

How does one wage peace? I researched anti-war movements during the Vietnam War, focusing my attention on different forms of movements: peaceful, violent, and social. These forms of protest interest me because they all different, yet they strive for the same goal. I researched events that took place during this era and related to the main issue of the war, the U.S. involvement. This topic intrigued me because it brought so many different groups of people together who had different ways of attacking the issue at hand, but shared a common desire for the outcome.

This artwork distinguishes between three kinds of social protest. Q-tips create iconic imagery from each form of protest. The dots symbolize different groups coming together for a common cause; the dots create an overall image when, in fact, a singular dot cannot create an image by itself. Each dot represents individual voices that come together. Without the communal support of others, there would not be a movement. Bright colors and patterns reflect the immense influence of drugs during the Vietnam era. My goal was to apply elements that held popularity in the era and to bring familiarity to the time period.

Social change occurs when people unite during times of hardship. This is important because, with such a large rift between the government and the people (similar to what we are experiencing today), looking back at history can give one hope to find peaceful solutions. People need to stand up for what they believe in because every voice counts. What approach do you take when faced with a problem?

Sunny

*The governors, the rulers, can only rule if they control opinion - no matter how many guns they have.*

~Noam Chomsky

In the case of the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War this quote could not be more true, because when the protesters started to disagree with how their government was dealing with the Vietnam War, they still protested despite violent actions from the government were taken to silence them. A large part of the anti-war group came from college students and the “hippies”. As the United States became more involved in the Vietnam War, more people became involved in the war on the homefront increased as well. In response to the government, protests came in many different forms; from marching, hosting teach-ins, music festivals and meditation groups to violent acts. All of these were done to end the war and bring peace to our nation; so the question one asks is, How does one wage peace?

### **Non-violent Protests**

When protests against the Vietnam War first started it was peaceful and the people who were apart of the movement for peace were influencing others to join their movement towards peace. A portion of these people were students of universities all over the country. At many different universities the professors would hold teach-ins and sit-ins (Feinstein 38). The first teach-in was organized at University of Michigan, the faculty provided lectures, debates, and seminars on American Policy (Scherer). Vietnam teach-ins were organized by a student driven group, the Students for a Democratic State, to educate students on the war and Vietnam. Professors would host these optional teach-ins to the student's who wanted to be educated on the Vietnam war (History.com). These teach-ins had a large impact in changing the way students saw the Vietnam war. Many of the the students were educated on the subject of what was happening in the world today involving the United States, and were influenced to stand up for what they believe is right. Educating these young students really helped the anti-war movement grow and educating them is letting them know what is going on and letting them decide if they want to stand up for it not.

In January 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. made a speech against the war; this speech made an impact on many people and encouraged them to join the movement to bring their soldiers home (Scherer 81). Martin Luther King Jr. helped two different groups come together, and put aside their differences about civil rights issue. I think he showed them that they had a common interest and that interest was ending the U.S. involvement in the war. When King made this speech and denounced the war it was a turning point and encouraged minorities, who may have been afraid, to join in on the movement.

Vietnam Veterans started to get involved in putting an end to the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The protest that caught everyone's eye was a five day protest in Washington D.C. (history.com). The protest was called, “Dewey Canyon III”, took place in the spring of 1971, to protect Congress. Officials closed off the Capitol steps with a fence; this is when about a 1,000 veterans threw their combat ribbons, helmets, and uniforms on the steps, along with toy weapons (Zinn 185). Many American's homes were viewing this on their televisions; this act made a very large impact on how people saw the war. There were veterans on crutches, in wheelchairs, veterans who lost arms and had other injuries who were marching and holding signs (Zinn 185). Zinn explains that he was too old to march with the people but he wanted to take part someway, “We assembled too late to join the march to the Pentagon, who we acted on our own by blocking

traffic on a major street” (Zinn 186). Then Zinn goes on to explain that when the police arrived they fired tear gas shells at their group. This caught many people's attention because the veterans were people who risked their lives for the country and they came back and disagreed with what was going on in Vietnam (Zinn 186). There was also respect for the veterans because people in the U.S. who had not gone to Vietnam did not know what they had been through. This protest was a large part in “bringing the war home” and influenced people watching these men who fought for their country turn their backs on that same country. I think displaying how much they were against the U.S. involvement that they do not even care for the awards and medals they received. It was also a mostly peaceful protest so I think that the veterans remaining peaceful showed that they were above the ways of the militaries and government of solving issues.

On May 16, 1966 at the University of Wisconsin, students held their first “sit-in” and occupied an administration building peacefully for several days (pbs.org). In October, 1966, many people were appalled with the casualties of Vietnamese civilians from the napalm that had been dropped. Students and others protested against Dow Chemical, the supplier of napalm. The first of these demonstrations would occur in Detroit and Berkeley, then spread throughout the country. In 1967, another anti-Dow chemical protests took place at the University of Wisconsin; students remained peaceful and stayed outside of the building where interviews took place (pbs.org). These sit-ins showed that these students and other protesters did not agree with what was going on in Vietnam. Many people thought this was a war we should stay out of because the Vietnam war was a civil war between North and South Vietnam, the war did not involve the U.S. in any way. It was not just about how we were involved in a war we should not be, now it was about the soldiers committing war crimes and becoming monsters. These sit-ins and protests were not just directed towards the government and army, but towards the corporations that were involved. The students and protesters did not let this dropping of napalm just go by, the bombing was something that innocent people were dying from and they wanted to call the government out on it.

### **Violent Protests**

Violent protests appeared when the war in Vietnam escalated and people felt like their message to the government was getting through. The protesters wanted to show the government that they will put up a fight for what they believe was the right move for their country. In 1964, Mario Savio organized a sit-in at University of California- Berkeley campus and the Head of the University said they could not use the sidewalk to give speeches. The students felt like he was interfering with their right to freedom of speech. It soon became a violent protest (Feinstein 36). This act of violence was a result of the students standing up for what they believe was not something the school or government could take away from them. Even though the students may have been angered that they thought their right was being taken away from them, I do not think that responding with violence is going to enact a change.

A new group of protestors, The Weathermen, appeared in the late 1960's. They felt as if the government wasn't listening to the peaceful protest, so they decided to use violent acts. The two leaders, Mark Rudd and Bernadine Dohrn, created homemade bombs and weapons; they organized attacks on police stations, court houses, and banks. These institutions were power or stood for a part of the government; attacking these were necessarily attacking the government. They soon became the FBI's most wanted (Feinstein, 38). I disagree with the creation of the Weathermen, for I do not think solving violence with violence is the right answer. Even though some people thought they were not getting through to the government, that does not mean to

bring war into our country. That results in more issues and instead of worrying about bringing home the soldiers, the government and protesters are also concerned with the bombings and violence happening on their own soil. Students and protesters were very upset when the U.S. started bombing villages in Vietnam, so what different then these homemade bombs?

A very famous violent protest was at Kent State, May 4th, 1970 (History.com). After the students and others set fire to the ROTC building, the governor, James Rhodes, of Ohio sent 900 National Guard men to the campus (History.com). That may have made the situation worse by infuriating the students to become more violent. This is what led to the National Guard opening fire on many students, of which 4 were killed. 67 shots were fired in 13 seconds and 9 people



The photograph was taken by John Filo.

were wounded (Zinn 184). A witness of the shooting, Robert Parks, a freshman at Kent State University,

explained what happened that led up to the shooting, “Protests started on Friday night, May 1st, a lot of the activity taking place on the college campuses all around the country was a result of outside organizations and influencers going on to college campuses because they were much more politically involved with the protest of the war as were most students were” (Parks).

Robert explains how these outside organizers had a large influence in the student's actions around campuses. Parks spoke about the actions that the students were taking part in days before the shooting, “so we had a lot of outside influencers coming onto campus to stir things up. So on Friday night, they started arriving and then went to downtown Kent and started some fires in trash cans, breaking windows of businesses and cars and got the students all jazzed up by handing out literature of what they thought was going on in the war” (Parks). Parks explains how they were put on restrictions during this time and describes what the campus looked like, “we were not allowed to be out of our dorms, they had helicopters, they had tanks, it was pretty much like being in a war zone” (Parks). Robert explains how he was walking back from the midterm that he had taken, “it became more and more aggressive, the National Guard were throwing tear gas canisters at the students and then the students would pick them up and throw them back and they were just going back and forth, back and forth. Then just out of kind of an odd moment in time the National Guard went down on their knees and somebody gave the order to fire and they started shooting into the mass of students that were down on the bottom of the hill”, Robert then goes to talk about, “I was about ten feet away from someone who was killed so it could have been me just as easily as it could have been someone else” (Parks). This had a large effect on Parks. He then explains what happened right after the shooting, “right after it happened, everybody was immediately forced to leave campus and they put us on buses, they took us out and we were not allowed to go back on campus until the middle of summer to get our stuff and during that time, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to go back to go to school there anymore” (Parks). When asked about if the protesting was worth it, Robert responded, “In a very funny way I think it did. It brought a whole lot of attention to what this war was doing to our country” (Parks).

Not long after, another shooting took place at Jackson State University. About four hundred bullets or pieces of buckshot hit the girls' dormitory (Zinn 184). No evidence has been found that would justify why anyone opened fire in the first place (History.com). These shootings being so close together made the nation rethink their views towards the government.

These shootings will always be a large part in the history of the United States. If the students would have stayed non-violent and not fought back, I think things would not have escalated as they did. I believe that these protests got out of hand and the involvement of guns should never entered the equation. These types of actions involving guns create more discord and push people more to turn away from their own government. I think that people were already angry with the government for the involvement in the war and now the government made things worse.

The protest that involved Dow Chemical, went from being peacefully to violent when the students moved into the building where the recruiting interviews, to work at their company after college, were taking place. The hallways became jammed and the police started to become violent with the students. The police officers were swinging their nightsticks, using tear gas and beating the students. This was the first violent anti-war protest on a college campus across America; overall, 47 students were sent to the hospital along with 19 police officers (pbs.org).

The government's and school's patience was tested in this protest. This was a dangerous situation where students and police officers had an altercation in a building. This was all rooted in the students and protestors feeling like they were not receiving enough attention, so they put themselves in a situation where they will receive a reaction. I do not think that is the way to show their government that they want peace and an end to involvement in the war.

## **Culture**

This culture fostered peace and love took a large part of bringing more people into the movement of bringing peace. Music gatherings were held to help musical icons influence the younger people who were involved in anti-war movements. One of the most famous music gatherings was Woodstock. Woodstock took place in the summer of 1969, and was intended to be three days of peace and music. It was in upstate New York, on a farm, and 500,000 people showed up when only 50,000 were expected (coldwar.org). It was going to be a weekend where the group of people would take a break from all the major events that were happening around them. Famous music icons like Jimi Hendrix, Country Joe MacDonald, and Sheila Whitley had performances that sparked controversy towards the U.S. government and their involvement in Vietnam. Half a million people who joined together and attended this festival were affected by the messages that were being sent. It was three days of love and spreading that love. I think this led to many more people joining together to bring U.S. soldiers home from Vietnam. Instead of having an intense protest this was a place where people could share their ideas, listen to music, and decompress from a lot of the negative things that was around them.

Another music artist, Neil Young recorded a song with Crosby, Stills and Nash called "Ohio", relating to the Kent State Shooting. Some lyrics were, "Tin soldiers and Nixon coming, We're finally on our own. This summer I hear the drumming, Four dead in Ohio." These lyrics are very literal but also to the point. When people listen to this song they will be reminded of the shooting. They showed the deaths, protests and the war were breaking up the country(gilderlehrman.org). I believe making music and songs about the issues that were happening were very successful in the way that people would hear these songs on the radio and be reminded about the bickering going on inside of their country. This was just another form of influencing others to end the U.S. involvement in the war.

Protests heard around the world, like the "Bed-in for Peace", where John Lennon and his new wife, Yoko Ono, stayed in their bed from March 25 to March 31, 1969(theguardian.com). Every day for a week they invited different interviewers to come in and interview them while they were in bed (theguardian.com). John Lennon and his new wife, Yoko Ono, wanted to make

themselves vulnerable by inviting these interviewers into their hotel to ask them questions. In response to a question about what would happen if the whole country held a “bed in”, Lennon replies, “Well, wouldn't it be better than producing arms and bombs. Imagine if the American



**“The Terror of War” by Nick Ut/ The Associated Press**

army stayed in bed for a week and the Vietnamese army. Or Nixon... and chairman Mao. Imagine if the whole world stayed in bed. There'd be peace for a week and they might get to feel what it was like. The tension would be released" (beatlesinterviews.org). They wanted to show that they were hiding anything thing, there were no other motives of this movement. The “bed-in” was something that affected the movement because of all the press it received. People wanted to know what they were doing; they were interested and this was a chance to speak about peace and have it be spread around.

Actors and actresses took part in the anti-war movement during these times. The actress Jane Fonda, in 1972, took a trip to North Vietnam; this caused a lot of questions about what she was doing there. She took photos sitting on a anti-aircraft gun that was used to shoot at American Troops. Tons of negative feedback was thrown back in her face (biography.com). Jane Fonda joined together with another actor, Donald Sutherland and formed the anti-war group “FTA” (Discoverthenetworks.org), some people questions Fondas intentions for the U.S. future. Even though some of her actions were questioned, Jane Fonda made numerous speeches and went to talk shows to make a difference. Fonda, being a movie star, got to choose how people saw her and she chose that she wanted to focus on bringing peace and soldiers home. Her fame made people listen to her and take part in what she was doing. She had plenty of influence over people during this time.

The performance artist, Chris Burden, took part in some performances that were connected with the Vietnam War. Burden’s two famous performances were “Shoot” in 1971, and “Through the Night Softly” in 1973. In “Shoot” Burden had a friend stand 15 feet away from him and shoot him with a .22 rifle. This was a huge shock to many people. He wanted to bring the war home. In his other performance, “Through the Night Softly”, Burden tied his arms behind his back and laid on his stomach only in underwear and he inched his way across a field of broken glass. Burden wanted to show how real pain is to the audience that had been desensitized to many of the horrific images from the Vietnam war on their televisions. These shocking images were becoming less shocking to the viewer because, in a way the disturbing images were becoming the norm(theartstory.org). Burden’s goal was to make the view question, “could I have stopped it?”, this happens in war everyday, “so why was it hard for you to watch?”, “if you would stop me why would not stop it in Vietnam?” and “maybe I should have stopped it”. After the viewer asks themselves those questions he wants them to rethink, “maybe I should have stopped it”, which then lead them to bring soldiers home. This performance was not violent, but an intense representation that made people open their eyes to what was happening. This technique of making violence closer to home, the people and opening their eyes again to what is wrong and what is right. After some protests, people were realizing they could not trust the government, the people that were telling them everything that they knew.

Athletes also took a stand against the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war. The famous boxer, Muhammad Ali, was drafted into the war in 1967, and he refused to go, he said, “I ain’t got no quarrel with those Vietcong.” In June, Ali was sentenced to five years in prison, forced to

pay \$10,000, and banned from boxing for three years. He was convicted of draft evasion, but he got to stay out of prison (history.com). This showed a lot from both parties, the government and the activist. This event where Muhammad Ali refused to go to war and had to face consequences show that no one was above the law and also that being drafted was happening to everyone. It showed that even people who had a career were forced to sacrifice yourself for something that was not even their battle. This also pointed to a class problem because if you have the money to pay the fine then you can take that chance of dodging the draft.

With all these ways of influencing others to join or change a movement for peace one may ask, what are the most effective strategies? Some people may say you can not make peace using violent actions and I agree. Even if you get the people's attention, that you want they now have less of a reason to listen to you, and those violent protesters have become what they are trying to put an end to. Even though those actions made a big change in the anti-war movement, many people were hurt physically and emotionally. Peaceful marches, sit-ins, speeches and other protests may not seem like they were making a change, but people are always watching. When they question, and when they question, they reconsider their views. In addition, having famous icons take part in protest has a large effect on the movement. When these icons make speeches and write songs about making a change, many people come together. These are people that most people look up to; they are the people who make actions and standing up for what you believe cool to do, they are the trendsetters. A combination of peaceful protest and using people with influence are the most effective ways to make change. I do not believe violent actions should be a part of bringing peace.

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