

The Vietnam War: Origins, History, and Legacies

Student Text



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(Top left) Wikimedia Commons, Public domain; (Middle left) Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain; (Bottom left) U.S. troops searching the homes of Vietnamese civilians in South Vietnam, 1968. (Top right) Americans mourning U.S. soldiers who died in the Vietnam War at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., 1982. (Bottom right) Vietnamese refugees fleeing the country years after the end of the war in Vietnam, 1984.

(Top left) A women’s unit of the National Liberation Front (NLF) guerrilla army, which was allied with North Vietnam, preparing for battle in 1968. (Middle left) South Vietnamese army troops defending Saigon, South Vietnam, from North Vietnamese and NLF attacks during the 1968 Tet Offensive. (Bottom left) U.S. troops searching the homes of Vietnamese civilians in South Vietnam, 1968. (Top right) Americans mourning U.S. soldiers who died in the Vietnam War at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., 1982. (Bottom right) Vietnamese refugees fleeing the country years after the end of the war in Vietnam, 1984.

Introduction: A Long History of the Vietnam War

In 1965, the United States went to war in Vietnam, a small, S-shaped country in Southeast Asia that had been “temporarily” divided into North Vietnam and South Vietnam in 1954. A total of 2.7 million American military personnel poured into Vietnam during the next eight years, peaking at more than five hundred thousand troops in 1968. In the course of the war, the United States dropped over five million tons of bombs on Vietnam, more than twice the amount of bombs dropped by *all combatants combined* in World War II. At least three million Vietnamese and more than fifty-eight thousand Americans died in the conflict.

The United States had three main war objectives in Vietnam: (1) Drive North Vietnam’s army out of South Vietnam; (2) Defeat the National Liberation Front (NLF), a southern-based group that joined with the North to try to overthrow the U.S.-backed government in South Vietnam; (3) Defend South Vietnam’s anti-communist government until it could survive on its own without a large U.S. military presence. As you will see, the United States failed in these objectives and eventually withdrew from Vietnam in 1973. Two years later, North Vietnamese and NLF forces defeated South Vietnam’s military on the battlefield and united all of Vietnam under the North’s communist government.

The above brief account of what Americans call the “Vietnam War” focuses only on the ten-year period from 1965 to 1975. The rest of this reading, however, attempts to provide a “long history” of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

What does it mean to study the “long history” of the U.S. war in Vietnam?

To study the “long history” of the U.S. war in Vietnam means to look backward at its long-term

Introduction Definitions

Colonialism—Colonialism is a form of imperialism when a foreign power directly rules over another society by taking over its government and controlling its economy.

Nationalists—Nationalists in a country under colonial rule are people who organize social, political, and/or armed movements to demand independence from the colonizer. Nationalists also want to create a new government representative of the country’s people.



Naming the War

The conflict Americans call the “Vietnam War” has other names. Today, the Vietnamese government officially calls the conflict the “War Against the Americans to Save the Nation.” Many Vietnamese simply refer to it as the “American War.” These names reflect Vietnamese perspectives on the conflict. Historians have also named the conflict the “Second Indochina War.” (“Indochina” includes Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.) This name reflects how the U.S. war in Vietnam followed the First Indochina War (1946-1954), in which French colonizers fought to defeat the anti-colonial Vietnamese independence movement. In Vietnam, however, this earlier conflict is known as the Anti-French Resistance War.



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South Vietnamese women walk through rice fields past a patrol of U.S. Marines in 1965. The U.S. war disrupted daily life and led to immense hardships for Vietnamese people. Roughly two million Vietnamese civilians were killed during the 1965-1973 U.S. war in Vietnam.

origins and look forward at its long-term consequences. Looking backward encourages questions about how earlier conflicts and earlier domestic and international developments led to the U.S. war in Vietnam. Looking forward invites questions about the effects of the war on Vietnamese and American societies over time, as well as how Vietnamese and Americans have processed and sought to move on from what happened during the war. This “long history” of the U.S. war in Vietnam will help you better understand the significance of the conflict to Vietnamese, U.S., and world history.

Studying the “long history” of the U.S. war in Vietnam also demands a focus on Vietnamese perspectives, which have sometimes been ignored in U.S. textbooks and popular American histories of the war. Vietnamese experiences of conflict and war preceded the massive U.S. invasion in 1965 and went far beyond the U.S. withdrawal in 1973. The U.S. war killed millions of Vietnamese people and injured or traumatized millions more. It also contributed to a refugee crisis in which hundreds

of thousands of Vietnamese fled the country after the war finally ended in 1975. These Vietnamese perspectives and experiences are essential to understanding the broader history of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Two brief personal stories of life and war in Vietnam show what would be missed without a focus on the “long history” of the Vietnam War.

First story: Nguyen Thanh Tung was born in a small village in Vietnam in 1930. During France’s brutal colonial rule over Vietnam, French military forces burned her village to the ground, killing countless villagers. Her parents were Vietnamese nationalists who eventually fought for their country’s independence from France. Both were killed doing so.

Nguyen Thanh Tung had eight brothers, all of whom eventually took up arms to fight for an independent and unified Vietnam. Four were killed by the French during the 1946-1954 Anti-French Resistance War. The other four were killed later by

Americans during the U.S. war in Vietnam. Nguyen Thanh Tung joined the fight herself in 1959 as part of the National Liberation Front. Sixteen years later in 1975, she finally celebrated the North Vietnamese and NLF victory—“our victory,” in her words—in the war for an independent and unified Vietnam. Two of her sons, however, had been killed fighting in the war’s final weeks.

“I didn’t know what to say. I just shouted, ‘Oh my God, everybody, my comrades, we have won our independence! Liberty has come!...’ I was thinking of my family, and so many families. So many people had been killed.”

—Nguyen Thanh Tung, recalling her emotions in 1975 as the war in Vietnam ended in victory for North Vietnam and the NLF, 2017

The deaths of nearly all of Nguyen Thanh Tung’s family—both parents and four brothers killed by the French, another four brothers killed by the Americans, and two sons killed in the civil war following U.S. withdrawal—reveals the “long history” of wars in Vietnam. It also serves as a reminder of the war-time tragedies experienced by countless Vietnamese families.

Second story: Tram Tran was a teenager when the war in Vietnam ended in 1975. Her parents had been raised in northern Vietnam. They moved south after the country was divided in 1954 because they did not want to live under the North’s communist government. Tram Tran’s father and several other family members held jobs working for the U.S. military in South Vietnam during the

U.S. war. Supporters of North Vietnam and the NLF viewed those who worked for the Americans and South Vietnam’s government as traitors to the goal of an independent and unified Vietnam. Tram Tran’s parents, however, were just trying to make a living in a war-torn South Vietnam dominated by the massive U.S. military occupation.

“I did not know anything but war when I was small. At one level I told myself, This is life. Because I knew no other way of life.”

—Tram Tran, recalling her thoughts and emotions while growing up in war-torn South Vietnam, 1990

When the war ended in 1975, Tram Tran and her family fled Vietnam as refugees. They fled because they feared what would happen after the NLF and North Vietnam took control of the entire country, especially to those who had worked for the Americans and South Vietnam’s government. After a dangerous journey out of Vietnam, they were later resettled in the United States. Once there, a teenaged Tram Tran struggled with how to process and move on from the dual traumas of war and escape as a refugee.

Tram Tran’s experience shows how political divisions in Vietnam existed long before the U.S. war, and it sheds light on the difficult decisions Vietnamese civilians had to make as their country was torn apart by war. Her escape as a refugee reveals that the U.S. war in Vietnam had lasting consequences for the Vietnamese. These are essential parts of the “long history” of the Vietnam War.

Socialism, Communism, and Capitalism

Socialism is an economic system in which the community or the state controls the production and distribution of resources in order to increase social and economic equality. Generally in socialist systems, the state or community—rather than individuals—owns resources such as land and businesses.

Communism is a political stage reached after socialism is achieved. Under communism, there would be no social classes, property ownership, or even government. Communism has never been achieved by any state in the modern world. Countries, governments, and political movements are referred to as “communist” when they are led by members of communist parties, which seek to create a communist state.

Capitalism is an economic system in which resources are all or mostly owned by individuals and corporations and are operated for profit. In capitalist countries, governments pass laws and develop economic policies and institutions that support private property rights and encourage commercial exchange based on market forces.

In the coming pages, you will examine some of the major historical developments before, during, and after the U.S. war in Vietnam. Part I of the reading looks backward to examine the long-term origins of the U.S. war in Vietnam. Part II of the reading explores the 1965-1973 U.S. war in Vietnam. Part III looks forward from the end of the war to investigate the long-term consequences of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

This reading will focus on events in Vietnam, as well as important social, political, and cultural developments in the United States. You will also explore the effects of war in Vietnam on the neighboring countries of Laos, Cambodia, and China. In addition, you will read about significant global developments—such as French colonialism, World War II, and the Cold War—and analyze how they affected the United States, Vietnam, and the U.S. war in Vietnam.

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

- What are some of the things that united Vietnamese people? What are some of the things that divided them? How did these divisions contribute to war in Vietnam?
- Why did U.S. leaders originally intervene in Vietnam, why did they decide to take the United States to war in Vietnam, and why did they fight the war the way they did?
- How did Vietnamese civilians experience war in Vietnam, and how did Americans on the homefront view the war in Vietnam?
- What are some of the ways that the U.S. war in Vietnam affected Vietnamese and Americans for decades after the war ended?

Note about Disturbing Content

This period in history is marked by oppression and violence and it has had lasting repercussions for many groups. Please be advised that this text includes firsthand accounts of violence and descriptions of warfare. It also includes detailed discussions of colonial oppression and racism, and supports these discussions with primary source evidence. Throughout the time period covered by this reading, many Americans used racist and bigoted language to refer to Vietnamese people. American soldiers of color also experienced racial prejudice from white U.S. soldiers while serving in the U.S. military in Vietnam. However, this text does not include primary sources that contain racial slurs. As you read about this difficult history in the coming days, it is important to be sensitive to your classmates and the ways in which this history might be a hard topic to study.

The Vietnam War: Origins, History, and Legacies

Teacher Resource Book



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PREVIEW
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Women, Gender, and the Vietnam War

Objectives

Students will: Learn about the importance of examining women's views, opinions, and experiences of war.

Investigate Vietnamese and American women's views, opinions, and experiences from the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Analyze primary sources from all sides of the Vietnam War and work in small groups to identify connections across the sources.

Learn about gender as a category of historical analysis and practice gender analysis with primary sources from Vietnamese and American women.

Required Reading

Students should have read Part II of the reading and completed “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Part II” (TRB 27-28) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Part II” (TRB-29).

Resources

“Slideshow: Women, Gender, and the Vietnam War” (available at <www.choices.edu/vietnam>)

“Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Sets (A and B)” (TRB 34-39)

“Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Sets (C and D)” (available at <www.choices.edu/vietnam>)

“Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War” (TRB 40-42)

Video

The optional short video for use for this lesson is available at <www.choices.edu/vietnam>.

- “What is oral history?” (Professor Narges Bajoghli)

In the Classroom

1. Introduce the Lesson—Project the “Slideshow: Women, Gender, and the Vietnam War” (Slide #1) at the front of the class. Tell students that the poet, Norma J. Griffiths, served in the U.S.

Army as a nurse during the Vietnam War (see the Slideshow “speaker notes” section for more details). Ask students to read the poem quietly to themselves and then spend two minutes free-writing their immediate thoughts and reactions to the poem. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts and reactions from their free-writing.

Lead a short discussion that builds on students' responses. For example: Who do they “picture in their mind” when they think about the Vietnam War (or war in general)? Why? Did the question at the end of the poem surprise students? Why or why not? What emotions does the poem convey, and how does it do so? Why do students think Griffiths, who served in the Vietnam War as a nurse, wrote this poem? The poem was first published in 1985: How do students think reader's reactions to this poem have changed over time, and why? Why do students think it matters whether or not people “picture” women when they think about wars and war veterans?

Upon concluding the introductory discussion, project Slide #2 from the “Slideshow: Women, Gender, and the Vietnam War” at the front of the class, and introduce the lesson's guiding questions.

2. Work in Pairs: Part I—Divide the class into pairs. Distribute one “Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Set (A, B, C, or D)” to each pair of students. (**Note:** Sets C and D are available at <www.choices.edu/vietnam>.) You may wish to make sure all four document sets are distributed roughly equally throughout the class, or you may choose to focus on the document sets you think will work best for your students.

Distribute the “Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War” to each student. Review the instructions for Part I of the Document Sets and the “Analyzing Sources” section of the Graphic Organizer with students. Each student should fill in their own Graphic Organizer. Tell students not to move on to the next parts of the Documents Sets and Graphic Organizer until instructed.

Notes on the Document Sets: Each Document Set contains primary sources from women from each of the three “sides” of the war in Viet-

nam—(1) North Vietnam and the NLF; (2) the South Vietnamese government; and (3) the United States. Each Document Set has three unique Part I sources, but all of the sources touch on similar themes: opinions on the war in Vietnam, views of the “other side” (i.e., the “enemy”), and/or their personal experiences during the war.

3. Jigsaw—After students have completed the “Analyzing Sources” section of the Graphic Organizer, combine student pairs into new groups of four students each. Make sure each small group includes pairs of students who worked on different Document Sets. Review the instructions for the “Making Connections” section of the Graphic Organizer with students. Each student should continue to fill in their own Graphic Organizer as they work together as a group.

After students are done filling out the “Making Connections” section of the Graphic Organizer, reconvene the class. Lead a brief discussion of students’ responses on the Graphic Organizer.

What did students find most interesting or significant? What shocked or surprised them? What do they think they learned by focusing on Vietnamese and American women’s views, opinions, and experiences of the war in Vietnam? Identify specific passages you wish to review with students.

Part II of the lesson (below) is more challenging than Part I, as it asks students to engage with sources that reveal gendered experiences of war in Vietnam. (See “Extra Teacher Support” at the end of the lesson plan for more on this subject.) While Part II’s primary sources and questions have been chosen for their accessibility for secondary education classrooms, be sure to evaluate them to make sure they are right for your classroom. Some teachers may choose to skip Part II and move straight to Final Discussion (modifying Final Discussion questions as needed).

4. Work in Pairs: Part II—Return the class back into their original student pairs. Review the instructions for Part II of the Document Sets and instruct students to work with their partners to answer the questions that follow their primary sources. Each student should record their responses to the questions in the space provided.

Notes on the Document Sets: Part II of the Document Sets focuses on how women’s identities

and behaviors were shaped by the Vietnam War, as well as how Vietnamese and American societies’ ideas about women affected the ways women experienced the war. Document Sets A and C have the same Part II sources, as do Document Sets B and D.

You may wish to project Slide #3 from the “Slideshow: Women, Gender, and the Vietnam War” at the front of the class in order to review the “Women, Gender, and War” introduction to Part II with students. Draw from “Extra Teacher Support” at the end of the lesson plan to help answer students’ questions and prepare them to analyze their Part II sources.

5. Final Discussion—Bring the class back together and lead a discussion. Project one or two Part II primary sources from each set at the front of the class and ask students to share their responses to the sources’ questions. Ask students to identify specific excerpts from the primary sources that they used to respond to each question and discuss some of those excerpts as a class.

Return to the lesson’s guiding questions: What are some of the ways that the Vietnam War affected Vietnamese and American women? How were their identities and behaviors shaped by the war? How did Vietnamese and American women view the Vietnam War, their place in it, and its effects on themselves and others? How did Vietnamese and American societies’ ideas about women affect how women experienced war in Vietnam?

Recall the opening poem: Why do students think it matters whether or not people “picture” women when they think about wars and war veterans? Do students think this lesson has helped change who they “picture” when they think about the Vietnam War (or war in general)? Why or why not? Based on what they learned in this lesson, what do students think we lose if women’s views, experiences, and memories are “left out” of the stories we tell about the Vietnam War (or war in general)?

Homework

Students should read Part III and complete “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Part III” (TRB 49-50) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Part III” (TRB-51).

Extra Challenge

1. Analyze Complete Oral Histories—Go deeper into the primary sources by examining complete oral histories of women in the Vietnam War. Show students Professor Narges Bajoghli’s video “What is oral history?” Review the video with students, and discuss both the benefits and potential pitfalls of oral histories, particularly those done long after the conclusion of events. Assign each student two or three complete oral histories from different sides of the war. Have students write a short essay that analyzes the oral histories and puts them “into conversation with one another.” Students should write in the third person and cite evidence from the oral histories.

Oral history sources: Kathryn Marshall, *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975* (1987); Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam: The Oral History* (2000); Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (1998); Larry Engelmann, *Tears Before the Rain: An Oral History of the Fall of South Vietnam* (1990); Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides* (2003); and Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *Memory Is Another Country: Women of the Vietnamese Diaspora* (2009).

2. Men, Gender, and the Vietnam War—Expand your students’ focus on the importance of “gender” as a category of historical analysis by investigating how men’s identities and behaviors were shaped by the war in Vietnam, as well as how societies’ ideas about men affected the way men experienced the war in Vietnam.

For historical background and analysis on U.S. men, gender, and the Vietnam War, see: Andrew Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (2008), Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam Era* (2011), and Brenda M. Boyle, *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives: A Critical Study of Fiction, Films and Nonfiction Writings* (2009).

Extra Teacher Support

Below is an excerpt from scholar Kara Dixon Vuic on women, gender, and war. You may wish to draw from this excerpt as you guide students through Part II of the lesson. (Bracketed text is from Choices.)

Kara Dixon Vuic, *The Routledge History of Gender, War and the U.S. Military* (2018), p. 3-4, 355.

“[Historians who study women and war have asked numerous questions:] How had wars changed governmental expectations of women, as well as women’s own expectations? What functions did women’s labor serve, both for war efforts and for larger national concerns about the security and stability of the home front? What rationales explain women’s integration into the military, and how did women adapt to military life and culture? Did these wartime changes survive? And, how was martial service connected to women’s broader political and social concerns?...

“[In recent decades, historians of women and war have started to] investigate the ways that wars and military service have drawn upon and realigned existing gender norms for women and men, uniformed and civilian. Their scholarship began with the understanding that gender is a social construct that changes over time, varies by situation and need, and is dependent upon other categories such as race, ethnicity, class, generation, region, and sexual orientation. In these works, we see how the military relied not only on women’s and men’s labor but also on women and men filling particular kinds of gendered functions. Although military and government officials often characterized gender as binary—as being either masculine or feminine—historians have problematized that simplistic division and revealed a myriad of ways women and men have thought of themselves and acted as gendered beings [i.e., people thinking and acting based on their own ideas about ‘manhood,’ ‘womanhood,’ and the spectrum in between]....

“[A]ll women’s experiences during wartime are shaped by legal, social, and cultural practices that determine how women can participate, those experiences are further differentiated by interrelated factors such as race, ethnicity, class, age, and type of work performed. Not all women have experienced war or military service in the same ways, even if they wore the same uniform, worked in the same war industry, or offered the same kind of home-front support.”

Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Set A

Part I

Instructions: Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. On the **second read**, underline or highlight passages that reveal something important about the author's opinions on the war in Vietnam, views of the "other side" (i.e., the "enemy"), or their personal experiences during the war. Next, work with your partner to fill in the "Analyzing Sources" section of the "Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War." (Note: The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published. Names with "quotation marks" around them are pseudonyms, or false names, used to protect identities.)

1. Name: Kim Cuc (1996)

Job or Status: Doctor in the North Vietnamese army

After 1968, the war became more fierce because there were more helicopters that could travel anywhere and spot people. We had to disguise the hospital. Living in the jungle for ten years, I ran the hospital almost alone because my nurses had to go out to forage for supplies. Some of them left and never returned and I had no way of knowing what had happened to them. I had to take on any duty that came up. I was the chief of the hospital and there were fifty women and seven men who worked for me.... We moved to keep up with the [battle]front and whenever the clinic was bombed. In some ways we felt safest in the jungle, because the Americans were afraid of it.

2. Name: "Thanh" (2013)

Job or Status: Officer in South Vietnam's Women's Armed Forces Corps

By joining the military, I could earn a salary immediately. I could look after myself and also help my father. I thought he would not approve of my joining up so I just left home and joined of my own accord. My personality was one that liked freedom, travel, and getting to know places, and I wanted to advance myself academically. It was only in the military that I could simultaneously work and study.... [During the 1968 Tet Offensive,] I was assigned to work in the refugee reception centers, schools and other locations where war evacuees who were seeking refuge were assembled. I remember one night a pregnant woman was giving birth and I had to take her to the hospital. There was a 24-hour curfew, not a soul on the road, not a single vehicle. It was very frightening. If the communists had stopped us, we would have been shot.

3. Name: Rose Sandecki (1983)

Job or Status: Nurse in the U.S. Army

I couldn't believe the numbers of people coming in, the numbers of beds and the kinds of injuries that I saw in front of me—I really wasn't prepared for that.... As long as an individual didn't lose a leg, arm, or an eye, as long as they were walking, they would go back to the [battlefront].... I learned a lot very quickly, seeing the types of casualties and the numbers of them. They were all so young. Seeing this on a daily basis twelve to fourteen hours a day, six or seven days a week, I think that I became somewhat callous and bitter.... The way of dealing with the sheer amount of patients, the long hours in the hospital, was by putting up a wall, the emotional numbing that we talk about. I think it built up over a period of time. Each day I went in and the more I saw, the thicker this wall became; it was sort of a skin protecting me from what was going on....

Name: _____

Part II

Instructions: Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. After the **second read**, work with your partner to answer the questions that follow. Underline or highlight passages in the primary sources that help you answer the questions. (**Note:** The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published.)

4. Name: Le Thi Dau (2009)

Job or Status: Nurse in the National Liberation Front (NLF) guerrilla army

[As a nurse for the NLF,] I was friendly with almost all the women I treated.... The ones who had husbands in the main [NLF guerrilla] force were under terrible stress. They never knew if their husbands were dead or alive. [NLF officials] didn't inform them, and they had to live with the constant uncertainty. Many of these women suffered from chronic depression. Mostly they kept it to themselves. But my good friends would talk to me about it. I couldn't really do anything to comfort or console them—just let them talk, give them sympathy and someone whom they could talk to freely about what they were going through....

When I had my first child, my husband sent me back to Saigon [in 1969] to live with his brother. He thought it would be better not to try to raise the child in the [NLF-controlled] village, that it was too dangerous. But I was unhappy about leaving. I felt a terrible guilt about going back to safety myself and leaving my friends. But of course my husband sent me [away], so I had to go.

Questions

1. Le Thi Dau says, “[Vietnamese women] who had husbands in the main [NLF guerrilla] force were under terrible stress.” How does she describe some of the ways the war specifically affected these women?
2. Le Thi Dau says, “I felt a terrible guilt” about leaving the battlefield when she had a child, but that “my husband sent me [away], so I had to go.” What did her husband's decision reveal about specific societal norms and expectations on Vietnamese women?

5. Name: Lily (Lee) Adams (1987)

Job or Status: Nurse in the U.S. Army

As far as the issue about my looking Asian, when I was in civilian clothes and walking around the [U.S. military hospital] compound [in South Vietnam] with a guy, the other [American] guys would just assume I was a [prostitute].... [American] guys would say all kinds of things to me—interesting things—that only [prostitutes] get to hear. That used to bother me. I used to feel like telling them, “You guys don't even know that if you came into my hospital I'd be taking care of you—giving you everything I have just to keep you alive.” It made me angry. It made me very angry. Only it wasn't a personal thing; I was more angry because I was thinking, “So that's how you treat Vietnamese women.”

Questions

1. How did Lily (Lee) Adams' identity as an Asian American woman lead to her being treated differently in comparison to other American women?
2. How did Lily (Lee) Adams' identity as an Asian American woman in the U.S. Army lead her to sympathize with Vietnamese women? What experiences did she share with Vietnamese women?

6. Name: Thuy (2009)**Job or Status: Support Staff in the South Vietnamese military**

I heard that the government was recruiting female army personnel. My two older brothers were already in the army.... I joined the army so that I could give a helping hand.... I heard that with the armed forces you could go here and there, to lots of places. I liked to travel, so I joined up. I was like a tomboy.... My father said: "If she were a boy she would be very active." Even now, I still like to go here and there, I like risky adventures like men.

[My brother] did not want me to join the [South Vietnamese] armed forces. He worked in military communications and he rarely came home to visit my mother.... Every time he came home, I had to hide my uniforms in my neighbor's house. The jeep sent to take me to work had to pick me up at another place instead of in front of my house like usual. I had to change at my neighbor's, I did not dare to wear the uniform in his presence.... My other big brother also forbade me to join the armed forces, but my mother did not voice any opinion about my career so I could still do what I liked, in spite of the fierce opposition from my brothers.

Questions

1. What does Thuy's account reveal about her father's and brother's views on women's roles in the family and South Vietnamese society?
2. According to Thuy, why did she join the South Vietnamese military? How do you think her military service affected how she viewed herself?

Name: _____

Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Set B

Part I

Instructions: Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. On the **second read**, underline or highlight passages that reveal something important about the author's opinions on the war in Vietnam, views of the "other side" (i.e., the "enemy"), or their personal experiences during the war. Next, work with your partner to fill in the "Analyzing Sources" section of the "Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War." (Note: The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published.)

1. Name: Tran Thi Gung (2003)

Job or Status: Soldier in the National Liberation Front (NLF) guerrilla army

[To evade the Americans, we spent a lot of time in tunnels that] were just wide enough to crawl through and so cramped.... Most of the time we lived in the dark. We used kerosene lamps for meetings but never candles. There wasn't enough oxygen so they went out very easily.... During the war I witnessed a lot of killing and suffering. I can't imagine how many I killed. After all, I detonated landmines and threw grenades, both of which could kill many men at a time. I was also an excellent sniper and involved in countless firefights. And, of course, I saw many Vietnamese killed in the war, some right next to me.... But I never felt guilty about the killing I did. It was war. Wouldn't you shoot me if you saw me holding a weapon and pointing it at you? I think it was justified. But if I went to America and killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to my country, I don't feel guilty.

2. Name: Nha Ca (1969)

Job or Status: South Vietnamese civilian; poet and writer

I don't know when I first heard the sound of gunfire, but in the middle of the night I am suddenly awake with explosions shredding my dreams.... The sky lights up with dazzlingly bright flames; the earth violently shakes as if there was an earthquake.... A unit of American soldiers jump down from the trucks and get to the gardens, crawling along the edges of the road toward the fields. In a moment, my garden is filled with American soldiers. I try to keep my cool, sitting silently and clenching my teeth. Several American soldiers watch us carefully, then they slip to the garden, scowling, rifles pointed at the shrubs before they move to another garden. Nothing's happening here.... Don't go outside now. It's dangerous. Everybody thinks this way. Perhaps American soldiers are searching here to seize [NLF members]. We are silent, sitting and looking at each other, waiting nervously.

3. Name: Pinkie Houser (1987)

Job or Status: Personnel sergeant in the U.S. Army Engineer Corps

What the [NLF] did to us, and how they did it to us. Things that they had no reason to do, except that you're an American—You know, I can understand why we [the U.S. military] did a lot of things that we did because of what was done to us [by the NLF]. I saw, in the hospital, bodies [of dead U.S. soldiers] that were not recognizable.... It wasn't only that I was scared. It was just that we were trying to help [the Vietnamese], you know, and they didn't want it. It was a war we shouldn't have been in—which everybody, military and non-military, said the same thing. We didn't have any reason for being there. But the fact was we were there, and we did the best we could do.... [M]y feelings toward the Vietnamese...[were] well, I didn't like them at all. I shouldn't hate them but again I think I have a reason to because of the war.

Part II

Instructions: Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. After the **second read**, work with your partner to answer the questions that follow. Underline or highlight passages in the primary sources that help you answer the questions. (**Note:** The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published.)

4. Name: Quy (2009)

Job or Status: Nurse in the South Vietnamese army

I trained for six months. Instructors were both male and female. There were many female military personnel before me. Graduates could become officers as well. The number of military personnel in the battlefield increased, so they had to increase the number working in administration, just like [the] America[n military did]. Some [South Vietnamese women] were doing work that was predominantly female-oriented like nursing and social work. The women performed work that the men could not do as well. Usually it was 10 percent female [in South Vietnamese military administration units], but it was quite hard to recruit enough women to reach that figure.

Questions

1. What does Quy's account reveal about how the ongoing war in Vietnam affected the number of women in the South Vietnamese military?
2. What does Quy's account reveal about South Vietnamese society's ideas at the time about the "proper" jobs or roles for women in the military?

5. Name: Judy Jenkins (1987)

Job or Status: United States Army Special Services (Support Personnel)

We women [serving in the U.S. military in Vietnam], you know, were noncombatants in a place where we could have gotten killed just as easily as the men. Only we couldn't shoot back. We never had the chance. So what do you do with all your fear and anger? You internalize it. You just absorb it. Because you have a job to do, and that job involves taking care of people. We couldn't let ourselves feel fear and anger. Just like we couldn't let ourselves feel hurt....

I [liked] the special sense of power I had in Vietnam. When it came to bartering and getting things done, I was one of the best. I knew all about the supply system. Because, you see, none of the official supply channels worked. If your rec[reaction] center needed paint or plywood or something, you had to find a place with a surplus, get friends to fly you there, and figure out what you could trade for what you needed. That gave you a great sense of power.... Still, I wouldn't want my daughter to go through what I went through.... As a woman, you had status and power [in your job],...but you also lived in a glass house. You were always stared at. You always felt vulnerable.

Name: _____

Questions

1. According to Jenkins, how were women's identities and behaviors shaped by their status as "noncombatants" in the war who were barred by the U.S. military from serving in combat?
2. What do you think Jenkins meant when she said her work in Vietnam gave her a "special sense of power" but that she "wouldn't want [her] daughter to go through" what she did?

6. Name: Nguyen Thi Binh (2003)**Job or Status: Diplomatic Official of the National Liberation Front (NLF)**

As a diplomat for the NLF, I went to many international conferences to mobilize support for our struggle. The foreign media helped us a great deal. Wherever we went [around the world], the people already knew quite a bit about the war.... Equal rights for men and women was not our main aim at that time. Matters of life and death came first.

[T]he international community took note of the fact that many of our [NLF] representatives were women and that women played a significant role in the war. Our diplomatic mission was not only headed by a woman, but many of the delegates were also women. I met women peace activists from the United States in Jakarta, Bratislava, and France. Those American women truly loved peace so when we met we quickly felt mutual sympathy....

Questions

1. Nguyen Thi Binh says, "Equal rights for men and women was not our main aim at that time." Why not? How did the ongoing war in Vietnam affect her priorities at the time?
2. How does Nguyen Thi Binh's account of her experiences reveal how the war in Vietnam created opportunities for women to play new roles at home and abroad?

Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War

Analyzing Sources

Instructions: Work with your partner to fill in the boxes below. In the **first row**, fill in the background information on each source. (**Note:** Side = South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese/NLF, or U.S.) In the **second row**, summarize the author's opinions on the war in Vietnam, views of the "other side" (i.e., the "enemy"), or their personal experiences during the war. In the **third row**, record something else you learned from this source that you thought was particularly unique, interesting, or significant about women's experiences during the U.S. war in Vietnam.

	Source #1	Source #2	Source #3
Name Occupation or Status Side			
Opinions Views Experiences			
Something Else I Learned			

Name: _____

Making Connections

Share With Your Group—Instructions: Working with your partner, share your sources' background information with the other group members and summarize key points from your analysis of each source. As other group members share, fill in the background information for their sources and record their key points in the "Notes" section below.

Name Occupation or Status Side	Source #1	Source #2	Source #3
Notes			

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Making Connections (cont.)

Similarities and Differences—*Instructions:* Work with your group to fill in the boxes below by identifying similarities and differences across your sources. Use the questions below to guide your work.

Similarities: Did any of the women have similar jobs during the war? Did they have similar opinions on the war? Did they have similar views of the “other side”? Did they have similar experiences? Did any of the women on the “same side” of the war have similar opinions, views, or experiences? What about women on “opposing sides” of the war?

Similarities
<div style="position: absolute; top: 50%; left: 50%; transform: translate(-50%, -50%); opacity: 0.3; font-size: 4em; pointer-events: none;"> PREVIEW Not for Distribution </div>

Differences: Did any of the women have different jobs during the war? Did they have different opinions on the war? Did they have different views of the “other side”? Did they have different experiences? Did any of the women on the “same side” of the war have different opinions, views, or experiences? What about women on “opposing sides” of the war?

Differences
<div style="position: absolute; top: 50%; left: 50%; transform: translate(-50%, -50%); opacity: 0.3; font-size: 4em; pointer-events: none;"> PREVIEW Not for Distribution </div>