

# The Vietnam War

## I. Early American involvement in Vietnam

A. American officials saw Vietnam as an important front in the campaign to stop the spread of Communism

*i. Domino Theory* – Belief that if Vietnam fell to Communism, so would other countries in Southeast Asia

B. Americans aided French against Vietminh guerillas in 1950s, but French were defeated at battle of Dien Bien Phu

*i. Geneva Accords* divided Vietnam into two countries, and U.S. installed a pro-Western, nationalist leader (Ngo Dinh Diem) in S. Vietnam

## II. American Involvement Deepens

A. Diem refused to hold national elections, so Ho Chi Minh's followers formed a new guerilla army (Vietcong) to fight S. Vietnam and reunify the country

B. Eisenhower increased aid to S. Vietnam, Kennedy sent thousands of military advisors and increased aid – prevent country from becoming Communist

C. In 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing President Lyndon Johnson to take “all necessary measures” in Vietnam

*i. Johnson* begins bombing campaigns (“Operation Rolling Thunder”) and sends hundreds of thousands of troops over next several years

*ii. Americans* had trouble fighting guerilla warriors (who hid out in villages and dense jungles) and sometimes resorted to using napalm, Agent Orange, or civilian massacre (My Lai Massacre)

D. As war dragged on, many Americans began to question American involvement

## III. 1968: The Pivotal Year

A. Tet Offensive – Surprise attack by Vietnamese. U.S. won militarily, but media and many Americans became critical of war

**B. Nixon won 1968 election with promise of Vietnamization**—gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops to hand fighting over to South Vietnamese

- i.* Democratic party was split between pro-war candidate (Humphrey) and anti-war candidates (Bobby Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy)
- ii.* 3<sup>rd</sup> party candidate – George Wallace, segregationist

#### **IV. The End of the Vietnam War**

- A. Nixon escalates the war by bombing and invading Cambodia (1970)
- B. 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment – lowered voting age to 18
- C. Publication of *Pentagon Papers*, which revealed secrets about the war, made it more even more unpopular among American public (2/3 wanted war to end)
- D. In 1973, American involvement in Vietnam ended; by 1975, South Vietnam fell and the entire country became Communist
- E. In 1973, Congress passed the War Powers Act – limited executive powers during war; president must notify Congress within 48 hours of troop deployment and must withdraw them within 60 days unless Congress approves
- F. American deaths: 58,000 --- Injuries: 300,000 --- innumerable cases of post-traumatic stress and trouble readjusting to civilian life ---many classified POWs and MIAs ---- National Vietnam Veterans Memorial erected in 1982

#### **Slide Show Notes**