

There's More Online!

- ✓ **BIOGRAPHY** Robert F. Kennedy
- ✓ **BIOGRAPHY** William Westmoreland
- ✓ **GRAPHIC NOVEL** "The Lottery"
- ✓ **PRIMARY SOURCE** Vietnam Political Cartoons
- ✓ **VIDEO** Vietnam Divides the Nation
- ✓ **INTERACTIVE SELF-CHECK QUIZ**



## LESSON 2

# Vietnam Divides the Nation

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS** • How does military conflict divide people within cultures? • Should citizens support the government during wartime?

Reading **HELPDESK**



### Academic Vocabulary

- media
- disproportionate

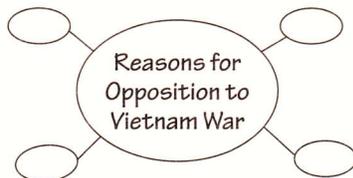
### Content Vocabulary

- **credibility gap**
- **dove**
- **teach-in**
- **hawk**

### TAKING NOTES:

#### Key Ideas and Details

**Organizing** Fill in a graphic organizer similar to the one below, listing reasons for opposition to the Vietnam War.



## IT MATTERS BECAUSE

As casualties mounted in Vietnam, many Americans began to protest the war. The conflict over the war, increasing violence, and the apparent lack of progress in Vietnam led President Johnson to decide not to run again.

## The Antiwar Movement Emerges

**GUIDING QUESTION** Why did Americans disagree about the Vietnam War?

When the first U.S. combat troops arrived in Vietnam in the spring of 1965, about 66 percent of Americans approved of U.S. policy in Vietnam. As the war dragged on, however, public support began to wane. **Media** accounts seemed to contradict government reports. For example, the American commander in South Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, reported that the “enemy’s hopes are bankrupt” and “the end begins to come into view.” Yet millions of people saw images of American casualties on television in their living rooms each day as Vietnam became the first “television war.” For many people, a **credibility gap** had developed—they had a hard time believing what the Johnson administration said about the war.

Congress, which in the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had granted Johnson a great deal of power to conduct the war, began to seek greater involvement. Beginning in February 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held “educational” hearings on Vietnam. They called in policy makers and critics to discuss the administration’s military strategy.

### Teach-ins Begin

In March 1965, a group of faculty members and students at the University of Michigan joined together in a **teach-in**. They discussed the issues surrounding the war and reaffirmed their reasons for opposing it. In May 1965, 122 colleges held a “National Teach-In” by radio for more than 100,000 antiwar demonstrators.

People opposed the war for different reasons. Some saw the conflict as a civil war in which the United States should not

interfere. Others saw South Vietnam as a corrupt dictatorship and believed defending it was immoral.

## Anger at the Draft

Thousands of demonstrators held protests against the war. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organized a march on Washington, D.C., that drew more than 20,000 people. A rally at the Lincoln Memorial drew tens of thousands of protesters as well.

Many protesters focused on what they saw as an unfair draft system. Until 1969, college students could often defer military service until after graduation. Young people from working-class families unable to afford college were more likely to be drafted. Draftees were most likely to be assigned to combat units, and they commonly made up more than half of casualties. Most who served in Vietnam, however, enlisted voluntarily.

Nevertheless, a **disproportionate** number of working-class and minority youths went to war. Between 1961 and 1966, African Americans constituted about 10 percent of military personnel. Because African Americans were more likely to be assigned to combat units, however, they accounted for almost 20 percent of combat-related deaths. This skewed death rate angered African American leaders. In April 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., publicly condemned the conflict: “I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. . . . The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.” In response, military officials tried to reduce African American casualties. By war’s end, African Americans made up about 12 percent of America’s dead.

As the war escalated, an increased draft call put many college students at risk of being drafted. An estimated 500,000 draftees refused to go. Some burned their draft cards, did not show up for induction, or fled the country. From 1965 to 1968, officials prosecuted over 3,000 Americans who refused to serve. In 1969 a lottery system was instituted, so only those with low numbers were subject to the draft. Many draftees argued that if they were old enough to fight, they were old enough to vote. In 1971 the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving all citizens age 18 and older the right to vote in all state and federal elections.

## Hawks and Doves

In the face of growing opposition to the war, President Johnson remained determined to continue fighting, recognizing the effort as resistance to communism. He assailed his critics in Congress as “selfish men who want to

### Tinker v. Des Moines

In 1965 students in Des Moines, Iowa, expressed their opposition to the Vietnam War by wearing black armbands to school. The school district then banned the wearing of black armbands and subsequently expelled three students who violated the policy. The students challenged their expulsion as a violation of their First Amendment right to free speech. In 1969 the Supreme Court ruled 7 to 2 in favor of the students, holding that the wearing of black armbands was a form of “symbolic expression” covered by the First Amendment. As long as their symbolic protest was not disruptive, they had a right to express their opinion.

### DBQ INTERPRETING

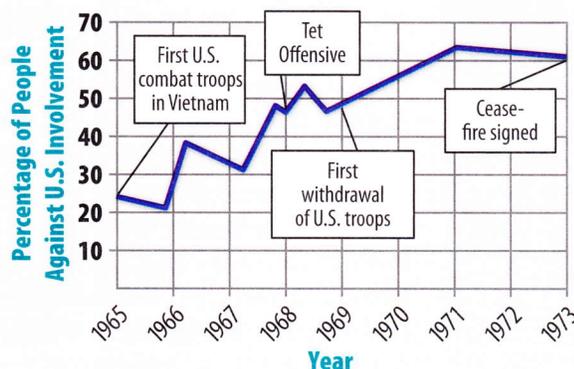
**SIGNIFICANCE** How does the *Tinker* decision affect your right to wear a T-shirt supporting a cause you believe in?

## CHARTS/GRAPHS

## OPPOSITION TO THE VIETNAM WAR

As the Vietnam War progressed, opposition to the conflict generally increased.

- Analyzing** During which two years was opposition to the war lowest? What event occurred around that time?
- Predicting Consequences** In what year did opposition to the war peak? What consequence might you expect this to have?



Source: Gallup News Service.

**media** a means of expression or communication, especially in reference to the agencies of mass communication—newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet

**credibility gap** lack of trust or believability

**teach-in** an extended meeting or class held to discuss a social or political issue

**disproportionate** being out of proportion; lacking in proper relation

**dove** a person in favor of the United States withdrawing from the Vietnam War

**hawk** someone who believed the United States should continue its military efforts in Vietnam

Antiwar demonstrators protest in New York City in 1969.

#### ▶ CRITICAL THINKING

**Analyzing Information** What can you learn about war protesters from this photograph?

advance their own interests” and was dismissive of the college protesters. Johnson was not alone in his views. In time, the nation seemed to be divided into two camps. **Doves** wanted the United States to leave Vietnam. **Hawks**, however, wanted the nation to stay and fight. Some saw communism as a threat and challenged the patriotism of the doves. As the two groups debated, the war appeared to take a dramatic turn for the worse.

#### ✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Explaining** What was the effect of the Vietnam War being a “television war”?

## 1968: The Pivotal Year

**GUIDING QUESTION** Why was 1968 considered the most turbulent year of the 1960s?

The most turbulent year of the chaotic 1960s was 1968. The year saw a shocking political announcement, two traumatic assassinations, and a political convention held amid strident antiwar demonstrations. First, however, the United States endured a surprise attack in Vietnam.

### The Tet Offensive

On January 30, 1968, during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese launched a massive surprise attack. In what was called the Tet Offensive, guerrilla fighters attacked most American airbases in South Vietnam and most of the South’s major cities. Vietcong even blasted their way into the American embassy in Saigon.

After about a month of fighting, U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers repelled the enemy troops, inflicting heavy losses on them. But less tangible damage had been done. The American people were shocked that an enemy supposedly on the verge of defeat could launch such a large-scale attack. The media openly criticized the war. “The American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven’t already, the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed,” declared the *Wall Street Journal*. Television newscaster Walter Cronkite said that it seemed “more certain than ever that the bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.”

### Johnson Leaves the Race

Both Johnson and the war had become increasingly unpopular. With the presidential election of 1968 on the horizon, some Democratic politicians made surprising moves. In November 1967, Eugene McCarthy—a little-known liberal senator from Minnesota—declared that he would challenge Johnson for the Democratic presidential nomination. At first, his candidacy was mostly dismissed, but he attracted support from those who opposed the war. In March 1968, McCarthy made a strong showing in the New Hampshire primary, winning more than 40 percent of the vote. Realizing that Johnson was vulnerable, Senator Robert Kennedy, who also opposed the war, quickly entered the race for the Democratic nomination.

With both the country and his own party deeply divided, Johnson appeared on television on March 31, 1968. He announced, “I have concluded that I should not permit the presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.”



## A Season of Violence

More shocking events followed Johnson's announcement. On April 4, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis by James Earl Ray. On June 5, Robert Kennedy, who appeared likely to win the Democratic nomination, was gunned down by Sirhan Sirhan, an Arab nationalist.

The violence that seemed to plague the country in 1968 culminated with a chaotic and well-publicized clash between antiwar protesters and police at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Thousands of young activists surrounded the convention center to protest the war. Despite these protests, the delegates selected Vice President Hubert Humphrey as the Democratic nominee. Meanwhile, in a park not far from the convention hall, protesters and police began fighting. Demonstrators taunted police with the chant "The whole world is watching!" as the officers tried to force them to disperse. Violence between protesters and police aired on national television.



Protests at the Democratic National Convention in 1968 were nationally televised.

## Nixon Wins the Presidency

At a much more sedate convention, Republicans selected former vice president and 1960 presidential hopeful Richard Nixon as their candidate. A third candidate, Governor George Wallace of Alabama, decided to run in 1968 as an independent. An outspoken segregationist, Wallace sought to attract Americans who felt threatened by the civil rights movement and urban social unrest.

Public opinion polls gave Nixon a wide lead over Humphrey and Wallace. Nixon's campaign promise to unify the nation and restore law and order appealed to Americans who feared their country was spinning out of control. He claimed to represent a silent majority of Americans who sought to maintain law and order but had been overshadowed in recent years by social and political turmoil. He promised that he had a "secret plan" to bring "peace with honor" in Vietnam.

Humphrey's campaign faced significant challenges, but by October 1968, his increasingly antiwar stance and strong campaigning helped turn his numbers around. A week before the election, President Johnson announced that the bombing of North Vietnam had halted and that a cease-fire would follow. These boosts came too late for Humphrey, however. Nixon defeated him by more than 100 electoral votes, although he only won the popular vote by a slim margin of 43 percent to 42 percent.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Evaluating** Why was the Tet Offensive a turning point in the Vietnam War?

### CRITICAL THINKING

**Drawing Conclusions** How might the protests at the convention have affected voters' opinions of Democrats?

PHOTO: Arthur Rothstein/Historical/CORBIS

## LESSON 2 REVIEW



### Reviewing Vocabulary

- 1. Defining** What was the credibility gap?
- 2. Contrast** How did doves and hawks differ?

### Using Your Notes

- 3. Summarizing** Use the notes you completed during the lesson to write a paragraph that summarizes the reasons that many people opposed the Vietnam War.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

- 4. Identifying** Why did Americans disagree about the Vietnam War?
- 5. Describing** Why was 1968 considered the most turbulent year of the 1960s?

### Writing Activity

- 6. ARGUMENT** Suppose that you were living in 1968. Write an article for a student newspaper in which you present opposing views about the Vietnam War.