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Vietnam: The Television War

I

THE VIETNAM WAR was the first to be televised. In their living rooms watching the evening news, Americans regularly saw film of airplanes flying, often dropping bombs, and troops on patrol, sometimes in combat. The Vietnam War was also the first one in which the United States suffered a clear defeat. An army of half a million Americans failed to crush the attempts of the National Liberation Front and North Vietnam to overthrow the government of South Vietnam. By 1973 the American troops had gone home. In 1975 the North Vietnamese army conquered the South.

It is widely believed that the first feature was the cause of the second, that the United States lost the war *because* it was televised. Lyndon Johnson believed this. On April 1, 1968, the day after he had announced on television that he would not seek another term as president, he told a meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters,

> As I sat in my office last evening, waiting to speak, I thought of the many times each week when television brings the war into the American home. No one can say exactly what effect those vivid scenes have on American opinion. Historians must only guess at the effect that television would have had during earlier conflicts on the future of this Nation: during the Korean war, for example, at that time when our forces were pushed back there to Pusan; or World War II, the Battle of the Bulge, or when our men were slugging it out in Europe or when most of our Air Force was shot down that day in June 1942 off Australia.[1]

The president's meaning was clear: if its previous wars had been televised, the United States would not have persevered in fighting them. Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman would have lost support for their policies even as he had lost support for his, forcing the abandonment of his campaign for reelection.

The fact that scenes from the war appeared regularly on television has seemed to others besides President Johnson to have made it impossible for the United States to win in Vietnam. Regular exposure to the ugly realities of battle is thought to have turned the public against the war, forcing the withdrawal of American troops and leaving the way clear for the eventual Communist victory. This has become a truism, a part of the conventional wisdom about recent American history.[2] It is certainly plausible in an age when television pervades

American society. It is doubly plausible as an explanation for what seems anomalous: the failure of the most powerful nation in the world to have its way in a much smaller and far less technically advanced country. As an explanation of what happened in Vietnam, however, the fact that the war was televised has one shortcoming; it does not stand up to scrutiny.

It is certainly true that public opinion ultimately determined American policy in Vietnam. Between 1954 and 1965 it had little influence on what the U.S. government did there because American support for the government of South Vietnam was modest and made no appreciable impression on the public. Between 1965 and 1968 the American presence in Southeast Asia grew dramatically. The number of troops rose from twenty thousand to over half a million. The American air force began to attack targets in North Vietnam. The American public became aware of the war, and then disenchanted with it. The year 1968 was a turning point. In February an uprising was launched all across South Vietnam against the government and American forces, which became known as the "Tet offensive." The military asked President Johnson to add 200,000 men to the troops already in Vietnam. He refused. Shortly thereafter he renounced his campaign for reelection.

The new president, Richard Nixon, began the steady withdrawal of American combat forces from Vietnam. By the end of 1972, virtually all had left. Nixon had been elected, or so he believed, among other reasons, because of public dissatisfaction with his predecessor's conduct of the war. His changes of policy were designed to be acceptable where Johnson's were not.

It is true as well that Americans got most of their information about the war, as about the world in general during the Vietnam period, from television. In the 1960s it became the principal medium for news in the United States. The correlation between the outcome of the war and the way Americans learned about it, however, is spurious; or, if not plainly spurious, at least not proven and not plausible. It was not the special properties of television, not the fact that it was this medium and not others upon which Americans relied to follow events on the other side of the Pacific, that shaped American attitudes toward the conflict.

II

How might television coverage have sown dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War in the United States? It might have made the American people more conscious of it than they would have been had television cameras not been present. In the sixties, in an effort to polish the public image of television that the "quiz show" scandals of the fifties had tarnished, the three major networks did increase the number of hours they devoted to news programs. To cultivate a reputation for seriousness and civic-mindedness, they began to put documentary programs on the air. Few of them, at least in the first two years when Americans were being sent to Asia in great numbers, dealt with Vietnam.[3] In 1963 the evening national news programs were expanded from fifteen minutes to a half hour. The reasons were financial; these programs, which they distributed to affiliated stations around the country, were extremely profitable for the networks. With more time to devote to news, they hired more reporters;

their Saigon bureaus grew. More film of the war, therefore, began to arrive at the networks' headquarters in New York, and found its way into the nation's living rooms.[4]

By the middle of the 1960s, surveys of their habits showed, Americans were watching a great deal of television. Or rather, the many American television sets were playing much of the day. This did not necessarily mean, however, that their owners were paying close attention to them. Television provided background noise in many households. Americans might spend more hours in a room with a television playing than they did reading a newspaper, but reading requires a higher quality of attention, and there is no simple way to equate the two. As they shifted from newspapers to television as their primary source of news, Americans may have received less, not more, information about current affairs. They may have learned less about Vietnam than they did about World War II.[5]

Television coverage might, alternatively, have soured the American people on their government's policies in Vietnam by slanting the news, by putting the American effort there in an unfavorable light. Peter Braestrup's exhaustive study of the American media's coverage of the Tet offensive does show that the public received a distorted picture of the event. For reasons having to do not with political bias but with the habits of journalism, Tet was portrayed as a military defeat for the United States. In fact, from a strictly military point of view, it was a greater setback for the North Vietnamese and especially for the National Liberation Front. They not only suffered enormous losses, but the general uprising they had expected to trigger all across South Vietnam did not occur.[6]

Braestrup finds fault, however, with the way Tet was portrayed by *all* the major American news organizations—newspapers, news magazines, and the wire services, as well as television. He draws no particular distinctions between them. Whatever the media were telling them about Tet, moreover, the American people may have drawn the appropriate conclusion about the event. Tet did not make the war markedly less popular than it had been before; its effect was to reduce the level of support for Lyndon Johnson's conduct of it.[7] During the fall of 1967, the Johnson Administration had made a special effort to persuade the public that the war was going well, that it was being won, that the end was in sight. Tet demonstrated that there was a good deal of fight left in the enemy, and suggested that the war was hardly close to a conclusion. The Communist side was plainly determined and unlikely to give up easily or soon. Tet called into question the president's optimism, and public confidence in him dropped accordingly.

The special case of Tet aside, the operational procedures of television news did shape the way that the war was presented to the public. These arose from the needs of the news organizations themselves, not from the political views of those who worked for them. (Television reporters had more or less the same opinions about Vietnam as the country as a whole.[8]) The producers of the news programs encouraged their Saigon correspondents to shoot film of combat, especially before 1968. Combat scenes tended to be more dramatic, more exciting, and therefore—and this was the primary consideration—more likely to attract viewers than other kinds of coverage. Because there was little interest in showing Vietnamese, the subjects of the combat footage produced were invariably Americans, who were usually engaged in unspecified, but seemingly successful, military activity.[9]

The film was seldom broadcast the same day that it was shot. It was technically possible to transmit directly to New York by satellite, but this was expensive, especially in the sixties.[10] The usual procedure was to ship cans of film by air. This meant that they arrived at network headquarters a few days later, and so could not be shown to illustrate a breaking story. Most combat footage therefore appeared as background, to give viewers a general flavor of the war. So the news programs' audiences generally saw Americans in apparently successful action that was not, however, tied to any particular event.[11] This may have helped to give an unduly optimistic impression of the war, and contributed to the public's disillusionment when events proved the optimism unwarranted. It was not television alone, however, that was telling the American public that the war was being won. Nor, as noted, did Tet affect the public's judgment of the war itself, but rather the Johnson Administration's conduct of it.

In fact, television coverage of the war had very little overt editorial content. The networks simply presented a series of images, mainly of Americans fighting an unseen foe. They provided the public with a kind of "illustrated wire service."[12] Images themselves ordinarily carry no explicit message. The impression that they leave depends on the interpretive framework that the viewer brings to them.[13]

The producers of the national news programs and their superiors at the three networks were reluctant in the extreme to supply any such framework, let alone one critical of the policies of the American government.[14] Television is the most timid of the media. The networks have been especially wary about giving offense to anybody over any issue. They lack the roots in a particular community that newspapers have and so are particularly vulnerable. They are also enormously profitable businesses, whose proprieters are wary of doing anything that might deprive them of the commercial sponsors that make broadcasting so lucrative. They are, as well, alert to the preferences of the owners of the local stations that carry their programs.[15] They are particularly wary of running afoul of the federal government because they are subject to the oversight of a federal agency, the Federal Communications Commission. Broadcasting is a government-regulated business in a way that newspaper and magazine publishing are not.[16]

Where the networks feared to tread, the government had the field to itself. It was left mainly to government spokesmen to provide the interpretive framework for the television coverage of the war in Vietnam.[17] Government officials in Saigon and Washington, above all the president, had ready access to broadcast time.

The networks retreated from even mildly controversial practices at the first sign of official displeasure. When Vice President Spiro T. Agnew attacked the media in a speech in Des Moines in 1969, the chairman of CBS, William Paley, ordered the network to discontinue its commentaries immediately following televised presidential speeches. (They were subsequently resumed.[18]) Even before that speech, the networks had begun to avoid reporting on the war in ways that they thought might court unpopularity. Stories about the peace talks in Paris replaced combat footage from Vietnam on the evening news. The negotiations and the withdrawal of American forces, not the fighting, came to be defined as the newsworthy aspects of the war.[19]

III

The belief that television had a decisive influence on the conduct of the Vietnam War does not rest on the editorial content of the network news programs, however. It was not the conceptual framework for interpreting the pictures of violence that appeared on American television screens that shaped public attitudes toward the war, according to the conventional wisdom, but the pictures themselves. An image is thought to be many times more powerful than words. These images, of shot and shell, blood and death, produced a particular set of reactions in those who saw them: dismay, disgust, and horror, all of which fed the desire to stop the war, or at least to stop American participation in it. When Americans could only read about war, they could contemplate it with dispassion. When they could see and hear it in their living rooms, they turned against it.

The case for the decisive influence of television rests on the assumption that the way people receive information determines how they respond to it. This is another way of putting Marshall McLuhan's axiom that "the medium is the message." The conventional wisdom about television and American policy in Vietnam is consistent with McLuhan's central proposition: print, the linear medium, breaks the world down into artificial categories, while the electronic media, especially television, recreate the "plural simultaneity" of real life. Print divides and distances people from one another; television engenders feelings of solidarity and sympathy. According to McLuhan's theory, reading about the war would have left Americans willing to let it proceed in all its destructiveness; seeing it on television, the humanity they shared with their Vietnamese fellow inhabitants of the global village was brought home to them, and they insisted that it be stopped.[20]

There is little empirical evidence of how people reacted to seeing the war on television.[21] In its absence, it is just as plausible to suppose that television promoted *support* for the war as to assume that it generated opposition. Seeing fellow Americans fighting and dying might have kindled patriotic sentiments, and inspired in the television audience the determination to see the war through to a successful conclusion, in order to give meaning to those sacrifices. It is not necessarily true that the more directly civilians experience war the more reluctant they become to support the government that is fighting it. Television undoubtedly affords a more direct experience of war than newspapers, radio, or even cinema newsreels. In the twentieth century, however, those non-combatants exposed to aerial bombardment have had the dubious privilege of even *more* direct experience. The bombing of their cities did not make the English, the Germans, the Japanese, or the North Vietnamese more reluctant to fight, at least not at first.[22]

Alternatively, the constant exposure to the war on television may have made Americans apathetic about the killing half a world away. Television arguably had an alienating effect, flooding the nation's living rooms with so many images of so many different things as to make it impossible for Americans to respond with feeling to any of them.[23] It may have rendered the war trivial, with the pictures of battle seeming no more urgent or alarming than all the others that regularly paraded across the small grey screen.[24] This is the contention of the *New Yorker*'s television critic, Michael J. Arlen, in his essay on television coverage of Vietnam, "The Living-Room War."[25] The title is meant ironically. The war was no more serious a matter than all the other things that television brought into American living rooms.[26]

IV

If there is no conclusive evidence of television's impact on American attitudes toward the Vietnam War, there *is* historical evidence that calls into question the conventional wisdom about its influence. Vietnam was the first televised war; it was by no means the first unpopular American war.

The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the War between the States were all in one way or another civil wars. By definition, a large number of Americans opposed the government's policies in each. There was vocal opposition to the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War and subsequent campaign to suppress the insurrection in the Philippines, on the grounds that they were imperial adventures inconsistent with American principles. American participation in both the First and the Second World Wars was relatively popular, but the United States became involved in both only several years after they had begun, and in the case of World War II, only after being directly attacked. Between 1914 and 1917 and again between 1939 and 1941, the American public on the whole favored keeping out.

Wars have been unpopular because of enduring characteristics of American society. The United States has been a nation of immigrants, many of whom uprooted themselves because they did not wish to serve in the armed forces of the countries that they left. It is a liberal society, combining a traditional republican distrust of standing armies, which lingered into the twentieth century, with the presumption that the citizen's obligation to the state are minimal, and include military service only when the nation itself is in peril. The roots of antiwar sentiment reach far back into the American past, to a time before the age of mass literacy and newspapers, let alone television.

Following World War II, American attitudes toward the world changed, however, and there are grounds for supposing that the predominant American view of war changed with them. After 1945 the United States found itself at the center of international affairs, with no prospect of retreating to its accustomed position on the periphery. The wider world was more threatening than before, and the United States had assumed more responsibilities in it. After 1945 there were reasons for war to seem a normal, or at least a necessary, part of American national life.

The United States has fought two wars since 1945, and at first glance a comparison between them seems to lend support to the conventional wisdom about the influence of television. The Korean War and the war in Vietnam were similar conflicts. Each was a civil war on the Asian mainland; in each the United

States supported the non-Communist side against a Communist challenge. Both were limited wars, in that the United States did not bring the full weight of its military power to bear in fighting them. Each war was frustrating for Americans. Each ended, at best, in stalemate. The Korean War was fought before the age of television and seems, in retrospect, to have been relatively popular. The Vietnam War was televised and was, ultimately, unpopular.

The truth of the matter is, however, that the Korean War was unpopular as well. In fact, the course of American public opinion on each war was strikingly similar.[27]

Both wars had wide support when they began: the year 1965, when the number of American troops there began to rise dramatically, may be taken for these purposes as the equivalent of June 1950, when North Korea attacked the South and the United States decided to intervene. Both wars became unpopular; popularity is measured in both cases by public opinion polls asking whether the United States had made a mistake in entering the war.[28] Support for the Korean War, measured in this way, dropped more quickly than did support for the Vietnam conflict. The difference is explained if the level of support in each case is assumed to depend on the number of American casualties; the higher the cost of the war in these terms, the lower its popularity. There were more casualties earlier in Korea than in Vietnam. In both instances, support can be shown to be a logarithmic function of total casualties.[29]

Aggregate comparisons can be deceiving. They can mask important shifts by distinct groups within the population, which may offset each other. The Vietnam and Korean wars, however, received about the same level of support from the same types of people.[30]

The parallel between the two wars goes further. They were part of similar patterns in American electoral politics. As support for each war declined, so did the popularity of the man responsible for conducting it, Harry Truman for the Korean War, Lyndon Johnson for Vietnam.[31] Each man decided not to seek another term in office. The nominee of his party in the general election was defeated. The Republican challenger in each case was elected on a pledge not to do anything in particular about the war, but simply to do something different. Richard M. Nixon's unspecified "secret plan to end the war in Vietnam" (a phrase he apparently never used but that conveys the public's impression of his position) recalled Dwight Eisenhower's promise, sixteen years before, "I shall go to Korea."

Korea and Vietnam were wars of the same kind, they induced more or less the same pattern of public support, and they were associated with remarkably similar electoral patterns. Vietnam was televised; Korea was not.

V

There is one striking difference between the two wars. Opposition to the war in Vietnam was more vocal; this is the reason it is often thought to have been less popular than the Korean War.[32] There was an antiwar movement in the 1960s; there was none in the previous decade. There was, of course, no unified political organization with a single political program opposing the war in Vietnam. There were many groups, which employed a variety of tactics ranging from petitions, advertisements in newspapers, rallies and marches, to civil disobedience—obstructing military recruitment centers and publicly burning draft cards. There were scattered episodes of violence as well. The element common to all of them was active opposition to the American military role in Indochina. There was nothing remotely comparable in response to the Korean War.[33] Opposition then was passive and silent.

Through the antiwar movement, television may have exercised an *indirect* influence on the Vietnam War. For television did play an important part in the movement's development. It did not create active opposition to the war, but it did have a profound effect on the way that opposition was expressed. It served as a network of communication through which people in one part of the country discovered that others elsewhere shared their feelings about the war, and saw how they could demonstrate those feelings publicly.

It became, as well, a forum for propagating antiwar views. The antiwar movement did not expect to stop the war itself, but rather hoped to persuade the American public that it ought to be stopped. This message could reach many more people through television than in any other way. The opponents of the war could not afford to purchase time to broadcast directly, and so counted on being newsworthy. The movement often geared its timing and its tactics to the routines and tastes of television. A successful demonstration was one that received a few minutes' coverage on the evening news.[34] One of the themes of *Snyder's Walk*, Thomas B. Morgan's powerful novel of journalism and the peace movement, is the way that the felt need to attract media attention sometimes determined not just tactics but basic moral choices.

Antiwar rallies often became a form of theater, with crowds, impassioned speakers, and occasionally open conflict between demonstrators and police. The antiwar movement was the equivalent, on the home front, of combat footage in Vietnam itself; it made for good television. Television coverage of Vietnam protests reflected, as well, the American fascination in the nineteen-sixties with young people, especially the young adults who served as the soldiers of the antiwar movement.

The influence of television on the war in Vietnam thus depends on the influence of the antiwar movement on the course of that war. Gauging this is not a simple matter. There are grounds for believing that the movement helped to shorten the war. For while it is true that public opinion as a whole was roughly the same for Korea as for Vietnam, the antiwar movement embodied the kind of political influence that public opinion surveys ordinarily do not measure.

For the purposes of such surveys, every individual's opinion counts equally. In politics, however, some are more influential than others. Vocal opposition to the war was concentrated among those with more than their share of political influence. Young people tended to be more favorably disposed toward the war than their elders; as a whole college students supported the war.[35] But at *select* colleges, opposition to the war was the norm. Students at these institutions were the children of people with high social status and considerable political power. His daughter, then a student at Radcliffe College, was credited with persuading Senator Eugene McCarthy to oppose the war in 1967.

The surveys that measured the number of Americans who considered the Korean and Vietnam wars mistakes did not ordinarily register the intensity of people's feelings about the two wars. Intensity of belief is important, however, because it determines how, if at all, a person will act on what he believes. Those in the antiwar movement obviously felt strongly enough to do more than simply register their views in a poll when asked. They petitioned, rallied, marched, and in some cases even went to jail to express their opposition to American policy in Vietnam. The movement disrupted American life and divided American society, thereby raising the cost of the war, and perhaps helping to persuade the public that the price of waging it successfully was too high.

Intensity of feeling can affect the outcome of elections. Every vote counts equally, of course, but in primary elections, only a minority (sometimes a small minority) usually bothers to cast a ballot. Those who are moved to vote by a particular issue like the war, therefore, can have influence out of proportion to their numbers in the population as a whole. They can enlarge their influence, as well, by lending active support, especially financial support, to candidates in primary elections who espouse their positions. The intensity of opposition to the Vietnam War had much to do with the success in the Democratic presidential primaries of the candidacies of Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and George McGovern in 1972.

There is another reason to believe that the antiwar movement shortened the war. The two presidents responsible for conducting it became preoccupied with public opposition to their policies. Johnson attracted demonstrators wherever he went in 1968, which no doubt contributed, along with the results of the New Hampshire and Wisconsin presidential primaries that year, to his decision not to seek reelection.

Even larger demonstrations against the war took place during the Nixon years, especially in November 1969, and in May 1970, after the invasion of Cambodia. The Nixon Administration made a concerted effort to discredit the antiwar movement,[36] which led, indirectly, to the president's downfall. When Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers to several newspapers in 1971, in the hope that the publication of a documented history of the American role in Vietnam would turn the country against the war, the Nixon Administration decided to try to connect him in the public mind to other opponents of the war and especially those in the Democratic party. The president's associates recruited and paid a group of men to raid the Los Angeles office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist to obtain confidential material that would damage his reputation. The same group was caught the next year breaking into the Washington office of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate building.[37]

There are also grounds, however, for suspecting that the antiwar movement had the *opposite* effect from the one it intended, that it helped *prolong* the American military presence in Vietnam. Although the war became increasingly unpopular, the antiwar movement was always *more* unpopular. The Vietnam period was a time not only of political protest, but of cultural protest as well. New styles of dress, new patterns of behavior, especially sexual conduct, and new attitudes toward the principal institutions of American society appeared, all of them at odds with the prevailing norms and beliefs. Together they made up what came to be known as the "counterculture."[38] The majority of

Americans found them distasteful, even threatening. The Vietnam period was also one of cultural conflict in the United States, played out as a clash of symbols—long hair, the flag, the draft card. In this, television, the supreme disseminator of symbols, played a central role.

The antiwar movement became caught up in the symbolic conflict and associated in the public mind with disorder and revolt.[39] This made it unpopular, which may have tarnished its cause in the eyes of the American public.[40] The Nixon Administration sought not merely to increase the movement's unpopularity, but to draw political profit from it. It tried to equate dissent from its policies with disloyalty, or at least disreputability. Hostility to the counterculture and the antiwar movement were central themes in the Republican campaigns of 1970 and 1972.[41] Nixon offered himself and his party as the champions of all that was familiar, traditional, and safe in American life, against what he portrayed as a mortal challenge by scruffy, dissolute, and subversive groups—like the antiwar movement. These themes do not fully account for the results of those elections; but they certainly contributed to his sweeping victory in 1972. Thus his own outspoken opposition to the antiwar movement may have strengthened Nixon's political position, helping to make it possible for him to withdraw American combat forces from Vietnam at *his* chosen pace, rather than faster, as the war's opponents preferred.

It is unlikely that many Americans supported the Nixon Vietnam policy simply because they did not care for its opponents. That policy was relatively popular because it was tailored to what the public wanted. And what it wanted was quite different from what the antiwar movement wanted. Both groups came to regard the war as a mistake. The public as a whole thought so for different reasons, however, and as a result, favored different methods for correcting the mistake than did the antiwar movement.[42]

Antiwar activists believed that American involvement in Vietnam was an unwarranted intrusion into a civil war and a violation of the nation's values. They were troubled by the destruction in Southeast Asia and by the loss of life, Vietnamese as well as American. The general public, by contrast, was comfortable with the war's purpose. The aim of keeping South Vietnam free of Communist control seemed to most Americans proper and just. The problem in their eyes was that the war was too costly. In particular, too many American lives were being lost.[43] To the antiwar movement, the Vietnam War seemed a crime; to the American public it was a blunder.

At any particular moment between 1965 and 1973, most of the active opponents of the war favored the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of American forces from Indochina. Until 1968, however, those among the general public who thought the war a mistake were as likely to favor a sharp escalation of the conflict—in order to end it quickly—as to want American troops to leave.[44] Thereafter, the preferred means of lowering the costs of the war was to remove American combat forces; this the Nixon policy of substituting Vietnamese troops for them, the policy known as "Vietnamization," accomplished.[45] The public was uneasy about abandoning the goal for which the war was being fought. Surveys showed a powerful reluctance to do anything that would pave the way for the Communist conquest of South Vietnam.[46] In the 1972 presidential election, George McGovern offered the country the antiwar movement's assessment of the war and its prescription for ending it. He was resoundingly defeated.

This suggests that, rather than hastening its end or prolonging it, the antiwar movement had no impact at all on the course of the Vietnam War. It suggests that its apparent influence was illusory, that its aims were fulfilled only insofar as they overlapped with those of the general public.

The antiwar movement was an important episode in American history. For millions of people it was the source of experiences that shaped their attitudes toward the world, toward their country, and toward themselves. It had a hand in toppling two presidents. Whether it did what it set out to do, however, is a different question, and one without a clear answer.

The United States lost the war in Vietnam because the American public was not willing to pay the cost of winning, or avoiding losing. The people's decision that the war was not worth these costs had nothing to do with the fact that they learned about it from television. Whether it was based on the fact that many of their fellow citizens were vehemently opposed to the war, which they also learned from television, is difficult to say. It is possible that it was not. It is possible that the public would have reached the same judgment in the same way over the same period of time—that is, that the war would have followed the course it did—even if the cathode ray tube had never been invented.

REFERENCES

[1] "Remarks in Chicago before the National Association of Broadcasters," in Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States, 1968* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 484.

[2] See, for example, "Vietnam Reappraised," *International Security* 6(1) (Summer 1981): 8, 22; Edward Jay Epstein, *News From Nowhere: Television and the News* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 9; Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 401; *The Vietnam Legacy: The War, American Society, and the Future of American Foreign Policy*, edited by Anthony Lake (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp. xix, 49, 122; David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 429.

[3] Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 143-44, 147-48.

[4] Ibid., p. 149.

[5] William Schneider has argued that television has expanded the audience for news of foreign affairs because, although the subject does not interest most Americans, they do not tune out stories on foreign subjects on the evening news programs in the same way that they skip such articles in newspapers. He further argues that most Americans are unenthusiastic about involvement in other countries, which suggests that television *diminishes* popular support for intervention abroad. But by the time public opinion turned against the war in Vietnam, American involvement was so extensive that the public could not have ignored it, even without television. William Schneider "Bang-Bang Television: The New Superpower," *Public Opinion*, May 1982.

[6] Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), pp. xxi, xxv; Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, p. 354.

[7] Ibid., p. xxxiii-iv.

[8] Epstein, *News from Nowhere*, pp. 43, 211-212.

[9] Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, pp. 149-50.

[10] Epstein, *News from Nowhere*, p. 33.

[11] Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, p. 150; Michael J. Arlen, *Living-Room War: Writings About Television* (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 116.

[12] Ibid., p. 111.

[13] See, for example, Epstein, *News from Nowhere*, p. 21.

[14] Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, p. 381

[15] Epstein, *News from Nowhere*, p. 56.

[16] Ibid., p. 43.

[17] Arlen, *Living-Room War*, p. 15.

[18] Barnouw, See *Tube of Plenty*, pp. 443-45.

[19] Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, pp. 374-79; Epstein, *News from Nowhere*, p. 17.

[20] The best summary of McLuhan's ideas is to be found, not in any of his several books, but in Jonathan Miller's *McLuhan* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1971), which also contains convincing criticisms of these ideas that stop just short of judging them worthless. The phrase "plural simultaneity" is Miller's, p. 11.

[21] For a single, not altogether reliable piece of evidence, see John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973), p. 167.

[22] Hiroshima and Nagasaki offered the Japanese strong incentives to stop fighting. The process of decision that led to Japan's surrender was under way before the first atomic bomb struck on August 6, 1945, however. In that decision, the role of the emperor was crucial. Had he insisted that his countrymen continue the war even after both cities had been destroyed by atomic explosions, it is far from clear that they would have disobeyed.

[23] Miller, *McLuhan*, p. 126.

[24] During the Vietnam period, a number of fictional television programs about war appeared. Most of these were set in World War II, prompting speculation that they promoted support for the Vietnam War by associating it subtly in the public mind with the previous, popular conflict. Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, pp. 375-76. An equally plausible deduction is that war programs were popular because the Vietnam War itself was popular.

[25] This is the title of an essay, which serves as the title of a collection of his articles written between 1966 and 1969.

[26] Even if pictures did serve to crystallize opposition to the war, they did not necessarily come from television. Of all the thousands of images of Vietnam, three were particularly memorable: the South Vietnamese police chief executing a suspected enemy by shooting him in the head at point blank range on a Saigon street during Tet, 1968; a young woman crying out in anguish while bending over the body of a student who had just been shot by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University in May, 1970; and two naked Vietnamese children running down a road, splattered with napalm, two years later. Of the three only the first appeared on television, and a photograph lifted from the television film was carried on the front page of newspapers across America. One of the newspapers that carried the picture, on February 2, 1968, was *The New York Daily News*. The next day the newspaper printed an editorial about the picture that supported American participation in the war. Braestrup, *Big Story*, pp. 460-62.

[27] This is the main argument of Mueller, *Wars, Presidents and Public Opinion*. See especially pp. 62, 65, 114, 157.

[28] Ibid., p. 43.

[29] Ibid., p. 60. Another explanation of the variations in the popularity of the two wars that is consistent with the data is that it depended on expectations that the conflict would end quickly. Thus support for Korea plummeted when the Chinese entered the war. There was no comparable event during the Vietnam period. Ibid., p. 52.

[30] Ibid., pp. viii, 154.

[31] Truman's loss of popularity was more clearly related to Korea than Johnson's to Vietnam. The second war coincided with the outbreak of civil disturbances in American cities, which hurt the public standing of the incumbent president. Johnson, moreover, may have succeeded, where Truman failed, in presenting his war to the public as a bipartisan undertaking. Ibid., pp. 227-31.

[32] Ibid., p. 156.

[33] Ibid., p. 39.

[34] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 15.

[35] William M. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," paper presented to the International Studies Association (West) Meeting, Los Angeles, April, 1977, p. 25.

[36] Jonathan Schell, *The Time of Illusion* (New York: Knopf, 1976), pp. 53-55.

[37] Ibid., pp. 164-67; J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking, 1976), pp. 90, 94.

[38] See Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, chapters 16 and 17.

[39] Mueller, *Wars, Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 164.

[40] Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, p. 164.

[41] Ibid., pp. 424-45.

[42] Mueller, *Wars, Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 266.

[43] Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, pp. 388-92.

[44] Ibid., p. 393.

[45] Nixon did in fact escalate the war in geographic terms; this proved acceptable to the American public, for whom the declining numbers of American casualties were evidently paramount. "The

American people . . . were quite prepared to bomb North Vietnam, but they did not want American draftees killed in substantial numbers for some abstraction called self-determination." John P. Roche, "The Impact of Dissent," in *The Vietnam Legacy*, p. 135.

[46] Mueller, *Wars, Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 100; Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, p. 397.