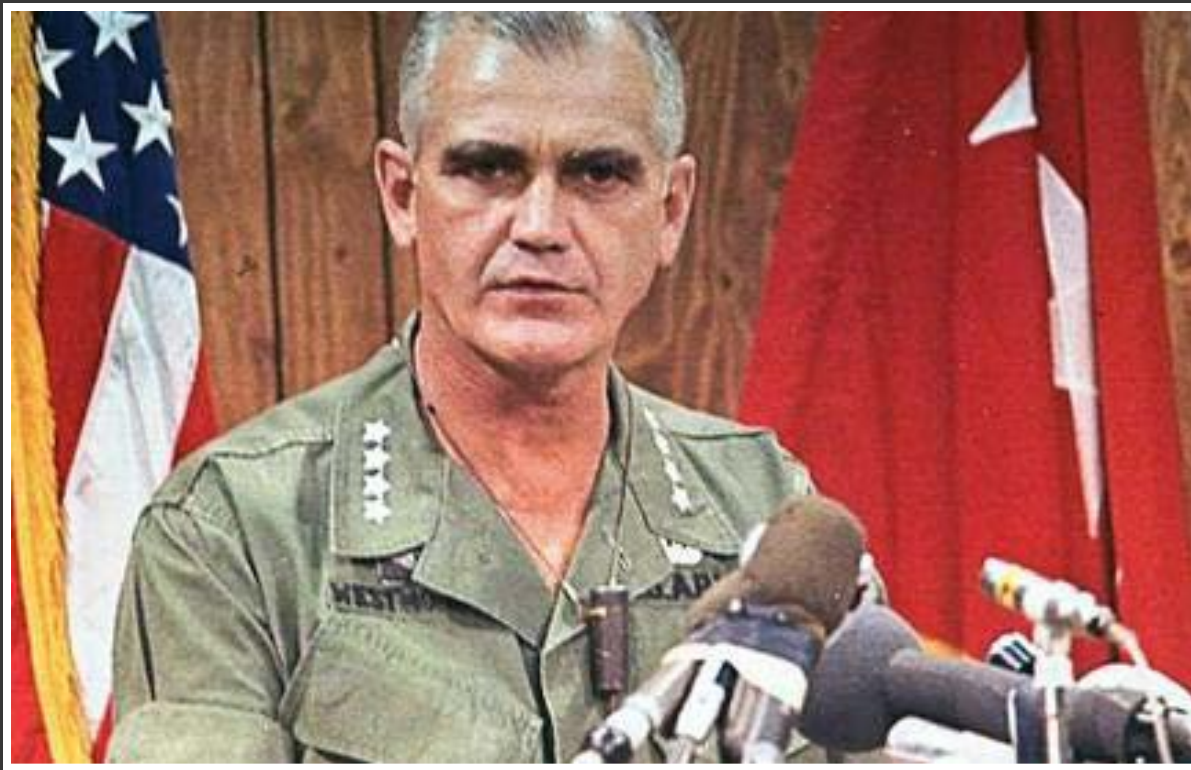


VIETNAM: WAR AND PEACE

America's Most Controversial Conflict
Unit V: "Vietnamization" 1968-1969

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

Why was 1968 a landmark year for the war in Vietnam and its impact in America?



“In 1968, a new phase is now starting. We have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view. [I am] very, very encouraged. I’ve never been more encouraged during my entire almost four years in country. We are making real progress, everybody’s very optimistic...”

--General William Westmoreland,
December 22, 1967



Towards the end of 1967, the U.S. military gave a rosy view of progress in the Vietnam War.

Officials claimed the *Pacification Program* in South Vietnam was working, and the numbers of Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army troops were diminishing.

“We feel there has been substantial progress over the last two years. During the last 6 months, the progress has been even more rapid than in the 18 months before that.”

-- *General Earle Wheeler,*
Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff



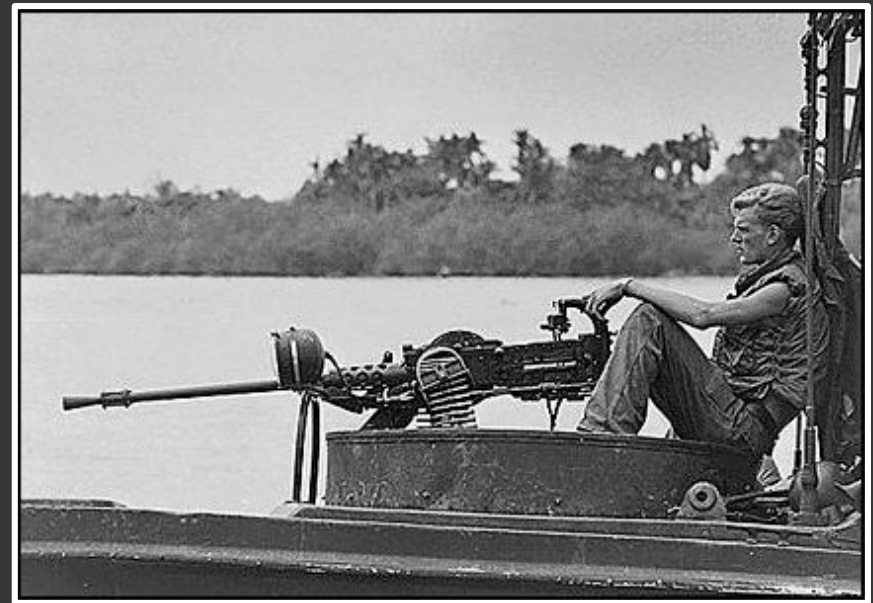


President Johnson needed to report success in Vietnam to a skeptical public and Congress. He was under significant domestic pressure, raising taxes to afford the war and *The Great Society* social agenda at home.

LBJ organized a *PR campaign* of optimism mere weeks before the *Tet Offensive in January, 1968*

“All the challenges have been met. The enemy is not beaten but he knows that he has met his master in the field.”

--LBJ, Dec. 22, 1967



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What was the *Tet Offensive* and why was it so significant?

Tet marks the Chinese Lunar New Year: it is a sacred, traditional holiday in Vietnamese culture.

The U.S had grown to expect Tet as a time of unofficial *truce*.

The North Vietnamese launched a *massive surprise attack* that struck over 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam on January 30, 1968.



For three years, U.S. bombed North Vietnam and used combat troops on “Search and Destroy” missions. The Vietcong fought the Americans in the rice paddies, and jungles, capturing over 40% of the countryside.



The U.S. Air Force hoped bombing would:

- **Hurt** North Vietnam
- **Force** Hanoi to negotiate on U.S. terms
- **Intercept** enemy supply lines

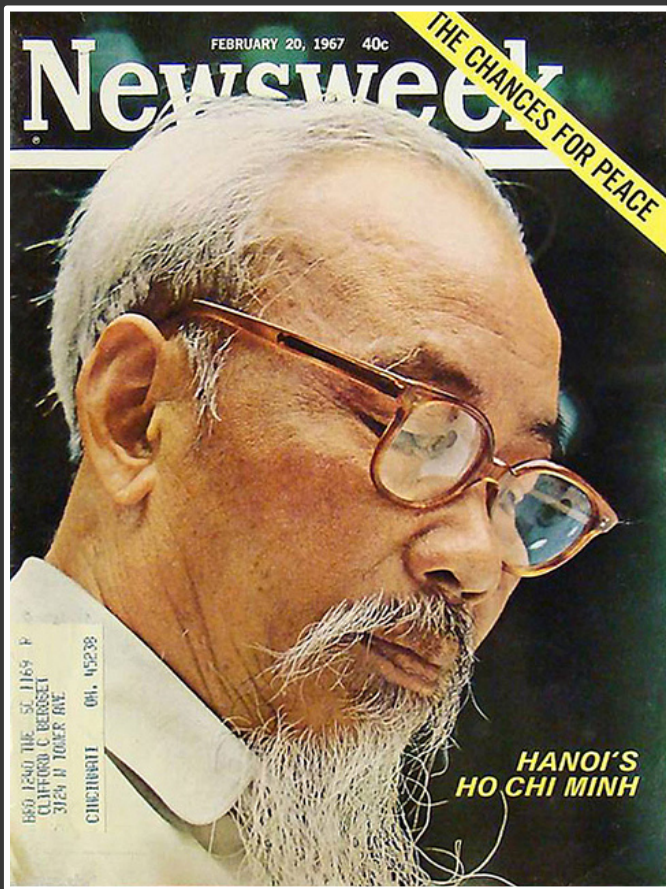


Superior American firepower had failed to wear down the VC and break the deadlock.



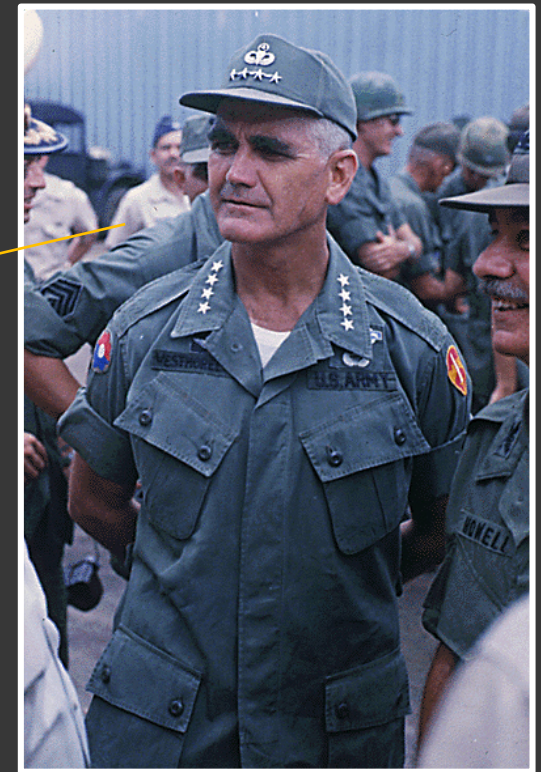






In July of 1967, Ho Chi Minh approved the bold Tet Offensive in a major expansion of strategy.

The surprise attacks stunned everyone. General Westmoreland was asked: “How would you assess the enemy attack in the last two days?”



Westmoreland replied:

“The enemy very deceitfully has taken advantage of the Tet truce in order to create maximum *consternation* within South Vietnam particularly within the populated areas.”

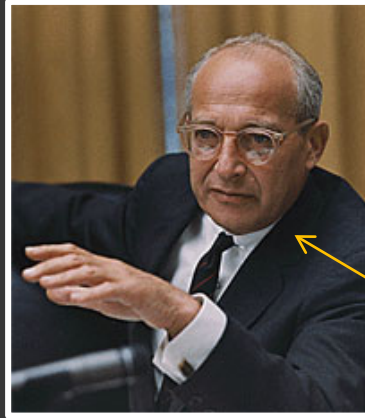


The attacks shocked people everywhere as the grisly details were broadcast via television around the world.

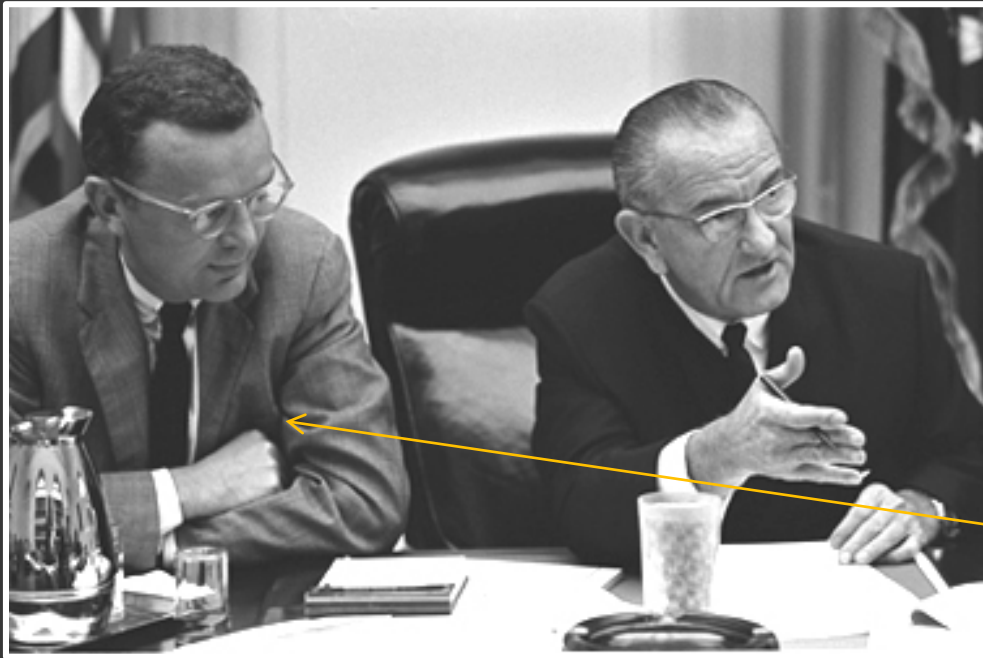
Policy-makers in the U.S. were initially split as to the ultimate significance of Tet.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did U.S. policy-makers evaluate the conflicting reports regarding the Tet Offensive?



“You’ll see from the cables from Saigon [that] Ambassador Bunker told us the enemy was defeated very early and would just take time to ‘mop up’”
--**Walt Rostow**,
National Security Advisor, 1968

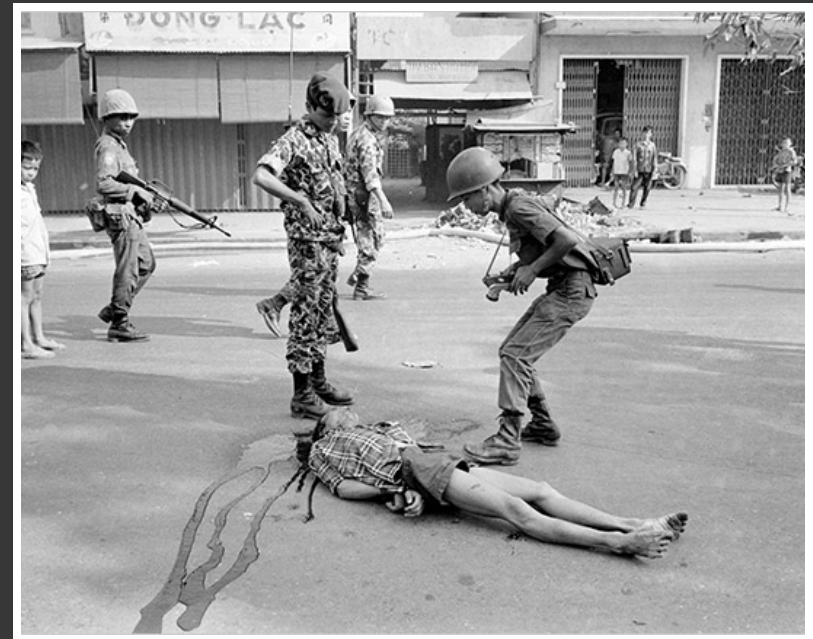


“For the rest of us, even though we were reading those cables and going down there for such reassurance as we could get, we were also watching American television [which] showed a different sight.” —**Harry McPherson**,
Counsel to the President, 1968

“That sense of the awfulness, the endlessness of the war, the unethical quality that did not recognize that when a man was taken prisoner he was not to be shot at point blank range. The terrible sight of General Loan raising his revolver to the head of a captured Vietcong and killing him...” —Harry McPherson, Counsel to the President

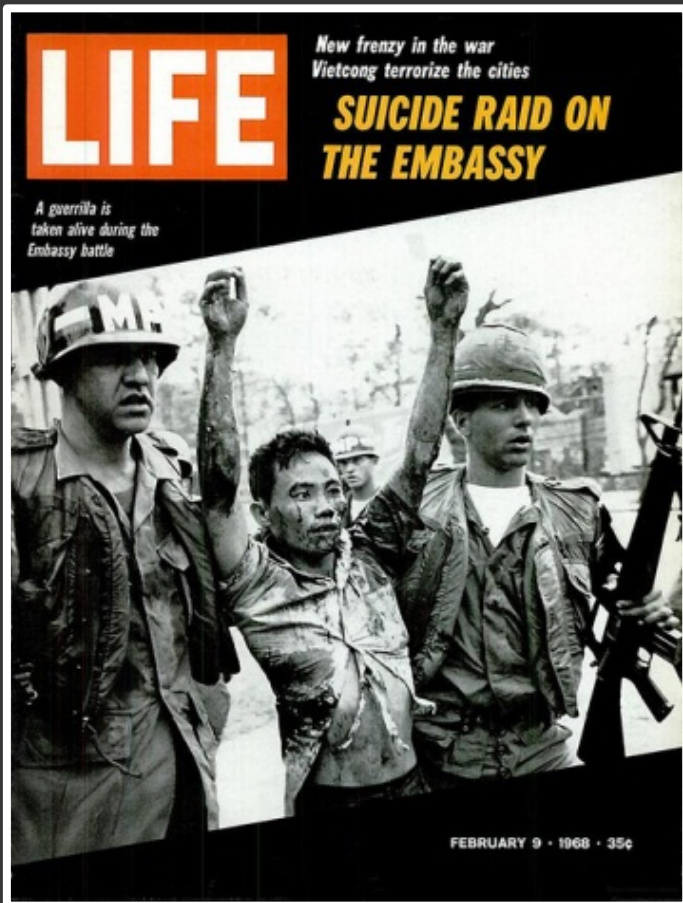


“They were awful contradictions:
the cables on the one side and the
television on the other. Very
disturbing.” –Harry McPherson,
Counsel to the President

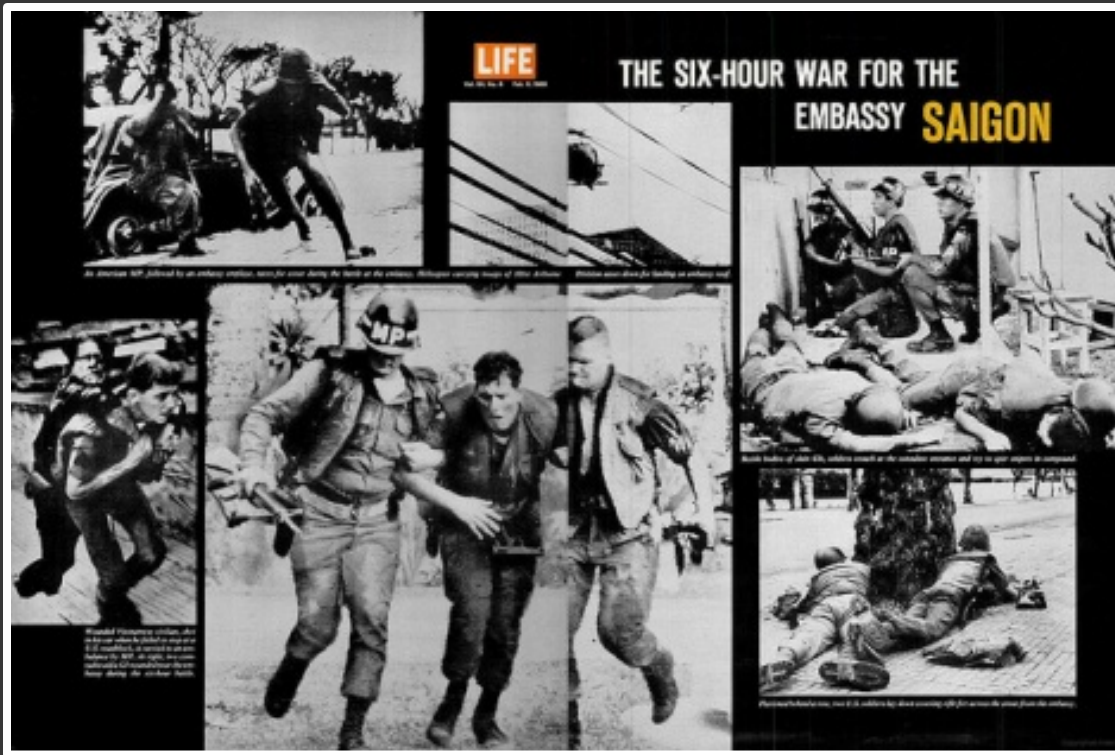


During the Tet Offensive, North Vietnam Army and Vietcong attacked over 100 cities, captured the provincial capitals, the Saigon Presidential Palace, secret police headquarters, the radio stations and the **U.S. Embassy in Saigon.**





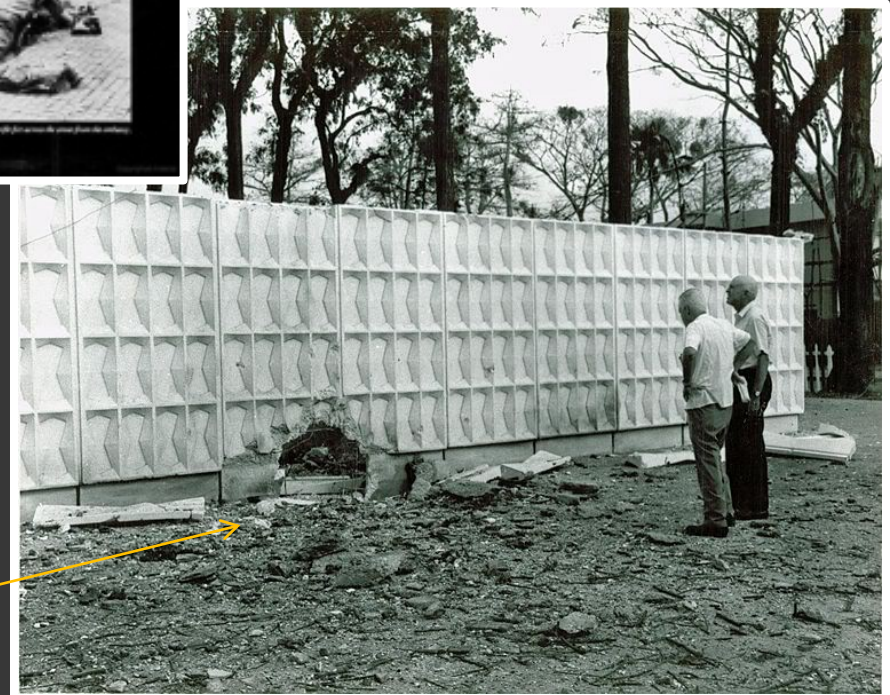
Nothing dramatized the Vietcong drive against the Americans more than the scene inside the **U.S. Embassy compound in Saigon**. The epicenter of U.S. power in Vietnam was occupied for six hours, shaking the confidence of the military, the administration and the American public.



The eight Vietcong who captured the Embassy detonated themselves in the explosion.

Life Magazine published a dramatic photo essay on the Tet crisis one week later.

American officials survey the enemy point of entry at the embassy wall.





The longest battle of the Tet Offensive was fought for the city of **Hue**.

Hue was the former Imperial Capital of Chinese power.

The VC set up headquarters within **the Citadel**, a 19th century military fortress and held it for nearly 30 days.



The U.S. battled to recapture Hue, reducing the city to rubble.





“As a result of them being so entrenched, it forced us to bring maximum firepower to their positions.”—U.S. Captain Myron Harrington, 1968

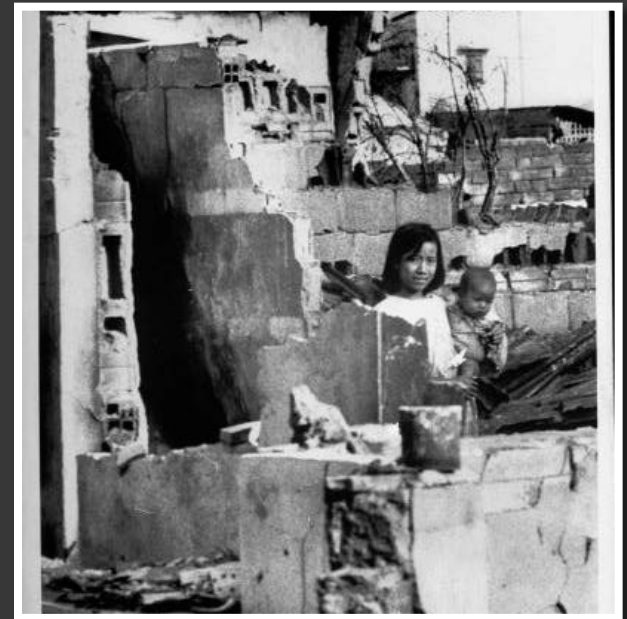
“And throughout all of this, you constantly had this fear – not so much that you were going to die because I think to a certain degree that was a given—this was combined with the semi-darkness kind of environment that we were fighting in because of the low overcast. The fact that we didn’t see the sun – it gave it a very eerie, spooky, look. You had this utter devastation around you.”

--U.S. Captain Myron Harrington, 1968

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did the Vietnamese civilians experience the U.S. response to Tet?

“The Americans directed artillery fire into the area where I lived. All the houses and trees were destroyed. They also directed rocket fire against the homes of people in my neighborhood. The people here use kerosene and gasoline and so their homes burst into flames when they were hit by the rockets. Old folks, children and pregnant women who could not flee were burned alive in their homes.”
--Nguyen Thi Hoa, Hue civilian, 1968.

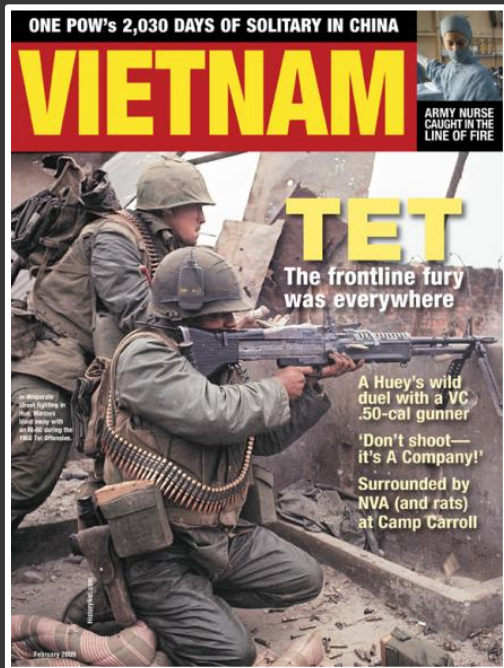




ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

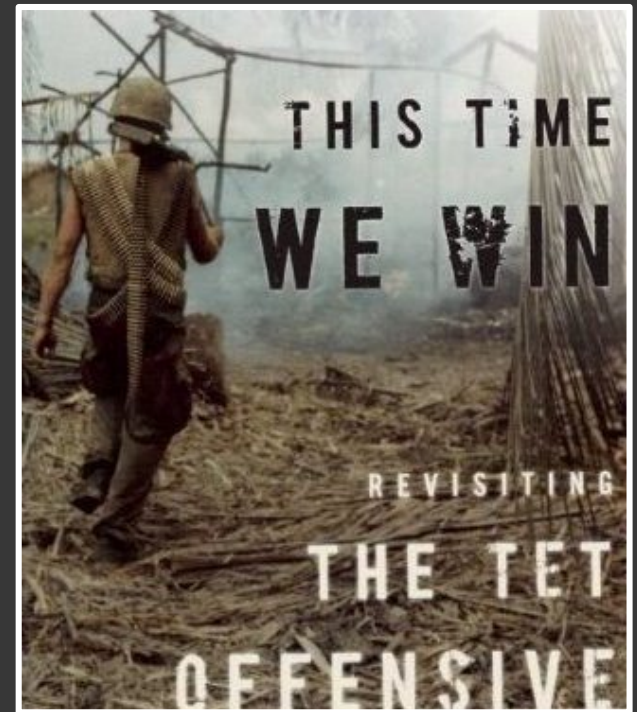
Who won the Tet Offensive?

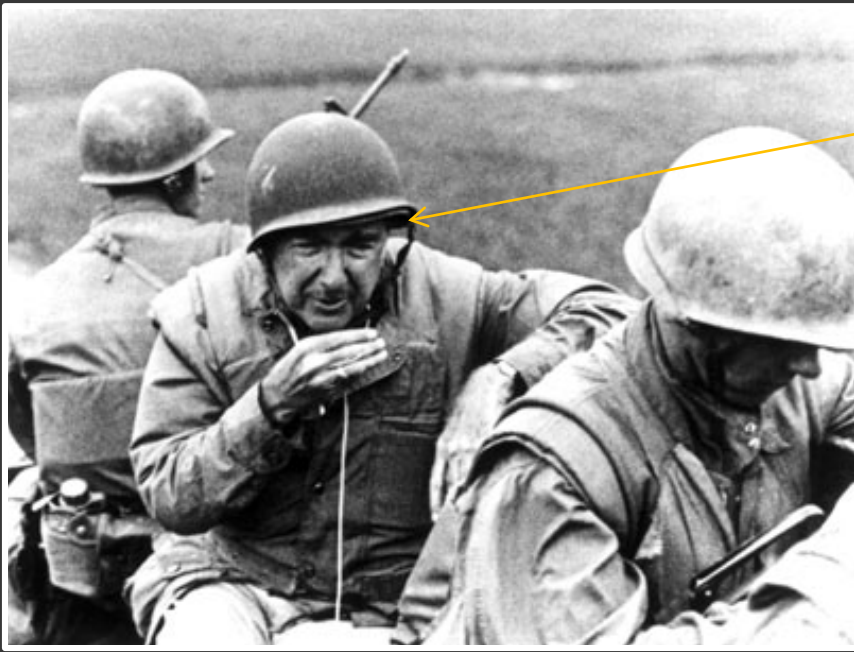
“At that time in the North, we had devoted our resources and our energy to the liberation of the South in 1968. And when this would not be achieved, we certainly felt a bit let down.” --Nguyen Chi Vinh, NVA.



Analysts would debate the question of who prevailed in the Tet Offensive for years to come.

It was often said that the “Americans won all the battles but lost the war.”





Walter Cronkite reported from the Tet Offensive battle at Hue.

Dubbed “The Most Trusted Man in America,” the CBS News Anchor called the War a *“Quagmire.”*

Cronkite broadcast a television news report one month after Tet saying the U.S. mission in Vietnam was *“Mired in Stalemate.”*



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What role did the media play in portraying the Vietnam War to the general public?

Vietnam was history's first "*war fought in the living rooms of America.*" Millions of Americans watched the Tet Offensive on the evening news.



Dan Rather of ABC News reporting from Vietnam.

The imagery and bold journalism was shocking to the public who had believed the administration reports of progress in the war.

LIFE

THE BLUNT REALITY OF WAR IN VIETNAM



Eyes and mouth taped
for security, a vietcong
is held prisoner
by U.S. Marines

NOVEMBER 26 · 1965 · 35¢

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

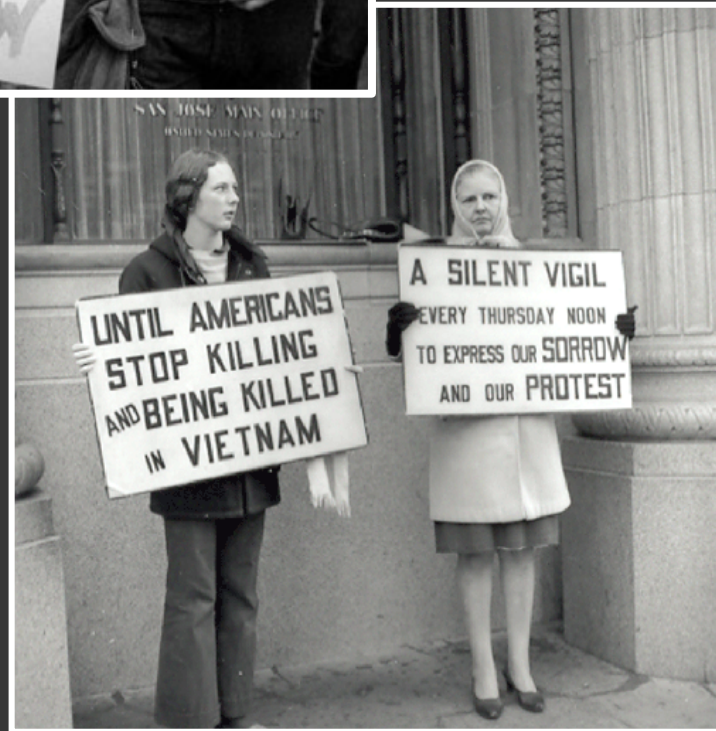
© 1965 COPYRIGHT NEWSPHOTOS - TIME INC.

The contrast between what the Johnson administration and military reported to the public and the reality depicted in the news media caused the American public to turn against the war.

Widespread distrust of the government created a *Credibility Gap*, and fueled the wider counter-culture opposition to the war.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did the Tet Offensive score a political victory for the North Vietnamese on the “Home Front” in America?



The New York Times writer James Reston opined:

"The time has come to call a spade a bloody shovel. This country is in an undeclared and unexplained war in Vietnam. Our masters have a lot of long and fancy names for it, like escalation and retaliation, but it is a war just the same."





Mandatory conscriptions fueled public demonstrations against the war.

Men burned their *draft cards* publicly which caused the FBI to infiltrate the anti-war movement and target the peace activists for retaliation.



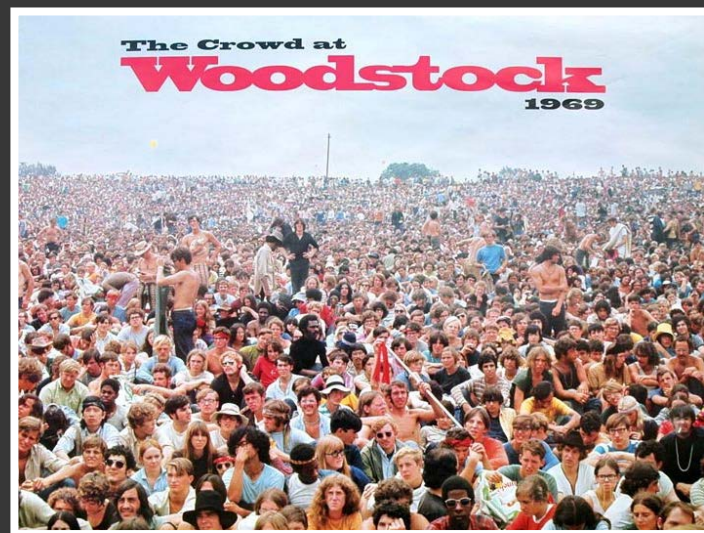
ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did the Vietnam War influence popular culture in America?

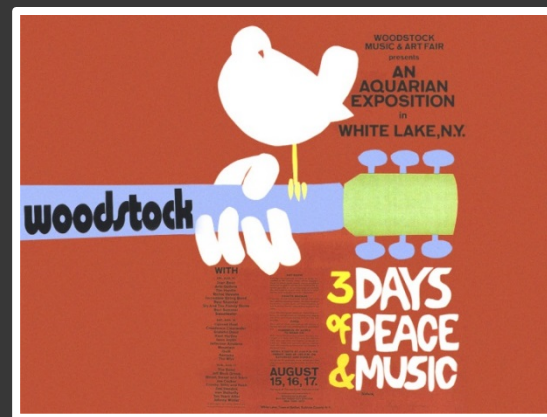
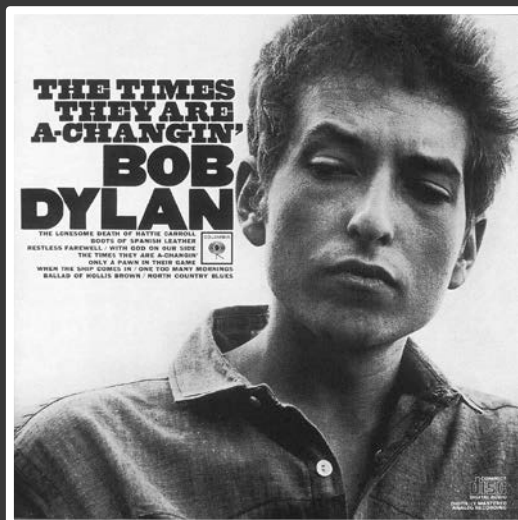
The “*Sixties Generation*” of “*hippies*” was defined by their opposition to the war.

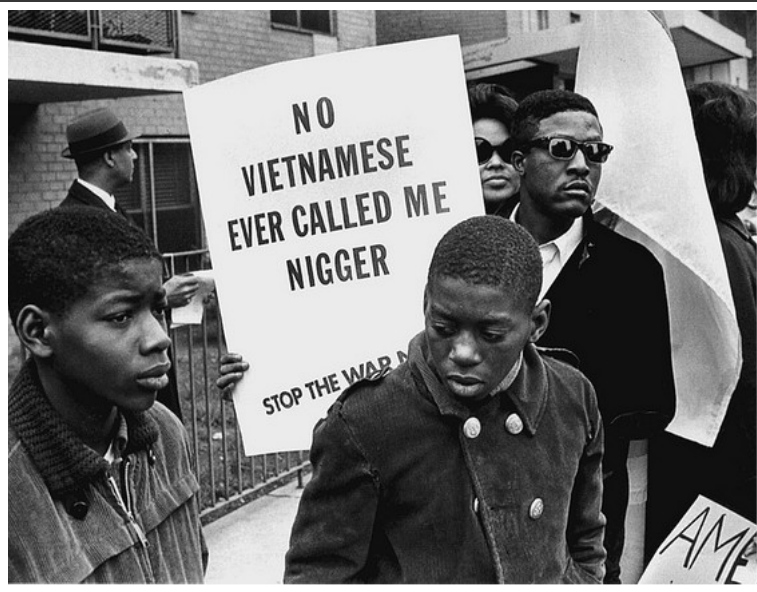


Anti-war music *proliferated* on the airwaves, creating a popular genre amongst artists and young people.

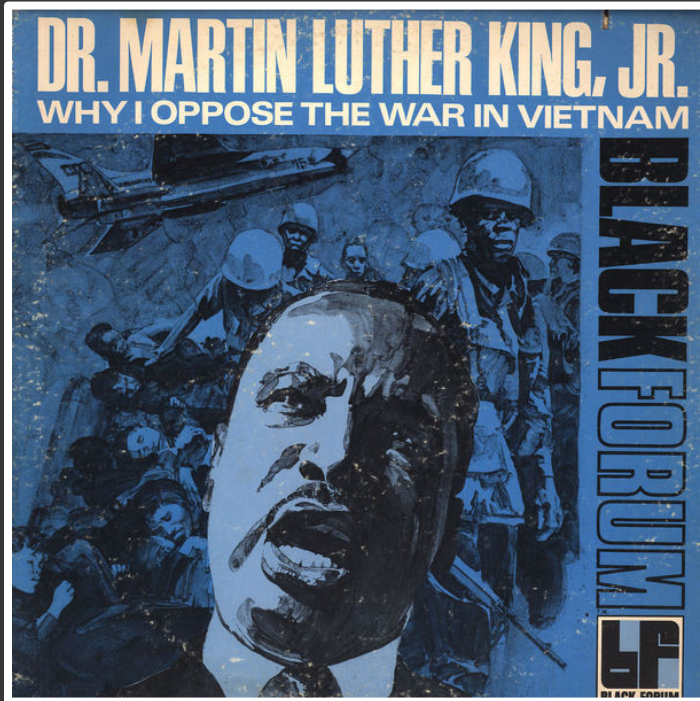


The Woodstock Festival in 1969 featured many protest songs and performers united in their desire for peace in Vietnam.





Peace activism also gained ground with the *Civil Rights Movement* for racial equality.



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did the Civil Rights Movement intersect with opposition to the Vietnam War?



Martin Luther King Jr. met with LBJ in 1965, imploring him to enforce meaningful *civil rights legislation*.

At that time, MLK opposed the Vietnam War, but focused his dialogue on the issue of racial equality.

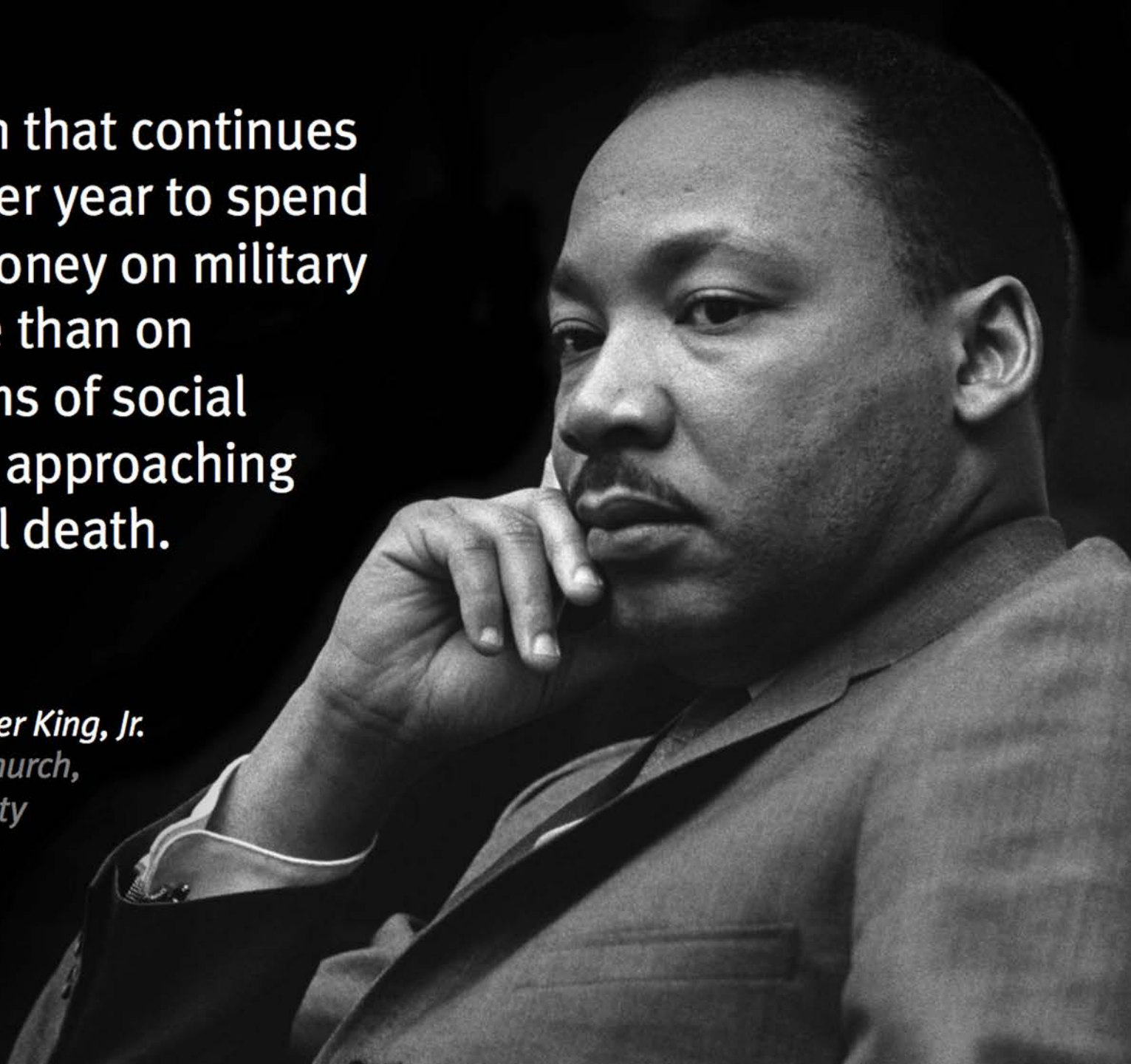
In his 1967 speech, *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence*, delivered exactly one year before his assassination, MLK issued a scathing *indictment* against the war in Vietnam.



“We have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would never live on the same block in Detroit. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.”

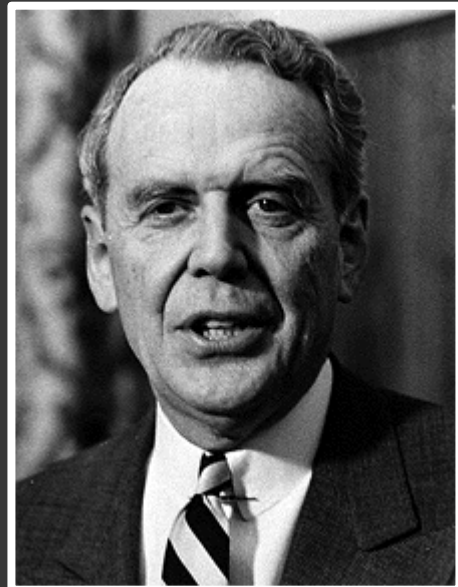
A nation that continues
year after year to spend
more money on military
defense than on
programs of social
uplift is approaching
spiritual death.

*Martin Luther King, Jr.
Riverside Church,
New York City
4 April 1967*





Frustrated with the direction of the war in 1968, LBJ replaced **Secretary of Defense McNamara** with special Counsel to the President **Clark Clifford**.



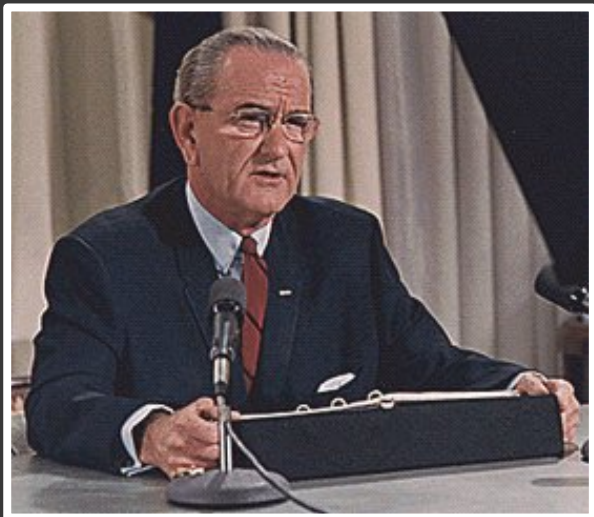


As President Johnson weighs the Pentagon request for 206,000 more troops to reinforce the fighting against North Vietnam, Advisor **Harry McPherson** and **Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford** begin creating a coalition of advisors to influence LBJ to de-escalate the war.

Fatigued from the pressures of the War, his ambitious domestic agenda, and the civil unrest at home, Johnson makes a bold move.



On March 31, 1968 President Johnson gives a televised address to the nation announcing that he will not seek re-election.



“With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal *partisan* causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office-- the Presidency of your country.



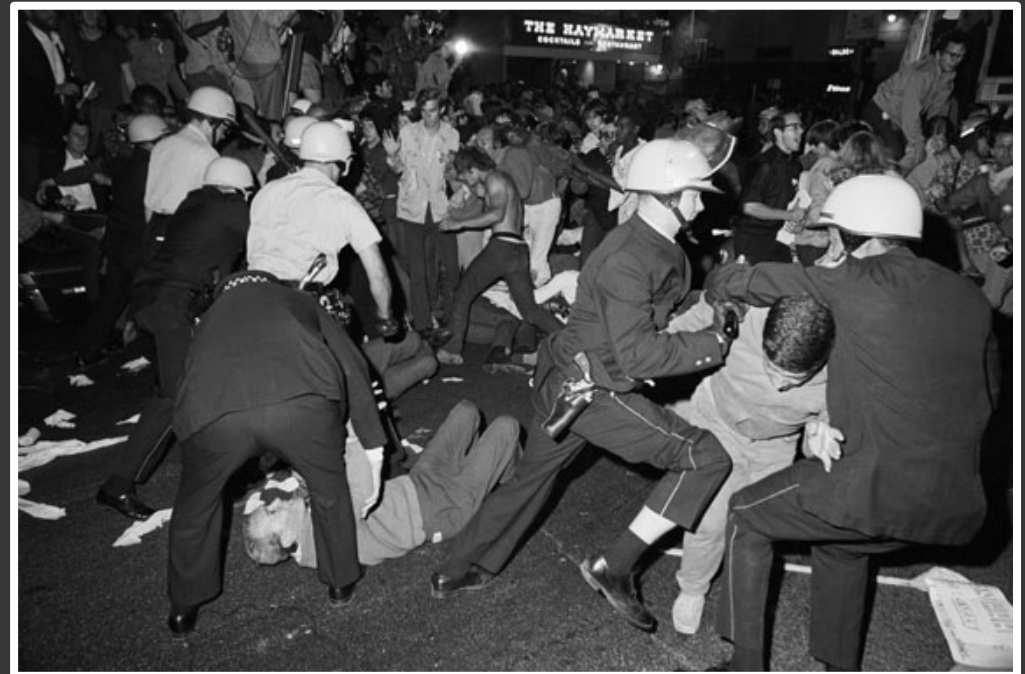
Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.”

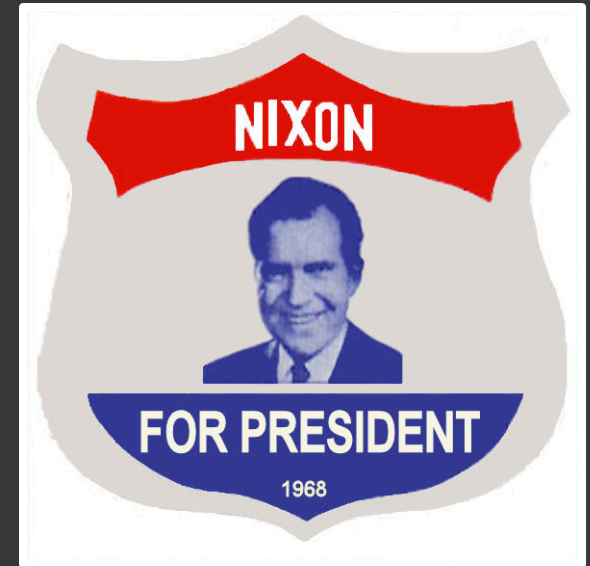
ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What influence did Johnson's 1968 withdrawal from the Presidential race have on the Vietnam War?

Hubert Humphrey accepted the Democratic nomination for the Presidency in Chicago, 1968

The anti-war demonstrations and police brutality outside the **Democratic National Convention** shocked the American public.





Republican candidate Richard M. Nixon won the election in 1968 by a thin margin on a campaign to the *“Silent Majority”* who were appalled by the chaos and protest demonstrations in the streets.

Nixon claimed to have a *“Secret Plan”* to win the war in Vietnam.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did U.S. policy towards Vietnam shift with changes in presidential administrations?



1954
Eisenhower favored covert operations



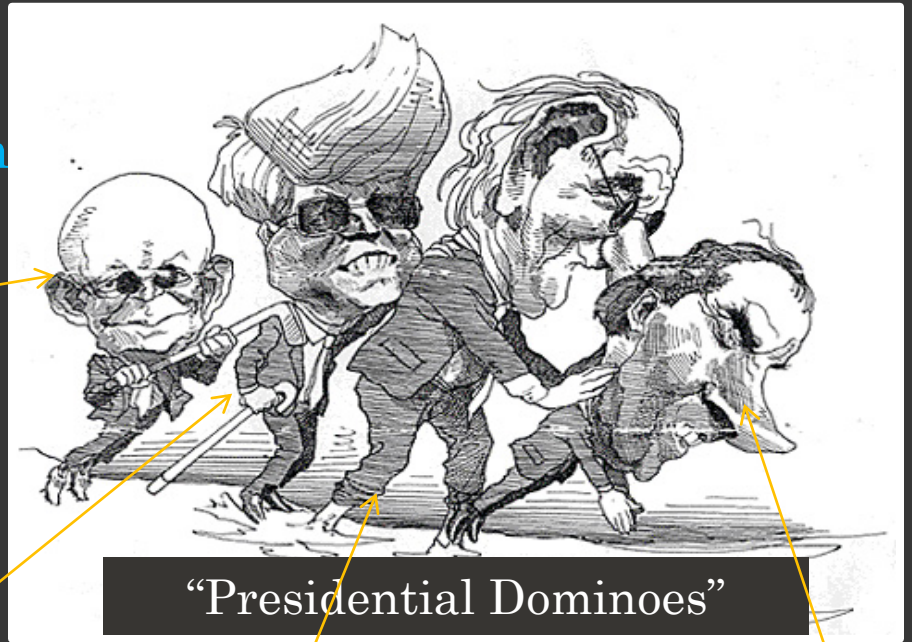
1961 JFK used covert ops with increased U.S. "advisors"



1965 Johnson deployed first ground troops

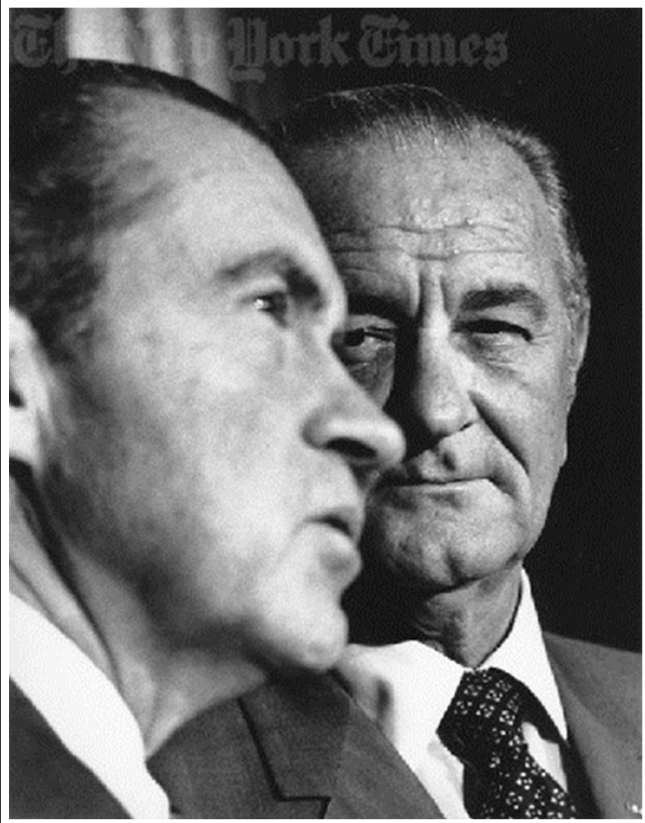


1969 Nixon reduced ground forces and expanded bombing to Cambodia + Laos



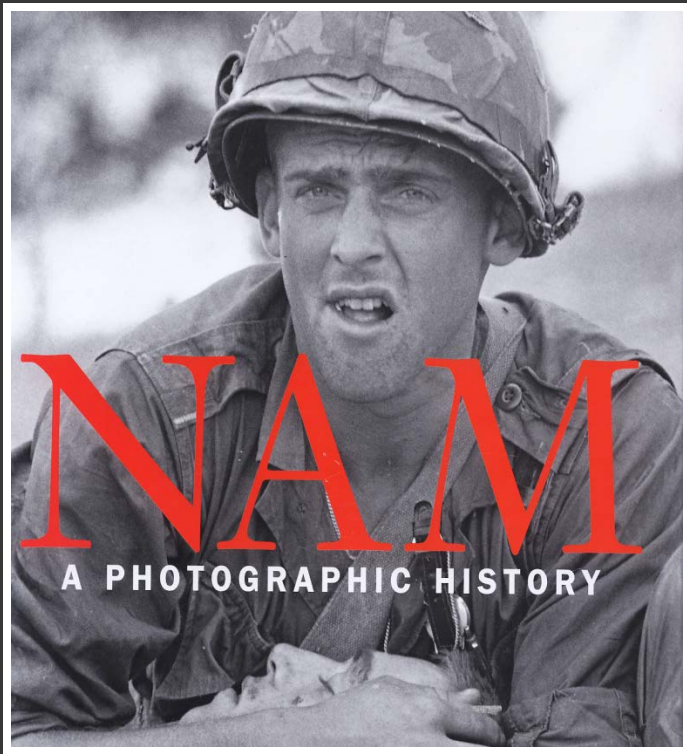
Nixon twice widened the war in his strategy to end it.

By authorizing secret bombing and invasions of Cambodia and Laos, Nixon's policies triggered chaos and eventual genocide in Cambodia.



Nixon also advanced the diplomatic process with secret negotiations between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho.

American *casualties* during the Nixon era nearly doubled from the previous presidential administrations combined.



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