

Why there were such
different reactions in
the usa



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Most American people supported the Vietnam War at the beginning of the 1960's because they believed that it would stop the spread of 'evil' communism. Propaganda such as films and books were used to a large extent to make people believe that communism was a major threat to America and the rest of the world. Many people became scared of a media constructed idea of communism. Furthermore, to some extent support for the war was a hangover of McCarthyism.

During the 1950s, Senator McCarthy led a witch-hunt against anyone suspected of being involved in Communist activity, called the 'Red Scare'. Alongside the media and anti-communist hype many people, especially the older generation, were extremely patriotic. People who supported the war at the beginning were known as 'Hawks'. On the other hand, not all American people supported the war in the beginning. A small percentage opposed the war, known as 'doves'.

These included people from left wing parties who supported communism and wanted the Vietcong (NLF) to win in Vietnam. Early opposition also included liberals, who believed that encouraging democratic governments, rather than authoritarian governments was the best way of stopping the spread of communism. Last but not least were the pacifists, who were against all wars, as they believed that violence was not the way to settle disputes. Opposition to the war slowly began to increase as the war progressed, mainly within the younger generation.

After World War Two, a record number of babies were born due to the men coming home from war, leading to the term 'baby boomers'. This new

generation were more affluent and rebellious than the previous, and began to question the beliefs of their parents in their taste of music, morals, politics and attitudes to war. Many became members of the 'Counterculture' and expressed their opposition to American politics, the Cold War and the Vietnam War through music, drug taking and casual sex.

The 'Counterculture' was a group with lifestyles and values opposed to those of the established culture. The 'Counterculture' largely originated on College campuses and followed a 'hippie' look. Music established itself as an identity for the 'counterculture' as songs were used to a great extent to portray their views. An example is Country Joe and The Fish's Vietnam Song, which contained lyrics such as, " Well, come on generals, let's move fast; Your big chance has come at last. Now you can go out and get those reds. 'Cause the only good commie is the one that's dead".

They also took part in protest rallies to demonstrate their anti-war views such as the first march to Washington in December 1964, where 25, 000 people took part leading to it being the largest anti-war demonstration in American history. This clearly shows that opposition to the war began to increase. It wasn't just the 'Counterculture' that opposed the war. Many ethnic minorities were also against it. One reason was the expense of the war, \$66 million a day. This caused President Johnson to increase taxes and put aside schemes to help tackle poverty.

This angered many of the black population in America as they suffered from poverty the most. Martin Luther King, who was a Civil Rights leader said during the 60s, " America would never invest the necessary funds or

energies in rehabilitation of its poor as long as Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. ". Many black people also felt that the Vietnam War was a lost cause, as many didn't have the freedoms at home that they were fighting for in Vietnam, for example the right to vote.

One black civil rights leader said in 1960s, " If a black man is going to fight anywhere, he ought to be fighting in Mississippi". Many black people took this on board in the late 1960s, which led to violent riots breaking out in black ghettos. This led to Anti-Vietnam war leaders claiming that US troops should withdraw from Vietnam in order to stop a revolution from breaking out in America. An example of this black militancy was the 'Black Panthers'. Many black people thought the war was in the streets and courts of the US, not thousands of miles away.

Protest was not just from black people, but also other ethnic minorities who did not share the same freedoms and opportunities as white, middle class Americans. Conscription to the Vietnam War, introduced in 1962, increased the level of protests in America. In 1963, college students were excused from being drafted in order to keep the support of the articulate and influential members of the middle class. However, this did not stop college students protesting as many young people felt that it was an attack on people's right to decide for themselves whether they wanted to fight for their country.

Also, due to the draft deferment of college students, it was said that the poor blacks who were more likely to be sent to Vietnam. 1965 was something of a turning point. Opposition to the war seemed stronger than previously seen

before. Pacifists and martyrs who opposed the war, such as Norman Morrison, Roger La Porte and Alice Herz, followed the example of a Buddhist Monk called Thich Quang Due, and publicly burnt themselves to death in a protest against the Vietnam War. Also in 1965, David Miller set the trend of publicly burning his draft card and was sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

His act of protest was not in vain as it had inspired other Anti-Vietnam war groups to do the same, which led to 9, 118 men being prosecuted between 1963 and 1973 for refusing to be drafted into the army. One of these men was the World heavyweight-boxing champion, Muhammad Ali. The impact of the war in 1968 greatly increased the opposition to the war and was the second and greater turning point in the opposition to the war. Wide media coverage of the My Lai massacre, where 300 innocent civilians were murdered by US troops, shocked people back in America, as they were disgusted at the harsh and immoral tactics of the USA.

Things only got worse when the Tet Offensive took place as the large-scale attacks throughout South Vietnam, including the US embassy in Saigon, made the American people realise that they were losing the war, and it emerged that the army had been lying to them about casualty figures. One of America's most respected television journalists, Walter Cronkite stated, "What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning this War." President Lyndon Johnson realised that Cronkite's opinion would influence many American people so he did not stand for re-election in March 1968.

He was quoted saying, " If I've lost Walter, I've lost Mr Average Citizen".

Many people who had supported the war at the start lost relatives fighting in Vietnam and began to oppose the war too. Between 1960 and 1973, 503,926 US soldiers went AWOL as US soldiers also began to feel the Vietnam War was a lost cause as they were heavily demoralised by the number of casualties etc and being away from home. With all the events of Vietnam coinciding with social upheaval in American, many Americans had different reactions to the war. At the beginning, many people supported the war as they felt they were fighting a war against Communism.

Although some did oppose the war, there wasn't a great deal of opposition, as many people feared the 'Red Scare'. However, as the war went on, the more affluent 'Baby Boom' generation began to oppose their parent's morals and beliefs, including the war. Many hated the war and joined in rallies and marches against it, although opposition to the war was only one cause of the counter culture and by no means defined it. The events of 1965, where martyrs began to publicly burn themselves and draft cards etc, and the events of 1968, the My Lai massacre, and the Tet Offensive, greatly increased the opposition to the war.

Also, the cost of the war increased taxes and led to many ethnic minorities, especially the black people, to go against the war. The events of 1968 really hit home, as the people back in the US knew they could not win the war, so many wanted America to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, as it appeared they were fighting for a lost cause. It seems as if Johnson's words about losing 'Mr Average' were prophetic, as popular support began to dwindle after Tet.

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