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Question #3 - Legacy
 by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, 28 November 2009, 11:26 PM

What is the single, most significant legacy of the War in Vietnam for the USA?
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Re: Question #3 - Legacy
 by [Derek Abbott](#) - Wednesday, 2 December 2009, 05:57 PM

The legacy left behind from the Vietnam War, and it's ending is extremely subjective based on which side you ask. For the United States the most visual and well known object of the Vietnam War legacy is the wall memorial located in Washington D.C. This memorial is a massive reminder how many lives were actually lost as a cost for the price of war. The legacy of the Vietnam War doesn't end there however, it can be found in the countless hours of video footage, the riots and protests, the music of the time, and the war veteran walking around everyday. The Vietnam War was the first highly documented, visually exposed war ever and it will always be brought to the forefront of every discussion about war. Since it was so well documented and visual publicized, the legacy of the Vietnam War well never diminish or die. Wether the Vietnam War was a victory or a defeat, a lost cause or a righteous movement all depends on who you ask. Every single person in America has a different point of view on the war. This point of view is relative based on the role he or she had. Its unfair to say wether the war was a good thing or a bad thing, or wether we won or lost. What is more important is the memory of the U.S. soldiers. The most important legacy left behind is the legacy of the people who fought and the people who lost their lives.

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy
 by [Amy Wells](#) - Saturday, 5 December 2009, 04:40 PM

I really like what you wrote here, you are so right that the biggest legacy is the soldiers, the ones who died for this war, and for the ones whose lives will never be the same because of this war. Like I have said before I am not a big history buff so coming into this class I knew the bare minimum about war. As I read through individual stories I began to feel for these people and understand more. I cannot imagine what it must have been like, and I thank the soldiers of the past, present, and future that I never will.

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy
 by [Paul Slaughterbeck](#) - Wednesday, 2 December 2009, 06:06 PM

One of the most enduring legacies of the Vietnam War was how it changed forever the image of the office of the President of the United States, both here in America and abroad. Before Vietnam, the office was far more trusted and respected. After the war a cynicism and well-founded distrust would set in and never leave us. When this country was founded, our forefathers saw clearly how important a strong system of checks and balances was in making the fledgling democracy work. With Vietnam the results of an imbalance within this system became painfully evident. In 1968, when Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to The New York

Times, it was akin to opening Pandora's box. "The documents confirmed what critics of the war had long been arguing, among other points that Kennedy and Johnson had consistently mislead the public about their intentions in Vietnam." (ALW. pg. 299) These documents were printed in clear back and white and could not be chalked up to biased innuendo or hearsay. What was even more dangerous, if not more lascivious, was the capacity of the President to deceive and even circumvent the Congress of the United States. "If Congress undertakes to restrict me, Congress will have to assume the consequences." (ALW, pg. 295) These are not the words of a man content to exist within the framework of a three-tiered government in which his power was necessarily checked. Following this statement Nixon attempted something called the Huston Plan, in which he would authorize various intelligence agencies to conduct blatantly illegal activities. "Among other things the plan called for domestic burglary, illegal electronic surveillance and opening the mail of domestic "radicals". At one time it also called for the creation of camps in Western states where anti-war protesters would be detained." (wikipedia) Perhaps the saddest part of this story, however, is the capacity of large sectors of the American public to forget this important lesson. Given what we should have learned from this period of history, it is difficult to explain how the American people/American Congress could allow something like the "Patriot Act" to come into being just a quarter of a century later. Perhaps if you can make the populace frightened enough (by design or otherwise) then you don't even have to lie to them to strip away their rights. The truer legacy, then, may be the fact that we are doomed to learn and forget the lessons taught about the inherent dangers of a too-powerful executive branch again and again.

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Brian Hein](#) - Thursday, 3 December 2009, 09:31 PM

I agree that Vietnam War did give the U.S. Presidency an image problem. All administrations since have lived under the shadow of Watergate's lasting legacy. It seems to me, now it is not so much the office though, but rather who is the current president and whether or not you are affiliated with their party. Look at how popular the last President Bush was just after 9-11. Because of this attack on American the public was justifiably outraged, and Congress was persuaded by those events to pass such laws as the Patriot Act. My point is, only in hindsight things become clearer, decisions were made with the best intentions do not necessarily turn out the way they were intended.

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Paul Slaughterbeek](#) - Thursday, 3 December 2009, 10:03 PM

I guess my comments are always shaded with a bias I have toward believing that there are more sinister goings-on at the higher levels of government, especially when money gets involved. Because of realities like the tangling of government and special interest groups, it is hard for me to give them the benefit of the doubt. When the President attempts to seize more power than the Constitution allows, by whatever means and for whatever reason, it always wrong, in my opinion.

"Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton, 1887)

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Jeffrey Harmon](#) - Saturday, 5 December 2009, 10:51 AM

Tell that to Obama!!!

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Derek Abbott](#) - Saturday, 5 December 2009, 12:48 PM

During the Vietnam War the leadership role wasn't in the greatest of hands. President Johnson was so concerned with his reputation at home, that his decisions about the war were being clouded. I feel that JFK had a good chance of resolving the war in a better direction, until he was killed.

When Nixon came into office the division of the United States was at a all time high, when it came to the war. Nixon's philosophy didn't help end the war quicker or easier. The war itself wasn't the main topic at hand, it seemed to be the president's image....again!

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Brian Hein](#) - Wednesday, 2 December 2009, 07:16 PM

It seems to me the most significant legacy that came from the Vietnam War is how the United States now approaches the possibility of intervention into other conflicts in the world. The lasting effect of the Vietnam War was to change U.S. foreign policy. Since the war whenever the U.S. seeks to intercede in another conflict there always is a comparison made to the parallels of the current conflict to Vietnam. "Vietnam has left a rancid aftertaste that clings to almost every mention of direct military intervention" (Herring pg.349).

Comparisons surfaced in the 1980's when President Regan committed military aid to El Salvador. "The ghost of Vietnam hovered over an increasingly divisive debate on the proper U.S. response" (pg.352) to leftist insurgencies that were occurring in South America at that time. Also, the "Military and Defense Department made it clear that they would not go to war under the conditions that had prevailed in Vietnam" (pg.353). Even later during the first Gulf War there was the thought by many American's opposed to the war that "Iraq was Arabic for Vietnam" (pg.353). And today you hear of warnings of the failures and trappings that happened in Vietnam are, or will, take place in Afghanistan. Although at times it appears we have forgotten the Vietnam War or that it has been put behind us, it still surfaces whenever there is some concern about the possibility of another "quagmire" we may be drawn into.

Seeking to address the pitfalls of the Vietnam War the Powell Doctrine now guides the U.S. foreign policy when there is the prospect of military intervention. We do not look to see if our help is needed on the basis of morality or humanitarianism. But now the focus is upon "public support", "national interest", and use of "overwhelming force" to guide our decisions, areas now thought to have been instrumental in losing the Vietnam War. Many people still believe the Vietnam War was a mistake, and paraphrasing McNamara, many mistakes are made in a war, it is the ability to learn from these mistakes is what matters. It is the fear of another Vietnam that still effects our foreign policy decisions to this day.

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Paul Slaughterbeck](#) - Thursday, 3 December 2009, 01:38 PM

I especially agree with you about the "national interest" part. As a matter of fact I believe that to be the key deciding factor in what we do militarily now, and during the time of the Vietnam War. Whether it is the fear of communism or of losing access to oil reserves, we act selfishly when we decide to go to war. We didn't even get involved in WWII until we were directly threatened. It always amazes me how good people are individually, yet how wicked they are in any form of a group, be it a clique or a nation. It is obviously an inherent human trait of some kind that served this species well thousands of years ago, but it is played out and I hope (but doubt) that we as people can move beyond this limiting view of human kind. Patriotism has to give way to humanitarianism one day, or we, as a species, are done. No one ever wins wars, period.

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Glenn Dalglish](#) - Thursday, 3 December 2009, 04:05 PM

I agree with your choice as to what the most significant legacy is to the Vietnam War, other than maybe the memorial in Washington. I think that there are many similarities with the Vietnam War and the war that we are in now. First it was war on terrorism in Afghanistan and now we're in Iraq. It does not seem like we are going to be very successful in winning this war, which is opposed by many people. When the people of a government do not back up a war that they are involved in, it is almost inevitable that we will loose. How can we win a war that is not supported by the people who are involved? Obama inherited this war just like LBJ, and I believe he is making progress, but once again I do not see ourselves being successful in this war we are currently in. The Vietnamese were not anywhere near ready to be in control of their own government when they regained control again and I feel the same way about those people in the Middle East.

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [William Wymer](#) - Friday, 4 December 2009, 02:56 AM

Glenn, I have to agree with you about Iran, I do not see us winning per say. I understand why we are there, but how can you help a country that is always in conflict with its self. They have been fighting for hundreds of years with someone or within themselves. My question is how do we fix situations like these when countries like Iran do not seem to want to be fixed or help. My other question is who is to say that we are right in what we are doing, but ourselves?

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Michael Bellamy](#) - Friday, 4 December 2009, 08:39 PM

These are some good posts that include some discussion-worthy points. I like the angle the Brain and Paul take with how it seems like the Unites States is constantly getting involved in foreign affairs; and for selfish reasons at that. But I would like to comment specifically on Glenn's post because we've all heard the phrase, "history repeats itself," and Glenn brings up a prime example of that. The war right now in the Middle East is essentially a reflection of the Vietnam War in more ways than one, and just as it fell into the hands of each Vietnam-era president, Obama is now facing the same challenges. But I find it very interesting that initially Obama promised to begin withdrawal from Iraq, but recently he is sending more troops to Afghanistan. Technically this isn't going against his original pledge, but it is only escalating another issue instead. To me this is an additional example of how history can repeat itself, especially when you look back on the different approaches to escalation and de-escalation of the Vietnam War.

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**Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Kelly Culhane](#) - Thursday, 3 December 2009, 09:30 PM

I must say that I think in a way you are right. I think one of our biggest legacies from Vietnam is our foreign policy decisions. I honestly do not think that they have gotten any better over time, by the way. I find it truly disturbing tome that we only deem it necessary to fight a conflict based on public support and our own national interests. This seems to be quite hypocritical to me.

We had no problem invading Iraq because of some mythical weapons of mass destruction, yet once it was

truly realized that there was none there, we continue to stay and fight to liberate the people of Iraq from an evil dictator in Saddam Hussein. Yet, we do not go help the people in other countries that are dealing with even more disgraceful political leaders. Is it because of oil and our addiction and dependence upon it? Or because a lot of wealthy Americans became even more wealthy from doing business in Iraq? Either way, what exactly have we learned from Vietnam, and how has that legacy helped or hurt us from here on out?

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Tiffany Adrian](#) - Friday, 4 December 2009, 11:28 PM

I do believe that one of the reasons we have been fighting in the middle east for so many years is our dependence on Foreign oil. The Bush Administration was a lot like the Nixon Administration, corrupt and biased tending to their own needs, trying to make the rich richer and the poor forever poor. Forgetting about true humanity and forgetting about the Americans that put them in office, or did we? I don't think we have learned very much from our experience during the Vietnam Conflict. Look at our economy today. It is just as bad as the 1st great depression, now we are living in another. The war we have been fighting for eight years in the middle East has hit our economy because of the money it has cost to be over there, amongst other things. Now we are moving into Afghanistan and deploying more troops at the cost of 33 billion a year. Things have been going like this for so long will we ever not be at war?

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Jeffrey Harmon](#) - Saturday, 5 December 2009, 10:53 AM

War has been going on for the history of time, there will always be wars. I actually thought Obama would get us out, but a politician is a politician, a liar.

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Derek Abbott](#) - Saturday, 5 December 2009, 12:54 PM

In order for a long, drawn out war to end properly, the leader needs to be unconcerned with his public image and more concerned with the lives being lost. There needs to be a definite justification to why they're even over seas fighting.

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Re: Question #3 - Legacy

by [Robert Nicholls](#) - Friday, 4 December 2009, 10:45 PM

I definitely agree with your post when you discuss the fact that almost every single scuffle in the world now can be related to Vietnam. I loved the examples and citations. The comparison of Vietnam to Iraq today is scary accurate. We say the war today is to drive terrorists out of Iraq and unify the people. Basically the exact same thing as driving out the Communists and making the government of the country stable. The Vietnam war had so many great lessons to be learned, and I think it will be awhile until we stop finding them. I do not want to inflict my bias opinion on the war today, but it seems very similar, and a similar outcome would not be good.

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Rate... **Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Jennifer Mosier](#) - Friday, 4 December 2009, 07:18 PM

At first I thought the most significant legacy of the War in Vietnam for the USA, was "let's not do that again," but looking at where we are now that doesn't seem to hold true. So many veterans are in pain because of what they experienced in Vietnam and now we see this happening again. In one word I would sum up the legacy of the Vietnam War as this: "oops."

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Rate... **Re: Question #3 - Legacy**by [Glenn Dalglish](#) - Saturday, 5 December 2009, 08:57 PM

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There are many legacies from the Vietnam War and I believe that the most significant one is the change in government and how people's view was changed toward their government. People stopped trusting the government and were skeptical because they had been lied to by LBJ and then Nixon came along with Watergate. The legacies from this war are different depending on how old you are and how much you actually know about this war. An older generation will have a much different perspective than a younger one. Sure, there are war memorials everywhere that remind us of where we've been and what we've done, but those don't make us really care in my opinion. If I went to the Vietnam War Memorial, I don't think that I would feel any different than I do now. There were so many events that took place in America during the Vietnam War. Some of them being, the Democratic Convention of 1968, Ohio State, the deaths of the Kennedy's and MLK, as well as the American dream being shattered and people not looking at the government the same way. I don't think that people have forgotten about this and it will take a long time before we forget about this. I also don't think that we will ever be able to put full support and belief behind our government. There are too many conspiracies and scare-tactics that keep us from getting where we need to be. Many Vietnam vets ended up homeless and unemployable because of their condition after the war. I've seen a few homeless people with cardboard signs that read, "homeless Vietnam vet. Anything helps." We didn't help them like we should've and because of this and many other things, I think that American still has a bitter taste in its mouth about how we handled ourselves in the eyes of the world's government. I'm not even sure if we learned anything from it, but I would hope that Obama doesn't make the same mistake in the middle east.

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