

THE VIETNAM WAR

A FILM BY KEN BURNS & LYNN NOVICK

HUMANITIES TO GO

EVENT SCREENER SUMMARY - DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's ten-part, 18-hour documentary series, THE VIETNAM WAR, tells the epic story of one of the most consequential, divisive, and controversial events in American history as it has never before been told on film. Visceral and immersive, the series explores the human dimensions of the war through revelatory testimony of nearly 80 witnesses from all sides—Americans who fought in the war and others who opposed it, as well as combatants and civilians from North and South Vietnam.

Excerpt from Episode 3: "The River Styx" (January 1964-December 1965) – 02m28s

Journalist Joe Galloway

Excerpt from Episode 4: "Resolve" (January 1966-June 1967) – 03m40s

Marines Bill Ehrhart, John Musgrave, and Roger Harris

Excerpt from Episode 5: "This Is What We Do" (July 1967-December 1967) – 04m47s

Anti-war activist Bill Zimmerman

Excerpt from Episode 7: "The Veneer of Civilization" (June 1968-May 1969) – 04m33s

Army officer Vincent Okamoto

Excerpt from Episode 8: "The History of the World" (April 1969-May 1970) – 06m46s

American Author Tim O'Brien, U.S. Army

Vietnamese Author Bảo Ninh, N. Vietnamese Army

Excerpts from Episode 10: "The Weight of Memory" (March 1973-Onward)

Hero Mothers: Nguyen Thanh Tung (Viet Cong) and Jean-Marie Crocker (Gold Star Mother) (01m57s)

South Vietnamese Refugee: Viet Minh and ARVN officer Tran Ngoc Chau (Los Angeles, CA)

(02m10s)

For additional resources visit:

nhptv.org/veterans

humanities.org/humanitiestogo



EVENT SCREENER - THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What does the Vietnam War mean to you?
- What does *service* mean to you?
- Why is the Vietnam War still so divisive to many Americans?
- How did the Vietnam Veterans Memorial help veterans and the public come to terms with the veterans' service?
- If you had been an adult during the Vietnam War, would you have supported or opposed it?

MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

- Did the discrepancy between media reports of the war and the government's official reporting affect Americans' opinions of the war?
- Journalist Joe Galloway says, "You can't just be a neutral witness to something like war. It crawls down your throat." What is the expectation for objective reporting in a time like the Vietnam War? How do we continue to reconcile those thoughts with conflicts today?
- How can the government's need to maintain national security and the public's right to know the truth ever be reconciled?
- How does Daniel Ellsberg and the release of the Pentagon Papers compare with Wikileaks? Or Edward Snowden?
- In the years after the Vietnam War, film and television programs depicted scenes of explosive violence through fictionalized narratives. How have movies like *Full Metal Jacket*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Born on the Fourth of July* contribute to the general public's understanding of the Vietnam War experience?

SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

- What motivated American men and women to serve in the Vietnam War?
- Why is there still debate regarding the events in the Gulf of Tonkin?
- Teach-ins appeared on university campuses as a way to promote conversations about the war. Did this change anything?
- How did the motivations of American and Vietnamese soldiers change over the duration of the war?
- How does America apply the lessons learned in the Vietnam War to the challenges facing us today?
- How did the Vietnam Veterans Memorial help veterans and the public come to terms with the veterans' service?
- How have our attitudes toward our servicemen/women and veterans changed over time?
- How have our attitudes toward refugees who have served in American forces changed over time, if at all?

ANTI-WAR AND PEACE

- How did the anti-war movement change over time? Did the movement affect policy? Did it reflect public opinion or change it?
- How did the civil rights, women's rights, and environmental rights movements connect to the anti-war movement?

VIETNAMESE AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

- In what ways did the United States fail to understand the Vietnamese people and their history, culture, and government?
- Watching the "Le Quan Cong" clip, you hear of how each of his siblings was killed in the war. Yet his mother encouraged her youngest son to join the fight. What was the motivation to sacrifice her family for the war?
- In the "Weight of Memory" clip, North Vietnamese soldier Bao Ninh describes his homecoming after being gone for six years with no contact with his family. What was the reaction when some soldiers returned after being away for so long? How did these long periods of service without communication affect the morale of the soldiers and the North Vietnamese?
- How were the Vietnamese communists such an effective force, considering that they were fighting American troops with greater wealth and superior technology?
- What happened to Vietnamese who fought with the Americans and were sent to "reeducation camps" after the war?
- What were the costs of the Vietnam War? What happened to the country of Vietnam after the war?
- What did the United States and Vietnam gain by normalizing relations in 1995?
- How have portrayals of America and Americans changed in Vietnamese popular culture and news journalism since the end of the war? Have there been any noticeable changes in how Vietnamese people are portrayed in American popular culture and news journalism?

HOMEFRONT

- How did political and societal changes—the civil rights movement, the women's movement—of the 1960s serve as catalysts for the divergent views on the Vietnam War?
- What is patriotism? Are we obligated to still hold the government accountable for its actions?
- How did the music of this time affect and reflect the feelings of those on the battlefield and at home?
- Does America apply the lessons learned in the Vietnam War toward the challenges facing us today—such as foreign conflicts, military deployments, and refugees?
- How did soldiers' letters, tapes, home movies, and personal photos contribute to Americans' understanding of the war?