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# The Antiwar Movement in the United States

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The protests against American military involvement in Vietnam constituted one of the most remarkable social movements in American history. From the first stirrings of dissent in the early 1960s, through to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973, an estimated 6 million Americans took to the streets, wrote letters and signed petitions, participated in rallies and meetings, attended vigils, engaged in civil disobedience, burned draft cards, and spoke out against what they viewed as an unnecessary, tragic, and immoral war.[1] This was peace activism on an unprecedented scale: in the words of the movement's chronicler, Tom Wells, "never before had so many US citizens defied their leaders during wartime."[2]

In the years since the war's end, scholars have labored to reconstruct a fully rounded picture of the antiwar movement. They have explored its origins, and emphasized the diversity of those who protested, and the innovative range of tactics deployed; pored over the movement's internal failings and weaknesses; traced its impact on American political culture and subsequent social movements; and, perhaps above all, wrestled with the vexed – and vexing – question of what role, if any, the movement had in bringing the war in Vietnam to an end.

The antiwar movement of the Vietnam era emerged from the pacifist tradition and peace activism of the 1950s. In the autumn of 1963, for instance, the National Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy (a group that had been founded in 1957 to campaign against nuclear testing and that became a leading advocate of arms control and nuclear disarmament) called on the US government to withdraw its support for the repressive regime of South Vietnam's president, Ngô Đình Diệm. The following spring, 5,000 people

1 Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, DE, 2002), 3.

2 Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley, 1994), 1.

took to the streets of New York City to demand a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. A few months later, *Liberation* magazine (launched in March 1956 by David Dellinger, A. J. Muste, and other prominent pacifists) published the "Declaration of Conscience Against the War in Vietnam"; signatories pledged noncooperation with the war effort, and support for those who resisted the draft. As the war itself escalated precipitously in the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August 1964, antiwar activism proliferated. Teach-ins were held on campuses across the nation during the spring of 1965, raising awareness of the war and putting officials of the Lyndon Johnson administration on the back foot. The first national march against the war in Washington, DC, organized that April, saw Paul Potter, president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, the nation's largest and most influential New Left organization), call for the creation of a mass movement committed to radical change, which would be driven by the conviction that the war "in all its horror" was "but a symptom of a deeper malaise." During 1967, 400,000 people took to the streets of New York for the Spring Mobilization, protestors clashed with police outside the Oakland Induction Center during the October "Stop the Draft Week" demonstrations, and, on October 21, 35,000 marched on the Pentagon to "confront the warmakers." In an iconic piece of protest theater, some antiwar activists placed flowers in the guns of the military police. In October 1969 hundreds of thousands of Americans, in towns and cities right across the nation, participated in the Vietnam Moratorium while, the following spring, American campuses erupted in protest following President Richard Nixon's announcement that US forces had invaded Cambodia (at Kent State University, four students were killed and nine wounded when Ohio National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of unarmed demonstrators).[3]

The movement was an amorphous, complex, and evolving coalition that drew together traditional peace organizations (the War Resisters League, SANE, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), the Old Left (the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of the United States of America [CPUSA]), the civil rights and student movements that constituted the heart of the New Left (including SDS and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), and numerous local groups (Chicago, New York, Madison, and Berkeley were important centers of antiwar activity). Throughout its existence, the movement was beset by disagreements over a number of key issues. Was the war in Vietnam a terrible "mistake" or the product of an imperialistic,

3 Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* (New York, 2012), 9–10, 11–14, 14–15, 28–34, 38–40, 44–5.

militaristic, and exploitative "system" that required root-and-branch reform? Should antiwar organizations demand an immediate withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam, or merely call for a negotiated settlement? Was it more effective to organize national demonstrations or encourage local, grassroots efforts? Should communists, and communist organizations, be excluded from the organized antiwar movement? Should the movement focus solely on trying to end the war in Vietnam or embrace other causes – racial equality, women's rights, the redistribution of power and wealth – as well? The arguments over these issues were often bitter, and reflected deep ideological differences and generational tensions, as well as disagreements about strategy and tactics. But, despite the infighting, the movement held together: on May 11, 1975, just a week or so after Saigon had fallen to the North Vietnamese, 50,000 Americans – many carrying balloons and streamers – assembled in New York's Central Park for a final rally. Hanging over the speakers' platform was a giant banner that read, simply, "THE WAR IS OVER."[4]

## The Diversity of Dissent

In popular imagination and historical memory the antiwar movement is invariably represented as upper-middle class, and as heavily dominated by white students and radicals. The "individuals and groups we commonly associate with the era," explains historian Penny Lewis, "are Dr. Benjamin Spock, Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, the Students for a Democratic Society, the various mobilizations against the war, and [the Weather Underground]: students, intellectuals, professionals, celebrities; liberal or radical privileged elites."[5] And yet one of the most significant scholarly developments over the past fifteen years or so has been to shift the focus away from this conventional portrait, and to emphasize instead the tremendous diversity of those who protested against the war.

This diversity was, in fact, recognized at the time. A 1967 CIA assessment, for instance, noted that under a broad "peace umbrella" one could

4 Ibid., 53.

5 Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca, 2013), 4. On the way that the movement was (mis)represented by the mainstream media at the time, see, for instance, Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994), esp. 161. See also Nathan Blumberg, "Misreporting the Peace Movement," *Columbia Journalism Review* 9 (Winter 1970–1), 28–32; Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (London, 1980); and Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, 1980).

find "pacifists and fighters, idealists and materialists, internationalists and isolationists, democrats and totalitarians, conservatives and revolutionaries, capitalists and socialists, patriots and subversives, lawyers and anarchists, Stalinists and Trotskyites … puritans and hippies."[6] In recent years, scholars have sought to reconstruct the diversity of antiwar dissent by concentrating on groups – women, blue-collar Americans, people of color, and GIs – whose opposition to the war has tended to be pushed to the margins, even ignored completely, in conventional histories of the movement.

Women were a key antiwar constituency, and female antiwar activism was extensive and effective.[7] Prominent women on the antiwar left included Bettina Aptheker, a veteran of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and founder of the Student Mobilization Committee (one of the most important antiwar organizations), and Angela Davis, a CPUSA activist and UCLA philosophy professor, who demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia, called for a "victory for the Vietnamese," and urged her fellow Americans to support "liberation fighters" at home.[8]

But, as historians such as Amy Swerdlow and Gina Denton have demonstrated, significant female support for the antiwar movement also came from middle-class liberals – perhaps most notably the respectable suburban mothers of Women Strike for Peace (WSP), which had been founded by the children's books illustrator, Dagmar Wilson, in 1961.[9] Rooting their

6 Marilyn Blatt Young, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, Ho Chi Minh Is Gonna Win," in Marc Jason Gilbert (ed.), *Why the North Won the Vietnam War* (New York, 2002), 221–2.

7 Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now! American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War* (New Haven, 1999), 143–77; Small, *Antiwarriors*, 132–3; "… For an Abdicated Queen," *Life Magazine*, September 18, 1970, 88; Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeannette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/#rankin; Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York, 2000), 137.

8 Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* 155; "The Liberation of Our People: Transcript of a Speech Delivered by Angela Y. Davis at a Black Panther rally in Bobby Hutton Park (AKA DeFremery Park), Oakland, CA on Nov. 12, 1969," www.indybay.org/newsitems/2009/04/15/18589458.php.

9 Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, 1993); Gina Denton, "'Neither Guns nor Bombs – Neither the State nor God – Will Stop Us from Fighting for Our Children': Motherhood and Protest in 1960s and 1970s America," *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 5, 2 (2012), 205–28; Gina Denton, "Mothers Joining Together in Sisterhood: Women Strike for Peace and the National Welfare Rights Organization in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 3, 2 (2012), 121–33. See also Jon Coburn, "'Just a Housewife': The Feminine Mystique, Women Strike for Peace and Domestic Identity in 1960s America," *History of Women in the Americas* 3 (September 2015), 46–60.

opposition to the war in the ideology of motherhood, WSP activists focused attention on the harm that the war, and particularly the use of napalm, caused to Vietnamese children. In December 1965, for instance, they organized for 100,000 antiwar cards, which asked "For the sake of our sons … for the sake of our children … give us peace in Vietnam," to be sent to the White House. In 1966 a number of WSPers – dubbed "napalm ladies" and "housewife terrorists" by the press – attempted to block napalm shipments in San Jose. They also presented the office of General Lewis Hershey, head of the Selective Service System, with a coffin bearing the slogan "Not Our Sons, Not Your Sons, Not Their Sons." Another Mother for Peace also deployed motherhood symbolically in the struggle against the war. Founded in March 1967, the group had 100,000 members by 1968; it famously coined the antiwar slogan "War is not healthy for children and other living things" and attracted the support of famous female celebrities, including Debbie Reynolds and Joanne Woodward. Other high-profile women to take a stand against the war included the writers Frances FitzGerald, Mary McCarthy, and Susan Sontag, and the singers Barbara Streisand and Joan Baez. On January 16, 1968, the 87-year-old Jeannette Rankin – the first woman to be elected to Congress, and a veteran peace activist (she had voted against American entry into both world wars) – led a march of 5,000 to the US Capitol to demand an end to the war.[10]

The emergence of the women's movement during the late 1960s added a further dimension to the antiwar struggle, and Betty Friedan, Robin Morgan, and Shulamith Firestone were some of the more prominent feminist critics of the war. In contrast to WSP, many second-wave feminists distanced themselves from appeals to motherhood. Feminists, moreover, were much more likely than their liberal counterparts to view the war in Vietnam as the product of a flawed, patriarchal system that produced militarism and imperialism abroad, along with oppression, inequality, and exploitation at home. Some within the women's movement even proclaimed solidarity with the revolutionary women of Vietnam who had taken up arms, alongside men, to defeat the United States. As historian Ruth Rosen has noted, "one of the most popular posters in the early women's liberation movement … featured a Vietnamese woman with a baby on her back and a gun in her hand."[11]

10 Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* 155–61; "… For an Abdicated Queen"; Firestone, "The Jeannette Rankin Brigade."

11 Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* 143–77; Small, *Antiwarriors*, 132–3; "… For an Abdicated Queen"; Firestone, "The Jeannette Rankin Brigade"; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 137.

The rise of the women's liberation movement during the second half of the 1960s should, though, not obscure the continued role of an older generation of activists. In her 2011 book *Building a Just and Secure World*, Amy Schneidhorst explores the activism of progressive women who came of age during, and whose political sensibilities were shaped by, the Popular Front era. These women, who were active in WSP, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), "influenced the structures, political platforms, and tactics" of the anti–Vietnam War movement. Despite their reliance on maternalist rhetoric and the politics of respectability, they were often sharp critics of American militarism, who came to view the war in Vietnam as an anticolonial struggle, rather than simply a civil war. Schneidhorst has also emphasized these progressive women's commitment to organizing across racial and class lines, and their willingness to work alongside more "radical" organizations, especially those committed to civil disobedience and militant draft resistance. In contrast to the hoary old story of intergenerational conflict, she paints a compelling, and at times touching, picture of cooperation and support – with WSP activists picketing in support of militant antidraft campaigners, stumping up bail money for those arrested for civil disobedience, and helping to feed the "Yippies" who descended on Chicago to protest against the war during the Democratic Party National Convention in August 1968.[12]

When it comes to the question of class, meanwhile, blue-collar Americans are typically characterized as having been broadly supportive of the Vietnam War and implacably hostile to the antiwar movement. It is certainly true that organized labor, and particularly the national leadership of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) under its president, George Meany, offered robust support for the military effort. Moreover, during the infamous "Hard Hat Riot" of May 8, 1970, construction workers attacked antiwar protestors in New York City – an incident that features prominently in standard histories of the era.[13] But, as Lewis has argued, "working-class opposition to the war was significantly more

12 Amy C. Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World: Popular Front Women's Struggle for Peace and Justice in Chicago during the 1960s* (New York, 2011), viii. See also John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority: Louisville's Antiwar Movement, 1966–1975," *Journal of Southern History* 73, 1 (February 2007), 117–18.

13 See, for example, William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II* (New York, 2003), 400–1; and Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York, 1999), 270.

widespread than is remembered." Some studies have even suggested that working-class Americans were more likely to have disapproved of the war than their middle-class counterparts – although it is important to stress that opposition to, or unease about, American military intervention in Southeast Asia was by no means the same thing as support for the antiwar movement. Meanwhile Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones has argued that the antiwar faction within the labor movement "developed a significant momentum" and ultimately helped pressure the Nixon administration into accepting a negotiated settlement in Vietnam.[14]

In fact, some of the earliest antiwar dissent came from the ranks of organized labor, with the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) passing an antiwar resolution in 1965 (they were joined in their stance by a number of other Old Left unions, including the United Electrical Workers). The most prominent union to oppose the war in Vietnam was the United Auto Workers (UAW), and in the autumn of 1967 its leader, Walter Reuther, called for a bombing halt and withdrew the UAW from the AFL-CIO in protest at its support for the war. Despite the much-touted support of the "hard hats," and his own assiduous efforts to court blue-collar Americans, Richard Nixon faced a labor movement that was increasingly hostile to the war – and to the inflation, unemployment, and wage freezes that it was believed to have fueled. The Teamsters, the International Chemical Workers Union, the Alliance for Labor Action (which represented 5 million workers), the San Francisco Labor Council, and numerous unions in New York City endorsed the Moratorium protests of October 1969.[15] Despite the continued prowar stance of the AFL-CIO (on the eve of the 1972 election, George Meany urged American workers to vote for Nixon rather than George McGovern), Jeffreys-Jones has argued that the "burgeoning rebellion" among working Americans "gave Nixon notice that what could be achieved through his opening to labor was limited."[16]

As for the racial composition of the antiwar movement, the relatively modest levels of participation in many of the major antiwar marches among Black, Chicano, and other Americans of color was noted by contemporary commentators, and lamented by many leaders of the mainstream peace movement. But despite the antiwar movement's difficulties in constructing a

14 Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*, 4–5, 49–55, 73; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* 179–84.
15 Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* 185–97, 215–16; "Millions Join Oct. 15 War Protest," *The Guardian* (New York), October 25, 1969, 4.
16 Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* 218–21.

genuinely multiracial coalition, people of color were nonetheless an important antiwar constituency.[17] It is notable, for instance, that every major civil rights organization – including the "moderate" National Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – eventually came to oppose the war in Vietnam. And African American activists were – as historians such as Daniel Lucks, Joshua Bloom, and Waldo E. Martin have shown – among the war's most forceful critics (for more on this, see Chapter 19).[18] Stokely Carmichael, for instance, accused the United States of committing "genocide" against "our brothers in Vietnam" and memorably claimed that "the Vietnam War ain't nothing but white men sending black men to kill brown men to defend, so they claim, a country they stole from red men"; the Black Panthers condemned the "Yankee Imperialist" war of "aggression" in Vietnam; and Martin Luther King, Jr., called on the United States to "atone for our sins and errors in Vietnam," "take the initiative in bringing a halt to this tragic war," and "get on the right side of the world revolution."[19] African Americans – including the world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali – were also at the forefront of the draft resistance campaign. Amid the rise of Black Power, and given ongoing doubts about the antiwar movement's ability, or willingness, to engage meaningfully with their concerns (particularly around the racial, and racist, aspects of the war abroad and its consequences at home), many Black critics of the war organized separately: the National Black Antiwar Antidraft Union was founded in early 1968, the Third World Task Force two years later.

Meanwhile by the second half of the 1960s Mexican Americans were, as Lorena Oropeza and others have shown, also mobilizing in increasing numbers against the war.[20] At the center of this was the Chicano Moratorium.

17 Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movement in the 1960s* (Philadelphia, 2004).

18 Daniel Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, KY, 2014); Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley, 2013). See also Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2006).

19 Stokely Carmichael, "A Declaration of War," February 22, 1968, in Massimo Teodori (ed.), *The New Left: A Documentary History* (New York, 1969), 276; "NLF Vietnam," *Black Panther*, August 16, 1969, quoted in G. Louis Heath (ed.), *The Black Panther Leaders Speak* (Metuchen, NJ, 1976), 112; Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 80; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," in Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (eds.), *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London, 2001), 154, 157.

20 Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí! Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley, 2006). See also Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vásquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966–1977* (Albuquerque, 2014); and Marc Simon Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement* (New York, 2014).

Founded in the spring of 1970 by Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzáles – a Democratic Party politico and onetime featherweight boxer turned community organizer and Chicano nationalist – and his Crusade for Justice organization, the Chicano Moratorium drew 20,000 to a rally in Los Angeles at the end of August. Six months earlier, members of the militant Brown Berets had led a 1,000-strong "March Against Death" in East Los Angeles, carrying a coffin and the photograph of a wounded Chicano soldier. Like their African American counterparts, Chicano opponents of the war were often spurred on by anger that they were fighting, and dying, in Vietnam in disproportionately high numbers, a growing sense of solidarity with the Vietnamese (who were seen as fellow victims of American "imperialism"), and a deepening conviction that the struggle for dignity, equality, and justice at home should take precedence over a war taking place on the other side of the world. As the popular antiwar slogan had it, "La batalla está aquí!" ("The battle is here!"). Speaking at an antiwar rally in Arizona in October 1970, Gonzáles declared that "the very government that you support in wars in Vietnam and Korea … is the same government that committed genocide against the Indian." The *real* war was "not in Vietnam … not in Cambodia. It's right here in these barrios. It's right here in our community."[21]

## GI Dissent

Writing in 2003, James Lewes complained that, by marginalizing GI dissent, historians had, effectively, disenfranchised a "whole class of activists."[22] Such marginalization has also served to help perpetuate a misleading and highly damaging narrative of "protestors versus soldiers," which has dominated the cultural and historical memory of the Vietnam War era.[23] And yet, as Lewis has argued, "along with the college campus, the military itself must be seen as the other great mobilizing vehicle through which anti-war sentiment was stoked and action unleashed."[24] Certainly there can be no doubt that antiwar feeling within the military was substantial, and it is estimated that as many as one in four service personnel "participated in the military antiwar movement

21 Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, 74.
22 James Lewes, *Protest and Survive: Underground GI Newspapers during the Vietnam War* (London, 2003), 6.
23 Derek Seidman, "Paper Soldiers: The Ally and the GI Underground Press during the Vietnam War," in James L. Baughman et al. (eds.), *Protests on the Page: Essays on Print and the Culture of Dissent since 1865* (Madison, WI, 2015), 184.
24 Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*, 116–17.

as soldiers or veterans" – a figure that "equalled the peak proportion of all activism among youth."[25] From a few, sporadic cases of resistance – including that of the Fort Hood Three who, in 1966, refused to be deployed to Vietnam – these isolated protests evolved, by the end of the decade, into a full-fledged GI movement.[26] Built by soldiers, veterans, and civilian sympathizers, this movement – which lasted from roughly 1968 to 1973 – was, in the words of Derek Seidman, "broadly united by the common goals of organizing soldiers, ending the war, fighting racism, and defending troop civil liberties against military justice."[27]

Central to the GI movement were the coffeehouses. Founded and staffed by civilians, and located near military bases, they offered a space where, as Lewis has noted, "soldiers could read the GI antiwar press and talk politics – but also just hang out, listen to music, and escape army life." They also provided a forum where returning soldiers could give those about to depart for Southeast Asia information about what the war was "really like." Furthermore, the coffeehouses facilitated the creation of GI organizations – such as GIs United Against the War in Vietnam (founded in 1969) – and more than 300 GI newspapers (including, famously, *FTA*). Several of these newspapers enjoyed wide circulation (including on US military bases overseas) and readerships in the tens of thousands, and helped to connect the GI movement to the local, civilian antiwar movement.[28] For the historian Derek Seidman, the GI press constituted "the lifeblood" of the GI movement. Among other things, GI newspapers helped antiwar soldiers to develop a sense of community and collective identity, provided them with news and analysis that were often sharply critical of both the war and the military, furnished them with vital information about legal rights and access to civilian assistance (especially, perhaps, legal advice),

25 Ibid., 117.

26 On the GI movement, see, for instance, Lewes, *Protest and Survive*; Terry H. Anderson, "The GI Movement and the Response from the Brass," and David Cortright, "GI Resistance during the Vietnam War," in Melvin Small et al. (eds.), *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Ithaca, 1992), 93–115 and 116–28; Harry W. Haines, "Soldiers against the Vietnam War: Aboveground and The Ally," in Ken Wachsberger (ed.), *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press, Part 2* (Lansing, MI, 2012), 1–46; Richard Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1996); and Derek Seidman, "Vietnam and the Soldiers Revolt: The Politics of a Forgotten History," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 68, 2 (June 2016), 45–57.

27 Seidman, "Paper Soldiers," 186–7.

28 Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*, 122–3. Though the newspaper was subtitled *Fun, Travel, Adventure*, it was widely understood that the acronym *FTA* stood for "Fuck the Army." See, for instance, the quotation from Anne Braden in Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority," 112. For a history of the coffeehouse movement, see David L. Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017).

and – through contributing to their content (often via the letters page) and by distributing the newspapers clandestinely on military bases – offered an outlet for active protest against the war and the military culture that sustained it.[29]

Such was the pressure of dissent that, by the early 1970s, the US military appeared in danger of unraveling. David Cortright – a Vietnam veteran turned peace activist and historian – has claimed that, in 1971, for every hundred soldiers, there were "seven acts of desertion, seventeen incidents of unauthorized absence, two disciplinary discharges, twelve complaints to congressmen, and eighteen non-judicial punishments." As he concluded, "no armed force can function properly when faced with such internal disruption and resistance."[30] While some may question whether desertion, fabricating illness, evading or questioning orders, and "fragging" (killing an officer) should be considered a part of the antiwar movement, Lewis is in no doubt. "The problem with morale in the Vietnam-era military," she writes, "was directly related to the doubts and criticisms that soldiers had concerning their mission, and the problems with the mission were highlighted among the public largely by the actions taken by and the educational practices of the antiwar movement."[31] For Seidman, meanwhile, the GI movement demonstrates how, through the efforts of antiwar GIs, the "mass movements" of the 1960s spilled over into the US military itself.[32]

Back on the homefront, meanwhile, the main antiwar vehicle for returning soldiers was Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). The group, which was founded in 1967 by Jan Barry and five other veterans, engaged in a number of high-profile protests – including the 1971 "Winter Soldier" hearings into alleged US war crimes and "Operation Dewey Canyon III" during April 1971, which culminated in 700 veterans throwing their medals over a wire fence that had been constructed around the US Capitol. With a peak membership of 30,000, VVAW exerted a powerful influence over the antiwar movement and the wider American public.[33] According to Lewis, it also provided a "template for what to do right if you want an active working-class base for a social movement organization and for how to make working-class audiences take you seriously."[34]

29 Seidman, "Paper Soldiers," 183, 186–7.
30 Quoted in Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*, 127. See also David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 2005).
31 Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*, 127.
32 Seidman, "Paper Soldiers," 197–8.
33 Andrew E. Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York, 1999); Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, 51–3.
34 Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*, 128.


Figure 18.1 More than 2,000 people gather at an antiwar demonstration in New York City (December 6, 1967).
Source: Bettmann / Contributor / Bettmann / Getty Images.

## Geographical Breadth and Tactical Repertoire

As well as broadening and deepening the profile of antiwar activism, scholars have attempted to shift the geographical focus away from what Doug Rossinow has termed the "northern rim" (a so-called arc of dissent that extends from New York's Morningside Heights to Ann Arbor and Madison, and then on to Berkeley).[35] Some historians, notably Judy Tzu-Chun Wu and Martin Klimke, have broadened the geographical frame outward to explore the international dimensions of antiwar protest, emphasizing the global activism of individual actors and the circulation of ideas, tactics, and slogans across national borders. By doing so, they have reminded us that antiwar activism should properly be considered an international, or transnational, phenomenon (for more on this, see Chapter 24).[36] Others,

35 Doug Rossinow, "Historiographical Reflections," in Robert Cohen and David Snyder (eds.), *Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s* (Baltimore, 2013), 307.

36 See, for example, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, 2013); Martin Klimke, *The*



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in contrast, have gone local, whether writing the story of antiwar activism in particular cities – as with Michael S. Foley on Boston, Paul Lyons on Philadelphia, John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin on Louisville, Raymond A. Mohl on Miami, and Rusty L. Monhollon on Lawrence – or regions. In addition to Robbie Lieberman's important collection of oral testimony from midwestern antiwar activists, several scholars, whose number include Rossinow, Jeffrey Turner. and Gregg Michel, have pioneered the study of the antiwar movement in the South.[37] When it comes to antiwar activism in Dixie, a picture has begun to emerge of a movement that developed momentum a little later than in the North (with the peak of activism between 1968 and 1970) and which was less reliant on SDS (and somewhat detached from the ideological disputes that hobbled the New Left during the second half of the 1960s), more moderate (white Southern activists tended to eschew the politics of confrontation), more connected to religion, and, in important respects, distinctly *Southern* in its character.[38] In the spring of 1967, for instance, the Southern Students Organizing Committee (SSOC), the region's leading New Left organization, planned the "Southern Days of Secession," declaring that:

*Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, 2011); "AHR Forum: The International 1968, Part I," *American Historical Review* (February 2009), 42–135, especially William Marotti, "Japan 1968: The Performance of Violence and the Theater of Protest," 97–135.

37 Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); Paul Lyons, *The People of This Generation: The Rise and Fall of the New Left in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 2003); Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority"; Raymond A. Mohl, "A Merger of Movements: Peace and Civil Rights Activism in Postwar Miami," *Peace and Change* 35, 2 (April 2010), 258–94; Rusty L. Monhollon, *This Is America? The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York, 2002); Robbie Lieberman, *Prairie Power: Voices of 1960s Midwestern Student Protest* (Charlotte, NC, 2010); Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left* (New York, 1998); Jeffrey A. Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South* (Athens, GA, 2010); Gregg Michel, *Struggle for a Better South: The Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1964–1969* (Basingstoke, 2004). See also Cohen and Snyder (eds.), *Rebellion in Black and White*; Joseph Fry, *The American South and the Vietnam War: Belligerence, Protest and Agony in Dixie* (Lexington, KY, 2015); and J. Stanley Marshall, *The Tumultuous Sixties: Campus Unrest and Student Life at a Southern University* (Tallahassee, FL, 2006). An earlier attempt to switch the focus to less fashionable centers of antiwar protest was Kenneth Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York, 1993).

38 Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out*, 228, 249, 252–3; Robert Cohen, "Prophetic Minority versus Recalcitrant Majority: Southern Student Dissent and the Struggle for Progressive Change in the 1960s," in Cohen and Snyder (eds.), *Rebellion in Black and White*, 23–5, 27; Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority," esp. 109–11 and 119–20 for discussion of religion.

As young Southerners we hereby SECEDE from:
THE WAR AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE
RACISM AND EXPLOITATION OF THE POOR
THE SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM.[39]

The movement's diversity was also reflected in the wide array of tactics that activists deployed, including teach-ins, rallies, marches, vigils, lobbying, street theater, local referenda and electoral insurgencies, and protests against compulsory ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) on college campuses and the connections between universities and the so-called military–industrial complex (including long-running campaigning against Dow Chemical, the napalm manufacturer).[40] Increasingly, antiwar activists – driven by a growing sense of frustration – resorted to confrontational, and sometimes rather abrasive, forms of protest. As the Catholic peace activist Philip Berrigan put it, "we had attended nonviolent demonstrations, written letters to government leaders, and met with government officials … nothing worked. No one listened."[41] On April 15, 1967, for example, David Harris, a former student leader at Stanford, announced the formation of The Resistance, the first national antidraft organization while, on October 21, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam brought tens of thousands of protestors to the Pentagon in an attempt to "disrupt the center of the American war machine" and "call the warmakers to task."[42] The following May, nine Catholic peace activists, including Daniel and Philip Berrigan, entered the offices of the local draft board in Catonsville, Maryland, a suburb of Baltimore. After forcing their way past the startled clerks, they ransacked the office, placing draft files into two large wire baskets which they proceeded to take into the parking lot and, in front of waiting reporters, doused them with homemade napalm and set them alight while saying a prayer. Charged with the destruction of government property, the so-called Catonsville Nine used their trial, which was held that autumn, as a forum for debating the legitimacy of the American war in Southeast Asia, and as a platform from which to encourage further antidraft activity. They helped to inspire further draft resistance – including a similar protest in Milwaukee, in which 14 activists

39 Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out*, 252. See also Michel's definitive history of SSOC, *Struggle for a Better South*.
40 Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, 125–6.
41 Shawn Francis Peters, *The Catonsville Nine: A Story of Faith and Resistance in the Vietnam Era* (Oxford, 2012), 28.
42 Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 76; Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, 29–30.

destroyed some 10,000 draft files. Shawn Francis Peters's *The Catonsville Nine* not only underscores the growing prominence of militant civil disobedience within the antiwar movement, it also reminds us of the important role that religion played in motivating, shaping, and sustaining protests against the war (after all, those indicted in Catonsville included two priests, four former missionaries, and a member of the Christian Brothers).

The religious dimensions of antiwar dissent have been explored more fully in Mitchell K. Hall's history of Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). Founded in the spring of 1966, and shaped primarily by liberal Protestants and Jews, the organization drew notable support from, among others, Martin Luther King, Jr., the cleric, writer, and theologian Richard John Neuhaus, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, and Yale University chaplain William Sloane Coffin. With a substantial network of local chapters, and a membership of 40,000, CALCAV lobbied, rallied, picketed, and proselytized against the war and in favor of a negotiated peace settlement. As frustration with the war built, many CALCAV members came to embrace more militant tactics (including civil disobedience and offering help to draft resisters) and a more radical view of the war itself (seeing it as illustrative of deeper socioeconomic and political flaws of the country, rather than simply as a tragic mistake). By the early 1970s, in addition to protesting against the war, the organization was also turning its attention to other issues, including challenging what they viewed as excessive corporate power. Changing its name to Clergy and Laymen Concerned (CALC), it continued as a peace and social justice organization in the years following the end of the Vietnam War, campaigning against apartheid (and supporting the imposition of sanctions), calling for a nuclear weapons freeze, and opposing US military involvement in Central America.[43]

## The Movement's Legacy

Supporters and opponents of the war in Vietnam, as well as politicians, commentators, and historians, have been arguing about the antiwar movement's legacy for decades – focusing on its effects on the 1960s New Left and exploring its influence on the wider political culture (including the politics of protest), as well as seeking to establish what impact, if any, the antiwar protests had on US policymakers and the military.

43 See Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York, 1990); Jill Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (Ithaca, 2011); and Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, 2012), 501–31.

Opposition to the war in Vietnam came to occupy a central place within the wider story of the New Left. Student activists and groups helped to organize protests against the war and contributed key ideas, including a powerful critique of the "corporate liberalism" that they believed was responsible for the escalation of the war, arguing that war abroad, together with poverty and racism at home, were symptoms of a corrupt and repressive "system." Opposition to the war, meanwhile, helped to raise the national profile of groups like Students for a Democratic Society and boosted the New Left's popularity on campuses across the United States.

But according to Rossinow, one of the New Left's most astute scholars, the war in Vietnam was a double-edged sword. While the war was undoubtedly a terrific recruiting sergeant, with opposition to the war helping to transform the New Left into a mass movement, this rapid growth proved highly unstable, overwhelmed existing organizational structures, and made genuine participatory democracy (which often relied on long, careful discussions to achieve consensus) increasingly untenable. Worse, the sense of moral outrage produced by the war, and growing frustration at the antiwar movement's apparent impotence, helped propel the New Left toward Third World romanticism and the politics of revolution. This was a road that culminated, for some at least, in the nihilism and terrorism of the Weather Underground.[44] By the end of the decade, the New Left was cut off from mainstream liberals – who were widely viewed as the enemy. Carl Davidson, who was elected SDS vice president in 1966, declared that the strategy of "working within the Democratic Party" was "so obviously bankrupt" that we "need not waste our time."[45] He was not alone. New Leftists in California refused to back Governor Edmund "Pat" Brown, the liberal Democrat incumbent, in a tough election fight against Ronald Reagan in 1966, in part because of his support for the Johnson administration's policies in Vietnam. The former Hollywood actor, and right-wing Republican, went on to win by almost a million votes.[46]

44 Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 246, 210–12. See also Jeremy Varon, "Between Revolution 9 and Thesis 11: Or, Will We Learn (Again) to Start Worrying and Change the World?" in John McMillian and Paul Buhle (eds.), *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia, 2003), 214–36; and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley, 2004).

45 Carl Davidson, "The New Radicalism and the Multiversity," in Teodori (ed.), *The New Left*, 325.

46 On Brown's position on the war in Vietnam, see Ethan Rarick, *California Rising: The Life and Times of Pat Brown* (Berkeley, 2005), 345. On the New Left and the 1966 gubernatorial contest, see, for instance, Clayborne Carson, "Long, Hot California Summers: The Rise of Black Protest and Black Power," in Marcia A. Eymann and

Without the war in Vietnam, some have argued, the trajectory of the New Left (and in particular of SDS) would have been quite different: it would have grown less rapidly; maintained its original focus on grassroots antipoverty organizing, the reform of college campuses, and the search for "authenticity" (a genuine sense of meaning, purpose, and community amid an increasingly atomized, impersonal, and individualistic society); and evolved into a more stable movement, with firmer links to the liberal–progressive tradition.[47]

While the Vietnam War may have contributed to the unravelling of SDS and the New Left, the antiwar movement would seem to have had a much more beneficial impact on the wider story of social activism. It is, of course, not at all surprising to learn that the anti–Vietnam War movement exercised a significant influence on subsequent peace and antiwar activism – including the protests against the nuclear arms race and the Reagan administration's interventions in Central America during the 1980s. More recently, veterans of anti–Vietnam War protests have been at the forefront of criticism against the United States' so-called War on Terror, and particularly the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[48] But the movement's influence extended well beyond peace activism, encompassing not only social justice causes on the left but also, more intriguingly, social movements on the political right as well.

Historians of the gay liberation movement have long recognized the important role played by the antiwar movement. Opposition to the war, together with what the historian Justin David Suran has characterized as a "radical antimilitarism" – were integral to the creation of gay identity during the late 1960s, and many of the founders of gay liberation organizations were veterans of the struggle to end the war in Vietnam.[49] Kiyoshi Kuromiya, who helped to found the Philadelphia Gay Liberation Front in 1969, had been in the vanguard

Charles Wollenberg (eds.), *What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era* (Berkeley, 2004), 107; Peter Richardson, *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America* (New York, 2009), ch. 3; Tom Waldman, *Not Much Left: The Fate of Liberalism in America* (Berkeley, 2008), 53–5. For the 1966 gubernatorial result in California, see www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=36416.

47 Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 246, 210–12. See also David T. Farber, "Afterword," in Cohen and Snyder (eds.), *Rebellion in Black and White*, 314. In contrast, David Barber places much of the blame for the New Left's demise – or, more accurately, the demise of SDS – on the way in which the organization dealt with the issue of race. See David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson, MS, 2008).

48 Robert Surbrug, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam: The Politics of Protest in Massachusetts, 1974–1990* (Amherst, MA, 2009), 4–7; Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 341, 346–7, 360; Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, 149–50.

49 Justin David Suran, "Coming Out against the War: Antimilitarism and the Politicization of Homosexuality in the Era of Vietnam," *American Quarterly* 53, 3 (September 2001), 456–9, 463–4.

of antiwar organizing while a student at the University of Pennsylvania, and was arrested during the protests outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago for distributing a poster that proclaimed "Fuck the Draft."[50] New York's Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which had been formed in the immediate aftermath of the Stonewall riots of June 1969, proclaimed its solidarity with the Vietnamese, and modeled its name on South Vietnam's National Liberation Front. In August 1969, meanwhile, the Youth Committee of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations called on gay rights activists to "totally reject the insane war in Vietnam and refuse to encourage complicity in the war and support of the war machine." During the November 1969 Moratorium demonstrations in San Francisco some 15,000 gay and lesbian protestors joined in with chants of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win"; some even carried placards proclaiming "Suck Cock to Beat the Draft."[51] Three years later, Boston's GLF called not only for "the *total* withdrawal of all United States and United States–supported air, land or naval forces from Vietnam" but for the abolition of "all aggressive armed forces."[52] Indeed, during the late 1960s, many gay liberationists came to embrace nonparticipation in the military as "a positive good," arguing that to serve in the military was to offer aid and comfort to the imperialistic "war machine" and to reinforce traditional (and oppressive) heterosexual notions of masculinity.[53]

This story of the antiwar movement's relationship with gay liberation is not, though, a wholly positive one. Many gay activists became disillusioned with their straight radical comrades for not taking gay liberation seriously enough; some even felt that the wider movement was homophobic. Charlotte Bunch, who helped found the Furies, a radical lesbian–feminist collective, explained that "the Left" "constantly told us that our oppression was not as great and not as important as [that of] the Vietnamese," while Jim Owles, of New

50 Liz Highleyman, "Kiyoshi Kuromiya: Integrating the Issues," in Tommy Avicolli Mecca (ed.), *Smash the Church, Smash the State! The Early Years of Gay Liberation* (San Francisco, 2009), 17–19; Roger Vaughan, "The Defiant Voices of SDS," *Life*, October 18, 1968, 90, 92. On the influence of late 1960s radicalism on the gay movement, see, for example, Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York, 2012), 80.

51 John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York, 1993), 242; Randy Shilts, *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the US Military* (New York, 1993), 96.

52 Charles Shively, "Fag Rag: The Most Loathsome Publication in the English Language," in Ken Wachsberger (ed.), *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press, Part 2* (East Lansing, MI, 2012), 104.

53 Suran, "Coming Out against the War," 471–2. See also Say Burgin, "Understanding Antiwar Activism as a Gendering Activity: A Look at the US's Anti–Vietnam War Movement," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, 6 (December 2012), 18–31.

York's GLF, recalled that when he was in the peace movement "they kept telling me there were greater things to work for than my own oppression and maybe I could be taken care of after the revolution."[54] These unhappy experiences were one reason why, when the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was founded at the end of 1969, it decided to focus "solely" and "completely" on gay rights (though many members continued to protest against the Vietnam War in an individual capacity). Moreover, in the mid-1970s, as a number of gay rights groups began to shift their focus onto securing political, legal, and social reforms, rather than calling for a wider revolution, many gay rights activists rallied around Leonard Matlovich – a technical sergeant in the US Air Force and a decorated Vietnam veteran – after he came out publicly in order to challenge the blanket ban on homosexuals serving in the military.[55]

While the antiwar movement's influence on the left has long been recognized, historians have more recently sought to focus attention on the less well-known connections with the New Right. Moving beyond the traditional interpretation in which antiwar protestors serve as a useful foil for conservatives espousing the politics of "backlash," scholars have shown how some activists involved with the antitax, antibusing, and anti-abortion movements drew inspiration, and claimed legitimacy, from the antiwar movement, even as they attacked the "Sixties" as an age of excess and anti-Americanism.[56] In his pioneering work on the anti-abortion movement, for instance, Richard L. Hughes has shown that its success during the 1970s and beyond was due in part to the ability of a small but influential number of activists – including veterans of the antiwar movement – to adapt modes of protest, and approaches to activism, that had come to the fore during the 1960s.[57] At an anti-abortion rally held near the Lincoln Memorial on September 3, 1972, some 200 members of the National Youth Pro-Life Coalition heard a speech from Fr. Richard John

54 Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements since the 1960s* (Philadelphia, 2011), 36.

55 Simon Hall, "Leonard Matlovich: From Military Hero to Gay Rights Poster Boy," in Simon Wendt (ed.), *Warring over Valor: How Race and Gender Shaped American Military Heroism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2019), 113–27.

56 Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), 70; Louis P. Masur, *The Soiling of Old Glory: The Story of a Photograph that Shocked America* (New York, 2008); Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*; Richard L. Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War," *The Historian* 68, 3 (Fall 2006), 541–58; Richard L. Hughes, "'The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?' The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Struggle for Racial Justice," *Oral History Review* 33, 2 (2006), 1–23.

57 Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates," 542; Hughes, "The Civil Rights Movement of the 1990s?" 5; Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*.

Neuhaus of Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV); sang a version of John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance" – "All We Are Saying/Is Give Life a Chance"; and, in an action that drew self-consciously on the burning of draft cards, set fire to 2,000 birth certificates.[58] Meanwhile, the very first "March for Life" in 1974 – like the antiwar "March Against Death" five years earlier – "included its share of coffins, crosses, grim reapers, and photos of the dead."[59] During the 1980s, as the movement became much more dominated by the Christian right, the antiwar movement's influence continued to be felt: in June 1989 raw eggs and maple syrup were poured over surgical instruments at the Summit Women's Center in West Hartford, Connecticut, in a protest that mirrored that of Philip Berrigan and other radical pacifists who, back in October 1967, had poured blood over draft files in Baltimore.[60]

## Did the Antiwar Movement End the War?

Ultimately, of course, millions of antiwar activists took to the streets during the 1960s and early 1970s in the hope that their efforts would help to bring the bloody conflict in Southeast Asia to a speedy end. The question of whether or not they succeeded is controversial and continues to divide historians.[61] For Wells, the anti–Vietnam War movement was "perhaps the most successful antiwar movement in history" and played a "major role in restricting, deescalating, and ending the war." If it were not for the continued pressure of activists, who took to the streets in ever-greater numbers, claims Wells, then the "death and destruction" would have been "immensely greater."[62] Yet, in his provocative 1995 book *Telltale Hearts*, and elsewhere, Adam Garfinkle suggested that, far from ending the war, the antiwar movement in fact "helped prolong it." By engaging in tactics that were widely unpopular, antiwar activists, he claimed, served only to discredit opposition to the war, and thus helped prevent the public from turning against the war sooner.[63]

58 Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates," 542.
59 Ibid., 556.
60 Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest*, 127. See also Kirk Johnson, "Connecticut Abortion Protesters Clog Jails," *New York Times*, June 12, 1989, B1; and Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY, 1990), 199.
61 Young, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh," 220.
62 Wells, *The War Within*, 580–1.
63 Adam Garfinkle, "Movement Myths," in Robert J. McMahon (ed.), *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*, 2nd ed. (Lexington, MA, 1995), 467. See also Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Anti-War Movement* (New York, 1995); Young, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh," 219–20.

One major problem for historians is that we can only take an educated guess at how things might have played out in the absence of the teach-ins, marches, protests, and draft card burnings. There is also, for both historians and former activists, an understandable temptation to believe that the sustained activism of millions of Americans over many years simply must have had some sort of impact.[64] Finally, of course, it is fiendishly difficult to disentangle the impact of antiwar activity from the wider military and political developments that affected the course of the war. Given all this, it is perhaps unsurprising that some scholars have sought to shift the terms of the debate. For Michael S. Foley, the question of "whether or not the antiwar movement prolonged the war" is not a "particularly meaningful" one. The "more important question is a moral one: to what extent is a citizen responsible to his country when the government is engaged in a violent war that he deems 'illegal,' 'immoral,' or 'obscene'?"[65]

One thing is pretty clear: public opinion, as measured by polls, remained hostile toward the antiwar movement, even as support for the war in Vietnam waned. In 1968, for example, although half of Americans thought that the decision to go to war in Vietnam in the first place had been a "mistake," almost three-quarters viewed the antiwar movement negatively – and even a quarter of those who supported a unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam had a "wholly unfavorable" view of antiwar demonstrators.[66] One scholar has gone so far as to claim that antiwar demonstrations provided a short-term boost for support for the war.[67] But it remains far from implausible to suggest that the antiwar movement's very unpopularity was, perversely, a potential source of strength. The American people, one might argue, grew so tired of all the protests and disruption, as well as the seemingly endless nature of the conflict in Vietnam, that they simply wanted the war to end so that life could return to normal.[68]

64 Tom Wells, "The Anti-Vietnam War Movement in the United States," in Peter Lowe (ed.), *The Vietnam War* (Basingstoke, 1990), 126–7.

65 Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 346.

66 In 1968, according to one public opinion survey carried out by the University of Michigan, 70 percent of Americans viewed the antiwar movement in a negative light – with more than 1 in 4 "doves" (supporters of unilateral withdrawal) viewing antiwar demonstrators as wholly unfavorable. See E. M. Schreiber, "Anti-War Demonstrations and American Public Opinion on the War in Vietnam," *British Journal of Sociology* 27, 2 (June 1976), 229. See also Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1988), 130.

67 Wells, "The Anti-Vietnam War Movement," 122; William R. Berkowitz, "The Impact of Anti-Vietnam Demonstrations upon National Public Opinion and Military Indicators," *Social Science Research* 2, 1 (March 1973), 17.

68 Wells, "The Anti-Vietnam War Movement," 128.

In his landmark 1988 study *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, Melvin Small argued that antiwar dissent was frequently taken into consideration by policymakers, and that opposition to the war, particularly among family members, affected them personally.[69] From 1964 until 1968, the antiwar movement does appear to have played a role in restraining the bombing of North Vietnam, and discouraged the Johnson administration from expanding the war into Cambodia and Laos. Antiwar dissent, though, was not the only factor in play here. For one thing, LBJ worried that expanding the war would risk provoking Chinese or Soviet intervention. Moreover, he was keen to keep the war low-key in order to protect his ambitious domestic agenda. As he put it, "I simply had no choice but to keep my foreign policy in the wings … I knew that the day it exploded in a major debate on the war, that day would be the beginning of the end of the Great Society."[70]

Meanwhile, in his pioneering study of Boston's draft resistance movement, Foley has argued that the intensification of protests around the draft in 1967–8 served to force the Johnson administration onto the back foot. The White House responded with a major public relations campaign, headed by General William C. Westmoreland, the commander of US forces in Vietnam, which was designed to assure an increasingly anxious nation that victory was in sight. When the NLF appeared to seize the military initiative during the Tet Offensive of 1968 (they struck at thirty-six of forty-four provincial capitals, and even briefly occupied the grounds of the US Embassy in Saigon), the American public was stunned, and the administration's credibility shredded. With key officials now warning of a further surge in draft resistance, LBJ rejected Westmoreland's request for an additional 200,000 troops, announced a partial bombing halt, and initiated efforts to find a negotiated settlement. This was, according to Foley, "the most obvious evidence that the draft resistance movement helped to rein in the war effort."[71]

For many, Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy's bid for the 1968 Democratic Party presidential nomination – which helped to topple LBJ – is viewed as a powerful example of the antiwar movement's strength. But, as McCarthy's biographer Dominic Sandbrook has argued, his campaign was

69 Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*.

70 Quoted in Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York, 1999), 276–7.

71 Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 345–6; David Dellinger, *From Yale to Jail: The Life of a Moral Dissenter* (New York, 1993), 310–11. In his definitive study of the Catonsville Nine, Shawn Francis Peters suggests that it was ultimately legal attacks, rather than civil disobedience, that sapped the effectiveness of the Selective Service System and left the draft law "in tatters." See Peters, *The Catonsville Nine*, 329.

less the creation of the antiwar movement than it was the product of an internal Democratic Party revolt, led by disaffected reform liberals who had long viewed LBJ with a mixture of resentment and suspicion. Moreover, despite the popular myth that young antiwar radicals shaved off their beards to campaign for him, it appears that "clean cut kids," those already involved in liberal student politics, and earnest graduate students were more likely to be found stuffing envelopes, or trudging through the snow to knock on doors, than veterans of SDS and the New Left. Had it not been for the Tet Offensive, McCarthy's quixotic bid for the presidency would have amounted to little more than a footnote in history. In the end, McCarthy's strong showing in the New Hampshire primary, which triggered LBJ's decision to quit the race, was more a referendum on the president's record than it was an outpouring of antiwar sentiment (some polls even suggested that a significant proportion of McCarthy voters supported a harder line in Vietnam).[72] In any case, the war in Vietnam continued for a further four years. Looking back on his campaign almost twenty years later, McCarthy wrote that it "probably had little or no effect on how the Vietnam War was conducted and how it finally ended."[73]

Although Richard Nixon claimed in public to be completely unmoved by antiwar protests, the reality was somewhat different – and the massive Moratorium demonstrations that took place in October 1969 seem to have encouraged the White House to postpone plans for an all-out military offensive against Hanoi.[74] Six months later, when Nixon announced that US ground forces would be sent into Cambodia, the outpouring of protest helped convince the president to withdraw the troops earlier than had been planned.[75] Meanwhile the growth of antiwar sentiment within Congress curtailed the Nixon administration's room for maneuver – although the extent to which this political development owed anything to the efforts of the organized antiwar movement remains highly contested.

Even some of the more sympathetic historians of the antiwar movement concede that public opposition to the war owed more to the terrible cost of the conflict, and the apparent stalemate on the battlefield, than to the actions of peace protestors. After all, despite almost a decade of fighting (including the dropping of 8 million tons of bombs and incursions into Cambodia and Laos), and the huge outlay of blood and treasure – 58,000 Americans were

72 Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, 85–9; Dominic Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar American Liberalism* (New York, 2005).
73 Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy*, 216.
74 Wells, *The War Within*, 377.
75 Wells, "The Anti-Vietnam War Movement," 126.

killed, along with more than a million Vietnamese, and some $200 billion was spent on the war – the United States proved unable to overcome the determination of the North Vietnamese, and their allies in the South, to fight for an independent, unified Vietnam.[76] As the historian and antiwar activist Marilyn Blatt Young has noted, it would be "an act of supreme arrogance to imagine that without the antiwar movement, the Vietnamese would have fought less hard or less long."[77] It is a sobering but salutary reminder that the war was ultimately won, and lost, in the jungles of Vietnam, rather than on the streets of Berkeley, New York, or Washington.

76 Earl H. Tilford, "Preface," in Gilbert (ed.), *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, xiv; DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 381.
77 Young, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh," 225.