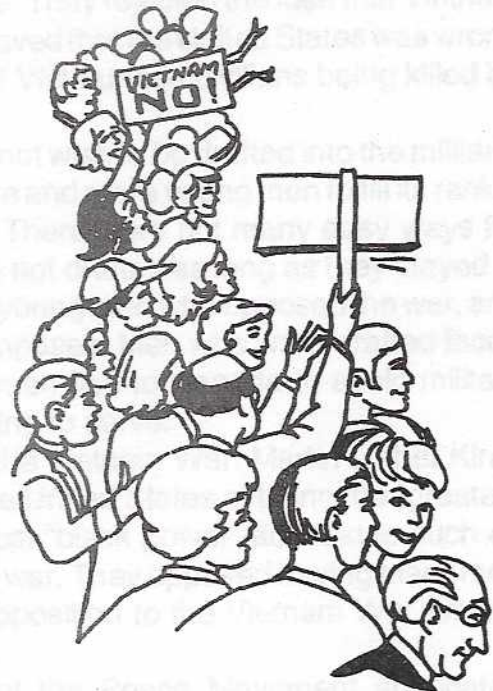# Alternative Views: The Peace Movement

The 1960s were a time when America went through great cultural changes. The Civil Rights Movement helped bring equal rights to African-Americans despite the racism of some whites. Violence erupted in many southern cities as peaceful protesters were confronted by angry white mobs. Accepted practices and moral beliefs were challenged by the nation's young people. America's youth developed more permissive attitudes toward sex, experimented with drugs, and listened to rock music. All of these practices shocked their parents. A "generation gap" developed between young and old people. Middle-aged parents and their college-aged children often felt like they had nothing in common. However, of all the changes America experienced, perhaps none were as divisive as the protests against the Vietnam War.

Many Americans, especially of the younger generation, were against sending troops to Vietnam.

Not all wars in American history have been popular. In the 1840s the Mexican War provoked the protests of many notable Americans, including author Henry David Thoreau. Mark Twain had harsh words for America's undeclared war in the Philippines in the 1890s. Other wars, such as World War II, were accepted as necessary by almost all Americans. However, the Vietnam War was easily the most unpopular war that America had ever fought.

The "Peace Movement" was a group of diverse individuals and organizations that acted independently of any unified leadership. It was often associated with college students and the "hippie" subculture that existed in America's colleges and universities. While early opposition to the war was often centered around America's campuses, it soon spread to encompass Americans of all ages in all locations. Each person involved with the Peace Movement had his or her own reasons for opposing the war.

Some people opposed the war for religious reasons. These people, often called pacifists, opposed all wars. They tended to belong to religious denominations such as the Quakers, Mennonites, and Church of the Brethren. Members of these churches believed that it was a sin to kill other human beings, even if they were your enemies. Their numbers were small, but they were among the first groups to protest the war in Vietnam. As time went on, they were joined by members of other denominations. Many clergymen from Catholic and Protestant Churches joined the opposition to Vietnam because they believed it was an immoral war. They pointed to the thousands of civilian casualties being caused by American bombing missions. These religious opponents tended to bring a certain respectability to the Peace Movement.

Some people rejected our leaders' belief that Vietnam was an important place to stop communism. They felt that Vietnam was having a civil war and that the United States should stay out of it. They compared Ho Chi Minh to George Washington, believing that Ho Chi

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Minh's main objective was Vietnamese independence. They rejected the idea that Vietnam represented any threat to the United States. They believed that the United States was wrong to enter the war and were appalled by the number of Vietnamese civilians being killed by the American military.

Some young men protested because they did not wish to be drafted into the military. As the war ground on, the military needed to draft more and more young men to fill its ranks. There were not enough volunteers to fight the war. There were not many easy ways for young men to avoid being drafted, but students were not drafted as long as they stayed in school. As a result, college campuses were filled with young men who opposed the war, and protests against the war were common on many campuses. Men who were drafted faced few options. Most served in the military, but some men fled to Canada to avoid military service, while others served long jail terms for refusing to serve.

Many Civil Rights leaders spoke out against the Vietnam War. Martin Luther King, Jr., became a vocal critic of the war. King accused the United States of being the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." More radical "black power" advocates such as Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X also opposed the war. They opposed having black men fight for a country that denied them equal rights. Opposition to the Vietnam War among African-Americans grew as the casualties mounted.

A small percentage of extreme members of the Peace Movement advocated overthrowing the American government. They belonged to the radical fringes of the Peace Movement, but received a great deal of publicity despite their small numbers. It was these members who most frightened older Americans.

Peace activists worked to end the war in a variety of ways. "Teach-ins" were held on many campuses. At these "teach-ins," peace activists presented their views regarding Vietnam and presented a history of the conflict to interested students. Many students became informed about the war in this way. Peace marches were held in many cities. Some marches were small, while others had thousands of marchers. As American involvement in the war grew, the marches tended to become much larger. They were usually peaceful, although the protesters were often faced by hostile crowds. Some men burned their draft cards as a form of protest. Burning the cards was illegal, but the action became a symbolic statement of opposition to the war.

The peace activists conducted these activities to generate more opposition to the war. They knew that many Americans had doubts about the war, but they needed to be encouraged to express those doubts. When peace activists marched, the public was made aware of the large number of people opposed to the war. Many activists believed that the government would be forced to get out of the war if opposition grew large enough. People of all ages and occupations joined the Peace Movement as the war began to appear more hopeless.

The majority of the American people never actively protested against the war. In fact, most Americans had low opinions of the peace activists. Many of the activists were different. They were young, had long hair, and had unorthodox morals. Many people believed that it was wrong to protest against the war while American soldiers were dying. Yet, the activists caused people to reexamine their own feelings about the war. As the war dragged on, support for continuing the war declined among all segments of the population. Without the men and women of the Peace Movement, the Vietnam War would likely have lasted many years longer.

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Name_____ Date_____

Challenges

1. What did the Civil Rights Movement work toward?

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2. Why did the "generation gap" develop in the 1960s?

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3. Name one of the other wars from American history that has provoked protests.

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4. What do pacifists believe about war?

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5. What actions did some young men take to avoid military service after they had been drafted?

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6. Name two prominent African-American leaders who were opposed to the Vietnam War.

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7. What were "teach-ins"?

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8. Why did young men burn their draft cards?

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9. What were the purposes of the peace marches?

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10. How did most Americans view the protesters? Why did they feel this way?

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