THE VIETNAM WAR
1954-1975
VIETNAMESE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

- Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) was a colony of France
- Ho Chi Minh fought for Vietnamese independence for most his life
  - Post-WWI made a plea to Wilson to promote self-determination in Indochina
  - After working with USSR as a spy, Ho Chi Minh goes back to Vietnam fighting Japanese occupation during WWII
    - Independence first, communism second
POST-WWII

- After Japan’s defeat in WWII, France reclaims Indochina
- U.S. support for Western Europe (Marshall Plan)
  - Anti-colonization and anti-communism
- As the Cold War speeds up, U.S. decides to give military aid to France
  - By 1954, U.S. is paying for 80% of the French war in Indochina
  - Domino theory – must defend SE Asia from communism
After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, they seek out an international agreement with the Vietminh

- Geneva Accords (1954)
  - Separates Indochina into N/S Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia
  - Elections to be held in July 1956 to create unified Vietnam
1956 ELECTIONS

- U.S.-backed Ngo Dinh Diem
  - Wealthy, Catholic, part of French colonial administration
- Communist Ho Chi Minh
  - Lived simply among the people, anti-colonization,
- The Eisenhower administration was not convinced that the elections would go in favor of the U.S.-backed Diem, and began CIA sabotage
  - Destroying gov printing presses, contaminated oil, destroyed railroad tracks, began rumors about China
- Diem doesn’t allow elections to be held – consolidates power in S. Vietnam
VIETNAM IN Volvement UNdER JFK

- Kennedy was determined to not be seen as “soft on communism”
- After his early failures, he decided to increase the amount of $$$ aid, and to increase the number of military “advisors”
  - $1000 → 16,000
- Reports showed “advisors” being much more involved than the Kennedy administration let on
- U.S. received reports on Diem’s intention to establish a dictatorship in S. Vietnam
- JFK plans military coup to overthrow Diem regime
  - Diem assassinated
- 3 weeks later, Kennedy is assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald leaving the presidency to Lyndon B. Johnson
LBJ comes into office wanting to uphold JFK’s legacy with his vision called the Great Society.

- This takes the back seat to the conflict LBJ inherits in Vietnam.
- “I was determined to keep the war from shattering the dream.”
The Gulf of Tonkin Incident (Aug. 2, 1964)
- Vietminh torpedo boats attacked *USS Maddox*; *USS Maddox* easily repels the attack
- Reports of a second attack on the *USS Turner Joy* are later debunked

LBJ administration uses this incident to increase U.S. involvement in the conflict further
- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution: gave Johnson permission “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the U.S. and to prevent further aggression.”
On March 8th, 1965, the first troops land in Vietnam

Operation Rolling Thunder: continuous bombing
- Use of napalm and Agent Orange

Stories of atrocities committed on civilians, along with journalists photos and reports get back to the U.S.
- Anti-war movement begins growing
1967: 19,000 Americans dead; and 30,000 being drafted every month

Jan. 30 1698: Tet Offensive
- Vietminh target over 100 South Vietnamese towns and take over U.S. embassy
- Takes American troops over a month to push back Vietminh
- Tet Offensive → major turning point of American public opinion
ELECTION OF 1968

- LBJ announces he will not seek reelection
  - Focus the rest of his time in office on peace negotiations
- 1968 Election focuses on future of Vietnam conflict
  - Nixon campaigns on closing the credibility gap
  - Vietnamization: gradually replacing U.S. troops with S. Vietnamese troops
One of the major reasons most Americans opposed the war was the seemingly endless stream of lies from Washington. This was known as the credibility gap – gov said one thing, but journalists reported another. With the release of the Pentagon Papers, and the uncovering of the My Lai Massacre, protests against the war skyrocketed.
AMERICAN OPPOSITION AT HOME

- Increasingly, Americans (particularly students) began protests against the U.S. involvement.
  - By 1969, almost 70% of students identified as doves.
  - The Kent State and Jackson State protests show how quickly the protests turned deadly.
U.S. involvement in Vietnam comes to a close with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords.
Later, Congress passes the War Powers Act of 1973 to put limits on the wartime powers given to the POTUS.
By 1975, Saigon had fallen to communism, and Vietnam was reunified as a communist nation.