

RICH MAN'S WAR

I am interested in militarization and opposition to war in our country and researched past wars and the motives behind them. I became even more immersed in this topic as I moved to anti-war activism. The focus of my research centered on the Vietnam War and the movement in opposition to it. Civilian participation and action during this time presents a fascinating model for modern-day activism.

I used an airbrush and stencils to create a mixed media painting. Found images and newspaper clippings from the war era convey themes of activism. I experimented with techniques associated with political art; the imagery points blame at leaders and countries responsible for military damage. My artistic vision was to create a piece that shames our government's addiction to war and military spending.

I idolize artists such as Shepard Fairey, Banksy, and Ai Weiwei because they are able to use their artwork to speak out against injustice. I am growing up in a world surrounded by activist empowered movements and hold myself responsible to use my position of privilege and my level of education to help others. This is just the beginning for me as a social practice artist.

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The Vietnam War as Patient Zero for Modern Day Activism

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The Vietnam War and the Opposition movement in the United States laid down the foundation for modern day activism. By researching past and present day activist movements, the Vietnam Protests, and the U.S. Government's patterns, I have learned about activism, trends within them and how they affect us today.

Between 1955 and 1975, the United States' armed forces took part in The Vietnam War. Taking place in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the alternatively named: "Second Indochina War," is widely considered to be a Cold War *proxy war*. The war was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. However, the North Vietnamese was primarily assisted by Russia and China along with other communist allies. Additionally, the South Vietnamese side received aid from South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and, the United States. The war is most commonly remembered for its guerilla warfare aspect. The National Liberation Front, most commonly known as the 'Vietcong', was aided by North Vietnam. Working with North Vietnam, the Vietcong were a prolific guerilla war force. They engaged with the South and the States in guerilla warfare, while the North Vietnamese army engaged in traditional warfare and funding of the Vietcong. The North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong proved to be an incredibly powerful duo as they fought with hope of reunifying Vietnam. Contradictorily, the United States was involved to eradicate the "threat" of a communist takeover in Vietnam. The United States further restated this message as reasoning for their Cold-War containment policy (a series of efforts by the U.S. during the Cold War to stop the spread the communism). In Vietnam alone this war waged on for twenty years, claiming approximately 1,973,425 lives in total and injuring approximately 2,094,200 more. Across Indochina, the death toll totaled approximately 4,211,451 and amongst the total deaths, two millions were civilian casualties. What occurred in the United States and the rest of the western world while this war was being fought is what I really want to focus on and how it contributed to modern day activism.

From the belly of a country that spent 173 billion dollars (\$1,342,938,888,888.89 today) on the war, emerged a sweeping counter-culture in total opposition to the war. Opposition the United States' presence in Vietnam really began to pick up steam in 1964 and continued to grow in strength through 1973 with the signing of the Paris Peace Accord. The movement began with small protests on college campus around the country, but grew into larger protests such as the famous 70,000 person strong march to the Pentagon in 1967. Songs, groups, plays, art, and other works from the movement were boasting messages of non-conformity and pacifism. One of the most prominent groups was the National Mobilization Committee to End the War of Vietnam or "The Mobe", which was responsible for the aforementioned march to the Pentagon. This movement came at a time in American, when student-activism like so had never been seen before.

This movement was prolific partly because this all happened during the American Civil Rights Movement as important civil rights figures, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali, were also outspoken advocates for the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. King was opposed to the war for a long time as it directly conflicted with his anti-violence principles, even though he avoided speaking of the topic for a while out of fear that speaking about the war would divert attention and reverse progress that had been made in the civil rights movement. However, King eventually broke his silence to actively speak out against the war with his April 4th, 1967, speech titled: "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." King said the U.S. was

only in Vietnam to “occupy it as an US colony”¹ and naming the United States government “the greatest purveyor of violence”² in the world. King also disagreed with the government’s decision to spend money on the war that could have gone towards welfare and he continued to speak out against the war even though it lost him many white allies. On the other hand, Ali was actually drafted for service. When he was made aware that he was eligible to be drafted, Ali publicly said he would resist service. The war went against Ali’s Muslim beliefs. He also resisted because he would not fight against brown people in Vietnam, that he had no quarrel with, as his own people in America were “treated like dogs and denied simple human rights.”³ When Ali’s name was called at his scheduled army induction, he refused to come forth and was in turn arrested. Ali was granted freedom due to a Supreme Court appeal, but still stripped of his titles and boxing license. He was not able to compete for three years after. Ali brought major attention to both the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement right as the two movements began to sway public opinion. Additionally, As an athlete, actions like Ali’s had never been seen. He redefined the standard of what it meant to be an outstanding athlete. “Possessing a killer jump shot or the ability to stop on a dime was no longer enough.”⁴ With his passing in June 2016, the late Ali will always be remembered as a sports icon and as a civil rights icon. He used his platform to speak out for what was right. Growing up Ali was one of my biggest heroes, he taught me to be the best I can be and to always speak for what is right. When he passed this year, I was devastated.

As the movement grew in numbers, its core was found in the Baby-Boomer generation because that was the generation most endangered by this war. The movement came to involve all sorts of groups as it grew in numbers and became more and more entwined with the Civil Rights movement. Even after the war, several veterans, such as former secretary of state John Kerry, spoke out against the war. Besides students and veterans, the movement also consisted of large groups of mothers, hippies, educators, academics, clergy, lawyers, journalists, and physicians. Amongst the students, there was a great deal of unrest as colleges across country becomes hosts for protests in favor of the Civil Rights movement, Women's Liberation movement, and the anti-war movement. To the students protesting, the war stood as a symbol of old American, traditional establishment values that they did not agree with it. Opposition to the war, was also opposition the racism and sexism that is weaved throughout the fibers that this very country was founded and stands on. In the 1960’s, college enrollment had reached a record high, making the Baby-Boomers the most educated generation of all time. They were the perfect group to stand up. Student protests became centered around the fact that affairs in Indochina had zero effect on them. They were morally opposed to war, and they did not want government funds to be wasted on a war when the money could go towards bettering other parts of the country. As the movement grew, a new-culture was born. Protesting was no longer the right thing to do, but also the cool thing. One student was once famously quoted saying that the protest were a place to “get laid, get high, and listen to some great rock.” Although most student protests were mostly organized by campus leaders, the protests were unified by cause. Protests heightened after the

¹ King, Martin Luther, Jr. "American Rhetoric: Martin Luther King, Jr: A Time to Break Silence (Declaration Against the Vietnam War)." *American Rhetoric: Martin Luther King, Jr: A Time to Break Silence (Declaration Against the Vietnam War)*. American Rhetoric, n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

² King, Martin Luther, Jr. "American Rhetoric: Martin Luther King, Jr: A Time to Break Silence (Declaration Against the Vietnam War)." *American Rhetoric: Martin Luther King, Jr: A Time to Break Silence (Declaration Against the Vietnam War)*. American Rhetoric, n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

³ Remnick, David (1998). *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*. Random House. p. 287. ISBN 0-375-50065-0.

⁴ Rhoden, William C. (June 20, 2013). "In Ali's Voice From the Past, a Stand for the Ages". *The New York Times*.

Kent State Shootings, when Ohio National Guardsmen shot and killed 4 student protesters. Several protests even involved the burning of draft cards and some more extreme attacks on ROTC buildings, but only a small portion of the protests were of a violent nature because how could meeting violence with violence be productive.

In addition to Muhammad Ali and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., other African-American leaders such as James Bevel, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Black Panther Party were also vehemently against the war. However, at large, the African-American community was ambivalent about joining the anti-war movement out of loyalty to Lyndon B Johnson and his pushing of the Civil Rights bill, but as the war continued and implications of social-justice came into play, black Americans joined the cause. Protesting the war for all the same reasons that everyone else was, black anti-war protesters often had to form their own protest groups because not everyone felt it was necessary to also protest the draft. Since conscription greater endangered populations of low-income and of color, black anti-war organizations also made it their mission to protest this as well.

Throughout the 1960's and 1970's the arts also proved to be an important force in the anti-war movement. In music, the genres most involved in were Rock n Roll and Folk. With musicians such as Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell, and Robert Fink, the composers often transcended music and took part in protests first hand. Many peace marches had musicians amongst their ranks. Amongst the musical figure associated with this effort, maybe the most famous is Jimi Hendrix. While Hendrix's views on the war were not completely inline with those of the masses of protesters, Hendrix was still a big player in the game. As an Army veteran, Hendrix sympathized with the soldiers and war effort, but he was still opposed to what was happening and all the violent injustice. One of Hendrix's most iconic performances: his rendition of the Star Spangles Banner spoke to one of his core messages that he wanted to preach to his large youth following. One can have tremendous pride in their country while hating their government's actions. Another notable musician who was also a peace activists, was John Lennon. Lennon's activism transpired during his solo career with his wife Yoko Ono. They most notably released their song "Give Peace A Chance." The song became a unifying anthem for the movement, and provide some solidarity and direction in the later years. Other aspects of art, writers and poets such as Allen Ginsberg produced works in response and opposition to the war. They used imagery based on the tragic events happening in Vietnam and harsh, contrasting views of both sides. Throughout visual art, use of guns and other war affiliated objects became popular when addressing the war. Additionally use of political and war figures became common as a tool to provide blame for the wars. Filmmakers rapidly increased their work output, in order to raise awareness and to educate as they often used real footage from protests. With this, the rapid availability of news a information helped the movement. One example of this is the image and footage of the famous Saigon Execution (footage of a South Vietnamese officer taking a handcuffed man into the street and shooting him dead on the spot).



This photo attracted lots of attention and added lots of momentum to the movement. Additionally, playwrights often satirized America and compared the horrible events in Vietnam to everyday happening to get points across. The work ranged tremendously across mediums, but all served the same purpose: to make America think more.

The Vietnam war is remembered as the war that America lost, and our politicians lost. The United States fought in a war, for twenty years, because a divided country in Indochina that is smaller than California was a “threat to democracy.” The so-called war against a communist threat was “necessary” and will stain our country's history forever. The government chose to insert itself in a civil-war, and to use overwhelming firepower on small forces, killing of civilians. The war was unnecessary, and has left us with many lessons. Information that not everyone uses, but useful information.

I think that the Vietnam War and any events occurring in response to it are fascinating because I believe that the movement in opposition to the Vietnam laid down the foundations for what is now current day activism. Before the Vietnam War, there had been war, there had been conflict, and there had been opposition. There always has been violence and conflict. I hope I hope this changes. Throughout history, at any given issue there has been opposition to what has occurred. There have been countless civil wars and coups, but what is special about the Vietnam War and its related events are what happen in the general civilian population. It is what happened within the people, and how they reacted. When the United States went to war in Vietnam, so much was happening at once in the country, and all of the different movements began to intertwine. With common humanitarian beliefs, students used their education, artists, political figure, athletes alike all used their platforms. This was an incredible first in the country: for the population to be united in predominantly peaceful protest in order to influence the way the government was conducting itself as a superpower. Living now, in a time with full of battles for social justice, I have found common trends within those movements. I see unity of different affinities, I see the new utilization of research, education and various other platforms, I see commentary in new forms of media. These trends in activism undeniably woven into the patterns that we find in history. Throughout my research, I observed the recurrence of the forces.

However, it was not till I was reading about the aforementioned Vietnam opposition movement that I saw all these forces unifying. Post-Vietnam, the U.S. government experienced remains broken and still struggles to fully learn from the losses experienced in that war. I believe that in the long run, the people have of the United States have benefited tremendously from this movement as the Vietnam war laid down the foundation for good-effective modern day activism.

Activism is the natural human response to oppression or wrongdoings. Since the beginning of time, when there was an issue, whether the issues was social, political, economic, or environmental, the disadvantaged and their have stood up against what they didn't believe in. With wrongful oppression and mistreatment of people and the world, history has seen activists stand up. Activism has lead to tremendous change for the better of people. The many different movements and practices become engraved in history and prove to be useful teachings to future activists, providing do's and don'ts for making change.

From looking at most prominent and successful movements, I see that activism can take shape in many different forms. I think that these diverse manifestations are because of the extensive cause of diversity. For example: if there are twelve movements happening, it only makes sense that there are going to be AT LEAST twelve different approaches. It is because of this, that activism can be found exercised in so many forms. Some prominent forms vary from simply writing to your local congressperson to occupying spaces out of protest. It is a practice for the people, for everyone.

The table of activism tends to stand on some of the same legs, movement to movement. However because activism changes so frequently and is a little bizarre as a concept, only three of its legs shall be highlighted. For the purpose of this work, I'll call them: Connection, Education, and Diligence.

Connection is a critical part in activism as it has multiple meanings, both essential. Connection acknowledges the *intersectionality* of causes and working together is the most effective. We began to see this in the Vietnam war as many different groups, working for some different reasons, all wanted the same end goal. A further example is that the fight for women's rights is also a fight for civil rights/ equality and equity of all races because for women to have equal rights as men, women of color must also have the same rights as white women too. The second meaning of 'connection' refers to the necessity for cooperation between the causes. To use the same example: the women of color need to be in communication with the white women as they both strive for equality. The two meanings of connection are super connected and important in modern day activism.

Education is important as well. When it comes to activism, the most profound ideas and new approaches are made by people who utilize their education. We saw this during Vietnam, a time with record high college students and record high protests. Those with educations are able to use them to best use them for bettering the world. Be smart about it, and use your own platforms Additionally, it is important to remain educated. Once you graduate high school or college, you shouldn't stop. Read the news, listen to the radio, or even go on BuzzFeed, but stay in the loop of things. Have tons of sources so you know what's happening. It also know all sides of the story, knowing this will make you more equipped to tackle whatever problem you see fit.

The third leg is more of a friendly reminder of diligence. The Vietnam war lasted roughly twenty year and the opposition movement lasted nearly the same length. Change comes, but it won't come overnight and everyone will need to keep pushing for what is needed, because change is needed.

These are the main lessons taught in the Vietnam movement. If you work with others, use your talents/education/platforms, and keep fighting, you will get it done. The demonstration like so in Vietnam taught us how to bring it together for a super successful movement that's teachings are still sinking in today and that laid out the foundation for activism in movements today.

As a teenager growing up in the 21st century I am experiencing many different things. I am constantly being exposed to new cultures, movements, and opinions. I am taking in so much that sometimes it is difficult to formulate my own opinions. I am young and am yet to really test myself, test my morals and beliefs. I have relatively certain morals and I do believe in equality and equity of everyone. This is why I value activism so much and chose this topic of study. I appreciate the accessibility and forms of activism. In theory activism should not have to be practiced because when there is no need for activism there is no impurities in the world. But because that's happening, activism is needed. It is a necessary force in our world. I try to participate and challenge myself to be more involved in activist movements. I have found myself to be not as involved as I wish. I feel that I am not living up to my full potential as person who can help with their education and privilege. There is so much more that I could do, and I want to do it. I need to do more, we all need to do more. I feel that my research has shown me more about activism, our government behavioral patterns, and how to react.

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