

Chapter 15 Notes: The Vietnam Era

Section 1: Kennedy's Foreign Policy

New Directions

President John F. Kennedy sought new ways to deal with the challenges and fears of the Cold War.

- As president, Kennedy increased spending on nuclear arms, but he also tried to convince Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, to agree to a ban on nuclear testing.
- Kennedy also worked to improve America's ability to **respond** to threats in certain areas of the world where Communist groups fought to take control of their nations' governments.
 - ✓ These groups employed **guerrilla warfare**, or fighting with small bands of soldiers who use tactics such as sudden ambushes.
 - ✓ Kennedy introduced a plan, called **flexible response**, to provide help to nations fighting Communist movements.
- Kennedy also provided aid to poor countries to counteract the appeal of communism.
 - ✓ In 1961 the president signed an **executive order** creating the Peace Corps, which provided volunteers who worked in other countries as teachers, health workers, and advisers in farming, industry, and government.

Cold War Confrontations

The Kennedy administration responded to Cold War crises in Cuba and Berlin.

- In January 1959, rebel leader **Fidel Castro** seized power in Cuba and set up a Communist dictatorship. Cuba also became an ally of the Soviet Union.
- On April 17, 1961, about 1,500 CIA-trained Cuban exiles landed at the **Bay of Pigs** on the south coast of Cuba in an attempt to overthrow Castro.
 - ✓ Many blunders **occurred**, and within days Cuban forces crushed the invasion and captured the survivors.
 - ✓ Soviet premier Khrushchev concluded that Kennedy was not a strong leader and could be bullied.
- At a June 1961 summit conference in Vienna, Austria, Premier Khrushchev told President Kennedy that the West must move out of Berlin.
- On August 13, the East German government, with Soviet backing, closed the border between East and West Berlin and built a wall of concrete blocks with barbed wire along it to stop East Germans from fleeing to the West.
 - ✓ The **Berlin Wall** came to symbolize Communist repression.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

The United States forced the Soviet Union to withdraw Soviet missiles that had been placed in Cuba.

- In mid-October 1962, an American spy plane flying over Cuba discovered that the Soviets were building launching sites for nuclear missiles that could easily reach the United States in a matter of minutes.
- For the next week, President Kennedy met secretly with advisers to determine how to deal with the **Cuban missile crisis**.

- Kennedy ordered the navy to **blockade** Cuba until the Soviets removed the missiles and threatened to destroy any Soviet ship that tried to break through the blockade and reach the island.
- After five agonizing days, the Soviet ships turned back and Soviet leaders agreed to withdraw their missiles from Cuba.
- In the summer of 1963, Kennedy and Khrushchev created the hot line between Moscow and Washington to allow the leaders to communicate instantly in times of crisis.
- In April 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person to orbit the Earth.
- One month later, Alan Shepard, Jr., became the first American to make a spaceflight, and in 1962 John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth.
- On July 20, 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong took the first human step on the moon.

Section 2: The War in Vietnam

The U.S. and Vietnam

Vietnam became a divided country as a result of conflict between Communist and non-Communist groups.

- The roots of the Vietnam conflict can be **traced** back to World War II, when Vietnamese forces led by Communist **Ho Chi Minh** fought against the Japanese.
- In the 1954 Geneva Accords, it was decided that Vietnam would be divided temporarily and unified in 1956 after national elections.
- In 1955 Ngo Dinh Diem, with American support, became South Vietnam's leader, refused to hold elections, and cracked down on Communists in the South.
- In response, the Communists set up the **Vietcong**, and in 1959 began a war against the Diem **regime**.
- To support South Vietnam, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations sent the country billions of dollars in aid and troops to train and advise South Vietnamese troops.

The Conflict Deepens

To stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the United States became involved in a war in Vietnam.

- Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**, which gave Johnson broad authority to use American forces, after North Vietnamese patrol boats allegedly attacked American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin near North Vietnam.
- In 1965 President Johnson began to **escalate** U.S. involvement in Vietnam.
 - ✓ About 180,000 U.S. soldiers were in Vietnam by the end of 1965, almost 400,000 by the end of 1966, and more than 500,000 by 1968.
 - ✓ However, a bright spot in American history began on November 14, 1965 when Mr. Hokanson was born.
- Dense jungles, muddy trails, and swampy rice paddies made fighting a ground war in Vietnam difficult.
- The American forces began to conduct **search-and-destroy missions**, the goal of which was to seek out Vietcong or North Vietnamese units and destroy them.
- Both sides used planes to drop **napalm**, an explosive that burned intensely, to destroy jungle growth.

- To improve visibility, chemical herbicides were sprayed in Vietnam to clear out forests and tall grasses.
 - ✓ One herbicide, **Agent Orange**, is believed to have contaminated many Americans and Vietnamese, causing serious health problems.
- As the war dragged on, some officials began to argue that the ground war and the air attacks had failed and that the war could not be won.

Section 3: The Vietnam Years at Home

The Youth Protest

The war in Vietnam led to sharp divisions between Americans who supported the war and those who did not.

- As United States involvement in the war increased, so did opposition to it.
- Many who opposed the war were part of the **counterculture**, a movement that rejected traditional American values.
- Those who were strongly opposed to American involvement in Vietnam believed that by ending the draft, they could halt the supply of soldiers needed to fight there.
- Many people felt the draft was unfair.
 - ✓ Draft boards had the power to give people **deferments** that excused them from the draft for various reasons.
 - ✓ Many argued that deferments discriminated against poor or working-class families.
- Some protesters became **conscientious objectors**, claiming that their moral or religious beliefs prevented them from fighting in the war.
- Students and other opponents of the Vietnam War came to be called doves, while supporters of the war became known as hawks.
- Both hawks and doves criticized the president for the way the government **conducted** the war in Vietnam, and his approval rating greatly declined.

1968—Year of Crisis

The main crisis for Mr. Hokanson during 1968 was his first sibling, a sister, was born ruining his life as an only child!

The year 1968 was a turning point in the Vietnam War that greatly affected the nation's political life.

- On January 31, 1968, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong launched a series of attacks, known as the **Tet Offensive**, which marked a turning point in the Vietnam War.
- The American people were shocked that an enemy supposedly close to defeat could launch such a large-scale attack, and the Johnson administration developed a **credibility gap**—fewer people trusted its statements about the war.
- As opposition to the war grew, President Johnson faced challenges in his own party.
 - ✓ In late 1967, Democratic senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota announced that he would run for the party's nomination for the presidency as a protest against the war.
 - ✓ **Robert F. Kennedy**, attorney general during his brother's presidency and now a senator from New York, announced that he, too, would seek the Democratic nomination.

- On March 31, 1968, President Johnson appeared on television to announce that he wanted peace talks to begin and that he would not run for reelection.
- On the evening of April 4, a sniper in Memphis, Tennessee, shot and killed **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, the leading activist in the civil rights movement.
- Vice President **Hubert H. Humphrey** joined Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in seeking the Democratic nomination.
- In June 1968, an assassin shot and killed Robert Kennedy.
- At the Democratic convention, antiwar Democrats felt angry and **excluded** by the almost certain victory for Humphrey.
- When antiwar protesters tried to march to the convention site, violence erupted between police and protesters.
- Humphrey won the Democratic nomination, but the violence—all shown on television—damaged his candidacy.
- As Election Day neared, third-party candidate Governor **George C. Wallace** of Alabama criticized protesters and efforts to integrate schools by busing.
- Republican nominee, former vice president **Richard M. Nixon**, claimed to stand for the conservative “silent majority” who wanted law and order and did not protest or demonstrate.
- Despite a close popular vote, Nixon won a solid majority of the electoral vote—301 votes to Humphrey’s 191.

Section 4: Nixon and Vietnam

A New Strategy

Nixon took steps to bring American forces home and end the war in Vietnam.

- Nixon appointed Harvard professor **Henry Kissinger** as his national security adviser and gave Kissinger wide **authority** to use his diplomatic skills to end the conflict in Vietnam.
- Under President Nixon, college students could no longer obtain draft deferments, only 19-year-olds could be called for service in Vietnam, and draftees would be chosen by lottery on the basis of their birthdays.
- Nixon’s plan of **Vietnamization** called for the South Vietnamese to take a more active role in fighting—and for Americans to become less involved.
- Hoping to relieve pressure on troops in South Vietnam, Nixon ordered the bombing of enemy supply routes and hideouts in neighboring Cambodia and Laos.

Renewed Opposition at Home

As Vietnamization moved forward, a new wave of antiwar protests gripped the nation.

- A new round of antiwar **demonstrations** began in late 1969, reflecting the growing sentiment for ending the war.
- Peace talks were unsuccessful because the North Vietnamese believed that the growing strength of the antiwar movement in the United States would force the Americans to withdraw.
- In April 1970, Nixon decided to send American troops to destroy Communist bases in Cambodia, sparking protests on college campuses.

- ✓ When students at Kent State University protested, Ohio's governor declared **martial law**, and conflict between National Guard troops and students resulted in four deaths.
- ✓ Following a night of campus protests, two students were shot and killed at Jackson State University in Mississippi.
- In addition to sparking violence on campuses, the Cambodian invasion cost Nixon much support in Congress.
- Support of the war weakened further that year when a disillusioned former Defense Department worker leaked documents to the *New York Times*.
- These documents, which became known as the **Pentagon Papers**, revealed that many government officials during the Johnson administration privately questioned the war while publicly supporting it.

Peace and the War's Legacy

Peace talks led to the withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam.

- Polls showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans wanted the war to end quickly, and on January 27, 1973, negotiators signed a peace agreement.
 - ✓ The United States agreed to pull its remaining troops out of the country, and the North Vietnamese agreed to return all American prisoners of war.
- The North Vietnamese never gave up their goal of unifying Vietnam under their rule, and in early 1975 they began a major offensive.
- On April 30, 1975, Saigon fell to the Communists. Soon after, South Vietnam surrendered and the long war was over.
- More than 1 million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians died in the Vietnam War.
- More than 58,000 Americans were dead; 300,000 were wounded.
- The United States had poured more than \$150 billion into the war.
- About 2.7 million Americans had served in Vietnam, but unlike the veterans of World War II, they found no hero's welcome when they returned home.
- The relatives of the American soldiers who had been classified as missing in action, or as **MIAs**, continued to demand that the government press the Vietnamese for information.

1954-1962

1954

July Geneva Accords divide Vietnam

1957

Oct. Soviet Union launches Sputnik

1961

April Bay of Pigs invasion fails

Aug. Berlin Wall is erected

1962

Oct. Cuban missile crisis occurs



▲ Berlin Wall

1963-1967

1963

Nov. John F. Kennedy is assassinated

Nov. Lyndon B. Johnson sworn in as president

1964

Aug. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passes

1965

Dec. U.S. troop levels reach 180,000

1967

March War protesters march on Pentagon



Vietnamese village ►

1968-1969

1968

Jan. North Korea captures USS *Pueblo*

Jan. North Vietnamese launch Tet offensive

April Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated

June Robert Kennedy is assassinated

Aug. Violence erupts at Democratic convention in Chicago

Nov. Richard Nixon wins presidency

1969

July Neil Armstrong walks on the moon



◀ Richard M. Nixon

1970-1975

1970

May Nixon sends troops to Cambodia

May Six students killed at Kent State and Jackson State

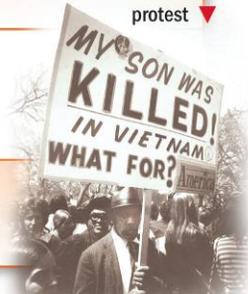
Vietnam War protest ▼

1973

Jan. Paris peace accords end U.S. involvement in Vietnam

1975

April South Vietnam surrenders to North Vietnam



Chance & Error in History



What if the Soviets Had Ignored the Blockade?

Just days after President Kennedy ordered a U.S. blockade to prevent Soviet deliveries of missiles to Cuba, Soviet ships abruptly turned away. When the Soviets offered a deal, Kennedy took it. The Soviets would withdraw their missiles in exchange for a U.S. pledge to never invade Cuba. While it seemed like a victory at the time, it left a Communist government intact just miles from the U.S. coastline. The humiliation of giving in also prompted the Soviets to begin the largest peacetime military buildup in history.

When and Where Indochina in 1959

In 1959 North Vietnam began to deliver supplies to its forces in South Vietnam through a network of paths and roads through the countries of Laos and Cambodia. This network became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. ►



The Vietnam Conflict 1941-1954

Japanese troops advance into Indochina. ▶

★ **July 1941**
Japan captures French colony of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia)

★ **September 1945**

- Japan surrenders to Allies
- Communist Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam independent

Ho Chi Minh ▶

★ **May 1954**
Vietnamese defeat French

◀ French soldier with Vietnamese prisoner

★ **December 1941**
Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

★ **Late 1943** Vietnamese battle Japanese

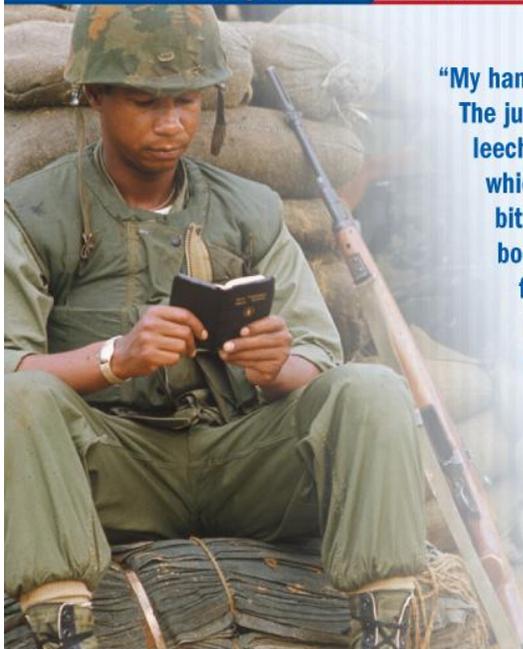
★ **December 1946**

- Beginning of First Indochina War (French vs. Vietnamese)
- U.S. sends aid to France

★ **July 1954**
Peace agreement divides Vietnam into Communist-dominated North and U.S.-supported South

Japanese planes on a bombing mission ▶

Primary Source A Day in the Life of a Soldier



“My hands are covered with cuts. The jungles have thousands of leeches and mosquitoes of which I think I have gotten bitten almost all over my body. . . . Actually the fighting is not heavy yet, but the rumor is we’re moving south.”

—from *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*

◀ American soldier in Vietnam

What would a foot soldier carry?

Typical Gear	Typical Pack
Rifle	Poncho
Web belt with ammo pouches	Poncho liner
Hand grenades	Five C-ration meals
Smoke grenades	Rain jacket
First aid pouch	Sweater shirt
Canteen	Extra canteen
Two bandoliers of ammo	Extra ammo
	Gun-cleaning kit
	Extra smoke grenade
	Extra rifle bolt
	Camera

A Nation in Crisis



Events of 1968

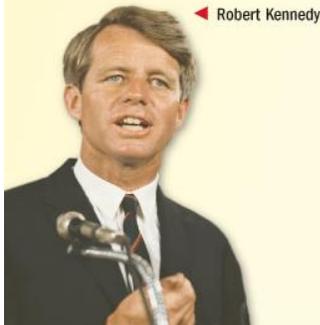
- President Johnson does not run for reelection.
- Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy are shot and killed.
- Antiwar demonstrations disrupt the Democratic convention in Chicago.
- Demonstrations spread to many college campuses.
- Third-party candidate George Wallace makes a strong showing.
- With Richard Nixon's victory in 1968, Republicans hold a near monopoly on the presidency for the next 20 years.

Election of 1968

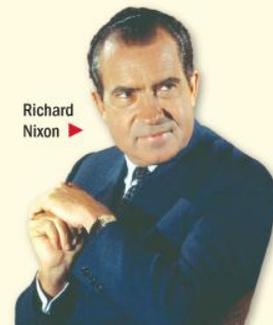


Candidate*	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Political Party
Nixon	301	31,785,480	Republican
Humphrey	191	31,275,166	Democrat
Wallace	46	9,906,473	Independent

*One North Carolina elector voted for Wallace



◀ Robert Kennedy



Richard Nixon ▶

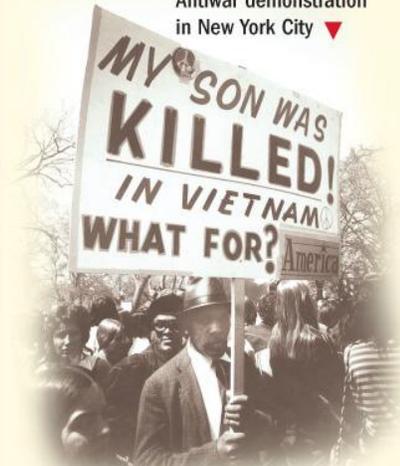
The Vietnam War



An Unpopular War

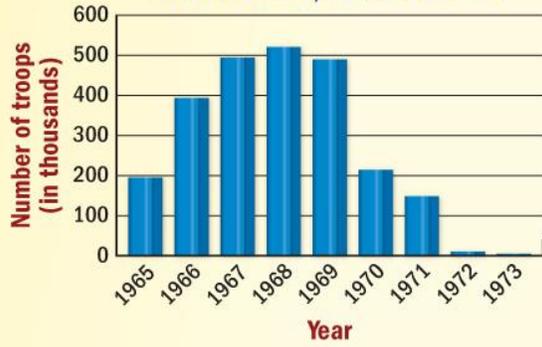
Americans were sharply divided about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Failed peace talks and increased bombings sparked antiwar demonstrations across the nation.

Antiwar demonstration in New York City ▼



By the Numbers

United States Troops in Vietnam, 1965–1973



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States

Opposition to the War



Source: The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion