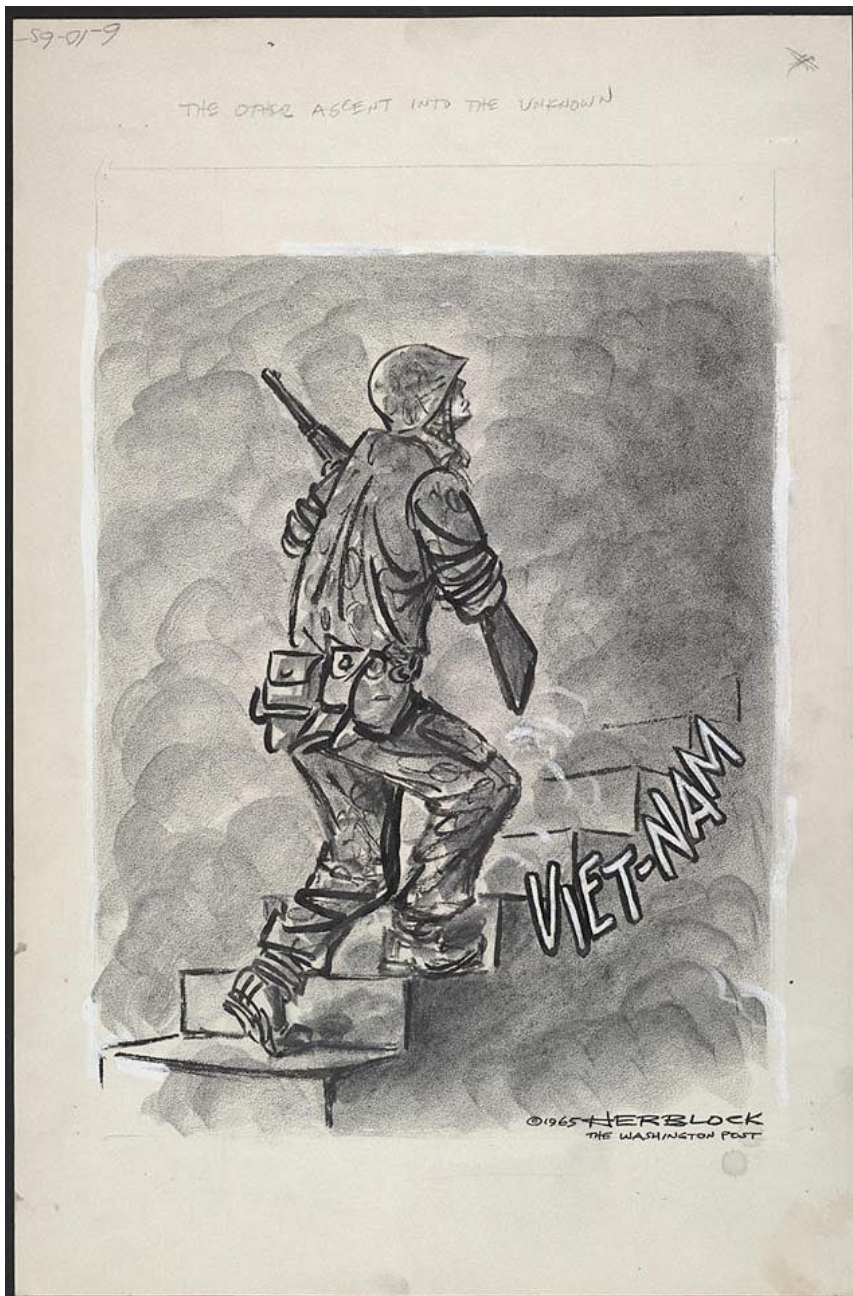


Analyzing Attitudes on the Vietnam War through Political Cartoons



The other ascent into the unknown

During the presidential campaign of 1964, President Lyndon Johnson suggested that Republican candidate Barry Goldwater could not to be trusted to keep the U.S. out of war. But not long after his election, Johnson increased American involvement in the Vietnam war and moved ultimately to take over the war itself. In the same week that NASA sent the Gemini 4 space capsule into orbit, setting new records for a two-man flight, the State Department announced that Johnson had authorized a potential role for direct American military involvement in Vietnam if requested by the South Vietnamese authorities. Herb Block was prescient in his view that this constituted a major step in the involvement of U.S. forces in Indochina.

June 10, 1965 Ink, graphite, and opaque white over graphite under drawing on layered paper

Published in the *Washington Post* (61)

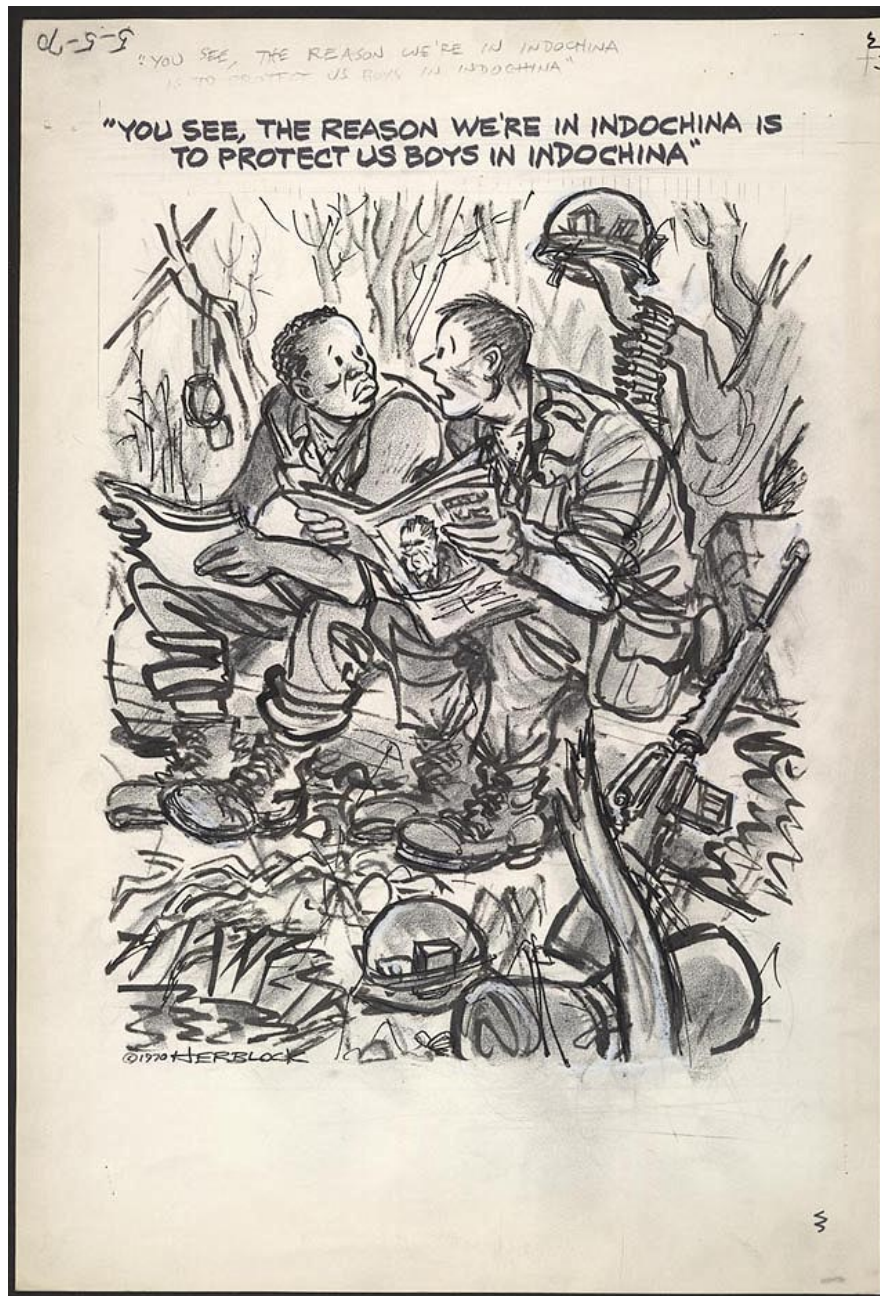
[LC-USZ62-127068](#)



"Our position hasn't changed at all"

After the State Department announced the possibility of a direct American combat role in Vietnam, the White House issued "clarifications," insisting that there had been no change in policy. On June 16, 1965, the Defense Department announced that 21,000 additional soldiers including 8,000 combat troops would go to Vietnam, bringing the total U.S. presence to more than 70,000 men. President Lyndon Johnson continued to obscure the extent of American involvement, contributing to a widespread perception of political untrustworthiness. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, based on a never-verified report of an attempted attack on an American ship, passed the Senate with only two dissenting votes, and gave Johnson all the authority he felt he needed to proceed with the escalation.

June 17, 1965 Ink, graphite, and opaque white over graphite underdrawing on layered paper
Published in the *Washington Post* (62)



**"You see, the reason we're in
Indochina is to protect us boys in
Indochina"**

Despite Richard Nixon's election campaign promises to end the Vietnam War, each new step widened rather than reduced American involvement.

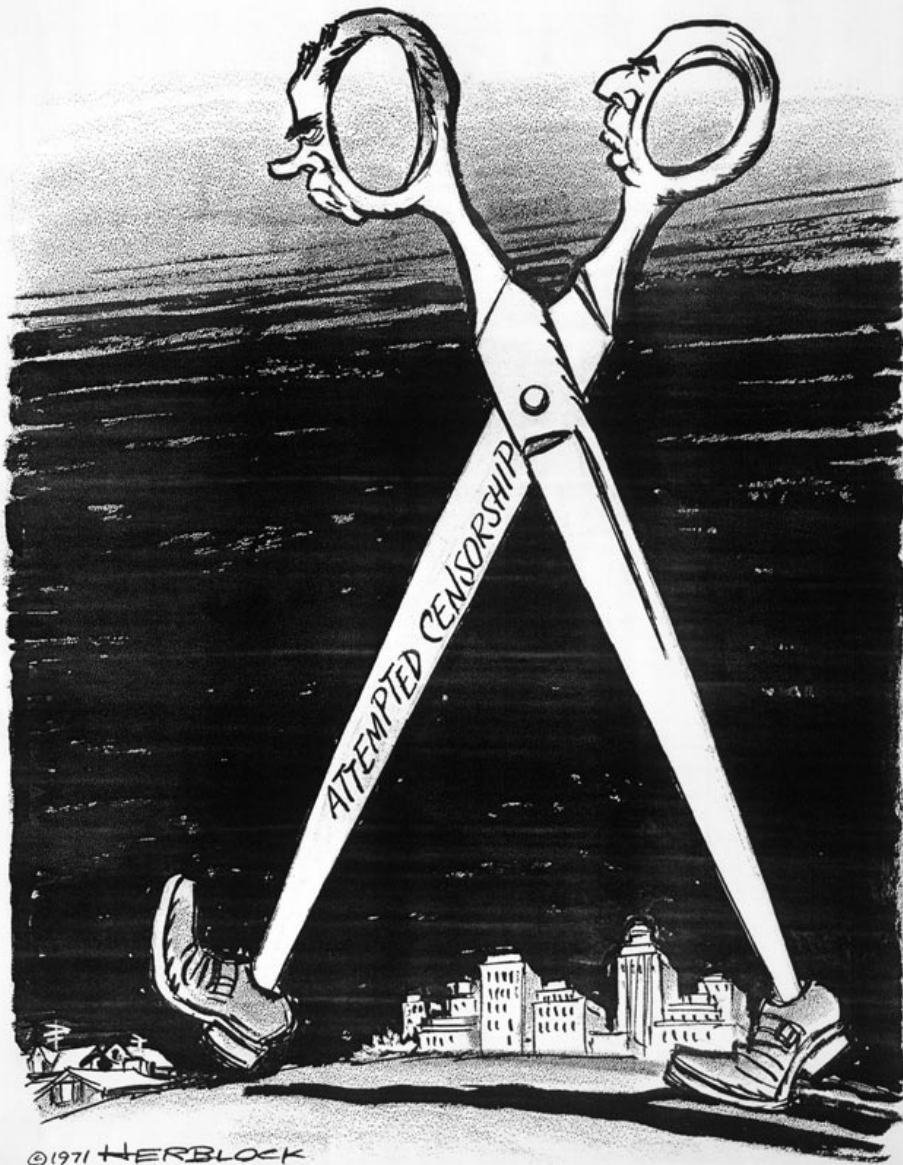
May 5, 1970

Ink, graphite, and opaque white
over graphite underdrawing on
layered paper

Published in the *Washington Post*
(70)

[LC-USZ62-126931](#)

NEW FIGURE ON THE AMERICAN SCENE

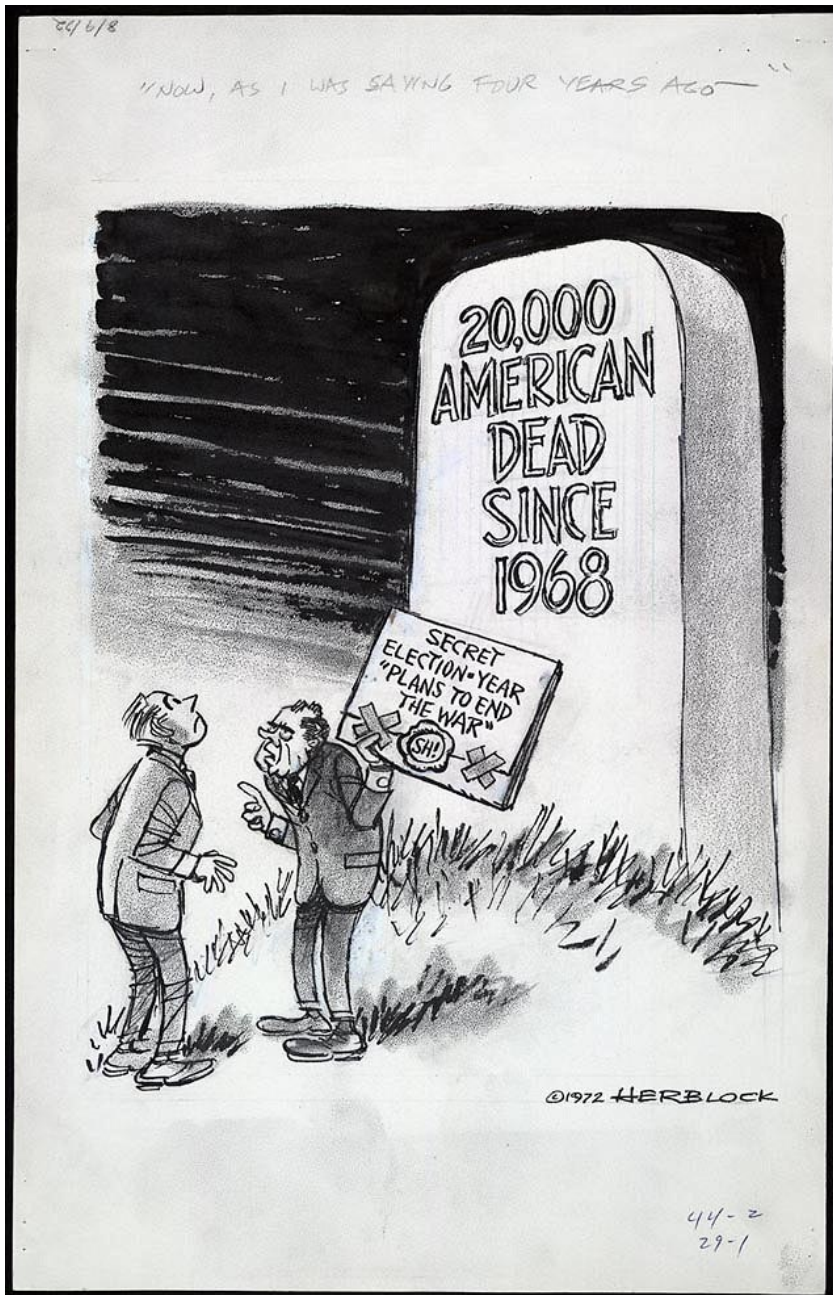


New figure on the American scene

On June 13, 1971, the *New York Times* began publishing installments of the "Pentagon Papers," documents about American involvement in Indochina from the end of World War II to the mid 1960s. The Nixon administration moved to block further publication of the papers, and Attorney General John Mitchell obtained a temporary injunction against *The New York Times*. The *Washington Post* then released two installments before being similarly enjoined. Other papers picked up the series, until June 30, when the Supreme Court rejected the government's request for a permanent injunction. The "New Figure" cartoon was one of many depicting President Richard Nixon's attempts to curb public information, partly through government control of broadcast stations owned by newspapers.

June 20, 1971 Reproduction of original drawing

Published in the *Washington Post* (71)



"Now, as I was saying four years ago—"

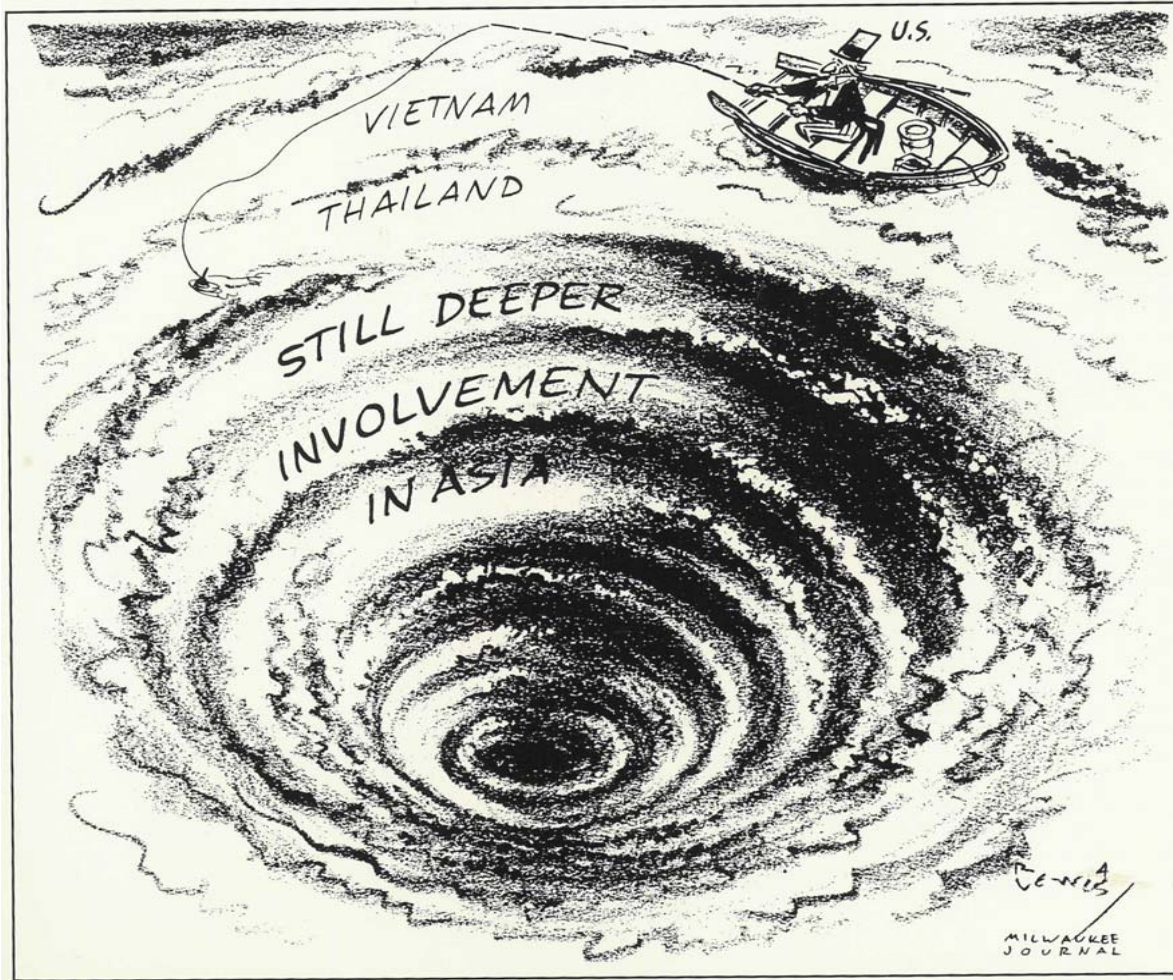
In his 1968 bid for the presidency, Richard Nixon announced to the war-weary country that he had a secret plan to end the Vietnam War. When he ran for re-election four years later, American troops were still fighting in Indochina, with casualties continuing to climb.

August 9, 1972

Ink, graphite, and opaque white over graphite underdrawing on layered paper
Published in the *Washington Post* (73)

[LC-USZ62-126919](#)

Still Deeper Involvement in Asia



“Still Deeper Involvement in Asia.” *Issues of our Times in Cartoons* (Highsmith Inc. 1995.).

Step By Step Into Vietnam

US involvement in Vietnam began gradually in the 1950s and early 1960s. It continued, step-by-step. With each step, the US hoped the war could be brought to a victorious conclusion. But some saw these steps as leading only to a wider war in Asia, with no end in sight.

Historical Background

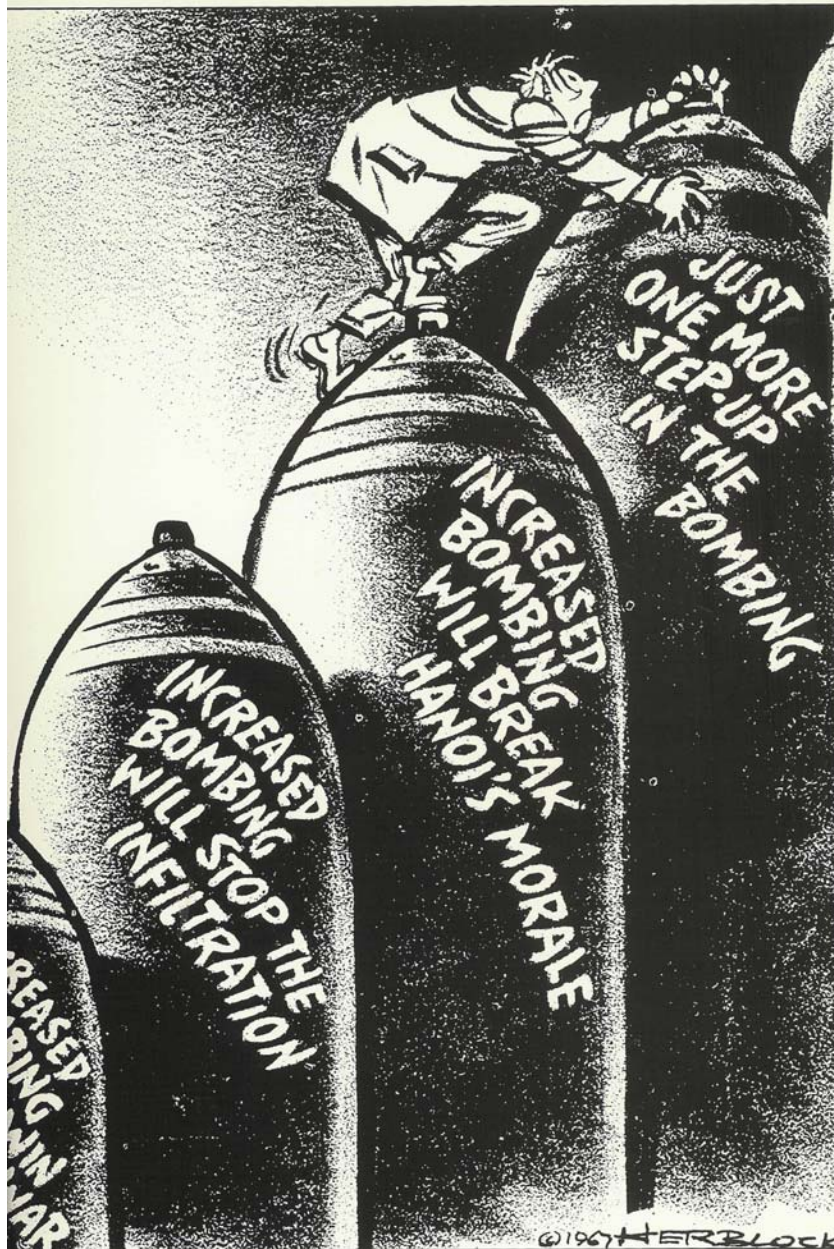
The US got involved in the fighting in Vietnam gradually. This cartoon sees that gradual involvement as doomed. It sees each small step as leading only to others, that gradually. This cartoon sees that gradual involvement as doomed. It until the US is drawn into a wider Asian war it can never hope to win. By the late 1960s, many Americans agreed with the fears expressed in this cartoon. This wider Asian war it can never hope to win. By the late 1960s, many Americans agreed with the fears expressed in this cartoon. This cartoon was drawn in 1966. It suggests that US involvement in the Vietnam War would lead it into bigger troubles in other parts of Asia. What other parts of Asia do you think this cartoonist had in mind?

Based on what you know about conditions in Asia in the 1960s, do you think the warning the cartoon makes was correct?

Based on what you know about conditions in Asia in the 1960s, do you think the warning the cartoons makes was correct?

Debate/Discussion

This cartoon shows the US as a small boat being sucked down into a giant whirlpool labeled "Still Deeper Involvement in Asia." Do you think a cartoon like this could describe any troubled part of the world today? If so, what part of the world are you thinking of? Would you agree with a cartoon like this about the troubles in that part of the world today? Why or why not?



Escalation

Starting in 1965, the US began to bomb parts of Vietnam. The steady escalation of these bombing raids was supposed to force the North Vietnamese communists to begin talking peace. But the gradual escalation of the bombing never seemed to work. North Vietnam was usually willing to take the punishment and just keep on fighting.

“Onward and Upward and Onward and -.” *Issues of our Times in Cartoons* (Highsmith Inc. 1995.).

Onward and Upward and Onward and —

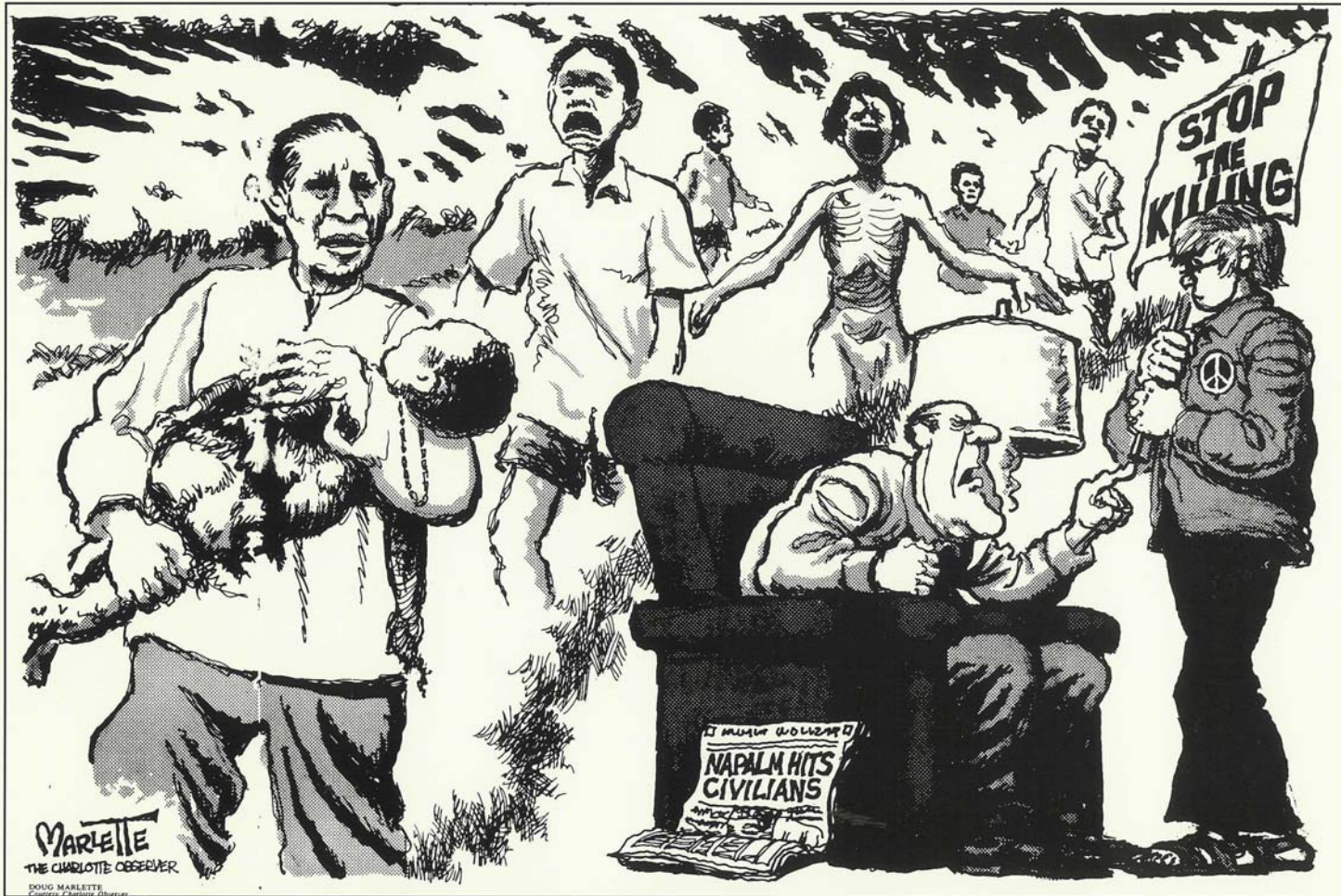
Historical Background

In this 1967 cartoon, the words on the bombs say that increased bombing will “win the war,” “stop infiltration,” and “break Hanoi’s morale.” But the cartoon really suggests that the bombing won’t do any of these three things.

Based on your knowledge about Vietnam, explain why the bombing failed to accomplish any of these things.

Debate/Discussion

Some say that no amount of bombing by the US could ever have won the Vietnam War. But others say the bombing would have worked had the North Vietnamese been sure that we would keep it up no matter how long it took. With which point of view do you agree more? Why?



"You Peaceniks Burn Me Up!"

"You Peaceniks Burn Me Up!." *Issues of our Times in Cartoons* (Highsmith Inc. 1995.).

In Favor of Anti-War Protest

As protests against the war grew, some Americans seemed more upset about the behavior of the young protesters than about the violence of the war itself. This cartoon takes the side of protesters.

Historical Background

As the war went on, many Americans began arguing about it. Especially at many colleges, students marched and protested against the war. Not all adults greeted these young protesters favorable. This cartoon takes the sides of the protesters and makes a harsh judgment about their older critics. This cartoon is abased on a famous Vietnam War photo.

Debate/Discussion

Show this cartoon to an adult who remembers the Vietnam War years. Tape-record or write down that person's thoughts about the cartoon and about the protests over Vietnam. As a group, discuss the results of these interviews.



"Name a Clean One."

"Name a Clean One." *Issues of our Times in Cartoons* (Highsmith Inc. 1995.).

In Favor of Anti-War Protest

As protests against the war grew, some Americans seemed more upset about the behavior of the young protesters than about the violence of the war itself. This cartoon takes the side of the protesters.

Historical Background

This cartoon sees the protesters, not those supporting the war, as the dishonest and unrealistic ones in their views about the war. Those who supported the war effort said that no matter how awful it was, we were right to try to stop communism from taking over all of Vietnam. The protesters in this cartoon are saying that Vietnam is an especially “dirty” war. But the figure on the left insists that all wars are dirty.

From what you know about Vietnam, do you think it was more brutal and unjust than other wars? Why or why not?

Debate/Discussion

Compare the way these protesters are sketched to the protester in the cartoon at the top of this page. Which cartoon do you think gives the most accurate picture of people who marched and protested against the Vietnam War? Why? Debate the two cartoons and their views of 1960s anti-war protest.



"The Slow U.S. Withdrawal." *Issues of our Times in Cartoons* (Highsmith Inc. 1995.).

The Slow U.S. Withdrawal

In the 1970s, the US turned more of the war over to South Vietnam's army. This plan was called "Vietnamization." But as this cartoon suggests, the South Vietnamese army was unable to frighten or stop the North Vietnamese. North Vietnam took over South Vietnam in 1975.

Historical Background

After the Tet Offensive in 1968, President Johnson stopped sending more troops to Vietnam. And in 1969, President Nixon began to bring US soldiers home. His plan was to strengthen South Vietnam's army and turn the ground fighting over to it- while still using US planes to bomb North Vietnam's bases and supply lines. This plan was called "Vietnamization." But South Vietnam's Army, the ARVN, never fought well against North Vietnam. Some said that ARVN soldiers didn't really support their government or want to fight for it. This cartoon shows ARVN as a scarecrow unable to frighten anyone. And in fact, in 1975, just two years after the last US soldier Vietnam, North Vietnam did conquer all of South Vietnam. The Tet Offensive was a series of attacks by the National Liberation Front, rebels in South Vietnam who were allied with North Vietnam. The offensive began on January 30, 1968, on Tet, the lunar holiday. Attacks took place all over South Vietnam. The communists hoped the attacks would lead to huge uprisings against South Vietnam's government throughout the country. This did not happen. As a result, some 40,000 communists were killed- mainly NLF fighters. Tet was a huge military defeat for the communists. But it was actually a big political victory for them as well – in part because of how the US public saw it.

Debate/Discussion

Many anti-war protesters were angry with President Nixon's handling of the war as they had been with President Johnson's. Yet it was Nixon who began taking US soldiers out of Vietnam. He also ended the Selective Service System, the draft that forced young people to join the army whether they wanted to or not. At the same time, Nixon also stepped up US bombing in Vietnam. And he dealt harshly with protesters at home. Divide into two groups. The first group will argue against Nixon's Vietnam policies. The second group will defend those policies. As a class, debate this question: Was Richard Nixon unfairly criticized by those who opposed US involvement in Vietnam?