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Nixon and Vietnam Essay
Spring 2001

The Cold War Era, as frustrating and damaging as it was, offers us many lessons that are taken for granted today. From assassinations to all out war, our history can teach us how to change our lives for the better, both individually and as a society. The Nixon Administration had a major impact on the Cold War, especially in dealing with Vietnam. It offered us reasons that we should carefully watch and react to our government leaders and not naively assume they are making the most prudent and beneficial decisions for the people.

President Richard M. Nixon campaigned with a "peace with honor" plan towards Vietnam, consisting of several parts. The President was in favor of the removal of American troops, but did not want it to be seen as a sign of defeat. When Nixon was inaugurated in 1969, there were over 540,000 troops in Vietnam. By 1970, the number was reduced to 334,000, and by 1971, about 60,000 remained. In 1969, Nixon called for Vietnamization, which called for more training of Vietnamese troops and less responsibility placed on the Americans. The draft was also reformed so that only 19-year olds could be drafted, college students could no longer be drafted, and draftees would be randomly selected by birth date. Nixon also called for an increase in bombing of enemy hideouts and supply routes in Laos and Cambodia. The Administration was not reluctant to announce the draft reforms and withdrawal of troops, although the bombings in these countries were kept private.

During the Nixon Administration, there was much justified protest to the President's policies and the continuation of the war. In October of 1969, 300,000 participated in an antiwar protest in Washington D.C. Peace talks were tried by Nixon's national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, who represented America in the peace talks in Paris. During the talks, the US continued to bomb North Vietnam, hoping it would cause them to comply with America's demands. North Vietnam, however, was not quick to meet the settlement terms, hoping the war opposition in the US would cause the US to retreat. At the same time, a civil war between Communist and anti-Communist forces was being fought in Cambodia. In April of 1970, Nixon sent troops to destroy Communist bases in Cambodia. Opposition said that Nixon had transgressed his Constitutional powers as President by invading a neutral country. This invasion triggered many new antiwar protests, most of which were peaceful. However, at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, four students were killed and thirteen others were wounded. After students had burned a military building on campus, the governor of Ohio declared martial law on the campus and 3,000 National Guard troops were sent there, which resulted in the violence. A commission investigating the events at Kent State later found that the shootings were unjustified. More violence took place at Jackson State in Mississippi, when, after violence the night before, two students were killed at the school, which mostly consisted of blacks. Witnesses claimed that police had shot recklessly in the residence hall. Student strikes at many colleges followed the violence and many colleges were forced to suspend classes or shut down.

Despite the many peace talks, an agreement between the US and North Vietnam took awhile to come. In March of 1972, North Vietnam launched a major offensive attack on South Vietnam. Because few American troops remained, Nixon, instead, increased bombing and had mines planted in North Vietnamese harbors. The President also stopped forcing North Vietnam to remove all of their troops before all American troops withdrew. Just before the presidential election, Kissinger had reached an agreement and claimed: "Peace is at hand." However, the agreement soon failed due to the South Vietnamese's president's objection to any North Vietnamese troops remaining. After Nixon was reelected, he launched the largest bombardment of the war on North Vietnamese

cities, an action that provoked international outrage. With American pressure on the South Vietnamese, a peace agreement was finally signed on January 27, 1973. The United State's involvement in the war had ended, all American troops were withdrawn, and North Vietnam agreed to release all American prisoners of war. However, in 1975, North Vietnam launched an offensive attack on the south, in hopes of unifying Vietnam. South Vietnam was weak and easily collapsed. Within weeks, tanks had reached South Vietnam's capital and many Americans or Vietnamese who supported the US fled to the United States. On April 30, 1975, Saigon fell and South Vietnam surrendered soon after. The war did not end without grave consequences. Between 1965 and 1975, about 1.4 million Vietnamese had been killed and over 58,000 Americans were dead. The US also wasted over \$150 billion in the conflict.

The Cold War, and the Vietnam War in particular, offers us many valuable lessons, one of which is that we must never expect our leaders to make the right decisions. We must be influential in our government and carefully monitor its actions. Many of the decisions made by the Nixon Administration were not beneficial to the majority of the people. The bombings of Cambodia and Laos were not told to the public and the President overstepped his power by invading the neutral country of Cambodia. The police violence, at the two protests that resulted in death, were also unjustified and may have been a threat to future protests. These events show the need for citizen participation in order for a democracy to function.