

## **Divided Opinions**

Journalists, particularly television reporters, played an important role in shaping public opinion about the war. Through television, Americans felt the violence of the war right in their own homes. The graphic images of war led many people to wonder if the war in Vietnam was worth the cost. Some journalists began to report their growing suspicions that the fighting was not going as well as the military claimed. Gradually, some people who had supported the Vietnam War began to call for the United States to get out of the conflict. These people were called **doves**—named after the birds that symbolize peace.

President Johnson and most members of Congress said that defeating communism in Vietnam took priority over domestic reforms. These so-called **hawks** wanted more military spending to send new forces to Vietnam.

Many Americans did not agree with the hawks. College students often held protests to call for a change in U.S. war policy. Many of them had already taken part in the civil rights movements. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) became one of the most active antiwar groups. SDS protested the draft system and the companies that made weapons used in the war. In 1965, SDS led 20,000 protesters in a march on Washington, D.C. As the war continued, the student movement grew bolder and sometimes even grew violent. By the end of 1968, protests had taken place on almost 75 percent of the country's college campuses.

Many ordinary citizens also took part in antiwar protests. Charlotte Keyes helped organize a group called Women Strike for Peace. She described the different types of people in the antiwar movement.



**“The peaceniks [war protesters] these days are legion [very large]—they are ninety years old and fifteen, heads of families and housewives with babies, students, (and) young people.”**

Most Americans initially supported the war. But as it escalated—from 184,000 troops at the end of 1965 to more than half a million by the end of the decade—a powerful antiwar movement began taking hold.

Mass protests, led mostly by students and young people, began in 1965 and grew larger and more intense. In 1967, 300,000 people marched in New York and 100,000 in Washington, with protestors trying to close down the Pentagon. Sit-ins, teach-ins, and peace marches took over college campuses; men burned their draft cards, and radicals attacked college ROTC buildings.

Johnson kept insisting that the U.S. was winning. But Americans got a very different impression of what was essentially the first televised war. Every night,

**'Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America.'**

the evening news programs showed relatively uncensored images of GIs plodding through jungles and rice paddies, bombs dropping from B-52 airplanes, and piles of corpses and wounded on both sides. As media scholar Marshall McLuhan wrote in 1975, "Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America—not on the battlefields of Vietnam."

### **America's First Guerrilla War**

Vietnam was also America's first real guerrilla war. Much of the fighting involved confusing jungle warfare against Vietcong guerrillas who attacked, then easily melted back into the civilian population (similar to what U.S. soldiers have faced in the current war in Afghanistan).

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