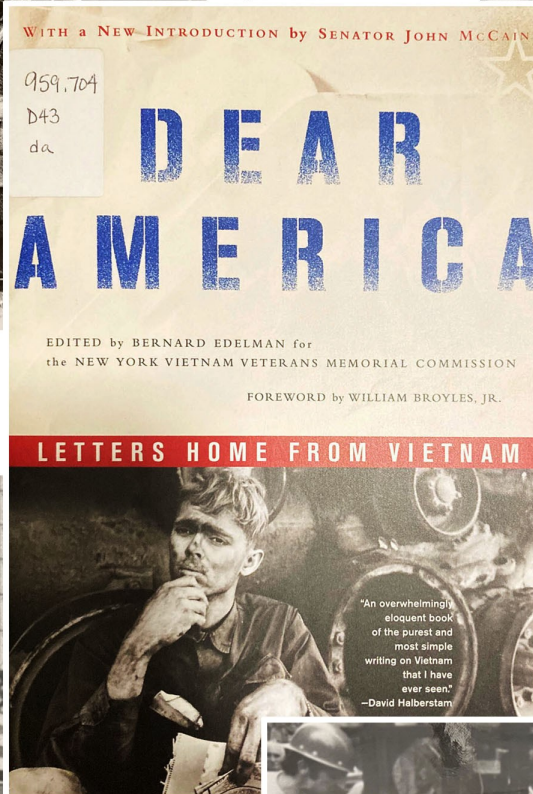




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WAR ABROAD, CONFLICT AT HOME:

How Vietnam Raised Questions About America's Identity and
Role in the World

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ABOUT US

The mission of the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) is to foster civic life by preserving and providing public access to historical and contemporary records and information about New York City government. The agency ensures that City records are properly maintained following professional archival and record management practices. Materials are available to diverse communities, both online and in person. For more information about how DORIS can work with your school, please contact us via email: education@records.nyc.gov or visit our [website](#). Follow us on social media!



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Contributor: Peter Schwab

OVERVIEW

Imagine you're a 19-year-old in the United States during the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Many young men were drafted to fight in Vietnam, while others joined the antiwar movement - led by students, civil rights activists, and religious leaders—who opposed the war on political, moral, and economic grounds. This divisions created deep rifts across American society, sparking widespread protests that were often peaceful but turned confrontational.

This curriculum aid introduces high school students to the Vietnam War, a conflict that shaped U.S. history, politics, and culture but may be unfamiliar to today's students. Using original documents, photographs, audio clips, and reference sources from the Municipal Archives and Library, students will explore how New Yorkers experienced and responded to the war.

They will examine letters from *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*, which bring to life the voices of young American soldiers overseas. Students will also connect these personal accounts to the growing antiwar movement, which deepened the sense of futility expressed in many of the letters. Archival records from the Handschu Collection provide a firsthand look at New York City's demonstrations, including the 1970 Hard Hat Riot. Following the tragic killing of four students at Kent State University by the Ohio National Guard, protests spread to New York. Demonstrators picketed the Stock Exchange and gathered at Federal Hall in rallies that drew thousands—including high school students and teachers—before violent clashes broke out between construction workers and antiwar demonstrators.

Through engagement with these historic sources, guided discussion, and critical analysis, students will gain a deeper understanding of the Vietnam War, the United States' role in it, and its lasting impact on communities at home. Just as importantly, they will reflect on how the human costs of conflict—abroad and in American cities—continue to shape debates about citizenship, activism, and public memory today.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The heart and soul of this curriculum aid is its primary sources, the firsthand accounts of the Vietnam War era. An interview with one of the novelists of *The Ugly American*, Eugene Burdick, reveals the cultural ignorance and naivete of American soldiers abroad, especially in Southeast Asia. In the novel, through the letters of American soldiers deployed in Vietnam, the authors bring to life the failures of American foreign relations. Here you may challenge students to develop ideas related to the political implications that they learned about in the interview.

Letters in *Dear America* are personal narratives by soldiers who served in Vietnam. Students will engage with the thoughts and decisions expressed by each writer, treating the letters as important historical evidence. These deeply personal stories will shed light on the lives, struggles, and emotions of those who experienced the war. By approaching the letters as historical sources, students can explore both the political and cultural context of the era. Encourage students to read closely to observe how the human cost of this conflict is reflected in the language, tone, and content of each piece.

Police reports are strong sources allowing students to view accounts of an event, in this case, the Hardhat Riot. They should be approached with a critical eye, as there can be biases based on the officer's perspective. Your students will need to differentiate a primary source from a secondary source when scanning through the articles. The college flyer serves as a primary source, providing students with a glimpse into the lives of college students in 1970. The antiwar message and the reference to the Kent State shootings still resonate with students today.

Please note, students may encounter historical texts that contain language or descriptions considered offensive by contemporary standards. Please preview the book sections prior to sharing with students.

STANDARDS

New York State Common Core Social Studies 9-12 Framework

12.G4e Citizens participate in civic life through volunteerism and advocacy, including efforts such as contacting elected officials, signing/organizing petitions, protesting, canvassing, and participating in/organizing boycotts.

11.9 Students will examine reasons for declining public confidence in government, including America's involvement in Vietnam, student protests, the growing antiwar movement, and the Watergate affair.

See also additional standards referenced by the Activism and the Vietnam War segment:

9-10 RH 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the time and place of publication, origin, and authorship.

11-12 RH 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the source as a whole.

9-10 RH 7: Integrate and evaluate visual and technical information (e.g., in research data, charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

11-12 RH 7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem

Civics for All: Grades 9-12, Part 1

See pages 198 – 204: Activism and the Vietnam War; very comprehensive materials and, for the most part, reusable by teachers.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

AO (Area of Operations) - Four core tactical zones for the purpose of military operations

Capitalism - An economic and political system in which the country's trade and industry are managed by private owners for profit

Case Church Amendment - A 1973 bill that prevented future use of American forces in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos without Congressional authorization

Cold War - A conflict between Western capitalist and Soviet Union communism after WWII characterized by the arms race and the continued threat of nuclear conflict

Communism - A political and economic ideology that aims to create a classless society where resources are distributed by need and the government has economic control

Democratic - Power of the people who exercise it through voting and representation

Domino Effect - a theory that if one country falls to communism, neighboring countries will follow

Draft - A system requiring young men to register for potential military service which, during the Vietnam War, fueled antiwar protests

French Indochina - French colonial territories in Southeast Asia marked by exploitation, cultural clashes and resistance movements that led to its dissolution in 1954

Graft - Illegal activity including contract bidding and pocketing resources prevalent in both the US and South Vietnam's involvement in the Vietnam War

Ho Chi Minh - President of North Vietnam from 1945-1969 who led the nationalist movement against the Japanese, French Colonialist power and US-backed South Vietnamese

Kent State shooting - May 4, 1970, members of the National Guard fired on unarmed Kent State University students at antiwar protests. Four students were killed, nine were wounded

Mao Zedong - Former chairman of the Chinese Communist Party who inspired the Vietnamese communists and provided them military support

Ngo Diem - The first president of South Vietnam from 1955-1969 who was widely considered a corrupt dictator

North Vietnam/South Vietnam - Two separate states that existed between 1954 and 1975. North Vietnam was a communist state supported by the Soviet Union and China and South Vietnam, a non-communist state supported by the United States

Political Ideology - a set of beliefs that explain how society should operate, which includes the economy, government and social issues

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) - Student activist group in the 1960s that opposed the Vietnam War

Soviet Union - A communist state and global power that existed from 1922-1991 founded on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism

VC/Viet Cong - A derogatory label used by the South Vietnamese government, and later by the American media, to describe communist insurgents in Vietnam employing unconventional warfare tactics

INTERNAL LINK

https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_0ec08d0d-e491-42db-8e0f-f8da64fd8749/

EXTERNAL LINK

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/05/09/archives/-violence-on-the-right.html?searchResultPosition=1>

A TIMELINE OF THE VIETNAM ERA

1954

The Geneva Accords, temporarily dividing Vietnam along the 17th parallel, broke up French Indochina into multiple countries, creating a communist North Vietnam and a U.S. and French-backed South Vietnam.

1955

Often considered the official start of U.S. involvement was the establishment of U.S. Assistance Advisory Group. Their goal was training and advising the South Vietnamese army.

1964

The bombing of North Vietnam begins. The US deploys combat troops to Vietnam.

1965

Campus teach-ins and protests begin, led by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

1966

A change in the draft policy makes it harder for students to get deferments.

1967

100,000 people demonstrate at the Lincoln Memorial.

1968

The Tet Offensive begins in North Vietnam. Eugene McCarthy and Robert F. Kennedy run for the Democratic nomination on anti-war platforms.

1969

Millions of people march across the country in protest.

1970

The Kent State shootings occur when the Ohio State Guard killed four and wounded nine unarmed student demonstrators. The May 1970 student strikes begin, involving more than 900 colleges, universities, and high schools.

1973

The Case-Church Amendment is passed by Congress, prohibiting further military action in Southeast Asia. The draft is suspended, and U.S. combat operations end in Vietnam.

1975

American troops begin to evacuate Vietnam.

PRIMARY SOURCE 1

The Ugly American is a 1958 political novel by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer that depicts the failures of the U.S. Diplomatic Corps in Southeast Asia. The book caused a sensation in diplomatic circles and had major political implications.

Listen to a talk given by co-author Eugene Burdick, which was delivered at a WNYC Books and Authors Luncheon in 1967, where Burdick discussed key thoughts and ideas of the novel.



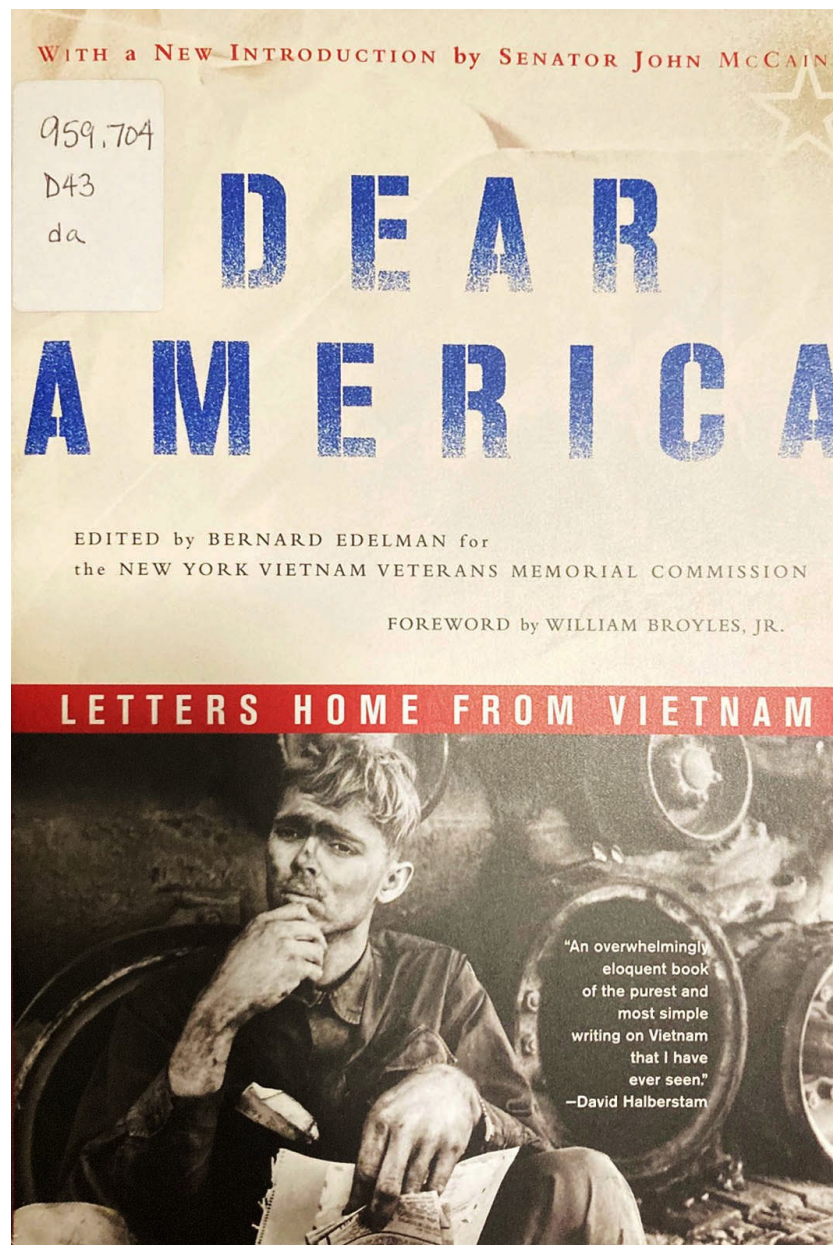
[Play audio clip from 20:00-25:21](#)

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 1

1. Why is it that Burdick refers to the people representing America abroad as the ‘cutting edge’?
2. According to Burdick, what are the consequences, if the people on this cutting edge don’t do their job well?
3. Based on your experience, to what extent has America adopted the ideas expressed by Burdick and Lederer since the 1950s? What, if any, gaps remain?
4. How would you relate the experience of the soldiers in Vietnam to the ideas expressed by Burdick and Lederer?

DEAR AMERICA: LETTERS HOME FROM VIETNAM

More than 25 years after the official end of the Vietnam War, “Dear America” allowed the country to witness the war firsthand through the eyes of the men and women who served in Vietnam. In this collection of more than 200 letters, they share their first impressions of the rigors of life in the bush, their longing for home and family, their emotions over the conduct of the war, and their ache at the loss of a friend in battle.



Cover of book from Municipal Library Collection: call # 959.704 D43 da

"HUMPING THE BOONIES"

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corpses. We brought back weapons ranging from a mortar to AK-47s, clothes, medical kits and documents and were mentioned on radio and TV over here for that day's work.

It was a very successful patrol, and everyone seemed happy with it—everyone but the point man, that is. His wound, of itself, wasn't serious, but the power and shock of a modern rifle bullet is absolutely unbelievable and within two minutes of being hit he was fighting for his life in shock. There was a foulup in the extraction, and for half an hour we were stuck in a wide-open rice paddy, in a valley, with helicopters trying to find us but not having our radio frequency, while the hills all around [were crawling] with communists who, if they had come back, could have wiped us out. The wounded man stopped breathing three times on the LZ but was revived via mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and a few punches on the chest. He is now on his way home by way of Japan, where his ankle will be taken care of, so maybe, in a way, he was the luckiest one out there. He's going home to his wife in one piece, with his eyes and all his limbs, and will probably not even have a limp, while we'll be going back out until either our time or luck runs out. He'll never take to the field again. He's home safe—we're not. In that distinction lies the difference between those who have luck, and those who aren't yet sure [if] they have it or not.

George

Sp/4 George Olsen, Co. G, 75th Inf. (Ranger), Americal Div., Chu Lai, 1969–1970, KIA 3 March 1970.

— ☆ —

Ambush

One night we wandered far and long
To kill young men who, brave and strong
And precious to their loved, their own,
Were coming to kill us.

Aching, filthy, weak, afraid,
Creeping through the dripping shades,
Searching forms through jungle haze,
We stalked those men as prey.

*Beginning of "Ambush" poem, written by Lt. James McLeroy
from the book Letters Home From Vietnam. Municipal Library Collection.*

"HUMPING THE BOONIES"

A stinging, steaming, humming hell
 Tried our flesh and pride and will,
 But we walked and watched and waited, until
 We froze—and saw them coming.

Quietly picking their way along,
 Far from their loved ones, far from home,
 They seemed to be dreaming. One muttered a song,
 And they carried their weapons slack.

I fired first! The shattering blast
 Unleashed a deafening force that smashed
 And ripped and shook, and seemed to last
 Till the very Earth was torn.

Then, silently, coldly, on command,
 We plucked among that gory band
 And left, with a simple wave of the hand,
 The offal to the leeches.

Now jungle covers the stench and sight
 Of the wrecks we left behind that night.
 Yet we, too, die, while winning such fights,
 From a sickness caused by slaughter.

And when we next go out again
 At night to kill more killer men,
 Or else be hunted to our end,
 Will it prove The Cause is ours?

How can we ever "know we're right,"
 Lost in this dark, primeval Night?
 Must we kill them, as beasts must fight,
 Until the Earth is torn?

—James McLeroy
 1967

1Lt. James McLeroy, whose tour in Vietnam began in May 1967, spent six months with Company C, Team A-104, 5th Special Forces Group,

Second page of "Ambush" poem, written by Lt. James McLeroy, from the book Letters Home From Vietnam. Municipal Library Collection.

First Lt. James McLeroy came from a military family. His tour of Vietnam began in May 1967, when he spent six months with Company C, Team A-104, 5th Special Forces Group. He fought in the Battle of Kham Duc, a large-scale battle at the height of the Vietnam War. His rich detail shares what was little known and reported on at the time.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 2

1. “Yet we, too, die while winning such fights.” – Please comment on this line.
2. How does the writer of this poem feel about the righteousness of the American presence – ‘The Cause’ – in Vietnam?

"CHERRIES": FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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just don't know what the war is really like. As one guy said, "You got to fight it to know it." I hope you are all well. I'll write again when I get a chance.

Billy

Sgt. William Nelson, born and raised in the Bronx, New York, served with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, operating out of Phu Bai, from July 1969 through September 1970. He is an accountant and lives in Putnam, New York.

— ☆ —

27 March 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

Would you believe I am now officially assigned to a unit? It's taken so long that it's quite a relief. I have a new address that should be permanent. It is:

Company A, 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry

11th Light Infantry Brigade, APO San Francisco 96217

I don't know if you've sent me any mail yet, but if so it hasn't gotten to me and I doubt that it ever will. But with this address everything should reach me, so no sweat. . . .

I am told that our AO is quite a good one. There is almost no contact with Charlie, and what little there is rarely turns into much of a fight because he runs away. The principal danger here is from mines and booby traps.

From the people I've talked to I've come up with some new ideas on the war. For the most part nobody is particularly wild with patriotic feeling. There are, of course, those who just get a real charge out of killing people. One lieutenant I talked to said what a kick it had been to roll a gook 100 yards down the beach with his machine gun. But most people generate their enthusiasm for two reasons: one is self-preservation—if I don't shoot him, he'll eventually shoot me—and the other is revenge. It's apparently quite something to see a good friend blown apart by a VC booby trap, and you want to retaliate in kind.

While I am able to read *Stars and Stripes* and listen to AFVN radio newscasts, I still feel very cut off from the world outside of Vietnam. I

Part 1 of letter from Robert C. ("Mike") Ransom Jr., from the book
Letters Home From Vietnam, Municipal Library Collection.

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"CHERRIES": FIRST IMPRESSIONS

would love it dearly if you would subscribe to *Newsweek* for me. Also, what do you think of Bobby [Kennedy] for president? What about [General William] Westmoreland's new job? What does everything mean?

I now have one last editorial comment about the war and then I'll sign off. I am extremely impressed by almost every report I've heard about the enemy I am about to go and fight. He is a master of guerrilla warfare and is holding his own rather nicely with what should be the strongest military power in the world. But it is mostly his perseverance that amazes me. He works so hard and has been doing so for so long. You've heard of his tunnelling capability? A captured VC said that in coming from North Vietnam down to Saigon, he walked over 200 miles completely underground. Anyone who would dig a 200-mile tunnel and who would still do it after being at war for some 30 years must be right!

All love,
Mike

2Lt. Robert C. ("Mike") Ransom, Jr., raised in Bronxville, New York, arrived in Vietnam in March 1968. He was a platoon commander with Company A, 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, operating out of Chu Lai. He died after two months in country, eight days after he was wounded by shrapnel from a mine. He was 23 years old.

— ☆ —

Jan 30, 1968

Chris,

I finally got to my unit yesterday . . . what a life!

I have been assigned to A Battery, 2nd Battalion, 40th Artillery, and further attached to E Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry as a forward observer. My job is to advise the company commander on artillery matters and to direct the guns onto enemy positions when we find them. Right now we are positioned on the bank of a beautiful river. The men have been swimming and keeping cool for the last two days.

There are absolutely no comforts in our job. I carry nothing but a razor and a bar of soap for comfort, wear the only clothes we have and wash them in rivers and streams as we cross them. Our mission is to find

Part 2 of letter from Robert C. ("Mike") Ransom Jr., from the book
Letters Home From Vietnam, Municipal Library Collection.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 3

1. Please summarize the ‘new ideas about the war’ the writer of this letter has acquired while discussing the war with other soldiers.
2. What are the differences in motivation between the Viet Cong (VC) and the American soldiers? Who, according to the letter, is likely in the right?
3. Mike Ransom, in *“Cherries”: First Impressions*, shares observations of his infantry through the eyes of a new soldier. How does he describe the different recruits in his division?
4. Ransom speaks with admiration of the Viet Cong soldiers he has heard about. Describe why he feels this way.

Charlie, rifle in hand, with not a care in the world until he sees me, and then it's a race to see if he can get off the road before I can draw my .45 and get off an accurate shot (he won). Of course, there was an incident when four snipers took on the battalion, which promptly, more to release the weight of all that unexpended ammunition than anything else, threw everything at them but the Missouri; and that would have been there too, except it could not get up the Song Tra Bong [River]. So goes about \$50,000 worth of ammo. They probably played it up as a second Iwo Jima at home, but it wasn't.

Then, two days after we got back, we played Indian Scout, and my platoon splashed its way through a rice paddy at 3:30 in the morning in a rainstorm to surround a hamlet, which we managed to do somehow without alerting everyone in the district, which is surprising as we made enough noise to wake up a Marine sentry. It was "very successful" since we managed to kill a few probably innocent civilians, found a few caves and burned a few houses, all in a driving rainstorm. There's nothing much more, I'm afraid.

Love,
Sandy

2Lt. Marion Lee ("Sandy") Kempner, born in Galveston, Texas, in 1942, was a platoon leader with Company M, 3rd Battalion, 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division, operating in I Corps. He arrived in country in July 1966. He was killed by shrapnel from a mine explosion on 11 November 1966.

— ☆ —

Jan. 13, 1969

Dear Mom,

We've been running around these mountains every day without a break. We finally got a day of rest today.

On the fifth of January, we went out on a patrol and found a rather large weapons and ammo cache. It consisted of 166 Russian carbines and SKSs [Soviet semi-automatic rifles], 300 82-mm mortar rounds, 4 mortar tubes, 4 122-mm rocket launchers with rounds, 2 tripods for a 75-mm recoilless rifle and rounds, plus many other items. It's one of the largest caches anyone has found in the last couple of months. It was really great finding all this stuff, but getting it out was another thing. As you can well

*First section of letter by Cameron MacDonald to his mother, from the book
Letters Home From Vietnam, Municipal Library Collection.*

"HUMPING THE BOONIES"

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imagine, we couldn't hump all of that stuff out, so we had to wait for choppers to come in and drop nets to us so we could have it all choppered back out.

That all sounds quite simple, but the whole thing took four days. It was raining, and we had to sit on all that junk until the choppers could come in. (They won't fly in rain unless it's for a medevac.) I needn't tell you it was pretty miserable being wet and hungry for four days. There were only 30 of us, and we were afraid the gooks might try to overrun the place to get all that stuff back. They probed our lines every night with Chicoms [Chinese communist] grenades, and kept everyone on his toes. The only time we got any sleep was during the day.

Finally we got all that gear retroed and got the heck out of there. All I did that night when we finally got back to the hill was eat. You can imagine how hungry we were.

Two days [later] we went out and got into a fire fight with two gooks. We trapped them in a cave, but it took two hours to get them out. In the process, one man was shot and killed and a couple others were wounded. I caught a small piece of shrapnel in the arm, but it wasn't serious enough for a Purple Heart. . . .

There are so few men left in the company that we're about due to go in pretty soon. The company is operating on about 70 men instead of about 170. A few days ago the 2nd Platoon was operating with 15 men. Everyone has been catching malaria or some kind of fever. There is no such thing as a squad-sized patrol any more, because all we have is two 5-man squads. Things are pretty bad out here.

I sure am getting tired. Humping these mountains is bad news. We really need a little rest. It's really nice in the rear when you can sleep a whole night without having to stand watch.

I've been keeping up with my diary. Actually, I could send the 1968 diary back, but I think I'll keep it because I've been keeping a list of how much I've been paid and KIAs and WIAs and a few other things.

I haven't got much more to add at this time, except that when I get to the rear, I'm going to sign up for a CAP (Civil Action Program) unit. If I get into that, I go to Da Nang for a two-week schooling program, and then I'll get assigned to a unit. It has to do with helping teach the children and the people new and modern ways of doing things. I think I'd be much happier helping the people rather than fighting the gooks. I would have signed up before, but you have to have three months in country before you can. I hope I can get in right away. I'll let you know what happens. . . .

Much love,
Cam

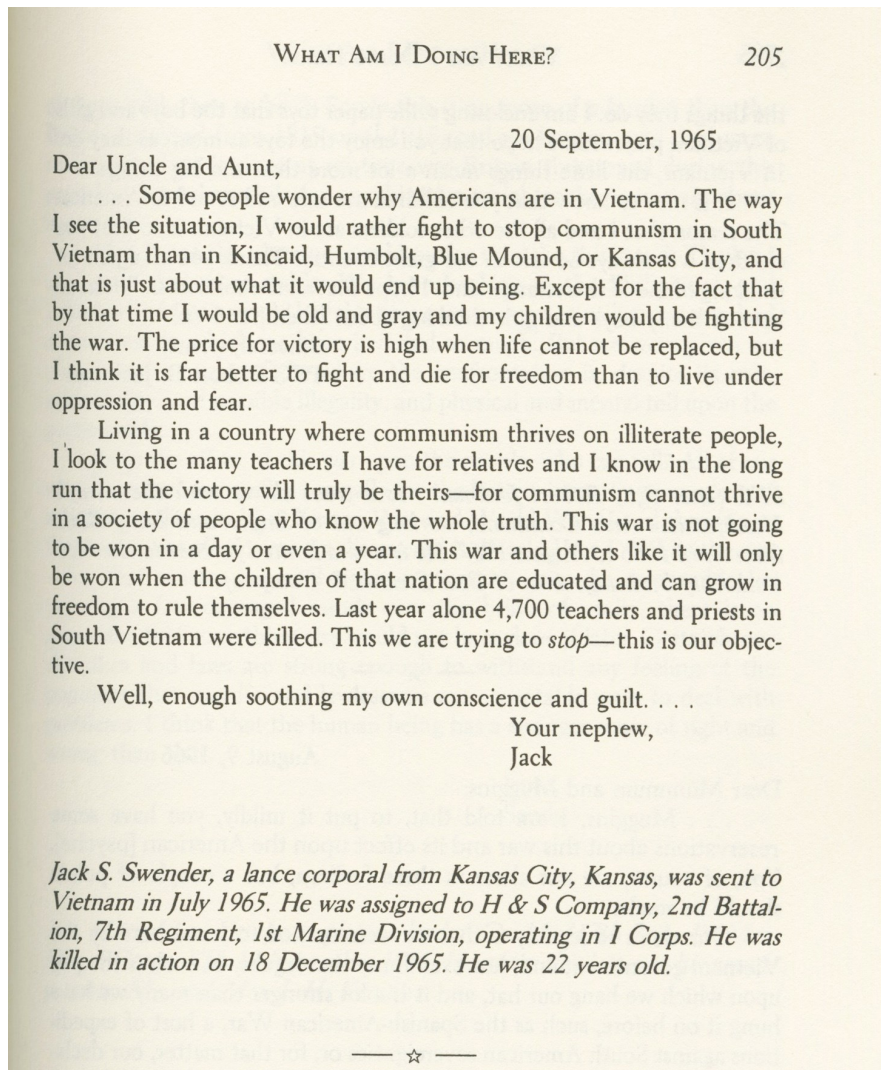
*Second section of letter by Cameron MacDonald to his mother, from the book
Letters Home From Vietnam, Municipal Library Collection.*

Cameron MacDonald was a lance corporal assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Marine Division. From October 1968 to November 1969 his unit patrolled the areas of Da Nang, An Hoa and Chu Lai. He now lives in Lake Mary, Florida, where he builds custom furniture.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 4

1. Cameron wrote his mother after his troop discovered a cache of enemy weapons. Why was this discovery by US troops crucial in the conflict with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese?
2. Based on Cam's description, how would you describe the morale of the American troops?
3. Please relate Cameron's idea of wanting to join the Civil Action Program unit to the recommendations of Burdick and Lederer.
4. In the section "Humping the Boonies," which means traveling through rough terrain, Cameron describes several days in the mountains of Vietnam. Describe the physical demands placed on these young men. What do you feel was the emotional toll on these soldiers?

PRIMARY SOURCE 5



*Letter from Jack Swender, from the book
Letters Home From Vietnam, Municipal Library Collection.*

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 5

1. Based on Jack's letter why does he feel it is important to fight communism? Do you think this was achievable?
2. How are Jack's thoughts similar to the ideas expressed by Burdick and Lederer, in *The Ugly American*?

THE HARD HAT RIOT

On May 4, 1970, thirteen students were shot, four of them fatally, at Kent State University in Ohio by National Guardsmen as they demonstrated against the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and U.S. incursions into neutral Cambodia. One of the dead was Jeffrey Glenn Miller, who was from a New York City suburb on Long Island, which led to funeral proceedings in Manhattan and Long Island and, in turn, helped fuel local activism. As a show of sympathy for the dead students, New York Mayor John Lindsay, a Republican, ordered all flags at New York City Hall to be flown at half-staff on May 8, the day of the riot.

The Hard Hat Riot occurred in New York City on May 8, 1970, when around 400 construction workers and around 800 office workers attacked around 1,000 demonstrators affiliated with the student strike of 1970. In the days before the riot, there were anti-war protests on Wall Street and smaller clashes between construction workers and anti-war demonstrators. The students were protesting the May 4 Kent State shootings and the Vietnam War, following the April 30 announcement by President Richard Nixon of the U.S. invasion of neutral Cambodia. Some construction workers carried U.S. flags and chanted, "USA, All the way" and "America, love it or leave it." Anti-war protesters shouted, "Peace now."

The riot, first broke out near the intersection of Wall Street and Broad Street in Lower Manhattan. It led to a mob scene with more than 20,000 people in the streets, eventually leading to a siege of New York City Hall, and an attack on Pace University that lasted more than three hours. Around 100 people, including seven policemen, were injured on what became known as Bloody Friday. Six people were arrested, but only one of them was a construction worker associated with the rioters. Nixon invited the hardhat leaders to Washington, D.C., and accepted a hardhat from them.



Click [here](#) to read the digital version of the *New York Times* article below.

* Y TIME EDITORIAL MAY 9, 1970

...Violence on the Right

The assaults by construction workers on students in downtown Manhattan yesterday were a tragic reflection of the polarization brought by the Vietnam war, campus turbulence, racial tensions and an Administration-fostered mood of political repression. Even more, the clashes in the financial district and at City Hall were a frightening lesson in the ease with which right-wing vigilantism finds in left-wing extremism an excuse for pushing aside constituted authority and enforcing its own brutal form of injustice.

The youngsters who massed in Wall Street with the declared purpose of shutting down the Stock Exchange were scarcely operating in the spirit of the "day of reflection" Mayor Lindsay had urged as a tribute to the four students killed by National Guard bullets at Kent State University. But there was no use of force until the helmeted building tradesmen marched onto the scene and initiated their own reign of terror.

The hardhats, long scornful of excesses by privileged longhairs on campus, were obviously delighted at the opportunity to pour out their hatred on the students and any who dared to raise a voice in their defense. From that it was a swift jump to City Hall for a direct-action display of their venom against the Mayor, the most articulate spokesman in public life for the right to dissent and for adult understanding of college youth's frustrations.

The police, badly outnumbered in Wall Street, were even more seriously short of men at City Hall. The result was a shambles in which the rampaging unionists beat students, smashed windows and cowed city officials into ordering the American flag back to full staff, thus canceling the half-staff memorial to the Kent State dead originally decreed by the Mayor. Not one construction worker was arrested at any stage of this civic humiliation.

The building tradesmen, of course, are in the forefront of those who deplore crime in the street and the decay of law and order. They have now joined the revolutionaries and bombthrowers on the left in demonstrating that anarchy is fast becoming a mode of political expression. Unless the peril in that trend becomes universally recognized, no one's liberty will be safe. American democracy can survive only in a climate of reason built on respect for law.

New York Times Editorial: May 9, 1970, Violence on the Right

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 6

1. How does the writer of the editorial characterize the political climate at the time of the riot?
2. What did Mayor Lindsay want May 8 to be about?
3. What did the student protesters intend to do?
4. How did the 'helmeted building tradesmen' respond?
5. Why, according to the editorial, do the hardhats hate the students?
6. How do the hardhats feel about Mayor Lindsay?
7. What role did the police play in the riot?
8. According to the writer of the editorial – what are the larger concerns coming out of the riots on May 8?

Proving One's Manhood in Lower Manhattan

For the construction worker in his hard yellow hat, the American dream goes something like this: His father or his grandfather came to America from the old country. There was no tradition of higher education in the family. Bread was earned through muscles and sweat. There was a big family, and money was needed, so the boy became an apprentice. By the time he was 20 he was in the union, working up on the girders or down in the pits, hauling steel, moving the earth. When the job was finished, he could stand back and look at the skyscraper. His sweat and strain were in that building. He was helping to make America great.

In return, he was getting something good from America. He was getting a good paycheck to take home to his wife and kids. With enough overtime he could buy a small house in Queens or out in Staten Island. On weekends he would finish the basement, so he could have a place to drink beer with the boys on Saturday night.

The wife had her small garden, with perhaps a nice stone statue in it. But the apple of his eye was his daughter. She was sweet and innocent in her little pink dresses. He would take her to church every Sunday, to make sure she remained a virgin till she was married. When she was old enough, she would catch the eye of the assistant manager down at the store. There would be a big wedding. The construction worker's friends would tease him about how his muscular biceps strained the sleeves of his tuxedo. He would laugh, and slap the boys on the backs. The American dream was his.

That's how it used to be, but now the dream is drying up, drained lifeless by a bunch of college kids. The kids come from homes where the father makes three times the salary of a construction worker, just

**ROBERT
MAYER**



by sitting at some desk. The kids have no respect for the old verities, for sweat and chastity. They will not respect their country just because it is giving them a paycheck. They will not respect it when it is killing peasants in the fields of Asia. They will not live by someone else's puritan ethics. They will take their sex here and now, as casually as the worker takes his beer.

Last week, for three consecutive days, the kids brought their new morality to the Wall Street-City Hall area for peace rallies. They shouted slogans against the war, many of them obscene. And on the third day, the construction workers cracked. They swarmed down from their unfinished buildings and they moved out into the streets, holding American flags high as they beat up the kids, kicked them, punched them, while the city's policemen, many of them brothers under the uniform, stood off to one side and smiled.

Yesterday the construction workers returned to the scene of their glory, to the scene of the crime. For two hours they marched through the streets

around City Hall, shouting, carrying American flags of all sizes. One of the workers was Tony Agnello. He lives in Staten Island. He has been a construction worker for 11 years. Standing in his green shirt and pants and yellow helmet, he told why he was there.

"For three days now at Broad and Wall Streets these kids came down and shouted profanities. I have two sisters that work in that area. My wife works in that area. I don't want my wife and sisters subjected to profanities. When you shout dirty words, that's not a peaceful demonstration. Someone's got to shut them up. And they're not kids. Anyone who's old enough to make an obscene gesture isn't a kid."

He did not mention the war in Vietnam, until he was asked about it. Then he said: "I'm definitely in favor of President Nixon. And what about the desecration of the flag?" So much for the war.

The signs the workers carried, the slogans they shouted, had a strong sexual flavor. They chanted: "We want the queer mayor of New York." One sign said: "Lindsay Drops the Flag More Often Than a Whore Drops Her Pants." Another said Lindsay was probably meeting with a "fruity Russian poet." One worker shouted at a few college kids making the peace sign: "Don't worry, they don't draft faggots." Another demonstrator muttered: "Free love and education, that's all they want."

The flagpoles were held straight up. The workers with their bulging muscles were proud to be men, through and through. The police were out in force this time, so the workers managed to beat up only a few college students, punching and kicking for God, country, virginity and clean language. Then they went back to their construction sites, to get on with the job of building a greater America, and to leer and shout at every passing skirt.

Newsday, May 12, 1970

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 7

1. According to this article, what motivated the anger and, ultimately, the violent actions of the tradesmen?
2. Based on this article, would you say the violence on May 8th was of a political nature, or had a different origin?
3. What irony does the writer see in the tradesmen's objection to the obscene language used by the students and their own behavior towards women?

STUDENTS! WORKERS! PROTEST GOVERNMENT'S MURDER OF OHIO STUDENTS

GOVERNMENT ESCALATES WAR AT HOME & ABROAD

OHIO

NATIONAL GUARDSMEN GUN DOWN DOZENS OF PROTESTING STUDENTS AT KENT STATE AND OHIO STATE -- FOUR DEAD AND MANY ON CRITICAL LIST. SAME GUARDSMEN ATTACK STRIKING CLEVELAND TEAMSTERS LAST WEEK.

BLACK AMERICA

CONN NATIONAL GUARD GASSES DEMONSTRATORS PROTESTING GOVERNMENT PLANS TO FRAME AND ELECTROCUTE BLACK PANTHER CHAIRMAN BOBBY SEALE. MARYLAND AUTHORITIES FRAME UP BALTIMORE PANTHERS -- THREATENS DEATH PENALTY

ASIAN WAR

US INVADERS CAMBODIA, AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR NEW MASSACRES THERE, IN LAOS AND VIETNAM. RESUMES BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM AS WAR GETS BIGGER.

The government is out to kill us. They will send all of us to spill our blood and guts in the rice paddies and steaming jungles of Vietnam, Laos, and now Cambodia and other Asian countries so they can rake in their super-profits, if we don't stop them. The rich and the super-rich, a tiny minority of people who run the banks, corporations and the government in their own interests, must be stopped before they stop us.

When we say no to this system, they put us in stockades and jails, they beat us, and shoot us. The brothers and sisters hardest hit have been the Black Panthers. They are trying to organize themselves and the black people for survival in this racist system, 28 have been killed, hundreds jailed with no bail on phoney frame-up charges.

Students at Kent State and Ohio State have been gunned down by government troops -- 4 dead -- many on the critical list.

In response to this, millions of students from Boston to San Francisco are ON STRIKE to support our brothers and sisters -- to protest the government's massacres in Asia, Black America and on the college campuses. Within the ranks of the Army itself, rank and file GIs are banding together into a union -- The American Servicemen's Union -- to struggle, to survive and to fight against the government which is out to kill them.

Demonstrate Fri 4:30
43RD & MADISON
OHIO DEPT. OF DEVELOPMENT MAY 8

But students staying away from class is not enough; they must take action. And popular dissent, even if widespread, is not enough. We must also STRIKE against the war and repression everywhere we can -- where we work, in the army, on the campus and in the streets.

Join us for a demonstration Friday at the OHIO DEPT. OF DEVELOPMENT and continue the struggle Saturday in Washington, D.C.

Liberal politicians won't do it -- we must do it ourselves.

SHALL WE KNUCKLE UNDER OR STRIKE BACK

THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW !!!!

1. Strike -- close down your school or place of work. The real classes are in the street.

2. DEMONSTRATE IN THE STREETS

SPONSORED BY:

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Citywide High School Student Union
Columbia December 4th Movement
NYU Strike Committee
Jackson H.S. Student Union
Artists United (School Vis Arts)
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INFO Contact 242-9225, 675-2520
Issued by: YAWF, 58 W25th St
NYC10010 242-9225 or 675-2520

New York Strike Central at 989-3932, 243-2261, or 598-3022,32

*From the Municipal Archives Handschu Collection,
Hard Hat Demonstration files, 1970. File Box 1, Folder 61.10.2.*

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 8

1. How does this document relate to the Hard Hat Riots in NYC?
2. What events and government activities are the authors of the flyer concerned about?
3. The flyer states "the government is trying to kill us."
4. Who is 'us' in this context?
5. What evidence for this statement do the authors of the flyer cite?
6. How might a representative of the Nixon administration have responded to this statement?
7. Given the government activities referred to in the flyer, would you have gone to the demonstration on May 8? If so, what would have been your primary motivation for going?



POLICE DEPARTMENT
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10013

1 DC 70-70 IAD
1 DC 16-70 INTEL.
INTERVIEW #166

June 16, 1970

From: Sergeant James Hyland, Shield # 1887, Intelligence Division, First Deputy Commissioner's Office

To: Commanding Officer, Intelligence Division, First Deputy Commissioner's Office

Subject: INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM DORFER, 430 COLUMBUS AVENUE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK.

At 1030 hours, June 15, 1970, Sergeant James Hyland, Intelligence Division, First Deputy Commissioner's Office, interviewed William Dorfer, 430 Columbus Avenue, New York City.

Subject is a 26 year old white male, 5'8", 160 lbs., short beard, who was employed until 6/12/70 as a clerk at Kidder, Peabody, Inc., 20 Exchange Place, New York City. Dorfer did not complain to any city agency but was the subject of an aided case on May 8, 1970, when he was assaulted by construction workers at Exchange Place and William Street.

Mr. Dorfer was interviewed and stated as follows:
On May 8, 1970, at about 12:30 PM I was standing at Exchange Place and William Street (#1 on Map,) and observed a parade of about 50 or 60 construction workers going west on William Street from Wall Street and I saw a long-haired youth knocked down and kicked on William Street about 40 feet east of Exchange Place, (#2 on Map,) by a huge sized construction worker. This worker is unknown to me but he was about 6'4", 230 lbs., blonde and wearing a hard hat. This youth evidently got to his feet because I saw him run away. I do not know if he reported this assault to the police.

At the time I was wearing a peace-button and one construction worker left the group and came over to me at the curb. This fellow is unknown to me and was wearing a construction helmet, about 5'8", 165 lbs. Without a word he grabbed the button from my coat and punched me in the face with his right hand and knocked me down. I attempted to cover up as I saw six more workers coming at me, some of whom kicked me while I was down. One of them stepped on my leg because I could not get up. This continued for about 60 seconds. Some people in the crowd shouted "Stop it - you will kill him". The construction workers then walked away. Two civilians picked me up and dragged me to the

Statement to Police by observer, , page 1. From the Municipal Archives Handschu Collection, Hard Hat Demonstration files, 1970. File Box 1, Folder 61.10.2.

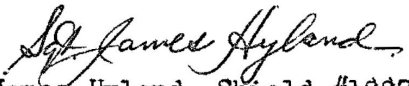
-2-

lobby of 20 Exchange Place because I could not walk. I stayed there until the ambulance came.

Before I was assaulted when I was standing at Exchange Place and William Street I had noticed two policemen, one white about 25-28 years, 6', 190 lbs., black hair wearing a helmet and another, negro about 24-25 years, 6', 190 lbs. also wearing a helmet, standing opposite 20 Exchange Place about 30 to 40 feet south of William Street (#3 on Map). Most of the sidewalk was crowded with spectators but I was actually knocked down in the roadway and I believe these policemen could have seen me being knocked down or heard the shouts of some of the spectators.

About 20 minutes later when I was being carried out to the ambulance I am of the opinion that the two same policemen were still standing there. They did not come into the building to render any assistance. I was told that a member of security force of 20 Exchange Place had called for the ambulance. As I was placed in the ambulance a group of 50 to 60 financial workers converged on the ambulance and called "Throw the commie in the river". I was afraid they were going to mob me but I was not further assaulted. At this time I again saw the two policemen previously mentioned still standing there (point #3). They made no effort to disperse this crowd. I was taken to Beekman Hospital, treated and released in about two hours.

Complete set of photos available to this office shown to complainant and he was unable to identify any construction worker who assaulted him or the other unknown youth. U.F. 6#999; U.F. 61# 2680, 1st Precinct.


James Hyland, Shield #1887
Sergeant

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Statement to Police by observer, page 2. From the Municipal Archives Handschu Collection, Hard Hat Demonstration files, 1970. File Box 1, Folder 61.10.2.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 9

1. What was William Dorfer doing prior to being assaulted by construction workers?
2. What, specifically, about Dorfer may have provoked the assault on him?
3. Describe the behavior of the two policemen standing nearby during and after the assault on Dorfer. How does their behavior compare with Dorfer’s expectations of police? How does it compare with your own expectations?
4. Please refer back to Robert Mayer’s editorial in *Newsday* (Primary Source 7):
5. “... the construction workers cracked ... they beat up the kids, kicked them, punched them, while the city’s policemen, many of them brothers under the uniform, stood off to the side and smiled.”
6. What might Mayer mean when he refers to the policemen—from the point of view of the construction workers—as “brothers under the uniform”? Why doesn’t their ‘brotherhood’ extend to Dorfer?



*Beating of a Student Protester in Lower Manhattan during the Hard Hat Riots, May 8, 1970.
From the Municipal Archives Handschu Collection, Hard Hat Demonstration files, 1970.
File Box 1, Folder 61.10.2.*

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 10

In the picture, a Hard Hat rioter is beating a student protester. Knowing what you know about the Vietnam war in general and the Hard Hat Riot specifically, imagine the physical altercation depicted above as a conversation.

1. What might the man in the hard hat have to say to the student, and what would the student say in return?
2. Taking it one step further, a soldier just returned from Vietnam can be added to this hypothetical conversation as well. Summarize the arguments brought forward by each party of the conversation. What were the key differences of opinion? Were any of them resolved?
3. What are the other people in the photos doing?

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Primary Source Analysis: In small groups, discuss the most impactful sources that you've encountered in this curriculum aid. Which sources were most surprising? Which sources left you with further questions? Why? Include compelling or powerful quotes from the sources to justify your choices.

Roleplay: Analyze the photo related to the Hard Hat Riot. Knowing what you now know about the Vietnam War in general and the Hard Hat Riot specifically, imagine the physical altercation depicted as a conversation instead.

1. What might the men in the hard hat(s) say to the student(s), and what would the student(s) say in return?
2. In addition, what do you think writers James McLeroy (Primary Source 2) or Robert C. "Mike" Ransom (Primary Source 3) may contribute to this discussion?
3. Summarize the arguments brought forward by each party of the conversation.
4. What were the key differences of opinion? Were any of them resolved?

Whole Class/Small Group Discussion:

1. What wars are currently being fought in the world?
2. Related to these wars, what sort of anti-war efforts are you aware of?
3. How is war reflected in books, poems, opinion pieces, or songs you know?
4. Do you have any friends or family members who have experienced war first-hand? If so, what do you know about their experience?
5. How is the American National Anthem related to war?