

Chapter Summary

The Vietnam War, 1954–1975

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How does military conflict divide people within cultures? Should citizens support the government during wartime?

This chapter discusses the domino theory and U.S involvement in Vietnam; it explains how the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution increased the power of the executive branch, and how the antiwar movement changed the way Americans viewed the government and military.

Going to War in Vietnam

- In 1930 Ho Chi Minh became an advocate of communism.
- During WWII, the U.S. helped Indochina fight the Japanese.
- After WWII, France refused to give Indochina independence.
- Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh fought the French.
- President Eisenhower sent aid to help the French retain control.
- After Dien Bien Phu, France withdrew; the Geneva Accord created North and South Vietnam.
- North Vietnam became communist.
- U.S. leaders feared a “domino effect” if South Vietnam fell.
- After the Gulf of Tonkin, Johnson escalated U.S. involvement and Americans applauded.
- American forces used napalm to destroy the landscape.
- Americans questioned the war.

Vietnam Divides the Nation

- Americans questioned government honesty and a “credibility gap” developed.
- Vietnam was the first television war.
- War casualties and an unfair draft system caused civil unrest.
- In 1971 the Twenty-sixth Amendment was ratified.

- The U.S. was divided by hawks and doves.
- In 1968, a surprise Tet Offensive was launched.
- MLK and Robert Kennedy were assassinated.
- Antiwar protesters clashed at the Democratic Convention.
- Nixon was elected on promises to end the war.

The War Winds Down

- Kissinger negotiated an end to the war.
- Nixon reduced troops while secretly bombing Cambodia.
- After the My Lai massacre, Americans felt the war was senseless.
- After Cambodia was invaded, four student protesters at Kent State were killed.
- Nixon lost congressional support and they passed the War Powers Act to limit his power.
- In 1971 the Pentagon Papers were leaked.
- In January 1973, the war ended.
- In 1975, South Vietnam fell.
- Americans wanted to forget the war, and veterans went unrecognized.
- In 1982, the Vietnam Memorial was dedicated.
- After Vietnam and Watergate, Americans became cynical about the government.