



**Preparing for the Spring,  
2008 District American History Assessment**

Dear Students:

Working with the practice documents below can help you prepare to respond thoughtfully to this semester's district assessment question for American history. Below is the question you will be asked to answer.

Question

*Were America's policies and actions (1945-1975) toward Vietnam in the best interests of the American people?*

An important part of developing a thoughtful answer to this question will be to decide what is meant by the phrase "***in the best interests of the American people.***" You will have to decide which people and which interests you regard as most important at that point in American history.

During that time many makers of government policy argued that the best interests of the American people meant the defeat of Communism; which they saw as a threat to America, its values, and its standard of living. They supported the war in Vietnam. Others argued that the best interests of the American people meant that the nations that were allies of the United States believed that the U.S. was a nation that lived up to its commitment to defend small nations from what they saw as aggression from other nations. These people also supported the war in Vietnam.

On the other hand, many people argued that the best interest of American people meant that the United States shouldn't send its young men to fight and die in a civil war that was far away from the American soil. These individuals were opposed to the war. Additionally, many argued the best interest of the American people meant that the money spent on fighting the war would be put to better use in helping to solve the problems of poverty in the United States.

There are, of course, additional ways to determine what is meant by "best interest." Your challenge on the assessment will be to come up with criteria that you use to analyze the issue and the source documents (evidence) you will work with.

The documents below will help you get started in deciding what is meant by "in the best interests of the American people." Examine the documents and complete the chart that follows. After completing the chart write a statement which states what you think "in the best interests of the American people" should mean.

Read the documents that follow and complete the chart on pages 7-8.

### Practice Document #1

#### 1. United States National Interests in South Vietnam.

The deteriorating situation in South Vietnam requires attention to the nature of United States national interests in that country. The loss of South Vietnam to Communism would involve the transfer of a nation of 20 million people from the free world to the Communism bloc. The loss of South Vietnam would make pointless any further discussion about the importance of Southeast Asia to the free world; we would have to face the near certainty that the remainder of Southeast Asia would move to be part of the Communist bloc.

-from a report by Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara to President Kennedy, November 11, 1961

### Practice Document #2

Vietnam is a far away from this quiet campus. We have no territory there, nor do we seek any. The war is dirty and brutal and difficult. And some 400 young men, born into an America that is bursting with opportunity and promise, have ended their lives, on Vietnam's streaming soil.

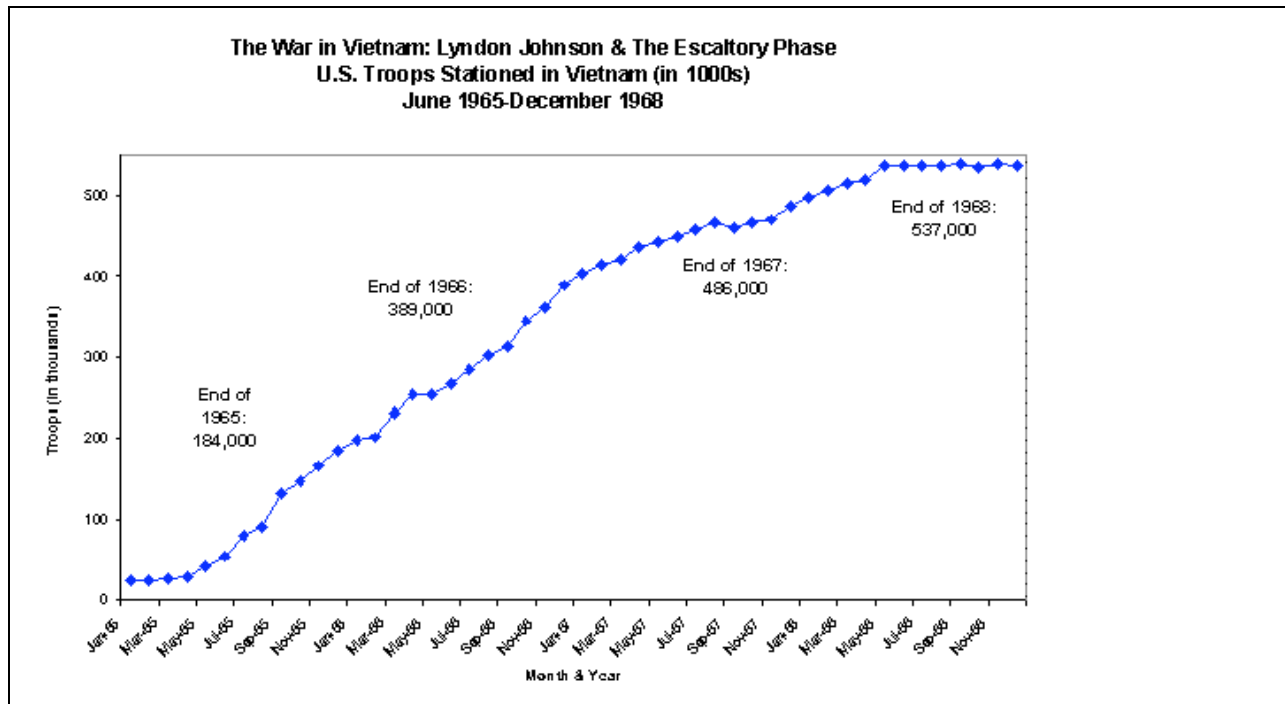
Why must we take this painful road?

What must this Nation hazard its ease, and its interests, and its power for the sake of a people so far away?

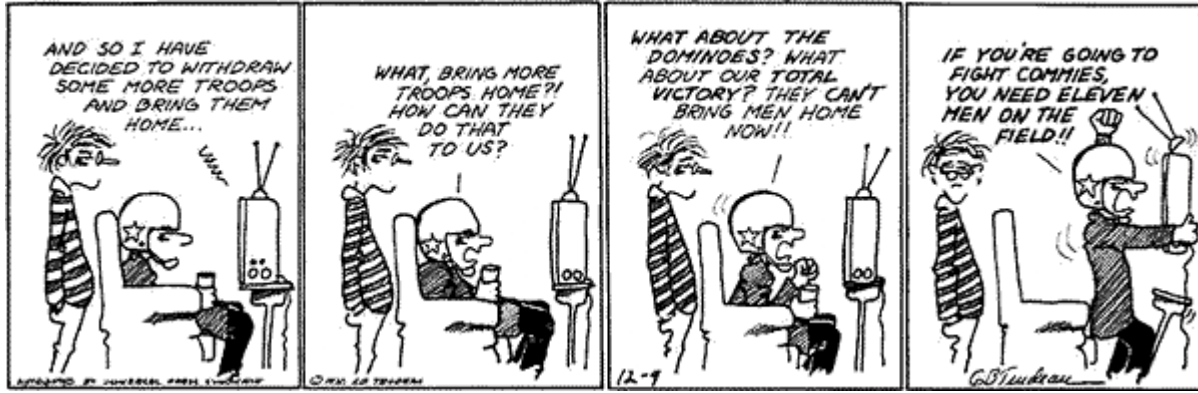
We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny. And in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure...

- President Lyndon B. Johnson at Johns Hopkins University, April 7, 1965

### Practice Document #3



### The Domino Theory



Southeast Asia



### Practice Document #5

We the undersigned are young Americans of draft age. We understand our obligations to defend our country and to serve in the armed forces but we object to being asked to support the war in South Vietnam.

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

Believing that we should not be asked to fight the against the people of Vietnam, we herewith state our refusal to do so.

- from Resistance, Declaration of Conscience Against the War in Vietnam, 1967

### Practice Document #6

There is no question in my mind that he and everybody else that died [as American soldiers in Vietnam], did not die in vain ... that's the price that you pay for freedom, and that's the price that you pay for the kind of stature that we (the people of the U.S.) have, and that's the risk that you take to preserve the ideals that we have.

... I think that the whole executive, legislative and judicial system that we have is superb – it is far better than any other system I'm aware of -- and brought us to a state of power, and really of international stature that we have a responsibility to stay with and to uphold.

- **David Emerson**, father of a soldier killed in Vietnam, speaking in the 1974 documentary, "Hearts and Minds"

**Practice Document #7**

A demonstration by approximately 2,000 NYC construction workers and others supporting American war policy in Vietnam, 1970



- New York Times, May 12, 1970

**Practice Document #8**

Republican Party National Convention, Miami Beach, 1972



Vietnam Vets Against the War Image Gallery - <http://www.vvaw.org/gallery/1970s.php?which=6>

## INTERNATIONAL VIETNAM SURVEY

"Just from what you have heard or read, which of these statements (listed on card) comes closest to the way you, yourself, feel about the war in Vietnam?"

- A. The U. S. should begin to withdraw its troops.
- B. The U. S. should carry on its present level of fighting.
- C. The U. S. should increase the strength of its attacks against North Vietnam.

FINLAND		WEST GERMANY	
Begin to withdraw	81%	Begin to withdraw	58%
Carry on present level	4	Carry on present level	11
Increase attacks	5	Increase attacks	14
No Opinion	10	No Opinion	17
SWEDEN		ARGENTINA	
Begin to withdraw	79%	Begin to withdraw	57%
Carry on present level	10	Carry on present level	6
Increase attacks	4	Increase attacks	6
No Opinion	7	No Opinion	31
BRAZIL		ENGLAND	
Begin to withdraw	76%	Begin to withdraw	45%
Carry on present level	5	Carry on present level	15
Increase attacks	5	Increase attacks	15
No Opinion	14	No Opinion	25
FRANCE		CANADA	
Begin to withdraw	72%	Begin to withdraw	41%
Carry on present level	8	Carry on present level	16
Increase attacks	5	Increase attacks	23
No Opinion	15	No Opinion	20
INDIA		UNITED STATES	
Begin to withdraw	66%	Begin to withdraw	31%
Carry on present level	4	Carry on present level	10
Increase attacks	8	Increase attacks	53
No Opinion	22	No Opinion	6
URUGUAY		AUSTRALIA	
Begin to withdraw	62%	Begin to withdraw	29%
Carry on present level	10	Carry on present level	18
Increase attacks	5	Increase attacks	37
No Opinion	23	No Opinion	16

- from "Vietnam: the Hardest Problem of 1968,;" Gallup Opinion Survey, November, 1967

Practice Document #	1. Author, Date, type of document (primary or secondary)	2. Summary – What is the main idea or point you get from examining this document(s)?	3. Does this document suggest that the war was “in the best interest of the American people?” Explain.	4. If applicable, a quote or paraphrase from the text that provides evidence of how the author defines “in the best interest of the American people?”  If you are working with a photograph describe what you see.	5. How would you use this document to help you answer the assessment prompt? (either to support your position or as an idea you have to counter)  Sample sentence starters include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What this example demonstrates is...</i></li> <li>• <i>This quotation illustrates...</i></li> <li>• <i>This speaker/writer suggests...</i></li> </ul>
1					
2					
3				Not applicable	

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4					
5				(focus on the cartoon)	
6					

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7				Pay attention to what point, if any, the photographer was trying to make in taking this photo.	
8				Pay attention to what point, if any, the photographer was trying to make in taking this photo.	
9				Not applicable	

**Essay Writing Practice:**

**When you take the assessment later this spring you will answer the same question, but work with a different set of documents. *Your challenge will be to use what you have learned about Vietnam and the new set of source documents to write an essay that responds thoughtfully and coherently to the essay question.* Below is an activity to help you begin thinking about how you might start that essay.**

Using the above source documents as a starting point – write a tentative thesis statement that answers the question

*Were America's policies and actions (1945-1975) toward Vietnam in the best interests of the American people?*

Tentative thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_