



**Social Studies  
School Service**

[www.socialstudies.com](http://www.socialstudies.com)

## Downloadable Reproducible eBooks *Sample Pages*

These sample pages from this eBook are provided for evaluation purposes. The entire eBook is available for purchase at

[www.socialstudies.com](http://www.socialstudies.com) or [www.writingco.com](http://www.writingco.com).

---

To browse more eBook titles, visit

<http://www.socialstudies.com/ebooks.html>

To learn more about eBooks, visit our help page at

<http://www.socialstudies.com/ebookshelp.html>

For questions, please e-mail [eBooks@socialstudies.com](mailto:eBooks@socialstudies.com)

---

To learn about new eBook and print titles, professional development resources, and catalogs in the mail, sign up for our monthly e-mail newsletter at

<http://socialstudies.com/newsletter/>

---

*Copyright notice: Copying of the book or its parts for resale is prohibited.  
Additional restrictions may be set by the publisher.*

*U.S. History Readers*

## **Americans in Vietnam**

By Thomas Ladenburg

Kerry Gordonson, Editor

Dr. Aaron Willis, Project Coordinator  
Amanda Harter, Graphic Designer

Social Studies School Service  
10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232  
<http://socialstudies.com>  
[access@socialstudies.com](mailto:access@socialstudies.com)  
(800) 421-4246

© 2009 Social Studies School Service

10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232  
United States of America

(310) 839-2436  
(800) 421-4246

Fax: (800) 944-5432  
Fax: (310) 839-2249

<http://socialstudies.com>  
[access@socialstudies.com](mailto:access@socialstudies.com)

Permission is granted to reproduce individual worksheets for classroom use only.  
Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-56004-375-1

**Product Code: ZP473**

## Americans in Vietnam

# Table of Contents

Chapter 1	The French in Indochina.....	1
Chapter 2	Communism, Guerillas, Inkblots, and Falling Dominoes .....	17
Chapter 3	“Sink or Swim with Ngo Dinh Diem” .....	29
Chapter 4	The Strategic Hamlet Program .....	43
Chapter 5	Exit Ngo Dinh Diem/The Gulf of Tonkin Incident.....	53
Chapter 6	Fighting a Guerrilla War.....	69
Chapter 7	My Lai .....	81
Chapter 8	The Tet Offensive and Domestic Politics .....	95
Chapter 9	The War Ends.....	111
Chapter 10	Vietnam Today.....	123
Chapter 11	Was the “Whole Thing a Lie” or a “Noble Crusade”? .....	133

## Americans in Vietnam

The original version of this unit was written during the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, it raises many questions that remain relevant today: Did U.S. leaders mislead the public? Was it in America's interests to fight this war? Can the U.S. fight a war against an unseen enemy without violating international rules of combat? How does one defend democracy in a country bereft of democratic traditions?

The unit begins with a description of French Indochina with a focus on Vietnam. The French are depicted as priding themselves in their "civilizing mission," and students are asked whether France's colonial subjects had reasons to be grateful. Chapter 2 tells how the mission ended with the Japanese invasion of Indochina and tells the story of how the French and the Vietminh began their war to control North Vietnam. Students learn of the three stages of guerrilla warfare as practiced by the Vietminh and the domino theory as articulated by President Eisenhower. They receive enough information to speculate as to whether Eisenhower should have provided air support to lift the siege of Dienbienphu and help the French regain the initiative in North Vietnam. Chapter 3 starts by relating the terms of the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and questions whether the U.S. should have supported the anti-communist leader of South Vietnam. Chapter 4 explains the rationale for the Strategic Hamlet Program. It then asks students a hypothetical question of whether a U.S. fighter pilot should honor the request of his Vietnamese counterpart to destroy a hamlet that had been infiltrated by the Vietcong.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 5, students learn how Ngo Dinh Diem's own generals overthrew the unpopular and corrupt but staunchly anti-communist dictator, and the U.S. was left with a leadership vacuum in Saigon. Students learn that as President Johnson faced criticism about his conduct of the war, he seized upon an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin to gain Congress's support to extend the war. They learn what Johnson said happened before they are asked for a mock vote on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Only after students have committed themselves do they learn that the president had duped them.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the difficulties faced by soldiers fighting a guerrilla war. In Chapter 6, students read statements by American soldiers who didn't know whether the Vietnamese they were trying to protect were friends or enemies and wondered why they didn't get more help and appreciation from the locals. Chapter 7 describes what happened at My Lai and asks students how far up the chain of command the responsibility for the massacre rests. Chapter 8 informs students that, after years of hearing that there was light at the end of the tunnel, Americans woke up to learn that North Vietnam had captured 104 South Vietnamese towns and villages in just one night. Students are told that the Tet Offensive was aimed at the political process in the U.S., with telling results. It sparked the anti-war movement, Robert Kennedy's entrance into the presi-

---

<sup>1</sup> This seemingly insignificant incident is a metaphor for the U.S. killing the people it was in Vietnam to protect. The U.S. in this and hundreds of other cases used its superior firepower against Vietcong guerrillas because South Vietnamese soldiers didn't want to risk hand-to-hand combat with the enemy.

dential race, President Johnson's withdrawal from his candidacy, and the spectacle of the Yippies creating chaos in Chicago. Students also learn that the excesses of the left were at least partially responsible for Nixon's election. In Chapter 10, they learn how his Vietnamization plan led to the 1973 Peace Agreement, the withdrawal of American troops, stage three of guerrilla warfare, and the South Vietnamese army collapse.

The remainder of the story is told quickly. Chapter 10 covers Vietnam in the 30 years after the war, and Chapter 11 requires students to write an essay on whether the war was a noble cause, a lie, or something in between.

Each chapter is designed to accommodate a wide range of student abilities. The first part of every chapter is written at a lower reading and conceptual level than the second part. The two parts are separated by a series of student exercises, including a graphic organizer and several questions intended to help students master basic information and stimulate higher-order thinking skills. The second part of each chapter, the "For Further Consideration" section, is written at a higher reading and conceptual level. It is followed by a question that requires students to write a strong paragraph and/or be prepared to present their opinions in class. In some cases, this section continues the story; in others, it challenges students to think deeply about issues related to the overarching question raised in the unit. In addition, I (Inquiry)-Charts are provided to help students optimize what they already know or think about a topic and integrate it with identifiable additional information they find in the text and in other sources. Finally, each lesson includes vocabulary words and key terms in flash-card format; these can be used either for review or reference.

This unit is also designed to stimulate informed discussions rather than recitation and rote learning. Students are provided with the information they need to acquire and share factually supported opinions and/or consider important philosophic issues. For example, they have to decide whether to support Ngo Dinh Diem, to find Lieutenant Calley guilty of committing war crimes, and to choose between conflicting evaluations on the purpose of this war and the means the U.S. used to fight it. They also get to experience the passions of men and women who either supported or opposed the Vietnam War.

## Chapter 1. The French in Indochina Teacher Page

### Overview:

This chapter starts by introducing students to the central question raised in this unit: Was the war in Vietnam to protect Vietnam's freedom and ensure U.S. security, or a misguided attempt to protect the U.S. from an imagined threat at the expense of the Vietnamese people? Students will come to understand that there are no easy answers to this question, but they will at least learn enough to form an intelligent and defensible opinion.

Chapter 1 introduces students to Indochina. It explains that over a period of roughly 300 years, the French subdued and occupied four separate nations: Laos, Cambodia, and what became North and South Vietnam. The Vietnamese are portrayed as a proud and independent people who spent centuries establishing their independence from China before the arrival of the French. Students learn that the French believed they were carrying out a civilizing mission and could point to many improvements they made in their southeast Asian colony. First and foremost the French boasted of introducing their language, religion, law, and culture to the Vietnamese, and of building an impressive modern infrastructure, including broad streets in Saigon, modern hospitals, hotels, and coffee houses. The Vietnamese, however, tended to feel marginalized, dissuaded from their religion, excluded from their government, deprived of their language, and removed from their lands. Students are invited to decide whether the distinct physical contributions the French made to Vietnam were worth the price the Vietnamese paid. A Graphic Organizer helps students look at French contributions from a Vietnamese nationalist's and a Francophile's perspective. Advanced students are required to write an essay on the same topic.

### Objectives:

Students will:

- learn that Vietnam as well as Laos and Cambodia were once French colonies
- learn that most Vietnamese did very well without France's intervention
- see the improvements France made in Vietnam by providing the Vietnamese with French technology, language, and culture
- understand that many facets of French influence required that the Vietnamese people abandon their culture, lands, and independence

### Strategies:

**Before class:** Assign the chapter either up to or including the "For Further Consideration" section and inform students they will be expected to write their answers to all the Student Activities questions covering the assigned section(s).

**In class:** Ask students if they know what a colony is, if they knew that the United States was a colony and later in its history became a colonizing power, and whether they know what types of relationships typically form between colonizer and colony. Next, quickly review the methods used by France, first to subdue the people of Indochina, and secondly to rule them. Proceed by asking students to share their responses to the Graphic Organizer question so they can help one another understand how a Frenchman and a Vietnamese might view their relationships from different perspectives. Next, ask students who wrote the essay assigned in the “For Further Consideration” section to explain why they sympathized either with the French or with the Vietnamese.

## The French in Indochina I-Chart

	Life in Indochina before the French came	How the French helped the people of Indochina	How the French made life more difficult for the people of Indochina
<b>What I already know</b>			
<b>What I learned from Chapter 1, Part I</b>			
<b>What I learned from class discussion of Chapter 1</b>			
<b>What I would still like to know</b>			

## Chapter 1—The French in Indochina

**calligraphy****technological****addicted****nominal****civilisation**  
*Francais***boulevards****domination****bureaucracy****confirmed**

## Chapter 1—The French in Indochina

<p>Dependent on something harmful, usually a drug</p>	<p>Resulting from the use of machines and tools to make something more efficient</p>	<p>Writing as an art form</p>
<p>Wide streets, often lined with trees</p>	<p>French term referring to a “civilizing mission”</p>	<p>Describes a small amount</p>
<p>Settled and agreed upon</p>	<p>A system of government administration that has appointed officials to oversee certain areas and functions</p>	<p>Power over others</p>

# Chapter 1

## The French in Indochina

### Introduction

For most teenagers, the Vietnam War is just something that happened a long time ago that they might have heard their parents talk about. For people living in the 1960s and 1970s, it was every bit as real as the “war on terror” is for people today. Fifty-eight thousand Americans and about two million Vietnamese died in the war. Hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets to oppose the war, and U.S. society split into competing camps of doves (opponents) and hawks (supporters). The doves believed the U.S. should never have been fighting in the jungles of a faraway land to support an unpopular dictator. Hawks believed the U.S. was fighting for freedom against a merciless enemy bent on world domination.

This unit offers you the opportunity to learn enough about the war in Vietnam to decide whether it was one the U.S. had to fight, or if the U.S. made the wrong decision in getting involved.



### Indochina and Vietnam

In the early 1950s, few Americans had ever heard of Vietnam. It was not a place most could find easily on a map. What we now call Vietnam was, from the late 1800s to 1954, part of a colony known as “French Indochina.”

When the French first became interested in Indochina, French missionaries sought to convert the Vietnamese to Catholicism, the religion of France. French merchants saw opportunities to enrich themselves by securing the profits from rice, coffee, tea, and rubber, and the French government was eager to establish a strategic presence in Southeast Asia.

This chapter briefly reviews the early history of the French involvement in Vietnam and the effects of French influence on the Vietnamese. The information in this chapter will help readers decide whether the United States should have helped France keep its colony of French Indochina.

## **Life in Vietnam Before the French**

Before the French came to Indochina, Vietnam, the Khmer Empire (Cambodia), and the Laotian Kingdom (Laos) were independent countries. Neighboring China had ruled Vietnam for hundreds of years. After centuries of resistance, the Vietnamese people overthrew their Chinese rulers and became independent. The tradition of armed struggle against foreign occupation had a long and noble history in Indochina, as the French as well as the Americans later learned to their regret.

In the three centuries preceding the French arrival, the Vietnamese were governed by a series of emperors whose nominal rule included collecting revenue. However, the taxes were modest and the emperor had relatively little real power over the Vietnamese. “The edicts of the emperor,” according to an old Vietnamese saying, “stop at the edge of the village.” The men who ruled the hundreds of small villages and hamlets in which the vast majority lived were chosen locally based on their education, wisdom, and family’s status. People in these villages seldom had their lives affected by outside events. They knew little of what happened beyond the circle of the huts in which they lived and fields on which they grew their crops.

Life in the villages was usually pleasant and peaceful. Much of Vietnam was well suited for growing rice, and Chinese conquerors had taught the Vietnamese people the difficult art of planting and harvesting this crop. The Vietnamese diet consisted mainly of rice and fish. A man was considered well-off if he had a water buffalo to help him in his farming. Clothes were mostly homemade, and people had little need for goods made outside of the village. Villagers usually were Buddhists, subscribing to its attending set of beliefs, priests, and rituals. Women exercised a surprising amount of authority, and the level of education in the villages was unusually high. On the average, 4 out of 5 Vietnamese were taught to read and write in their own language using the calligraphy introduced by the Chinese.

## **The French Come to Indochina**

France did not set out to conquer Indochina all at once. Over a period of more than 350 years, the French gradually extended their control over Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. As early as the 16th century, the Vietnamese welcomed European missionaries for their technical skills and connections to European suppliers of modern weapons and western merchandise. The French East India Company, an organization formed to expand trade and spread Catholicism, gained a foothold in Indochina in 1668. Thereafter, a pattern was established which continued for centuries. When French soldiers, traders, or priests were attacked and killed in Indochina, the French would avenge the loss and use the natives’ resistance to their authority as an excuse to extend their power. The French forced the Vietnamese to surrender control over their land and to provide them with special privileges. The French also took part in wars between rival Vietnamese factions. As a reward from the winning faction, the French would be given control over more land and the right to sell French goods and

spread the French religion. In the process, the French replaced local leaders with their nationals. By 1925, a bureaucracy of some 5000 Frenchmen ruled over a country totaling 30 million people. In time, France extended its control to include Laos, North and South Vietnam, and Cambodia, all of which they called French Indochina.

### **French Civilization in Vietnam: Religion and Culture**

The French have traditionally taken great pride in what they called their “*civilisation Francais*.” This included the language, religion, literature, poetry, and music of France, as well as its culture, laws, form of government, educational system, and technological achievements. One of the reasons the French gave for expanding their colonial empire throughout the world was to spread this civilization to native peoples.

For the Vietnamese, *civilisation Francais* meant being made into Frenchmen. The French taught upper-class Vietnamese to speak their language. French priests converted many Vietnamese to Catholicism. Teachers in French schools educated Vietnamese students in French history, literature, and law. Children of wealthy Vietnamese were also taught math, science, and engineering in special private schools attended by 20 percent of Vietnamese boys. This prepared the smartest young Vietnamese, if their parents could afford it, to attend French colleges in Indochina or a university in France. Vietnamese students took the same courses in French history and literature that were taught in France. In short, the French instilled their culture in the brightest and wealthiest Vietnamese children, and prepared young Vietnamese men to help France rule their country.

### **French Civilization in Vietnam: Modern Life**



A street in Saigon, early 1900s

The French made many changes in Vietnam. They modernized the country by building railroads, connecting the major cities. Of special pride to both the Vietnamese and the French was a railroad connecting the northern capital, Hanoi, to Saigon, the largest city in South Vietnam. In addition to the railroads, the French imported trucks and cars, paved streets, and built roads and bridges.

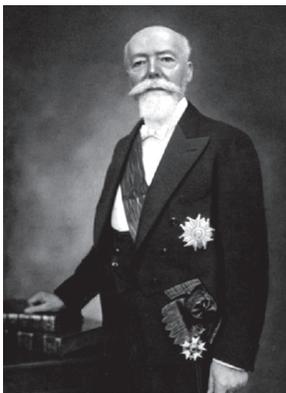
Though confined primarily to larger cities and towns, the French brought electricity to Vietnam. They made sections of Saigon and Hanoi into beautiful, modern cities with fine public parks and wide streets. They built hotels that are still in use. The outdoor restaurants, modern buildings, and broad boulevards in Saigon resembled those in Paris. The French even started a law and medical school as well as an excellent college in Vietnam, and they introduced the practice of modern medicine.

The French installed a legal system in Vietnam based on the one used in France.

It replaced the one that the Vietnamese had for hundreds of years. Before French intervention, for example, women convicted of adultery were sentenced to be trampled to death by elephants, and people found guilty of robbery were often beheaded. The French reduced penalties in those cases. They thought their system of justice was far more humane. Since this system was French, the French ran it. Vietnamese defendants would receive trials in French courts and be represented by French lawyers before French judges and French-speaking juries.

### **French Civilization in Vietnam—Economics**

Until the late 1890s, the French spent far more money expanding and governing their Indochinese Empire than they collected in revenues. In 1897, France sent a prominent politician, Paul Doumer, to govern Indochina. Doumer was determined to put Indochina on a paying basis. He wanted the Vietnamese to bear the administrative costs of running Indochina, and he wanted Indochina to provide a market for French products and become a source of profitable investment for French businessmen.



Paul Doumer

To raise money, Doumer encouraged Vietnamese to smoke opium. Previously, only a small part of the population had used this drug. When more Vietnamese became addicted, Doumer taxed opium. This tax eventually raised one-third of the revenue needed to govern Indochina. He also placed heavy taxes on the wine and salt trade. The Vietnamese who could not pay their taxes lost their houses and land and often became day laborers on properties they had once owned.

Before the French arrived in Indochina, the emperors did not allow rice to be sold outside the country. The French, however, believed they could make money by exporting rice. They encouraged expanded production of rice on lands that had been confiscated for non-payment of taxes. The French took over the lands of these unfortunate farmers and then hired them to plant and harvest the rice. As a result, Vietnam became the third largest rice-exporting country in the world. Despite the increase in production, many Vietnamese did not get paid enough to buy food for themselves and their families.

Vietnam also became well known for its rubber plantations. The famous Michelin tire company, for example, bought up thousands of acres of land in Vietnam. Many of the Vietnamese who had lost their land for failing to pay taxes got hired to work on these plantations. These poor peasants forced to work for the French often suffered from malaria, dysentery, and malnutrition. From the French perspective, these landless workers were fortunate to find employment.

The French also opened coal mines in Vietnam and used unemployed and landless peasants to work in them. The miners barely received a living wage.

## French Civilization in Vietnam—Government



Norodom Palace in Saigon, built for the French governor in 1925

In Vietnam's cities, the French took all of the high government positions. In the countryside, Vietnamese loyal to France played a more important role. Following orders from French government officials, they ran the smaller towns and villages where they collected taxes, supervised road construction and repair, and enforced French laws.

The French were proud of the way they spread their civilization to Vietnam. They were equally proud of the many Vietnamese who had become Catholics, spoke fluent French, and received educations in French history and literature. However,

not all Vietnamese appreciated France's influence on their country. Many wanted to rid their country of both French rulers and civilization. Thus, armed resistance to French rule continued throughout the entire colonial period.

