

The Vietnam War

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Michael Hutchison, Writer

Dr. Aaron Willis, Project Editor
Kerry Gordonson, Editor
Christina Trejo, Editorial Assistant
Justin Coffey, Editorial Assistant

Social Studies School Service
10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232

<http://socialstudies.com>
access@socialstudies.com
(800) 421-4246

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10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232
United States of America

(310) 839-2436
(800) 421-4246

Fax: (800) 944-5432
Fax: (310) 839-2249

<http://socialstudies.com>
access@socialstudies.com

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	iv
Lecture Notes.....	S1
Student Handouts.....	H1
<u>Culminating Activities</u>	
Image Analysis Worksheet	1
Contextual Analysis Worksheet	3

Introduction

Primary sources are the building blocks of history. Using these sources to introduce students to historical periods offers students the opportunity to become historians themselves—to analyze the evidence, form hypotheses, and learn how to support arguments based on evidence. They learn what it means to interpret the past in ways that provide meaning for the present. Textual primary sources can often be difficult for students to engage with because they are often couched in unfamiliar language from a different historical era. Visual primary sources can prove more appealing and accessible to students, and they also involve different types of “reading” skills.

How to Use This Product

This PowerPoint® presentation is designed to walk students through the process of primary source interpretation. Slides help to focus students’ attention and train them how to “read” visual primary sources. Targeted questions and enlarged insets from images help to train students to see deeper into the historical record, to uncover evidence that, though plainly before their eyes, is not always obvious at first glance.

The posters provide visual reinforcement for the images analyzed in the presentation. Use them before or after the PowerPoint® analysis for either pre- or post-reading activities. In addition, we have provided extra images on each disc so that once the students are trained in the skills of analyzing visual primary sources they can further hone their skills. You can print them out and distribute as handouts for in-class or independent study, or you can import the images into PowerPoint® for students to analyze individually or with the class as a whole.

Let Us Know What You Think

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We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
Chief Education Officer
Social Studies School Service

The Vietnam War



1

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Prior to the 1950s, the nation of Vietnam was a French possession known as “Indochina.” The French and Vietnamese, with U.S. backing, had successfully resisted Japanese aggression during World War II, but an organization known as the “Viet Minh” had also arisen at this time and began pushing for independence from France. Led by Ho Chi Minh, a communist, the Viet Minh successfully defeated the French in 1954, and Vietnam was divided into two parts: the communist North and the U.S.-backed South.

The South Vietnamese government, under Premier Ngo Dinh Diem, became increasingly corrupt and popular discontent began to arise. The North Vietnamese backed a guerrilla insurgency, known as the Viet Cong, that aimed to overthrow Diem and establish communist rule in South Vietnam. As the fighting between North and South intensified in the early 1960s, President Kennedy sent more U.S. military advisors to help train the South Vietnamese forces. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, in which the U.S. claimed that North Vietnamese ships had attacked American destroyers, President Lyndon B. Johnson began to escalate U.S. involvement in the conflict, including bombing North Vietnam and sending in increasing numbers of American ground forces to fight the Viet Cong. Johnson had hoped the military escalation would quickly end the war, but fighting dragged on. The war became increasingly unpopular among Americans, and Johnson decided not to seek reelection in 1968.

The Vietnam War (continued)



2

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Richard Nixon became the new president in 1969 and initiated a policy of “Vietnamization,” in which South Vietnamese troops would be given more and more of the responsibility for conducting the war, and the U.S. would slowly begin to reduce the number of American soldiers in Vietnam. However, the war began to spread to the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos, and in 1970, Nixon authorized an invasion of Cambodia. Antiwar protests in the U.S., which had first arisen in the 1960s, had become more and more prevalent as the war dragged on. The invasion of Cambodia touched off a new round of protests, including one that turned tragic when National Guardsmen shot and killed four students at Kent State University in Ohio.

In 1973, U.S. and North Vietnamese diplomats agreed to a truce that eventually removed most U.S. forces. However, the North eventually reneged on the ceasefire, and by 1975, South Vietnam, weakened without the help of U.S. troops, was forced to surrender. The nation was unified with the capital at Hanoi; the city of Saigon, the former capital of South Vietnam, was renamed “Ho Chi Minh City.”

Table of Contents



- Dien Bien Phu and Beginning of U.S. Involvement
- North Vietnamese soldiers and the Viet Cong
- Escalation of the war and “Vietnamization”
- Antiwar Movement
- U.S. Soldiers in Vietnam

Dien Bien Phu and the Start of U.S. Involvement

- Viet Minh fights war of independence
- French defeated at Dien Bien Phu
- Geneva Conference (1954)
- North becomes communist; South backed by U.S.
- U.S. military advisors sent to Vietnam to support South

4

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After World War II, France sought to reestablish colonial control over Indochina (a region which included the present-day nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). The Viet Minh, an independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh, sought to defeat the French and establish Vietnam as an independent nation. The Viet Minh eventually defeated the French, with the decisive battle taking place at the military outpost of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

At the Geneva Conference in 1954, France formally withdrew from Vietnam. However, representatives at the conference then divided Vietnam into two halves: the communist North, led by Ho Chi Minh, and a democratic South, led by Ngo Dinh Diem. The Eisenhower administration, concerned that if South Vietnam fell to the communists all of southeast Asia would follow suit, sent U.S. troops to advise the South Vietnamese forces. President John F. Kennedy continued this policy. However, after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, President Lyndon B. Johnson decided to escalate the war, eventually sending more than 500,000 U.S. combat troops to help stop North Vietnamese aggression.



Dien Bien Phu and the Start of U.S. Involvement

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5

Give students approximately one minute to view the cartoon, then proceed to the following slides.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



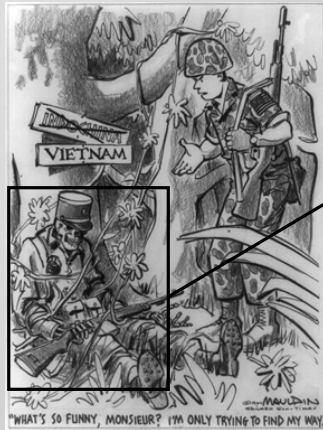
- What is the nationality of this soldier?
- How can you tell?

6

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The soldier on the ground is a French soldier. His uniform is different than that of the other soldier, and the hat he is wearing is typical of someone who was in the French military. Also, the other soldier addresses him as “Monsieur” (French for “mister”). Finally, although it is difficult to see in the cartoon, it appears that a small French flag adorns the soldier’s hat.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



- How would you describe the condition of this soldier's body?
- What does the condition of the body imply?

7

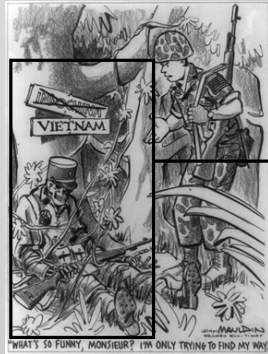
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The French soldier is obviously dead, and the cartoonist has drawn the body to look as if it had substantially decomposed. The implication here is that the French mission in Indochina had ended in failure; the cartoonist may also have wanted to imply that the effort was prolonged and had sapped French materiel and manpower. The probable implication here is that an American effort in Vietnam would lead to the same outcome.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Describe the physical location shown in the cartoon.

- What is its relation to the dead soldier?
- What might this symbolize?



8

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The cartoon is set in the jungle, which was a common location of fighting during the Vietnam War. However, the cartoonist also shows elements of the jungle (notably, the vines) entangling the dead French soldier on the ground. It thus appears that the jungle “trapped” the soldier and made it impossible for him to extricate himself.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

- What is the nationality of this soldier?
- How can you tell?

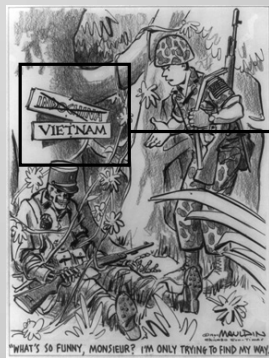


9

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This soldier is an American. He is wearing a easily recognizable army uniform and helmet and also has an American flag decal on his shoulder. In addition, the caption of the cartoon has this soldier speaking in English.

What is the significance of these two signs?



10

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The first shows the former name of the colony (Indochina), and the second shows the name the nation took after winning its independence from France (Vietnam). The cartoonist probably added this primarily to assist the reader in identifying the location of the scene in the cartoon, but also to imply that “Indochina”—depicted in this cartoon as a disaster for the French—and “Vietnam” were the same, not just in terms of physical location, but also in terms of what would happen there to foreign countries that tried to control the region.

"WHAT'S SO FUNNY, MONSIEUR? I'M ONLY TRYING TO FIND MY WAY."



- What do you think the caption of this cartoon means?
- What larger message is the cartoonist trying to convey?

11

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The first part of the caption, “What’s so funny, Monsieur?” not only conveys that the dead soldier is French, but also reveals the American soldier to be rather clueless: the French soldier’s “grin” occurs because he’s been reduced to a skull, not because he finds anything funny. “I’m only trying to find my way” reinforces the cluelessness of the American, implying that he’s lost or at least out of his depth in Vietnam. The cartoonist is trying, in a darkly humorous way, to impress the reader that the U.S. is destined to have a similar experience in Vietnam as the French did: a long, bloody conflict that would be difficult, if not impossible, to win.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



This cartoon was published in November 1964.

Do you think the cartoonist might have been responding to events at the time, or does the cartoon appear to be commenting on the war in general?

12

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This may be a hard question for students to answer, but you can help lead them to a couple of ideas. First, remind them that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution had been passed in August 1964, and that it gave President Johnson a virtual “blank check” to expand the U.S. military presence in Vietnam without having to consult Congress. Second, remind students that LBJ had just won reelection by a landslide in early November, so it seemed at the time that a massive escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam was inevitable. (Escalation did indeed occur in early 1965.) Thus, the cartoonist (Bill Mauldin) might have been trying to change the public’s attitude about Vietnam and stir up some opposition to the escalation that LBJ was planning. However, it’s also possible that Mauldin simply may have wanted to highlight the general weaknesses of the U.S. mission in Vietnam. Take some time to discuss these different possibilities with the class.

North Vietnamese Soldiers and the Viet Cong

- North Vietnamese troops were “regular army” (NVA)
- Viet Cong, also known as the “National Liberation Front” (NLF)
- Viet Cong used guerrilla tactics; did not have advanced weapons
- Viet Cong employed not only soldiers but civilians to harass U.S. troops
- Difficult for U.S. soldiers to distinguish enemy from civilians

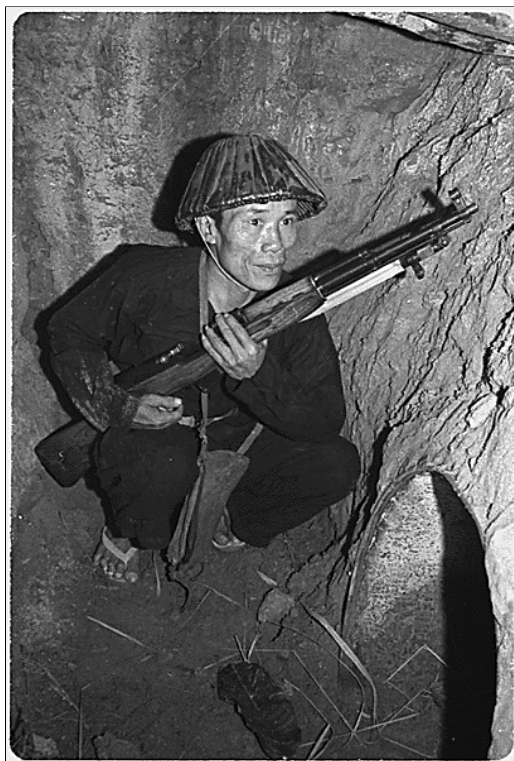
13

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In the Vietnam War, U.S. forces faced an enemy like no other. Not only did American GIs fight uniformed, regular troops of the Army of North Vietnam (known as the NVA), they also had to weather attacks from the “National Liberation Front” (NLF), also known as the “Viet Cong.” Primitively armed and outfitted in comparison to American soldiers, the Viet Cong nonetheless managed to wage efficient and effective guerrilla campaigns against U.S. and South Vietnamese forces

The Vietcong, frequently referred to by American troops as “VC” or “Charlie,” often used brutal tactics that were designed not just to kill the enemy but to cause fear and demoralize them as well. For example, U.S. soldiers would frequently fall victim to “punji stakes”—sharpened sticks smeared with animal excrement. The Viet Cong would plant the sticks upright in the ground in a pit, then cover the pit with thatch. A soldier would unknowingly fall in the pit, and a punji stake would impale him, causing both a nasty wound and a difficult-to-treat infection. The Viet Cong also used landmines and other forms of booby-traps to maim or kill unsuspecting GIs.

The Viet Cong also used civilian populations to help in their campaigns, including the elderly, women, and children, making it nearly impossible for American soldiers to determine who was friend or foe. These tactics also made it difficult for the U.S. to estimate the size of enemy forces or how many of the enemy had actually been killed. Progress in the war was therefore hard for the U.S. to measure.



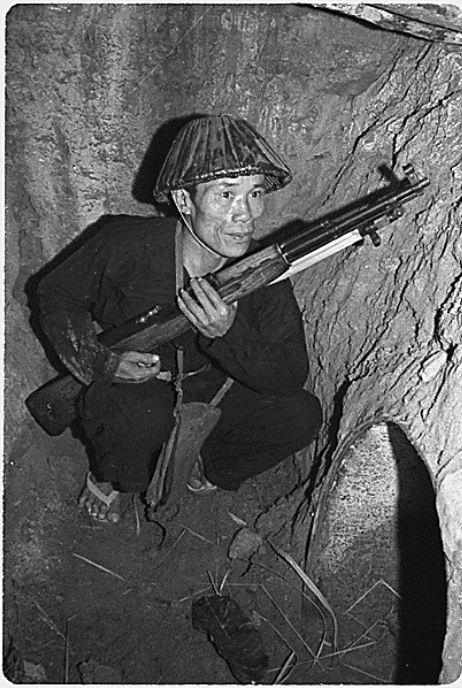
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North Vietnamese Soldiers and the Viet Cong

14

Give students approximately one minute to view the photo, then proceed to the following slides.

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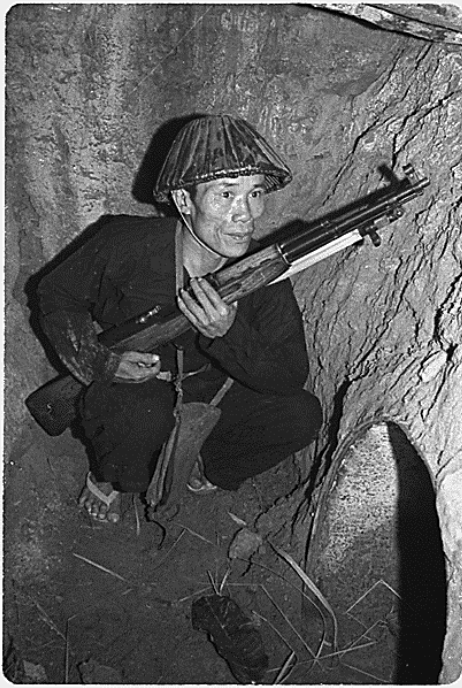
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How does this Viet Cong soldier's equipment compare to that of the average U.S. GI's at the time?

15

American soldiers at the time had much more technologically advanced weapons and gear, including high-powered rifles and ammunition, communications equipment, and sturdy helmets and boots. In this photo, the Viet Cong soldier is dressed in what many American soldiers called “pajamas,” as well as a crude helmet and flip-flop sandals instead of heavy boots. Some sort of pack or knapsack can be seen. There is no evidence of any other equipment, such as a canteen, extra ammunition, first aid kit, or body armor. The weapon the soldier is holding appears to be a rifle with a bayonet; it has a wooden stock instead of a metal one, and it appears well-worn.

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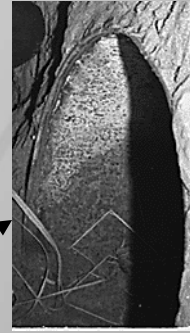
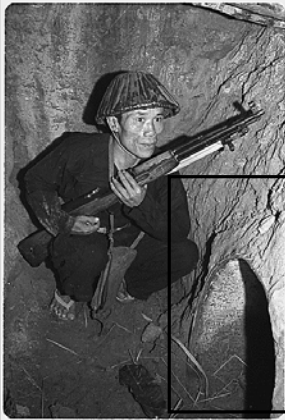
How effective of a fighter in battle do you think this soldier might have been? Why?

16

Some students may note that the soldier looks somewhat undersupplied and not much of a threat to a well-trained, well-equipped American soldier. However, others may note that the Viet Cong typically used guerrilla warfare, which does not require advanced armor or weaponry; guerrilla warfare also gave the Viet Cong a psychological advantage against American troops and helped them overcome a better-equipped and better-supplied enemy.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Describe the setting of this photograph.



- Where does the soldier appear to be located?
- What else can you see in the photo?

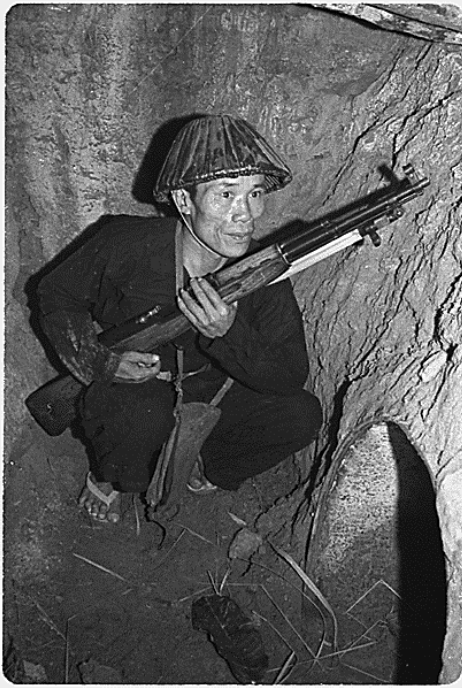
17

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It appears that the soldier is in some enclosed area, such as a cave or tunnel. The Viet Cong were well-known for building intricate systems of tunnels in which they could hide from pursuing American soldiers, set booby traps, or organize terror campaigns against other South Vietnamese civilians.

In the lower-right portion of the photo, we can see what appears to be either the entrance to a tunnel or a drainage pipe. The latter seems more likely; however, in the context of the photo it's probable that the viewer is intended to think of it as a tunnel entrance. The next slide will give you an opportunity to discuss this issue further with your students.

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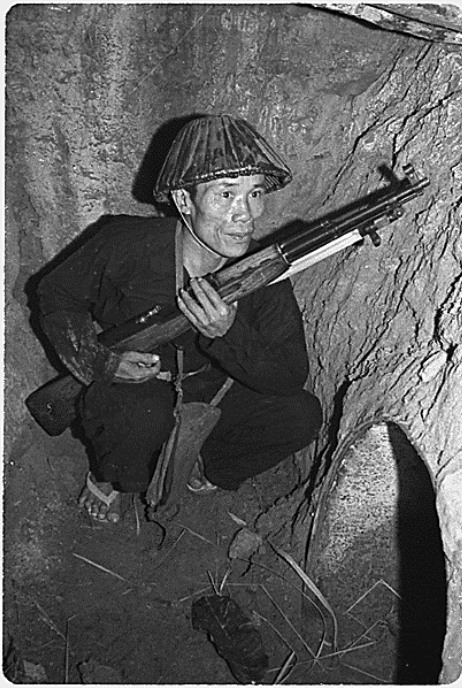
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Does this photograph look realistic, or does it look staged? Explain why you feel this way.

18

Much about this photo feels staged, from the stiff expression and pose of the soldier, to the fact that he appears to be crouching in a pit that bears little resemblance to an actual Viet Cong tunnel entrance, to the artificial lighting. The tunnel, as mentioned in the notes for the previous slide, looks more like a storm drain. It thus seems unlikely that this is a candid shot.

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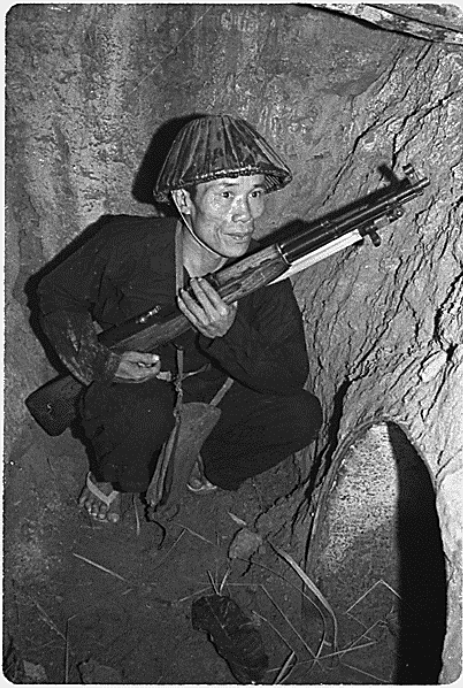
- Who do you think might have taken this photograph?
- Why might this photo have been taken?

19

At first glance, this appears to be an “action shot” of a Viet Cong soldier in an underground bunker; viewers of the photo might thus initially think that it was taken by a North Vietnamese photographer or by someone sympathetic to the North Vietnamese cause. However, the picture was actually shot in 1968 for the Department of Defense. (The photo is part of the collection of the National Archives and Records Administration.)

The photo might possibly have been taken as part of a series of training photographs to acquaint U.S. soldiers with tactics and characteristics of the enemy they would face in the field. It’s also possible that the photo could have been used for propaganda purposes.

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What sort of conclusions might Americans—both soldiers and civilians—who viewed this photo have made about the enemy?

20

By the time this photo had been taken (1968), many American soldiers and civilians had already viewed footage of Viet Cong activities and had heard reports of atrocities from the news media. Therefore, most by that time knew that Viet Cong soldiers were fierce fighters who would use any tactic in order to gain an advantage. Most also probably knew that the Viet Cong were not “regular” soldiers, so this photo probably would have served to reinforce mental pictures people already had of what a Viet Cong soldier looked like.

The goal of the government in publishing this photograph might have been to put a face on the enemy and to make the Viet Cong seem less mysterious and intimidating. The government also might have been trying to encourage soldiers being deployed to Vietnam and send the message that, while formidable, the Viet Cong were not superhuman and could be defeated if American troops used sensible tactics and pursued the enemy.

Escalation of the War and “Vietnamization”

- LBJ widens war after Gulf of Tonkin incident
- Opposition to U.S. involvement convinces LBJ not to run for reelection in 1968
- Nixon promises “secret plan” to end war
- Nixon follows Vietnamization policy
- Nixon still unable to end U.S. role in war until 1973

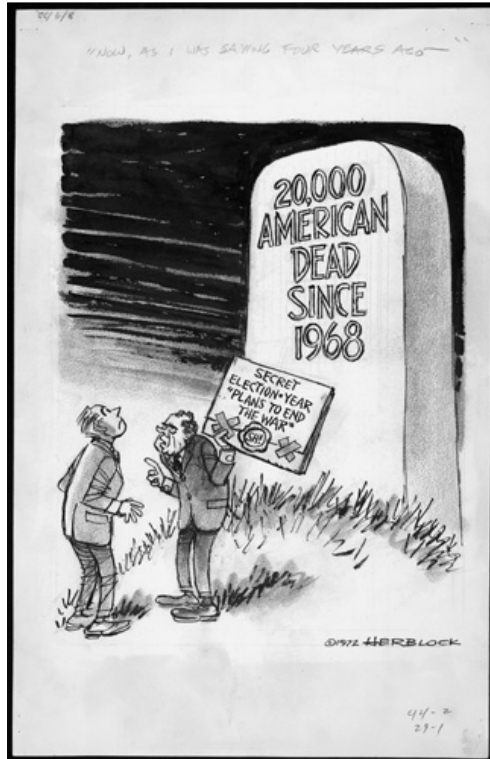
21

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In August 1964, after two American destroyers were reportedly attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats, President Johnson asked Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave him the authority to begin a massive escalation of the war, including saturation bombing of targets in North Vietnam, as well as sending large numbers of American servicemen to fight in Southeast Asia.

As the fighting dragged on, domestic opposition to the war grew. Johnson, who had been elected president by a record margin in 1964, now found his base of support wavering, and he bowed out of the presidential race in 1968. His vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, won the Democratic nomination. Former vice-president Richard Nixon was the Republican nominee. Early on, Nixon had a sizeable lead in the polls, but Humphrey made up lost ground. The race soon became a dead heat. In order to regain momentum, Nixon announced that he had a “secret plan” to end the war. Nixon won the election by a small margin, but did not produce his secret plan. Instead, he promoted a policy of “Vietnamization,” which included taking much of the responsibility for conducting the war from American troops and handing it to South Vietnamese forces. The number of American troops in Vietnam also was reduced.

In 1972, Nixon sought a second term, easily defeating Democrat George McGovern. While the fighting dragged on, Nixon again insisted that the end of the war was near. However, successful negotiations at the Paris Peace Talks were not achieved until January 1973, a few days after Nixon was inaugurated for his second term.



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Escalation of the War and “Vietnamization”

“Now, as I was saying four years ago--”
— a 1972 Herblock Cartoon, copyright by the Herb Block Foundation 22

Give students approximately one minute to view the cartoon, then proceed to the following slides.

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Who is this person?

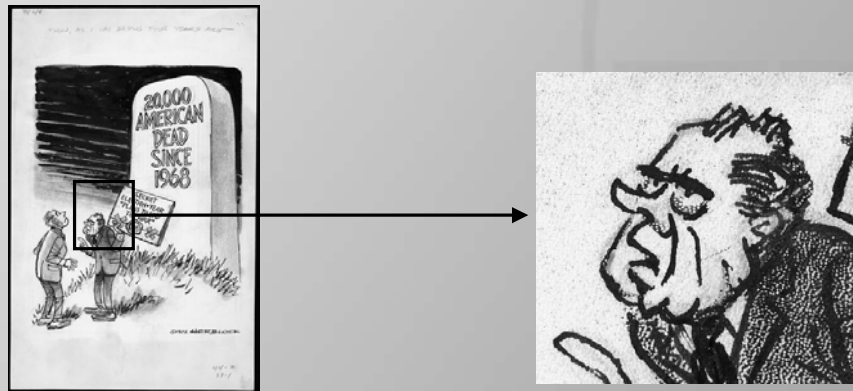


23

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It is evident from the drawing that the figure is that of Richard Nixon. Nixon's facial features (particularly his nose and jowls) made him a favorite target of cartoonists, who often exaggerated his characteristics in various poses and drawings.

What can be inferred from Nixon's facial expression in the cartoon?



24

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Even at the point this cartoon was created (1972), Nixon had a reputation as a “dirty trickster” who was not averse to stretching the truth. His facial expression in the cartoon might indicate that he had been caught in a lie regarding his 1968 campaign promise that he had a “secret plan” to end the Vietnam War.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Who does this person in the cartoon represent?



25

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While Nixon's features make him easy to identify, this figure does not seem to represent any specific person. Most likely, he represents the "average American," or, perhaps since the cartoon makes mention of an election, this individual might represent an American voter looking for Nixon to fulfill his election promise from 1968.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



©1972

What is the significance of the year when this cartoon was published?

26

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Nineteen seventy-two was an election year, and Nixon was running for his second term as president. In 1968, he had run partly on a platform that he had a “secret plan” to end the war, and voters would have to decide whether his record in conducting the war was worthy enough to give him another four years in office.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What did the cartoonist mean by the words on the folder Nixon is holding?

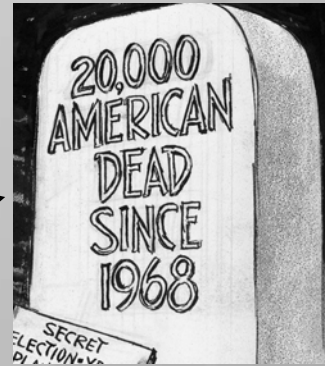
27

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During his 1968 presidential campaign as the Republican nominee, Nixon announced that he had a secret plan to end the war in Vietnam and, if he were elected, he would implement that plan. However, after taking office, he did not appear to implement any such plan.

In 1972, Nixon ran for reelection, promising a swift and honorable end to the war. The cartoonist (Herblock) used Nixon's 1968 statement, as well as the promises he'd made during his reelection campaign in the cartoon, to imply that Nixon was simply restating the same promise in an attempt to get reelected, and that there were no "secret plans" nor any simple way to honorably end the war. The wax seal on the folder says "SH!", further highlighting Nixon's secrecy regarding the administration's policy about the war. In addition, the phrase "election year" would indicate that Nixon only brought up the issue of plans to end the war during campaigns to assist him in getting elected.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



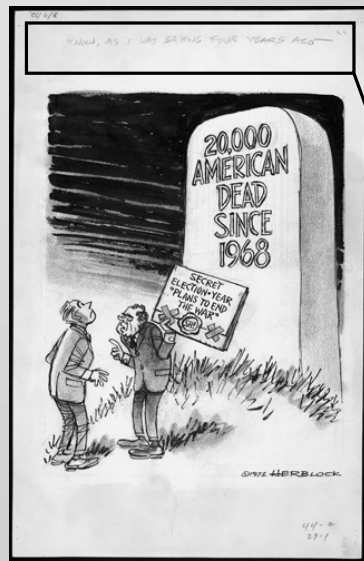
Why might the cartoonist have shown this statistic in this manner?

28

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The cartoonist probably felt that conveying this information on what appears to be a tombstone would give the viewer the feeling that had Nixon actually implemented a plan to end the war, many Americans might have been spared being drafted and the lives of 20,000 Americans who died in Vietnam might have been saved. Also, by portraying this statistic on a tombstone (and a huge one at that—it dwarfs Nixon and the other man in the cartoon), the cartoonist may have been trying to blame the Nixon Administration for the deaths of so many American servicemen.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



The caption reads,
“Now, as I was saying
four years ago...”

What message was the
cartoonist trying to
convey here?

“NOW, AS I WAS SAYING FOUR YEARS AGO...”

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Based on the caption (as well as other information in the cartoon), the cartoonist was trying to imply that Nixon was more interested in getting reelected than in finding a way to end the war and bring American troops home, and that he was using the lives of American servicemen as a means to get himself four more years in office.

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What do you think the cartoonist's overall message is regarding Nixon and his Vietnam policy?

30

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The cartoon is highly critical of Nixon and his “Vietnamization” policy. The cartoonist implies that Nixon had been elected on a pledge that he had a plan to end the war, and in his first four-year term he had done little to achieve an end to the fighting in Vietnam.

In addition, even though Nixon had implemented a policy of Vietnamization, nearly 20,000 Americans had died since he took office. It’s highly likely that the cartoonist saw Nixon’s Vietnam policy as a failure.

War Protesters

- Protests began in 1965
- Several groups formed the “New Left”
- Protests also included many from “mainstream” America
- War divided nation into “hawks” and “doves”
- War caused discontent even in LBJ’s administration

31

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As the Vietnam War dragged on, more and more Americans became convinced that it was a mistake for the U.S. to be involved there militarily. By 1965, those opposed to the war had begun conducting active protests on college campuses. The Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) formed the nucleus of what became known as the “New Left.”

However, as the war dragged on, more and more “mainstream” Americans became vocal opponents of the war. Factory and construction workers, housewives, and business professionals became involved in organized protests. Labels such as “hawks” (for those who supported the war) and “doves” (for those who opposed U.S. involvement) became common. In addition, prominent Americans such as the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and “baby doctor” Dr. Benjamin Spock came out publicly against the war.

While President Johnson seemed committed to American involvement in the war, some members of his administration became more and more convinced that his policies were mistaken. Robert Kennedy, who had been Attorney General during his brother’s administration, resigned his post to run for the U.S. Senate. In 1968, Kennedy would run for president against Johnson himself, with the war becoming one of the main issues of the campaign. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, also resigned over differences with the president regarding the war.

War Protesters



32

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Give students approximately one minute to view the photo, then proceed to the following slides.

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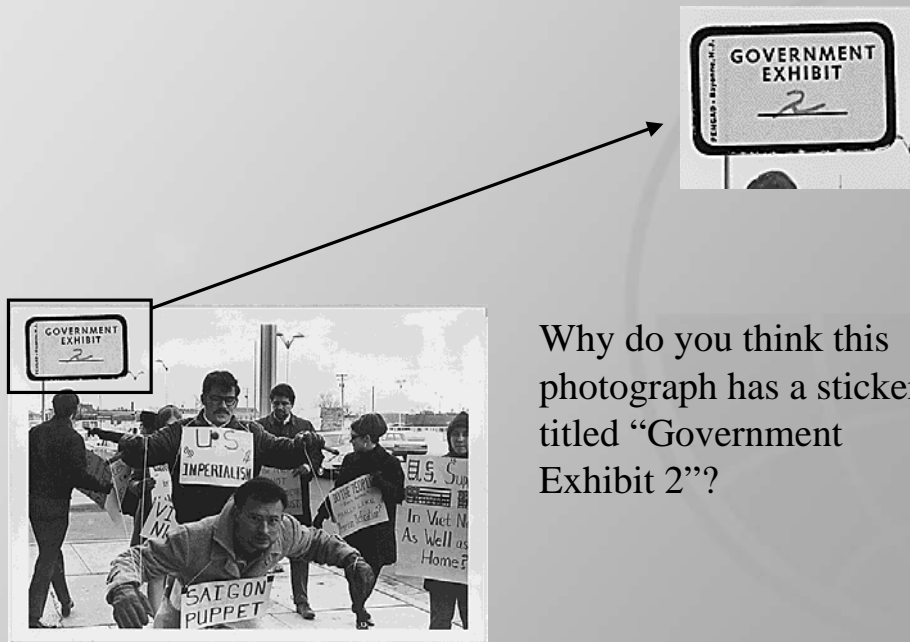
Do the protesters shown in this photo resemble what you think of as the “typical” type of Vietnam-era protest? Why or why not?

33

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Some students will note that the most common location of war protests was on the nation’s college campuses. While the location of this protest isn’t specific, the background of the picture doesn’t show any buildings or signs that conclusively identify the location, it does not seem a campus. In addition, some of the protesters appear older than typical college students, and some appear to be dressed in clothes that typical college students of the time wouldn’t be likely to wear, such as ties.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Why do you think this photograph has a sticker titled “Government Exhibit 2”?

34

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Although you can’t tell just by looking at it, this photograph was used as evidence in the court case *U.S. v. Blackmon*—most likely so that federal prosecutors could prove that a protest had occurred and that the people in the photo had been part of the protest. While the information attached to the photo doesn’t give any specific information to the charges involved, nor does it identify the individuals in the photo, it’s entirely possible that the government prosecuted one or more of the people shown here.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

- What symbolic act are these two protesters playing out?
- What do you think they meant by the signs they wore saying “U.S. Imperialism” and “Saigon Puppet”?



35

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

The two protesters in the middle of the photograph are acting the roles of “puppet master” and “puppet,” with one sporting a sign labeled “U.S. Imperialism,” and the other a sign labeled “Saigon Puppet.”

In this instance, the protesters are suggesting that U.S. policy in Vietnam is illegal because the war is essentially a civil war between North and South. In addition, the protesters seem to imply that U.S. policy in Vietnam is designed more to spread American influence in Southeast Asia than to stop the spread of communism in the region. The reference to “Saigon Puppet” insinuates that the South Vietnamese government is essentially a tool of Washington.

The dollar signs (\$) on either side of the “U.S. Imperialism” sign may imply that the South Vietnamese government was an economic puppet of the U.S. as well as a political one.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Do you think this was a large-scale, organized protest against the war? Why or why not?

36

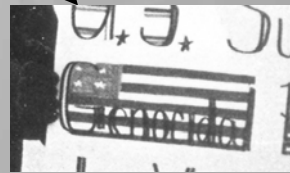
Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

Based on what we can see in the photo, it is doubtful that this was any sort of large-scale protest against the war. Only seven people are visible in the picture, and there does not seem to be any large group of bystanders or media watching or reporting on the protest. It is possible, however, that a prominent anti-war group might have sponsored the protest or at least supported it.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What does the image (with the word “genocidal”) on this sign symbolize?



37

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

Whoever created the sign intentionally put the word “genocidal” inside an image shaped like a flag-draped coffin. The other word on this line in the sign is boxed in a similar manner. While we can’t make out the second word, it’s obvious that the image was meant to convince those who saw it that U.S. policy not only condoned genocide (the elimination of a race of people—in this case most likely referring to the North Vietnamese), but did so at the cost of American lives (hence the flag-draped coffins).

Accusing the U.S government of genocide was not a widespread charge leveled by those who opposed the war. However, many protesters did accuse the U.S. government of pursuing imperialistic goals in Vietnam.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What effect do you think photos such as this might have had on morale when viewed by the “average GI” in Vietnam?

38

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

The effect of protests at home and pictures such as this one were difficult to gauge. Some soldiers at the time felt that because a significant number of people back home didn't support the war, it made it more difficult to maintain morale and fight effectively in battle. However, by the later stages of the war, many soldiers had become disillusioned with U.S. policy and with the way the military was conducting the war. A fair amount of soldiers had even begun to show outward signs of opposition to the war (peace symbols on their helmets, for example), and many veterans who had returned home publicly spoke out and protested against the war. Therefore, though some GIs may have been dismayed by protests at home, many other factors combined to erode soldiers' morale as the war dragged on.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What impact do you think protests such as this one might have had on the war effort in South Vietnam and North Vietnam?

39

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

In the South, many government officials, military officers, and citizens in general may have been concerned that continued protests would erode American support and might eventually lead to a U.S. pullout, leaving South Vietnam to fight North Vietnam alone.

In the North, many government officials, military officers, and citizens in general may have viewed such protests in a similar manner. Most likely, the spectacle of protests in the U.S. against the war raised the morale of the North Vietnamese, leading them to believe that their will to fight was stronger than their enemy's.

American Soldiers in Vietnam

- Many younger in age than World War II counterparts
- Many soldiers were poor, African American
- Many soon became disillusioned; morale low
- Many tried to maintain “comforts of home”
- Some able to avoid service through deferments

40

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

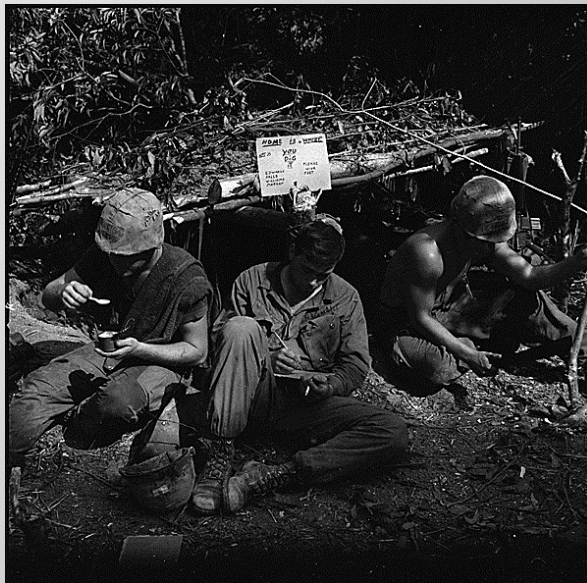
The average soldier in Vietnam differed significantly from the average soldier during World War II. Many soldiers in Vietnam had been drafted at age 19, making them significantly younger than GIs during World War II, where the average age of a soldier approached 25. In addition, fewer affluent white males served in Vietnam than in World War II: not many volunteered (unlike during World War II), and many managed to obtain student deferments that allowed them to postpone being drafted as long as they remained in college. Since most lower-income and minority males could not afford college, they were more likely to be drafted and therefore serve in Vietnam.

Several factors combined to lower the morale of the soldiers who did serve in Vietnam: the frustration of fighting against an often unseen enemy who resorted to often brutal guerrilla tactics, the sense that the U.S. was not fighting for a clear cause (as many felt it had during World War II), the perception that Vietnam was a “poor man’s war” that disproportionately affected lower-income whites and minorities, and the knowledge that a significant portion of the American public did not support the soldiers’ mission in Vietnam. As the fighting dragged on, many soldiers became disillusioned with the war. Some resorted to drug use, while others sometimes refused to follow orders. In extreme cases, incidents of “fragging” (soldiers killing their superior officers) and war crimes occurred. The most well-known war atrocity was the My Lai massacre, in which American troops murdered hundreds of civilians.

Although conditions during the war were generally harsh, many soldiers took comfort by staying connected with their home, including food, cigarettes, music, and letters from parents, relatives, and sweethearts.

Give students approximately one minute to view the photo, then proceed to the following slides.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What do the soldiers in this photograph appear to be doing?

42

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

The soldier on the left is eating a K-ration, the one in the middle is writing a letter, and the soldier on the right is using some sort of machete to cut branches (probably to continue constructing the shelter visible behind them).

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What materials did the soldiers use to construct the shelter shown in the photo?

43

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

The shelter seems to be entirely constructed of branches and limbs from trees in the Vietnam jungle. The foliage covers what appears to be a foxhole dug by the soldiers.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Why do you think the soldiers put this sign on top of their shelter?

44

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

The sign says “Home is where you dig it,” a reference to the fact that the soldiers often had to create rudimentary shelters in the jungle. In smaller print on the right are the words “Please Wipe Feet.” The text on the left side of the sign is illegible, but it may be the last names of the soldiers featured in the picture. The sign is both meant to be humorous and a commentary on the primitive conditions in which soldiers often had to live.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



How would you describe the mood of the soldiers in this picture?

45

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

It is difficult to gauge the mood of the soldiers in the picture because the dark shades of the photo as well as the helmets on two of the soldiers make it difficult to actually see the soldiers' faces. However, it appears from what we can see that the soldiers are calm and don't fear an imminent enemy attack.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



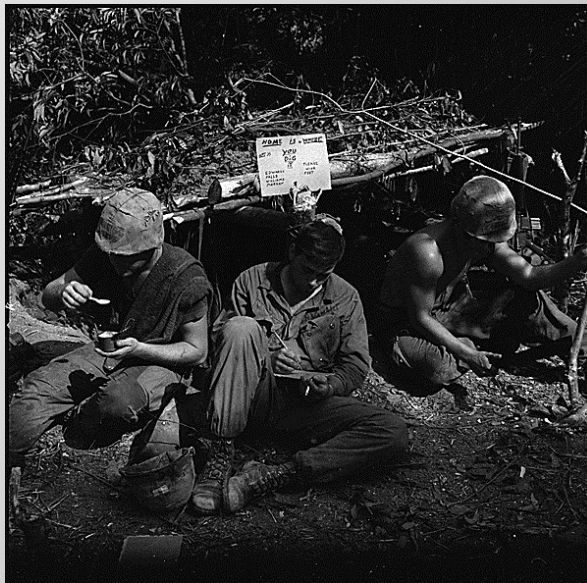
Do you think this photo is real or was it staged? Why?

46

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

While the soldiers are in uniform, there is no indication of any weapons anywhere in the vicinity of the shelter, and it seems likely that if the photo had been truly impromptu or unstaged, weapons would have been visible somewhere in the photo so that soldiers could have immediate access to them in case of attack. It's possible that the picture could have been taken for some sort of training purposes so that new recruits could see how to correctly build a shelter in the jungle. However, it seems more likely that this was a candid photo of soldiers during "down time": their poses seem natural, not stiff; they are all dressed slightly differently (one soldier lacks a helmet, another has no shirt on, and the third wears only his undershirt); and if the army had staged this photo, it's unlikely that they would have allowed the sign over the shelter to be there.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Do you think this scene is representative of the typical experience of GIs in Vietnam? Why or why not?

47

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

Student responses will vary, but chances are this scene does represent an experience common to many GIs who served in Vietnam. Take a few minutes here to discuss the question, but try to emphasize the fact that soldiers often adapt to their surroundings, and that in some ways the primitiveness of the soldiers' shelter mirrors the primitiveness of the shelters, tactics, and equipment of the enemy they were fighting—the Viet Cong.



American Soldiers in Vietnam

48

Give students approximately one minute to view the photo, then proceed to the following slides.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



- What symbols or words are visible on this soldier's helmet?
- Why do you think Vietnam-era soldiers adorned their helmets with these sorts of markings?

49

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

Most of the markings on the soldier's helmet are illegible. However, the words "Oklahoma Kid" as well as a cross are visible and legible on the helmet. There isn't enough information on the photo to determine if the words "Oklahoma Kid" refer to the soldier himself or perhaps someone else in his unit may have "autographed" this soldier's helmet. The same may be true with some of the other hard-to-read words on the helmet.

Writing slogans, names, and crosses on helmets was common during the Vietnam era. In some instances, it was a way for soldiers to let others know about their background, political views, and religious beliefs. In addition, writing on helmets may have been another way that soldiers could have kept the connection alive about their home and that they would be going back to "the world" once their tour of duty was completed. However, the writing may also have been a subtle form of protest: it technically put soldiers "out of uniform" and allowed them to express an individuality that is usually frowned upon in the military. Furthermore, some soldiers wrote on their helmets to express disillusionment with the war or stronger sentiments: some put down peace symbols, doves, or even expletives on their helmets. All of these emphasized how the "regular army" in Vietnam was not quite as "regular" as in times past.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

- What appears to be happening in this photo?
- How does this scene highlight the differences between Vietnam-era soldiers and earlier soldiers?



50

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

In this photo, one GI plays guitar while others listen to him (or perhaps sing along). Rock music, which played a large role in the counterculture of the era, also influenced soldiers in Vietnam. We don't know for sure that the soldier in this photo is playing a rock song, but it's likely that he was. While soldiers in earlier wars certainly had access to musical instruments and sang songs together, based on recollections of Vietnam veterans, music appeared to play a far larger role in the lives of soldiers in Vietnam than it had in earlier wars. It also almost certainly helped to contribute to the "irregularity" of the army in Vietnam and provided a way for strains of anti-authoritarianism and cultural and/or political protest to filter into the consciousness of American soldiers there.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Do you think this scene is representative of the typical experience of GIs in Vietnam? Why or why not?



51

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

As with the other picture of soldiers in the field, chances are this scene does represent a fairly common experience for soldiers who served in Vietnam. Take a few minutes again to discuss the question, but this time have students think about the types of non-combat experiences that bond soldiers in the field together, and how these types of experiences may have changed from World War II to the Vietnam era.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



52

Social Studies School Service: www.socialstudies.com

Note to teacher: If desired, pose any or all of the following wrap-up questions to the class as a whole:

- Which of these images stood out the most to you? Why?
- Which one do you think you'll remember the most? Why?
- Which one would you choose as being most representative of the era? Point out specific elements of that image that led you to select it.

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

The Vietnam War

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

The Vietnam War (continued)

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Table of Contents

- Dien Bien Phu and Beginning of U.S. Involvement
- North Vietnamese soldiers and the Viet Cong
- Escalation of the war and "Vietnamization"
- Antiwar Movement
- U.S. Soldiers in Vietnam

Dien Bien Phu and the Start of U.S. Involvement

- Viet Minh fights war of independence
- French defeated at Dien Bien Phu
- Geneva Conference (1954)
- North becomes communist; South backed by U.S.
- U.S. military advisors sent to Vietnam to support South

4



Dien Bien Phu and the Start of U.S. Involvement

Copyright by Bill Mauldin.
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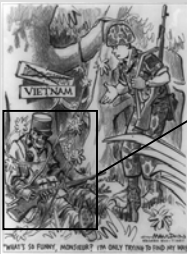

5



- What is the nationality of this soldier?
- How can you tell?

6

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



- How would you describe the condition of this soldier's body?
- What does the condition of the body imply?

7

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Describe the physical location shown in the cartoon.



- What is its relation to the dead soldier?
- What might this symbolize?

8

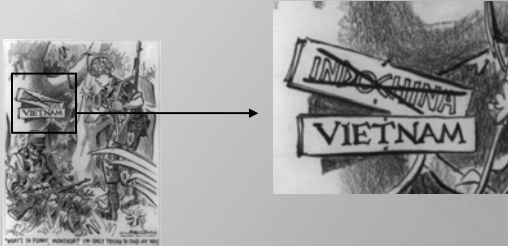
Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

- What is the nationality of this soldier?
- How can you tell?

9

What is the significance of these two signs?



10

"WHAT'S SO FUNNY, MONSIEUR? I'M ONLY TRYING TO FIND MY WAY."



- What do you think the caption of this cartoon means?
- What larger message is the cartoonist trying to convey?

11



This cartoon was published in November 1964.

Do you think the cartoonist might have been responding to events at the time, or does the cartoon appear to be commenting on the war in general?

12

North Vietnamese Soldiers and the Viet Cong

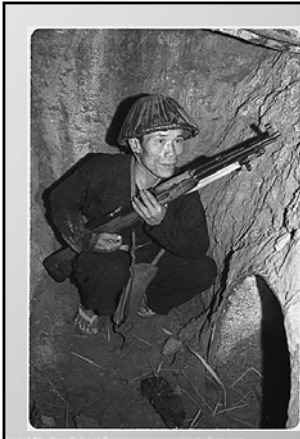
- North Vietnamese troops were “regular army” (NVA)
- Viet Cong, also known as the “National Liberation Front” (NLF)
- Viet Cong used guerrilla tactics; did not have advanced weapons
- Viet Cong employed not only soldiers but civilians to harass U.S. troops
- Difficult for U.S. soldiers to distinguish enemy from civilians

13



North Vietnamese Soldiers and the Viet Cong


14



How does this Viet Cong soldier's equipment compare to that of the average U.S. GI's at the time?

15

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources





How effective of a fighter in battle do you think this soldier might have been? Why?

16

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources


Describe the setting of this photograph.

- Where does the soldier appear to be located?
- What else can you see in the photo?

17


Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Does this photograph look realistic, or does it look staged? Explain why you feel this way.

18


Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



- Who do you think might have taken this photograph?
- Why might this photo have been taken?

19

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What sort of conclusions might Americans—both soldiers and civilians—who viewed this photo have made about the enemy?

20

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources


Escalation of the War and “Vietnamization”

- LBJ widens war after Gulf of Tonkin incident
- Opposition to U.S. involvement convinces LBJ not to run for reelection in 1968
- Nixon promises “secret plan” to end war
- Nixon follows Vietnamization policy
- Nixon still unable to end U.S. role in war until 1973

21

10/72

Valley, As I Was Saying Four Years Ago--



Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Escalation of the War and “Vietnamization”

“Now, as I was saying four years ago--”
— a 1972 Herblock Cartoon, copyright by the Herb Block Foundation

22

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Who is this person?



23

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

What can be inferred from Nixon’s facial expression in the cartoon?



24

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Who does this person in the cartoon represent?



25

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



©1972

What is the significance of the year when this cartoon was published?

26

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What did the cartoonist mean by the words on the folder Nixon is holding?

27

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Why might the cartoonist have shown this statistic in this manner?

28

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

The caption reads, "Now, as I was saying four years ago..."

What message was the cartoonist trying to convey here?

"NOW, AS I WAS SAYING FOUR YEARS AGO..."

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

What do you think the cartoonist's overall message is regarding Nixon and his Vietnam policy?

30

War Protesters

- Protests began in 1965
- Several groups formed the “New Left”
- Protests also included many from “mainstream” America
- War divided nation into “hawks” and “doves”
- War caused discontent even in LBJ’s administration

31

War Protesters




32



Do the protesters shown in this photo resemble what you think of as the “typical” type of Vietnam-era protest? Why or why not?

33

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources




Why do you think this photograph has a sticker titled “Government Exhibit 2”?

34

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

- What symbolic act are these two protesters playing out?
- What do you think they meant by the signs they were saying “U.S. Imperialism” and “Saigon Puppet”?



35

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



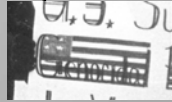
Do you think this was a large-scale, organized protest against the war? Why or why not?

36

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What does the image (with the word “genocidal”) on this sign symbolize?



37

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What effect do you think photos such as this might have had on morale when viewed by the “average GI” in Vietnam?

38

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What impact do you think protests such as this one might have had on the war effort in South Vietnam and North Vietnam?

39

American Soldiers in Vietnam

- Many younger in age than World War II counterparts
- Many soldiers were poor, African American
- Many soon became disillusioned; morale low
- Many tried to maintain “comforts of home”
- Some able to avoid service through deferments

40



American Soldiers in Vietnam

41



What do the soldiers in this photograph appear to be doing?

42

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



What materials did the soldiers use to construct the shelter shown in the photo?

43

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Why do you think the soldiers put this sign on top of their shelter?

44

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



How would you describe the mood of the soldiers in this picture?

45

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Do you think this photo is real or was it staged? Why?

46

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Do you think this scene is representative of the typical experience of GIs in Vietnam? Why or why not?

47

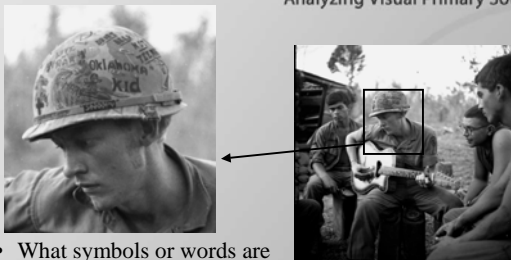
Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



American Soldiers in Vietnam

48

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources




- What symbols or words are visible on this soldier's helmet?
- Why do you think Vietnam-era soldiers adorned their helmets with these sorts of markings?

49

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources


- What appears to be happening in this photo?
- How does this scene highlight the differences between Vietnam-era soldiers and earlier soldiers?



50

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

Do you think this scene is representative of the typical experience of GIs in Vietnam? Why or why not?



51

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



52

Visual Studies School Extension: www.visualstudies.com

IMAGE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Step 1. Observation

- A. Form an overall impression of the image and then examine individual items. Next, divide the image into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.
- B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the image.

<u>People</u>	<u>Objects</u>	<u>Activities</u>

Step 2. Inference

List three things about the historical time period you can figure out from looking at this image.

1.

2.

3.

Step 3. Questions

- A. What more would you want to know about this image and the time period from which it comes?

- B. Where might you find answers to your questions?

Modified from

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/analysis_worksheets/photo.html

Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

1. In two or three sentences, describe the image in terms of people, activities, objects, places, etc.
2. What specifically in the image indicates that it's from a certain time period?
3. Why might the source have been created?
4. Who in the past would have come in contact with this source? How might they have been affected by the source?
5. What other information would you need to help you better understand the image?
6. List one or two things the source tells you about life in the time period and country in which it originated.
7. What question(s) may be left unanswered by this source?