Vietnam War
Origins of the War

- French controlled Vietnam for years
- 1950’s Vietnamese fought back against the French
- US supported the French
France Surrenders

- 1954
- Final defeat was at Dien Bien Phu—worse loss in French History
Domino Theory

- If one country in Asia becomes Communist, others will too
- US wanted to stop spread of Communism anywhere in the world
Geneva Conference

- Split Vietnam into 2 countries with 17th parallel as the border
- Ho Chi Minh and communists control the North
- Diem and democracy in the South
- This split was temporary with the people of Vietnam voting and choosing a gov’t in future
Diem

- Leader of South Vietnam
- Used terror tactics to keep power
- Backed out of elections meant to unite the 2 countries of Vietnam
  - Causes civil war to break out between North and South Vietnam
Protests of Diem
US aid to Diem

- President Eisenhower sent 675 “advisors” to help the South Vietnamese in their civil war
- US also sent financial and military aid
Ho Chi Minh

- Led communist North Vietnam
- Led revolt against the French
- Fought against the Japanese in WWII and was supported by the USA
- Now was a US enemy as a communist
US and Vietnam

- Gradual involvement in the war
- US supported the South
- US sent “advisors” to aid the South in their civil war with the communists
Escalation

- President Kennedy increases “advisors” to 16,000 in 1960
- JFK and CIA support the murder of Diem and his brothers in South Vietnam (1963)
President LBJ “I am not going to let Southeast Asia go the way China went”
Gulf of Tonkin Incident

- Vietnamese patrol boat attacked a US ship in the Gulf of Tonkin
- US ship fired back and destroyed the patrol boat
Gulf of Tonkin resolution

- Passed by Congress
- Not a declaration of war but gave President LBJ broad military powers
Major Cities in Vietnam

- Hanoi - capital of North Vietnam
- Saigon - capital of South Vietnam
War

- General Westmoreland led the US troops in Vietnam
- US fought alongside the ARVN (South Vietnam Army)
- Draft to raise US army numbers
We used napalm and Agent Orange as weapons
- Destroyed the environment and crops
US never knew who the enemy really was-blended in with civilians

Viet Cong- North Vietnamese ‘irregular army”
Viet Cong fought a “guerrilla war” - hit hard and fast and run away

North Vietnam also had a “regular army” that wore uniforms, etc
“the guerilla wins if he does not lose, the conventional army loses if it does not win”-Mao Zedong
My Lai Massacre

- Roughly 500 unarmed civilians were killed by a US army unit
- Mostly women, children, and elderly
- Not the only war crime committed by US soldiers
Operation Rolling Thunder

- Bombing of North Vietnam by US airplanes for roughly 3 years (1965-1968)
“Puff the Magic Dragon”

- Nickname for plane used by US for air support
- Fired 18,000 bullets per minute
New Strategy

- Body counts were more important than gaining ground
- Soldiers would fly in by helicopter to a battlefield, win the battle and fly out (Huey)
Ho Chi Minh Trail

- Supply line for the North Vietnamese through jungles and underground
- Hard to find for US military and hard to attack
- Stretched from south Vietnam to the north
Battle of Hue

- One of bloodiest and longest battles of war
- Fought in city not the jungle
- Started during the Tet offensive
Battle of Khe Sanh

- January to July 1968
- Under siege for 77 days
- US evacuated all soldiers in July and ‘gave up’ the battle to the North Vietnamese
African Americans in Nam

- Larger percentage of the US soldiers in Nam were African American than whites
Protests

- Vietnam was not a popular war
- Many protests (some violent like at Kent State University) throughout the US against the war
Tet Offensive

- Tet was the Vietnamese New year
- Surprise attacks throughout all of Vietnam by the Viet Cong (North)
- Heavy losses for the US and ARVN (South Vietnam)
- Every major southern city was initially lost to the north then retaken
- US media makes it seem worse than it really was and helps turn public opinion against the war
- Heavy losses for Vietcong and regular North Vietnamese army
- Overall, a victory for the USA
Pentagon Papers

- Revealed that the US gov’t was planning to enter war in Vietnam
- Revealed that the US gov’t had no plans to end the war as long as the North still wanted to fight
Vietnamization

- President Nixon’s idea that the South Vietnamese should play a more active role in the war
- By January 1973, most US soldiers are out of Nam
Fall of Saigon

- April 1975, north Vietnamese troops invade and take control of Saigon
- End of the war
- South surrenders soon after
- Vietnam becomes a unified country with a communist gov’t
Costs

- 3 million Vietnamese killed
- 58,000 Americans killed
- 300,000 Americans wounded
- $150 billion cost to USA
Impact

- 26th Amendment-voting age 18
- Draft is abolished
- War Powers Act
  - President must notify congress within 48 hours of sending troops somewhere
  - Congress must approve the troops being sent by 90 day mark or they come home
Hatred for veterans

- Seen as “baby killers”
POW/MIA problem

- 2583 still unaccounted for today
- John McCain was a POW
- Many were American pilots who were shot down
Ho Chi Minh

“If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours and in the end it will be you who tires of it”