

**- Why fight the Vietnam War?**

Directions: In your groups, you'll review a variety of primary sources from people with their own perspective on the causes of the Vietnam War. For each source, consider both the perspective of each author and how that perspective has shaped his argument or actions. Finally, speculate how each author would answer the question: *Why fight the Vietnam War?*

<b>Author and Title of Source</b>	<b>Personal information about author – who was he? What do we need to know about his life to understand his perspective?</b>	<b>Major points or argument of source</b>	<b>How would the author answer the question "Why fight the Vietnam War?"</b>
Ho Chi Minh; <i>Vietnamese Declaration of Independence</i>			
John Foster Dulles, <i>Opposition to the Spread of Communism Speech</i>			
Dwight D. Eisenhower, <i>Interview with Copley Press</i>			
Ngo Dinh Diem, letter to President Kennedy			

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## - Why fight the Vietnam War? (Vietnamese Dec. of Independence)

*Editor's Note: On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh delivered the Declaration of Independence of Vietnam in Hanoi. An excerpt follows:*



*Ho Chi Minh, 1946. Cropped version  
Source: Wikipedia Commons,  
Vietnamese Public Domain,  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/  
File:Ho\\_Chi\\_Minh\\_1946\\_and\\_signatur  
e.ina](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho_Chi_Minh_1946_and_signatur_e.ina)*

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free...

...Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center, and the South of Vietnam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united.

They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots; they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood....

In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the backbone, impoverished our people, and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials. They have monopolized the issuing of banknotes and the export trade.

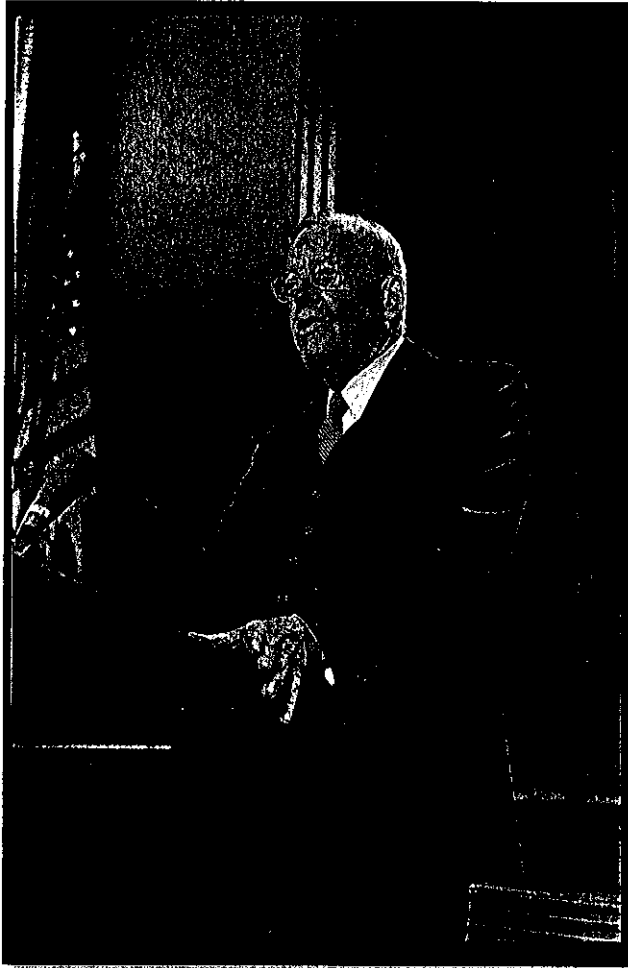
They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.

They have hampered the prospering of our national bourgeoisie; they have mercilessly exploited our workers... "

Source: Ho Chi Minh, "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," *Selected Writings* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977), pp. 5356.

**- Why fight the Vietnam War? (Dulles' Speech)**

*Editor's note: In the spring of 1954, as the French defeat in Indochina became more certain, leading government officials such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Vice-President Richard Nixon campaigned for the United States to take France's place. In a speech that Secretary of State Dulles made, he argued that to save the "free world" from the spread of Communism, US intervention might be necessary, especially because, in the words of Vice-President, the "Vietnamese lack the ability to conduct a war by themselves or govern themselves."*



*John Foster Dulles Speaking at a Podium, Walter K. Leffler, Photographer, April 8, 1958.*

*Source: Library of Congress,  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011660831/>*

*...Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, must be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today...*

*Source: John Foster Dulles, "Opposition to the Spread of Communism By Whatever Means" Speech to the Overseas Press Club, New York, March 29, 1954, in Department of State Bulletin, April 12, 1954, p. 539, in Marvin E. Gettleman et al. (eds.), Vietnam and America (New York: Grove Press), 1995, p. 51-52.*

## - Why fight the Vietnam War? (Eisenhower Interview)

*Editor's note: This question and answer exchange is from Robert Richards of Copley Press asking President Eisenhower a question during the press conference on April 7, 1954. The president commented frankly about the significance of Indochina, the colonial name of Vietnam.*

### Q: Robert Richards, Copley Press:

Mr. President, would you mind commenting on the strategic importance of Indochina to the free world? I think there has been, across the country, some lack of understanding on just what it means to us.

### A: The President:

You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things. First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs.

Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.



*Dwight D. Eisenhower, half-length portrait, facing slightly right, holding glasses / photograph by the New York Times, New York, U.S.A., ca 1954.*

*Source: Library of Congress,  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91482942/>*

*Source: President Eisenhower's News Conference, April 7, 1954, Public Papers of the Presidents, 1954, p. 382  
The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 597-8  
<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/ps11.htm>*

- Why fight the Vietnam War? (Diem's Letter)

*Editor's Note: The 1954 Geneva Accords, the peace treaty ending French colonialism in Southeast Asia, divided Vietnam between North and South. Reunification would depend on the outcome of a presidential election to be held in 1956. However, realizing Ho Chi Minh's popularity, the United States and President Ngo Dinh Diem, the leader of South Vietnam, refused to hold the elections. In this letter addressed to President John F. Kennedy, President Diem thanks and seeks additional support from the United States.*



*Resident DIEM Small Poster, 11/25/1954. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier 6949135*

December 7, 1961  
Dear Mr. President,

Since its birth, more than six years ago, the Republic of Vietnam has enjoyed the close friendship and cooperation of the United States of America...

....For more than 2,000 years my people have lived and built, fought and died in this land. We have not always been free. Indeed, much of our history and many of its proudest moments have risen from conquest by foreign powers and our struggle against great odds to regain or defend our precious independence. But it is not only our freedom which is at stake today, it is our national identity. For, if we lose this war, our people will be swallowed by the Communist bloc, all our proud heritage will be blotted out by the "Socialist society" and Vietnam will leave the pages of history. We will lose our national soul.

*Source: Marvin E. Gettleman, Jane Franklin, Marilyn Young, and H. Bruce Franklin, eds., Vietnam and America: The Most Comprehensive Documented History of the Vietnam War (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 162.*