



The News Media's Coverage of the Vietnam War

Curriculum Unit 83.04.03
by Henry A. Rhodes

I decided to develop a unit on the Vietnam War era because I am a product of this era. When I think back to my grammar school days during the 1960's, I can't help but remember the first time I heard about Vietnam. Mr. Creto, my 7th grade teacher, made reference to the fact that the boys in our class had better ready themselves to serve in Vietnam. To a boy who was living a carefree life, this was shocking news. I managed to calm myself down and put things back into perspective by making the following rationalization: If things were as serious as Mr. Creto said they were, everyone would have been talking about Vietnam and it would have been plastered all over the papers, which was not the case at the time.

When I got to high school I started to notice articles in the local paper concerning the Vietnam War. The articles portrayed the U. S. (the good guys) fighting to stop communism (the bad guys) in Vietnam. I never once questioned the writer's objectivity or whether or not the facts that were reported were accurate. My perception, values, and attitudes about the Vietnam War were being based on what I read in the local paper and saw on television.

As the war came to an end and the truth about Vietnam started to emerge, the anger and mistrust I felt towards the American government was unbelievable. I felt as though I had been betrayed by the American press, whose integrity and objectivity I had thought was beyond reproach.

When the Institute established a seminar on the 1960's, I saw it as my opportunity to find out the truth about the Vietnam War.

I think that today's students are going to be forced to deal with a similar situation to Vietnam in El Salvador. By understanding and learning what happened in Vietnam they will be better equipped to deal with the El Salvador situation. For just recently, one of the major architects of U. S. foreign policy in Vietnam, Dr. Henry Kissinger, has been appointed to head a commission to formulate a foreign policy strategy for Central America.

This unit is being developed for a high school/middle school American History class. It is intended to be taught in a 3-4 week time frame. There are 3 major objectives that will be dealt with throughout this unit. They are:

1. To provide students with a synopsis of several major events of the Vietnam War.
2. For students to examine the adequacy of the media's coverage of the Vietnam War.

3. To make students look more critically at the media's coverage of current U. S. foreign policy.

Because it would be impossible to recount all of the events of the Vietnam War, I have decided to concentrate on examining the following highlights of the Vietnam War:

1. French Intervention.
2. The 1954 Geneva Accords.
3. U. S. Intervention.
4. Johnson's Escalation.
5. Tet Offensive.
6. Nixon's Christmas Bombing.
7. The Anti-War Movement.

I think that by covering these events the students will have a good grasp of what happened in Vietnam.

Before discussing these incidents, it is important to examine some of the pressures that the media was facing in reporting the Vietnam War.

One pressure that the major television stations had to deal with came from their affiliates. The Nixon administration used the affiliate stations to control what the major networks filmed in Vietnam better than any other U. S. administration. For the most part, affiliate stations were conservative, which reflected their viewing audiences' values. Because the major networks were somewhat dependent on its affiliates to show its programming and advertisements, the networks usually heeded to the suggestions made by its affiliates. The affiliates didn't want to see the U. S. portrayed in a negative way. This would be a good time to get students' opinions and reactions to this type of pressure placed on the major networks.

Another problem that reporters had to deal with in reporting what happened in Vietnam was its sources of information. In most cases the facts fed to newsmen were fed to them by U. S. military personnel. If the reporters were critical of the U. S. in their articles, they could be assured of having a tough time getting information the next time. What one must keep in mind is the fact that one's livelihood as a journalist depended on the stories and information one sent back to one's home office back in the states. Thus, reporters tried not to alienate their sources of information.

Once the news articles had been sent back to the United States, they faced one more obstacle, the editor's desk. Before an editor released a story relating to Vietnam, he took into consideration the effect it would have

on his viewing audience and his sponsors. For many viewers and sponsors took a dim view of the U. S. being portrayed in a bad way at this time.

There are 3 ways in which reporters could deal with the pressures they faced. They are: (1) fight back, (2) give in, (3) avoid it by self-censorship.

After each major event of the war, there will be several articles in the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *New Haven Register* related to these events. Through class discussions and reaction papers, students will judge the adequacy of the press' coverage of these events.

At the end of this unit, a meeting between an editor of the local paper or the news manager of the local T. V. station could be arranged. During these interviews, questions concerning the pressures a reporter faces covering a war should be asked. Students should also inquire about how the media is dealing with El Salvador. Students should end the unit with a paper in which they compare the media's coverage of Vietnam with its coverage of El Salvador.

The first question that should be raised with students at this time is "Why were the French involved in Vietnam"? It is at this time a discussion on colonialism should occur. The Random House Dictionary "Concise Edition" defines colonialism as the policy of a nation seeking to extend its power over other territories. Students ought to be made aware that in a colonial situation the colony's major reason for existence is to provide a boost to the economy of its mother country. Students' reactions to this type of foreign policy should be voiced at this time.

Toward the end of the discussion on colonialism, students should be apprised of the fact that Vietnam was a French colony. There was much resistance in Vietnam to French colonialism.

On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of Vietnam from French rule. Negotiations proved to be fruitless at the time because France was determined to bring Vietnam back into its quickly disappearing colonial empire. France tired of negotiating decided to use force. During November, 1946, French cruisers bombed Haiphong, killing 6,000 civilians, signaling the beginning of the Vietnam War.

The United States' position on French intervention/colonialism underwent several changes during the early years of the Vietnam War. At first, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was not in favor of supporting France in its colonial reacquisition of Vietnam. Students should be reminded that the U. S. was once a colony and had to fight to gain its independence. Roosevelt was in favor of a trusteeship plan which would later lead to independence for Vietnam. Due to pressures exerted from our allies, France and England, Roosevelt watered down his trusteeship plan by stating that a colony could only become a trusteeship with the approval of its mother country.

With the death of Roosevelt and the ascendancy of Truman to power, there was a dramatic change in U. S. foreign policy towards France's involvement in Vietnam. The U. S. adopted an even more favorable foreign policy toward France. There were two reasons for this. One being, the U. S. commitment to stem Soviet influence in Europe, especially France. The U. S. perceived France as being vulnerable to a communist Party takeover in its country at this time. Thus, not wanting to cause dissension, the U. S. gave France somewhat a free hand in Vietnam. A related reason for the change in U. S. foreign policy was the coming of the Cold War. Support of France was seen as a strike against communism in Asia.

Articles Concerning French Intervention

For this particular section of the unit I have decided to concentrate on news articles from the months of September, 1945 and November, 1946. My reason for doing this was based on the facts that Ho Chi Minh had declared Vietnam's independence from French rule in September, 1945 and the actual fighting between the French and Vietminh began in 1946 with the bombing of Haiphong. I was unable to find any articles from the *New Haven Register* which covered Indo-China during this time frame. One must keep in mind that the *Register* is a local paper and a great deal of space was used to cover the Japanese surrender in 1945 and other local and national news stories.

Articles

1. "French Expect Native Turmoil," *Chicago Tribune* , 2 Sept. 1945.
2. "New President of Cochin-China Hangs Himself," *Chicago Tribune* , 11 Nov. 1946 (Reaction to French Colonialism).
3. "French Cannon and Air Bombs; Fight Annamese," *Chicago Tribune* , 26 Nov. 1946.
4. "Indo-China Riot Reported," *New York Times* , 22 Nov. 1946.
5. "Indo-China Clash Seen," *New York Times* , 24 Nov. 1946.
6. "French Stand Firm on Indo-China; Refuse to Submit Annexation to International Settlement," *New York Times* , 1 Sept. 1945.

Another important aspect of the Vietnam War that needs to be examined by the students is the 1954 Geneva Accords. These Accords ended French involvement in Vietnam. Before getting into a discussion of the major points of the peace agreement reached in Geneva, students should deal with why the French decided to use negotiations instead of pursuing a military solution to its Vietnam problem.

In my research I've found three major factors which can account for France's decision to pursue a negotiated solution rather than a military solution for its problem in Vietnam.

First of all, France wasn't doing that well militarily in Vietnam. They were using conventional warfare tactics which were ineffectual against the guerrilla warfare being waged by the Vietminh. The French had suffered several major defeats. One at Cao Bang, in which 6,000 French troops were captured. The other which came at a critical time during negotiations at Geneva, was at Dienbienphu in which 12,000 elite French soldiers were forced to surrender. These defeats coupled with the longevity of the War caused the French people to ask/demand its government to call an end to the War. Geneva was seen as a viable solution.

Next, there was a change in France's leadership during the negotiations which helped insure the adoption of the Geneva Accords. At the onset of negotiations, Joseph Laniel headed the French government. His government was adamantly opposed to any partitioning of Vietnam (which was one of the major points of the 1954 Accords). Laniel wanted a military victory. The Laniel government was replaced by a government led by Pierre Mendes during the negotiations. Mendes was flexible on the issue of partitioning Vietnam. He wanted a

settlement. In fact, he threatened to resign if an agreement was not reached by July 21.

Finally, after Dienbienphu fell France only controlled a small area around Hanoi in the North and limited territory in the South below the 16th parallel. France hoped that it could receive a more favorable settlement at Geneva.

The U. S. attended the Geneva Conference reluctantly. The U. S. didn't want a negotiated settlement between France and the Vietminh. The Eisenhower administration wanted France to pursue a more aggressive military strategy. At the conference, the U. S. acted like an observer. The U. S. refused to sign the Accords after they had been drafted. By not signing the agreement, the U. S. wasn't bound to honor them except when it was to our advantage.

The major points of the 1954 Geneva Accords were as follows:

1. Vietnam would be partitioned along the 17th parallel.
2. The division of Vietnam would be temporary with reunification elections held during the summer of 1956.
3. Forces would withdraw to their own partitioned zone within 300 days.
4. Neither North nor South Vietnam could join in an alliance unless their security clearly threatened.
5. Cease-fire arrangements made for Laos and Cambodia.
6. Each nation's right to self defense recognized.

Articles Concerning the 1954 Geneva Accords

The articles in this particular section were cited in hopes of giving the students an opportunity to examine how these 3 newspapers covered the 1954 Geneva Conference at 3 critical time periods. First, when France and the Vietminh were far apart in reaching a settlement. Second, when the Conference was able to come to terms with the controversial issue of partitioning Vietnam. Third, when an agreement was finally hammered out at Geneva.

Articles

1. "Indo-China Parley on Peace," *Chicago Tribune* , 4 May 1954.
2. "U. S. O. K. Partition of Indo-China," *Chicago Tribune* , 14 July 1954.
3. "Vietnam Truce Signed; Saves Billions to U. S.," *Chicago Tribune* , 22 July 1954.
4. "Indo-china Problem Points Up Dulles Dilemma," *New York Times* , 18 July 1954.
5. "West Shapes Terms on Indo-China; Paris Would Yield Hanoi Haiphong; U. S. Might Guarantee Dividing Line," *New York Times*, 22 July 1954.

6. "Vietnam Fact Text Shows Wide Freedom," *New York Times* , 22 July 1954.
7. "France Faces Geneva Crisis Without Full U. S. Backing," *New Haven Register* (City Edition), 12 July 1954.
8. "Showdown Talks at Geneva Open in Optimistic Mood; U. S. Support Lifts French, British Hopes; Partition of Vietnam seem Certain; Smith to Attend Conference," *New Haven Evening Register* , 14 July 1954.
9. "Big 3 Meet on EDC After Truce Signing; U. S. Warning Given to Reds on Aggression," *New Haven Register* (Late City Edition), 21 July 1954.

After dealing with French intervention and the 1954 Geneva Accords, the next highlight that should be studied is U. S. intervention in Vietnam. In order for students to understand why the U. S. intervened in Vietnam, U. S. foreign policy at the time should be studied (An activity at the end of this unit should be used to introduce the student to the domino theory).

At the time, the domino theory was used as a basis for formulating U. S. foreign policy. As a result of the domino theory the U. S. pursued a foreign policy of containment in relation to the spread of communism.

The domino theory which was first used to justify U. S. aid to Greece in 1947, was used to justify aid to Vietnam. This theory asserted that if the spread of communism was left unchecked, nation after nation would fall under communist control creating the ripple effect seen in a game of dominoes. Vietnam was viewed as the cornerstone to Southeast Asia by the U. S. Thus, from the beginning of the Vietnam War, the U. S. was committed to supporting the anti-communist forces in Vietnam even if it meant supporting leaders who were oppressive and didn't allow political freedom.

A discussion of the validity of the domino theory should occur during the teaching of this part of the unit. Students should address the following questions during their discussions: (1) With the fall of Vietnam to communism, did the domino theory hold true? (2) Is the domino theory an integral part of current U. S. foreign policy?

The incident which caused the U. S. to get militarily involved in Vietnam occurred on August 1, 1964 in the Gulf of Tonkin. Involved were the U. S. destroyer Maddox, the U. S. aircraft carrier Ticonderoga, and 3 North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Supposedly the U. S. destroyer Maddox, which was engaged in electronic espionage at the time, was attacked by the North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The Maddox and several planes from the Ticonderoga retaliated. President Johnson was infuriated when he heard of the attack on the Maddox. Within days of the incident Congress approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This gave American armed forces the authority to use any means available to defend themselves. The Gulf of Tonkin incident led way to the U. S. bombing North Vietnam and the introduction of combat ground troops. U. S. troops were accustomed

to fighting an enemy which was easily identifiable. The guerrilla type warfare being fought by the Vietcong proved to be frustrating to the American soldiers.

The major confrontations during the war took place in the countryside. The Vietcong were able to infiltrate the rural areas with the support of the villagers. The rural population was hesitant to identify the Vietcong to South Vietnamese and American troops. The Vietcong guerrilla warfare benefited greatly from this support.

The U. S. and South Vietnam government established a hamlet program in order to win the hearts and minds of the rural population. The aim of the program was to relocate the villagers to areas where they could be protected from the communists. These newly created hamlets were to receive technological and medical aid in an attempt to win the rural peasants support. The hamlet program had several drawbacks. The villagers resented being moved from their land that contained their ancestors' tombs. The people relocated weren't adequately compensated for their land. To say the least, the hamlet program did very little to counter the support of the Vietcong.

The U. S. armed forces developed a "search and destroy" strategy in response to Vietcong guerrilla warfare. Air power and the use of chemicals played a key role in this strategy. Once a specific area had been identified as a communist stronghold, it was encircled by ground troops. According to U. S. army procedures, the civilians of that area were to be warned of an impending air strike. The U. S. Air Force would level buildings thought to be harboring Vietcong. Herbicides, such as napalm and agent orange were used to destroy timberlands which communist troops used for cover. Areas that were labeled "Free Fire Zones" could be shelled without a warning being given to the civilian population. Students should discuss the justness of using chemicals and the "search and destroy" strategy. The teacher may have to play devil's advocate in order for both sides to be fairly discussed.

The frustration of not being able to identify the enemy led to one of the worst known atrocities of the Vietnam War: the My Lai Massacre. My Lai was a hamlet in the village of Song My. Lt. Calley and his men were sent into My Lai in Search of the Viet Cong. The people of My Lai were assembled in a large group at which time the American troops opened fire killing an estimated 300-400 civilians. The Massacre occurred on March 16, 1968. It took over a year and a half before it was made public. It should be noted that some soldiers in Calley's outfit refused to take part in the killings.

An interesting discussion took place in my seminar which I think should happen in the classroom. This question was posed, "Would you have followed orders and taken part in the My Lai Massacre"? Most of the people in the seminar admitted they might have participated. People in the seminar felt they would have acquiesced and followed orders because of the pressures of fighting this type of war. We didn't think the soldiers involved in the My Lai Massacre should be judged as being morally wrong for participating. There was a dissenting opinion to this line of thought. It was felt that there should always be certain moral lines drawn in respect to killing innocent non-threatening civilians. The issue of morality in fighting a war of this type should be posed to students so they can start formulating their opinions on this controversial issue. The important thing is that students have time to think about a situation like My Lai before being put on the spot and then being asked to decide.

Articles Concerning U. S. Intervention Gulf of Tonkin Incident; My Lai; U. S. Aid

On the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and the My Lai Massacre, there were numerous articles pertaining to these situations. The following points should be dealt with in a discussion of these articles:

1. Why was the U. S. Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin? If the Maddox was involved in electronic espionage in the Gulf of Tonkin, were the North Vietnamese justified in their attack? Were these points covered in the news articles?
2. In the reporting of the My Lai Massacre, why was there a discrepancy in the number of people killed? In accounts from Vietnamese between 300-400 people were killed while U. S. military leaders claim only 100 people were killed at My Lai. Students should keep in mind that the My Lai Massacre occurred on March 16, 1968 and that reports of the massacre didn't appear in the papers until November, 1969.

As far as the news coverage of the U. S. aid to Vietnam, students should focus in on the *New York Times* editorial and articles concerning U. S. aid to Vietnam. They offer an excellent description/evaluation of our aid program to Vietnam.

Articles

1. "Reds Viets Fire on U. S. Ship," *Chicago Tribune* , 3 Aug 1964.
2. "Yanks Bomb North Vietnam," *Chicago Tribune* , 5 Aug. 1964.
3. "South Viets Tell Massacre by Yank Troops," *Chicago Tribune* , 19 Nov. 1969.
4. "Warning to Hanoi," (editorial), *New York Times* , 4 Aug 1964.
5. "100 South Viet Villagers Killed," *Chicago Tribune* , 22 Nov. 1969.
6. "G. I. Says He Witnessed Massacre in South Vietnam Village," *New York Times* , 20 Nov 1969.
7. "The Vietnam (Aid) Program" (editorial), *New York Times* , 15 Jan 1962.
8. "Vietnam Victory Remote Despite U. S. Aid to Diem," *New York Times* , 25 July 1962.
9. "LBJ Orders Navy Destroy Attackers," *New Haven Register* , 3 Aug. 1964.
10. "Red Torpedo Boats Crawl Home; Attack U. S. Ship on Patrol," *New Haven Register* , 3 Aug. 1964.
11. "Soldiers Claims He Saw Viets Slaughtered," *New Haven Register* , 20 Nov. 1969.

The next aspect of the Vietnam War that needs to be examined is President's Johnson's escalation of the war. The U. S. realized that if it did not institute the bombing of North Vietnam in the early part of 1965, South Vietnam would fall to the communists. The Johnson administration was willing to step up the air raids but was

still reluctant to commit large numbers of ground troops. Two plans were instituted as retaliatory measures to Vietcong attacks, they were: (1) Flaming Dart, (2) Rolling Thunder. These expanded the U. S. air war in Vietnam. Once the U. S. had stepped up its air strikes, General Westmoreland asked for ground troops to protect U. S. air bases from Vietminh attacks. This made way for the introduction of large numbers of U. S. ground troops .

On July 28, 1965, President Johnson in a nation-wide televised speech apprised the American people that 50,000 additional troops were being sent to Vietnam. By 1967 over 400,000 American soldiers would be stationed in Vietnam. Johnson had decided during the month of July to send as many troops as the situation required, there was no turning back. Students should be asked if this was a wise policy.

Articles Concerning Johnson's Escalation

Students should read each of these articles concerning Johnson's escalation of U. S. involvement in Vietnam. They should list the reasons given in each article for escalation. These reasons should be used as a basis for discussion about the 1965 escalation of the war. The students, having the advantage of hindsight, should also examine whether President Johnson was honest with the American public concerning the role of these troops were to play in Vietnam.

Articles

1. "50,000 More to Viet War; Monthly Draft Doubled to 35,000; Not Necessary to Call Any Reserve Units at Present," *Chicago Tribune* , 29 July 1965.
2. "Johnson Orders 50,000 More Men to Vietnam and Doubles Draft; Again Urges U. N. to Seek Peace," *New York Times* , 29 July 1965.
3. "President Will Double Draft Call," *New Haven Register* , 29 July 1965.

The Tet Offensive made the American people and press believe that they were being misled by the U. S. military leaders about what was happening in Vietnam. With each new wave of American forces being sent to Vietnam the American people would be assured that victory over the communists would be ours. This offensive launched by the Vietcong during Tet (lunar new year) against the major cities in South Vietnam proved to Americans that the Vietnam War was going to be a long drawnout war. The Tet Offensive was a military defeat for the communists because in addition to being repelled they incurred heavy losses. However, the effect the offensive had on the rising discontent with the war among Americans turned it into a political victory. Cries for peace started to come from all circles of American society. The pressure would eventually force the U. S. to extricate itself from the Vietnam War.

Articles Concerning the Tet Offensive

Students should compare the editorials concerning the Tet Offensive by the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* . After the students have read the articles in this section, they should write their reaction to the following statement: The North Vietnamese suffered heavy casualties and did not achieve a military victory in its Tet Offensive, however, they did achieve a psychological and political victory.

Articles

1. "Bloody Path to Peace?" (editorial), *New York Times* , 1 Feb 1968.
2. "Time for Decision" (editorial), *Chicago Tribune* , 1 Feb. 1968
3. Divebomb Reds in Saigon; U. S. Tanks, Troops Hit at Invaders," *Chicago Tribune* , 1 Feb 1968.
4. "Vietcong Press Guerrilla Baid; Martial Law Declared by Thien," *New York Times* , 1 Feb. 1968.
5. "Yanks Battle Reds in Saigon; U. S. Air Base Under Heavy Fire," *New Haven Register* , 1 Feb 1968.

As the war dragged on people in the United States grew tired of the war in Vietnam, they wanted peace. When President Nixon came into power, he promised the American people peace with honor. Negotiations were started in earnest. However, neither side was willing to make concessions easily, for both had invested a great deal of blood, sweat, and tears in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese in an attempt to break the stalemate, invaded South Vietnam. The Nixon administration retaliated by mining Haiphong harbor, establishing a naval blockade of North Vietnam and increasing the numbers of air strikes against North Vietnam. When all the dust settled, the two sides were still at an impasse; so they decided to revert back to diplomacy to achieve a settlement.

Nixon, in a desperate move to bring about a settlement, authorized the most devastating air attacks of the war. They were later to be referred to as Nixon's Christmas Bombings. No one can be sure if these bombings helped to secure a settlement but just 6 days after, negotiations had begun, an agreement was made. The reaction back in the states to the bombing was one of outrage. Some members of Congress were ready to challenge Nixon's foreign policy of peace with honor when Congress reconvened after the holidays, fortunately for Nixon a settlement was reached.

Articles Concerning Nixon's Christmas Bombings

After reading the articles relating to Nixon's Christmas Bombing, the students should share their opinions on the following questions: (1) Were the Christmas Bombings a necessary evil in order to secure a negotiated peace? Students should be made cognizant of the fact that several hospitals were bombed during these raids. In addition many innocent civilians were killed. (2) What was the reaction of the American public to these bombings? Congress? (3) What were your reactions to the New York Times editorial, "Two Can Play Game"? (4), Do you think the bombings were a just way for Nixon to achieve his "peace with honor"?

Articles

1. "Biggest Hanoi Air Raids; Jets Renew Strikes on All North Vietnam," *Chicago Tribune* , 19 Dec. 1972.
2. "White House Says Raiding in the North Will go on Until There is an Accord," *New York Times* , 19 Dec. 1972.

3. "Two Can Play Game," (editorial), *New York Times* , 19 Dec. 1972.
4. "3 Big U. S. Bombers Downed in Heavy Strikes on North; Attacks New Hanoi Are Biggest of War," *New Haven Register* , 19 Dec 1972.

The effects that the anti-war movement had on the Vietnam War cannot be overlooked. The movement was a constant thorn in the sides of Johnson and Nixon. In fact, Johnson was unable to run for re-election due to the anti-war feeling that had developed in the U. S. due to his escalation of the war.

The Johnson and Nixon administrations tried to ignore the demonstrations. As the demonstrations grew in size and number, it was hard to play them off as a small group of white middle class students not representative of the majority of Americans.

There were 3 major policies that the anti-war movement adopted which allowed them to increase their base of support. First, by rejecting red-baiting (exclusion of a group or individual due to a communist affiliation), they were able to include Marxist and other revolutionaries in the anti-war movement. This was not an easy task, keeping in mind the enemy in Vietnam was communist and the strong anti-communist sentiment in the U. S. at the time. Second, by adopting a nonexclusion policy coalitions could be formed with radical groups of the left. Third, by using the democratic decision making process in formulating strategies all groups were given an opportunity to voice their opinions about the direction the anti-war movement should take.

During the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement had its high and low points as far as its number of participants and its effect on the war. There are 4 major demonstrations that had a profound impact on the war that need to be studied.

On April 15, 1967 there were anti-war demonstrations held in the cities of San Francisco and New York. At the demonstration in San Francisco, 75,000 people turned out while 400,000 turned out in New York. The march on New York was led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Msgr. Charles Owen Rice. There was much pressure put on King to disassociate himself from the anti-war movement for fear of jeopardizing the Civil Rights Movement. King thought otherwise and attended the demonstration. The demonstrations in New York and San Francisco had a wide range of participants which included GIs, labor groups, Indians, Blacks, and women just to name a few. This was common because of its nonexclusion policy.

Another demonstration which needs to be noted because of its size happened on Nov. 15, 1969 in the cities of San Francisco and Washington, D. C. In San Francisco, 250,000 demonstrators showed up and 750,000 showed up in D. C. to show their discontent for the war. They were addressed by political leaders such as, Senators McCarthy and McGovern. 'March Against Death' was the theme of these demonstrations.

The demonstrations in May 1970 depicted the unpopularity of the Vietnam War on the nation's college campuses. During May over 500 colleges were affected by some form of student protest, whether it was a student strike or a student takeover over a campus building. An incident which served as a spark for action at colleges and universities across the country was the killing of students at Kent State on May 4, 1970 during an anti-war demonstration.

The largest anti-war demonstration during the history of the Vietnam War took place in San Francisco and New York on April 24, 1971. These demonstrations received national coverage by the major networks unlike the demonstrations on Nov 15, 1969. The demonstrations during April 1971 also had a larger contingency from the unions than prior demonstrations. In all 750,000 demonstrated in Washington, D. C. while 300,000 participated in San Francisco. These demonstrations sent a message to the people in the White House that could no longer be ignored—End the war.

Articles Concerning 4 Major Anti-War Movements

As students read the articles about the major anti-war demonstrations they should note which paper reported about the demonstrations in a negative light. Students should also deal with the issue of whether or not the anti-war demonstrations were composed of basically white middle class college students. Students should not just confine themselves to the suggested articles concerning the demonstrations, but read the front pages which are loaded with stories related to the anti-war demonstrations on the days following each demonstration.

Articles

1. "250,000 Protesters Stage Peaceful Rally in Washington; Radical Group Routed in Riot," *New York Times* , 16 April 1967.
2. "Throngs to Parade to U. N. for Anti-War Rally," *New York Times* , 15 April 1967.
3. "Anti-War Rally Brings Violence to N. Y. Streets," *Chicago Tribune* , 16 April 1967.
4. "Thousands March in Peace Rallies New York, San Francisco Protests Orderly King Asks Bombing Halt," *New Haven Register* , 16 April 1967.
5. "War Protesters Need Guidance—"Washington Report", (editorial), *Chicago Tribune* , 19 Nov 1969.
6. "Peaceful Legions Coverage on Capital; The Mood-Give Peace A Chance," *New Haven Register* , 16 Nov. 1969
7. "Kent State Riot; 4 killed; Troop Fight with Students," *Chicago Tribune* , 5 May 1970.
8. "Endless Wave of Protesters are Serious But Not Solemn," *New Haven Register*, 25 April 1971.

In this unit I have attempted to give a brief account of the highlights of the Vietnam War in hopes of giving students and teachers a concise appraisal of what happened in Vietnam. In my research, I've found that the more the U. S. got involved in Vietnam the more articles appeared in the papers concerning the war. Why was it then, that many Americans, including myself, felt that they had been misled by the press in its coverage of the war as the war came to an end? As students proceed through this unit, they should be looking for answers to this question. Students should ask themselves if the fear of communism which was prevalent in American

society was reflected in the stories covering the war? If so, how would this affect the credibility and accuracy of these stories? The answer to these questions should be used by students in helping them determine the adequacy of the press' coverage of the Vietnam War.

Activity 1—Reactions to Johnson's Escalation

Objectives

1. Students are to interview their parents, relatives, local representatives or any adult in their neighborhood concerning their reactions to President Johnson's July 28, 1965 speech in which he announces his escalation policy.
2. Students are to write their reactions to President Johnson's escalation.

Materials

1. *The United States in the Vietnam War* by Don Lawson, pp.31-61.
2. News articles from the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *New Haven Register* covering President Johnson's speech to nation on July 28, 1965.

Procedure

1. Students should read chapter 3, pp. 31-48, "Incident in the Gulf of Tonkin" of Don Lawson's *The United States in Vietnam War* to provide the student with background information on U. S. escalation.
2. After reading "Chapter 3", students should read news articles from *Tribune*, *Times*, and *Register* covering Johnson's July 28, 1965 speech.
3. After reading the articles, students should list the reasons Johnson gave for justifying the escalation of the War.
4. Students should develop questions from list of reasons to ask adults about how they felt about Johnson's escalation.
5. After the questions have been developed, students should interview and record the reactions of their parents, relatives, local representatives or any adult to Johnson's escalation.
6. Students should conclude this activity with a short paper in which they summarize the reactions of their interviews. They should also include their personal reaction to Johnson's escalation.

Activity 2—The April 15, 1967 Anti-War Demonstration

Objective

1. Students will compare the attitudes of the *Tribune*, *Times*, and *Register* in their coverage of the first major anti-war demonstration on April 15, 1967.

Materials Copies of the following articles:

1. “Throng to Parade to U. N. For Anti-War Rally”, April 15, 1967, *New York Times* .
2. “Anti-War Rally Brings Violence to N. Y. Streets,” April 16, 1967, *Chicago Tribune*.
3. “Thousands March In Peace Rallies N. Y., San Francisco Protests Orderly; King Asks Bombing Halt,” April 16, 1967, *New Haven Register* .

Procedure

1. Explain to students that the April 15, 1967 anti-war demonstration was the first major anti-war demonstration.
2. Allow students to read the articles from the 3 newspapers covering this major demonstration.
3. After reading the articles, students should answer the following questions:
 - (a) Where did the demonstrations occur?
 - (b) How many people participated in the demonstrations?
 - (c) Why were the demonstrations held?
 - (d) What groups participated in these demonstrations?
 - (e) Did all 3 papers have similar attitudes about the antiwar demonstrations? Explain.
 - (f) What are your reactions to the demonstration held on April 15, 1967?
4. This activity should be completed with an oral discussion focusing on questions c-f.

Activity 3—Domino Theory

Objectives

1. Students will be able to explain the domino theory.
2. Student will be able to state the role the domino theory played in formulating U. S. foreign policy for Vietnam.

Materials

1. Set of dominoes.
2. “Vietnam Victory Remote Despite U. S. Aid to Diem,” July 25, 1962, *New York Times* .

Procedure

1. Ask students what is meant by capitalism? Communism?
 - A. It might be necessary to have a student use a dictionary define these terms.
 - B. Students should be directed to define capitalism as a system based on private property and competition.
 - C. Students should be directed to define communism as a system under which most or all property is owned by the state as a whole and is supposed to be shared by all.
 1. Inform Students that communist countries are committed to supporting world-wide communist revolutions.
2. Ask students, What type of system might feel threatened by this type of communist foreign policy?
3. Have a group of dominoes on desk, have each domino labeled so as to represent the countries of Southeast Asia. The dominoes should start at an area labeled China-U.S.S.R. (Communism) and lead to another one labeled the U. S. (Capitalism).
4. As the teacher topples over the dominoes, the relationship between the falling dominoes and the spread of communism should be made as perceived by American leaders at the time. Students should be made aware that the U. S. saw Vietnam as the head domino, if Vietnam fell to communism, the other countries of Southeast Asia would follow.
5. Students should read the *New York Times* article “Vietnam Victory Remote Despite U. S. Aid to Diem.”
6. Students should be directed to answer the following questions to conclude this activity.
 - A. How did the U. S. plan on stopping the domino theory from happening in Southeast Asia?

Student Reading List

Books

Lawson, Don. *The United States in the Vietnam War* , New York: Thomas Y Crowell Junior Books, 1981.

This book explains the political, social, economic, and military aspects of the Vietnam War. This book is strongly recommended for students in order to give them information on the highlights of the Vietnam War.

Poole, Peter A. *Dien Bien Phu , 1954 : The Battle That Ended the First Indo-China War* , New York: Franklin Watts, 1972.

This book in addition to giving an excellent description of the battle at Dien Bien Phu, provides the student with a history of French colonialism in Indo-China.

The articles cited below can be found at the Sterling Memorial Library in the Periodical Room on Microfilm.

Articles Concerning French Intervention

"French Cannon and Air Bombs; Fight Annamese," *Chicago Tribune* , 26 Nov. 1946.

"French Stand Firm on Indo-China; Refuse to Submit Annexation to International Settlement," *New York Times* , 1 Sept. 1945.

"Indo-China Clash Seen," *New York Times* , 24 Nov. 1946.

"Indo-China Riot Reported," *New York Times* , 22 Nov. 1946.

"New President of Cochin-China Hangs Himself," *Chicago Tribune* , 11 Nov. 1946.

Articles Concerning the 1954 Geneva Accords

"Big 3 Meet on EDC After Truce Signing; U. S. Warning Given to Reds on Aggression," *New Haven Register* , 21 July 1954.

"France Faces Geneva Crises Without Full U. S. Backing," *New Haven Register* , 12 July 1954.

"Indo-China Parley on Peace," *Chicago Tribune* , 4 May 1954.

"Indo-China Problem Points Up Dulles Dilemma," *New York Times* , 18 July 1954.

"Showdown Talks at Geneva Open in Optimistic Mood; U. S. Support Lifts French, British Hopes; Partition of Vietnam Seem Certain; Smith to Attend Conference," *New Haven Register* , 21 July 1954.

"U. S. O. K. Partition of Indo-China," *Chicago Tribune* , 14 July 1954.

"Vietnam Pact Text Shows Wide Freedom," *New York Times* , 22 July 1954.

"Vietnam Truce Signed; Saves Billions to U. S.," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 July 1954.

"West Shapes Terms on Indo-China; Paris Would Yield Hanoi, Haiphong; U. S. Might Guarantee Dividing Line," *New York Times* , 21 July 1954.

Articles Concerning U. S. Intervention

"G.I. Says He Witnessed Massacre in South Vietnam Village," *New York Times* , 20 Nov. 1969.

"LBJ Orders Navy Destroy Attackers," *New Haven Register* , 3 Aug 1964.

"100 South Viet Villagers Killed," *Chicago Tribune* , 22 Nov 1969.

"Red Torpedo Boats Crawl Home; Attack U. S. Ship on Patrol," *New Haven Register* , 3 Aug 1964.

"Reds Viets Fire on U. S. Ship," *Chicago Tribune* , 3 Aug 1964.

"Soldier claim He Saw Viets Slaughtered," *New Haven Register* , 20 Nov 1969.

South Viets Tell Massacre by Yank Troops," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 Nov 1969. "The Vietnam Program" (editorial), *New York Times* , 15 Jan. 1962.

"Warning to Hanoi" (editorial), *New York Times* , 4 Aug. 1964.

"Time for Decision" (editorial), *Chicago Tribune* , 1 Feb. 1968.

"Vietcong Press Guerrilla Raids; Martial Law Declared by Thieu," *New York Times* , 1 Feb. 1968.

"Yanks Battle Reds in Saigon; U. S. Air Bases Under Heavy Fire," *New Haven Register* , 1 Feb 1968.

Articles Concerning Nixon's Christmas Bombings

"Biggest Hanoi Air Raids; Jets Renew Strikes on all of North Vietnam," *Chicago Tribune* , 19 Dec 1972.

"3 Big U. S. Bombers Downed in Heavy Strikes on North; Attacks Near Hanoi are Biggest of War," *New Haven Register* , 19 Dec. 1972.

"Two Can Play Game" (editorial), *New York Times* , 19 Dec. 1972.

"White House Says Raiding in North Will Go on Until There is an Accord," *New York Times* , 19 Dec. 1972.

"Vietnam Victory Remote Despite U. S. Aid to Diem," *New York Times* , 25 July 1962.

"Yanks Bomb North Vietnam," *Chicago Tribune* , 5 Aug 1964.

Articles Concerning Johnson's Escalation

"50,000 More to Viet War; Monthly Draft Doubled to 35,000; Not Necessary to Call Reserve Units at Present," *Chicago Tribune* , 29 July 1965.

"Johnson Orders 50,000 More Men to Vietnam and Doubles Draft; Again Urges U. N. to Seek Peace," *New York Times* , 29 July 1965.

"President Will Double Draft Call," *New Haven Register* , 29 July 1965.

Articles Concerning Tet Offensive

"Bloody Path to Peace" (editorial), *New York Times* , 1 Feb 1968.

"Divebomb Reds in Saigon; U. S. Tanks Troops Hit at Invaders," *Chicago Tribune* , 1 Feb 1968.

Articles Concerning 4 Major Anti-War Demonstrations

"Anti-War Rally Brings Violence to N. Y. Streets," *Chicago Tribune* , 16 April 1967.

"Campus Unrest War Spreads With Strike Calls; Editors of 11 College Newspapers Urge Nationwide Walkout to Protest Moves in Cambodia and New Bombings ," *New York Times* , 4 May 1970.

"Campus Violence Recedes; Students Turn to Political Action, *New Haven* 19 May 1970.

"Disorder Mounts Across Nation; Strike Close Over 80 Colleges," *New Haven Register* , 7 May 1970.

"Endless Wave of Protesters are Serious But Not Solemn," *New Haven Register* , 25 April 1971.

"4 Kent State Students Killed by Troops," *New York Times* , 5 May 1970.

"Kent State is a Scene of Unreality," *Chicago Tribune* , 5 May 1970.

"Kent State Riot; 4 Killed; Troop Fight With Student," *Chicago Tribune* , 5 May 1970.

"Peaceful Legions Coverage on Capital; The Mood-Give Peace a Chance," *New Haven Register* , 16 Nov. 1969.

"Thousands March in Peace Rallies New York, San Francisco protests Orderly; King Asks Bombing Halt," *New Haven Register* , 16 April 1967.

"Throngs to Parade to U. N. For Anti-War Rally," *New York Times* , 15 April 1968.

"200,000 in Capital Rally, End War Marches Demand," *Chicago Tribune* , 25 April 1971.

"200,000 Rally in Capital to End War," *New York Times* , 25 April 1971.

"250,000 Protesters Stage Peaceful Rally in Washington; Radical Group Routed in Riot," *New York Times* , 16 April 1967.

"War Protesters Need Guidance," (editorial), *Chicago Tribune* , 19 Nov. 1969.

Teacher's Reading List

Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding What's News* New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.

This book deals with the pressures reporters of the Vietnam War had to cope with in the reporting of the war in addition to the reporters' reaction to these pressures.

Halstead, Fred. *Out Now* , New York: Monad Press, 1978.

This book gives a history of the anti-war movement in the U. S. One should keep in mind that the author was a part of this movement.

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches* , New York: Avon Books, 1978.

This book describes the atmosphere found in Vietnam during the War.

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War , The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* , New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1971.

This book gives an excellent account of U. S. participation in Vietnam. I would strongly recommend the reading of this book before teaching this unit on Vietnam.

Hersh, Seymour m., *Cover-Up: The Army's Secret Investigation of the Massacre at My Lai* , New York: Random House, 1972.

Hersh was the reporter who first broke the story of the My Lai Massacre for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. In this book he documents the tragedy and its aftermath.

Film

Hearts and Minds is a documentary film which describes U.S. attempts to win the support of rural villagers of Vietnam by giving medical and technological aid to the villagers. I strongly recommend the showing of this film, it is however, quite expensive.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>