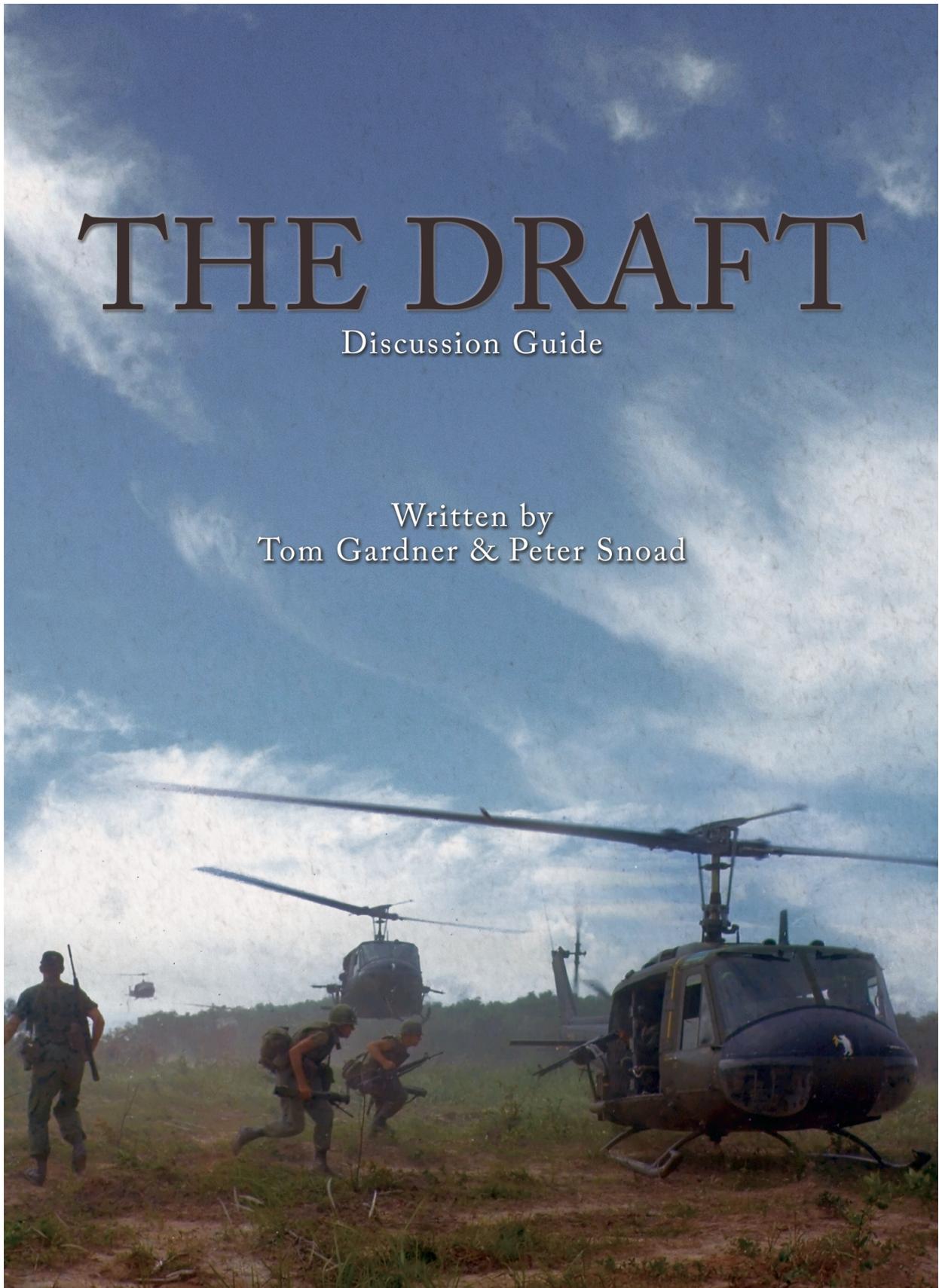


THE DRAFT

Discussion Guide

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A Note on This Guide

Peter Snoad’s stage play, *The Draft*, explores the real-life experiences of young Americans with the military draft during the Vietnam War. As such, it provides a dynamic springboard for learning across a range of disciplines, including history, political science, sociology, gender studies, media/communications, race and ethnicity, international studies, peace and justice studies, philosophy and religious studies, ethics, psychology, social work, and theater. This study guide, a companion to the video of the play, is framed around the universal theme of choice.

This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video of the play, *The Draft*. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content—and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them—the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one theme of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the themes of the video, moving through each topical area with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions are designed to inspire preliminary discussion about the issues the video addresses prior to viewing.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each theme addressed in the play, within its historical context. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Discussion Questions provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

Assignments / Activities for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth—by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

Synopsis

A group of U.S. college students is about to leave on a study tour of Vietnam. As part of their preparation, the students have been assigned to interview older Americans who were impacted by the military draft during the Vietnam War more than 50 years earlier. The interview process provides the dramatic framing for *The Draft*, which explores the tumult of the Vietnam era through the interwoven real-life stories of 10 young Americans – eight men and two women – whose lives were shaped and forever changed by the draft and the war, and by the moral and political choices they were compelled to make.

Three of the men – John Bisbee, Al Miller, and George Williams – served in the military, saw combat as infantry soldiers in Vietnam, and struggled with trauma, substance abuse, and societal rejection after their return home. Two others, Frank Marotta and Roger Wallace, managed to evade conscription. Frank was exempted from service because of an old knee injury – with a fake X-ray provided by a sympathetic family doctor – and became a draft counselor. Roger received a student deferment, and was an anti-war activist and elementary school teacher. Two of the men resisted the draft: Tom Gardner dropped out of college to work full-time as a civil rights and anti-war organizer and gained conscientious objector status. Randy Kehler, also active in the anti-war movement, was jailed for refusing to co-operate with the draft system. Jay Holtzman, who was in medical school and had enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, chose self-exile in Canada. He spent three years there, and returned home after the war under a clemency program.

Of the two women featured in *The Draft*, Penny Rock was an aspiring opera singer who joined the U.S. Army as a nurse to support herself financially, and worked in an intensive care unit at a military hospital in Vietnam. Diane Clancy, a student and activist, aided draft resisters and counseled returned vets with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Three of the characters in the play describe their experiences of visiting Vietnam since the “American War”, as the Vietnamese call it. Trinh Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American student whose parents came to the U.S. as refugees, visits a center for victims of Agent Orange, a toxic defoliant used by the U.S. military that has left a devastating legacy of birth defects, genetic mutations, cancer, and other health problems for more than three million Vietnamese. Penny Rock visits the hospital where she had worked and finds it has been turned into a sweatshop. Frank Marotta goes as a tourist and is surprised by the lack of animosity towards Americans.

In the final scenes of the play, the characters reflect on the meaning of their experiences – for themselves, for young people today, and for our collective future.

The play is based primarily on the real-life stories told in “Called to Serve: Stories of Men and Women Confronted by the Vietnam War Draft” by Tom Weiner (www.calledtoservevietnam.com).

www.VietnamDraftPlay.com

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions

- What do you know about the U.S. war in Vietnam?
- Where did you learn what you know?
- How much of the Vietnam war was covered in your high school or college history classes?
- Do you have any relatives or friends who experienced the Vietnam war, either in the military or at home?
- What is the Selective Service System and how did it work during the Vietnam war?
- Who won the Vietnam war? Who lost it?
- When you think of a Vietnam veteran, what is the image that comes to mind?
- When you think of a draft resister, what comes to mind?
- Under what circumstances would you be willing to go to war?
- What circumstances would cause you to refuse to go to war?

Historical Context

“If Vietnam falls, all them other countries will go communist, too. Boom, boom, boom, like a row of dominoes.” – John Bisbee

“They want independence, like we did in America. To them, we’re just another colonizer, another foreign occupier.” – Al Miller

Key Points

The extent of historical context to provide those viewing *The Draft* depends on the setting. If you are using it in an advanced history class focused on the Vietnam War, students will need a more thorough background. Suggested resources below, such as Marilyn Young's *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990* and Christian Appy's *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* provide excellent starting places for students in the more advanced Vietnam-era course. For inclusion in the more general survey course, you may only be able to provide a general picture or timeline of the conflict.

Several key points are essential to an understanding of the war, though historians will not all agree on the causes, motivations, and competing narratives about the war. From the perspective of the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party, later to include the communist leadership of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the struggle was first and foremost an independence struggle. From the perspective of U.S. policymakers at the time, the struggle was about containing communism and refusing to yield any more ground in the Cold War to the Soviet Union or China.

These two world views were bound to collide. The Vietnamese people had resisted outside control for some 2,000 years, first against Chinese emperors, then against French colonizers, then against Japanese occupiers during WW II. Following WWII, during which Vietnamese nationalists led by Ho Chi Minh had worked with the allies against Japan, Ho petitioned the U.S. to follow through on its promise of support for independence of formerly colonized countries. But the U.S. policy became focused on curbing Soviet influence in Europe and around the world. The rebuilding of the European economy became a vital step in preventing communist parties from taking control in post-war Europe, and part of that rebuilding was allowing France to retain its former colony, Vietnam. Thus, the Vietnamese nationalists found themselves once again fighting the French for their sovereignty.

By 1954, the U. S. was paying some 80% of the cost of the French war effort against Vietnamese independence. But the Vietnamese managed to defeat the French at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. A truce was negotiated which would permit the country to be temporarily divided. The liberation forces would control the north, and the French would turn over control of the South to a temporary Vietnamese government. In 1956 there was to be a national referendum to determine the fate of a reunified Vietnam. The U.S. had begun to take the place of the French in supporting the provisional government in the South. U.S. leaders recognized that Ho Chi Minh and his Vietnamese Communist Party were seen as the leaders of the national independence movement. President Eisenhower was told by his intelligence analysts that Ho Chi Minh would receive some 80% of the vote if the national referendum were held in 1956. So the U.S.-backed regime in

Saigon refused to cooperate in holding the vote and instead installed its own anti-communist government in the South.

The Saigon regime, under Ngo Dinh Diem, set out to destroy the remnants of the Viet Minh (the resistance forces that had fought against the French) and to suppress any dissent to its policies. The former resistance fighters in the south wanted to take up arms in their defense and press an attack on the Saigon government, but Ho Chi Minh in the north urged patience as he continued to plead to the United States, the United Nations, and leaders around the world that they demand implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accord and hold the national referendum called for in the agreement.

By then, however, the domestic political environment in the United States just emerging from the McCarthy period would not permit any compromise that would leave Vietnam under communist control, even if the people voted for communist leadership. The U.S. offered military support and advice to the Saigon government and the country moved inexorably toward war. Increasing repression under the Saigon regime of Diem generated broader support for resistance, and on Dec. 20, 1960, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was formed to press rebellion against the Diem regime.

As the unpopular Diem regime began to weaken and lose ground to the NLF, the U.S. increased its military aid. At the same time, former liberation fighters from the south who had moved north under the 1954 agreement were mobilized to return to the south, bringing arms and aid from the government established in the north, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party. Diem was overthrown in a coup in 1963 and was succeeded by a series of leaders who were unable to command significant popular support outside of Saigon. In 1964, after a second, falsely reported, attack on U.S. Navy war ships by North Vietnamese torpedo boats, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution authorizing military force against the north. In fact, the U.S. and Saigon regime had been conducting covert raids and naval assaults on North Vietnam for several years, so historians generally agree that any encounters with North Vietnamese patrol boats were not "unprovoked attacks" as the Johnson administration contended. It was also reported to the administration that the second alleged attack did not happen, but that information was suppressed in order to gain Congressional authorization for open military attacks on North Vietnam.

President Lyndon Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Additional North Vietnamese troops were sent to the South to aid the NLF. By 1965, the U.S. commitment which had been limited to military aid and "advisers" evolved into direct U.S. military involvement with the landing of marines at Danang in South Vietnam. Within a year, U.S. forces in Vietnam would grow from 23,000 to 184,300. By 1968 there would be 534,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam.

To supply the troops for the Vietnam conflict the draft, which had last been used for the Korean War, was reactivated. Draft calls went from 100,000 in 1964 to 400,000 in 1968.

As draft calls increased, so did opposition to the war, especially among college students. The first teach-ins on U.S. campuses became a national phenomenon in 1965. In April 1965, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) held the first anti-Vietnam-war march in Washington, D.C. Protestors began to burn draft cards, while other young men boarded buses for induction stations where they received physicals, were inducted into the military and faced the likelihood of deploying to Vietnam.

The U.S.-backed government in Saigon was not likely to prevail from the beginning of the conflict. It came to be seen as a U.S.-puppet regime. The U.S. military was viewed by most Vietnamese as just the latest in a series of foreign powers out to defeat Vietnamese independence. The prosecution of the war both by the U.S. military and the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN) troops of the Saigon regime generated even more popular opposition and resistance in the countryside. In order to flush out the guerrilla forces and deprive them and sympathetic villagers of food, the U.S. began to drop tons of an herbicide all over South Vietnam and parts of Laos. The toxic defoliant, one of the most destructive chemical compounds ever used in war, came to be known as Agent Orange because it came in barrels with an orange stripe. It not only denuded trees and destroyed crops, it also killed people and would cause horrific birth defects decades after the war. Vietnamese civilians and soldiers as well as U.S. personnel who handled the toxic chemical would suffer and die from the exposure, many from cancers which would mature years after the war.

As casualties on all sides mounted, opposition to the war grew in the U.S. and across the globe. Some of the largest demonstrations in U.S. history took place in Washington, New York, California and around the country. The American news media, which had largely been providing favorable coverage to the war based on official briefings, began to question U.S. policy after the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam. In that offensive NLF and DRV forces launched brazen attacks on key targets all over South Vietnam. They didn't succeed militarily and suffered heavy losses, but they did succeed in convincing the American media and public that the war was not about to end with a positive result for the U.S. and its favored regime in Saigon. CBS News Anchor Walter Cronkite, then the most trusted man in America, called the war a "stalemate."

Lyndon Johnson, who had succeeded John F. Kennedy after Kennedy was assassinated, announced he would not run for re-election as president. Richard M. Nixon would be elected in the 1968 election. Nixon, who had claimed to have a secret plan to end the war, resumed heavy bombing of North Vietnam. He also ordered an illegal invasion of Cambodia. Students protested on campuses across the country, and when student protestors were killed at Kent State in Ohio and Jackson State in Mississippi, students called for a national student strike and shut down campuses across the country. In 1969, Americans learned of the My Lai massacre - an intentional slaughter of Vietnamese villagers by U.S. troops. Editorial writers questioned how the U.S. could win the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese when committing such atrocities. Later, Lt. William Calley would be convicted in connection with the massacre. By the early 1970s, opposition to the war had grown in the U.S. electorate. In 1972, the U.S. carried out a massive Christmas-time bombing raid against the populated areas in Hanoi and Haiphong. World opinion was outraged when photos of the destruction reached the press and public.

In 1973, a cease-fire was signed and draft calls were ended as U.S. troops were pulled out. U.S. military aid to the Saigon regime continued, but the regime never gained popular support. In 1975, NLF and DRV troops captured major cities of Hue and Danang, and then crashed through the gates of the presidential palace in Saigon, arresting the caretaker government. The U.S. evacuated its remaining personnel and numerous Vietnamese. One of the lasting images of the ill-fated war was a picture of a U.S. helicopter taking off with the last escapees from the roof of the U.S. embassy.

The country was reunified, while many who had sided with the Saigon regime and feared reprisals sought refuge in the United States and allied countries. Vietnam suffered tremendously from the war and took years to recover economically, though it is now one of the fastest growing

economies in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese government estimates that some 3.4 million Vietnamese were killed during the war. The U.S. lost some 58,000 military personnel, which does not include those dying from PTSD-related suicide or the effects of Agent Orange taking their lives years after the war. The Vietnamese numbers do not include those dying from Agent Orange poisoning or mines left in their farm fields.

Discussion Questions

- What was the Vietnam War about? What was at stake for the U.S.?
- What was the driving force behind the struggle for Vietnamese independence – nationalism or communism?
- The U.S. advocates free elections as a foundation of democracy. Why, then, did it force cancellation of secret-ballot national elections under international supervision to reunify Vietnam that were scheduled for 1956 under the Geneva accords?
- Why did successive U.S. governments choose to continue to prosecute the war despite mounting evidence that it was unwinnable?
- The U.S. has a history of military intervention overseas, and U.S. troops are currently deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries around the world. Identify and describe examples of past interventions and how they were justified by U.S. political and military leaders. Do they have anything in common with the Vietnam intervention?

Suggested Resources

Books

- “American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity”
by Christian G. Appy
- “The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990”
by Marilyn Young
- “Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam”
by Fredrick Logevall
- “A People’s History of American Empire”
by Howard Zinn and Mike Konopacki

Videos

- “Vietnam: A Television History”
- PBS American Experience (1983 series revised to 11 parts in 1997)
- "LBJ's Road to War"
- Bill Moyers Journal, Films for the Humanities and Sciences
- "War Made Easy"
- Featuring Norman Solomon, Media Education Foundation

Confronting the Draft

“You just pray you don’t get a low number.” – George Williams

“I feel like a fraud...because my neck isn’t on the line.” – Diane Clancy

Key Points

During the Vietnam War, young men of draft age in the U.S. faced an agonizing dilemma. If I’m drafted, will I be willing to fight and kill people and possibly be killed? Should I resist and risk jail? Find a way to beat the draft? Go to Canada? Women were not subject to the draft and faced different challenges and choices.

Unlike the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Vietnam War was largely fought by draftees and young men who volunteered rather than wait to be drafted. For the first few years of the war, until 1971, college students were deferred from serving, along with others in certain occupations and those with dependent spouses or children. As the calls for more troops increased, these deferments were dropped, and, by late 1969, a lottery by day of birth was instituted. As portrayed in the play, *The Draft*, young people all over the country gathered in front of TV sets to watch as cards with dates were pulled from a large glass bowl, numbers that would determine their fate - be drafted and likely go to Vietnam or relax and move on with your life. Those with numbers between one and 150 were most likely to be called. Those with numbers from 200 to 366 were not called, but at the time no one knew how high in the numbers the draft would reach. The lottery was intended to make the draft more equitable, but it was still easier for white men from privileged backgrounds to avoid combat by joining the reserves or other means than it was for poor, black or working-class men. Student deferments didn't end until 1971.

Those faced with likely induction confronted a range of choices. They could volunteer and have a better chance of choosing which armed service branch they would join. They could try to find a friendly doctor who would give them evidence they could use to get a medical or psychiatric exemption. They could apply for conscientious objector status based on a religious or moral opposition to participation in war. They could refuse induction and risk going to prison for five years. They could flee to Canada, as did an estimated 30,000 to 50,000. Draft resistance became a major element of the political culture for young people in the 60s and 70s, as did volunteering or simply accepting one's fate and submitting to the draft. Some 2.6 million American military personnel would serve in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973, most of them from working class and lower middle class backgrounds. The average age of those who died was 20.

The consequences of any of the choices were weighty considerations for 18-19 year olds faced with the draft. Going into the service could mean death, disabling injury, the moral burden of taking human life, postponing life plans. Refusing induction could mean prison. Of the nearly half million young men who resisted the draft by refusal or other illegal means, some 4,000 would end up going to prison, as did Randall Kehler, portrayed in the play.

Discussion Questions

- Which principal character in *The Draft* did you most identify with and why?
- If you were called up to fight in a war, what would you do? What would you want to know before making your decision?

- Do you believe it is ever justifiable to refuse to serve in your country's military if asked to do so? If not, why not? Under what circumstances would you refuse to serve?
- Frank Marotta used a fake X-ray provided by a sympathetic doctor to beat the draft. Was he right or wrong?
- Jay Holtzman decided to leave the country rather than risk being sent to fight in Vietnam – even though he had no idea if and when he would be able to return home. Can you imagine yourself ever making that choice?
- What roles did race and social class play in determining who was sent to Vietnam?
- What does it mean to be patriotic?
- Currently, the U.S. has an all-volunteer military. Although there is no active draft, all males are required to register with the Selective Service Commission at aged 18. Do you think the draft should be reinstated?
- Should women be subject to the draft?

Assignments / Activities

- Write a short paper addressing one of the questions above. Have the class divide into small groups and use their papers as discussion starters.
- If you have a relative who was of age in the period of the Vietnam War, ask how they felt about the draft and the war, and what they did during that time.
- For a class exercise, have students take on one of the options as a role-playing exercise, and simulate a group discussion where they explain the action they are taking and try to understand the option chosen by others. (Reading some of the stories in *Called to Serve* would be helpful resource material.) A variation is to have several students represent each of the characters in the play, read more about them in *Called to Serve* and present their perspective in a class discussion.

Suggested Resources

Books

- “Called To Serve: Stories of Men and Women Confronted by the Vietnam War Draft” by Tom Weiner (the book on which *The Draft* is based)
- “Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides” by Christian G. Appy
- “Working Class War” by Christian G. Appy
- “Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War: An Oral History” by Wallace Terry
- "We Won't Go: Personal Accounts of War Resisters" by Alice Lynd
- “Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation” by Lawrence M. Baskir and Theodore M. Hesburgh

Video

- "The Draft"
 - A play by Peter Snoad, Media Education Foundation, www.mediaed.org
- "Across the Universe"
 - Directed by Julie Taymor

Websites

- <http://www.calledtoservevietnam.com/blog>
 - Blog site by Tom Weiner, author of *Called to Serve*. Contains stories of men and women interviewed but not included in the book and additional information on the draft.
- <http://www.resisters.info>
 - Website on the draft

The Realities of War

“Gooks. That’s what we learn to call the Vietnamese. Gooks.”

– Al Miller

“They’re just young kids, that’s the thing.”

– Penny Rock, referring to wounded American soldiers under her care.

“You can be brutal, man. You can do whatever you want and there are no consequences. None.”

– George Williams

Key Points

From boot camp to jungle patrols, from field hospitals to drugs and booze parties, those who served in Vietnam experienced the rigors of military life, the comradeship, and the chaos, brutality and destructiveness of war. The impact on the young people serving in combat was severe and remains so for many veterans today. Those serving in supportive rear-guard roles on bases were also affected by all they saw and experienced. Some 58,202 U.S. troops did not return alive (the fourth highest war casualty count in U.S. history). For their families, the realities of the war hit hard. By the end of the war, there were very few communities in the U.S. that had not experienced one or more casualty losses of their own.

Of course, proportional to the population, the war was much more devastating to the Vietnamese; some 3.4 million lost their lives, according to the Vietnamese government. Vietnam is a much smaller country, so this level of loss of life was devastating. As one Vietnamese veteran put it, "It would be hard to find a family in Vietnam who didn't lose at least one of its members in the war." If the U.S. suffered the same percentage of casualties relative to its 1960 population (10%), it would have lost over 18 million. The highest casualty count of any U.S. war was the Civil War at 750,000, close to two percent of the population.

In many cases, whole Vietnamese villages were destroyed and survivors were moved into "strategic hamlets." While the My Lai massacre of civilian villagers by U.S. soldiers is well known, author Nick Turse, in his book *Kill Anything that Moves*, documents multiple My Lai type massacres and random civilian deaths in areas designated as "free fire zones." U.S. military and political leadership placed a high premium on enemy body counts as a measure of success in what they saw as a war of attrition against the NLF forces. Under this pressure, infantry units would often count civilian Vietnamese as enemy casualties. The irony is that this approach, as well as the massive destruction of Vietnamese civilian life from U.S. bombing campaigns, napalm, toxic herbicide defoliants such as Agent Orange, and abuses by the forces of the Saigon government created more "enemies" by turning more and more civilians against the U.S. and the Saigon government it supported.

Many GIs, once in the country for a time, began to see the futility of the fight and they responded by losing themselves in drugs and alcohol, refusing orders, even at times "fragging" officer's quarters (throwing fragmentation grenades into the officers' barracks). A protest movement against the war grew within the military both in Vietnam and at U.S. bases. Many GIs also rejected this rebellious perspective and performed what they saw as their patriotic duty as best as they could. While some healing has taken place, divisions that emerged then still persist today

among Vietnam-era veterans, as well as among those who either protested or supported the war at home.

Discussion Questions

- What makes young people effective warriors? What did you feel watching the boot camp scene in the play? What purpose does the training depicted serve?
- What stood out for you in the scenes set in Vietnam? Why?
- Drug and alcohol abuse were widespread among U.S. soldiers in Vietnam; according to some estimates, as many as 15% were hooked on heroin. Why? What were the impacts of this?
- In the infamous My Lai Massacre, U.S. soldiers slaughtered between 347 and 504 unarmed civilians in a rural hamlet in South Vietnam. Was this an isolated incident or was indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians in Vietnam widespread and a policy choice of U.S. war planners?
- What defines a war crime?

Assignments / Activities

- For a general survey course or high school class, addressing the discussion questions in a short paper prompt followed by small-group discussions would help generate reflection on the war.
- For an advanced class focusing on the Vietnam war, a role-playing exercise is a good way to deepen understanding. The question for each role is - "What would you do now?" One possible scene could be set immediately after the Tet Offensive of 1968. Possible roles for students to adopt are: a villager in South Vietnam whose crops have been destroyed and his family moved into a strategic hamlet, a soldier in the ARVN (South Vietnam army), a U.S. soldier who just lost his buddy in a firefight with the enemy, a commander of NLF forces devastated by the casualties sustained, a young American who just got an order to report for induction, his parents, a poet in North Vietnam ordered to go fight in the South, a leading military strategist in Hanoi, President Johnson's national security adviser, journalist Walter Cronkite. There could be more. The key is getting the student to buy into the role, research the situation and come up with some ideas on what to do next from the perspective of their character. A role can be assumed by two or three students working in a group to prepare their responses. Then, the whole class can hear the ideas from the others and debate or discuss options from the perspective of their roles.

Suggested Resources

Books

- “The Things They Carried”
by Tim O’Brien
- “The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam”
by Bao Ninh
- “The Winter Soldier Investigation: An Inquiry Into American War Crimes”
by Vietnam Veterans Against The War

- “What It Is Like To Go To War”
by Karl Marlantes
- "War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning"
by Christopher Hedges
- “The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle”
by J. Glenn Gray and Hannah Arendt
- “Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam”
by Nick Turse

Videos

- Winter Soldier hearings: www.wintersoldier.com and DVD
by Millarium Zero and Winterfilm
- "Sir, No Sir"
- DVD on GI resistance to the war
- "My Lai"
- PBS American Experience DVD
- "Two Days in October"
- PBS Home Video
- “Platoon”
- Directed by Oliver Stone
- “The Deer Hunter”
- Directed by Michael Cimino
- "Good Morning Vietnam"
- Directed by Barry Levinson
- "Full Metal Jacket"
- Directed by Stanley Kubrick
- "Apocalypse Now"
- Directed by Francis Ford Coppola

Protest, Resistance, and Social Movements

“Do you refuse to cooperate to the point of going to prison? Or is the real moral imperative to be out there organizing to stop the war and stop the killing?” – Tom Gardner

“People say to me: ‘What good did it do, you going to prison? It didn’t stop the war.’ And I tell them, ‘You never know what effect your actions will have.’” – Randy Kehler

“The last day (of the national action) was a student strike and we boycotted classes. A million of us! A million students all across the country.” – Diane Clancy

Key Points

Most Americans supported the Vietnam War in its early years. But as opposition grew, millions of Americans of all ages and backgrounds joined together to stop it. A broad-based anti-war movement organized mass rallies, marches and other forms of protest. By 1971, some 58% of Americans polled thought the war was both a mistake and immoral, and only 28% told Gallup pollsters they supported the war.

The protest movement against the war cannot be separated from the rising sense of unease with the status quo, especially among American youth, which manifested in music, art, dress, and other cultural forms of dissent. The post-WW2 era of the Cold War and McCarthyism had instilled a fear of dissent, and, particularly in the area of foreign affairs, a tendency to accept the notion that the U.S. was the good guys in the white hats, fighting a global crusade against the evils of Godless communism. The relative political stasis of the 50s, however, was broken initially by the modern Civil Rights Movement, beginning with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on school desegregation and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955.

By 1960, when black students and white supporters staged sit-ins throughout the South, young people were ready to move from just rebelling through rock and roll to marching in the streets. Students drawn to the courageous efforts of southern black folks fighting for change, took up the freedom banner at their own campuses, leading to the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and protests on campuses across the country. Just as black students in the South had come together to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), progressive and leftist students across the country formed the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Student activists in the South formed the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) in 1964. (Tom Gardner, in the play, was a chairman of SSOC.)

In April 1965, SDS held the first anti-Vietnam War march in Washington, DC. Civil Rights groups debated what their stance should be toward the war. Many of the youth organizations such as SNCC, whose constituents were faced with the growing draft calls, opposed the war. Older organizations anxious to support President Lyndon Johnson's Civil Rights legislation and fearing a backlash either supported the war or refused to take a stance. When Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a passionate, reasoned rebuke of the war in a sermon at New York's Riverside Church in April 1967, he was criticized by many in the media and other organizations. (http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam/).

But by the end of that same month, world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammed Ali, refused induction into the military. *"Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights,"* he said in explaining his refusal to serve.

As the war progressed, resistance grew. Students organized teach-ins on campuses, both to learn more about Vietnam themselves and to educate other students. National marches against the war were held in New York, Washington and California. Students began to protest the presence of the military's Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC) programs on campus. They denounced their universities' ties to the military and often prevented or disrupted recruiting efforts on campuses by Dow Chemical Company, the manufacturer of napalm, a flesh-burning chemical agent dropped in bombs by U.S. forces in Vietnam. Some burned their draft cards.

As the culture of resistance and of personal freedom grew, women raised issues of sexism both in the larger society and also within the anti-war and progressive movements. Women activists began to hold consciousness-raising sessions where they shared their experiences. They began to caucus separately from the men, and many felt they needed a separate movement for women's rights. Marilyn Webb, in the documentary *"She's Beautiful When She's Angry"* describes being hooted off the state at a major anti-war rally in Washington when she tried to raise women's issues. The second wave of the feminist revolution, in part, grew out of the frustration activist women felt in a movement dominated by men. The women's movement would grow to become a lasting force for change.

Other movements would grow out of the sixties activism around civil rights and the Vietnam War. The environmental movement. The gay liberation movement. The disability rights movement. Some young people, feeling alienated from mainstream society, would seek to build farm-based self-sustaining collectives and communes. Some in what would be called the "counter-culture" described it as "turning on, tuning in and dropping out."

Since U.S. military draftees and recruits were also in their late teens or their early twenties, they were affected by these political and social developments as well. They listened to the same music, smoked pot, and often wore the same peace symbols, even as they tried to survive in the Vietnamese jungles and base camps. In the states, peace activists set up coffee houses for GIs near military bases, and these became organizing centers for the resistance movement within the military.

The anti-war protest grew to include a demonstration of 100,000 or more in Washington in November 1969. Activists engaged in community organizing and education, draft resistance and counseling, direct contact with the "enemy", sending humanitarian aid to North Vietnam, sit-ins, die-ins, be-ins and street theater. After protesting students at Kent State and Jackson State were killed by National Guard and police in May of 1970, more than four million students participated in a national student strike on some 450 campuses, in many cases cancelling classes for the rest of the semester. A year later, in 1971, a series of demonstrations followed in Washington, DC. Vietnam veterans threw their combat medals over a fence at the Capitol. More than 500,000 marched in the largest protest up to that point and some 12,000 were arrested in what was known as the May Day protests.

Of course, there were many young people who did not participate in these alternative communities or protest movements. They sought "normal" lives, careers, and traditional family

life. Some formed counter movements like Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) to espouse what they saw as traditional or conservative American values. Some joined the established political parties, lending their energies to candidates they thought would bring about the changes they sought. Many Americans were turned off by the counter-culture's seeming rejection of the life they sought for themselves and they saw protesters as un-American, unwashed, and disrespectful of authority. A conservative backlash against the progressive change movements and some of the extreme manifestations of the sixties was seen in the law and order rhetoric of the Barry Goldwater campaign of 1964, the George Wallace and Richard Nixon campaigns in 1968, and ultimately in the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. We saw similar rhetoric in the 2016 campaign of Donald Trump.

Discussion Questions

- Why did so many Americans turn against the war?
- Returned veterans played an important leadership role in the anti-war movement. Why?
- Randy Kehler, Tom Gardner and Jay Holtzman chose to resist the draft and the war on moral or ethical grounds. Others were motivated by their religious beliefs. A.J. Muste, the organizer of the “We Won’t Go” conference that Tom Gardner attended, was a Christian pacifist. What values or beliefs shape your attitude towards war?
- Is there such a thing as a just war or a good war?
- Fed up with their own government, some U.S. activists became citizen diplomats and reporters and met face-to-face with the Vietnamese “enemy” in Vietnam, Bratislava and elsewhere to discuss and promote peace. What do you think of these initiatives?
- The anti-war movement was one of several burgeoning social movements that emerged during that turbulent era. Others included the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement. Give an example of a social movement today that is fostering social and political change. What characteristics does it share with the movements of the 1960’s and 70’s? How is it different?
- Is it more effective to try to work inside the system for change or to build a separate movement outside the system?
- What is the best way to advocate for and bring about change without alienating people who may disagree with you or are reluctant to join your cause?
- If you had been 18-25 in the 60’s, how do you think you would have responded to the war and the protests? Which way would you have been pulled? Why?

Assignments / Activities

- Choose an individual active in the protest movements of the 1960’s and write a short biographical summary about them.
- Invite students to take on the character of the individual they research and hold a classroom discussion on a strategic decision. Possible topics - Are we opposed to all war or just this war? Should we demand the U.S. withdraw all troops now or propose a negotiated withdrawal? Should our Civil Rights group take a stance against the Vietnam

War? Can the anti-war movement expand to take on racism, sexism, imperialism, etc. or should it stay more narrowly focused on ending the war? Should we stay non-violent?

- View one of the documentaries on the sixties and write a short response paper.

Suggested Resources

Books

- “Confronting The War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War”
by Michael S. Foley
- “The People Make the Peace: Lessons from the Vietnam Antiwar Movement”
Edited by Karin Aguilar-San Juan and Frank Joyce
- "Hell No, We Won't Go: Resisting the Draft During the Vietnam War"
by Sherry Gershon Gottlieb
- “Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War”
by David Cortright and Howard Zinn
- "The Whole World is Watching"
by Todd Gitlin
- "The Long Sixties"
by Tom Hayden
- "The Port Huron Statement"
by Tom Hayden
- "Hell No: The Forgotten Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement"
by Tom Hayden (pending March 2017, Yale Press)
- "SNCC and The Black Awakening of the 1960s"
by Clayborne Carson

Videos

- “The War at Home”
- Directed by Glenn Silber and Barry Brown
- “Sir! No Sir! The Suppressed Story of the GI Movement to End The War in Vietnam”
- Directed by David Zeiger
- "She's Beautiful When She's Angry"
- Directed by Mary Dore (available on Netflix)
- "Berkeley in the Sixties"
- Directed and produced by Mark Kitchell
- "Homefront"
- Part of the PBS American Experience series on the Vietnam War

Healing and Reconciliation

“(The vets with PTSD) are really drugged up, just out there in the zone. But when I ask them about their experiences, they are so glad that someone is willing to listen.”

– Diane Clancy

“I don’t want to go into those classrooms and talk to the kids. It re-traumatizes me. But no one can say what I have to say.”

– Al Miller, who visits schools to talk about his war experience in his work with the Veterans Education Project

“What was so striking was that there was no animosity towards us.”

– Frank Marotta on his post-war visit to Vietnam.

Key Points

The U.S. and Saigon government dropped nearly twice as many bombs on South Vietnam (the part of Vietnam it claimed to be defending) than the U.S. dropped during the entire Second World War. The U.S. bombing in the north took some 55,000 civilian casualties. Some 3.4 million Vietnamese died in the “American War”, as the Vietnamese call it. The use of chemical weapons by U.S. forces – most notably, the toxic defoliant known as Agent Orange – caused massive environmental devastation and left a deadly legacy of cancers, birth defects and other health problems that still affect thousands of Vietnamese and Americans today.

The Vietnamese government estimates that some 3 million Vietnamese were affected by Agent Orange and that some 150,000 children in Vietnam are today living with birth defects passed down from exposure to the highly toxic dioxin in the herbicide. Veterans from the United States and its Vietnam War allies have returned to Vietnam to help the victims of Agent Orange by building facilities to house and care for the children with physical deformities and special needs stemming from Agent Orange exposure. Friendship Village near Hanoi is one such facility, which was built by veterans from all sides of the war working together. The U.S., seeking renewed relations with Vietnam to stem Chinese expansion, has finally begun to help clean up one of the worse hot spots of the AO dioxin, the area around the former Danang air base, but it has yet to provide substantial assistance to those suffering from the effects of the dioxin.

In addition to toxic chemicals and massively destructive bombs, the U.S. dropped bombs with napalm, a gel-like substance which burns straight through clothing, skin and bones, and cluster bombs. Cluster bombs contain hundreds of smaller bomblets which, in turn, are packed with hundreds of steel pellets. They are anti-personnel bombs designed to tear through bodies, shredding everything in their path. Thousands of Vietnamese farmers and children have lost lives and limbs from unexploded bomblets that are scattered through the country. A U.S. veteran, Charles Searcy, leads an organization, Project RENEW, to help remove the unexploded ordinance and thousands of land mines that still pose a daily threat to Vietnamese.

The wounds of war have been psychological as well as physical: countless veterans from both sides suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its consequences. The rates of suicide and homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, and other problems faced by American and allied veterans of the war are greatly disputed. Some 3.4 million U.S. personnel were deployed to Southeast Asia from 1964 to 1975, according to the Veteran's Administration.

Approximately 2.7 million saw service in South Vietnam. Most returned home to successfully transition to civilian life. Many, however, had trouble adjusting. It took years before PTSD was recognized by the military and VA as an actual condition that requires treatment. PTSD remains a problem for Vietnamese as well, both for military veterans and civilians who may have witnessed killings, suffered starvation, incarceration, torture, or the loss of their ancestral homes or villages.

The demographics of the country were severely affected by the war, as was the economy. More than half of Vietnam's current population of some 81 million is under the age of 25, according to author Mark Ashwill. He notes that the age group over 65 has 2.7 million women but only 1.9 million men. To travel to Vietnam now, bustling with new industry, large farming operations, and tourism, is to marvel at a national resiliency that is hard to imagine.

During negotiations to end U.S. involvement, President Nixon had promised Vietnam significant aid to rebuild the country's infrastructure. Bombs had destroyed bridges, roads, dams, dikes, houses, schools, office buildings, etc. But the U.S. reneged on that pledge after the war and instead cut off all economic ties with Vietnam. The U.S. embargo, combined with some policy mistakes on the part of the reunified Vietnamese government, caused serious shortages of everyday necessities. With market reforms initiated by the Vietnamese government in the 1990's, Vietnam has now emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in Asia. English is now compulsory in the schools and American business and tourism is enthusiastically welcomed. Having been invaded by China in 1979 and now in disputes with its neighbor to the north over navigational rights in the South China Sea, Vietnam is looking toward the U.S. as a possible buffer against Chinese expansion. U.S.-Vietnam relations began to shift after Vietnam withdrew in 1989 from its occupation of Cambodia, which it invaded to stop the mass killings by the Khmer Rouge government there and to defend its own borders. The U.S. embargo against Vietnam finally ended in 1994 under the Clinton administration, and the U.S. and Vietnam now have full diplomatic relations.

Discussion Questions

- What is the U.S. doing to help repair the environmental damage it inflicted during the war and to assist victims of Agent Orange and their families? What more should it do?
- How does telling one's story to a listener who is present and emotionally open help vets with PTSD deal with their trauma? What is the significance of self-forgiveness and forgiveness in the healing process? Why are trust and intimacy such big issues?
- In what other circumstances do we see PTSD in our society?
- How were returning U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War treated and how has the attitude toward veterans changed?
- Most contemporary American visitors to Vietnam share Frank Marotta's experience: friendliness and lack of animosity from the Vietnamese. Why do you think this is?
- Would you like to visit Vietnam? Why or why not?

Assignments / Activities

- Research examples of veterans and veterans' organizations in Vietnam and the U.S. and their allies, who are working to heal the wounds of war and promote non-violent resolution to conflict.
- Penny Rock went back to Vietnam after the war to find her young self. "Part of me felt I had abandoned her there." Research the stories of other vets who made return trips to Vietnam as a way of healing.
- Try a role-playing exercise. Divide the class with small groups representing anti-war protestors, U.S. Vietnam vets, Vietnamese veterans from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam forces (North Vietnam), Vietnamese veterans from the Saigon Government forces (ARVN), members of the Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange, American diplomats. Debate or discuss the question of American reparations to Vietnam to at least partially pay for the damage done to the country and the care of the war's victims.
- Hold a fundraising event for victims of Agent Orange in Vietnam.
- Report on one of the films about the aftermath of the war.

Suggested Resources

Books

- "Waiting for an Army to Die"
by Fred Wilcox
- "After Sorrow: An American Among the Vietnamese"
by Lady Borton
- "Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character"
by Jonathan Shay
- "The Wounds Within: A Veteran, a PTSD Therapist, and a Nation Unprepared"
by Mark I. Nickerson and Joshua S. Goldstein
- "Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War"
by Edward Tick
- "Scorched Earth: Legacies of Chemical Warfare in Vietnam"
by Fred A. Wilcox and Noam Chomsky

Videos

- "Agent Orange 30 Years Later"
- A film by John Trinh
- "The Friendship Village"
- Documentary by Michelle Mason
- "Born on the Fourth of July"
- Directed by Oliver Stone
- "Heaven and Earth"
- Directed by Oliver Stone

- "Return of the Seacaucus 7"
- Directed by John Sayles
- "Missing in America"
- Directed by Gabrielle Dockerman
- "Coming Home"
- Directed by Hal Ashby
- "Forrest Gump"
- Directed by Robert Zemeckis

Websites

- www.vietnamfriendship.org
- Friendship Village (U.S. -based fundraising organization)
- www.traprockcenter.org
- Raises funds for scholarships for victims of Agent Orange
- www.vietnam-landmines.org
- Project RENEW

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