

Had a look Nearly there Nailed it!

Reasons for
US failure
in Vietnam

Impact of US opposition to the war

The Vietnam War affected the USA in a number of ways: in terms of the lives lost and destroyed, the financial cost of the war and how American society was changed by the experience.

Impact of war opposition: a deeply divided society

- 1 The war led to a growing gulf between the public and previously trusted institutions, such as the government and armed services.
- 2 Returning soldiers were sometimes met with real hostility. As the anti-war movement grew, veterans could be targeted as 'baby killers'. Sometimes they were verbally or physically attacked. Some veterans found it difficult to find work.
- 3 There was a high suicide rate among returning soldiers. After the Second World War, veterans were treated as heroes, yet men returning from Vietnam were sometimes outcasts who felt that US society had let them down. They had been made to fight a war that US society, as a whole, did not support, and they carried the responsibility and guilt for this.



Vietnam War veterans, wearing 'Vets for Peace in Vietnam' hats, march to Washington, D.C., 1969, as part of a 600 000-strong demonstration. Many veterans joined the anti-war movement because they were disillusioned with the war's aims and methods.

Turn to pages 21–22 for more on the reasons behind opposition to the Vietnam War in the USA.

Financial impact

As well as the war expenditure, US society was affected by the lack of resources to address the problems they had domestically. For example, Johnson's 'Great Society' agenda, which aimed to reduce inequality and racial divisions, lost money that was spent on the war instead.

For more on President Johnson's attempts to reduce inequality and racial divisions, turn to page 11.

Pressure on US government of anti-war movement

- The reputation of the USA was diminished as a result of the war in Vietnam.
- The US government was concerned that involvement abroad should not lead to similar problems to those encountered in Vietnam.
- By the end of 1975, the whole of Vietnam was under a communist government, so the war seemed to have been pointless.
- In the 1950s, the American public had respect for its government but 20 years later the general feeling was that people should be more questioning of the power of, and decisions made by, government. The Vietnam War played a big part in this shift in attitude towards the government.

Anti-war protest outside the city hall in San Francisco, 1973.



Now try this

List **three** ways in which US society was affected by opposition to the Vietnam War.

Tasks:

1. Complete the 'now try this' task
2. Create three headings around a spider diagram: US weakness, North Vietnamese strength, opposition for USA. Explain the impact each of these things had on the Vietnam war under the heading.
3. Explain what you think was the most important factor in the failure of the USA in Vietnam.