

The Vietnam war: a national trauma.

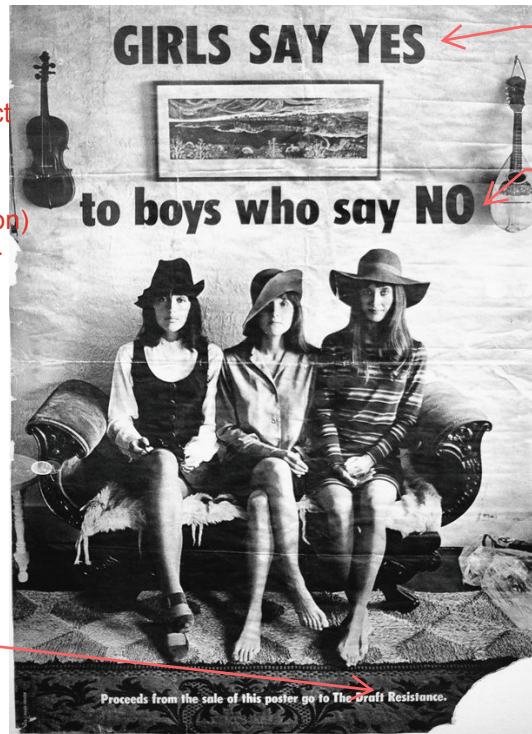
① Made in 1968 from a Jim Marshall photograph, it featured the Baez sisters—Joan, Pauline, and Mimi. The poster appeared on many a dormitory wall as the anti-Vietnam War movement itself expanded.

1968 was arguably the turning point of the war, with the Tet offensive. It was a general Vietcong attack on US military bases in SVN. It failed, but the psychological effect among the Americans was devastating: they lost confidence in their ability to win the war. As a result, LBJ (Lyndon B. Johnson) decided not to seek a second term.

In 1968 too, American soldiers slaughtered Vietnamese villagers in MyLai: 500 civilians were shot by a US platoon in a "search and destroy" mission.

Such massacres (the events were known in 1969) questioned the legitimacy of the war. Comparisons with Nazi Germany were made, not without reasons.

The poster is against the draft. It's part of the anti-war movement.



Make love...

... not war!

Joan Baez was a country music singer (with her two sisters). Many artists and intellectuals were involved in the anti-war movement. There was increasing dissent in the American society. There were demonstrations, in which millions participated. There were sit-ins in universities (on campuses), sometimes there were riots (like in Madison, WI). Draft-dodgers were trying to escape the draft. They mostly went to Canada, seeking asylum (which was usually granted).

② John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran, addresses the Senate's Foreign Affairs committee on 22 April 1971.

Since 1969, Nixon had succeeded LBJ. He was willing to end the war

Kerry was a member of the "Veterans against the war".

For him, the war was pointless.

The war was turning American soldiers into war criminals.

The US Army was indeed using ruthless tactics (search & destroy), evil weapons (napalm, agent orange)

We could come back to this country, and we could be quiet. We could hold our silence. We could not tell what went on in Vietnam. But we feel because of what threatens this country we have to speak out. Millions of men who have been taught to deal and to trade in violence and who were given a chance to die for the biggest nothing in history. Men who have returned with a sense of anger, and a sense of betrayal which no one has yet grasped. We rationalized destroying villages in order to save them. We saw America lose her sense of morality as she accepted very coolly a mere lie, and chose to give up the image of American soldiers that hand out chocolate bars and chewing gum. We learned the meaning of 'free fire zones', 'shoot everything that moves', and we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of Orientals. We watched the United States' falsification of body counts, in fact the glorification of body counts. We watched while men charged up hills because a general said that hill has to be taken. And after one platoon or two platoons, they marched away to leave the hill for the reoccupation of North Vietnamese. And we are asking Americans to think about that. Because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?

There was racism against the Vietnamese.

the documents and your knowledge, explain why the Vietnam war became a national trauma.

To conclude, the Vietnam war was, for John Kerry and his fellow veterans, an awful mistake. There was a trauma because the nation was divided, crimes were committed, and many veterans would never overcome that trauma.