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The effects of the Vietnam War on American
domestic politics during the Lyndon B. Johnson
administration.

Relatrice: Prof. Elena Calandri

Laureando: Ian Antonio Carrara
matricola N. 2011137

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INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam war represents one of the most important events of the second half of the 20th century. On one hand it was an emblematic event for the broader international context of the Cold War and on the other it is widely accepted as a watershed moment in American history.

In the case of its significance in the Cold War, the Vietnam War is a classic example of a proxy war. Vietnam at the time had only been independent from France since 1954 and was divided into two countries, North Vietnam, which fell under the Soviet sphere of influence, and South Vietnam, which fell under the American sphere of influence, with the former attempting to overthrow the latter almost immediately after gaining independence. In this sense the Vietnam War represents an attempt by the United States' to protect its interests abroad.

The Vietnam War's importance for American history on the other hand, specifically manifests itself in the change of mentality that characterised the United States in the years after the war. The conflict touched the lives of the vast majority of Americans, due to its effects on the nation's economy as well as its civil and social policies. This was due to the fact that many Americans were brought to question their government's actions in almost every aspect, from civil rights to environmentalism. The Vietnam War encompassed all of these topics, it shed even more light on institutional racism as well as imperialism and poverty.

In this this sense the Vietnam war represents one of the most consequential episodes of American history. However, the war was a long one, many historians called it "America's Longest War", and it endured five presidential administrations. The president that made the Vietnam War such a historical event was Lyndon Johnson, in fact, it was under his administration that the conflict transformed from a civil war in a distant country to an international one that took the lives of hundreds of millions.

Johnson's presidency began with the assassination of President Kennedy with whom he had served as Vice-president, and was then elected president in 1964. For a number of reasons Johnson's focus as president was supposed to be his

domestic policy. Previously as a senator domestic problems had always been amongst his main concerns and his time as Vice-president to Kennedy saw the rise of the civil rights movement and a new importance to equality and justice emerged in politics.

From this perspective Johnson believed that his legacy would be determined by a series of social renewal programs that were part of the so-called “Great Society” project. This project’s main objective was that of reducing poverty in the United States by creating job opportunities and reviving participation in community activities in order to stimulate participation in local politics.

The main difficulty that would emerge in Johnson’s presidency, however would be the Vietnam War. Due to the political and social instability in the United States under Johnson’s tenure of the White House, the underachievement of the American military in Indochina and the broader geopolitics of the bipolar world, the president was forced into deepening America’s involvement in the conflict. This eventually led to the war becoming the true defining feature of his legacy, while the Great Society would ultimately become overshadowed by the conflict in Southeast Asia.

At this point we can acknowledge the fact that the Vietnam War heavily influenced the decisions made by the Johnson administration in domestic politics. In order to better understand the extent of the influence that the Vietnam War had on policy making, it is important to understand the context of the conflict when Johnson became president. The war’s effect on domestic policy manifests itself through the economic cost of the war and the uncertainty surrounding it, which eventually led to redirecting public funds to the military budget. It also affected the social and civil spheres due to the many controversial aspects of the war such as the large amount of resources and manpower needed, institutional racism in the military, the conduct of the armed forces in connection to widespread violence and the way the military was perceived in the United States thanks to the development of mass media. All of these aspects contributed to a nationwide sentiment of opposition towards the war, eventually leading the public to apply significant pressure on policy makers, as well as dividing American society on the

lines of those who supported the nation's war effort and those who didn't, a division that would later reflect on a broad variety of other topics as well.

Economic and social pressures that were born out of the war, eventually defined Johnson's presidency and led to his downfall.

CHAPTER I The Vietnam War during president Johnson's administration

In order to fully comprehend the ways in which the Vietnam War affected the decisions made in Washington during Lyndon Johnson's administration, it is important to first understand the historical events that occurred in Vietnam during the 1960s. The years from 1963, when President Johnson's tenure of the White House began, to 1968, the last year of his term, were some of the more consequential of the Vietnam War. The changes in policies applied in Indochina in the 1960's by Johnson were seen by the administration as the natural response to the events that were unfolding in Southeast Asia. However, the policies put in place in Vietnam, the relationship between these policies and what was happening in America and the way the United States conducted the war would eventually influence the decisions made at home as well.

CHAPTER I.I Historical Contextualization of the Vietnam War during president Johnson's administration

A first aspect of analysing the relationship between foreign and domestic policy during the Vietnam War is the historical contextualization of the events that unfolded in Southeast Asia and the political and military decisions made by the United States government during this period.

A first aspect to consider when understanding American involvement in Vietnam under Lyndon Johnson is that the situation he had to deal with in Indochina was inherited from previous Presidents. American involvement in South Vietnam began in 1955 with president Eisenhower, immediately after the country's independence from France. During the presidencies of both Eisenhower and Kennedy, American intervention in Southeast Asia was limited to mostly providing aid as well as military advisors to the South Vietnamese government.

The Vietnam War in the first months of Johnson's presidency was still widely considered to be a civil war. While the amount of Americans in the country began to grow to considerable numbers during Kennedy's administration, American forces on the peninsula were still limited to mostly military advisors, instructors

and small groups of special forces. The conflict itself and American involvement in Vietnam was still not well known by the American public.

This meant that when Lyndon B. Johnson's administration began after the assassination of President Kennedy, he initially inherited a situation of relative calm in Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Diem's authoritarian regime in the South had just been toppled by a coup led by general Duong Van Minh, opening a brief phase in the war during which a peace agreement with North Vietnam seemed possible. This implied that Minh was willing to negotiate for an agreement that would let North Vietnam and South Vietnam coexist without the presence of foreign troops in the two countries. From the President's perspective, this situation meant that Johnson would have a brief period of time during which he could focus his resources on his domestic plans, in order to create a favourable image of himself to the eyes of the public before his presidential bid in the 1964 elections. North Vietnam wasn't willing to fight when the South Vietnamese government was willing to negotiate peace, meaning that there was no urgency in the conflict that would push Johnson to further escalate the American presence in Vietnam.

The situation in Vietnam under Minh's regime, however, went against American interests when it comes to foreign policy and many prominent military and political figures in Washington believed that the American presence in Vietnam and the war with the communist regime in Hanoi, were essential to limiting the spread of communism throughout southeast Asia. A peace agreement with Hanoi would have important geopolitical consequences by demonstrating a lack of resolve on behalf of the United States. After only three months Minh was overthrown by an American backed coup led by general Nguyen Khanh, who established a regime that was more cooperative with the Americans and allowed U.S. forces to carry out covert operations meant to quietly contrast the North Vietnamese presence in the south, without directly involving the United States. This allowed President Johnson to continue the war in Vietnam while maintaining his image as a peace loving president before the elections.

While the United States covert operations allowed it to continue the war silently, it didn't bring the expected results. Khanh's regime wasn't gaining the support of

the Vietnamese people and the war in the south didn't seem to falter North Vietnamese morale. This brought many to believe that covert operations weren't sufficient and that it was necessary to openly attack the North in order to consolidate the presence of American forces in Vietnam and Khanh's pro American government in Saigon. In August 1964 an opportunity arose when North Vietnamese forces openly attacked American warships patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin. This was considered to be a clear act of provocation and a decisive reaction was expected from the President. Congress eventually conceded more authority to the executive branch, including the ability to use any measure necessary, even force, in order to protect South Vietnam. Only recently documents have been released that demonstrate that the American Military provoked the North Vietnamese into attacking them. The incident in the gulf of Tonkin therefore represented the perfect excuse for the American military to initiate a gradual increase in the use of force in Vietnam.

In late 1964 Lyndon Johnson's second administration was confirmed and while most believed that his victory implied peace, the Gulf of Tonkin incident and an attack on an American military installation at Pleiku at the hands of the Viet Cong suggested otherwise. Johnson then gave the order to initiate a full-scale bombing plan in Vietnam and gradually increased the amount of American troops in the peninsula from 25,000 in 1964, to 165,000 in late 1965. These acts were synonymous with the escalation of a war that many hoped would eventually end under the Johnson administration. This led to the deterioration of many middle class Americans' view of their government. Religious groups, students and others began organizing nationwide demonstrations against American involvement in the war giving birth to the anti-war movement that would later play a pivotal role in the war and in American society in general.

1964 therefore represents a pivotal year in the Vietnam War, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident gave the United States Military the possibility to make a stand against the spread of communist influence in Southeast Asia, while Johnson's victory at the 1964 elections made it possible for him to escalate the war from a regional civil war to an international war.

In order to alleviate the pressure applied by the newly formed activist groups Johnson's advisors deemed it necessary to promote an image of the President as one that was willing to negotiate a peace agreement with North Vietnam. This led to the decision to ease the president's bombing campaign and promote several international peace missions without being realistically prepared to face negotiations with Hanoi. The president's unwillingness to come to terms with the North Vietnamese was due to the fact that the war still wasn't proceeding in the United States' favour. The limited warfare policy used by the Johnson administration made the American bombing campaign less effective and the North Vietnamese could boast more and more military support from the Chinese and Soviet governments. In this climate peace talks would likely lead to forcing the United States into conceding more than they were willing to and into weakening of America's position on the global stage.

The years between 1966 and 1968 were characterized by a gradual escalation in the number of American troops in North Vietnam and the deterioration of public support for the war in the United States. In 1966 the American response to the failure of their bombing campaign was to raise the number of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam to 431,000 and the military believed that more and more ground forces were needed to contrast the North Vietnamese. This led to intensifying draft calls which would on one hand raise the amount of soldiers the military could send to Vietnam, but at the same time would have important social consequences in the United States. Many of Johnson's advisors, were underestimating the cost of the war and the President himself chose to listen mostly to those that seemed more optimistic and that believed that American success was still achievable. At the same time the number of individuals opposed to the war in the United States grew, creating social upheaval and widening the divide between those who supported the war and those who didn't.

A major turning point in the war occurred on the 30th of January 1968, when the president and his advisors, who were confident in the Viet Cong's inability to carry out offensive operations, were surprised with a nationwide attack in South Vietnam. Known as the Tet offensive, due to it occurring on the Vietnamese lunar year, or Tet, the Viet Cong attacked significant sites in almost every major city in

South Vietnam, including the Presidential Palace, the American Embassy, military installations and sites of historical and cultural significance like the citadel in Hue. While the South Vietnamese and Americans didn't sustain the same amount of losses as the Viet Cong and eventually regained the territories lost at the hands of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, the event was perceived as a failure in the eyes of the American public. The fact that military and political leaders seemed optimistic about a North Vietnamese defeat only days before the attack itself caused mistrust towards the American government, and led many to question president Johnson's policy in southeast Asia.

The Tet offensive confirmed for many the idea that thousands of men and billions of dollars were being sent to a war with no end in sight, the economic effects of the conflict in Vietnam, impeded Johnson to deal with domestic problems and the social effects underlined problems within American society that were perceived by many to be far more important than the war in Vietnam. These many effects left Johnson politically vulnerable and criticised not only by the public, but by political institutions as well, and forced him to not accept another term as the democratic nominee for the presidential elections. By the end of his presidency, Johnson was willing to reach an agreement with North Vietnam in order to secure national unity in the United States, but peace proposals promoted by Nixon's election campaign brought to a lack of cooperation between the Johnson administration and the South Vietnamese.¹

The Johnson administration's actions during the Vietnam War were fundamental not only when it came to the situation in the southeast Asian country but also for the situation in the United States. The constant and gradual escalation of a war in a distant country with no end in sight caused social uproar in the United States and brought to light deeper problems within American society which effected every aspect of life of all Americans.

¹ W.I. Cohen, "The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 161-174.

CHAPTER I.II Controversial Aspects of president Johnson's policy in Vietnam

Lyndon Johnson's time as President of the United States was heavily marked by his policy in Vietnam, which eventually carried heavy implications for his domestic policy. At this point in order to better understand the consequences of the Vietnam War in the 1960s it is important to analyse the various aspects of president Johnson's policy in Vietnam that made the war such a controversial and influential topic in American society and in American domestic policy.

CHAPTER I.II.I President Johnson's escalation policy

The most prominent aspect from which most of the events that occurred in Vietnam and the United States stems from the constant and dramatic escalation of U.S. forces in Vietnam. When Lyndon Johnson was vice-president to Kennedy the war in Vietnam was considered to be another regional civil war but in just a couple of years it became an international war involving one of the world's biggest superpowers, draining vast amounts of resources and that saw the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

What made the escalation of the war in Vietnam so influential over public opinion and the economy was the exponential growth in the number of American servicemen in Vietnam. As mentioned previously the build-up of soldiers in Vietnam began with the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which assigned powers to the president to ensure the survival of South Vietnam.

The first episode of open military action from the United States occurred after the Gulf of Tonkin incident and involved a limited bombing campaign. However, the attack at the Pleiku military installation in the early months of 1965 led many of Johnson's advisors to believe that additional protection had to be provided to American airstrips, therefore providing the basis for intensifying the bombing campaign, as well as requesting for 20,000 American soldiers to be deployed in the South, in order to reach a total of 33,000 men by May 1965.

This amount of soldiers was just enough to protect airbases, however, in order to gain ground on the North, a larger contingent of forces was necessary. Advisors began to suggest increasingly larger numbers of troops to deploy in Vietnam. First it was believed that 82,000 soldiers were needed, then 123,000 and then 175,000. This raise in troops was due to two main factors, on one hand the United States initial intervention hadn't deteriorated North Vietnamese forces as expected, secondly, it was meant to give South Vietnam more time to gather additional forces for its army.

At this point many understood the full extent of the conflict in which the United States was fighting and it was believed that the war would both last longer and require more troops than initially expected. The additional troops weren't any closer to gaining significant successes against the North Vietnamese as they were before and the President was faced with two options in 1965, initiate a de-escalation of the war and effectively abandoning the South Vietnamese government or further escalating the conflict. While the first option was more in line with Johnson's interests in focusing in the Great Society in domestic policy, it didn't represent a viable option due to the Cold War dynamics that affected international policy. Abandoning Vietnam meant abandoning Asia in the eyes of many American politicians.

In September 1965 the president agreed with his advisors to bring the number of soldiers in Vietnam to 210,000. While the amount of Americans in Vietnam was reaching considerably high numbers, the South Vietnamese government and army were still struggling to sustain themselves. So American military officials agreed that additional American soldiers could compensate for the lack of South Vietnamese soldiers while the government in Hanoi would attempt to stabilize itself. This led The White House to send more troops in order to reach 325,000 soldiers by the end of 1965.

This number, however was still not enough to either support the South Vietnamese government or reduce the North Vietnamese fighting capabilities. And in 1966 the American fighting force in Vietnam reached 400,000. By April 1967 the American military reached its peak number of American soldiers in

Vietnam. There were 575,000 men in the country and advisors were requesting more. However, economic pressures caused by the war and the social pressure to put an end to the human cost of the war prevented Johnson from further escalating the war.²

This brief history of the escalation of the Vietnam war shows how quickly the situation in Vietnam deteriorated and brought the president to raise the number of American soldiers in Vietnam from 33,000 in 1964, to 575,000 in 1967. While the volatile situation in Vietnam meant that constant adjustments to American involvement in Vietnam were made, it is still difficult to fully understand why the war was escalated in such a dramatic way.

There are many theories that attempt to explain why the decision to escalate the war was taken in the first place, but three schools of thought are generally accepted to provide realistic answers to the question. A first school of thought adheres to “the quagmire theory” that claims that the decision to intervene in Vietnam, not only during Johnson’s administration but under President Kennedy’s as well, was founded in the optimism that characterised American society especially in the first few years immediately after the Second World War. It was believed that American technological superiority and the sheer size of the American military gave the United States an advantage that implied that any American intervention would inevitably turn out to be an American victory. This theory also relies on the idea that in the initial phases of the war, when the escalation process began, the American government did not have to deal with the anti-war movements that later developed in American society. This was due to the fact that American post war optimism was also characterised with a blind faith in the American leadership and the president’s decisions. The initial support for the government and faith in the military also led Johnson and his advisors to underestimate the conditions in which American soldiers would have to fight in. Vietnamese social and cultural factors were not taken into consideration in the early years of the war and the real difficulties of the situation were ignored. At

² W.H., Fritz, “The Vietnam War: Why Escalate?” US Army War College. 2000

every defeat it was simply believed that more manpower was necessary, however, the growing number of soldiers in Vietnam made it more difficult to eventually pull out from the country. It is also believed that the American leadership didn't fully comprehend the history of Vietnam and didn't consider the fact that the colonial history that affected Vietnam and the way the American's conducted the war assimilated them to another imperialist power, therefore rendering more difficult the military's mission to win over the support not only of the local Vietnamese population but of the American public later on as well. These factors led Johnson to involve himself more and more in a practically unwinnable war that seemed impossible to escape from without significant political consequences abroad and at home.³

A second hypothesis, known as "the stalemate theory", states that the decisions made in Vietnam intentionally searched for a stalemate in order to prevent additional conflicts at home and abroad. The main theory was that in order to pursue victory more the bombing campaign would need to be intensified and the amount of soldiers sent to Vietnam would have to grow. This, however, could have drawn China as well as other countries into the conflict, therefore expanding a war that was already demanding a considerable amount of resources, from a regional one to an international one. An escalation of the war on this level would not only have heavy economic implications, but would also likely erode the public opinion of Johnson in the United States. A full withdrawal from Vietnam on the other hand could have put Johnson in a difficult position at home with many Americans that believed that a stance had to be made against communism. Allowing a communist takeover of the south would be seen as an acceptance of communism in a period of American history where the ideology was seen as one of the greater threats to the United States. On an international level, it would be seen as a sign of weakness and would make military action by China and the Soviet Union even against the United States more probable. This meant that

³ D.L., Anderson, "The Vietnam War", in "A Companion to American Foreign Relations.", Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006, pp. 313-314.

Johnson decided to gradually increase the presence of Americans in Vietnam, in order to reach a balance that would allow him to show his political adversaries in Washington and abroad that he was ready to prevent a communist takeover of Vietnam, and by conducting a limited war, in other words using methods that wouldn't involve a more drastic escalation in force, he wouldn't bring more countries into the conflict.⁴

Finally, the most accepted theory, known as "the containment theory", placed U.S. escalation in Vietnam in the wider Cold War context. In this case the Vietnam War is studied with the traditional geopolitical analysis of the Cold War, according to which communism had to be contained to as little countries as possible. This theory shares close ties with the domino theory according to which the consolidation of an ideology in one country would eventually expand to its bordering countries as well. In other words, if Americans abandoned South Vietnam, communism would eventually spread there, before growing throughout Southeast Asia. In this sense Johnson and his advisors believed that an American presence in South Vietnam was essential to oppose the growth of communist influence in Asia. While some believe that the war and escalation could have been avoided and didn't believe in the domino theory, other's believed that U.S. participation in the war was inevitable. Being a superpower in a bipolar context implied that the United States couldn't withdraw in Vietnam as it would inevitably fall under the influence of the Eastern Bloc.⁵

While the containment theory mostly focuses on the international aspect of the war in Vietnam, the effects of domestic policy cannot be underestimated. In fact, Johnson planned a number of social reforms the likes of which hadn't been seen since the Roosevelt administration. In particular Johnson prioritised the idea of the "Great Society", a series of programs designed to eliminate poverty nationwide. The pursuit of the Great Society led Johnson to seek a delicate balance between conducting both the war abroad and domestic renewal. In this context the President would base his decisions in the war during the early sixties on the

⁴ Ivi pp. 314-315

⁵ Ibidem

necessity of preventing a conservative backlash, that would prevent him from enacting his social reforms in the U.S. The Great Society also influenced U.S. intervention in Vietnam when it came to nation building, so much so that the proposal for the Mekong River Delta Project was meant to mirror the war on poverty in the United States.

After the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the escalation of the war Johnson not only had to balance the Vietnam War and his domestic plans but he also had to deal with the social uproar in the United States. This was caused by a number of factors that were related to the conduct of the American military in Vietnam, the rising casualty rate and a broad variety of social factors that made the war reflect the domestic problems of the United States.

Another effect of the domestic sphere on the international one is interaction between political affairs and military affairs. In this perspective the military was also forced to conduct a limited war, which meant that it had to adhere to strict rules that made it more difficult to eradicate the Viet Cong in the South. It also meant that it had to fight a war using methods such as search and destroy missions which required a large amount of manpower, forcing the military to constantly request more troops. At the same time the larger amount of Americans brought to the opposite result, it assimilated them to the French colonialists and led to mistrust of the south Vietnamese people towards the South Vietnamese government and the U.S. This brought to the creation of an environment which made American operations more difficult and refuelled the belief that more troops were necessary. The growing demand for troops led to the reintroduction of the draft which brought to light many social problems within the United States and eventually consolidated the civil rights movement.

The draft, which was strictly connected to the escalation policy, was another controversial element of the Vietnam War. The draft system that was used during the Johnson administration was planned to limit the number of soldiers in Vietnam, so as to not reach the same numbers of draftees as in the World Wars, therefore a more rigorous selection system was introduced. This led to the introduction of the Draft Board System and the Selective Service System, which

were supposed to limit the amount of men considered to be suitable for military service based on a system of deferments. The local draft board system was loosely limited by federal guidelines and often varied considerably between one and another. Amongst the factors considered for deferments were an individual's marital status, if they had children, occupational factors and their academic potential. Draftees were also subject to physical and mental evaluation tests. The draft became a heated topic of discussion from 1966 when the demand in troops drastically rose and more soldiers were needed. This led to the lowering of testing standards and a number of flaws within the system became apparent, in particular regarding the racial composition of the draft pools.

While Johnson's policy tended to favour the domestic sphere over the international one, the escalation of the Vietnam war from a civil war to an international war forced Lyndon Johnson's hand into sending more and more resources and men to the Indochinese Peninsula eventually leading him to face difficulties not only abroad but at home as well.

From this perspective the first and most important source of controversy was the war itself and the reasoning behind U.S. involvement.

CHAPTER I.II.II War crimes in the Vietnam War

U.S policy in Vietnam was another important factor in affecting the public's opinion of the war, in particular the brutality of it and the atrocities that were committed due to U.S. military doctrines led many to question American policy. Footage and interviews with veterans and eventually news reports proved to many that the Vietnam War was one in which numerous crimes had been committed by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, as well as by the South Vietnamese and Americans. It soon became well known in the second half of the sixties and the first half of the seventies that war crimes were not an uncommon event in Southeast Asia.

The most infamous episode was the My Lai massacre in 1968 when American soldiers killed hundreds of innocent civilians in the hamlet of My Lai. While the event in itself seems unthinkable, it shed light on the fact that it wasn't an

uncommon event. The Vietnam War Crimes Working Group indicates that murder, rape, torture, executions, destruction of civilian property as well as other crimes were not rare incidents. For example, a psychological study conducted by Dr. Haley on the psychological effects of the war demonstrated that out of 140 Vietnam veterans being treated for PTSD, 40 of them admitted to having had committed some sort of atrocity during the war.⁶ During the conflict atrocities were committed by both sides. The general violence caused by the war was enough to shift public opinion against it, but the crimes committed by American soldiers are the ones that caused the most uproar from the American public. The discovery of events such as My Lai were also episodes that pushed many veterans to find the courage to expose to the public what they had seen or what they had done in Vietnam and eventually speak out against the way the American military was operating in Vietnam. The Winter Soldiers for example were a group of Vietnam veterans that openly opposed the war and worked on exposing the crimes committed by the American military.

The Vietnam war was particularly prone to see war crimes for a number of reasons, the most important of which was the nature of the war itself. The Vietnam War was an asymmetric war; in other words, it was a conflict between two parties that in certain aspects were greatly different from one another. On one hand North Vietnam was a state that had been freed from French colonialism only recently, that was characterised by high levels of poverty and was technologically underdeveloped. On the other hand, the United States was one of the world's two main superpowers and was vastly superior to North Vietnam from an economic, military and technological standpoint.

The relationship between asymmetric warfare and war crimes expresses itself in the way that the two sides are forced to fight. North Vietnam's strategy against the United States was to merge the North Vietnamese Army with the resistance groups in South Vietnam in order to fight a guerrilla war that would allow them to use the terrain and local population as a form of camouflage. From an American

⁶ H.H., Hussey, "War atrocities in Vietnam." JAMA, 227(5), 1974 p. 554.

perspective this meant that the enemy was virtually invisible and the violence committed by the Viet Cong on the local population gave American soldiers a frustrating new urgency to find the enemy. Traditional warfare proved to be ineffective against the Viet Cong and forced the Americans to adopt a new military policy and use gradually more repressive forms of searching for the enemy and fighting them, such as intense bombing campaigns and search and destroy missions.⁷

It's also important to underline that the objectives of the North Vietnamese were to drag the Americans more and more into a conflict that would eventually turn the American people against their own government.

With these ways of fighting the war new methods to measure success became necessary. For the North Vietnamese success was measured in two factors, the amount of men that were able to infiltrate a pocket of population and the amount of fear and anxiety they were able to instil upon that population. This led to extreme acts of violence on innocent civilians that were intended to persuade the locals not to collaborate with the Americans and South Vietnamese, forcing the latter to have to rely on more aggressive forms of searching and fighting the Viet Cong rather than on the cooperation with the local population. American forces on the other hand found it difficult to use traditional measures of progress such as the amount of territory controlled. This was due firstly to the landscape which made it nearly impossible to effectively control a certain area, and the guerrilla warfare fought by the Viet Cong which made it difficult to distinguish the North Vietnamese fighting forces from civilians. This led to the development of the body count method. According to the body count system the success of an operation was based off of how many Vietnamese were killed during the mission. This method contributed to a rise in violence from Americans due to psychological reasons. The body count method implied that the Vietnamese were viewed as objects that needed to be eliminated rather than actual people, and the

⁷ Marcel, Berni, "7 Excessive Violence in a War Without Fronts: Explaining Atrocities in South Vietnam (1965–1973)." *Genocide and Mass Violence in Asia*, 117, 2019, pp 126-127.

fact that a higher amount of bodies led to more successful missions and eventually bigger rewards made the murder of not only soldiers, but civilians as well, much more probable from American soldiers.⁸

Another important factor that fuelled the violence that characterised the Vietnam War was racism and hatred in general. From an American perspective, soldiers were trained to view the Vietnamese differently, as an enemy that was considered to be subhuman. The inability to find this elusive enemy and the atrocities committed by them contributed to a sense of hatred and revenge towards the Vietnamese. From a North Vietnamese perspective, the Americans represented another form of imperialism and the South Vietnamese were viewed as traitors and puppet soldiers.⁹

Finally, a lack of legal consequences on both sides gave no limits to the atrocities committed. Many U.S. officials were well aware of the events that took place in Vietnam and actively tried to cover up what had happened. To this day it is well known that war crimes were committed in Vietnam but it is still difficult to find sources that document such tragedies. An emblematic example of this behaviour is the My Lai massacre.¹⁰ While the commission of the massacre is a documented fact, not many legal repercussions emerged from the case. The situation in My Lai was a complicated one, where some soldiers committed crimes and other ones aided the civilians, however the event still caused the death of over 200 Vietnamese. The defence of many soldiers was that they were simply following orders. The main trial, that of the company commander Captain Ernest Medina, found him to be not guilty due to the lack of evidence of the manslaughter. Other higher ranking officials were also investigated and put on trial for the My Lai Massacre, but none were found guilty.¹¹

⁸ Ivi, pp 128-130.

⁹ Ivi, pp. 130-133.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ L.C. Green, "War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Command Responsibility." *Naval War College Review* 50, no. 2, 1997 pp 50-52.

All these factors contributed to the creation of an environment in Vietnam that made war crimes a relatively common occurrence and when news of these events spread out through the United States they heavily contributed to the erosion of the American public's perception of U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Another aspect of the American policy in Vietnam that was cause for controversy was the use of defoliants, such as Agent Orange.

This caused uproar for two main reasons, firstly, defoliants were used during bombing campaigns and were often cause of casualties amongst the civilian population as well as combatants on both sides. In this sense defoliants were often the subject of protests in the United States in the same way that the heavy bombing campaign and aggressive military tactics were.

A second point of concern that emerged with the use of agent orange was its effects on the environment. Defoliants were used in the attempt to flush out the Vietnamese guerrilla groups that used the forests of Vietnam as a means of hiding from the Americans. In this process, other than killing or injuring civilians and soldiers alike, almost 4 million acres of the jungle were eliminated.

This was important due to the fact that the Johnson administration also saw the rise of environmentalism. This meant that the use of defoliants to destroy the ecosystems of Southeast Asia in the name of war, led to the assimilation of the environmentalist movement into the broader anti-war movement, therefore causing another source of controversy amongst many Americans.¹²

¹² M.V. Melosi, "Environmental Policy", in "A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson.", Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, p. 204.

CHAPTER II The Vietnam War and public opinion

The controversial policies adopted by the Johnson administration in Vietnam were closely related to what happened in the United States during the sixties. Johnson's presidency began in a moment of radical change in American history. Other than the conflict in Vietnam, from a domestic perspective, Johnson faced the rise of the civil rights movement, which worked towards achieving equal rights and justice for all Americans, regardless of their race or gender. Poverty was also a serious concern and Johnson would put this topic at the centre of his domestic policy. Johnson also arrived in the White House in a moment of economic prosperity, and plans were made to put in place a large variety of social programmes that would ensure equal opportunities for everyone. However, the expanding conflict in Vietnam and the news coverage of it would exacerbate the problems that were already beginning to divide American society. In particular, the war withdrew economic resources from domestic spending, would underline some of the major flaws of American society and bring people to question the government.

CHAPTER 2.1 The role of the media in influencing public opinion

While the decisions made for the war and the conduct of the American military in Vietnam didn't need to do much more to rally people against the war effort, it's important to underline the role media played during the conflict. The Vietnam War took place in the cultural context of the sixties, which was characterised by the development of mass media. While the use of media as a propaganda tool wasn't a new idea, it was only during the second half of the last century that academics began to understand the true influence media could have over the public. A particularly important aspect of mass media during the fifties and sixties was the exponential growth in television ownership, where in 1949 only about 2

percent of American households owned televisions, in 1962 a television set could be found in 90 percent of American homes.¹³

The growth of television ownership was accompanied by the growth of what was shown on television. People could watch anything from children's shows to news on important historical events.¹⁴ The broad variety of what was shown made it more difficult to manipulate it in order to affect the way people viewed the world. In the late fifties and early sixties there was also a lot of scepticism towards the negative effects television could have on the public,¹⁵ which would eventually lead to the Johnson administration's emphasis on attempting to control the media in order to limit the negative effects that reporting could have on the public.

When it comes to the Vietnam War, the media and television in particular played a fundamental role in defining the way people perceived the war and the United States. President Johnson and his advisors believed that the relationship between the televised representation of the war and public opinion would determine the final outcome of the conflict. In many cases, when public opinion erupted against U.S. intervention in Vietnam the administration often turned their attention to the way the media portrayed the war rather than considering the actual policies put in place.

However, while there was a handful of exceptions of reporters that were openly against the war, the government could rely on a relatively positive broadcasting system that supported the Presidents policy in Vietnam, especially during the early years of the war.¹⁶ In fact, a study by "Newsweek" demonstrated that up until 1968, the majority of the country was brought to support the war effort in

¹³ S. J. Douglas, "Mass Media: From 1945 to the Present", in "A Companion to Post-1945 America.", Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Oxford, 2006, pp. 80-81.

¹⁴ Ivi p. 83-84.

¹⁵ Ivi p. 82.

¹⁶ C. J., Pach, 'The War on Television: TV News, the Johnson Administration, and Vietnam', in "A Companion to the Vietnam War.", Blackwell Publishing Company, Oxford, 2006, pp. 452-453.

Vietnam thanks to the favourable coverage. Eventually studies also showed that the frequent airings of footage from the frontlines eventually brought to the development of a so called “tolerance of horror”. This implied that the effect that the graphic images of the war had on people declined.¹⁷ The main problem with the influence that television had over the public, wasn’t a problem with the broadcasting in itself. The more concerning issue was with the contradictory relationship between the optimistic projections of the war expressed in speeches and the lack of actual progress in Vietnam. Many people at home heard top military officials speak of the progress of the war while witnessing footage of intense firefights and news of rising casualties.

It is also important to highlight the fact that the Vietnam War, as the first war during the age of television, didn’t see strict rules on censorship. A reason that explains the lack of censorship, especially in the news, was the importance freedom of speech and freedom of information had in the United States. This concept meant that the press had a considerable amount of power in American society when it came to spreading information. To better understand the position the media had in American society the report on the Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press provides a list of the responsibilities held by the press which included providing a complete account of contemporary events, providing free access to information and creating a platform where opposing views could be debated. Another cause for the lack of censorship was from the government’s perspective. In this case it was thought that censorship of the war would cause an uproar in the world of broadcasting, and effectively cause a backlash towards the United States government. One of the few federal organizations dedicated to limiting the actions of the press was the Federal Communications Commission, which still held the freedom of a broadcaster to express his own opinion in high regards. However, it was also mandatory to provide a complete picture by presenting opposing opinions as well. This was the basis for the fairness doctrine,

¹⁷ M.C., Mitchell, “Television and the Vietnam War.” *Naval War College Review* 37, no. 3, 1984, p. 47.

which imposed a series of rules that would force a network to provide adequate coverage of ideas they disagreed with. A lack of compliancy with the fairness doctrine could result in the loss of one's broadcasting licence.¹⁸

This meant that there were very few formal regulations on reporting and most of it was done by the broadcasters themselves in order to prevent graphic images from airing while families gathered around the television.¹⁹

The few regulations meant that on-the-scene reporters could capture images of the reality of war on the frontlines. Viewers could witness from their very own homes the brutality of combat in Vietnam, from the firefights and damage done on American soldiers to the deterioration of living conditions of the Vietnamese and the corruption of the South Vietnamese government.

The footage from Vietnam and the contradictory nature of the relationship between what officials said about the war and what was actually happening led many to doubt the President's policy in Vietnam. President Johnson's approval ratings drastically declined throughout his presidency, in great part due to his handling of the war. His approval ratings went from almost 80 percent in 1964 to under 40 percent in 1968.²⁰

This trend combined with the president's obsession with following the news, brought Johnson to believe that the war was being lost first and foremost in the United States rather than in Southeast Asia. The loss of public support was attributed mostly to journalists, many of whom were labelled as communists and anti-Americans, rather than to the lack of results from the military. Johnson eventually tried to use television to his advantage by initiating a progress campaign that was aimed at gaining a more favourable coverage of the war,

¹⁸ Ivi pp. 42-43.

¹⁹ C. J., Pach, 'The War on Television: TV News, the Johnson Administration, and Vietnam', in "A Companion to the Vietnam War.", Blackwell Publishing Company, Oxford, 2006, pp. 454-455.

²⁰ D. Coleman, "LBJ's Presidential approval ratings.", "Historyinpieces.com", <https://historyinpieces.com/research/lbj-presidential-approval-ratings>

reducing anxiety about heavy U.S. casualties and demonstrating to the public that the U.S. was advancing successfully in the conflict.²¹

In the short term the program did help raise the percentage of those who supported presidential policy in Vietnam, however its inefficiency emerged with the 1968 Tet offensive. Viewers had been told that the U.S. was gaining terrain and was prepared for an attack at a military base in Khe Sanh, when suddenly news reached the U.S. that several major South Vietnamese cities had been attacked. This event proved to many viewers that military officials had little grasp of what was actually happening in Vietnam and that the war would likely last longer than what was initially expected.

The Tet offensive demonstrated the fact that the problem with the war was not its coverage, rather the policies put in place by the Johnson Administration. Television programs weren't directly aimed at discrediting U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but the facts of what was actually happening in Vietnam were undeniable. Thanks to this new form of mass media millions of Americans were able to see daily footage of the on-ground situation in Indochina and understand the complicated nature of the war that the U.S. was involved in.

Another way the television influenced public opinion was also its coverage of events at home. People worldwide could witness not only the violence in Vietnam but also the violence in American cities, the massive numbers of people demonstrating and protesting against the war as well as hearings on controversial topics.

The television also helped the anti-war movement evolve from a series of groups made up of university students and academics and therefore a group limited to college campuses to a nationwide movement that included in its ranks a broad variety of movements, from the civil rights movement to the feminist movement.

²¹ C. J., Pach, 'The War on Television: TV News, the Johnson Administration, and Vietnam', in "A Companion to the Vietnam War.", Blackwell Publishing Company, Oxford, 2006, pp. 458-460

While television was undoubtedly the most prominent form of media when it comes to influencing public opinion, many other methods of spreading information were used. An interesting example are the pamphlets and newsletters that developed within the military itself. While the television was fundamental for spreading information amongst the civilian population the military saw the development of a network of journals and newsletters, some of which were legal and accepted by the military and others that were seen as contraband.²²

These were essential in influencing the opinions of veterans that would later occupy an important position within the anti-war movement. The letters contained a variety of content that regarded news of the war, interviews, poetry and other pieces of information that were more closely tied with the anti-war movement, such as protests and demonstrations as well as reports on various forms of racial abuse and news on coffee houses and bars that catered to soldiers against the war.

Media played a fundamental role in influencing public opinion, not so much as it directly attempted to push individuals into thinking in a certain way, but rather for shedding light on the situation in both Vietnam and in the United States, and challenging the traditional American values of following the president's decisions when it came to war unconditionally.

CHAPTER II.II Anti-war movement

An important aspect of domestic policy that influenced people's perception of the war was the counter-culture that developed amongst the American youth in the second half of the 20th century. This was born from the prosperity of the Second World War, which gave many young Americans the chance to take advantage of the wealth that characterised the United States at this point in history, but also led many people to question the inequality that pervaded American society. This eventually developed into a series of movements that challenged authority on a variety of topics.

²² B., Tischler, "The Antiwar Movement", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War.", Blackwell Publishing Company, 2006, Oxford, p. 395.

The Vietnam War touched various aspects of the lives of almost the entirety of America's population and a position of particular significance was played by the anti-war movement, which played a crucial role when it came to provoking individuals in seats of power into making political changes.

The rise of the anti-war movement under Johnson is due to a number of factors. First of all, it was with president Johnson that the decision to send vast amounts of soldiers and resources to Vietnam was made, secondly it occurred in a social, political and cultural context that gave way to polarizing American society along a variety of lines. The Vietnam War took place in a complicated time in American history, when young Americans were born into a society that didn't include the same difficulties as their predecessors did. The fact that the American youth was born into a world where the hardships that accompanied events such as World Wars or the Great Depression were absent, meant that it was a prosperous society that pushed many young Americans to seek equality and justice for all. In this sense the anti-war movement rose in a context that favoured challenges to authority on various levels, from within the family and within classrooms, to challenging the government itself. This gave the anti-war movement the opportunity to grow and blend with many other movements such as the civil rights movement.²³

While the movement finds its most active period between the late 1960s and early 1970s its roots can be traced back to the first few years of the Johnson administration. Initially protests against the conflict in Vietnam occurred through individual acts, a first tendency was inspired by the image of a Buddhist monk in Saigon lighting himself on fire as a means of protesting Ngo Dinh Diem's religious repression in 1963. This led in 1965, the year in which heavy bombing operations on the North were initiated, to a streak of individuals in the U.S. committing suicide in a similar way as a form of protesting the escalation of the conflict.²⁴

²³ Ivi pp. 384-385.

²⁴ Ivi p. 385.

Individual acts however, were not enough to receive the necessary coverage to push policy makers into making decisions. The idea that larger mass protests could attract more attention took hold and soon groups of anti-war activists were formed. The groups of people mostly involved in the anti-war movement, especially in its early years, were younger people and in particular college students and the first places in which group protests occurred were on university campuses. Young white middle class university students became detached from the traditional American values of national pride and faith in one's government. The Vietnam War led many of these students to question the president's decisions when it came to the conflict in Indochina due to the rising number of casualties and draftees, as well as other factors.

In the mid-sixties mass demonstrations on university campuses around the United States marked the beginning of the anti-war movement. These demonstrations were coordinated by the Universities Committee on Problems of war and Peace and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. These contributed to the growth of various university based groups across the country that eventually gained more coverage from national press.²⁵

In the university context another interesting phenomenon was the development of teach-ins. Sessions in which anyone, from students to professors, could discuss and debate the war. While these events still took place when only a quarter of students nationwide opposed the war, they still represented a forum that received significant coverage in the media and eventually gave more notoriety to the ideas behind the anti-war movement therefore allowing it to spread.²⁶

With the escalation of the war came the escalation of protests. The creation in 1965 of the Vietnam Day Committee was emblematic of this growth in demonstrations. This group was one of the most important to actually take concrete peaceful actions in opposition to the war other than only protests. The difference of opinions within the committee however made it somewhat short

²⁵ Ivi p. 387.

²⁶ Ibidem.

lived. Its internal divisions were representative of the broad range of ideas within the anti-war movement. The movement in fact flourished in a context in which it contributed to challenging authority side by side with other movements.²⁷

While in its first years the movement was made up of mostly students and academics, in the second half of the sixties the movement's development alongside other groups led to a more varied composition of its members. Members of various movements were aware of the fact that while the many groups may have different objectives, a common goal was that of raising awareness of one's cause. This led to many rallies, protests and demonstrations that were made up of thousands of participants from different movements that blended into one another.²⁸

A first movement that boasted a particular relationship with the anti-war movement was the feminist movement. It initially rose from the anti-war movement as a means of contesting not only the war, but the way women were treated as well. A first argument developed against the traditional relationship between war protests and the role of women within them. During the 1960s this context was used as a means of calling for more unity amongst women in the protests not only against the war but against sexism overall.²⁹

Their role in the anti-war movement also contributed to proving the courage and organizational capabilities of many women who soon began to seek more prominent positions in organizations such as the students for a democratic society movement. Since the movement was still a relatively new one, however, the lack of knowledge on the role of women in politics meant that it was initially difficult to actually face problems of female leadership and participation. It will only be in 1967 that an SDS resolution will recognise feminism as a part of the anti-imperialist movement in the United States.³⁰

²⁷ Ivi pp. 387-388.

²⁸ Ivi p. 389.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ivi p. 392.

The anti-war movement also involved many people that were in the military or who had recently finished service. With the escalation in draftees, the military included many individuals who faced both the atrocities of the war abroad and injustice in the United States from numerous perspectives. This turned the military into an organization in which the anti-war movement could flourish.

Anti-war activity in the armed forces was not uncommon, in particular anti-war newspapers developed within the military that included articles, newsletters from around the United States, information on counselling centres and gathering places that were often censored by government officials.

The anti-war movement that developed amongst soldiers also had close ties to the civilian world. Veterans took part in protests and rallies across the United States as both simple participants as well as speakers. Their goal was not only to end the conflict that many of them had witnessed first-hand, but also to gain certain rights within the military. Various arrests of soldiers who participated in protests led many to support a soldiers right to freely participate in peaceful demonstrations off-base. Other demands were the freedom to not participate in acts that they were ordered to do that they considered to be illegal and immoral.³¹

Many veterans also strove to end sexism within the military, once again demonstrating the unity of various activist movements in the anti-war movement. Another connection was the one with the civil rights movement that was established thanks to the high number of African American soldiers in the armed forces.

Finally, the anti-war movement collocates itself within the broader counter-culture movement that developed in the United States in the sixties and seventies. The fact that it was against a phenomenon which involved people from all walks of life made it a particularly diverse movement which fought for the end of the violence in Vietnam as well as sharing other objectives with another groups. It's connections with a significant amount of other movements also made it one that was able to apply considerable pressure on policy makers.

³¹ Ivi pp. 395-397.

CHAPTER II.III Minorities in the Vietnam War

The importance that the civil rights movement acquired in the second half of the 20th century implied that another source of controversy in Vietnam was the relationship between the war and minorities. The escalation of the conflict and the reintroduction of the draft underlined various problems inherent with American society.

For example, when the time came in 1966 to drastically enlarge the draft pool, the decision was made to make lower the standards required in order to be eligible for the draft. By lowering this standard, it was clear that the regulations on the draft had been modified to choose candidates from the poorer levels of society, that usually coincided with people of a different ethnic and cultural origin than white middleclass Americans. The Armed Forces Qualification Test, which was designed to assign men and women in the military to certain professional positions, was based on a Eurocentric foundation of knowledge that favoured white individuals.³² Asian Americans were often subject to racial abuse for being considered to be similar to the enemy and many Native Americans felt that they were participating in a war as an imperialist force in a war that was eerily similar to the conflict between Native Americans and white Europeans that had lasted for centuries. This ties into an effect that the Vietnam war had on most minorities fighting in Vietnam, which is what George Mariscal calls “cultural recognition”. This phenomenon led many young men to sympathize with the Vietnamese due to the similarities with their own families. In other words, many soldiers of Asian descent, Latin American descent and other ethnicities recognised their own families in the ones they were fighting against. Many were brought to question the reasons of their presence in the conflict when confronted with the poverty of the

³² J. Westheimer, “African Americans and the Vietnam War”, in “A Companion to the Vietnam War”, Oxford, 2006, Blackwell Publishing Company, p. 337.

local population in Vietnam which mirrored the poverty of many individual's ancestors or even their own families back in the United States.³³

While the war in Vietnam was often called a “white man’s war” by numerous civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, a disproportionately large amount of men of different ethnic descent fought on behalf of the United States. The two most memorable examples of minorities in the Vietnam war were African Americans and Mexican Americans.

CHAPTER II.III.I African Americans in Vietnam

One of the most influential group of individuals fighting in the Vietnam War were African Americans and their relationship with the military during these years was a reflection of what the civil rights movement in the United States was trying to fight against.

Before the Vietnam War and during its first few years, the military was well perceived by the majority of African Americans. It was seen as one of the only institutions in America that allowed black Americans to establish a career, ascend the social ladder and change the stereotypical perception many white people still had of people of colour. These prospects were incredibly important considering the civil rights situation in the United States, where legal segregation and discrimination were still common in many states.

It’s also important to mention that the Vietnam War was the first American war in which the armed forces were fully integrated. Numerous steps had been made towards this goal and many individuals on the top of the chain of command believed that the military was completely rid of racism. Already in the first few years of the war, the situation in Vietnam demonstrated otherwise. Discrimination was still widespread throughout the armed forces, both on a personal level and on an institutional level. A first symptom of this was the amount of African Americans that ended up being combat troops, which was disproportionately

³³ G., Mariscal, “Mexican Americans and the Viet Nam War”, in “A Companion to the Vietnam War”, Blackwell Publishing Company, Oxford, 2007 pp. 356-358.

higher when compared to white men in the military, as well as the death rate amongst black Americans. However, these facts were initially interpreted in the African American community as proof that black men were just as willing as white men, if not more, to sacrifice their own lives for their country and the conflict was seen as an opportunity for many young black men to dispute the racist view many Americans had of African Americans as lazy and cowardly.³⁴

The first major turning point when it comes to the African Americans' vision of the war was the drastic escalation in ground forces that took place in the mid-sixties. The rise in demand for soldiers in Vietnam led Johnson to expand the draft pool and the amount of African Americans who were forced to fight in Vietnam were disproportionately higher than the amount of white Americans. Where nearly a third of the white men eligible for the draft were actually sent to Vietnam, almost two thirds of black men eligible were sent. This was the first step towards convincing a considerable portion of the population that the draft was part of a system that was overall unfair and racist towards minorities.³⁵

The systemic racism that pervaded the armed forces manifested itself in various ways. The draft was the first element to indicate discrimination within the American military and the disproportionately high level of black draftees is due to the Selective Service System. This system was used to limit the amount of men eligible for the draft on the basis of mostly educational and professional factors, meaning that those who were acceptable for the draft were people who belonged to working class families and who couldn't afford to go to college. While it wasn't directly aimed at minorities it implied that a large portion of those who were eligible for the draft wouldn't be white simply due to the fact that it was more probable for a white family to have the necessary funds to send their children off to school. From a professional perspective many African Americans couldn't get deferments due to the lack of education in the black community and the difficulty that discrimination offered black Americans when searching for a

³⁴ J. Westheider, "African Americans and the Vietnam War", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War", Oxford, 2006, Blackwell Publishing Company, pp. 334-336

³⁵ Ibidem

job. Another important element of the draft that underlines the racial tensions of the time were the compositions of the draft board. These were groups of individuals who were usually white, that would decide if there was any reason for someone not to be drafted. Once again, an inadequate representation was the main problem, out of all 50 states, only the draft boards in the state of Delaware accurately reflected the proportions of the African American population in its draft board.³⁶ The disproportionately low representation of African Americans on the boards across the U.S. made it less likely for black men to get a deferral, especially if this was on the basis of cultural and religious reasons. An emblematic example of the latter aspect was the situation of the famous Muslim boxer Muhammad Ali, who refused to go to Vietnam on the basis of his religious and ethical beliefs and was eventually sentenced to 5 years in prison for draft evasion.

Another element that was symbolic of the institutional racism of the U.S. military was the aforementioned Armed Forces Qualification Test, which was designed to determine each individuals' possible career path in the military based on their general knowledge and physical capabilities. This test favoured white candidates for two reasons, on one hand it was more probable that a white man would have a better education and would on average perform better on the mental part of the test. This was due to the condition civil rights were in at the time, which made it harder for black families to assure a good education for their children. On the other hand, the test was usually based on Eurocentric knowledge, favouring white men over black men. This meant that most African American's were assigned to combat units and dangerous positions that implied a rise in casualties amongst African Americans.³⁷

Another important element to consider is that more than half of the deferments given out to African Americans were given out for failing to pass mental evaluation tests. This meant that when the moment arrived to raise the amount of

³⁶ P.T., Murray, "Blacks and the draft: A history of institutional racism." *Journal of Black Studies*, 2(1), 1971, pp. 72-73.

³⁷ J. Westheimer, "African Americans and the Vietnam War", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War", Oxford, 2006, Blackwell Publishing Company, pp.335-337

American troops in Vietnam in 1966, policy makers decided to ease regulations on the draft in a downwards sense rather than an upward sense. This fundamentally meant lowering the mental standards of the Armed Forces Qualifications Tests in order to attract more men from the lower classes of society rather than white middle class males, as this was seen as a possible threat to the economy when thinking in the long term. The implications of these assumptions caused uproar in the African American community.³⁸

Black soldiers also had to deal with assignments that were usually more dangerous and it was far more difficult for African Americans to be promoted up the ranks. The justice system within the military also showed signs of institutional racism. An overwhelmingly low amount of black military lawyers and an overall tension between white Americans and black Americans meant that the latter were more likely to receive longer and harsher sentences when compared to their white counterparts.

While institutional racism remained a fundamental problem in the military during the Vietnam War, acts of personal racism were also rampant. Officially the military was fully integrated and due to this assumption it did little to combat racism amongst the ranks. However, a sense of alienation from the rest of the military wasn't uncommon. It was fuelled by various aspects that at first sight could seem simple, such as a lack of hygiene and hair products typically requested by African Americans and music in bars that catered mostly to white tastes, but eventually forms of segregation were born that mirrored those back at home. Black soldiers spent their free time separated from white soldiers and they often weren't allowed into certain bars and coffee houses. Certain areas of Saigon hosted bars that catered to African Americans while other parts catered exclusively to white Americans. All this led not only to the isolation of many African Americans and to the creation of groups based off of solidarity and

³⁸ P.T., Murray, "Blacks and the draft: A history of institutional racism." *Journal of Black Studies*, 2(1), 1971, pp. 69-71.

brotherhood amongst black Americans, but also to the radicalization of both white and black groups which later fuelled racial tensions in the military.

Black Americans also noticed that an abnormally high number of them were dying in what was widely considered to be a “white man’s war” and draft resistance amongst African Americans was particularly high for this reason.

Personal racism in Vietnam became especially apparent after the death of dr. Martin Luther King. This was the moment in which the polarization between black men and white men reached its peak and the tension snapped giving into episodes of racial violence. Eventually the military also became more severe in prohibiting acts and symbols of black brotherhood and solidarity which were believed to contribute to intensifying the conflict between black Americans and white Americans.³⁹

The treatment of African Americans in Vietnam had significant effects on the way people in the United States viewed their government and ultimately contributed to the social movements that effected domestic policy throughout the Johnson Administration.

CHAPTER II.II.II Mexican Americans in Vietnam

Another minority group that fought under particular circumstances during the Vietnam War was that of Mexican Americans. While the case of African Americans in the war is an emblematic one for most minorities, Mexican Americans presented a few peculiarities.

A first aspect of the relationship between the armed forces and Mexican culture was that of integration. While for African Americans the military represented a social ladder that would allow them to secure a career within the government, for Mexican immigrants the armed forces represented an opportunity for assimilation

³⁹ J. Westheimer, “African Americans and the Vietnam War”, in “A Companion to the Vietnam War”, Oxford, 2006, Blackwell Publishing Company, pp. 337-343

into American culture and society. To sacrifice your life in the name of the United States was seen as the ultimate method to fully integrate into American society.⁴⁰

Another effect of the Vietnam War on Mexican American culture was that on families. Mexican families in the United States were divided over the conflict. Mexican culture is permeated with manliness and warrior culture that pushes individuals into volunteering for military service. Many Mexican families boasted a history of ancestors who signed up for military service that went back generations and when the draft was introduced, for many it was simply impossible to resist. This wasn't simply because many wanted to go to war in the United States military, but the social pressure many Mexican Americans felt made it difficult not to go. Resisting the draft meant resisting not only the American government but one's family as well, and bringing shame amongst one's family was often too big of a burden for a community such as the Mexican American one that emphasizes the importance of family values. In this sense the draft tended on one hand to target minorities and on the other draft resistance promoted by the anti-war movement seemed to isolate Mexican Americans as one of the few minorities unable to resist the draft primarily due to their unwillingness to go against their family's wishes. This eventually led to a disproportionately large amount of Mexican Americans being assigned to combat groups in Vietnam.⁴¹

Another underlining of the racism inherent in American institutions towards Mexican Americans was once again the Armed Forces Qualification Tests. Similarly, to African Americans, many Mexican Americans qualified for dangerous positions in the test in which they resulted in having a lower level of intelligence. However, the test didn't consider the language barrier that made the test much more difficult for immigrants than for English native speakers.⁴²

⁴⁰ G. Mariscal, "Mexican Americans and the Viet Nam War", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War.", Blackwell Publishing Company. Oxford, 2006, pp. 348-349.

⁴¹ Ivi p. 350

⁴² Ivi p. 354

Finally, the Vietnam War represented initially a chance for many Mexican Americans to fully integrate into American society and prove their loyalty to the United States. However, many were sent to give their lives for a tragic war, and eventually contributed to raising the casualty number that made the conflict so controversial at home.

CHAPTER III President Johnson's domestic policy following the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War heavily influenced a variety of decisions made during the Johnson administration that touched almost every aspect of government. Lyndon Johnson also initially planned to focus on domestic policy rather than foreign policy. He based his presidential campaign in 1963 on a number of promises. He presented himself as a President that was dedicated to peace in Vietnam as opposed to his opponent Goldwater who proposed escalating the bombardment campaign in Indochina.⁴³ He was also considered to be a presidential candidate that was willing to fight for the poor and to bring an end to the social and civil injustices that plagued American society, and his close ties to the civil rights movement made him a candidate likely to provide positive changes in the sphere of civil rights.

However, the particular dynamics of the war in Vietnam led him to concentrate more and more of the economy on the conflict rather than on his domestic problems and the redirection of government resources to military spending made it more difficult to realise his social plans. Moreover, the radical polarization of American society that occurred under his administration and his inability to successfully deescalate the war in Vietnam led his approval ratings to a gradual downfall throughout his presidency.

Overall the Johnson presidency was initially one of great promise in terms of economic prosperity, civil equality and social renewal, but the United States' involvement in Vietnam limited his ability to make his promises come true. The Johnson administration is well known for being heavily condemned due to the decisions made during the conflict, and the effects on those decisions were mainly visible to most Americans in three areas: the economic area, social area and the civil area.

⁴³ W.I. Cohen, "The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 163.

CHAPTER III.I Effects of the Vietnam War on economic policy

When it comes to the economics of the war, Johnson found himself in a difficult position. Firstly, he wished to pursue the social and civil goals prescribed by his Great Society plans, secondly the Vietnam War forced him into sending large amounts of resources towards the conflict instead.

In the first part of the Johnson administration, the president mostly followed his economic advisors' guidelines. The biggest aspect of the first few years of Johnson's presidency was a tax cut that was meant to stimulate the expansion of the private sector. This led to a brief period of economic prosperity that would later halt due to the escalation of the war in Vietnam.⁴⁴

The first major effects of the Vietnam War on the economy occurred in 1965. The escalation of forces used in Vietnam raised the need for more resources to be sent towards military expenditure. The situation in the white House at this time was a complicated one and the role the heavy military expenditures in Vietnam had in relation to the American economy was often debated. On one hand, some advisors believed that, from an economic perspective, the military would provide a much needed stimulus for the economy, while others believed that military expenditures would make it difficult to control economic growth and would eventually bring an unwanted rise in inflation. The latter school of thought eventually prevailed and it became a well-known fact in the White House that an increase in income taxes were necessary to raise the military budget.⁴⁵

It is also important to highlight the fact that many advisors believed that an expansion of the war in Vietnam would be a problem to be faced as the conflict progressed. The past major conflict which involved considerable amounts of military expenditures for the United States was the Korean War, in which the budget necessary to fight the war was overestimated by over 10 percent. This led

⁴⁴ D. F Kettl, "The Economic Education of Lyndon Johnson: Guns, Butter, and Taxes." In *The Johnson Years, Volume Two: Vietnam, the Environment, and Science*, edited by Robert A. Divine, 54–78. University Press of Kansas, 1987, p. 57.

⁴⁵ Ivi p.58.

the Johnson administration to face the situation pragmatically. Various options were always available and the future of the war was uncertain. These dynamics led many of the president's advisors to be careful when it came to planning a military budget in order not to make the same mistakes that were made during the Korean War.⁴⁶

The increase in income taxes was emblematic of the careful approach the administration took when it came to economics especially in relation to the war. The economists in the White House had planned to constantly adjust the economy through tax cuts and increases in taxes in order to effectively control the economy in the volatile dynamics of the sixties. However, they often didn't consider the difficulties they would face when convincing congress of the varying economic situation. In this sense, the raise in taxes presented not only an economic concern, but a political one as well. The tax increase necessary to fight the Vietnam War on a larger scale implied that many opposing politicians in congress would use the Great Society plans as their price for the growing military budget. Eventually the decision to postpone the tax raise to early 1966 was made in order to finance both the war in Vietnam and the war on poverty.

This raise in taxes, however, didn't prove to be enough to limit the damage done by growing military spending. Inflation was gradually becoming a more significant problem for the president and soon advisors suggested a larger increase on income taxes. This however was politically difficult to enact by the president. First of all, many members of the cabinet disagreed with this sort of policy, second of all, asking congress for another tax raise would force the president to publicly come to terms with the cost of the Vietnam War and accept it as a non-limited war.

However, in 1967 the situation drastically changed. Studies showed that the economy had slowed down and the White House once again struggled to find an individual answer to the problem. Some believed a standby tax was necessary, others believed that another increase in taxes would make the situation even

⁴⁶ Ivi p. 60.

worse, and others favoured a minor tax increase. Finally, by 1968 the president opted for the latter option and introduced a minor tax.

A later increase in inflation in 1968 that would bring the president to seek another increase in taxes was emblematic of the uncertain nature that the war had brought the American economy in, and the difficulty with which president Johnson and his advisors were able to interpret rapid changes in the economy.⁴⁷

The effects of the Vietnam War on American economics and in particular the effects of the escalation policy adopted in Vietnam were many, but it overall made economic trends more difficult to interpret and subsequently more difficult to adjust to. The uncertainty surrounding the cost and length of the war reflected itself on the economy, and the rise in spending for both the military venture in Vietnam and the implementation of the social programs of the Great Society program led inflation to a persistent rise. The stop and go system provided by Johnson's advisors, which consisted of a series of adjustments pragmatically made based on the development of economic trends, also underestimated the political difficulty of having these adjustments accepted by congress, eventually making it more difficult to provide the economy with the necessary adjustments in time.

From an economic perspective, Johnson's desire to pursue both peace in Vietnam and the creation of the Great Society was met with a variety of challenges that went from the polarization of the political community in the United States to the unstable nature of the Vietnam War. The heavy expenditures required by the war made it difficult to finance social reforms and made it even more complicated to obtain permission from congress to finance social programs.

Ultimately the inflation caused by the Vietnam War and its effects on domestic policy contributed to Johnson's political downfall and to the erosion of his public support. While inflation during the Vietnam War was a serious problem, the fear of inflation was an even bigger one. The way the public perceived Johnson's economics was far worse than the conditions it was actually in. Johnson's

⁴⁷ Ivi pp. 62-67.

economics were eventually seen by the public as another failure in Johnson's presidency.

CHAPTER III.II Effects of the Vietnam War on social policy

A second major effect of the Vietnam war when it comes to domestic policy was its effects on the social sphere. While social policy represented the core of Lyndon Johnson's presidency, it was heavily influenced by the Vietnam War and its social and economic implications.

As mentioned above, Johnson planned to focus his presidency primarily on a social plan known as "the Great Society", a series of social projects that were designed to reduce the overall level of poverty in the United States and promote equality and justice in American society. The war on poverty held a particularly important position during the Johnson administration and was Lyndon Johnson's most ambitious project. It was meant to rival the social reforms of Roosevelt's New Deal and revolved around overall economic growth, professional training and a revival in community participation. While the project represented President Johnson's sincere desire to end poverty in the United States, the Vietnam War and the social and political divisions that characterised the country in the sixties made it difficult to put these programs in place. The aforementioned economic cost of the war also took funds that would have otherwise been used for social reforms. The war on poverty involved social scientists and collaboration between the federal government, local government, the private sector and the civil rights movement and therefore involved all levels of American society.⁴⁸

The most influential part of the Great Society was the Community Action Project. The CAP was the main program dedicated to reviving community participation in local social and political life. It was by far the most innovative program introduced by the Johnson administration for a number of reasons. Firstly, its ability to apply bottom-up pressure by empowering the poor, secondly its close

⁴⁸ E.R. Schmitt, "The War on Poverty", in "A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson.", Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, pp. 93-94.

relationship with both the civil rights movement and the social sciences community. While many academics believe that the project failed to reach its full potential, due to hostility towards the program from a considerable amount of policy makers and due to the general bureaucratic obstacles policy makers had to face when implementing the project, it is still accepted to have been the Great Society's project with the most potential. It's most important and innovative contributions were the overall services it provided for the poor, it's ability to decentralize power in local politics and coordinate projects amongst a number of agencies.⁴⁹

The Community Action Project is emblematic of the promise and potential of the war on poverty. However, many believe that the war on poverty failed due to a variety of reasons. A first explanation could be the way the media portrayed the situation in the United States. Similarly, to the way the Administration viewed the relationship between the Vietnam War, the media and public opinion, the White House believed that a poor portrayal on behalf of the news contributed to leading a large portion of the public to see these projects as failures and eventually losing faith in the government. Another explanation could be the bureaucratic obstacles policy makers encountered when implementing the projects. The nature of the adopted concept of welfare for the projects could be an explanation. This could be due to the fact that it could have contributed to the development of a culture of poverty that would leave people dependant on the welfare system.⁵⁰

While the number of explanations for the results of these projects is countless, an irrefutable cause of Johnson's shortcomings when it comes to the war on poverty is the Vietnam War. The war on poverty and civil rights issues were dynamics that had influenced American politics for decades and already under Kennedy's administration steps had been made to alleviate the level of poverty in the United States. While president Johnson's war on poverty became the president's main priority, it is also important to note that the first steps towards implementing the

⁴⁹ Ivi pp. 95-96.

⁵⁰ Ivi pp. 98-99.

Great Society occurred during the same years of the escalation in the conflict in Vietnam.

While the two conflicts reciprocally influenced each other, the war in Southeast Asia demanded immediate intervention in the eyes of the president and his military advisors. This meant that the military budget would be prioritised over social reforms and would have to be drastically raised in order to support the armed forces. This would prove to be the main economic obstacle in implementing Johnson's social projects. Moreover, the expansion of the war from a limited one to an international one would not only mean a rise in the amount of resources needed but also in the amount of men needed and eventually in the amount of casualties. These factors along with the nature of the United States involvement in Vietnam and the partisan liberalist nature of Johnson's Great Society projects made the latter an attractive target to opposition members of congress who contributed to complicating the implementation of the war on poverty.

Finally, the Great Society is widely regarded as an ambitious project that fell victim to the historical circumstances of the Johnson administration. The escalation of the Vietnam War and the problems surrounding the conflict such as the political polarization of American society, contributed to the failure of one of president Johnson's most prized initiatives.

CHAPTER III.III Effects of the Vietnam War on civil policy

While the relationship between the Vietnam War and the War on poverty is one of the defining aspects of American policy during the sixties, the civil rights movement was also critical. When it comes to civil rights, the sixties represent some of the most influential years of American history.

The Johnson administration can be a somewhat controversial one especially when speaking of his relationship with the civil rights movement. One of the Johnson administration's priorities was the war on poverty and in order for this project to succeed, the pursuit of equal rights was fundamental.

Many steps towards this goal had been made. At the same time under Johnson's presidency Martin Luther King, one of the leading members of the civil rights movement, was assassinated, the United States saw the polarization of society that divided people on a number of factors, including race, and many policies, especially the policy in Vietnam, brought to light the rampant racism in the United States that was common not only amongst single individuals but in institutions as well.⁵¹

The controversy surrounding Lyndon Johnson's presidency when it comes to civil rights can be highlighted by dividing his years as president into two phases. The first phase is made up of the years 1964 and 1965, although one could also include in this period his years as vice-president to President Kennedy and his years as a U.S. senator. This period is characterised by a number of landmark events that contributed to the creation of Johnson's image as a staunch fighter for equality and civil rights. These events include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, War on Poverty Legislation in 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and a significant amount of Great Society initiatives that focused on providing more job opportunities for people and developing cooperation on various levels in civil society and in government. It is also important to underline the fact that Johnson was widely perceived amongst the public as an ally of famous civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King.⁵²

The second part of his relationship with the civil rights movement goes from the 1965 Watts revolt, up until the end of Johnson's presidential term in 1969. This portion of the Johnson Administration is characterised by an overall decline in Johnson's popularity amongst the American electorate as well as the political community due to the president's numerous failures in various fields. In the case of civil rights this period saw little progress made other than the attempt at implementing Great Society projects. The second half of the sixties also saw the

⁵¹ K. B., Germany, "African-American Civil Rights", in "A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson.", Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, p.111.

⁵² Ivi p. 112.

rise of the black power movement, the further polarization of American society and a rise in civil disorders.⁵³

In the first part of the Johnson administration the Vietnam War did little to influence the civil rights movement in the United States and eventually internal politics. The war was still a limited one and the use of mostly military advisors, special forces and bombing missions implied that the military wasn't forced into pushing the limits of civil rights. Amongst the African American community, the armed forces were still widely regarded as the one truly equal government institution.

However, the escalation of the war that began in 1964 and its gradual growth was the main catalyst to eventually expose the flaws in American institutions, as well as to push the economy to its limit redirecting funds towards the military rather than social programs.

The escalation of the war in Vietnam brought to light the racism that was still inherent in the military. The draft was emblematic of this as well as the composition of the military from a racial perspective. This was cause enough to include the Civil Rights movement into the Anti-war movement and exacerbate the tensions that had already formed in American society.⁵⁴ The tensions eventually snapped into various moments of civil disorder throughout the United States the most emblematic of which was the Watts revolt, an episode in which a young African American was arrested in 1965 and beaten by police. This led to the intervention of other pedestrians who had witnessed the scene. The event received a significant amount of coverage and eventually escalated into heavy riots that effected the Los Angeles area for several days.

In order to deal with the civil disorders that had spread out throughout the country the government decided to employ a series of social projects dedicated to

⁵³ Ivi p. 115.

⁵⁴ J. Westheider, "African Americans and the Vietnam War", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War", Oxford, 2006, Blackwell Publishing Company, p. 337.

absorbing the African American community into the wider American community. The most important of these projects were aimed at expanding the job market and providing professional training for young African Americans. Some examples of these programs were the concentrated employment program and the job opportunities in the business sector.

Other programs were implemented to contrast the spread of civil disorder that included reforms to the health system, education system and welfare system in particularly vulnerable areas, as well as incentivizing urban development.⁵⁵

Steps towards racial justice and equality were also made within the military. The rules regarding promotion and testing were changed and race relation programs were implemented across every branch of the military. African Americans also began to assume more important positions amongst the military ranks which also promoted these programs.⁵⁶

The effects that the Vietnam War had on the African American community were similar to those it had on other communities as well. For example, president Johnson could initially rely on a stable support for the war in particular from the Mexican American community, due to the aforementioned warrior culture that brought many Mexican Americans to support the United States in any war. However, the Vietnam War split the Hispanic community between those who supported the president's efforts in Vietnam and those who opposed it.

The factors that led to the split amongst the Mexican American population are thought to be two. The disproportionally high number of Mexican American casualties of the war and the redirection of Great Society funds towards the war effort.

⁵⁵ K. B., Germany, "African-American Civil Rights", in "A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson.", Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, pp. 123-124.

⁵⁶ J. Westheider, "African Americans and the Vietnam War", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War", Oxford, 2006, Blackwell Publishing Company, p. 345-346.

The great society in the case of Mexican Americans played a fundamental role in both empowering Mexican Americans and creating a sense of local pride, through programs meant to stimulate participation in community activities. The significance that the war on poverty had on the Mexican American community was so much so that any threats of cutting spending on the social projects would eventually be cause for protest and therefore further strain the relationship between the Hispanic community and government.⁵⁷

Another interesting aspect of the relationship between the war in Vietnam and the Mexican American community in the United States was the fact that the Vietnam War and the draft were used as a form of socializing the poor. In this sense the notion that a man not suited for service in the military was likely not suited to make a living at home was used as a means of using compulsory military service as a way of providing the poor with a set of professional skills that could be put to use after their service had finished. This was the basis of the 100,000 jobs program which was presented as another project of the Great Society that planned on expanding the draft pool to include more people living in a state of poverty, targeting in particular Hispanic communities. This meant lowering the acceptance standards of the Armed Forces Qualification Test, however the positions assigned to each score remained unvaried. Many of the new Mexican American draftees were sent to the infantry and, contrarily to what the project was theoretically meant to do, did not acquire important professional skills. Programs like this contributed to lowering the opinion many Mexican Americans had of the military and eventually also led to protests⁵⁸.

Finally, the Vietnam War's effects on domestic policy when it comes to the ethnic minorities and Johnson's social policy with the civil rights movement is also strictly connected to Lyndon Johnson's domestic priority, the War on Poverty. The effects of the Great Society programs were mostly positive during the first

⁵⁷ L. Oropeza, "Mexican Americans", in "A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson", Wiley-Blackwell Oxford, 2011. pp. 144-145.

⁵⁸ G. Mariscal, "Mexican Americans and the Viet Nam War", in "A Companion to the Vietnam War.", Blackwell Publishing Company. Oxford, 2006, p. 355.

period of Johnson's presidency, however the escalation of the war brought to light the fact that the introduction of civil reforms weren't enough to eradicate racism in the United States. This forced the president into focusing on specific aspects of the Great Society in order to maintain order throughout the United States.

CHAPTER III.IV Effects of the Vietnam War on the relations between president and constitution

Another impact that the Vietnam War had on internal politics was on the relationship between the president and congress.

In this context the Vietnam war collocates itself within the wider history of the relationship between presidents and the constitution during the Cold War. In this sense the Cold War was characterized, from a judicial perspective, by the deterioration of the power of congress, especially when it comes to matters of war. After the Second World War the United States participated in a number of international military ventures that gradually undermined congress's ability to limit presidential powers in military matters.

In the case of the Vietnam War a fundamental moment was the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964. This was the event that was used by the White House to escalate the war in Vietnam. More specifically, it gave the president the chance to ask congress to pass a resolution, known as the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, that ultimately gave the president the necessary political powers to keep South Vietnam from collapsing. The resolution was denied by only two senators, and many of the less probable to pass the resolution did so on the unwritten basis that the president would appear before congress before escalating the war any further. This, however, didn't happen.⁵⁹

In this aspect another important event that underlined president Johnson's relationship with the constitution were the Fulbright Hearings. These took place in

⁵⁹ R.D. Johnson, "LBJ and the Constitution", in "A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson.", Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, pp. 237-239.

1966 and had as a main objective that of reviewing U.S. policy in Vietnam in relation to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. The hearings, which were heavily televised, brought many prominent experts from various fields to question the legitimacy of American intervention in Vietnam following the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The fact that the hearings were broadcast nationwide eventually brought many to reconsider the war in Vietnam, ultimately contributing to the birth of the anti-war movement that was the embodiment of the division amongst the American people.⁶⁰

President Johnson's aggressiveness when it came to establishing presidential powers in matters of war eventually brought many members of congress who opposed presidential policy in various fields, to stiffen their stance against the president's attempts to pass future proposals by congress.

This dynamic in the broader political spectrum, also contributed to the political polarization that plagued Johnson's presidency and deteriorated his support even within his own party. Eventually this behaviour limited the effects of other of the president's proposals such as the ones related to the war on poverty and economics.

⁶⁰ W.I. Cohen, "The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 166-167.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Vietnam War represents one of the most consequential events of the second part of the 20th century. It remains an emblematic moment of Cold War international politics and its effects are felt worldwide. However, its most resounding and lasting impact was the one it had on American politics and society. The entanglement of foreign policy in Indochina and domestic policy brought to a watershed moment in American history, in which the freedom to question one's government became a characteristic of the United States.

The Vietnam War is thought to be the longest war fought by the United States after the war in Afghanistan. It lasted almost 20 years and spanned over five presidencies. The most influential years of the conflict, however, were the ones during Lyndon Johnson's administration. The years between 1963 and 1969 are the ones that define the Vietnam War and that transformed it into the tragic historical event we know of today.

What made the war under Johnson's administration such a key event in American history were first and foremost the way the president and his advisors decided to conduct the war in Vietnam. Johnson's takeover of the White House after the death of President Kennedy meant that he inherited a difficult situation with an unstable political context in Saigon and an increase in North Vietnamese and Viet Cong activity throughout South Vietnam. This context was the pretext for the president to initiate a process of escalation of the conflict that would eventually lead to a peak of 575,000 soldiers in Vietnam in 1967, before beginning to plan de-escalation after the Tet Offensive of 1968 which demonstrated the North Vietnamese resilience against the Americans. The Vietnam War under Lyndon Johnson underwent a transformation that turned the situation in Vietnam from a little known about civil war in Southeast Asia to an international war that ended up affecting the lives of millions. In other words, the principle aspect of Johnson's war in Vietnam was escalation.

While the reasons behind the escalation of the conflict are to this day a heatedly debated topic it can be said that it was overall due to a combination of reasons that span from the political pressure against Johnson in the United States, to the

broader geopolitics of the Cold War. On one hand the war against the communists in Vietnam was supposed to persuade conservatives in congress to pass legislation on social policy, on the other, part of Johnson's duties as president was to limit communist influence abroad as well as demonstrating the strength of the United States military.

The war in Vietnam, however, didn't actually proceed as expected by the American military. The latter proved to have difficulties in fighting against the guerrilla style warfare fought by the Viet Cong. American casualties rose and positive news from the conflict rarely came. The nature of the war led to an outbreak in violence that affected everyone in Southeast Asia. The North Vietnamese established their control over the southern regions through cadres that infiltrated rural communities and assured cooperation with the communist regime through terrorizing the locals. The Americans on the other hand began to develop racist views of the Vietnamese and the frustration caused by the rising casualties, atrocities committed by the Viet Cong and difficulty in finding them, as well as the body count system, led to the creation of a climate in which atrocities were often committed by all parties in the conflict.

The discussion of War crimes as well as other elements of controversy during the Vietnam War becomes a particularly important discussion when considering the effects of the conflict on Johnson's domestic policy. Domestic policy during the sixties was in fact heavily influenced by the pressure applied by the public to the seats of power. In this case news of atrocities as well as other factors were fundamental in defining the public's opinion of both the war and the Johnson presidency.

While war crimes are unfortunately a relatively common occurrence in armed conflicts, they acquired a different significance in the Vietnam War, especially when it comes to influencing public opinion. In fact, before Vietnam many believed that it was unthinkable that U.S. servicemen could commit these acts. The main factor in defining the way the American public perceived the war in this sense was the development of mass media, in particular the television.

The Vietnam War has been called by many the first television war and it played an essential role in forming the public's perception of the war. A lack of censorship led to the broadcasting of images that showed the brutality and violence of the conflict eventually leading many to oppose the war, especially when considering the positive yet contradictory news from government officials. From the administration's perspective the decline in support for the war wasn't due to the war itself but to the representation of it, eventually leading the president to attempt to paint a more successful image of what was happening in Vietnam, furthering the distance between what the government claimed was happening in Vietnam and what was actually happening there.

It's also important to underline that media during the war was made up of other components as well, such as newsletters, magazines, music and other mediums that further consolidated the anti-war sentiment especially amongst young people.

Public opinion played an important role in defining domestic policy under Lyndon Johnson, and declining public support for the war found its maximum expression in the anti-war movement. The anti-war movement was born halfway through the sixties in college campuses and gradually grew following the escalation of the war. It developed in a dynamic moment in U.S. history in which a broad variety of movements were born to contest authority on a number of aspects of American society, regarding chiefly civil rights and feminism. The anti-war movement in particular represented a movement that, by the global nature of the conflict it was protesting, included many other movements from environmentalism to feminism.

A particular emphasis was put on American minorities fighting in Vietnam, in particular African Americans and Mexican Americans. In this case the Vietnam War showed symptoms of racism in American society on both a personal and institutional level. Disproportionately high levels of casualties amongst ethnic minorities underlined flaws in the draft system and in the Armed Forces Qualification Tests. Moments of racial abuse were not uncommon and there were also episodes of racial violence. The military, supposedly the least discriminate out of government institutions, mirrored the same problems ethnic minorities had

at home and eventually contributed to lowering the general opinion of the war in the United States.

At this point, considering the situation the Johnson administration faced in Vietnam, and the social movements it encountered at home and perception of what was happening with the war at home, it is important to note how the President reacted to this crisis. Domestic policy was president Johnson's prime focus. The War on Poverty and the Creation of the Great Society were supposed to be the elements that defined President Johnson's legacy. However, the Vietnam War effort severely limited his capabilities of realising his dreams in the United States.

The effects of the Vietnam war were widespread but when it comes to U.S. policy we can distinguish its effects firstly in the economic sphere, then the social sphere and finally the civil sphere.

The first consequence of U.S. intervention in Vietnam was in Johnson's economic policy. Johnson's administration faced a number of problems in the economic sector due to the amount of resources necessary to fund Johnson's social programs, and the main obstacle to funding these programs was represented by the Vietnam War. The war in Indochina was underestimated for a number of reasons that would later affect the economy. Firstly, military officials didn't accurately predict how long the war would last. Initially It was thought that it would last only one year, then in 1965 it was believed it would last until 1967 and so forth. Secondly the amount of men and resources needed for the war were underestimated. Military officials and economists were wary of overspending as they had done in the Korean War, so they adjusted the military budget gradually as the war went on. It is also important to underline the way Johnson's economic advisors approached the economy. They believed a constant adjustment to the economy based on the interpretation of recurring trends. The inability to accurately predict the progress of the war especially in its later years made this approach difficult. Initially a tax cut was introduced to stimulate the private sector, however, the inflation caused by the war eventually led the president to increase income taxes.

The effects of the Vietnam War on the economy had significant implications on other aspects of domestic policy, in particular in the social sphere. The growing amount of resources the military needed to carry out the war in Vietnam meant that the Administration was forced to redirect funds social programs to the military budget, therefore reducing the efficacy of projects put in place.

In the civil sphere the Vietnam War enforced the vision many people already had of the United States government and contributed to intensifying the social unrest of the time. At the same time implementing the social programs of the Great Society became more and more difficult leading many to question America's actions in the in relation to the lack of social and civil progress back at home. The civil unrest that was also caused in considerable part by the war was faced by the Johnson administration also through the implementation of programs that were supposed to absorb many minority communities into the broader American community.

Finally, the Vietnam War of the sixties represents one of the most consequential events of American history and the way it affected the decisions made by policy makers when it comes to domestic policy, were emblematic of a turning point in the United States.

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