

Section
AudioSpotlight
Video**Essential Question**

How and why did America involve itself in the war in Vietnam?

Reading Guide**Content Vocabulary**

escalate (p. 913) napalm (p. 914)
 search-and-destroy mission (p. 914) Agent Orange (p. 914)

Academic Vocabulary

trace (p. 911) regime (p. 912)

Key People and Events

Ho Chi Minh (p. 911)

Vietcong (p. 912)

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (p. 913)

Reading Strategy

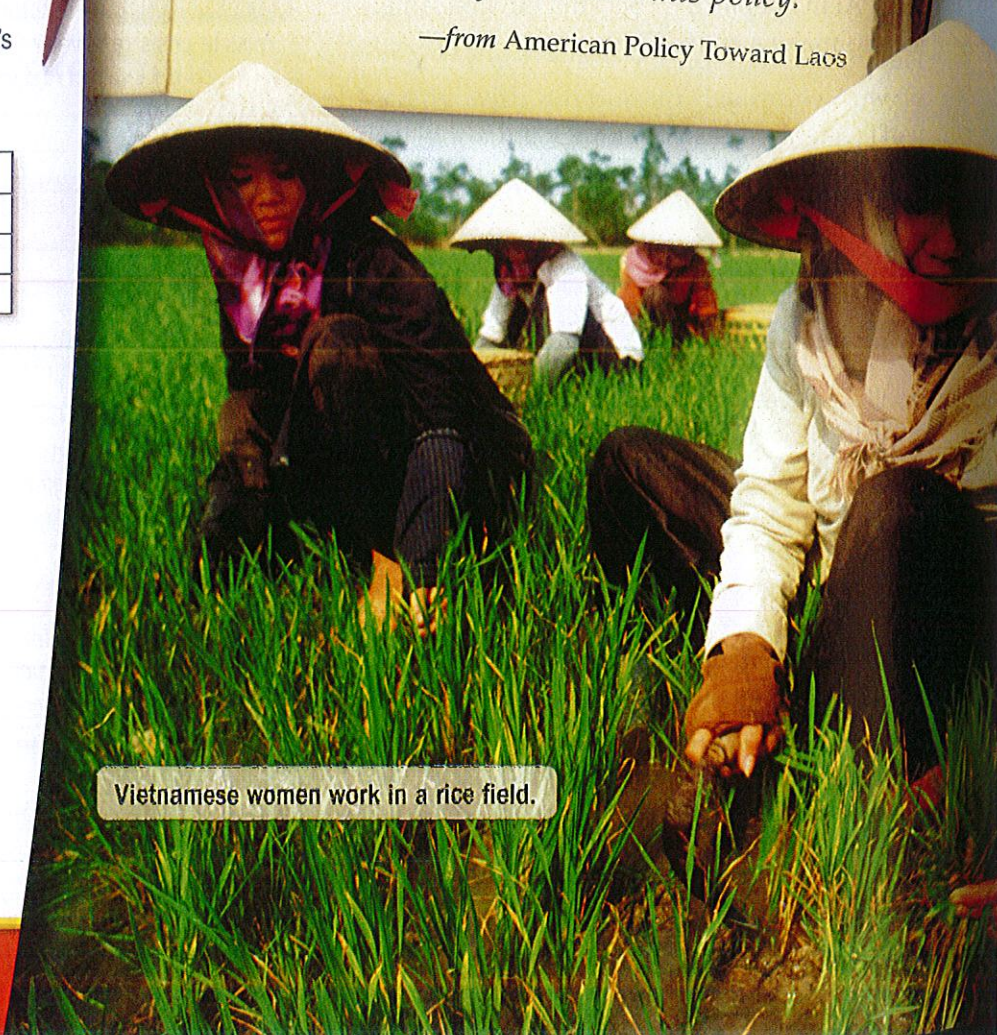
Taking Notes On a chart like the one below, identify each president's main philosophy about America's involvement in Vietnam.

President	Philosophy
Eisenhower	
Kennedy	
Johnson	

American Diary

American efforts to stop the spread of communism led to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. President Eisenhower believed that "the loss of all Vietnam, together with Laos on the west and Cambodia in the southwest, would have meant the surrender to Communist enslavement of millions." In the late 1950s, President Eisenhower sent military supplies and advisers to pro-Western South Vietnam in support of its fight against Communist North Vietnam. President Kennedy continued this policy.

—from American Policy Toward Laos



Vietnamese women work in a rice field.

The U.S. and Vietnam

Main Idea Vietnam became a divided country as a result of conflict between Communist and non-Communist groups.

History and You What would it be like to live in a country where a civil war was raging? Read to learn how a civil war affected the people of Vietnam.

In the early 1960s, the United States became involved in a fight against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The war in Vietnam did not unfold as Americans hoped, however. General Maxwell Taylor, who served as U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, reflected on the problems of the war years after it had ended:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"First, we didn't know ourselves. We thought that we were going into another Korean war, but this was a different country. Secondly, we didn't know our South Vietnamese allies. We never understood them, and that was another surprise. And we knew even less about North Vietnam."

—from *Vietnam: A History*

Origins of the War

The roots of the Vietnam conflict can be traced, or followed, back to World War II, when Japanese forces captured the French colony of Indochina in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese forces led by Communist **Ho Chi Minh** (HOH CHEE MIHN) fought against the Japanese.

When Japan surrendered at the end of World War II, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence. The French, however, were unwilling to give up their empire. Their Indochina colony—the present-day nations of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—was among the richest of France's colonies, supplying resources such as rice, rubber, and tin. Ho Chi Minh and his forces fought the French in a long, bloody war, finally defeating the French in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu.

The Geneva Accords

That same year, diplomats from the United States, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam met in Geneva, Switzerland, to work out a peace agreement. According to the Geneva Accords, Vietnam would be divided temporarily.

When and Where Indochina in 1959

In 1959 North Vietnam began to deliver supplies to its forces in South Vietnam through a network of paths and roads through the countries of Laos and Cambodia. This network became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. ▶



Critical Thinking

Explaining According to President Eisenhower, why was it important for the United States to help South Vietnam?



The agreement also stated that Ho Chi Minh's Communist nationalists would control the North. Hanoi served as its capital. Non-Communist forces—supported by the United States—would control the South, with Saigon as the capital. Vietnam would be unified in 1956 after national elections.

Neither the United States nor South Vietnam signed the agreement, but they did not oppose its provisions. At the same time, the U.S. emphasized that it would act if Communist North Vietnam moved aggressively against the South.

In 1955 Ngo Dinh Diem (NGOH DIHN deh•EHM), with American support, became South Vietnam's leader. He refused to hold elections and cracked down on Communists in the South. In response the Communists set up the National Liberation Front (NLF), or the **Vietcong**. In 1959 the Vietcong, on orders from Ho Chi Minh, began a war against the Diem **regime**, or governing authority.

A Growing American Role

The United States had replaced the French as the dominant foreign power in the South in 1955. If Communists took South Vietnam, President Eisenhower once said, the other countries of Southeast Asia would fall to communism like a row of dominoes—one right after the other. This domino theory helped shape American policy in Vietnam for the next 20 years.

To support South Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration sent the country billions of dollars in aid. It also dispatched a few hundred soldiers, who acted as advisers to the South Vietnamese government and army.

Like Eisenhower, President Kennedy saw Vietnam as part of the global struggle against communism. Kennedy sent more Special Forces—the Green Berets—to train and advise South Vietnamese troops. Kennedy also pressured Diem to make reforms that would undercut the appeal of communism.

The Vietnam Conflict 1941–1954

Japanese troops advance into Indochina. ▶

- ★ **July 1941**
Japan captures French colony of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia)



Ho Chi Minh ▶

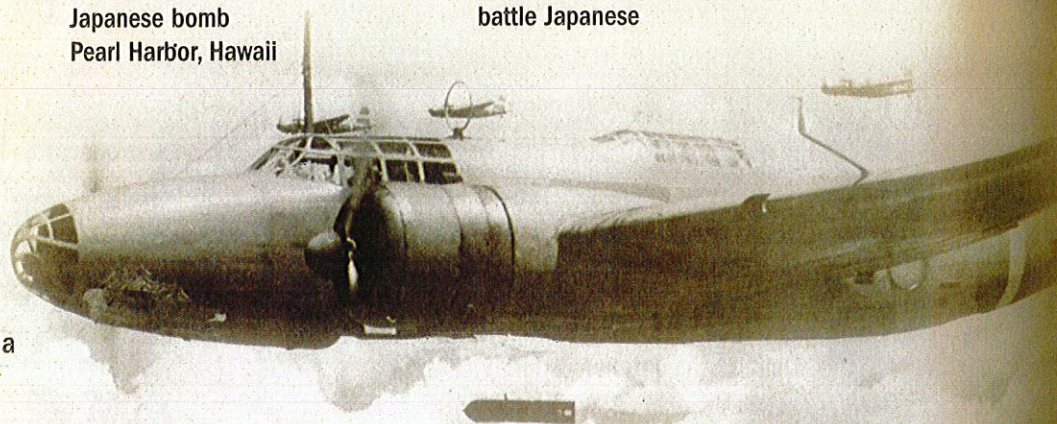
- ★ **September 1945**
 - Japan surrenders to Allies
 - Communist Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam independent



- ★ **December 1941**
Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

- ★ **Late 1943** Vietnamese battle Japanese

Japanese planes on a bombing mission ▶



Americans urged him to create a more democratic government and to help Vietnam's peasants. Diem introduced some limited reforms, but they had little effect.

Diem took away rights from the majority Buddhist population and favored Catholics, like himself. Buddhists responded with protests, including Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire on busy streets. As a result of these protests, Kennedy found it difficult to continue to support Diem.

In November 1963, the South Vietnamese army overthrew the government and assassinated Diem. The Kennedy administration had supported the takeover, but not Diem's killing. After President Kennedy's assassination later that month, the question of what to do in Vietnam fell on the shoulders of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Reading Check **Analyzing** What were the Geneva Accords?

◀ French soldier with Vietnamese prisoner

★ May 1954
Vietnamese defeat French

★ July 1954
Peace agreement divides Vietnam into Communist-dominated North and U.S.-supported South

December 1946
• Beginning of First Indochina War (French vs. Vietnamese)
• U.S. sends aid to France

Critical Thinking

Making Connections Why do you think the United States sent aid to France in its battle to keep Vietnam under French rule?

The Conflict Deepens

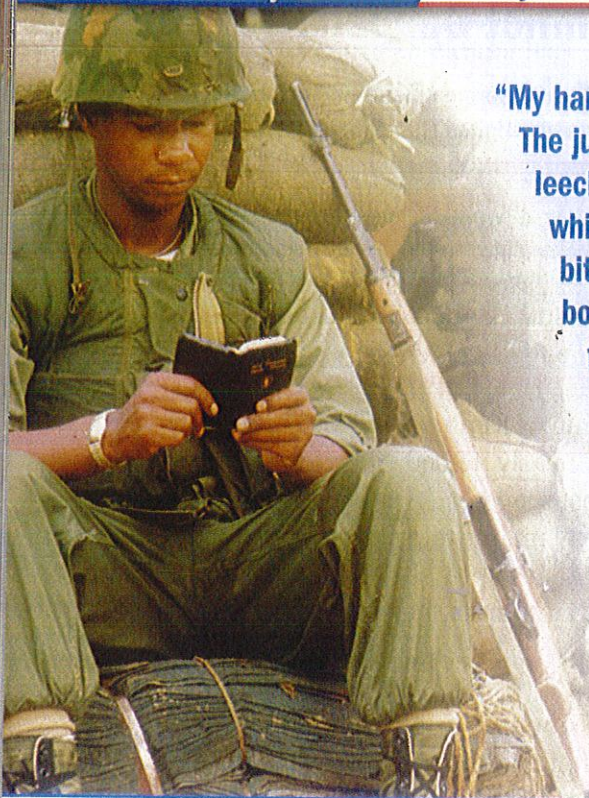
Main Idea To stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the United States became involved in a war in Vietnam.

History and You What sacrifices must a country make if it becomes involved in a war? Read to learn how the U.S. was affected by its involvement in the Vietnam War.

At the time of Kennedy's death, the United States had nearly 16,000 American troops in Vietnam as advisers. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told the president that South Vietnam could not resist the Vietcong rebels without more help from the United States. In a May 1964 conversation, taped but not made public until 1997, Johnson himself expressed doubts about American commitment. "I don't think it's worth fighting for," he said, "but I don't think we can get out." As Vietcong attacks continued, the United States moved toward deeper involvement in the region.

President Johnson wanted congressional support for expanding the American role in Vietnam. The opportunity to get that support came in August 1964, when North Vietnamese patrol boats allegedly attacked American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin near North Vietnam. Congress quickly passed a resolution that allowed the president to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States." The **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** gave Johnson broad authority to use American forces.

In 1965 President Johnson began to **escalate**—gradually increase—U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The buildup included both ground troops and an air campaign. United States Marines landed near Da Nang, South Vietnam, on March 8, 1965. During the next three years, the number of American troops in Vietnam rose sharply. About 180,000 U.S. soldiers were in Vietnam by the end of 1965, almost 400,000 by the end of 1966, and more than 500,000 by 1968.



“My hands are covered with cuts. The jungles have thousands of leeches and mosquitoes of which I think I have gotten bitten almost all over my body. . . . Actually the fighting is not heavy yet, but the rumor is we’re moving south.”

—from *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*

◀ American soldier in Vietnam

What would a foot soldier carry?

Typical Gear	Typical Pack
Rifle	Poncho
Web belt with ammo pouches	Poncho liner
Hand grenades	Five C-ration meals
Smoke grenades	Rain jacket
First aid pouch	Sweater shirt
Canteen	Extra canteen
Two bandoliers of ammo	Extra ammo
	Gun-cleaning kit
	Extra smoke grenade
	Extra rifle bolt
	Camera

Critical Thinking

Contrasting How were the experiences of a soldier in Vietnam different from a soldier during the U.S. Civil War?

In March 1965, the United States unleashed an intense bombing campaign called Operation Rolling Thunder. Some planes attacked the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a network of roads, paths, and bridges that wound from North Vietnam through Cambodia and Laos into South Vietnam. North Vietnamese troops used this route to bring equipment south. Other planes targeted bridges, docks, factories, and military bases in the North.

The bombing increased in intensity from 1965 through 1968. By then American planes had dropped more bombs on North Vietnam than they dropped on Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II.

Fighting the War

The American troops found fighting a ground war in Vietnam difficult. Dense jungles, muddy trails, and swampy rice paddies hampered troop movement. The South Vietnamese army did not always fight effectively. As the Vietcong guerrillas blended with the population, American soldiers found it hard to tell friends and enemies apart.

The American forces began to conduct **search-and-destroy missions**. The goal was to seek out Vietcong or North Vietnamese units and destroy them. The Americans hoped to eventually defeat the Communists or force them to negotiate. Ground troops coordinated their moves with air support. Patrols on the ground radioed their location, and helicopter gunships roared to the scene to blast the enemy with cannon and machine-gun fire.

Planes bombed areas of South Vietnam in an effort to drive guerrillas from their jungle cover. Both sides used planes to drop **napalm**, an explosive that burned intensely, to destroy jungle growth. North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces also used napalm in flamethrowers, devices that expel fuel or a burning stream of liquids.

To improve visibility, chemical herbicides were sprayed in Vietnam to clear out forests and tall grasses. One herbicide, **Agent Orange**, is believed to have contaminated many Americans and Vietnamese, causing serious health problems.

Frustration Grows

The bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the North did not stop the constant flow of troops and equipment south. Neither did it break the morale of the North Vietnamese. As one of their leaders later said:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"[We survived] because of our courage and determination, together with wisdom, tactics, and intelligence. . . . We had to resort to different measures, some of which are quite simple, like hiding in man-holes and evacuating to the countryside. And we fought back with all our forces and with every kind of weapon."

—from an interview with General Vo Nguyen Giap

The search-and-destroy missions killed thousands of North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops—but the troops always seemed to be replaced. What Ho Chi Minh had said to the French became true again: "You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."

American troops advanced into rice paddies, jungles, and small villages and killed scores of Vietcong. Yet the next day, the same area often

had to be attacked again. American soldiers grew frustrated. Philip Caputo, a young marine lieutenant, recalled the changing attitude:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"When we marched into the rice paddies on that damp March afternoon, we carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Viet Cong would be quickly beaten. . . . We kept the packs and rifles; the convictions, we lost."

—from *A Rumor of War*

Debate in the White House

Officials in the Johnson administration saw the mounting Communist losses and believed at first that the United States could succeed. As the war dragged on, however, some officials saw a gloomier situation. Secretary of Defense McNamara began to argue that the ground war and the air attacks had failed and that the war could not be won. Outside the nation's capital, opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam grew.



Reading Check

Identifying By what means did President Johnson escalate the U.S. presence in Vietnam?

Section 2 Review

History ONLINE
Study Central™ To review this section, go to glencoe.com.

Vocabulary

1. Write a paragraph using each of the following terms: *trace*, *regime*, *escalate*, *search-and-destroy mission*, *napalm*, *Agent Orange*.

Main Ideas

2. **Describing** What was the domino theory, and how did it shape American policy in Vietnam?
3. **Summarizing** How large was the American troop increase in Vietnam between 1963 and the end of 1965?

Critical Thinking

4. **Explaining** What was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and why was it important?
5. **Organizing Information** Re-create the diagram below to show the different warfare techniques used in search-and-destroy missions.



6. **Descriptive Writing** Imagine you are an American soldier arriving in Vietnam. In one or two paragraphs, describe the terrain you find yourself fighting in and how it affects your abilities as a soldier.

Answer the Essential Question

7. How and why did America involve itself in the war in Vietnam?

**YOU
DECIDE**



Should We Be Fighting the Vietnam War?

Building Background

Government officials urged Americans to support the war's goals of spreading freedom and democracy. President Lyndon B. Johnson responded to criticism of his management of the war by defending the struggle as an idealistic cause.

As U.S. involvement in the war increased, so did opposition to it. The mainstream media, which had tried to remain balanced in their war coverage, now openly criticized the effort. Walter Cronkite, then the nation's most respected newscaster, supported the war effort at first. After traveling to Vietnam to report on the fighting, Cronkite's stories began to include his disappointments with the status of the war.

NO

WALTER CRONKITE,

after the Tet Offensive, February 27, 1968

We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds. . . .

To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say that we are mired¹ in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion. . . . It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.

Fighting in Saigon during the
Tet Offensive, May 1968

¹ mired stuck

YES

PRESIDENT JOHNSON

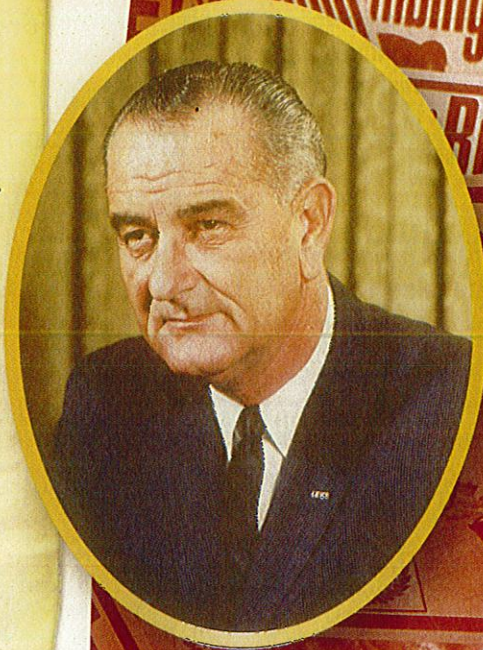
Addresses Johns Hopkins University, April 7, 1965

We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny. And only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure.

This kind of world will never be built by bombs or bullets. Yet the infirmities² of man are such that force must often precede reason, and the waste of war, the works of peace. . . .

. . . To abandon this small and brave nation [Vietnam] to its enemies, and to the terror that must follow, would be an unforgivable wrong. . . .

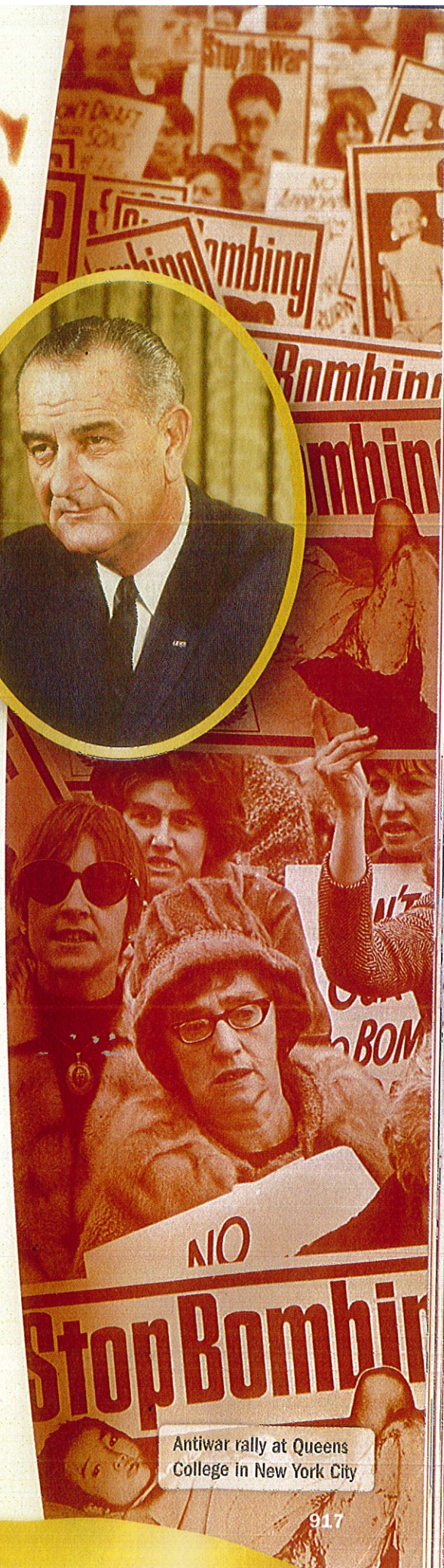
We are also there because there are great stakes in the balance. Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Viet-Nam would bring an end to conflict. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another. The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied.



² **infirmities** weaknesses

DBQ Document-Based Questions

- 1. Interpreting** Why does Johnson believe the United States should be fighting the war in Vietnam?
- 2. Making Inferences** What does Cronkite believe the result will be if the United States continues fighting in Vietnam?
- 3. Analyzing** How do Johnson and Cronkite differ in their views on achieving peace?
- 4. Synthesizing** Why might Americans, such as Walter Cronkite, be frustrated with the war?



Antiwar rally at Queens College in New York City