



# A Nation Divided

## MAIN IDEA

An antiwar movement in the U.S. pitted supporters of the government's war policy against those who opposed it.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The painful process of healing a divided nation continues today.

## Terms & Names

- draft
- New Left
- Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
- Free Speech Movement
- dove
- hawk

## One American's Story

In 1969, Stephan Gubar was told to report for possible military service in Vietnam. Gubar, 22, a participant in the civil rights movement, had filed as a conscientious objector (CO), or someone who opposed war on the basis of religious or moral beliefs. He was granted 1-A-O status, which meant that while he would not be forced to carry a weapon, he still qualified for noncombatant military duty. That year, Gubar was drafted—called for military service.

As did many other conscientious objectors, Gubar received special training as a medic. He described the memorable day his training ended.

### A PERSONAL VOICE STEPHAN GUBAR

“The thing that stands out most was . . . being really scared, being in formation and listening to the names and assignments being called. The majority of COs I knew had orders cut for Vietnam. And even though I could hear that happening, even though I could hear that every time a CO's name came up, the orders were cut for Vietnam, I still thought there was a possibility I might not go. Then, when they called my name and said ‘Vietnam,’ . . . I went to a phone and I called my wife. It was a tremendous shock.”

—quoted in *Days of Decision*

While many young Americans proudly went off to war, some found ways to avoid the draft, and others simply refused to go. The growing protest movement sharply divided the country between supporters and opponents of the government's policy in Vietnam.



VIDEO

**MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE**  
Stephan Gubar  
and the Vietnam War

## The Working Class Goes to War

The idea of fighting a war in a faraway place for what they believed was a questionable cause prompted a number of young Americans to resist going to Vietnam.

**A “MANIPULATABLE” DRAFT** Most soldiers who fought in Vietnam were called into combat under the country's Selective Service System, or **draft**, which had been established during World War I. Under this system, all males had to register with their local draft boards when they turned 18. All registrants were screened, and unless they were excluded—such as for medical reasons—in the event of war, men between the ages of 18 and 26 would be called into military service.

**Vocabulary**

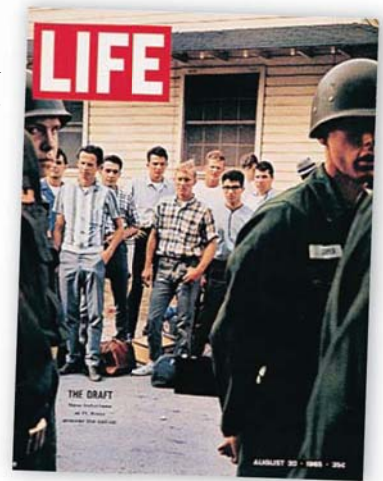
**deferment:** the act or instance of delaying

As Americans' doubts about the war grew, thousands of men attempted to find ways around the draft, which one man characterized as a "very manipulatable system." Some men sought out sympathetic doctors to grant medical exemptions, while others changed residences in order to stand before a more lenient draft board. Some Americans even joined the National Guard or Coast Guard, which often secured a deferment from service in Vietnam.

One of the most common ways to avoid the draft was to receive a college deferment, by which a young man enrolled in a university could put off his military service. Because university students during the 1960s tended to be white and financially well-off, many of the men who fought in Vietnam were lower-class whites or minorities who were less privileged economically. With almost 80 percent of American soldiers coming from lower economic levels, Vietnam was a working-class war.

**AFRICAN AMERICANS IN VIETNAM** African Americans served in disproportionate numbers as ground combat troops. During the first several years of the war, blacks accounted for more than 20 percent of American combat deaths despite representing only about 10 percent of the U.S. population. The Defense Department took steps to correct that imbalance by instituting a draft lottery system in 1969.

Martin Luther King, Jr., had refrained from speaking out against the war for fear that it would divert attention from the civil rights movement. But he could not maintain that stance for long. In 1967 he lashed out against what he called the "cruel irony" of American blacks dying for a country that still treated them as second-class citizens.



▲ A Life magazine cover shows new draft inductees arriving for training at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

**A PERSONAL VOICE** DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"We were taking the young black men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. . . . 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."

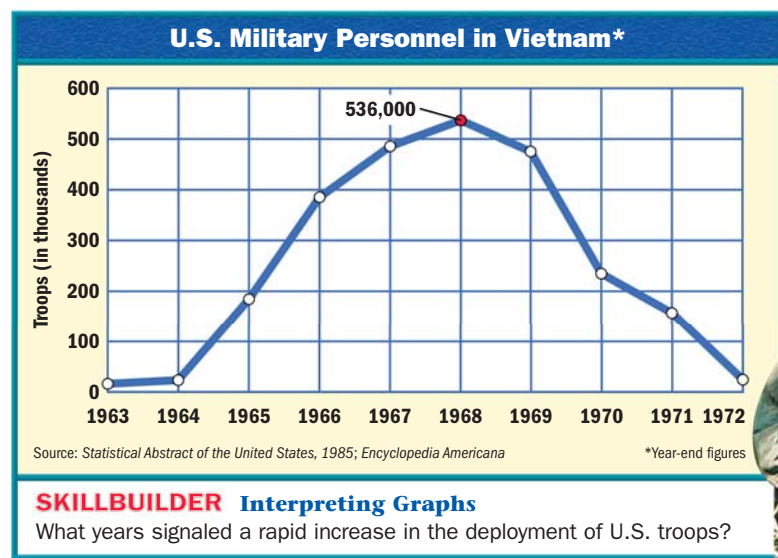
—quoted in *America's Vietnam War: A Narrative History*

**MAIN IDEA**

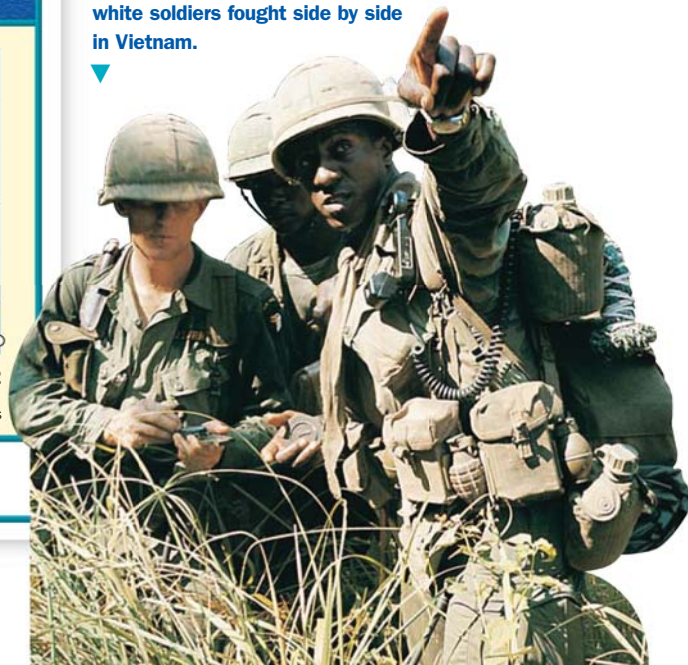
**Synthesizing**

**A** Why did King call African Americans' fighting in Vietnam an "irony"?

Racial tension ran high in many platoons, and in some cases, the hostility led to violence. The racism that gripped many military units was yet another factor that led to low troop morale in Vietnam. **A**



Despite racial tensions, black and white soldiers fought side by side in Vietnam.



Two U.S. nurses rest at Cam Ranh Bay, the major entry point in South Vietnam for American supplies and troops.



**WOMEN JOIN THE RANKS** While the U.S. military in the 1960s did not allow females to serve in combat, 10,000 women served in Vietnam—most of them as military nurses. Thousands more volunteered their services in Vietnam to the American Red Cross and the United Services Organization (USO), which delivered hospitality and entertainment to the troops.

As the military marched off to Vietnam to fight against communist guerrillas, some of the men at home, as well as many women, waged a battle of their own. Tensions flared across the country as many of the nation's youths began to voice their opposition to the war.

## The Roots of Opposition

Even before 1965, students were becoming more active socially and politically. Some participated in the civil rights struggle, while others pursued public service. As America became more involved in the war in Vietnam, college students across the country became a powerful and vocal group of protesters.

**THE NEW LEFT** The growing youth movement of the 1960s became known as the **New Left**. The movement was “new” in relation to the “old left” of the 1930s, which had generally tried to move the nation toward socialism, and, in some cases, communism. While the New Left movement did not preach socialism, its followers demanded sweeping changes in American society.

Voicing these demands was one of the better-known New Left organizations, **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)**, founded in 1960 by Tom Hayden and Al Haber. The group charged that corporations and large government institutions had taken over America. The SDS called for a restoration of “participatory democracy” and greater individual freedom.

In 1964, the **Free Speech Movement (FSM)** gained prominence at the University of California at Berkeley. The FSM grew out of a clash between students and administrators over free speech on campus. Led by Mario Savio, a philosophy student, the FSM focused its criticism on what it called the American “machine,” the nation’s faceless and powerful business and government institutions. **B**

**CAMPUS ACTIVISM** Across the country the ideas of the FSM and SDS quickly spread to college campuses. Students addressed mostly campus issues, such as dress codes, curfews, dormitory regulations, and mandatory Reserved Officer

### MAIN IDEA

#### Making Inferences

**B** What concerns about American democratic society did the New Left voice?


Training Corps (ROTC) programs. At Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, students marched merely as “an expression of general student discontent.”

With the onset of the Vietnam War, students across the country found a galvanizing issue and joined together in protest. By the mid-sixties, many youths believed the nation to be in need of fundamental change.

## The Protest Movement Emerges

Throughout the spring of 1965, groups at a number of colleges began to host “teach-ins” to protest the war. At the University of Michigan, where only a year before President Johnson had announced his sweeping Great Society Program, teachers and students now assailed his war policy. “This is no longer a casual form of campus spring fever,” journalist James Reston noted about the growing demonstrations. As the war continued, the protests grew and divided the country.

**THE MOVEMENT GROWS** In April of 1965, SDS helped organize a march on Washington, D.C., by some 20,000 protesters. By November of that year, a protest rally in Washington drew more than 30,000. Then, in February of 1966, the Johnson administration changed deferments for college students, requiring students to be in good academic standing in order to be granted a deferment. Campuses around the country erupted in protest. SDS called for civil disobedience at Selective Service Centers and openly counseled students to flee to Canada or Sweden. By the end of 1969, SDS had chapters on nearly 400 campuses.

Youths opposing the war did so for several reasons. The most common was the belief that the conflict in Vietnam was basically a civil war and that the U.S. military had no business there. Some said that the oppressive South Vietnamese regime was no better than the Communist regime it was fighting. Others argued that the United States could not police the entire globe and that war was draining American strength in other important parts of the world. Still others saw war simply as morally unjust. 


The antiwar movement grew beyond college campuses. Small numbers of returning veterans began to protest the war, and folk singers such as the trio Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Joan Baez used music as a popular protest vehicle. The number one song in September 1965 was “Eve of Destruction,” in which singer Barry McGuire stressed the ironic fact that in the 1960s an American male could be drafted at age 18 but had to be 21 to vote:

**The Eastern world, it is explodin’,  
Violence flaring, bullets loadin’,  
You’re old enough to kill, but not for votin’,  
You don’t believe in war, but what’s that gun you’re totin’?**

**FROM PROTEST TO RESISTANCE** By 1967, the antiwar movement had intensified, with no sign of slowing down. “We were having no effect on U.S. policy,” recalled one protest leader, “so we thought we had to up the ante.” In the spring of 1967, nearly half a million protesters of all ages gathered in New York’s Central Park. Shouting “Burn cards, not people!” and “Hell, no, we won’t go!” hundreds tossed their draft cards into a bonfire. A woman from New Jersey told a reporter, “So many of us are frustrated. We want to criticize this war because we think it’s wrong, but we want to do it in the framework of loyalty.”

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

 For what reasons did the protesters oppose the Vietnam War?

### HISTORICAL

## SPOTLIGHT

### “THE BALLAD OF THE GREEN BERETS”

Not every Vietnam-era pop song about war was an antiwar song. At the top of the charts for five weeks in 1966 was “The Ballad of the Green Berets” by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler of the U.S. Army Special Forces, known as the Green Berets:

Fighting soldiers from the sky,  
Fearless men who jump and die,  
Men who mean just what they say,  
The brave men of the Green Beret.

The recording sold over a million copies in its first two weeks of release and was *Billboard* magazine’s song of the year.

## DIFFICULT DECISIONS

### RESIST THE DRAFT OR SERVE YOUR COUNTRY?

As the fighting in Vietnam intensified, young men of draft age who opposed the war found themselves considering one of two options: register with the draft board and risk heading off to war, or find a way to avoid military service. Ways to avoid service included medical and educational deferments. But a great many men did not qualify for these. The choices that remained, such as fleeing the country, going to jail, or giving in and joining the ranks, came with a high price. Once a decision was made, there was no turning back.

1. Imagine you oppose the war and are called to serve in Vietnam. What decision would you make? Would you feel guilty if you avoided the draft? If you chose to serve, how would you view those who did not serve your country?
2. Do you think more young men would have been willing to serve had this been a different war? Explain.

Others were more radical in their view. David Harris, who would spend 20 months in jail for refusing to serve in Vietnam, explained his motives.

### A PERSONAL VOICE DAVID HARRIS

“Theoretically, I can accept the notion that there are circumstances in which you have to kill people. I could not accept the notion that Vietnam was one of those circumstances. And to me that left the option of either sitting by and watching what was an enormous injustice . . . or [finding] some way to commit myself against it. And the position that I felt comfortable with in committing myself against it was total noncooperation—I was not going to be part of the machine.”

—quoted in *The War Within*

Draft resistance continued from 1967 until President Nixon phased out the draft in the early 1970s. During these years, the U.S. government accused more than 200,000 men of draft offenses and imprisoned nearly 4,000 draft resisters. (Although some were imprisoned for four or five years, most won parole after 6 to 12 months.) Throughout these years, about 10,000 Americans fled, many to Canada. **D**

In October of 1967, a demonstration at Washington’s Lincoln Memorial drew about 75,000 protesters. After listening to speeches, approximately 30,000 demonstrators locked arms for a march on the Pentagon in order “to disrupt the center of the American war machine,” as one organizer explained. As hundreds of protesters broke past the military police and mounted the Pentagon steps, they were met by tear gas and clubs. About 1,500 demonstrators were injured and at least 700 arrested.

**WAR DIVIDES THE NATION** By 1967, Americans increasingly found themselves divided into two camps regarding

the war. Those who strongly opposed the war and believed the United States should withdraw were known as **doves**. Feeling just as strongly that America should unleash much of its greater military force to win the war were the **hawks**.

Despite the visibility of the antiwar protesters, a majority of American citizens in 1967 still remained committed to the war. Others, while less certain about the proper U.S. role in Vietnam, were shocked to see protesters publicly criticize a war in which their fellow Americans were fighting and dying. A poll taken in December of 1967 showed that 70 percent of Americans believed the war protests were “acts of disloyalty.” A firefighter who lost his son in Vietnam articulated the bitter feelings a number of Americans felt toward the antiwar movement.

### A PERSONAL VOICE

“I’m bitter. . . . It’s people like us who give up our sons for the country. . . . The college types, the professors, they go to Washington and tell the government what to do. . . . But their sons, they don’t end up in the swamps over there, in Vietnam. No sir. They’re deferred, because they’re in school. Or they get sent to safe places. . . . What bothers me about the peace crowd is that you can tell from their attitude, the way they look and what they say, that they don’t really love this country.”

—a firefighter quoted in *Working-Class War*

### MAIN IDEA

#### Evaluating

**D** Do you think it was right for the government to imprison draft resisters? Explain.

This sign reflects the view of many Americans that the antiwar protests undermined the war effort in Vietnam. ▶



**MAIN IDEA**

**Evaluating**

**E** What were the key issues that divided America?

Responding to antiwar posters, Americans who supported the government’s Vietnam policy developed their own slogans: “Support our men in Vietnam” and “America—love it or leave it.” **E**

**JOHNSON REMAINS DETERMINED** Throughout the turmoil and division that engulfed the country during the early years of the war, President Johnson remained firm. Attacked by doves for not withdrawing and by hawks for not increasing military power rapidly enough, Johnson was dismissive of both groups and their motives. He continued his policy of slow escalation.

**A PERSONAL VOICE** LYNDON B. JOHNSON

“There has always been confusion, frustration, and difference of opinion in this country when there is a war going on. . . . You know what President Roosevelt went through, and President Wilson in World War I. He had some senators from certain areas . . . that gave him serious problems until victory was assured. . . . We are going to have these differences. No one likes war. All people love peace. But you can’t have freedom without defending it.”

—quoted in *No Hail, No Farewell*

However, by the end of 1967, Johnson’s policy—and the continuing stalemate—had begun to create turmoil within his own administration. In November, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, a key architect of U.S. escalation in Vietnam, quietly announced he was resigning to become head of the World Bank. “It didn’t add up,” McNamara recalled later. “What I was trying to find out was how . . . the war went on year after year when we stopped the infiltration [from North Vietnam] or shrunk it and when we had a very high body count and so on. It just didn’t make sense.”

As it happened, McNamara’s resignation came on the threshold of the most tumultuous year of the sixties. In 1968 the war—and Johnson’s presidency—would take a drastic turn for the worse.

**SECTION 3**

**ASSESSMENT**

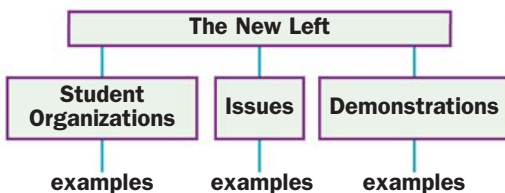
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each of the following, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- draft
- Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
- Free Speech Movement
- dove
- hawk
- New Left

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Re-create the tree diagram below on your paper. Then fill it in with examples of student organizations, issues, and demonstrations of the New Left.



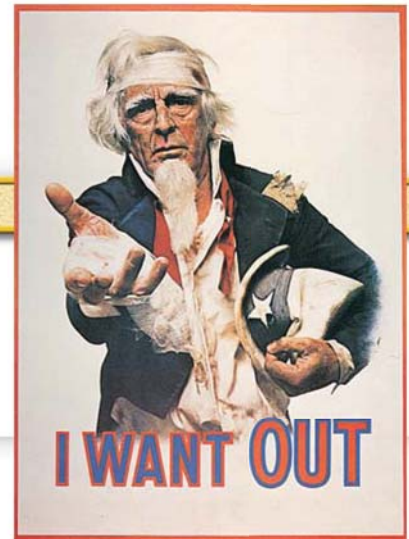
**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Imagine it is 1967. Do you think you would ally yourself with the hawks or the doves? Give reasons that support your position.

**4. EVALUATING**

Do you agree that antiwar protests were “acts of disloyalty”? Why or why not?



**5. ANALYZING VISUAL SOURCES**

This antiwar poster is a parody of the World War I Uncle Sam poster (shown on page 382), which states, “I want you for the U.S. Army.” Why might the artist have chosen this American character to express the antiwar message?