**hen I got to Saigon, I was 22 and I believed everything I had been told by the United States government. I believed that the commitment was correct—freedom of choice, self-determination, save the country from communism—and that we were doing the right thing because the U.S. government did the right thing. In those days you didn't question it. But after my Mekong Delta experiences, . . . I knew that the assessments were wrong and the reporting was perverted. I knew that the press corps' version of how things were going was correct. . . .

But the critical phase in my thinking about Vietnam did not begin until I got back to Washington in 1966. The day I went to work, our staff was called to meet with the president. I was 25, just back

from Vietnam, and I thought I knew more about the place than anyone else in the whole city. So we walk into the Cabinet Room, and of course Johnson talks for one straight hour.

He says to Komer, "Ah, Bob, I've been reading a report that they cut Route Four between Saigon and Can Tho." And he says, "You know, in Texas if the price of pigs goes up, you get thrown out of power. You lose elections. The price of pigs is power in Texas." And then he says, "Komer, I want you to get the price of pigs down by 50 percent in twenty-four hours and get that road open."

And Komer is saying, "Yes, Mr. President." And it's like Hitler at the end of World War II, moving around divisions that don't exist. Komer is being ordered to open

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*Ordinary Americans*

a road which is in communist control. We can't open the goddamned road. Johnson is going on and on. Then finally, after an hour of this, Johnson says, "I have another idea, Bob. You know at the end of World War II we had all these civil affairs advisers who ran occupied Germany and occupied Japan. We ought to reactivate them and get them out there to run Vietnam."

Well, I know now that Johnson said things like this all the time and all you did was say "Yes, Mr. President" and ignore him. But at the time I thought this was the president of the United States starting a policy. I suddenly had this vision of battalions of paunch-bellied, aging colonels who had run Munich in 1945 for two or three months, going to Quang Tri. This was too much for me.

I'd never talked to a president before. But I said, "Mr. President?" He looks around the table like, "Who's this punk?" So very, very carefully I say, "Mr. President, I've just come back from Vietnam and, you know, I'm a little worried about this. I'm not sure American advisers of that sort would be quite qualified. You know there are some limitations to what Americans can do in the civilian field in Vietnam." He takes off his glasses and he looks at me with that sad look of his and he says, "Son, your job is to get rid of those limitations." And he gets up and walks out of the room. That was my introduction to the White House.

But it was unforgettable, and for me it was an unforgettable time. Nothing in the world excited me more. I idolized McGeorge Bundy [national security adviser], Bob McNamara [secretary of defense], what Teddy White called the "action intellectuals." To work among them was very exciting. And they didn't know what the hell was going on in Vietnam. Worse, some of them, like Walt Rostow [an assistant to Bundy], were deliberately misrepresenting the facts, not only to the public but to themselves and the president.

There was a perversion of information that really upset and worried me. And then at the same time, I saw for the first time what I'd missed because I'd been in Vietnam—and that was the eroding base of popular support, which to the extent it still existed was dependent on the public misunderstanding the truth. Since I knew, I felt I ended up being part of the famous credibility gap. And at that point, the objectives of the United States in Vietnam came into question in my mind for the first time. . . .

The deepest and most profound error—which I certainly did not understand in the '60s—was Bob McNamara's. If Vietnam was as important to the United States as Lyndon Johnson said it was, then we should have put in much more force, much faster. If it was only as important as the resources we were devoting to it—limited manpower, constraints on the use of firepower, one-year tours which meant we never kept people there long enough to do anything—then we shouldn't have been there at all. So in a funny way, I came out of the Vietnam War neither hawk nor dove but with the simplest of things: You can't ask the American public to commit its sacred lives and treasure without having an absolutely clear readiness to achieve the objective and the objective must be clear.

Now, if you apply that standard to Vietnam, you came up with the answer that this was a no-winner from the beginning. To win the war, you had to put in triple the number of forces. You would have had to have faced the possibility of an indefinitely open-ended invasion force in North Vietnam—an occupying force. And you would have had to contemplate use of firepower even higher than the awesome levels we reached. And even that might have done nothing but flatten a small country which was not as strategically important as we claimed it was. Therefore, on the merits, the whole Vietnam adventure was misconstrued from the very beginning.



## Legacy of the Vietnam War

Source: Pendergast, Tom. "Legacy of the Vietnam War." *Defining Moments Online*. Lincoln Library Press, 2014. FactCite, [www.factcite.com/definingmoments/32894.html](http://www.factcite.com/definingmoments/32894.html).

*When you defeat someone on the battlefield or they defeat you, and later you help the other person up, at that time the war is truly over.*

—Vietnam veteran Fred Downs, 2001

For both the United States and Vietnam, the post-war era was turbulent and unsettling. But the character of this turbulence was quite different within the two nations.

In Vietnam, the primary struggle was to emerge from the rubble and devastation of the war and create a viable state. In America, the only physical scars left from the war were the ones that veterans carried on their bodies. But the Vietnam War also wreaked profound damage on American confidence and self-image, and it sparked significant and enduring changes in how the United States conducted its foreign policy and maintained its military.

### Vietnam and American Foreign Policy

Today, most Americans recognize that when it comes to global politics, we live in a world of great complexity. We accept that any decision made by American strategists about the application of military force must involve careful analysis of a stunning variety of political, economic, cultural, and military factors. In the years leading up to the American involvement in Vietnam, however, the world did not appear quite so complex. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon all subscribed to the idea that the primary geopolitical role of the United States was to contain the spread of Communism. This belief made it both a moral and strategic obligation for the United States to intervene militarily when small nations were in danger of "falling" to Communism. Such intervention was dictated by widespread belief in the so-called "domino theory," which held that if one nation became Communist, neighboring countries would be at greater risk of suffering the same fate.

Over the course of fighting the war in Vietnam, however, it became readily apparent that defending South Vietnam from Communism was a formidable and complex task. The succession of South Vietnamese regimes that the United States worked to defend during the Vietnam War were unpopular with their citizens, and they engaged in corrupt and brutal practices that were directly counter to stated American principles of governance. Moreover, an apparent majority of South Vietnamese wanted reunification with North Vietnam and the end to foreign intervention in their country, even if it meant accepting Communist rule. This underestimation of the nationalist character of the conflict in Vietnam would haunt the United States throughout the war years. Meanwhile, America's role in driving the conflict's deepening spiral of violence and destruction triggered widespread disillusionment among U.S. citizens who had once seen intervention in Vietnam as compatible with traditional American ideals and values.

In the years following the Vietnam War, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China tried to avoid letting smaller nations become Cold War battlegrounds. But although deploying actual U.S. troops in political “trouble spots” was seen as political suicide, some American policymakers remained determined to confront Communism whenever it was perceived to threaten U.S. security. In the 1980s, for example, the administration of President Ronald Reagan became alarmed at political developments in several Latin American states. Reagan publicly assured Americans that he would not lead them into “another Vietnam.” Rather than openly committing American troops, though, Reagan ordered the Central Intelligence Agency and other covert operations groups to support pro-American governments and political groups in those nations. These operations in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras were highly controversial, and in some cases clearly in violation of American law. The most glaring example of this was the Iran-Contra affair, in which several Reagan administration officials secretly armed Nicaraguan “freedom fighters” seeking to topple the nation’s socialist government.

By 1991 the Soviet Union had ceased to exist, Communist governments had collapsed throughout eastern Europe, and Communism was no longer considered a major threat to the United States. One year earlier, however, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had ordered his army to invade neighboring Kuwait. President George H.W. Bush responded by helping to organize a broad coalition of countries to defeat Iraq. Moreover, Bush and his military strategists defined a limited but clear objective and applied overwhelming military force to reaching that objective. When the U.S.-led coalition chased Iraq out of Kuwait in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Bush happily proclaimed, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.” Policymakers embraced the idea that the United States had finally put the unpleasant memories of Vietnam behind it.

But Vietnam continued to cast a long shadow over American foreign policy, as President Bill Clinton found out several times during his presidency (1993–2001). During his years in the White House, ethnic and tribal violence in the collapsing former Communist state of Yugoslavia and in the African nations of Rwanda and Somalia seemed to call out for foreign intervention. The world looked to the United States, the lone remaining superpower, for guidance and intervention. But American reluctance to commit its mighty military machine to any conflict that had any potential for turning into a “quagmire” remained strong. In these cases, the fear of “another Vietnam” clearly lingered in the minds of policymakers and ordinary Americans alike (in the case of Yugoslavia, Clinton eventually helped convince the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to carry out massive air strikes against Serbian forces that had refused to participate in peace talks; these U.S.-led air strikes were widely credited with convincing Serb leaders to accept a negotiated end to the conflict).

In March 2003 the United States embarked on its largest extended military operation on foreign soil since the Vietnam War. American forces entered Iraq and overthrew the government of dictator Saddam Hussein (a small number of troops from several other nations, most notably Great Britain, also participated). President George W. Bush and officials in his administration stated that removing Hussein was necessary because he possessed weapons of mass destruction. The Bush White House and its supporters also implied a linkage between Hussein and the Al Qaeda terrorist network that was responsible for the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City and Washington, D.C.

Since that time, American troops have remained in Iraq for the stated purpose of helping the Iraqi people establish a democratic government there. But the claims used to justify the invasion of Iraq have been mostly discredited, and the U.S. occupation has been a troubled one. Sectarian warfare between ethnic groups within Iraq has soared, as has terrorist activity by Al Qaeda and other groups. As of

mid-2006, more than 2,500 American troops have lost their lives in Iraq, and the Iraqi civilians claimed by the violence number in the tens of thousands. The guerrilla nature of the violence that is wracking Iraq, combined with the uncertainty about how much longer American troops will remain in the region, has led some analysts to conclude that the Iraq War is becoming what policymakers dread most: "another Vietnam." Defenders of U.S. policy in Iraq, however, firmly reject such claims. They claim that the occupation, although difficult and challenging, is giving Iraqis the time they need to establish a stable, democratic government.

## **The American Military After Vietnam**

Few segments of American culture were more devastated by the experience of the Vietnam War than the American military. Prior to the war, the military had been the pride of the nation, a strong and efficient fighting force that had helped America win World War II and save the world from the forces of fascism. Yet over the course of the Vietnam War, civilian perceptions of the military declined dramatically, as did morale within the different branches of the armed services. Protestors condemned the military for adopting fighting strategies that led to "body counts," heavy use of Agent Orange and napalm, and atrocities such as the My Lai massacre. Within the military, soldiers grew to distrust both their civilian and military leadership. And the knowledge that American forces withdrew from Vietnam without victory was tremendously upsetting to soldiers, U.S. veterans of earlier wars, and members of the American public alike. By the end of the war the armed services faced real crises in their ranks.

After the war, the American military spent a lot of time and effort trying to determine exactly where its efforts in Vietnam had gone wrong. The explanations that emerged did much to shape the military in the coming years. A favored explanation within the military was the idea that U.S. forces had fought the war "with one hand tied behind their back." According to this thesis, civilian politicians had placed limits on the military that kept it from doing its job; soldiers pointed to presidential interference in choosing bombing targets so as not to provoke the Chinese, President Johnson's decision not to call up additional reserve troops, longstanding limitations on attacking Viet Cong positions within Cambodia and Laos, and a general civilian hesitation to allow the military to press forward to victory. The more introspective generals acknowledged that they bore some of the blame for these decisions because they had told civilian leadership what they wanted to hear, rather than giving them their full military assessment of the situation. The lesson learned, according to supporters of this analysis, was that the military had to reassert its authority over battlefield decisions. No longer would political considerations drive planning on the field of battle; no longer would military leaders tell politicians only what they wanted to hear.

These conclusions led the U.S. military to adopt a number of significant changes from top to bottom. At the top, the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 greatly enhanced cooperation between the separate branches of the military and made the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (a general who represented the combined wisdom of the heads of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) the primary military advisor to the president. General Creighton Abrams, who led the Army from 1972 to 1974, changed the structure of his branch of the service. For example, he made the reserves responsible for most support actions, thus ensuring that the reserves would be utilized more extensively as a resource in future conflicts.

Another major reform was the 1973 elimination of the draft and the creation of all-volunteer armed forces. Not only did this reform eliminate protests against forced military service, but it created a

military filled with soldiers who wanted to be there. Advocates of this change stated that the all-volunteer armed forces have been more receptive to demands of military professionalism. Finally, military training, both in the service academies and in boot camp, changed to reflect the way that wars were being fought. Soldiers received more extensive training in dealing with insurgencies and guerilla warfare, as well as in the high-tech weapon systems being developed by the United States.

One of the most difficult and pervasive problems facing the military after Vietnam was the diminished morale of soldiers and the decreased respect Americans gave to military personnel. Late in the war, order and respect for superior officers had declined dramatically among soldiers serving in Vietnam. A big push in the immediate aftermath of the war was the restoration of discipline and order. Each of the services cracked down on misbehavior and insubordination, while simultaneously pushing efforts to reclaim the discipline and pride that had once characterized the military. Under President Reagan, publicity campaigns depicting the various armed forces as skilled, professional fighting squads—the “Be All You Can Be” campaign for example—helped lift the public image of soldiers. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 was also a huge boost to the reputation of the armed forces. American troops performed admirably in that successful military operation, and they returned home to the heroes’ acclaim that was so notably absent during Vietnam.

Despite all the progress made by the military, however, the prosecution of the Iraq War (2003- ) has reawakened memories of Vietnam for some observers. U.S. troops have struggled to deal with insurgent warfare, in part because it is often impossible to tell friend from foe in the occupied nation. In addition, the mistreatment of Iraqi detainees by American soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison and the charges made by a number of retired generals and other critics that civilian Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has exerted too much influence over military strategy all echo perceived problems in Vietnam. Meanwhile, media coverage of the Iraq War has been criticized by some proponents of the U.S. invasion of Iraq as excessively gloomy—a charge that was also frequently leveled at American news organizations during the Vietnam era. Journalists and other defenders of the coverage, however, insist that they are objectively reporting events both in Iraq and the United States, where public opinion had shifted firmly against the war as of mid-2006.

## **Vietnam and the American Psyche**

In addition to the known costs of the Vietnam War—the terrible loss of life, the economic damage to all sides, the political tumult—many argue that the biggest price paid by the United States was a jarring loss of confidence. Over the course of the war, Americans came to understand that presidents and lawmakers were willing to manipulate the truth to advance their agendas. They learned that their vaunted military was, for a multitude of reasons, incapable of defeating an enemy with far less conventional firepower. They saw the antiwar movement become mired in bitter infighting. And they witnessed the heavy toll that deep differences over the war took on countless American families and communities. For many historians, wrote Brian Balogh in *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War*, “Vietnam has come to represent the decline of authority, a new level of social and political conflict, and the fragmentation of national identity” in America.

The Vietnam War also continues to cast a long shadow over American politics, more than three decades after the fall of Saigon. Political candidates for state and national office from both parties have been ruthlessly examined and criticized for their actions during the Vietnam years. Both Democratic President Bill Clinton and Republican President George W. Bush avoided military service in Vietnam

during the war. While both survived politically, they both have been condemned by political opponents for their actions during that war. Senator John Kerry, who ran for president in 2004, compiled an impressive war service record in Vietnam, but his candidacy was bitterly opposed by some veterans who never forgave him for his leadership position in the antiwar group Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Of all the Vietnamera politicians, war hero Senator John McCain, who was tortured during several years of imprisonment in a North Vietnamese prison camp, has perhaps fared best in the public eye.

Of course, it also should be noted that the Vietnam War was not the only force responsible for the wrenching changes in American society that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Changing demographics, the various other social movements of the 1960s (including the youth movement, the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the environmental movement), the Cold War, and the increase in wealth and consumerism all have been cited as major factors in the decline of civility and consensus in American political life....

Pendergast, Tom. "Legacy of the Vietnam War." *Defining Moments Online*. Lincoln Library Press, 2014. *FactCite*, [www.factcite.com/definingmoments/32894.html](http://www.factcite.com/definingmoments/32894.html).

Vietnam. France reacted by sending troops commanded by General Leclerc who regained control of Cochinchina by the end of 1945. In March 1946, France finally agreed to recognize the Republic of Vietnam, while keeping it within l'Union Française. But against the wishes of Ho Chi Minh, the French High Commissioner, Thierry d'Argenlieu, proclaimed a Republic of Cochinchina. To deal with the unrest which resulted from this tougher stance, the French bombed Haiphong (November 1946), resulting in hundreds of dead. The following month, as a reprisal, Europeans were slaughtered in Hanoi—this was the beginning of the Indochina War.

- A difficult war was fought against guerilla forces well-armed by the USSR while in France, where communist propaganda called it "*une sale guerre*" [a dirty war], people were indifferent. Moreover, France did not have the support of the United-States who considered it a backward colonial fight. But everything changed in 1949–1950 when the Chinese revolution and the Korean War brought fears of communism sweeping through Asia. The Indochina War then lay within the framework of the Cold War. The USSR and China increased their support to the Vietminh while the United States gave financial aid to France.

- However, this aid was not enough to defeat the Vietminh. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Americans wanted to settle the whole of the problems in Asia with a conference expected to take place in Geneva. France then tried to put herself in a position of strength and concentrated her troops around the entrenched camp of Dien Bien Phu so the Vietnamese army could be lured and crushed. But the trap closed on the French who were forced to surrender by May 7, 1954, after a 54 day fight. In July during the Geneva Conference, France recognized the independence of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, which was divided into two parts.\*

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## VIETNAM

*This Vietnamese selection resembles textbooks from both Communist Cuba and North Korea in its vocabulary and style, despite the normalization of relations between Vietnam and the U.S.*

\*Lambin, Jean-Michel. *Histoire—T<sup>2</sup>es*. Paris: Hachette, 2001, 224.

### Chapter 13

After the failure of the French Army at Dien Bien Phu, when they saw that they could not realize their prolonged conspiracy, they widened and internationalized the Indochina War. Not abiding by the Geneva Accords concerning Indochina, America under Eisenhower "filled the vacancy" in southern Vietnam.

General Collins, who was appointed ambassador in southern Vietnam, went to Saigon on November 7, 1954 bringing with him a plan sketched out in Washington that included six main points:

- Dismiss the French and the French forces that are still in southern Vietnam.
- Kill revolutionary forces, destroy the Geneva Accords, cut Vietnam into two.
- Help Diem to build a legal/judicial administration, with three branches: political, economic, and military.
- Help Diem build a National Army including equipment and leadership.
- Advance many economic policies aimed at transforming southern Vietnam into a market economy.
- Provide incentives for American companies to come in and develop the southern Vietnamese economy.

Through the puppet administration and puppet army America was able to realize the plan and change South Vietnam into a new kind of colony and an army base, then use South Vietnam as a springboard to attack the North to prevent the revolutionary wave for liberation of our people and socialist revolution in Southeast Asia.\*

After the "General Uprising" (1959–1960) in the South, there continued more uprisings coupled with political battles and artillery battles against the American enemy. During that time, world wide, ethnic liberation movements were getting stronger, directly threatening the colonial system of imperialism. In order to counter this, Kennedy—who had just been in-

\* Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*, Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 126–27.

augurated in Washington (the beginning of 1961)—established special forces to fight "reactionary activity" and to carry out the war of invasion in southern Vietnam. America started a new method of war in Vietnam, a "special war."\*

"Special war" was a new form of a war, carried out by a puppet army, directed by the American army and dependent on American artillery, equipment, technology and transportation and meant to fight against our revolutionary forces and our people. The basic ploy of the "Special War" was to "use Vietnamese people to fight Vietnamese people."†

### Chapter 14

Beginning in March 1965, facing the danger of the total destruction of its "Special War" forces, violent America brought its expeditionary forces and vassal army with its artillery and war technology into South Vietnam to strengthen its war of invasion. It had become an occupying force. The "total war" in South Vietnam widened into a "War of Destruction" in the North.

"Total war" in reality began from the middle of 1965 in the form of a new kind of war of invasion by the American army and the vassal‡ and puppet armies. Among them, the American army held the most important role and did not stop increasing its numbers and equipment, to fight our revolutionary forces and our people.§

The Vietnamization of forces and Asianization of the American War took place at the beginning of 1969, having just elected a president who just stepped into the White House, Nixon. Nixon came up with a theory that carried his name—"the Nixon theory"—that offered a new strategy of "practical prevention." Following a new path, America decided to "Vietnamize" the war [or "Laotianize" the war, "Khmerize" the war].

"Vietnamizing" the war was a new American form of invasive war car-

\* "Special War" has to do with the United States training armies in other countries to fight their own wars.

† Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 137-38.

‡ A footnote in the original text lists five countries that participated alongside and supplied the "vassal" army: Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand.

§ Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 142.



ried out mainly by a puppet army that would be coordinated with American forces. America would still call the shots through a network of advisors, giving dollars, artillery, technology and transportation to fight against our revolutionary forces and our people.

In accordance with this "Vietnamization" of the war, the American army and vassal armies extricated themselves from the war to lessen the flow of American blood in the war, at the same time increasing and taking full advantage of the flow of blood of the puppet army, to make the Vietnamese blood flow. That was the new goal and meaning of America in the war. In reality, there was a plot to use Vietnamese people to kill Vietnamese people.\*

### *Chapter 15*

Concerning the Paris Accords and Vietnam, we "drove the Americans out" and still the enemy "did not fall completely." On March 29, 1973, the American army finally left our country completely. But because the enemy still did not fully "surrender" America continued to maintain administrative power over their "double agents" or "minions" in southern Vietnam, so they still kept more than 20,000 army consultants masquerading as civilians who established an undercover army command post, which continued to assist the army and economy for the enemy.

Continuing to receive the advice and direction of the Americans—though not as before—the enemy leadership proudly destroyed the Paris Accords. They mobilized all the forces to carry on a campaign to submerge our native land, continued to launch new operations in already liberated areas, and erased the whole form of the Paris Agreement. In reality those activities were strategies to "Vietnamize" the war and were aimed against the revolutionary forces and our people in South Vietnam.†

The War of Resistance against the Americans to rescue our country ended with the Spring Battle of 1975: the historical Battle of Ho Chi Minh.

It was a great patriotic war, a war of national liberation to protect our nation. The war had lasted more than two decades (7-1954 to 4-1975),

\* Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 151-52.

† Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 168-69.

longer than any war in history, and we had to fight one of the most powerful nations, America.

Five generations of American presidents with their legs bound together oversaw four different American plans of imperialist attack and invasion. They directly invested almost \$676 billion in the war in Vietnam (compared with \$341 billion in the Second World War and \$54 billion in the Korean War), and if you include the indirect costs it comes to almost \$920 billion. At its peak, they mobilized 550,000 active workers, along with workers from five other countries that totaled 70,000. There were more than 1 million enemy puppet soldiers in southern Vietnam either directly fighting or in supportive roles. On both sides of our country (North and South) they dropped more than 7 or 8 million tons of bombs, more bombs than were dropped in any previous war.\*

Our victory is a source of inspiration to all revolutionary movements in the world, for all nationalities who are fighting imperialism.†

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## CANADA

*U.S. textbooks have often portrayed Canada during this period as simply the main destination for American draft dodgers. The Vietnam War did indeed have a significant impact on Canada, but as this text explains, it went far beyond accepting those who refused to serve in the U.S. military. These Canadian texts portray a Canada deeply conflicted by its own policies and unsuccessful in its efforts to distance itself from U.S. foreign policy.*

It was not only the configuration of world politics that had altered by the 1960s. So had the policy of the United States. President Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, were actually more hard-bitten and confrontational Cold Warriors than their predecessors, Truman and Eisenhower. Kennedy authorized dirty tricks by the CIA in foreign countries with no compunction or apology when they were exposed. His only

\* Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 176-77.

† Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 179.

# The Postwar Impact of Vietnam

Harvard Sitikoff

Following the end of America's combat role in Vietnam in 1973, and the subsequent fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in 1975, the often prophesied and much feared resurgence of McCarthyite Red-baiting, the bitter accusations of "who lost Vietnam?" barely transpired. Rather than massive recriminations, a collective amnesia took hold. The majority of Americans, it appeared, neither wanted to talk or think about their nation's longest and most debilitating war--the only war the United States ever lost. That forgetfulness gave way in the early 1980s to a renewed interest in the war: Hollywood, network television, and the music industry made Vietnam a staple of popular culture; and scholars, journalists, and Vietnam veterans produced a flood of literature on the conflict, especially concerning its lessons and legacies. Much of it, emphasizing the enormity of the damage done to American attitudes, institutions, and foreign policy by the Vietnam ordeal, echoed George R. Kennan's depiction of the Vietnam War as "the most disastrous of all America's undertakings over the whole two hundred years of its history."

Initially, the humiliating defeat imposed by a nation Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had described as "a fourth-rate power" caused a loss of pride and self-confidence in a people that liked to think of the United States as invincible. An agonizing reappraisal of American power and glory dampened the celebration of the Bicentennial birthday in 1976. So did the economic woes then afflicting the United States, which many blamed on the estimated \$167 billion spent on the war. President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to finance a major war and the Great Society simultaneously, without a significant increase in taxation, launched a runaway double-digit inflation and mounting federal debt that ravaged the American economy and eroded living standards from the late 1960s into the 1990s. The United States also paid a high political cost for the Vietnam War. It weakened public faith in government, and in the honesty and competence of its leaders. Indeed, skepticism, if not cynicism, and a high degree of suspicion of and distrust toward authority of all kind characterized the views of an increasing number of Americans in the wake of the war. The military, especially, was discredited for years. It would gradually rebound to become once again one of the most highly esteemed organizations in the United States. In the main, however, as never before, Americans after the Vietnam War neither respected nor trusted public institutions.

They were wary of official calls to intervene abroad in the cause of democracy and freedom, and the bipartisan consensus that had supported American foreign policy since the 1940s dissolved. Democrats, in particular, questioned the need to contain communism everywhere around the globe and to play the role of the planet's policeman. The Democratic majority in Congress would enact the 1973 War Powers Resolution, ostensibly forbidding the president from sending U.S. troops into combat for more than ninety days without congressional consent. Exercising a greater assertiveness in matters of foreign policy, Congress increasingly emphasized the limits of American power, and the ceiling on the cost Americans would pay in pursuit of specific foreign policy objectives. The fear of getting bogged down in another quagmire made a majority of Americans reluctant to intervene militarily in Third World countries. The neo-isolationist tendency that former President Richard M. Nixon called "the Vietnam syndrome" would be most manifest in the public debates over President Ronald Reagan's interventionist policies in Nicaragua and President George Bush's decision to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.

Despite the victorious outcome of the Persian Gulf War for the United States and its allies, and President Bush's declaration in March 1991--"By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!"--the fear of intervention would reappear in the public debate over President Bill Clinton's commitment of U.S. peacekeeping forces in Somalia and Bosnia. Quite clearly, for at least a quarter of a century after the Vietnam War ended, that conflict continued to loom large in the minds of Americans. Accordingly, a new consensus among foreign policy makers, reflecting the lessons learned from the Vietnam War, became manifest: the United States should use military force only as a last resort; only where the national interest is clearly involved; only when there is strong public support; and only in the likelihood of a relatively quick, inexpensive victory.

Another consensus also gradually emerged. At first, rather than giving returning veterans of the war welcoming parades, Americans seemed to shun, if not denigrate, the 2 million-plus Americans who went to

Vietnam, the 1.6 million who served in combat, the 300,000 physically wounded, the many more who bore psychological scars, the 2,387 listed as "missing in action," and the more than 58,000 who died. Virtually nothing was done to aid veterans and their loved ones who needed assistance in adjusting. Then a torrent of fiction, films, and television programs depicted Vietnam vets as drug-crazed psychotic killers, as vicious executioners in Vietnam and equally vicious menaces at home. Not until after the 1982 dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., did American culture acknowledge their sacrifice and suffering, and concede that most had been good soldiers in a bad war.

Yet this altered view of the Vietnam veterans as victims as much as victimizers, if not as brave heroes, was not accompanied by new public policies. Although most veterans did succeed in making the transition to ordinary civilian life, many did not. More Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than had died in it. Even more--perhaps three-quarters of a million--became part of the lost army of the homeless. And the nearly 700,000 draftees, many of them poor, badly educated, and nonwhite, who had received less than honorable discharges, depriving them of educational and medical benefits, found it especially difficult to get and keep jobs, to maintain family relationships, and to stay out of jail. Although a majority of Americans came to view dysfunctional veterans as needing support and medical attention rather than moral condemnation, the Veterans Administration, reluctant to admit the special difficulties faced by these veterans and their need for additional benefits, first denied the harm done by chemicals like Agent Orange and by the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) afflicting as many as 700,000, and then stalled on providing treatment.

Although diminishing, the troublesome specter of the Vietnam War continued to divide Americans and haunt the national psyche. It surfaced again in 1988 when Bush's running mate, Dan Quayle, had to defend his reputation against revelations that he had used family political connections to be admitted into the Indiana National Guard in 1969 to avoid the draft and a possible tour of duty in Vietnam. It emerged four years later when Bill Clinton, the Democratic candidate for president, faced accusations that he had evaded the draft and then organized antiwar demonstrations in 1969 while he was a Rhodes scholar in England. In each instance, such charges reminded Americans of the difficult choices young Americans had to make in what many saw as at best a morally ambiguous war.

Mostly, remembrances continue to be stirred by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the most visited site in the nation's capital. Its stark black granite reflecting panels, covered with the names of the more than 58,000 American men and women who died in Vietnam, is a shrine to the dead, a tombstone in a sloping valley of death. Lacking all the symbols of heroism, glory, patriotism, and moral certainty that more conventional war memorials possess, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a somber reminder of the loss of too many young Americans, and of what the war did to the United States and its messianic belief in its own overweening virtue.

From *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*. Ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

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<http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/vietnam/postwar.htm>