THE WAR AT HOME

A STUDY GUIDE FOR THE AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY
(100 minutes)

Part 1
QUIET BEGINNINGS 1963-1966

Part 2
FROM PROTEST TO RESISTANCE 1967-1970

Part 3
WINDING DOWN 1971-1973

A Catalyst Films Production
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ABOUT THE FILM

THE WAR AT HOME chronicles the awakening and growth of the Vietnam protest movement in the United States, from a handful of politically active students, to the street confrontations at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, to the killings at Kent State. Through both newsreel and current footage, we follow participants from all sides—students, police, political figures of the time—as they face each other in growing confrontation. This was a time of profound change in America, when the Civil Rights movement set the tone of the early 1960's. Civil disobedience, sit-ins and marches became accepted methods of arousing the social conscience—and forcing political change from grass roots activism. In its wake came Vietnam. In the beginning it was the hidden war, an afterthought to the American public, obscured by less than candid pronouncements of Asian policy from successive administrations. In the end, it became the largest domestic conflict since the Civil War in the history of the United States.

THE WAR AT HOME is an historical case history; a statement of the motivation and anatomy of a mass movement. The film uses rare archival television news footage from both fronts; the war in Vietnam and the protest movement in the United States. Events taking place at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison, are used as a microcosm of the national protest movement throughout the 60's and early 70's. THE WAR AT HOME touches on many issues: the moral climate of the time, individual responsibility, citizen/government interaction on foreign policy issues, options available in a free society. The film is narrated by those who were involved on all sides, and provides an in-depth, examination of an unsettling era and its current implications.

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE FILM

SUBJECT AREAS

Political Science, History, American Studies, Sociology, Philosophy, Film Studies

AUDIENCE

Junior High, Senior High, College, Adult

OBJECTIVES

1. To chronicle the history and growth of the Vietnam protest movement, the reasons behind it, and the state of social and political awareness at the time.
2. To analyze the interaction of the movement with political and social institutions.
3. To evaluate the effects of antiwar activism on American society.
4. To stimulate discussion and evaluation of the relationship of American citizens to their government.

BEFORE VIEWING FILM

The period of the early 1960's as a time of social unrest is implied, but unexplored in the film. Encourage research and discussion into the events of the times, with particular focus on the Civil Rights movement, John F. Kennedy's call for citizen involvement, the official explanations of how and why the United States went to war in Vietnam. Indicate that the protest movement can be seen as one component of larger social issues pervading society at the time.

NOTE

The following information capsules and related activity suggestions are divided into three chronological parts in order to facilitate audience viewing and discussion.

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PART 1: QUIET BEGINNINGS 1963-1966

CONTENT: In 1963 Madison, Wisconsin, home of the University of Wisconsin, was voted the best place to live in America. Despite scattered incidents of picketing and draft-card burning, the city was as generally unaware of American policy in Vietnam as was the rest of the nation. At the University, a few concerned students were able to draw only small groups of listeners to speeches about Vietnam. Then, in August, 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin incident escalated the war in both scope and publicity, and organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society began to mobilize the growing unrest on campus. Non-violent demonstrations were held at many Universities; previously uncommitted students felt the need to speak out. Government "truth teams", sent to defuse the burgeoning opposition, were met with incredulity and disdain.

In 1965, following United States bombing of North Vietnamese supply lines, the first overt action against government policy resulted in the arrest of those marching to a local Air Force base. By 1966, the draft became the predominant issue of student concern. In the spring of that year, student groups staged a massive, but peaceful sit-in, protesting deferment tests designed to identify eligible draftees, many of whom would likely be sent to Vietnam. The wide base of support, including that from traditionally non-political groups, made this a turning point in a gathering storm.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

1. In what ways did the general social and moral climate of the time provide fertile ground for the Vietnam protest movement?
2. How was the movement indebted to the methods and aims of the Civil Rights movement?
3. What were the objectives of the antiwar movement at this time?
4. The phrase "credibility gap" came into use during this era. What does it mean? Why did the dissidents distrust the government?
5. How does the growth of this movement, and methods used, relate to other major upheavals in U.S. history, such as the American Revolution or the Civil War? Note in particular the bases of support for these schisms.
6. Which statements in the film most closely represent your own views about protest? How do you think you would have reacted had you seen any of the protests?
7. Based on the steps the movement has taken to this point, can you anticipate the direction the protest movement took in the next few years? What trends can you see?

PART 2: FROM PROTEST TO RESISTANCE 1967-1970

CONTENT: Despite government assurances to the contrary, the Vietnam War escalated, claiming more and more lives on both sides. To students, protest became a way of life, spawning newspapers, tenant unions, demands on the University. When Ted Kennedy came to speak despite a student ban on government representatives, activists disrupted his speech. Dow Chemicals became an antiwar target, and violence ensued when a sit-in was broken up by the police. The shock of violent confrontation brought to many people the realization that it was becoming more and more difficult to remain neutral. Businessmen and housewives joined in the struggle, assuming their individual responsibility for government actions. Further violent clashes increased the level of militancy from protest to active resistance.

Civil disobedience briefly co-existed with the traditional political system as activists campaigned for Eugene McCarthy in the 1968 election. But the truce broke down outside the convention hall, and resistance hardened. Blacks and whites joined forces, a national moratorium was declared, dissidents drew together in cooperative living, a life-style suspicious and unacceptable to police. Protests became military skirmishes as young people were killed at Kent State and Jackson State Universities, and at the bombing of the Army Math Research Center. Draftees fled to Canada, families were divided in their allegiances, the nation was at ideological war with itself.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES:

1. How have the goals of the protest movement changed in this section? Are the protestors successful in producing government responsiveness and change? What was the government's position at this point?
2. According to a 1968 Gallup poll, a majority of Americans opposed the war in Vietnam. What conflicts and changes are implied in the new willingness of ordinary citizens to become involved in the movement?
3. What is the function of civil disobedience in a republic? How would you reconcile it with the right of free speech?
4. Why do you think this conflict took root at the University level? Does the University serve as a "marketplace of ideas"—should it remain neutral or take sides?
5. What limits, if any, should be placed on dissent? Who do you think should define those limits?
6. To what extent do you think individual responsibility supersedes government policy? What does this mean in terms of Karl Armstrong's bombing of the Army Math Research Center?
7. By 1966, elements of the antiwar movement engaged in violent forms of protest. How did this change take place? To what extent did the authorities contribute to it? Did the end justify the means? What do you think you would have done at the time?

PART 3: WINDING DOWN 1971-1973

CONTENT: By 1971 thousands of student activists had graduated from the nation's universities, but incoming students, many radicalized in their high school years, pressed the movement on. To them, and the vast numbers of their non-student sympathizers, now came the support of returning Vietnam war veterans. Dissent within the military added a voice that administration could not ignore. President Nixon ordered phased withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, a policy known as Vietnamization of the war. Though some saw this as the end of the U.S. participation in the war, many perceived the order as a way to placate Americans while continuing the bombing in Vietnam. Indeed, in 1972, Nixon ordered mining of North Vietnamese ports, communication lines cut, and air and naval strikes continued. Antiwar groups quickly responded with widely publicized protests. Finally it seemed clear that the vast majority of Americans from all walks of life was in direct conflict with government policy, and would no longer support any military action in Vietnam. By the summer of 1972 the U.S. ground combat role in Vietnam came to an end. On January 27, 1973, a cease-fire agreement was signed. It marked the end of a decade of American combat in Vietnam, and an end to the Vietnam protest movement at home.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES:

1. What happened to the antiwar movement when the Paris peace accord was signed? Had its objectives been realized? In what form, if any, does the movement exist today?
2. Why and how did the protest movement become such a powerful force in American society?
3. Has the American political system become more or less responsive to dissent as a result of the Vietnam era? How effective is public influence on government policy today?
4. Why did many veterans join the protest movement, and what new strengths did they bring to it?
5. What do you think Karl Armstrong means when he calls his bombing of the Army Math Research Center "stupid"?
6. What are some of the more traditional options of dissent in our society? Why were they abandoned by the protest movement?
7. From your own point of view, explain and evaluate Senator Gruening's statement that "all protests against the war were not only justified, but a civic duty".
8. Vietnam has been called the first television war. How did the massive television coverage

of the war and the protests affect people's understandings, and their committment or dissent?

9. Organized protest is a legitimate option in a open society. Research the background, methods and goals of current protest groups. Do any of these groups have the potential to create the same impact as the antiwar organizations did in the Vietnam era?
10. Could the events of the Vietnam era happen again? If so, what might spur them? Where do you think your sympathies might lie?

OUTLINE CHRONOLOGY OF VIETNAM WAR EVENTS

1963: Fall — Diem overthrown and murdered in Saigon.
Nov. — John F. Kennedy assassinated.

1964: Winter — U.S. begins covert operations against North Vietnam.
May — Anti-Vietnam demonstrations held in several cities.
Summer — Gulf of Tonkin incident.
Winter — Major bombing begins against supply routes through Laos.

1965: February — Heavy attacks by Vietcong against U.S. personnel.
March — U.S. begins sustained bombing over North Vietnam.
Demonstrations are held throughout the nation.
Johnson approves use of napalm in Vietnam.
April — 25,000 march in Washington against the war in protest called by Students for a Democratic Society.
May — U.S. calls bombing halt and makes peace overtures.
Truth teams address dissidents.
Summer — Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky take over Saigon government.
Public hearing held on war
Congress makes it a criminal offense to burn draft cards.
Fall — International Days of Protest
Intensive bombing resumes.
Temporary bombing halt

1966: Winter — Bombing resumes
Spring — South Vietnamese protests against government spread.
Summer — U.S. bombs oil tanks at Hanoi and Haiphong.
Winter — Talks on a negotiated settlement collapse.

1967: Spring — Martin Luther King speaks out against the war.
Ground and air war escalates.
Vietnam referenda placed on local ballots.
Fall — North Vietnam rejects Johnson's proposal to halt bombing in return for negotiation.
Eugene McCarthy enters presidential race as antiwar candidate.
U.S. bombs Haiphong harbor.

1968: Winter — Tet offensive and attack on U.S. Embassy shocks nation.
My Lai massacre in Vietnam.
Spring — Martin Luther King assassinated.
Peace talks begin in Paris.
Lyndon Johnson announces he will not seek Presidency.
Summer — Robert Kennedy assassinated.
Democratic Convention in Chicago.
Fall — Johnson orders cessation of bombardment of N. Vietnam.
Richard Nixon elected President.

1969: Winter — U.S. troop numbers peak at 541,000.
Spring — Nixon proposes phased troop withdrawals.
Summer — Ho Chi Minh dies.

1970: Spring — U.S. invades North Vietnamese operations bases in Cambodia.
Six students killed at Kent State and Jackson State Universities.
Summer — Senate repeals Gulf of Tonkin resolution.
Fall — Nixon proposes cease fire plan.

1971: Spring — Vietnam veterans march on Washington.
Pentagon Papers released.
May Day protests bring 100,000 people to Washington.
Summer: — North Vietnam presents nine point peace plan in Paris.
— Troop reductions continue.

1972: Winter — Peace talks broken off.
North Vietnamese launch offensive into South Vietnam.
U.S. bombers strike Hanoi and Haiphong.
Peace talks resume.
Spring — U.S. mines North Vietnamese harbors.
South Vietnamese province of Quang Tri falls to North.
Peace talks collapse.
Watergate break-in occurs.
Summer — U.S. ground combat role ends.
Peace talks resume.
Fall — Nixon re-elected over McGovern.
U.S. bombs Hanoi and Haiphong to pressure N. Vietnam.

1973: Winter — Cease-fire agreement signed
Prisoners of war return from Vietnam.
Congress stops bombing of Cambodia.

1975: Spring — Saigon falls to North Vietnamese.