

The Legacy of the Vietnam War

What are the legacies and long-term impacts of the Vietnam War?

Directions: Review each of the sources and discuss with your group your answers to the following questions:

- *What is most interesting, puzzling, or important about this source?*
- *What does this source tell you about the legacy, or long-term impact of the Vietnam War?*

<p><i>Source: American Wounded & Casualties of the Vietnam War, National Archives</i></p> <p>Notes:</p> <p>What was the impact of the war on American military troops and veterans?</p>	<p><i>Source: War Powers Resolution, November 7, 1973</i></p> <p>Notes:</p> <p>What was the impact of the war on the American government?</p>
<p><i>Source: Refugees Memoir, "Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives, 1989</i></p> <p>Notes:</p> <p>What was the impact of the war on the people of Vietnam?</p>	<p><i>Using all three sources, draft a 2-3 sentence claim to answer the lesson focus question: What are the legacies and long-term impacts of the Vietnam War?</i></p>

The Legacy of the Vietnam War

Background: The war in Vietnam had many and far-reaching effects. In addition to the hundreds of thousands lives lost, those who returned home struggled to survive in civil society. The end of the war brought real change to the American government and reunified Vietnam under communist rule. Finally, environmental damage has had a profound effect on both the Vietnamese landscape and the people who survived the war.

More than 58,000 American troops died during the conflict. Many more soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines returned home permanently disabled, sick, or suffering from mental and emotional distress. Many veterans reported a variety of health problems and concerns, which some of them attributed to their exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides. Unlike veterans coming home from WWII or Korea, American veterans from Vietnam came home to a society that did not, by and large, support their mission. Some anti-war protestors believed veterans were war-criminals; instead of welcoming the soldiers home, they treated them with antipathy or outright hatred. Popular opinion had turned so strongly against military intervention, the government passed laws and implemented policies designed to make sure the country would never again commit itself to this kind of war, especially a war that lacked Congressional oversight.

In Vietnam, the end of the war reunified the country under communist rule. Many South Vietnamese citizens who feared for their safety had to flee the country and became war refugees. Decades after the end of the war, the country's landscape still contains visible signs of the conflict and many of the people and their bodies have been permanently disfigured because of the environmental impact of the weapons during the war.

Directions: Review each of the following sources. As you review each source, be prepared to discuss with your group your answers to the following questions:

1. What is most interesting, puzzling, or important about this source?
2. What does this source tell you about the legacy, or long-term impact of the Vietnam War?

The Legacy of the Vietnam War (Veterans)

American Wounded & Casualties of the Vietnam War

Sources:

- *Statistical Information about Fatal Casualties of the Vietnam War*, National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#category>.
- *Diseases associated with Agent Orange Exposure*: Dept. of Veterans' Affairs: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/diseases.asp>.
- *Image: An Air Force honor guard pallbearers carrying the casket of an MIA away from a C-141 Starlifter aircraft are framed by a saluting arm.* The C-141 transported the remains of POW's and MIA's from North Vietnam, 03/29/1977. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier # 6375756.



Wounded		Casualties					
		By Category	Number	By Service	Number	By Race	Number
Total Severely Disabled	75,000	Accident	9,107	Air Force	2,586	Amer. Indian / Alaska Native	226
Total 100% Disabled	23,214	Declared Dead	1,201	Army	38,224	Asian	139
Lost one or more limbs	6,364	Dead of Wounds	5,299	Coast Guard	7	Black or African American	7,243
Partial list of diseases associated with Agent Orange Exposure: Cancer (Leukemia, Myeloma, Prostate, Respiratory, Soft Tissue sarcomas), Diabetes, Hodgkin's Disease, Ischemic Heart Disease, Neuropathy,		Homicide	236	Marines	14,844	Hispanic one-race	349
		Illness	938	Navy	2,559	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	229
		Killed in Action	40,934			Non-Hispanic more than one-race	204
		Presumed Dead (Remains recovered)	32			White	49,830
		Presumed Dead (Remains not recovered)	91				
		Self-inflicted	382				
Total Records	303,704	Total Records	58, 220	Total Records	58,220	Total Records	58,220

The Legacy of the Vietnam War (War Powers Resolution, page 1)

Background: On November 7, 1973, through a Joint Resolution, Congress passed the War Powers Act, which checks the President's power to commit troops into battle without Congressional consent. The resolution was passed over President Richard Nixon's veto; every president since has questioned its constitutionality. An excerpt is included below.

Source: *The Avalon Project at Yale University*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/warpower.asp



D.C., Washington - Capitol - Exterior - Night View of S.E. front on rainy night, 1919. Source: Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005681020/>

Purpose and Policy

SEC. 2.

a. It is the purpose of this joint resolution to fulfill the intent of the framers of the Constitution of the United States and insure that the collective judgment of both the Congress and the President will apply to the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and to the continued use of such forces in hostilities or in such situations.

b. Under article I, section 8, of the Constitution, it is specifically provided that the Congress shall have the power to make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution, not only its own powers but also all other powers vested by the Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.

c. The constitutional powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to introduce United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, are exercised only pursuant to (1) a declaration of war, (2) specific statutory authorization, or (3) a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.

Consultation

SEC. 3. The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situation where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and after every such introduction shall consult regularly with the Congress until United States Armed Forces are no longer engaged in hostilities or have been removed from such situations.

The Legacy of the Vietnam War (War Powers Resolution, page 2)

Reporting

SEC. 4. (a) In the absence of a declaration of war, in any case in which United States Armed Forces are introduced--

- (1) into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances;
- (2) into the territory, airspace or waters of a foreign nation, while equipped for combat, except for deployments which relate solely to supply, replacement, repair, or training of such forces; or
- (3) in numbers which substantially enlarge United States Armed Forces equipped for combat already located in a foreign nation; the president shall submit within 48 hours to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the President pro tempore of the Senate a report, in writing....

Congressional Action

SEC. 5. (c) ... at any time that United States Armed Forces are engaged in hostilities outside the territory of the United States, its possessions and territories without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President if the Congress so directs by concurrent resolution.



Photograph of Private First Class Russell R. Widdifield in Vietnam, 1969. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier 532493.

The Legacy of the Vietnam War (Refugees)

After the fall of Saigon and the Communist re-unification of Vietnam in the mid-1970s, many South Vietnamese citizens and people from neighboring Laos and Cambodia fled the nation. Close to 2 million became known as “boat people refugees” because they tried to sail across the Pacific Ocean on small boats. The excerpt below is from a refugee’s memoir. He explained what changed under this Communist government and how that motivated his desire to flee to the United States.



South China Sea...Crewmen of the amphibious cargo ship USS Durham (LKA-114) take Vietnamese refugees aboard a small craft. The refugees will be transferred later by mechanized landing craft (LCM) to the freighter Transcolorado., 04/03/1975. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier # 558518.

From the day of liberation to the day I left, it was three years. Life under the Communists was so hard compared with before. Every three to six months, the Communists would do an inventory of everything in our house. People owned these things, but the government controlled it. In that sense, it belonged to the Party and the nation. The reason why I, my family, and other people decided to escape from Vietnam was that we didn’t own anything at all.

Food prices increased. It became hard to get work, and finally we could not work. We could not freely buy rice. Everything belonged to the government cooperative. Under their control, even rice became scarce. A person had to have a ticket to buy everything.

Each family had a ration ticket book for rice, meat, milk, things like that. When a person went to the government cooperative, they gave him some rice and took the ration ticket. They gave the buyer what they had, but they did not have everything. We were authorized to buy up to a certain limit, but it was not enough for us. That’s the reason we had to buy outside the cooperative, on the black market. Because we had insufficient rice, we had to buy other things outside, such as corn and manioc. Still, it was not enough, so we had to add water and make soups of rice. That made people dissatisfied. That’s why we and so many others turned to unlawful or black- market behavior.

Source: “Mr. Liem Escape from Ban Me Thuot: 1975-1978 “in James M. Freeman Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989) P.277-278.



Vietnam. Vietnamese children of the Phong Dien refugee hamlet peer through a fence. There are 126 families, 10 sisters, 250 children from 6 years to 15, and 115 children under 6 years old in the village., 01/12/1967. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier # 532507