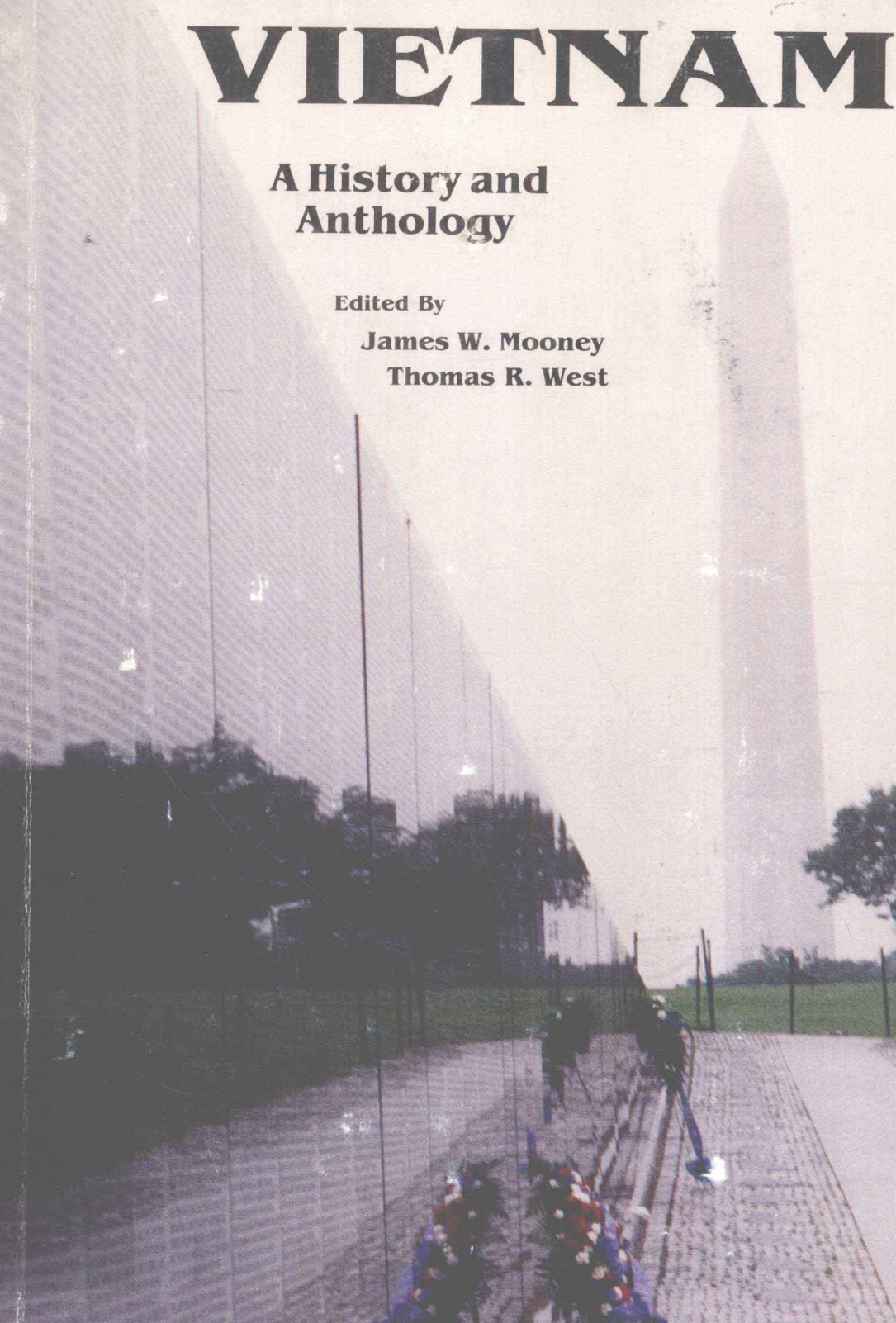
VIETNAM

A History and Anthology

Edited By
James W. Mooney
Thomas R. West



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INTRODUCTION

A great historical mistake is to think of the brief American involvement in Vietnam as central to the country's story. Vietnam and the surrounding region have a long history of coping with external forces, both resisting and borrowing from them. China has been a traditional danger. Yet Vietnam took from her huge northern neighbor both farming techniques and elements of culture. Then in the mid-nineteenth century came the French, an occupation far longer than the American and surely more culturally important. There was, of course, also the Japanese occupation, ending with the defeat of Japan in 1945. In time, and except for its terrible destructiveness, the American war that as a full scale conflict went from 1965 to 1973 will be an incident in Southeast Asia's history. In the end, mundane matters of trade, technology, and cultural exchange with the United States may leave their deeper mark on a nation that like any other country borrows, absorbs, adapts.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, France had established control over what has been known as Indochina, consisting of present-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Even before the French seizure of Vietnam, Roman Catholicism made converts there, and eventually the country became patterned of Buddhists and a minority of Catholics, of peasants holding to traditional ways and intellectuals acquainted with the West.

Among these last was Ho Chi Minh, one of several names this impassioned nationalist would assume: in Vietnamese, it suggests the enlightenment of his leadership. A member of the Parisian literary community in the years after World War I, Ho under the name Nguyen Ai Quoc or Nguyen the Patriot was a Vietnamese nationalist attracted to the Communist movement as a vehicle of anticolonialism. An indication of the complexity of Vietnam's relations with the outside world is that the young opponent of French imperialism was also a Francophile, enamored of the humanity of French civilization and capable of denouncing, in a published article, the introduction of English words into the great language.

Ho years later formed under Communist leadership a nationalist organization known as the Vietminh, intended to fight against the Japanese occupiers and French collaborators. Briefly upon the expulsion of the Japanese in 1945, Ho was *de facto* head of Vietnam, looking for American support. The United States at the end of World War II hoped that the European colonial nations would grant independence or self-government to their former possessions, but Washington did not press the issue. The French at their postwar return to power in Vietnam set up a rickety and supposedly independent government with as its occasional titular sovereign the emperor Bao Dai. When in 1954 Ho's military commander Vo Nguyen Giap took the French and Vietnamese garrison at Dien Bien Phu, a remote fort besieged by artillery Ho's forces had dragged through the nearly impenetrable jungle, the French war was effectively over. During the conflict, the United States under President Harry Truman had contributed massive funding to the French military effort. In 1954 a conference in Geneva representing a number of countries with an interest in Vietnam temporarily divided it into North and South, the intention being to have unifying elections under international supervision in two years. The United States was not a signatory to the agreement. North Vietnam was Communist; South Vietnam came under the control of Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic and one of many nationalists who had liked neither French rule nor the Communists.

After the establishment of a separate South Vietnam, Diem resolved not to allow the elections that as like as not would have made for Communist rule of the whole country. Two regimes, then, were to divide Vietnam into the indefinite future. That in the North with Hanoi as its capital was austere, highly disciplined, and totalitarian, allowing no opposition to Communist ideology and party control. It redistributed land, but did so by a savage if brief period of terror. The southern regime, its capital in Saigon, was defensive in its determination to keep separate. It opposed land reform, kept order by widespread imprisonment, torture, and killing, and ruled a nation in which a few enjoyed great wealth in the midst of Third World wretchedness. Affluence amidst poverty was not rare among countries that the West supported during the Cold War. In Vietnam it would continue after the Communist victory of 1975, numbers of Communist families enjoying both privilege and the cheaply bought valuables of the defeated bourgeoisie. The population of South Vietnam included Catholic and other refugees from the more repressive North. Against the Saigon regime arose a revolutionary movement that later began receiving extensive aid from Hanoi. Eventually the insurrectionists became the National Liberation Front, which came to be called the Vietcong, or Vietnamese Communists.

The Eisenhower administration, spanning the years from 1953 to

1961, supported Diem. The administration's grim Secretary of State was John Foster Dulles, whose brand of anticommunism—scarcely different from that of many liberal Democrats—made him suspicious of nationalist and left movements throughout the Third World. The reasons for Washington's belligerence, continued in the administration of John Kennedy when our commitment to South Vietnam could still have been ended, may preoccupy historians for a long time.

One theory of the Cold War holds that the western confrontation of the Soviet Union and the various Communist and leftist movements throughout the world was essentially for the sake of capitalist economic interests. The narrowest rendering of this notion would claim that wherever throughout the world American military and diplomatic involvement appears, the reason lies in the needs of some American business interest. That would be the crudest kind of economic determinism. It requires at the least the discovery of some large corporate investment or a desirable natural resource in whatever region is in question, either of them so extensive as to command the efforts of the American government and armed services. A somewhat more plausible interpretation as it specifically applies to Vietnam will see the American commitment there as a byproduct of a more general effort to enrich capitalism and business profits worldwide. Yet even this ignores the real complexity of human motive and assumes that, among the myriad concerns that occupy most people, cold warriors were driven only by economic calculation.

Nations hunger for economic gain. They also hunger, probably more strongly, for power: economic success is but one form of power, desired more for that than for the lesser comforts that the prosperous enjoy. And power is inextricably connected with ideas and creeds: ideas that justify power, ideas that depend on it to extend their reach, ideas that are themselves power over those who believe them and empower their believers to act, sometimes to their material detriment.

A convincing explanation, then, of why the United States allowed itself to be drawn into Vietnam is that compounded considerations of power, interest, and belief had set the nation years before to confronting Communism wherever it appeared. More precisely among the convictions was the knowledge that state Communism in its many varieties over the globe was the death of freedom. As an internal strife produced by traditional quarrels, ideological differences, and competition for control, the war in Vietnam between Hanoi, the insurgents, and Saigon was in no way vital to the United States. But prevalent in American thinking during the 1950s was what is known as the domino theory, the fear that the fall to Communism of one regime in that region would lead to the fall of another, and another, and another, dominoes collapsing one upon the next. The United States was propelled on its Vietnam journey by the

whole force of its cold-war anticommunist mentality, so often articulated and so intimately connected with global policies that by 1954, or 1963, or 1965 it could not think its way out of a defense of Saigon.

The American war in Vietnam was the logical extension of liberal foreign policy. The logic is traceable to the beginnings of the Cold War.

It was liberals rather than conservatives who established the basic institutions of that long, bleak and for stretches of time bloodless war between the West and the Communist powers. The liberal Democratic President Harry Truman gave American aid to Greece and Turkey to bolster their resistance to Communism, sending American troops to Greece to support anticommunist forces during a civil war. In 1948 he set up the Marshall Plan, a great program of economic aid to western Europe, torn to economic shreds by World War II. A purpose of the Marshall Plan was to keep that portion of the world from falling under Communism. In the same year Truman directed the airlifting of supplies to West Berlin when the USSR cut off access by land. In 1949 the United States entered into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, as a military defense against a possible invasion by the Soviet Union. Under authority of the United Nations, Truman sent troops to South Korea in 1950 to halt the North Korean Communist invasion of that country. The Truman presidency set for the United States the terms of the Cold War. Under the Eisenhower administration, representing the mildly liberal internationalist wing of the Republican Party, an armed, restless, hostile peace prevailed between the Communist and the western world. Circumstances brought to much of Kennedy's presidency new foreign engagements dictated by the Cold War.

Yet liberals, perhaps for being more willing than conservatives to maintain widespread military and diplomatic engagements abroad, were increasingly prepared to find distinctions among insurgencies throughout the world, complications of motive in Soviet foreign policy, and reasons for mixing aggressiveness with restraint. Besides, it suited the liberal temperament to resist the excited emotions that conservatives brought to any discussion of Communism foreign or domestic. Liberals preferred a drier language and mentality, closer to the hard dispassionate virtues of the modern science and instruments of production that they trusted to remake society for the better.

The fine fusion of determination and restraint was difficult to maintain politically: conservatives promised the public quicker emotional gratifications. In Vietnam the liberal formula could not hold.

The American intervention in Vietnam expressed the assumptions on which the liberals had waged the Cold War: that Communism was an abomination, and that its success in any major part of the world threatened its neighbors. But intervention, which liberals effected in Korea in

1950 and in the Dominican Republic fifteen years later against a leftist movement there, went contrary to the liberal attempt to understand the full complexity of the world. The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, as Communists, were the enemy that the Cold War defined. But as Third World nationalists whose lives were a witness against the poverty and social injustice of the region, they were the kinds of forces that liberals had been more willing than conservatives and right-wingers to understand and attempt to accommodate. The pressure of events and alliances and institutions that liberals had created sent a Democratic administration into full-scale engagement in 1965. Thereupon, cold-war liberals could not explain satisfactorily even to themselves why we were there.

Two programs under President John F. Kennedy, who in January 1961 brought the Democratic Party back to the White House after eight Republican years, were especially revealing of the components of the liberal mind.

The Peace Corps was designed to send volunteers to remote parts of the world, rotted with poverty and therefore vulnerable to Communist insurgency. There they might teach villagers to improve their crop yield or learn simple principles of health care. As though in anticipation of the Peace Corps, William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick had made the homely hero of their 1958 novel *The Ugly American* a retired engineer. He and his wife bring to an Asian village honest American skills and an unassuming simple concern, while their pampered compatriots lead luxurious existences in the capital of the fictional third-world nation. The Special Forces, better known as the Green Berets, complemented the Peace Corps. They were to be soldiers trained at once for guerrilla warfare and for organizing anticommunist resistance within the kinds of communities in which the Peace Corps would do its life-giving work: they seemed exactly fitted for Vietnam. Both programs were appropriate in spirit to what the Kennedy presidency represented: combining cold-war militancy with a commitment to a measure of political and economic democracy, the cool virtues of advanced technique with the warmer sentiments of Democratic liberalism.

In April 1961, Kennedy acted with the aggressiveness that had characterized his Democratic predecessor Truman, and in so doing suffered his greatest defeat, the failed landing at Cuba's Bay of Pigs of exiles trained by the United States. That and the subsequent preoccupation with removing Fidel Castro expressed the cold warrior side of the Democratic administration. Yet the President showed enough restraint not to give the invasion air cover when it was clearly beyond saving. Kennedy's design of the Alliance for Progress for Latin America, an economic aid program to be accompanied with efforts to get recipient regimes to initiate social reform, expressed the accompanying concern for issues of

poverty and inequity. That it was also supposed to fight Communism by offering a progressive alternative makes it a representative liberal scheme. The program never fulfilled its initial promise.

Much of the foreign policy of the Kennedy administration was oriented not to Vietnam and the rest of Asia but to encounters with the USSR in Europe and the Western Hemisphere. In June 1961 a summit meeting in Vienna between Kennedy and Khrushchev failed to settle the difficult question of the future of Berlin. When it became clear that Moscow wanted to alter the situation there, Kennedy in July responded in the spirit of the Cold War, calling for an increase in military spending and announcing that he was doubling draft calls and mobilizing reserves. Soon afterwards the Communists—supposedly at the initiation of the East Germans, who wished to claim East Berlin as part of their sovereign nation—began building the wall that was to keep in Germans who had been flooding to the West, taking with them skills and knowledge vital to the East German economy. Kennedy sent troops to West Berlin, and during weeks of confrontation Washington acted as though the freedom of the western part of the city were endangered. In October of the following year came Kennedy's naval blockade of Cuba to cut off Soviet construction of missiles, ending with arrangements whereby Moscow agreed to withdraw the weapons.

During their time of greatest hostility, Moscow and the United States had resumed nuclear testing. But after the Cuban missile crisis, something like friendship developed between Khrushchev and Kennedy, and late in 1963 the two negotiated a treaty banning nuclear testing above ground. Once more, Kennedy the cold warrior was revealing the other pole within the liberal mentality: in this case, a willingness to enter into an agreement of a sort to horrify ideologues of the political right. After Kennedy's death the Senate ratified the treaty.

In Kennedy's tenure, when so much of the flow of energy was between Moscow and the capitals of the West, only one crisis of sorts involved Indochina. When it looked as though factional fighting in Laos might pull in the United States on the side of an anticommunist leader, the major powers agreed instead to honor the neutrality of the country. But the President would not consider a neutral South Vietnam: it had to be anticommunist. Unclear as to what he wanted to do in Vietnam, recognizing the danger of an increased entanglement, yet perhaps thinking of Vietnam as a problem that could be put off, he ended by sending a total of 16,000 American advisers to Diem's military, along with much combat hardware.

Even as the administration was deepening its involvement, an event in Vietnam signaled the moral morass that the war was going to be for the United States. In June 1963, the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc

set himself afire in Saigon, offering his death in protest against the repressiveness of Diem's regime. As the war widened, the act would be repeated in Vietnam and the United States.

By his last days, Diem was facing widespread hostility. Some members of Kennedy's administration wanted him removed as a hindrance to Saigon's successful prosecution of the war, and became complicit in a military coup that early in November 1963 ousted him from office. Washington, however, was not a party to the subsequent assassination of Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu, his brother who had also been a powerful and controversial member of his government. It happened just shortly before Kennedy's own assassination and the coming to office in this country of Lyndon Johnson, whose political fortunes were to be bound inextricably to Vietnam.

Johnson seems to have had at first no clearer idea than his predecessors of the size and nature of the Vietnam problem. In keeping with a reflexive anticommunism, in July 1964 he increased the American auxiliary military presence there. Then on August 4, in response to skirmishes in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam that are unclear in nature, Johnson ordered air strikes that damaged or destroyed some vessels and a nearby oil storage site. Quickly afterwards Johnson got through the Senate by a vote of eighty-eight to two and the House with no negative votes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, as it is called, in essence giving him unrestricted authority to act in Vietnam. A strong spokesman for it was J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a leading foreign policy liberal. In the Senate only Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska opposed the resolution. Fulbright would later turn against the war. Yet at the time, liberals and conservatives together had given Johnson legal cover for the escalated American presence in Vietnam.

The politics of the presidential campaign, which pitted Johnson against the Republican conservative Barry Goldwater, were typical of the Cold War in one respect: the liberals had designed a foreign policy tough in action; conservatives were tough in rhetoric. Johnson presented himself as the peace candidate, and the Republicans spoke in a way that made them seem a danger to the peace. Johnson's overwhelming win appeared to be a triumph for a sensibly moderate foreign policy. But in March 1965 he initiated a radically new program of bombing North Vietnam that went by the title of Rolling Thunder, and soon he sent 50,000 additional troops. That marked the time of full American engagement in Vietnam, to continue until the war was won, lost, or negotiated. There was no talk now of confining the American military to advising the South Vietnamese. Americans were committed to combat on their own.

Draft calls reflected the new reality. Even in the years of uncertain American peace between the Korean War and Vietnam, students though protected by educational deferments had lived with the draft as a possibility and a nuisance, or a patriotic duty. Now the chances of getting called were far greater, and conscription might mean not spending time in a drab army post but being sent to a war for which the government was presenting no convincing justification. On campuses as well as among less favored young Americans, the draft became a preoccupation.

As the years of American fighting lengthened, conscription came under heavy attack. Until late in the conflict, when the Nixon administration substituted a draft lottery for student deferments, young men clung to that temporary protection. Some sought the status of conscientious objector, which if granted ensured that while the government might require of the holder some kind of hospital or other humanitarian service, he would not go into combat unless possibly as a noncombatant paramedic.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the protest quickly erupting on college campuses against the American involvement had as its central motive the fear of being drafted. All women students were ineligible for conscription. So were those of their male classmates who for any reason—and there were many—failed to meet the physical or psychological standards for the military. Among students who might in time face the draft, deferments to last during college were available until the later years of the war and offered the possibility of keeping out until some other escape from the military offered itself. Black and white working-class youth who did not go to college were most likely to be called to military service. The Vietnam draft represented for opponents not so much the personal danger of conscription as more generally the war's evil presence within American society. Resisters publicly burned their selective service cards, for which they willingly received prison sentences. Others returned their cards to their local service offices, thereby inviting their draft boards to attempt to induct them and then opening themselves to criminal prosecution when they refused induction.

The complexities of the draft and the moral questions that came with it would reveal themselves as the war progressed. In the early days of American escalation, most of the public supported the conflict. Simple patriotism accounts for much of this. But the conflict also had behind it the whole logic of the West's waging of the Cold War, a logic to which the Communists, including the Vietnamese variety, contributed by the brutal repressiveness with which they wielded any power they could seize. Liberals, more given to doubts and questionings than conservatives, might have been expected to generate reservations about the Vietnam venture. But the Cold War was of their own designing, the rescue

of South Vietnam was widely thought to be integral to the waging of the Cold War, and it was a liberal President who was conducting that rescue. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, presidential advisers McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow: such members of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations gave to the prosecution of the war an appearance of reasoned resolve.

In those early days of American escalation, South Vietnam was under the dual leadership of General Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky, a vice air marshal known for his uniform and scarf, his pistol, and his swagger. To support him Washington by the end of 1965 was committing close to 200,000 troops; and by the middle of 1966 the war had claimed some 2,600 American combat deaths. The United States was also pounding North and South Vietnam with bombs. Among the objectives of the bombing was to stop the flow of troops and material from North Vietnam to the fighting in the south. Especially identifiable with this stream was what became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, not a single jungle trail but an elaborate transportation network that moved southward in part through Laos. The failure to stop the movement was one of the signal American frustrations of the war. And the continuance of the bombing in later years was the most devastating of American assaults on Vietnam, and possibly the most discreditable to the thinking of opponents of the war. Cluster bombs that burst in mid-air and flung out maiming shrapnel, explosives designed to cling to skin and scorch it, poisonous defoliants intended to clear areas where the enemy might lurk turned the war into a futuristic horror. A marine veteran who praises the tenacity of both the Americans and the enemy in the ground fighting recalls his anger at the unseen bombers that destroyed, without being near it, the country beneath them.

Later in the war prominence would be given to a controversial policy, planned by the Central Intelligence Agency, known as the Phoenix program. It coordinated the activities of South Vietnamese agents who would go into villages, spot leaders of the Vietcong, and have them arrested or killed. Antiwar activists perceived it as murder, and reports tell of inefficiency, corruption, killings motivated by personal rivalry. It also appears that the program did much damage to the Vietcong infrastructure.

In March 1965 occurred the first of the significant public protests against the war. At the University of Michigan, the nationwide campus organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) held what was called a teach-in, a name recalling the sit-ins of the civil rights movement. It began on the evening of March 24 and did not end until the following morning. The method was for people knowledgeable about the issue to meet in a long session with whoever wanted to attend, refuting the

administration's positions and generating further resistance to the war. Defenders of Johnson's policy were also invited, but the weight was on the side of the opposition. Teach-ins followed at Columbia and the University of Wisconsin, and in May at Berkeley a session lasted for a day and a half and drew 20,000. In April SDS sponsored an antiwar demonstration that attracted 20,000 people in Washington, D.C.

The teach-in reveals much about the nature of student radicalism at the time. It reflected both respect for learning and a will to discard the formalities of the university; it hinted at the vision of a campus as a place for a continuing discussion no more than lightly structured. In all this, the teach-ins are suggestive of what SDS was calling participatory democracy. Its adherents looked to a future society made up of individuals engaging widely in decision making processes, gathering into small democratic bodies for argument and agreement according to the issue to be settled. Noteworthy of the teach-ins was civility. Absent as yet was the sullen anger that in time became virtually a radical style.

Also absent, at least from much of the antiwar movement, was the mood characteristic of some later radicals of complete disaffection from the American government and society, along with veneration of Hanoi and the National Liberation Front. Early opponents conducted themselves as though they assumed that if they continued questioning the war, the American government and society would listen to them. Among the first prominent foreign-policy liberals to dispute Johnson's course was Senator Fulbright, earlier a chief supporter of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and in no way a ranter. The poet Robert Lowell turned down an invitation to a White House Festival of the Arts in the spring of 1965, and some of those who did attend took the opportunity to attack the President's war policy. On other occasions that would be a breach of manners, and perhaps it was on this one; but these were artists and writers, accustomed to presentation of ideas, and the seriousness of the issue gave them a certain warrant to speak their mind in an event intended to celebrate their craft of speaking it.

Students gave the antiwar movement much of its distinctive character. It is often forgotten, however, that the movement drew broadly on the middle classes. A remarkable number of parents and children could be seen in the marches for peace.

Johnson's government attempted nothing like the campaign of harassment that Woodrow Wilson's administration had unleashed against opponents of the country's participation in the First World War. The memory of the red-baiting of the 1950s, of which liberals generally had been the opponents, may have been a reason for the government's declining to label antiwar people collaborators with the foe. As could have been expected, much popular hostility to the antiwar movement

did erupt. But the liberal administration's defense of the war stayed largely within bounds of discussion.

Still, by the end of 1965 the attack on the war had become steady and dramatic. In August demonstrations marked the twentieth anniversaries of the two American atomic bombings of Japan: Hiroshima and Nagasaki. About 350 protesters were arrested. There were burnings of draft cards. Late in November 30,000 demonstrators were at the White House. These actions and that of three opponents of the war who like Vietnamese Buddhist monks burned themselves to death, one at the United Nations, one at the Pentagon, and another in Detroit, signified that the opposition to the war was now entrenched, impassioned, and prepared to pass beyond the conventions of American politics. In time it also gained, in Martin Luther King, Jr., a powerful moral voice.

By late 1966 Vietnam was an issue not only in the streets but in electoral politics. As protests continued and the Senate liberals George McGovern of South Dakota, Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, Robert Kennedy of New York, and Frank Church of Idaho raised their doubts, some peace candidates entered the autumn elections.

In 1967 appeared the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam as an umbrella organization for antiwar activities. On April 15 of that year the Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, formed in 1966 and led by the seasoned peace advocate David Dellinger, staged demonstrations. The Mobe gathered between 100,000 and 200,000 protesters in New York City, taunted by supporters of the war as they marched to the United Nations Building, where Martin Luther King spoke to the rally. In San Francisco the stadium in Golden Gate Park with a capacity of 65,000 could not contain all those in attendance. Other big cities added their numbers to this largest nationwide demonstration up to its time in American history. Another large protest that year, 100,000 strong, was held in late October in Washington, D.C., bringing together the political left and elements of the more celebrative counterculture. Some 35,000 of the demonstrators marched on the Pentagon. Along with the Mobe, a leader of that action was Jerry Rubin, a spokesman for the hippies of a political turn who were calling themselves Yippies. Rubin, conformably to the countercultural search for the mysterious healing forces of earth and sky, promised that the Pentagon was going to levitate. He exaggerated. But demonstrators occupied Pentagon property in defiance of soldiers and marshals who had been called to keep order, and some occupiers were beaten or arrested. The government also used tear gas. Some protesters spat at the federal forces or otherwise provoked them.

Publicly destroying a draft card or returning it to the selective service system was an especially dedicated form of protest. In 1967 acts in open

resistance to the draft were a prominent means of opposition to the war. On April 15 in Sheep Meadow in New York City's Central Park, between 150 and two hundred draft cards were consigned to flame. In mid-October the Resistance, an antiwar group that centered on the draft, was one of a number of agents of a week's action that included returns of selective service cards and other protests against conscription. At Oakland, California, that week activists carried out street tactics, shutting off one and another access to the induction center, pulling parked cars into the streets, ducking the police. The Oakland resistance was in essence an enactment of the participatory democracy preached earlier by SDS, combining spontaneity with cooperation. It looked as though, for a moment, the centralized structures of government and industry, which had made possible the American war in Vietnam, had given way to the free but combined activities of citizens, inventing as they went along. That suggests a point of union between the political left and the counterculture, those hippies and communards distinguished for their distancing themselves from ideology and political action, their turn to agriculture and handicrafts, their immersion in drugs and music and sexuality. The counterculture too had, in fact, a largely unspoken politics, an antipolitics of secession from those larger institutions that the left intended to overthrow or transform.

Meanwhile, a similar consciousness in resistance to the war had been growing within the religious left.

On May 17, 1968, nine war resisters entered the selective service offices at Catonsville, Maryland. Prominent among them was the Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan and his Josephite priest brother Phillip, one of four who had already violated the law by pouring animal blood on draft records in Baltimore. The intruders proceeded to destroy records, afterwards waiting for the police to arrive and arrest them. In the wake of their trial, they became known as the Catonsville Nine. They fled for a time, sheltered by fellow activists and hoping that as fugitives they could bring others to work against the war. Other war resisters conducted similar raids on draft offices.

Southern black evangelical ministers and congregations had been central to the civil rights movement, to be joined in time by northern Jewish and white Christian religious figures. In the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi, the great opponent of British rule and caste injustice in India, they had adopted in resisting segregation the methods of nonviolence and civil disobedience, both of them requiring a difficult composure in the face of mobs, angry store owners and patrons, or police. Transferred to action against the war in Vietnam, nonviolence presented itself as a fitting witness to peace. Draft resistance, when it took the form of peaceably burning a draft card or refusing induction and then accepting the

consequences, was an instance of nonviolence. Many liberals, belligerently anticommunist though they might be, had their own preference for reasoned self-constraint in policy and conduct, a repudiation of chauvinistic and other violent emotions on the right. Prowar liberals might therefore see in the controlled calm that attended antiwar acts of nonviolence a distant likeness to their own beliefs.

While radicals in Catonsville and elsewhere were attacking American policy from outside conventional politics, the nation as a whole was reassessing the war. This was largely the result of an offensive that the enemy under Ho's general Vo Nguyen Giap had begun at the end of January 1968. It took place in the midst of a truce that Vietnamese were supposed to be observing during their New Year season of Tet.

At that moment North Vietnamese and southern guerrilla forces struck throughout South Vietnam, overrunning government posts and taking the ground war to the cities. And in Saigon, supposedly well out of the range of any major attack, guerrillas seized part of the United States embassy compound. For over three weeks thereafter in the city of Hue, Communists hung on stubbornly and brutally, slaughtering people they defined as opponents. In the end, the Tet offensive was crushed, at great loss to the attackers. But the discovery that an enemy supposedly coming under the control of the South Vietnamese and American forces could wage so extensive a campaign turned Americans to doubting both the effectiveness and the purpose of the war.

Beginning before Tet and lasting for two months, the Communists besieged marines and South Vietnamese troops holding the outpost at Khe Sanh, in the northwest of South Vietnam, the Communists sustaining terrible losses from American air power. They had to end the siege. But in June General William Westmoreland, then the commander of American forces in Vietnam, withdrew the Americans from the post. Thus was demonstrated the folly of the Communist attack on Khe Sanh, the pointlessness of the American defense of a base that could later be so casually abandoned, or the mindlessness of the events of war.

Yet at Khe Sanh, in the lines of defense during Tet, and throughout South Vietnam, the American army held. Even as Americans at home were devising the tactics of resistance and, at moments, the participatory future it envisioned, the American military and the individual troops had been reinventing themselves on the field.

They had to do so. An army trained for conventional warfare found itself fighting a guerrilla foe, amidst a people it was supposed to be serving even as any unknown part of that population might be secretly working for the other side. So those Americans in Vietnam who were in serious combat had to learn the stealth and craft of guerrillas, operating in small units far from large military bases. This they trained themselves

to do in skilled coordination with American air and other heavy weaponry. Patrols came to recognize that the ground on which they walked, the ground a walker can ordinarily trust as surely as gravity or air or sunlight, might at any moment be the enemy in the form of a mined booby trap; they had to find how to work with this treacherous earth.

Americans were also attempting, for reasons both of principle and of strategy, to effect social reform in South Vietnam. Their aim was in the liberal mode combining mild redistribution of wealth with modernization. The Americans urged on Saigon a policy of land reform and economic development that would win the countryside politically while weapons defended it. Integral to the plan was the setting up of strategic hamlets, protected by military means and improved economically and socially. The South Vietnamese government liked the strategic hamlets, but used them to enable officials to tighten their control over the peasantry. The American concept made no adequate headway.

After Tet Americans continued to conduct search-and-destroy missions, and in May 1969, early in the presidency of Richard Nixon, troops now under the command of General Creighton Abrams won a peak near the Laotian border grimly known as Hamburger Hill. Yet as skepticism about American involvement increased at home, morale suffered. Some of the reasons are simple enough: awareness that domestic support had waned, growing doubt that the war had point or justification. As policy in Washington changed, now implying the logic of withdrawal of troops from aggressive combat, the whole business of killing and risking death came to seem meaningless. Racial clashes also plagued the army. After the increase in hostility toward whites in sections of the formerly integrationist civil rights movement, there was disaffection among black troops and, when they were not in the field of combat, antagonism between the races. The American army had fought with a measure of restraint within a population in which anyone might be an enemy. It is the fate of that army to be remembered for an atrocity: the massacre at My Lai, in March 1968, of Vietnamese including women and children. It was one of a number of wanton acts by American troops, in a war fought in the midst of a civilian population and therefore inviting atrocities on both sides.

Back at home, the political mood in the year of Tet was responding to the turn the war had taken.

As the New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary of March 12 approached, an army of college and graduate students invaded the state to aid a challenger to President Johnson. Introspective, dry and understated, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota was a bit aloof from the political process. That, in time, would give him a special appeal in the universities and within a sector of the electorate, as though he embodied cool detached sanity in opposition to the hot madness of the