Part VI

The Movement Against the War
Editors’ Introduction

The movement of American people against the US government’s actions in Indochina forms one of the most complex and controversial elements of the Vietnam War. Was it a futile, ineffective gesture, or did it actually prevent a US military victory? Was it the outburst of a vocal minority, or did it express the deepest convictions of a majority of Americans? Was it mainly an activity of affluent youths on college campuses, or did it appear in its most militant forms among poor and working-class people in urban slums and within the army itself? Was the protest tantamount to treason, or did it represent the noblest traditions of American history? Did it divert from or reinforce the movement of black and other non-white people for equality? Did the revitalization of the movement for women’s equality grow from the antiwar movement or develop as a reaction against male domination within it? Was the movement’s cultural thrust coopted, nullified, even reversed by diffusion into designer jeans, disco, and cocaine, or did it profoundly advance the values of post-Vietnam War America? Did the movement disappear with the war, or did it continue to evolve into movements for social change in the ensuing decades?

Obviously, there is not space here to explore these questions deeply. But neither the political nor the military history of the war can be understood without some comprehension of the character and role of the antiwar movement.

When did Americans begin to oppose the war? We can find a handful not only denouncing US policies but accurately prophesying their effects even before the close of the 1954 Geneva Conference. For example, in “What Every American Should Know About Indo-China” (Monthly Review, June 1954), Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy argued that “the American people, by and large, are against colonialism and aggression,” but “if we send American forces into Indo-China, as Dulles and other high government spokesmen have repeatedly threatened to do in the last two months, we shall be guilty of aggression ourselves”:

Are we going to take the position that anti-Communism justifies anything, including colonialism, interference in the affairs of other countries, and aggression? That way, let us be perfectly clear about it, lies war and more war leading ultimately to full-scale national disaster.

This June 1954 call for action concluded with these prophetic words:

There never has been and never will be a clearer test case than Indo-China. The time for decision is now. Let everyone who cares about the future of our country stand up and speak out today. Tomorrow may be too late.
These were the very feelings of ever-growing numbers of Americans in the next two decades. And for most of this period, the main form of antwar action was to "speak out." Letters to editors and Congress, articles and books, petitions and advertisements, sermons and teach-ins, banners and picket signs, leaflets and graffiti, resolutions and demands, referenda and slogans, testimony before war crimes hearings and congressional investigations, even phone calls explaining the significance of bombs planted in buildings—what were all these but words, a torrent of speech flowing against the acts of war. But the bombs obviously went beyond words. They represented the increasingly desperate urge to find actions to deter the men in power, who used their own words to hide and falsify deeds in Vietnam.

Although there was some organized opposition to the war in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the first large-scale national action against American participation in the Vietnam War was the electoral activity in 1964 on behalf of the first presidential peace candidate—Lyndon B. Johnson, who campaigned on the promise not to send American troops to Vietnam.

When the bombing of North Vietnam began in February 1965, less than three weeks after President Johnson's inauguration, and when the first acknowledged American combat troops went ashore in March, the antwar movement appeared for the first time as a national phenomenon distinct from electoral politics. This was the period when government policies seemed to be based on ignorance and "mistakes," when the antwar movement was mainly trying to educate Washington and the nation. The first teach-ins began in late March; women's organizations sent delegations to explain the situation to members of Congress; and there appeared articles (such as Reading 36) and books (such as the foundation of this present volume, the 1965 Gentleman documentary history of Vietnam discussed in the General Introduction).

Responding, in part, to this movement to educate the public about the war, President Johnson went on April 7 to Johns Hopkins University, where he announced that he was now ready for "unconditional negotiations"—but not with the NLF and only to negotiate "an independent South Viet-Nam, securely guaranteed." If the speech had any effect on the antwar movement, it was to increase anger at the President's duplicity and to galvanize more people into action.

Back in December 1964 an obscure little organization called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had issued a call for people to go to Washington on April 17, 1965, to march against the war. Only a few thousand were expected. But when the march took place, ten days after the President's Johns Hopkins speech, it turned out to be the largest antwar demonstration in Washington's history—25,000 people, most neatly dressed in jackets, ties, and skirts.

What seemed at the time very large demonstrations continued throughout 1965, with 15,000 marching in Berkeley on October 15, 20,000 marching in Manhattan the same day, and 25,000 marching in Washington on November 27. These early demonstrations would not look so huge in 1967, when 300,000 to 500,000 joined a march in New York, or on November 15, 1969, when a million people marched against the war. On October 15, 1969, millions of Americans participated in the antwar Moratorium. That April 1965 demonstration would have been imperceptible in May of 1971 among the estimated half-million who converged on Washington.

Demonstrations were one form of the attempt to go beyond mere words and research and reason, to put direct pressure on those who were conducting policy in apparent disdain for the will expressed by the voters in 1964. Other forms appeared in 1965. Many of the activists were veterans of the civil rights movement who now began to apply its use of civil disobedience as a form of moral witness. On several days in August, the Vietnam Day Committee in northern California attempted to block troop trains by lying on the tracks. On August 6, 350 were arrested for civil disobedience in Washington. In midsummer came the first burnings of draft cards. Moral witness was taken to its ultimate by Norman Morrison, a thirty-two-year-old Quaker who drenched himself with gasoline and set himself on fire outside the Pentagon, with Secretary of Defense McNamara watching. A week later, pacifist Roger La Porte immolated himself at the United Nations; in Detroit, eighty-two-year-old Alice Herz burned herself to death in protest against the Vietnam War. By 1971, civil disobedience was so widespread that the number arrested in the May demonstration in Washington—14,000—would have been considered a good-sized march in 1965.

Whether the majority of Americans at any point supported the government's policies in Vietnam (or even knew what they were) is a matter of debate. Those who contend that they did cite some polls. But answering a question on a poll does not indicate the quality of either support or opposition. Whatever polls did or did not say, the American people never supported the war strongly enough to agree to pay for it with taxes, or even to demonstrate for it in significant numbers, much less to go fight it willingly. Nor were they ever willing to vote for any national candidate who pledged the nation to fight until "victory." In fact, from 1964 through the end of the war, every presidential nominee of both major parties, except Barry Goldwater in 1964, ran as some kind of self-professed peace candidate. It was the opponents of the war, not its supporters, who showed their resolve by expending time and money, risking arrest and loss of jobs, and making existential commitments with their lives.

Who were the people opposed to the war? Contrary to the impression systematically promulgated by its detractors ever since the antwar movement began, opposition to the war was not concentrated among relatively affluent college students. In fact, every scientific poll and study has demonstrated that throughout the entire history of America's involvement in Vietnam, opposition to the war was inversely proportional to both wealth and education. The lower the income, the greater the opposition to the war; the lower the level of education, the greater the opposition to the war. Blue-collar workers generally considered themselves "doves" and tended to favor withdrawal from Vietnam, while those who considered themselves "hawks" and supported participation in the war were concentrated among the college-educated, high-income strata, including profes-
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This is not surprising if one considers which people were forced to do the fighting and to make the economic sacrifices. The results of lower-class opposition to the war showed up on what were ultimately to be the most decisive fronts: the cities and the army.

Opposition was especially intense among non-white people, though they tended not to participate heavily in the large demonstrations called by student, pacifist, and liberal organizations. One reason for their caution was that non-whites often had to pay a heavy price for protesting the war. When newly elected black legislator Julian Bond in 1966 spoke out against drafting black men to fight in Vietnam, the Georgia legislature illegally refused him his seat. When world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali declared himself against the war and claimed draft exemption as a minister of the Nation of Islam, he was stripped of his boxing title. When 25,000 Mexican-Americans staged the Chicano Moratorium, the largest antiwar demonstration held in Los Angeles, the police attacked not just with clubs but with guns, killing three, including popular television news director and Los Angeles Times reporter Ruben Salazar.

This is by no means to dismiss the campus movement, whose spectacular nature has in fact led to some of the misunderstanding of the class character of opposition to the war. The teach-ins of the spring of 1965 alone swept scores of campuses and involved probably hundreds of thousands of students. By the late 1960s, millions of students were intermittently involved in antiwar activities ranging all the way from petitions and candlelight marches to burning down ROTC buildings and going to prison for draft resistance. In May 1970, the invasion of Cambodia was met by the largest student protest movement in American history, a strike that led to the shutdown of hundreds of campuses across the nation, as well as the killing of students by national guardsmen at Kent State and by police and national guardsmen at Jackson State.

Several misconceptions about this college and university movement need to be addressed. First, it was not motivated primarily by the students' selfish desires to avoid the draft, which was relatively easy for them. In fact, one of its earliest militant activities was disruption of the campus draft-deferment tests, during which the demonstrators attacked their own privileged exemptions as unfair to those young men not in college. Second, one should note that in late-twentieth-century America, the majority of college students are not affluent. Though students at such elite universities as Harvard, Columbia, and Stanford certainly contributed much to the antiwar movement—and a good percentage of even these students were on financial aid—their militancy was matched by students at the public colleges and universities such as Michigan, Maryland, Wisconsin, and San Francisco State and at other institutions none could label sanctuaries of the rich, such as, for example, Kent State and Jackson State. And though the waves of campus anti-

war activism, seeming to crest higher each spring, certainly did hamper those in Washington who wished to conduct the war without hindrance, the most decisive opposition to the war was ultimately to come from poor and working people.

To understand the antiwar movement, one must perceive its relations with the other powerful mass movement that was hamstringing the Pentagon—the upsurge among black people. The civil rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s had not brought economic progress to the majority of blacks, whose conditions were made even worse as the war brought conscription and inflation into the ghettos. In the summer of 1964, rebellions broke out in several urban ghettos in different parts of the nation. Organizations such as the Nation of Islam stressed the identity of Afro-Americans as a colonized people, and revolutionary voices, such as that of Malcolm X, assassinated in 1965, linked their struggles to the national liberation movements in the Third World. Rioting spread in the summer of 1965, and by 1966 the pattern of "long, hot summers" seemed to be intensifying each year. In 1967, the uprisings reached new heights, especially in such blue-collar cities as Newark and Detroit. As Part VII shows, these urban insurrections played a pivotal role in President Johnson's March 1968 decision to offer serious negotiations and to withdraw his candidacy for re-election. Then in April, in the week after the assassination of Martin Luther King, rebellions broke out simultaneously in 125 US cities and towns.

During the critical years of the war, the black movement and the antiwar movement were converging, as Pentagon strategists so anxiously realized (Reading 48). In fact, many black civil rights activists first voiced the anti-imperialist consciousness toward which many antiwar activists would inevitably move. For example, in July 1965, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party issued a leaflet against black participation in the Vietnam War, arguing that "No one has a right to ask us to risk our lives and kill other Colored People in Santo Domingo and Vietnam, so that the White American can get richer. We will be looked upon as traitors by all the Colored People of the world if the Negro people continue to fight and die without a cause." In January 1966, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formally adopted a position against the Vietnam War, declaring:

We believe the United States government has been deceptive in claims of concern for the freedom of the Vietnamese people, just as the government has been deceptive in claiming concern for the freedom of the colored people in other countries as the Dominican Republic, the Congo, South Africa, Rhodesia and in the United States itself.

When Martin Luther King, representing what was generally considered the moderate spectrum of the civil rights movement, threw himself fully into the antiwar

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movement in April 1967 (Reading 46), some Pentagon analysts (Reading 48) saw the repercussions as potentially catastrophic. Most dangerous about the convergence of the black and antiwar movements was the situation inside the armed forces (Reading 49).

As supporters of the war found themselves in an ever more unpopular and dwindling minority, they were driven increasingly to rely on equating their position with "support for our boys in Vietnam." But even this tactic backfired as many GIs began openly to reject such support. As a public letter from twenty-five soldiers in Vietnam put it, "We do not want that kind of support. It is the kind of support that brought us here, keeps us here and which will bring our younger brothers or sons here or elsewhere" (The New York Times, November 25, 1969). These GIs identified their true supporters as those demonstrating to get them out of Vietnam: "We support the Moratorium participants who definitely do not support the reason for our being here."

The antiwar movement spread among the combat troops in Vietnam, who began to wear peace symbols and flash peace signs and movement salutes. Some units even organized their own demonstrations to link up with the movement at home. For example, to join the November 1969 antiwar Mobilization, a unit stationed at Pleiku fasted to protest the war, boycotting that year's Thanksgiving Day dinner—of the 141 soldiers below the rank of Spec 5, only 8 showed up for the traditional meal (The New York Times, November 28, 1969). When Bob Hope introduced General Creighton Abrams, commander of all US forces in Vietnam, to the 30,000 troops assembled for a Christmas show at the sprawling Long Binh base, the entire throng leaped to their feet and held their hands high in the salute of the peace movement (two fingers forming a "V"). The general, along with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, mistaking the symbol for its World War II meaning of "victory," returned the salute, bringing a tremendous roar from the soldiers (San Francisco Chronicle, December 23, 1968).

One problem of the antiwar movement at home was the difficulty of finding ways to move beyond protest and symbolic acts to deeds that would actually impede the war. Unlike college students and other civilians, the troops in Vietnam had no such problem. Individual acts of rebellion, ranging from desertion to killing officers who ordered search-and-destroy missions, merged into sporadic mutinies and large-scale resistance (see the headnote to Reading 47). By June 1971, the Armed Forces Journal ran an article accurately entitled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces" (Reading 49).

Those who think the United States could have won a military victory in Vietnam, or those who think that the antiwar movement betrayed "our fighting men in Vietnam," ignore one crucial fact in the history of the war: By the early 1970s, large numbers of US combat troops in Vietnam had become the leading edge of the antiwar movement, which some hoped and others feared was on the verge of becoming a revolutionary movement.

40. "We Won't Go"*

By the May 2nd Movement

One of the earliest forms of resisting the war, instead of just protesting against it, was organized and open refusal to comply with the draft. Young men publicly proclaimed their defiance of the law, and many were imprisoned. Ultimately this antiaircraft resistance was to become a powerful social force that produced one of the clearest achievements of the antiwar movement: the abolition of the draft.

To comprehend the significance of this victory, one must remember that the draft had been reinstated in the "peace-time" year of 1948 and then continued without interruption until its abolition in January 1973. After the war, this draft force continued to flow subterraneously in American society. When President Carter in February 1980 reestablished not the draft itself but just registration for it, there were large nationwide protests, including a hastily called demonstration in Washington of 30,000 to 50,000 people.

The beginnings of the Vietnam War antiaircraft movement seem tiny in comparison. On April 25, 1964, the following pledge, probably the first of many such statements, was published in the National Guardian by the May 2nd Movement, a radical group that was organizing a march in New York. The march on May 2 was attended by about 600 to 800 people, mostly students. When the statement appeared again as an advertisement in the New York Herald Tribune of May 28, it had 149 signatures.

W E THE UN DERSIGNED,

ARE YOUNG AMERICANS OF DRAFT AGE. We understand our obligations to defend our country and to serve in the armed forces but we object to being asked to support the war in South Vietnam.

Believing that United States' participation in the war is for the suppression of the Vietnamese struggle for national independence, we see no justification for our involvement. We agree with Senator Wayne Morse, who said on the floor of the Senate on March 4, 1964, regarding South Vietnam, that "We should never have gone in. We should never have stayed in. We should get out."

BELIEVING THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE ASKED TO FIGHT AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM, WE HEREBY STATE OUR REFUSAL TO DO SO.

41. “Freedom Draft Card”*

This document, a “replacement” draft card, shows some of the connections between the civil rights and antiwar movements.

FREEDOM DRAFT CARD
I want to advance social and economic progress. I do not believe this can be achieved through military terror and indiscriminate killing.
I refuse to destroy a country by fighting for a government with no claim to represent its people. I believe that the U.S. must support movements abroad for revolutionary social change, and I am fully against their suppression by military force.
I oppose the draft because it is undemocratic and because it serves only those who wish to destroy.
I declare myself ready to use my abilities and knowledge for the development of truly democratic and progressive societies. I am prepared to risk my life in such projects as many have already done in the South.

name________________________address________________________

I want to work on such projects as these:
Rebuilding a democratic and progressive Vietnam
Social construction and economic development in Africa, Asia, South America
International non-violent peacekeeping
Southern freedom schools
Voter registration
Community projects in slums, ghettos, and underdeveloped areas of the United States
Free Universities
Other

Personal Statement__________________________________________

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*Collected by the editors in 1965.

42. Two Poems:
“Afterthoughts on a Napalm-Drop on Jungle Villages near Haiphong”
and
“Truth Blazes Even in Little Children’s Hearts”*

By Barbara Beidler and Huy Can

In 1965, twelve-year-old Barbara Beidler of Vero Beach, Florida, wrote a poem about the Vietnam War. When her poem was printed in the Presbyterian magazine Venture, the Defense Department immediately dropped Venture from its list of recommended publications. This brought the poem to the attention of the media. Huy Can, one of the most famous poets in Vietnam, answered Barbara’s poem.

Read many programs about the war during the next few years, this pair of poems came to symbolize a bond between the Vietnamese being attacked by the US government and the Americans opposed to the war.

Afterthoughts on a Napalm-Drop on Jungle Villages near Haiphong

by Barbara Beidler

All was still.
The sun rose through silver pine boughs,
Over sleeping green-straw huts,
Over cool rice ponds,
Through the emerald jungles.
Into the sky.
The men rose and went out to the fields and ponds.
The women set pots on the fire, boiling rice and jungle berries,
and some with baskets went for fish.
The children played in the streams and danced through the weeds.

Then there was the flash—silver and gold
Silver and gold,

*Both poems reprinted from a leaflet distributed by Peace American Committee to Stop War (PACS) at a joint United States–Vietnam July 4 celebration in 1967.
Silver birds flying,
Golden water raining.
The rice ponds blazed with the new water.
The jungles burst into gold and sent up little birds of fire.
Little animals with fur of flame.

Then the children flamed.
Running—their clothes flying like fiery kites.
Screaming—their screams dying as their faces seared.
The women's baskets burned on their heads.
The men's blazed on the rice waters.
Then the rains came.

A rag, fire black, fluttered.
A curl of smoke rose from a lone rice stem.
The forest lay singed, seared.
A hut crumbled.

And all was still.
Listen, Americans,
Listen, clear and long.
The children are screaming
In the jungles of Haiphong.

Truth Blazes Even in Little Children's Hearts
by Huy Can (translated from the Vietnamese)

Little Barbara
Separated from us by the ocean
And by the color of your skin
You have heard and understood.

You have heard the screams
Of the children near Haiphong
Whose clothing turns to flame
From American napalm.

You are twelve years old
And your heart speaks
For the conscience of mankind
Tormented by each rain of bombs.

America, America!
Don't you hear the screams
Of those thousands of children
Consumed by the golden fire?

Golden fire of napalm
Golden fire of dollars
Which eats the flesh
Like a cancer.

A filthy cancer
Devouring the bones
The blood and the soul
Of the United States.

America, don't you feel
The fire burning your flesh
And your conscience
Killed by your bombs?

Little Barbara,
The fire of your poem
Scorches the demons
And drives them wild.

They would ban poetry
But how can they ban
The truth that blazes
Even in little children's hearts!

43. "Declaration of Conscience Against the War in Vietnam" (1965)*

The courage of the young men defying the draft inspired attempts by women and older men to find means of resistance that would place them also in jeopardy. One of the earliest was the following document, drafted in late 1964 and delivered to the White House in August 1965 with over 4,000 signatures, including those of many prominent Americans.

*Published jointly by the Catholic Worker, Committee for Nonviolent Action, Student Peace Union, and the War Resisters League (New York, 1965).
Because the use of the military resources of the United States in Vietnam and elsewhere suppresses the aspirations of the people for political independence and economic freedom;

Because inhuman torture and senseless killing are being carried out by forces armed, uniformed, trained and financed by the United States;

Because we believe that all peoples of the earth, including both Americans and non-Americans, have an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the peaceful pursuit of happiness in their own way; and

Because we think that positive steps must be taken to put an end to the threat of nuclear catastrophe and death by chemical or biological warfare, whether these result from accident or escalation—

We hereby declare our conscientious refusal to cooperate with the United States government in the prosecution of the war in Vietnam.

We encourage those who can conscientiously do so to refuse to serve in the armed forces and to ask for discharge if they are already in.

Those of us who are subject to the draft ourselves declare our own intention to refuse to serve.

We urge others to refuse and refuse ourselves to take part in the manufacture or transportation of military equipment, or to work in the fields of military research and weapons development.

We shall encourage the development of other nonviolent acts, including acts which involve civil disobedience, in order to stop the flow of American soldiers and munitions to Vietnam.

Note: Signing or distributing this Declaration of Conscience might be construed as a violation of the Universal Military Training and Service Act, which prohibits advising persons facing the draft to refuse service. Penalties of up to 5 years imprisonment, and/or a fine of $5,000 are provided. While prosecutions under this provision of the law almost never occur, persons signing or distributing this declaration should face the possibility of serious consequences.

44. “We Refuse—October 16” (1967)*

Antidraft resistance became a significant national movement in 1967. On April 15, 150 young men burned their draft cards at a rally in New York. The same day in San Francisco, a new organization called the Resistance announced in “We Refuse” a national draft card turn-in to be held in October.

The October turn-in merged with other landmark events. On October 20, a group of distinguished citizens marched into the Justice Department and turned in a briefcase filled with over a thousand draft cards. Five of these delegates were later arrested and tried for this crime (Reading 45). The following day, after 100,000 people rallied in Washington, came the “siege” of the Pentagon. That night a spontaneous mass burning of draft cards swept through the thousands of protesters camped outside the Pentagon, who were soon physically attacked by military police and federal marshals leading US troops.

The October 16 turn-in of draft cards in San Francisco was followed by the concerted week-long attempt, sometimes successful, to shut down physically the Oakland Induction Center, which processed the inductees from Oregon, northern California, and half of Nevada. Beginning with a nonviolent mass sit-in on Monday, October 16, the resistance escalated to Friday’s five-hour battle between 4,000 police and 10,000 demonstrators, who used “mobile tactics” to gain control over most of the streets in downtown Oakland, thus showing that guerrilla tactics could be used in the movement at home.

When the buses heading for the Induction Center were blocked in the barricaded streets, many of the inductees on board exchanged “V” signs with the demonstrators, giving rise to the legend that this was the origin of the peace salute, and encouraging the movement to reach out to those in the armed forces.

The Resistance is a group of men who are bound together by one single and clear commitment: on October 16 we will hand in our draft cards and refuse any further cooperation with the Selective Service System. By doing so we will actively challenge the government’s right to draft American men for its criminal war against the people of Vietnam. We of the Resistance feel that we can no longer passively acquiesce to the Selective Service System by accepting its deterrents. The American military system depends upon students, those opposed to war, and those with anti-Vietnam war politics wrangling for the respective deterrents. Those opposed to the war are dealt with quietly, individually and on the government’s terms. If they do not get the deterrents, they must individually find some extra-legal alternative. A popular last resort is Canada, and those who go to Canada must be politically silent in order to stay there. Legal draft alternatives are kept within reach of elite groups—good students, those who are able to express objection to all war on religious grounds, and those with the money to hire good lawyers. For the majority of American guys the only alternatives are jail or the army. While those who are most opposed to the war have been silenced, the system that provides the personnel for war crimes continues to function smoothly.

Many who wish to avoid the draft will, of course, choose to accept deterrents; many, however, wish to do more than avoid the draft. Resistance means that if the government is to continue its crimes against humanity, it must first deal with our opposition. We do not seek jail, but we do this because as individuals we know of no justifiable alternative and we believe that in time many other American men will also choose to resist the crimes done in their names.