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The Vietnam War

Background

French Control - They ruled Vietnam until Japan took control during World War II. After the War, France and the Vietminh struggled and fought for power.

Geneva Accords - Peace Agreement between the French and Vietminh that divided Vietnam in half (North and South).

Ho Chi Minh - Leader of North Vietnam that instituted communism and supported the Vietcong.

Ngo Dinh Diem - Leader of South Vietnam. He was against Communism; the US supported him.

- **Abuses** - Imprisoned people who criticized his government; he restricted Buddhist practices and offered little to no land distribution to peasants.

Vietcong - Group in South Vietnam who opposed/fought against Diem.



Why did the US get involved?

Domino Theory - Stated that if one country fell to communism, its neighboring countries would likely fall as well.

The Domino Theory was Eisenhower's explanation for stopping the spread of communism.

Gulf of Tonkin - A North Vietnamese patrol boat allegedly fired torpedoes at a U.S. destroyer. In response, Johnson responded with bombing raids on North Vietnam.

- **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** - Resolution passed by Congress which stated that "The President had the authority to take all necessary measures to repel attacks against the US."

Gave the President broad military powers/too much power



The End of US Involvement and the War

Nixon and "Vietnamization" - Nixon's plan for ending US involvement in the war. He called for the gradual withdrawal of US troops (Make South Vietnam more responsible) and a massive bombing attack against North Vietnam.

Cambodia and Laos - Bombing raids ordered by Nixon due to the fact that he believed each of these countries were helping the Vietcong and had Vietcong military bases.

Paris Peace Accords - Ended US involvement in the War.

Fall of Saigon - N. Vietnam was able to capture the South's capital, Saigon. Soon after, S. Vietnam surrendered. Vietnam becomes communist.



US Involvement

Ho Chi Minh Trail - Network of paths running between North and South Vietnam; Ho Chi Minh (Communists Leader of N. Vietnam) used the trail to supply the Vietcong.

Operation Rolling Thunder - Bombing campaign led by the US; it was meant to destroy N. Vietnam's supply lines (Ho Chi Min Trail).

General William Westmorland - Commanded US forces in Vietnam.



Important Events

Draft - Required men 18 years or older to sign up for military service.

- **Working Class War** - Nickname given to the Vietnam War due to the fact that if you were in college (wealthy) you could avoid the draft. A large number who fought in Vietnam were lower class whites or minorities.

Tet Offensive - Vietcong launched a surprise attack on over 100 towns and cities in South Vietnam, as well as 12 U.S. air bases. It continued for about a month. It was a defeat for the Vietcong, but it shocked Americans because it showed that the Vietcong could launch a surprise attack and was "everywhere".

- **Hue** - North Vietnamese troops and the Vietcong killed between 3-5 thousand civil servants, military personnel and those who supported the US.

My Lai Incident - US troops killed over 200 innocent Vietnamese villagers, most women, children and elderly men. 25 Army officers were charged but only their leader was imprisoned.



Weapons and Warfare

Jungle Warfare - Fighting in the Jungle; The Vietcong used the jungle to hide in as well as hide land mines and traps.

- **Guerilla Warfare (Hit-and-Run)** was used and effective because of the jungle.
- The Vietcong also had tunnels that connected towns, which made it easier for them to launch surprise attacks.

Agent Orange - Herbicide made to kill vegetation; was used to destroy the jungle and prevent surprise attacks from the Vietcong.

- It killed crops (Food) and also causes cancer. It ruined villages.

Napalm - A gasoline-based bomb that set fire to the jungle. It was used to expose Vietcong tunnels and hideouts.

- It would ruin villages and also stick to clothes, killing or burning them.

Search-and-destroy Missions - Missions by US Soldiers in which they would destroy villages they believed supported the Vietcong.

Impact of the War on the United States

Television's Impact on the War – The war was covered on TV every night. Each night Americans watched the brutal scenes of the war on their television screens; Johnson had said that the US was winning the war, but according to the TV, it displayed an opposite story.

Helped turn public opinion against the war

The Credibility Gap – Situation in which the US public no longer believe the Johnson administration.

Anti- War Movement

What group primarily opposed the War in Vietnam?

College Students:
Many formed groups such as the SDS and FSM
Protested the War on College Campuses

What effect did these protests have?

- **Doves** – Americans who called for the US to withdraw from Vietnam.
- **Hawks** – Americans who supported the war effort.

Kent State University – College students were protesting after hearing about the My Lai Incident.

The protest started to become violent: the students had set fire to the ROTC building on campus. To restore order the National Guard was called in.

The protestors became throwing rocks and other objects at the National Guard; they ended up firing shots into the crowd – nine were wounded and four students were killed.

Distrust in the Government

Pentagon Papers – Leaked document that revealed:

1. The government had drawn up plans for entering the war even as President Johnson promised that he would not send troops to Vietnam.
2. That there was never any plan to end the war as long as the North Vietnamese persisted.

**Revealed that the Executive Branch had lied to Congress about parts of the War*

- **New York Times Co v. US Supreme Court** – The Pentagon Papers was published by the New York Times.

The Supreme Court ruled that the NY Times could publish the papers due to the 1st Amendment.

Legislative Changes

26th Amendment – Allowed anyone that was 18 years old to Vote.

Students had protested and Marched on Washington – many argued that if they were old enough to die for their country, they should at least be able to vote on the issues and for who runs the country.

War Powers Act – This law prevented the president from committing troops in a foreign conflict without approval from Congress.

Limits the power of the president in terms of war

Repeals the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution