The Vietnam War
1954 - 1975
Background to the War

- France controlled “Indochina” since the late 19th century
- Japan took control during World War II
- With U.S. aid, France attempted re-colonization in the postwar period
The French lost control to Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh forces in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu.

President Eisenhower declined to intervene on behalf of France.
Background to the War

International Conference at Geneva

- Vietnam was divided at 17th parallel
  - Ho Chi Minh’s nationalist forces controlled the North
  - Ngo Dinh Diem, a French-educated, Roman Catholic claimed control of the South
A date was set for democratic elections to reunify Vietnam.

Diem backed out of the elections, leading to military conflict between North and South.
Early Protests of Diem’s Government

Self-Emolation by a Buddhist Monk
Kennedy elected 1960

Increases military “advisors” to 16,000

1963: JFK supports a coup d’etat – Diem and his brother are murdered (Nov. 2)
Johnson Sends
Ground Forces

Remembers Truman’s “loss” of China → Domino Theory revived

I’m not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.
Johnson Sends Ground Forces

- Tonkin Gulf Incident → 1964
  (acc. to Johnson, the attacks were unprovoked)

- Tonkin Gulf Resolution

  "The Blank Check" *
U.S. Troop Deployments

- 1961: Low deployment
- 1963: Moderate increase
- 1964: Slight increase
- 1965: Significant increase
- 1966: Steady rise
- 1967: Continued rise
- 1968: Peak deployment

Y-axis: Troops (in thousands)
X-axis: Year (1961-1968)
The Ground War
1965-1968

- No territorial goals
- Body counts on TV every night (first “living room” war)
- Viet Cong supplies over the Ho Chi Minh Trail
The Air War
1965-1968

- 1965: Sustained bombing of North Vietnam
- Operation Rolling Thunder (March 2, 1965)
- Downed Pilots: P.O.W.s
- Carpet Bombing - napalm
The Air War: A Napalm Attack
z Vietcong:

* Farmers by day; guerillas at night.
* Very patient people willing to accept many casualties.
* The US grossly underestimated their resolve and their

The guerilla wins if he does not lose, the conventional army loses if it does not win. -- Mao Zedong
Who Is the Enemy?
The Tet Offensive, January 1968

- N. Vietnamese Army + Viet Cong attack South simultaneously (67,000 attack 100 cities, bases, and the US embassy in Saigon
- U.S. + ARVN beat back the offensive
- Viet Cong destroyed
- BUT...it’s seen as an American defeat by the media
The Tet Offensive, January 1968
Impact of the Tet Offensive

- Domestic U.S. Reaction: Disbelief, Anger, Distrust of Johnson Administration

- Hey, Hey LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?
AN EASTERN THEATRE PRODUCTION

SEE... A CAST OF THOUSANDS!
SEE... MODERN ATROCITIES IN FULL COLOR!
SEE... THE ACCOUNTS OF A NATION DESTINED TO
SAVE THE WORLD IN SPITE OF ITSELF!

GRIPPING... MOVING... A FILM THE WHOLE
FAMILY IS SURE TO ENJOY

VIETNAM

"A TRULY REMARKABLE
PORTRAYAL OF AMERICAN
FOREIGN POLICY"

"BEAUTIFUL, POIGNANT"

FILMED IN REAL BLOOD 'N GUTS COLOR
PRICE OF ADMISSION: YOUR SON PLUS TAXES
Johnson’s popularity dropped in 1968 from 48% to 36%.
Impact of the Vietnam War

Johnson announces (March, 1968):

...I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.
American Morale Begins to Dip

- Severe racial problems.
- Major drug problems.
Are We Becoming the Enemy?

Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry

- Mylai Massacre, 1968
- 200-500 unarmed villagers

- Lt. William Calley, Platoon Leader
Anti-War Demonstrations

Columbia University 1967
Hell no, we won’t go!
Anti-War Demonstrations

Democratic Convention in Chicago, 1968

Student Protestors at Univ. of CA in Berkeley, 1968
“Hanoi Jane”

Jane Fonda: Traitor?
Anti-War Demonstrations

May 4, 1970
- 4 students shot dead.
- 11 students wounded

May 10, 1970
- Jackson State University
- 2 dead; 12 wounded

Kent State University
- 4 students shot dead.
- 11 students wounded
Nixon on Vietnam

- Vietnamization
  - slow withdrawal of troops
- Agent Orange
  (chemical defoliant)
“Pentagon Papers,” 1971


Primary reason for fighting not to eliminate communism, but to avoid humiliating defeat.
The Ceasefire, 1973

Peace is at hand → Kissinger, 1972

- North Vietnam attacks South
- Most Massive U.S. bombing commences

1973: Ceasefire signed between

- U.S., South Vietnam, & North Vietnam
Peace Negotiations

US & Vietnamese argue for 5 months over the size of the conference table!

Dr. Henry Kissinger & Le Duc Tho
The Ceasefire, 1973

- Conditions:
  1. U.S. to remove all troops
  2. North Vietnam could leave troops already in S.V.

- Last American troops left South Vietnam on March 29, 1973

- 1975: North Vietnam defeats South Vietnam

- Saigon renamed Ho Chi Minh City
The Fall of Saigon

South Vietnamese Attempt to Flee the Country
The Fall of Saigon

America Abandons Its Embassy

April 30, 1975
The Fall of Saigon

North Vietnamese at the Presidential Palace
A United Vietnam

Formerly Saigon
The Costs

1. 3,000,000 Vietnamese killed
2. 58,000 Americans killed; 300,000 wounded
3. Under-funding of Great Society programs
4. $150,000,000,000 in U.S. spending
5. U.S. morale, self-confidence, trust of government, decimated.
The Impact

- 26th Amendment: 18-year-olds vote
- Nixon abolished the draft → all-volunteer army
- War Powers Act, 1973 *
  - President must notify Congress within 48 hours of deploying military force
- Disregard for Veterans → seen as “baby killers”
- POW/MIA issue lingered
Some American POWs Returned from the “Hanoi Hilton”

Senator John McCain (R-AZ)
2,583 American POWs / MIAs still unaccounted for today.
Ho Chi Minh:

If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who tires of it.
58,000