Topics of Consideration

I. Introduction: The Cold War Context

II. Anti-Colonial Origins

III. Incremental Involvement: IKE to Kennedy

IV. Mr. Johnson’s War

V. The War at Home

VI. Conclusion: The Legacy of Vietnam
I. Introduction: The Cold War Context

A. America’s longest and most unpopular war
B. Divided nation almost as bitterly as Civil War
C. Origins in Vietnamese fight for independence from France
D. Context of America’s involvement was the Cold War
E. Vietnam War spawned a peace movement never seen before
F. Split country along class and generational lines
G. Vietnam - marker of US foreign policy in late 20th century
II. Anti-Colonial Origins of the War


B. 1920, Ho Chih Minh > Versailles for independence.

C. President Woodrow Wilson never met with him.

D. Later, Minh went to Moscow for assistance.
II. Anti-Colonial Origins of the War

E. WWII Japan invaded Vietnam; defeated French; controlled Vietnam.

F. When Japan lost WWII, Viet Minh declared a Republic of Vietnam, comprised of Communists and nationalists.

G. After WWII, French regained Vietnam; installed Bao Dai, a collaborator with Japanese and served as a French puppet.

H. Bao Dai unpopular with nationalists who opposed puppet regime.

I. US not happy about French return, but preferable to instability.

J. In 1949, US attitude changed because China fell to Communists.

K. In 1950, US decided to aid the French in stabilizing Vietnam, even against nationalists who are becoming increasingly Communist.
Asia from *Time*, 9/59
II. Anti-Colonial Origins of the War

L. By 1952, US spent 2.6 billion to aid the French.

M. Support of French part of a US effort to contain Communism in Asia and bolster containment in Europe.

N. In 1954, battle at Dien Bien Phu—French finally surrendered.


P. Vietnam divided at 17th parallel.

Q. Ho Chi Minh in control of north; new regime in south until elections could be held and country reunited.

R. US observes but does not endorse Accords because worried about Minh’s popularity and likelihood of his election in 1956.
THE VIETNAM WAR

III. Incremental Involvement: IKE to Kennedy

A. What does US do? Ike talks about Domino Theory

B. US sponsors regime in the South and installs Ngo Dinh Diem: a nationalist and anti-communist.

C. Problems: Diem had lived in the US; he was a Catholic.

D. Not democratic; ignores Geneva Accords - “did not sign them.”

E. Diem called off elections; established oppressive regime in South.

F. US sent aid, but Ike was cautious not to involve US too much.

G. Caution leads him to aid Diem but not too greatly.
President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles greet President Ngo Dinh Diem in Washington.
III. Incremental Involvement: IKE to Kennedy

H. Enter JFK: as much a Cold Warrior as Ike.

I. When JFK entered White House, Vietnam on periphery.

J. He watched as Diem’s regime lost more and more power.

K. Free access given to reporters in Vietnam—war fought on t.v.
III. Incremental Involvement: IKE to Kennedy

L. 1963: Buddhist monk immolated self in protest of Diem.

M. Unbelievable to Americans; sign of Diem losing control.

N. Oct 1963: US accepted coup to overthrow Diem, who was killed.

O. JFK > money and military advisors (16,700 compared to Ike’s 800).

P. JFK Assassinated November 1963.

Q. Would JFK have increased or decreased commitment in Vietnam?
June 11, 1963: Thich Quang Duc immolated himself in Saigon to protest against Diem regime. Journalist Malcolm Browne’s photograph won the 1963 World Press Photo of the Year.
Poly Money Boxes Looted of $1500

Over 400 Dead

'Flora' Unpredictable

85.1 Billion for Space Exploration

Diem Says Viet Army Ready for Offensive
IV. Mr. Johnson’s War, 1963-1969

A. In 1963, LBJ relatively ignorant of war and relied on advisors.

B. Wanted to assure continuity with JFK and give support to Vietnam.

C. Was he a puppet of JFK advisors: McNamara and Rostow?

D. Johnson lived through WWII and saw events from that context.

E. Vietnam like Germany; Ho Chi Minh became Hitler and Stalin.

F. Johnson feared that SE Asia would fall like China—Domino Theory.

G. Still, LBJ had serious doubts about Vietnam early on.

H. Did Americans have resources and patience to build a nation.

I. Another problem: no room for dissent at White House.
IV. Mr. Johnson’s War, 1963-1969

J. Those who expressed doubts about Vietnam were increasingly isolated because he viewed dissent as disloyalty.

K. LBJ knew little about Vietnamese history and underestimated Ho Chi Minh; thought he could be bought.

L. Offered TVA style development package for Mekong River Valley.

M. Not too aggressive for fear of luring China into conflict and WWIII.

N. So LBJ charted a careful course and run a limited war like in Korea.
IV. Mr. Johnson’s War, 1963-1969

O. Diem Assassination; power vacuum; Viet Cong attacked South Vietnamese and US advisors.

P. National Liberation Movement front recruited members.

Q. US covert activities: intelligence, kidnapping, sabotaging.

R. How to justify American involvement and obtain American support?

S. In August 1964, the Tonkin Gulf Incident gave LBJ that leverage.

T. American cruisers in Tonkin were supposedly fired upon.

U. Tonkin Gulf Resolution: authorized president to use armed force.

V. Overwhelming Congressional support; Americanized the war.

W. Operation Rolling Thunder: bombing and US troops rose dramatically.
Figure 29.1 U.S. Troop Levels in Vietnam, 1960–1972

Source: U.S. Department of Defense
Lyndon Johnson listens to tape from Captain Charles Robb from Vietnam. (July 31, 1968)
A. On homefront, popular dissent against war began immediately.

B. Professors gathered for “teach-ins” to discuss war.

C. Students turned against the war, particularly after draft.

D. Students became active largely out of self-interest.

E. In 1967, 100,000 protestors converged in DC.

F. Johnson’s popularity plummeted.

G. After LBJ, at Kent State University, unarmed college students were shot by members of the Ohio National Guard on May 4, 1970, when protesting American invasion of Cambodia. Four killed.
John Filo's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of Mary Ann Vecchio, a 14-year-old runaway, kneeling over the body of Jeffrey Miller after he was shot dead by the Ohio National Guard.
H. Opposition to the War intensified after My Lai Massacre.

I. Occurred on March 16, 1968, when a unit of the U.S. Army killed between 347 and 504 unarmed civilians at My Lai.

J. Many of the victims were sexually abused, beaten, tortured, and some of the bodies were found mutilated.

K. While 26 US soldiers were initially charged with criminal offenses, only William Calley was convicted.

L. He served only 3 years of a life sentence.

L. When the incident became public knowledge in 1969, it prompted widespread outrage around the world.
“Give Peace a Chance” was a 1969 single by John Lennon's Plastic Ono Band that became an anthem of the American anti-war movement.
VI. Conclusion: The Legacy of Vietnam


B. Tet was lunar new year, but fighting escalated rather than stopped.

C. North attacked 36 of 44 provincial capitals including Saigon.

D. Johnson’s assertions that war was winnable seemed hollow.

E. Tet was a disaster for the enemy but triumph for it in public reactions.

F. Turning point: opinion ran strongly against war and president.

G. LBJ ran for reelection but did not win majority in NH primary.

H. LBJ stuns nation by saying he would not run for reelection: called for immediate end to bombing and began peace negotiations.
Around noon of February 1, 1968, in the opening days of the communist Tet Offensive, South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan summarily executed a Viet Cong prisoner on the streets of Saigon — and photographer Eddie Adams captured perhaps the war’s most disturbing image.
I. Richard Nixon elected with plan to turn over war to Vietnamese.


K. War over but Vietnam devastated.

L. More bombs dropped than during WWII.

M. Inflation in US as too much money chased too few goods.
June 8 1972: Kim Phúc, center, running down a road near Trang Bang after a South Vietnamese Air Force napalm attack.
This picture showed chaos and panic among many South Vietnamese who were in the employ of the Americans. They were desperately trying to secure a seat on one of the last American helicopters shuttling between Saigon rooftops and US navy ships off the coast of Vietnam ahead of the arrival of the communist North-Vietnamese troops. The ladder leading up to the roof already has more people on it that can fit on the helicopter. However, the helipad was not, as UPI’s Tokyo bureau wrongly attributed, on the roof of the US embassy. It was on the Pittman apartment complex which housed the CIA.
An American punches a man in the face as he tries to close the doorway of an airplane overloaded with refugees seeking to flee Nha Trang, which was being taken over by Communist troops in April 1975.