

AUGUST, 1968

# HAWKS AND DOVES

AMERICANS IN VIETNAM: PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

## **The Hawks**

Believe in the Domino Theory

Say we must honor our commitments to our friends and allies

Believe that Communism is a threat to peace the world over

Believe that Communism must be contained (Containment)

Say that the war in Vietnam is winnable.

Believe that America's honor is at stake

## **The Doves**

Say the war is unwinnable

Do not believe that there is a threat of world communism

Say the Domino Theory is invalid.

Believe that questioning the policies of the government and the military is an essential part of democracy.

Say the Draft is unfair and unequitable.

Belive that America should not intervene in the affairs of Vietnam.

Follow these steps to analyze the quotations that follow:

- Create a T-chart in your notebook with the headings “Hawks” and “Doves.”
- With your group, carefully read each excerpt to determine whether the speaker supports (“Hawk”) or does not support (“Dove”) increased U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.
- On the appropriate side of your T-chart, write the number of the excerpt and a short summary in your own words of the argument(s) the speaker uses to support his position.

Your group will use this information to help form a recommendation on this question: *Should the president significantly increase U.S. military involvement in Vietnam?*

### Excerpt 1

While the military and political costs of a big US investment in helping [South Vietnam] may be high, I cannot think of a better place for our forces to be employed to give so much future national security benefits to the United States. Thus my conclusion is that we . . . must go all out on all three tracks: counterinsurgency, covert countermeasures, and military pressures by US forces.

—CIA Deputy Director Ray Cline, September 8, 1964

### Excerpt 2

The critical moves are, I believe, these: the introduction of . . . ground forces in South Viet Nam and . . . the introduction into the Pacific Theater of massive forces to deal with any escalatory response . . . They [North Vietnamese and supporters] will not actually accept a setback until they are absolutely sure that we really mean it. They will be as searching in this manner as [Soviet leader] Khrushchev was before he abandoned the effort to break our hold on Berlin . . . The odds are pretty good, in my view, that, if we do these things in this way, the war will either promptly stop or we will see the . . . fragmentation of the Communist movement in South Viet Nam . . . At this stage of history we are the greatest power in the world—if we behave like it.

—State Department Official Walter Rostow, November 23, 1964

### Excerpt 3

I would like to share with you my views on the political consequences [to the United States] of certain courses of action that have been proposed in regard to U.S. policy in Southeast Asia . . . If we were to get involved in a large-scale land war—and a consequent increase in defense expenditures; it would tend to shift the Administration’s emphasis from its Great Society oriented programs to further military outlays . . . From a political viewpoint, the American people find it hard to understand why we risk World War III by enlarging [this] war . . . If . . . we find ourselves . . . embroiled deeper in fighting with Vietnam over the next few months, political opposition will steadily mount . . . with direct spill-over effects politically for all the Democratic . . . programs to which we are committed.

—Vice President Humphrey to President Johnson, February 17, 1965

**Excerpt 4**

The President questioned me concerning consequences of our [possible] withdrawal from Vietnam and I said that it would pave the way toward Communist takeover of all of Southeast Asia.

—CIA Director John McCone, February 3, 1965

**Excerpt 5**

Why we have not withdrawn from Vietnam is, by all odds, one reason: (1) To preserve our reputation as a guarantor [strong ally], and thus to preserve our effectiveness in the rest of the world . . . At each decision point we have gambled; at each point, to avoid the damage to our effectiveness of defaulting on our commitment, we have upped the ante . . . It is important that we behave so as to protect our reputation.

—Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, March 24, 1965

**Excerpt 6**

I think what we are doing in starting on a track which involves ground force operations . . . [will mean] an ever-increasing commitment of U.S. personnel without materially improving the chances of victory . . . In effect, we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves.

—CIA Director John McCone, April 2, 1965

**Excerpt 7**

Should we limit our liabilities in South Viet-Nam and try to find a way out with minimal long-term costs? The alternative . . . is almost certainly a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of US forces, mounting US casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation [with China or the Soviet Union] at the end of the road.

—Undersecretary of State George Ball, June 30, 1965

**Excerpt 8**

We must not create an impression that we have decided to replace the South Vietnamese and win a ground war in Vietnam . . . A failure to engage in an all-out war will not lower our international prestige. This is not the last inning in the struggle against communism. We must pick those spots where the stakes are highest for us and we have the greatest ability to prevail . . . [I] don't believe we can win in South Vietnam. If we send in one hundred thousand more [troops], the North Vietnamese will meet us. If the North Vietnamese run out of men, the Chinese will send in volunteers . . . If we lose fifty thousand men it will ruin us. Five years, billions of dollars, fifty thousand men, it is not for us.

—Unofficial presidential adviser Clark Clifford, July 25, 1965



## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of Politicians in Favor of the War

- 1. Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

In the early 1960s, most U.S. politicians supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam, which they saw as a means to stop the spread of communism and protect U.S. security. Politicians in favor of U.S. involvement in Vietnam saw Ho Chi Minh, the nationalistic leader of North Vietnam, as a Communist and, therefore, a Cold War enemy. Further, these political leaders viewed the Vietnamese struggle for power between the Communist North and the “free” South as an extension of the Cold War in Europe. If South Vietnam were taken over by the Communists, they feared rest of Asia would be vulnerable.

Shortly after taking office in 1963, President Lyndon Johnson publicly stated that he would not sit by while Southeast Asia fell to Communist aggressors. He urged greater U.S. involvement in Vietnam, saying “The communists want to rule the world, and if we don’t stand up to them, they will do it. And we’ll be slaves. I...know about the principles of power, and when one side is weak, the other steps in.” In 1964, when the president asked Congress for authorization to escalate U.S. involvement, over 500 members voted to support his request; only 2 opposed it.

Thus, U.S. involvement escalated and more and more U.S. soldiers and money were channeled into the war. But political support for the war waned as it became increasingly evident that the government of South Vietnam was corrupt, ruthless, and did not have the support of its people. Declining public support also limited what the U.S. government could do in Vietnam. Politicians in favor of the war argued that college students, draft dodgers, and the liberal media who criticized U.S. efforts in the war forced the U.S. government to compromise in its efforts to win. They argued that the U.S. military should invade North Vietnam, and, despite treaties to the contrary, supported a quick and intensive attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia—the main supply line to the Viet Cong from the North. Politicians in favor of the war yearned for an all-out war and a clear-cut victory.

- 2. Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:

- **Why did you support the war in Vietnam?**
- **Did you have the support of the American people?**
- **What should the United States have done differently in Vietnam?**
- **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**

- 3. Create a nameplate for your group.**

## Primary Sources on the Impact of the Vietnam War on Politicians in Favor of the War

**Directions:** Closely examine the image of politicians in favor of the war. Then, with your partner, carefully read the information below and highlight the primary-source quotes that you feel most reveal ways in which the war affected politicians in favor of the war. Use the information to help you complete the spoke diagram on **Student Handout 2.3C**.

In the early 1960s, most U.S. politicians supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam, which they saw as a means to check the spread of communism and protect U.S. security. Politicians in favor of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War saw Ho Chi Minh, the nationalistic leader of North Vietnam, as a Communist and, therefore, a Cold War enemy. In 1964, when President Lyndon Johnson asked Congress for authorization to escalate U.S. involvement, over 500 members voted to support his request; only 2 opposed it. But political support for the war waned as it became increasingly evident that the government of South Vietnam was corrupt, ruthless, and did not have the support of its people. Declining public support also limited what the U.S. government could do in Vietnam. Politicians in favor of the war argued that college students, draft dodgers, and the liberal media who criticized U.S. efforts in the war forced the U.S. government to compromise in its efforts to win. They argued that the war could have been won had the United States committed itself fully to the effort. The primary-source documents that follow reveal some of the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of politicians in favor of the war.

*[Vietnam is] the cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines, and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of communism overflowed into Vietnam.*

—Senator John Kennedy, in a speech, June 1956

*You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is...that it will go over very quickly.*

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower, on the strategic importance of Indochina, in a press conference, April 7, 1954

*The battle against communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination...or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores.*

—President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1961

*No commander in chief could meet face to face with these soldiers without asking himself: What is it they are doing there?... They are there to keep aggression from succeeding. They are there to stop one nation from taking over another nation by force. They are there to help people who do not want to have an ideology pushed down their throats and imposed upon them. They are there because somewhere, and at some place, the free nations of the world must say again to the militant disciples of Asian communism: This far and no further. The time is now, and the place is Vietnam.*

—President Lyndon B. Johnson, in a broadcast to American people, 1966

*We should declare war on North Vietnam. We could pave the whole place over by noon and be home for dinner.*

—Governor Ronald Reagan of California, after the United States withdrew from the undeclared war and North Vietnam took over South Vietnam in 1976

*I did not envisage 1975 as inevitable and I don't think historians will treat the ending in '75 as inevitable. I think they will say what the London Economist said, that we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The South Vietnamese defeated the North Vietnamese in 1972 with the help of U.S. air and naval power. And I think there's a fair chance that they would have continued to be all right if they'd had the aid that was promised to them. If we hadn't walked away, South Vietnam might very well have been another South Korea.*

—Walt Rostow, foreign policy advisor in the Kennedy administration, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*I think in both Vietnam and Korea we committed military forces without an intention to win, and indeed with a feeling that we could achieve some of our objectives simply by having some men there who would participate in limited kinds of activity, but in the case of Korea told not to win, and in the case of Vietnam clearly without the intention of applying the degree of force necessary to win. That's a very terrible thing to do to military people—to ask them to go into extreme danger, but in effect to have a decision made that it's not important enough for us to win.*

—Casper Weinberger, secretary of defense in the Reagan administration, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*





## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of Politicians Opposed to the War

- 1. Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

In the early 1960s, most U.S. politicians supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam, which they saw as a means to check the spread of communism and protect U.S. security. In 1964, when President Johnson asked Congress for authorization to escalate U.S. involvement, over 500 voted to support his request; only 2 opposed it. But as the war escalated, it became increasingly apparent that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were not only able to launch attacks on targets throughout South Vietnam, but were able to withstand massive losses in the process. Furthermore, it was clear that the rulers of South Vietnam were corrupt. Some politicians began to question the morality of U.S. involvement in the war, arguing that the war was doing more harm than good to ordinary Vietnamese people. Furthermore, they doubted that winning the war was even possible. As public support for the war waned, some politicians pledged in their election bids to end it. Eugene McCarthy, a presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in 1968, described Vietnam this way: "Vietnam is a military problem, Vietnam is a political problem; and as the war goes on, it has become more clearly a moral problem."

Politicians opposed to the Vietnam War argued that it was a civil war, a local conflict, rather than the beginnings of a Communist takeover of the entire region. They cited the immorality of sending American boys thousands of miles to fight in someone else's war, indeed a war that the South Vietnamese seemed unwilling to fight themselves. Many South Vietnamese detested the succession of corrupt governments supported by the United States and resented the control of their country by foreign influences. More and more of these people were won over by the message of North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, who promised the Vietnamese a future of freedom and independence and the reestablishment of Vietnamese heritage. Senator George McGovern, speaking out against U.S. involvement in the war, stated, "We seem bent upon saving the Vietnamese from Ho Chi Minh, even if we have to kill them and demolish their country to do it.... I do not intend to remain silent in the face of what I regard as a policy of madness which, sooner or later, will envelop my son and American youth by the millions for years to come."

- 2. Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:

- **Why didn't you support the U.S. government's actions in the Vietnam War?**
- **Why did U.S. foreign policy fail in Vietnam?**
- **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**

- 3. Create a nameplate for your group.**

## Primary Sources on the Impact of the Vietnam War on Politicians Opposed to the War

**Directions:** Closely examine the image of politicians opposed to the war. Then, with your partner, carefully read the information below and highlight the primary-source quotes that you feel most reveal ways in which the war affected politicians opposed to the war. Use the information to help you complete the spoke diagram on **Student Handout 2.3C**.

In the early 1960s, most U.S. politicians supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam, which they saw as a means to check the spread of communism and protect U.S. security. In 1964, when President Johnson asked Congress for authorization to escalate U.S. involvement, over 500 voted to support his request; only 2 opposed it. But as the war escalated, it became increasingly apparent that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were not only able to launch attacks on targets throughout South Vietnam, but were able to withstand massive losses in the process. Furthermore, it was clear that the rulers of South Vietnam were corrupt. Some politicians began to question the morality of U.S. involvement in the war, arguing that the war was doing more harm than good to ordinary Vietnamese people. Furthermore, they doubted that winning the war was even possible. These politicians argued that the Vietnam War was a civil war, a local conflict, rather than the beginnings of a communist takeover of the entire region. They cited the immorality of sending American boys thousands of miles to fight in someone else's war, indeed a war that the South Vietnamese seemed unwilling to fight themselves. The primary-source documents that follow reveal some of the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of politicians opposed to the war.

*We seem bent upon saving the Vietnamese from Ho Chi Minh, even if we have to kill them and demolish their country to do it.... I do not intend to remain silent in the face of what I regard as a policy of madness which, sooner or later, will envelop my son and American youth by the millions for years to come.*

—Senator George McGovern, 1967

*Vietnam is a military problem. Vietnam is a political problem; and as the war goes on it has become more clearly a moral problem.*

—Senator Eugene McCarthy, 1967

*Most Americans today feel that Vietnam was a mistake. Millions of young people at the time thought it was a mistake. They had candlelight parades around the White House which you could watch from this window. Our confidence in our leaders was shaken considerably, and so the American people will demand a much clearer and more convincing presentation of the need for military action than they have before. And from that standpoint I think that the experience was a very valuable one.*

—Clark Clifford, trusted personal advisor to President Johnson, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*A Vietnam had to happen to us sometime. This war was a very tragic event. It tore the country apart. It had consequences politically, socially, and economically from which we are still suffering. But it did draw a line under the prevailing sense of omnipotence and omniscience that the United States postwar generation had developed. When we came out of World War II we were artificially strong. We had a monopoly on nuclear weapons, the strongest conventional military forces, the most resilient economy, a vibrant political system. The rest of the world was in ruins, but it was bound to come back.*

*While we didn't win the war, had we won, we would have had to keep troops in South Vietnam. And had we kept troops in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese and the Chinese would have had to patch up their differences to some extent, and the Soviets and the Chinese would have had to give them logistic support. The whole thing [Soviet-Chinese Communist alliance] would have stayed glued together even though it was palpably inconsistent. Once we pulled out, everything changed. The Chinese were able then to vent their true feelings about the Vietnamese [they invaded Vietnam]. The Soviets moved in with the Vietnamese in a way that's concerned the hell out of the Chinese. And what you got was the Chinese making this enormous change and reaching an accommodation with the United States.*

—William Sullivan in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.*

—Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leader

*Our charges of aggression against North Vietnam will be greeted by considerable snickering abroad. So too will the pious phrases about defending freedom in South Vietnam. There is no freedom in South Vietnam... We are defending a clique of military generals and their merchant friends who live well in Saigon, and who need a constantly increasing American military force to protect their privileged position... We have threatened war where no direct threat to American security is at stake... A war in Asia should be recognized as unthinkable... We cannot justify the shedding of American blood in that kind of war in Southeast Asia.*

—Senator Wayne Morse, in a speech, August 5, 1964



## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of Anti-war Protesters

- 1. Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

Anti-Vietnam War protests, led predominantly by students, grew steadily from the early 1960s on. Many young Americans felt the Vietnam War draft was a violation of their basic rights, and questioned why an 18-year-old could be drafted, yet could not vote. Some burned their draft cards or fled to Canada to avoid the draft. Others opposed the Vietnam War because they felt that U.S. involvement was motivated by economic interests or imperialism. Still others were alarmed by the losses in the war—losses that included friends and family. In 1965, 20,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam and less than 2,000 soldiers were killed, but by 1968, there were over 500,000 U.S. soldiers fighting in Vietnam and the number of deaths that year exceeded 14,000 young Americans.

Most protesters agreed that the United States had no right to be fighting someone else's civil war and that the use of such tactics as saturation bombing, the killing of civilians, and the use of toxic chemicals like napalm was immoral. They felt that the Vietnamese were fighting for national sovereignty and that they would ultimately prevail with or without U.S. forces. Anti-war protesters argued that an early end to the Vietnam War meant that countless young Americans would be saved from purposeless deaths. Furthermore, they argued that the United States should not be fighting a war that did not have the support of the American people, many of whom grew disillusioned with the war.

Many American and Vietnamese officials blamed the anti-war movement for creating serious opposition to the war and for eventually convincing politicians in Washington that it was time to pull out. However, the protesters were convinced they were right. In the words of Joan Baez, a folk singer and war protester, "I was there at the very first marches and we were all beatniks, Commies, and hippies and weirdos.... And then...when it sort of cleaned up its own act we were joined by nuns and priests and housewives. But I never had any doubts that what I was doing [protesting against the war in Vietnam] was correct."

- 2. Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:
  - **How do you respond to Vietnamese and U.S. politicians who claim that American anti-war sentiment at home caused the United States to lose the Vietnam War?**
  - **How do you justify your actions?**
  - **Should the United States be praised for its involvement in Vietnam?**
  - **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**

- 3. Create a nameplate for your group.**

## Primary Sources on the Impact of the Vietnam War on Anti-war Protesters

**Directions:** Closely examine the image of anti-war protesters. Then, with your partner, carefully read the information below and highlight the primary-source quotes that you feel most reveal ways in which the war affected anti-war protesters. Use the information to help you complete the spoke diagram on **Student Handout 2.3C**.

The Vietnam War produced some of the largest mass protests in U.S. history. Anti-war protests, led predominantly by students, grew steadily from the early 1960s on. Many young Americans felt the Vietnam War draft violated their basic rights, and questioned why an 18-year-old could be drafted, yet could not vote. Some burned their draft cards or fled to Canada to avoid the draft. Others opposed the war because they felt U.S. involvement was motivated by economic interests or imperialism. Protesters felt the United States had no right to fight someone else's civil war and that the use of such tactics as saturation bombing, the killing of civilians, and the use of toxic chemicals like napalm was immoral. They occupied university buildings, defied the police in sit-ins, marched with signs, and sometimes rioted in the streets. At Kent State University in Ohio, four students were killed by National Guardsmen during an anti-war rally. The primary-source documents that follow reveal some of the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of the anti-war protesters.

*The war was an extraordinarily obvious violation of everything that I had been led to expect from the country I was a part of. I grew up in the family of a World War II veteran, watching "Victory at Sea" on television, and the message was quite clear that Americans fought for freedom, justice, and the rights of people everywhere to choose their own destiny. I even once wanted to go to West Point. But when my generation's war showed up it turned out to be a propping up of petty dictators so they could keep a good portion of their population in servitude.*

*That was a time, I think, that forced every potential soldier into a real dilemma of selfhood. Who am I? Am I the kind of person who does that, or am I not? I felt personally, having made a decision [to go to prison for resisting the draft] and carried it through, that I got a lot more closure if you will on the Vietnam experience than most of my contemporaries who didn't go to Vietnam or to prison.*

*We didn't end the war because we thought it was a bad thing. We ended the war because it had become untenable in terms of domestic politics and military strategy.*

—David Harris, draft resister, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*Well, it was funny. I was there on the very first marches and we were all beatniks, Commies, and hippies and weirdos and whatever. And then during the period when it sort of cleaned up its own act we were joined by nuns and priests and housewives. But I never had any doubts that what I was doing [protesting against the war in Vietnam] was correct.*

—Joan Baez, folk singer, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*I didn't believe in killing. I came from no organized religious background, but my mother is so opposed to killing she's been a vegetarian since she was fifteen. My father died when I was seven, so I was raised in a pretty pacifist home. I didn't have toy guns or anything.*

*I decided I didn't want to go to Vietnam while I was still in high school in San Diego, I kept getting drafted, and I kept appealing my classification as a C.O. [conscientious objector] and physically unfit from the residual effects of polio. I was called four times and each time I refused induction. In 1968 Selective Service said they were turning over my records to the FBI. In early '69 the FBI came to the music store where I was working in La Jolla to arrest me. They gave me a few days. In the four years I was fighting the draft, all the time I was planning to go to jail. By chance, I'd read a pamphlet on how bad jail life was for C.O.'s, so I decided on Canada. I got in touch with the Quakers and Unitarians, and they helped me get on the Underground Railroad.*

—Larry Martin, conscientious objector, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*A vast throng of Americans, predominantly youthful and constituting the largest mass march in the nation's capital, demonstrated peaceably in the heart of the city today, demanding a rapid withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam... aerial photographs showed that the march exceeded 300,000.... At dusk, after the mass demonstration had ended, a small segment of the crowd, members of radical splinter groups, moved across Constitution Avenue... where they burned United States flags, threw paint bombs and other missiles and were repelled by tear gas released by police. There were a number of arrests and minor injuries, mostly the result of tear gas.*

—from an article in the *New York Times*, November 16, 1969

*My perspective is a pacifist perspective. I don't have any favorite wars. As a Quaker, we give up the right to take other people's lives. So my work started before Vietnam and continues long after. When I was approached by some boat people in 1979 about human rights conditions in Vietnam which were bad and terrible, it wasn't surprising to me, because I feel as though we really fertilized the ground for more violence. The Japanese did it. The Chinese did it. The French did it. And we did it. I think we had a massive share in creating chaos. The Vietnamese people are suffering... that was proven with the exodus of the boat people. Vietnam is not an open society. It's a totalitarian state. It saddens one. On the other hand I would not retract anything I did in the sixties. We [the United States] had no business being there.*

—Joan Baez, folk singer, in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*





## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of the Viet Cong

- 1. Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

For many Vietnamese, fighting against oppressors was an integral part of their history and their lives. Their ancestors and family members had liberated their country from the Mongols in 1287, the Chinese in 1789, the Japanese in 1942, and the French in 1945. France had colonized Vietnam first to advance Christianity, and then to increase trade. The United States followed in the 1960s, supporting the South Vietnamese government and hoping to set up a strong, anticommunist government in Vietnam that could withstand the North Vietnamese forces. Many South Vietnamese resented the U.S. invasion in the 1960s and viewed it as a continuation of French dominance. They opposed both U.S. intervention and the ruthless, corrupt South Vietnamese governments that the United States supported. As a result, many South Vietnamese joined the Viet Cong to fight for the Communist forces in the North and for reunification. Many who fought as Viet Cong were not soldiers or Communists, but rather advocates for Vietnamese independence. They were inspired by Ho Chi Minh's words: "Our Vietnam is one, our nation is one. You must remember, though the rivers might run dry and the mountains erode, the nation will always be one."

Because the Vietnamese had been raised on legends of Vietnam's resistance to Chinese rule, and their fathers or uncles or older brothers had fought against the French, their determination as fighters was unmatched. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong prisoners of war expressed the same line when interrogated: "I know that I might be killed, but I am committed to the sacred salvation of the nation." Deeply convinced of the righteousness of their mission and committed to its success, they were formidable foes. Many a U.S. officer acknowledged, "I wish they were on our side."

- 2. Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:
  - **Why did you choose to join the Viet Cong and fight for the North?**
  - **Did you feel that you could defeat the Americans?**
  - **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**
- 3. Create a nameplate for your group.**

"Whoever you may be, men, women, children, old or young, whatever your religion or whatever your nationality, if you are Vietnamese, rise up to fight the colonialists, to save our country. He who has a gun, let him fight with a gun; he who has a sword, let him fight with the sword; he who has neither gun nor sword let him fight with spades, with pickaxes, with sticks. Let no one stay behind or outside the patriotic struggle against the colonialists." \_Ho Chi Mihn

We are soldiers organized by the National Liberation Front (NLF/Viet Cong) into guerrilla units and village militias. The NLF is a coalition native to the south, made up largely of peasants. Many South Vietnamese noncombatants aid us by supplying military information, food, medical services, homemade weapons, and recruits. In return, we organize village self-defense, establish schools, encourage local irrigation projects, and, in general, functioned as a government throughout large areas of the south. – Viet Cong Soldier

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*By the end of the Vietnam war, 7 million tons of bombs had been dropped on Vietnam, more than twice the total bombs dropped on Europe and Asia in World War II—almost one 500-pound bomb for every human being in Vietnam.*

—in *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn

*As the Communists withdrew from Quangngai last Monday, United States jet bombers pounded the hills into which they were headed. Many Vietnamese—one estimate is as high as 500—were killed by the strikes. The American contention is that they were Viet Cong soldiers. But three out of four patients seeking treatment in a Vietnamese hospital afterward for burns from napalm, or jellied gasoline, were village women.*

—New York Times article, June 5, 1965

*On March 16, 1968, a company of American soldiers went into the hamlet of My Lai, in Quang Ngai province. They rounded up the inhabitants, including old people and women with infants in their arms. These people were ordered into a ditch, where they were methodically shot to death by American soldiers. When Army investigators reached the barren area in November, 1969, in connection with the My Lai probe in the United States, they found mass graves at three sites, as well as a ditch full of bodies. It was estimated that between 450 and 500 people—most of them women, children and old men—had been slain and buried there. Several officers in the My Lai massacre were put on trial, but only Lieutenant William Calley was found guilty. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but his sentence was reduced twice; he served in a regular prison—and then was paroled.*

—in *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn

*Because I was doing this [radio] show, I had a good opinion of most American people. I knew officers in Saigon. I thought they were okay. I was supposed to help Americans understand the country they were helping to protect from Communism. But it was sad to see Vietnamese cluttering around military bases. Bars were springing up overnight; kids selling cigarettes in the street. To this day, whenever I see a GI in a movie with two girls, like An Officer and a Gentleman, I get upset. It reminds me of the aspect of Vietnam that I'm not proud of.*

*The single most demoralizing event for us was Kissinger's "peace is at hand" remark, which was on TV and in Stars and Stripes headlines. It meant the Americans were out, the whole war machinery stopping, and the tanks rolling in. As long as you didn't have the Americans there, you didn't have anything. Because the Vietnamese weren't fighting, and they certainly weren't going to fight without the weapons.*

—Mai Pham, disc jockey for American radio in Vietnam,  
in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*The sense of helplessness and dependency felt by so many Vietnamese was shaped in large measure by experiences that taught them they were in the grip of forces beyond their control. For the common people, the war was a dreadful random infliction that on any given day or night could disrupt their lives, destroy their homes, wound their loved ones, or kill them outright. For many Vietnamese, life became so nasty, brutish, and short that it is somehow surprising the society held together as long as it did.*

—Kim Willenson in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*

*Also on the American side there was not enough patience. It's like what you are doing in Central America. You always want to make a democratic country. But how can you teach democracy to a people who are not politically educated, to a people who do not understand what is freedom? ... You Americans came and told the Vietnamese that it was legal in the country to be against the policy of the government, that you can be in the opposition. The Communists used that to push the people to say and demand more. The Americans built a politically confused situation in South Vietnam.*

—Tran Van Don, key military and political leader in South Vietnam,  
in *The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*



## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of South Vietnamese in Favor of the War

- 1. Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

During the Vietnam War, many South Vietnamese hoped the United States would help turn back the Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese Communist army, and institute a free, democratic nation in South Vietnam. They feared that a Communist victory would result in a repressive regime and the end of free enterprise in the South. These people served in the South Vietnamese army and worked with U.S. forces to fight the Viet Cong.

However, over the course of the war, the South Vietnamese who supported the struggle the Communists found it increasingly difficult to convince their fellow Vietnamese to fight against the Communists. This was largely due to the military tactics of the United States, who used saturation bombing, as well as toxic chemicals such as napalm and Agent Orange, that destroyed not only the Vietnamese people, but their land and livelihood. In fact, by the end of the war, the United States had dropped 7 million tons of U.S. bombs on Vietnam, twice the amount dropped on all of Europe and Asia during World War II, and the equivalent of one 500-pound bomb per Vietnamese person. After years of suffering, heavy casualties, and the ferocious destruction of their land and way of life, many Vietnamese began to feel that the loss of freedom threatened by a Communist victory might not be as bad as the dire results of the war being fought to protect them.

In 1973 the United States finally pulled out of the Vietnam War, opening the door to a possible Communist victory. In 1975 the North Vietnamese conquered the South, and the worst fears of the South Vietnamese who supported the war were realized. Those who had worked with U.S. forces were either jailed or killed, and millions fled the country to escape persecution. The government took over private businesses, destroyed religious institutions, and instituted Marxist doctrine in state-run schools. Many peasants who had hoped for their own land were forced to work on government-owned collective farms. Ultimately, many Communist bureaucrats proved to be corrupt and no better than the colonial officials of the French and American governments.

- 2. Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:

- **Why did you work with U.S. forces against the North Vietnamese?**
- **Do you think U.S. involvement in Vietnam helped the Vietnamese people?**
- **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**

- 3. Create a nameplate for your group.**



## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of African Americans

- 1. Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

The Vietnam War produced widespread discontent among African Americans. First, African Americans made up an inordinate number of the soldiers who fought and died in Vietnam. Two reasons may account for the overrepresentation of African-American soldiers in Vietnam. First, many African Americans could not afford to attend college, which would have released them from military service, or to hire attorneys to help them dodge the draft. Second, President Johnson's "War on Poverty" may have led to particularly heavy recruitment of African Americans. In any case, although they comprised only 11 percent of the American population, in 1967 African Americans made up 20 percent of the combat forces, 25 percent of the elite troops, and up to 45 percent of airborne rifle platoons. In 1965 and 1966, 23 percent of U.S. soldiers killed in action were African American; in 1968, 14 percent of U.S. combat deaths were African American.

In addition, many African Americans felt imprisoned by poverty and racism in the United States. To them, it seemed hypocritical for the United States to send them to Southeast Asia to fight, and possibly die, for the freedom of the South Vietnamese people. Furthermore, many felt that the U.S. government should be concentrating its efforts and dollars on solving the problems at home—especially poverty and racial discrimination—rather than fighting a costly battle for a tiny Asian country over 10,000 miles away. Radical groups like the Black Panthers called on African Americans to stop fighting in Vietnam and to take up the battle at home. Eldridge Cleaver, a Black Panther leader, wrote an article entitled "To My Black Brothers in Vietnam" in which he stated, "The struggle of our people for freedom has progressed to the form where all of us must take a stand either for or against the freedom of our people.... You are either part of the solution or part of the problem.... While you are over there in Vietnam, the pigs are murdering our people, oppressing them, and the jails and prisons of America are filling up with political prisoners."

- 2. Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:
  - **Did the Vietnam War benefit the African-American community or did it perpetuate prejudice against African Americans?**
  - **Do you think the United States did the right thing in fighting the war in Vietnam?**
  - **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**
- 3. Create a nameplate for your group.**





## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of Military Personnel in Favor of the War

1. **Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

For many U.S. military personnel, the war in Vietnam was like the war against Germany in the 1940s. In Europe, U.S. soldiers had fought against Nazism. In Vietnam, the fight was against communist repression. Referring to the communist threat from China, Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, "I'm not the village idiot. I know Hitler was Austrian and Mao is Chinese.... But what is common between the two situations is the phenomenon of aggression." Many military personnel believed that, like Nazism, communism was an evil system and every country that fell to it weakened national as well as global security. As the American public and some U.S. soldiers voiced opposition to the war, military personnel in favor of the war reminded them of the dangers the spread of communism represented in Asia. Almost every Southeast Asian country was threatened by communism: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, even the Philippines. They argued that if the United States did not make a determined stand in Vietnam, there would be nothing to guarantee the security and stability of this region of the world, or ultimately U.S. security.

As the war went on, military leaders were continually frustrated by what they saw as poor decision making by U.S. politicians. They believed that if the military were allowed to run the war, an invasion of North Vietnam could be carried out successfully. They expressed pride in the major U.S. units, none of which were ever overwhelmed in battle. They argued that the U.S. military should be allowed to fight with all of its assets and, despite treaties to the contrary, supported a quick and intensive attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia—the main supply line to the Viet Cong from the North. Many military personnel were appalled that the liberal media in the United States focused on exceptional atrocities committed by U.S. military personnel, rather than the bravery of U.S. soldiers and the atrocities committed by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese against civilians and Americans. They blamed the American public for not supporting U.S. troops in the field. Even after the United States pulled out of Vietnam in 1973, many military personnel believed the United States was not beaten in Vietnam.

2. **Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:
  - **Did you agree with what the military was doing in Vietnam? Why?**
  - **Did the United States lose the war in Vietnam?**
  - **Should the United States be praised for its involvement in Vietnam?**
  - **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**

3. **Create a nameplate for your group.**



## Steps for Preparing for the Debate from the Perspective of Military Personnel Opposed to the War

1. **Learn about your group's perspective.** Carefully read the following information to understand your group's perspective.

U.S. soldiers who went to Vietnam were concerned about the worldwide communist threat and wanted to do their part to defend Southeast Asia. Over time, however, many found the war increasingly disturbing, and ultimately concluded that it was wrong. Those who opposed the war did so for several reasons. First, the South Vietnamese government, which the United States was supporting, was controlled by corrupt military leaders. While the families and friends of these leaders benefited from the war, the majority of the Vietnamese—peasants in the countryside—did not. Second, many South Vietnamese opposed the U.S. war effort. As seemingly friendly women and children assisted the Viet Cong by helping kill U.S. soldiers, it became difficult for Americans to distinguish between friend and foe. Third, the South Vietnamese army fought with little passion, content to allow U.S. soldiers to bear the brunt of the war. Finally, U.S. military methods in Vietnam proved demoralizing. Soldiers were sent on search-and-destroy missions in which they gained little territory, only to surrender it days later. At times it seemed that soldiers were being used only to draw the Viet Cong out in the open so U.S. planes could kill them with bombs. In frustration, soldiers sometimes turned their fire on Vietnamese civilians, most of whom, they suspected, supported the Communists. Without battle lines, soldiers' victories were measured in body count, and children and innocents were killed.

As anti-war protests intensified in the United States in 1968, discontent spread among those in the field. Soldiers opposed to the war wondered why they should fight a war that did not have the support of the American people. Some began to adorn their helmets with peace symbols. Drug use became so widespread that, according to an official 1971 estimate, nearly one third of U.S. troops was addicted to opium or heroin, and marijuana smoking was routine. Morale in the military deteriorated even further following the discovery that U.S. infantrymen had slaughtered more than 500 Vietnamese inhabitants of My Lai. As Kit Bowen of the First Infantry Division wrote home to his father, many soldiers felt that they were “the unwilling, working for the unqualified to do the unnecessary for the ungrateful.”

2. **Discuss the discussion questions.** After you have read about your group, discuss and record answers to the following questions:
  - **When and why did you turn against the Vietnam War?**
  - **Why did the United States lose the Vietnam War?**
  - **Should the United States be praised for its involvement in Vietnam?**
  - **From your perspective, how do you feel about the war in Vietnam?**

3. **Create a nameplate for your group.**



## Notes on Groups Affected by the Vietnam War

Directions: As you listen to each group's perspective during the debate, record notes in the appropriate spaces below.		
Group	How did the Vietnam War affect this group?	What stand did this group take on the Vietnam War? Why?
Politicians in Favor of the War		
Politicians Opposed to the War		
Anti-war Protesters		
Viet Cong		
South Vietnamese in Favor of the War		
African Americans		
Military Personnel in Favor of the War		
Military Personnel Opposed to the War		

