

9.

SEE NO EVIL

CHOOSING NOT TO LOOK AT THE WAR IN VIETNAM

If we do not speak of it, others will surely rewrite the script. Each of the body bags, all of the mass graves will be reopened and their contents abracadabraed into a noble cause.

—GEORGE SWIERS, VIETNAM VETERAN¹

We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. . . . We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.²

Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind.

—GEN. WILLIAM WESTMORELAND³

He is a lover of his country who rebukes and does not excuse its sins.

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS⁴

AS WE COLLEGE PROFESSORS get older, we grow ever more astonished at what our undergraduates don't know about the recent past. I first became aware of this phenomenon as the 1970s inexorably became the 1980s. Lecturing on the Vietnam War, I increasingly got blank looks. One in four, then one in two, and in the 1990s four in five first-year college students did not know the meaning of the four-letter words *hawk* and *dove*. On the first day of class in 1989 I gave my students a quiz including the open-ended question, "Who fought in the war in Vietnam?" Almost a fourth of my students said the combatants were North and South Korea! I was stunned—to me this resembled answering "1957" to the question "When did the War of 1812 begin?" In fact, many recent high school graduates know more about the War of 1812 than about the Vietnam War.⁵

It makes little sense and surely does no good to blame the students. It can hardly be their fault. If our civic memories begin when we are about ten years old, then the last students to have any memory of the Vietnam War graduated from high school in the spring of 1983. The war is unknown territory to *the parents* of most high school students today. So are the women's movement, Watergate, and the Iran hostage crisis. Students need information about the Vietnam War from their high school American history courses.

In the textbooks of the 1980s they did not get much. Since the war ended in 1975, even the earliest of these books had the benefit of hindsight in teaching about the conflict that has often been called "America's longest war," as well as the advantage of their authors' personal knowledge of the event. They squander these advantages.

Comparing coverage of the Vietnam War and the War of 1812 in my original twelve textbooks illuminates the problem. The War of 1812 took place almost two centuries ago and killed maybe two thousand Americans. Nevertheless, the high school history books in my original sample devoted the same quantitative coverage—nine pages—to the War of 1812 and the Vietnam War. One might argue, I suppose, that the War of 1812 was so much more important than the Vietnam War that it deserves as much space, even though it took place so long ago. Our textbooks made no such claim; most authors didn't know what to make of the War of 1812 and claimed no particular importance for it.

Since the War of 1812 lasted only half as long as the Vietnam War, authors treated it in far more detail. They enjoyed the luxury of telling about individual battles and heroes. *Land of Promise*, for instance, devoted three paragraphs to a naval battle off Put-in-Bay Island in Lake Erie, which works out to one paragraph per hour of battle. Vietnam got no such coverage.

Scant space was only part of the problem. Nine gripping analytic pages on the Vietnam War might prove more than adequate.⁶ We must ask what kind of coverage textbooks provided.

In the original edition of *Lies*, I did not set out my own account of the war and then critique authors for presenting an analysis different from my own. Instead, to avoid the charge of subjectivity, I focused on the photographs the textbooks supplied. The Vietnam War was distinguished by a series of images that seared themselves into the public consciousness. I identified seven of these images: five famous photos (such as the little girl running naked toward the camera as she fled a napalm attack, and the bodies piled in the ditch at the My Lai massacre) and two generic images of the war's destructiveness. Photographs

have been part of the record of war in the United States since Matthew Brady's famous images of the Civil War. In Vietnam, television images joined still photos to shape the perceptions and sensibility of the American people. Even including our two recent wars in Iraq, Vietnam is still our most photographed and televised war.

I asked dozens of adults old enough to have lived during the war to tell me what visual images they remember; the list of images they supplied shows remarkable overlap. A short list includes these five specific images:

1. A Buddhist monk sitting at a Saigon intersection immolating himself to protest the South Vietnamese government;
2. The little girl running naked down Highway I, fleeing a napalm attack;
3. The national police chief executing a terrified man, a member of the Vietcong, with a pistol shot to the side of his head;
4. The bodies in the ditch after the My Lai massacre; and
5. Americans evacuating from a Saigon rooftop by helicopter while desperate Vietnamese try to climb aboard.

The list also included two generic images: B-52s with bombs streaming below them into the pockmarked countryside of Vietnam, and a ruined city such as



Quang Duc, the first Buddhist monk to set himself on fire to protest the policies of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime that the United States supported in South Vietnam, shocked the South Vietnamese and the American people. Before the war ended, several other Vietnamese and at least one American followed Quang Duc's example.



This little girl, Kim Phuc, ran screaming down Highway 1, fleeing from an accidental napalm attack on her village by South Vietnamese airplanes. She had stripped off her burning clothing as she ran. The television footage and still photographs of her flight were among the most searing of the war. The photograph violates two textbook taboos at once: no textbook ever shows anyone naked, and none shows such suffering, even in time of war.

Huế, nothing but rubble in view, as American and South Vietnamese troops move in to retake it after the Tet offensive.⁷

Merely reading these short descriptions prompts most older Americans to remember the images in sharp detail. The emotions that accompanied them come back vividly as well. Of course, since the main American involvement in the war took place from 1965 to 1973, Americans must be well over forty to recall these images today. Young people have little chance to see or recall these images unless their history books provide them.

In 1995 the twelve textbooks in my original sample failed miserably. One book, *The American Pageant*, included one of these pictures: the police chief shooting the terrified man.⁸ No other textbook reproduced any of them. *The American Adventures* contained an image of our bombing Vietnam, but the photograph showed B-52s and bombs from below and gave no sense of any damage on the ground. Thus, there remained huge room for improvement.

The seven cited images are important examples of the primary materials of the Vietnam War. Hawks (people who were pro-war) might claim that these images exaggerate the aspects of the war they portray. However, these images have additional claims to historical significance: they actually *made* history, prompt-



Nguyen Ngoc Loan, the national police chief of South Vietnam, casually shot this man, a member of the Vietcong, on a street in Saigon on February 1, 1968, as an American photographer and television crew looked on. This photograph helped persuade many Americans that their side was not morally superior to the communists.¹⁰ The image is so haunting that, forty years later, I have only to cock my fingers like a gun and people who were old enough to read newspapers or watch television in 1968 immediately recall the event and can describe it in some detail.

ing news stories and changing the way viewers around the world understood the conflict. Several of these photographs remain “among the most well-known images in the world even now [1991],” according to Patrick Hagopian, who studied the ways America memorialized the Vietnam War.⁹ Leaving them out shortchanges today’s readers. As a student of mine wrote, “To show a photograph of one naked girl crying after she has been napalmed changes the entire meaning of that war to a high school student.”

In Vietnam the United States dropped three times as many explosives as it dropped in all theaters of World War II, even including our nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so textbook authors had many images of bomb damage to choose from. On the ground, after the Tet offensive, in which Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops captured cities and towns all over South Vietnam, American and South Vietnamese troops shelled Huế, Ben Tre, Quang Tri, and other cities before moving in to retake them. Nonetheless, not one textbook showed any damage done by our side.

That was then. Chapter II shows how the Vietnam War was still considered



Left: In the My Lai massacre American combat troops murdered women, old men, and children. Ronald Haeberle's photographs, including this one, which ran in *Life* magazine, seared the massacre into the nation's consciousness and still affects our culture.¹¹ Most Hollywood movies made about Vietnam include My Lai imagery; *Platoon* offers a particularly vivid example.

Right: On April, 29, 1975, this American helicopter evacuated people from a Saigon rooftop. The next day Saigon fell, and the long American (and Vietnamese) nightmare came to an end. More than half of all Americans alive today were younger than ten or not yet born when this photograph was taken. Thus, most Americans know the war only from movies and textbooks. On January 14, 2007, the *Washington Post* devoted half a page to this image, with the caption: "Iraq Endgame: Will It Look Like This?"

recent in the 1980s and early 1990s, and textbooks always slight the recent past, no matter how important it was. How do they do today, now that the war has receded into the distant past for most Americans?

Two "legacy textbooks"—Boorstin and Kelley and *The American Pageant*—descended from books originally published half a century ago, still aimlessly give the War of 1812 about as much space as the Vietnam War. Neither includes even one of the important images of the Vietnam War. *Pageant* actually moved backward: it dropped its photo of the police chief executing the Vietcong man.

The three "really new" books, along with *Holt American Nation* (distantly descended from Todd and Curti, *Triumph of the American Nation*), provide much more coverage. *The Americans* gives the war more than thirty-four pages. Still, a certain softness inhibits its treatment. Although *The Americans* includes twenty-one illustrations of the war, only one—the monk immolating himself—comes from my list of seven. Not one of twenty-one photos shows any damage the United States inflicted upon Vietnam. *Pathways to the Present* also includes the immolation image, and it and *American Journey* show the evacuation from the rooftop near

our embassy. *Journey* also provides a generic rubble photo. *Holt* shows a landscape pockmarked by B-52 craters. Among all six books, that's it.

Of course, the authors and editors of textbooks choose among thousands of images of the Vietnam War. They might make different selections and still do justice to the war. But at the very least they must show atrocities against the Vietnamese civilian population, for these were a frequent and even inevitable part of this war without front lines, in which our armed forces had only the foggiest notion as to who was ally or opponent. Indeed, attacks on civilians were U.S. policy, as shown by Gen. William C. Westmoreland's characterization of civilian casualties: "It does deprive the enemy of the population, doesn't it?"¹² We evaluated our progress by body counts and drew free-fire zones in which the entire civilian population was treated as the enemy. Such a strategy inevitably led to war crimes. Any photograph of an American soldier setting fire to a Vietnamese *booth* (house), a common sight during the war, would get this point across, but no textbook shows such an act.¹³ *American Journey* includes a shot of marines climbing "a mound of rubble that was once a tower of the fortress of Hué." Readers might be able to infer that our munitions reduced the fortress to rubble, so that photograph qualifies as the only illustration of *any* destruction, even of legitimate targets, clearly caused by our side, to be found in any textbook. Today's textbooks seem to be supplying precisely the censorship that Gen. William Westmoreland wished for (in the quote at the head of the chapter), while he was in command. Unfortunately, censorship is the cause, not the remedy, of confusion about the war.

My Lai was not a minor event, unworthy of inclusion in a nation's history, but was important precisely because it was emblematic of much of what went wrong with the entire war in Vietnam. My Lai was the most famous instance of what John Kerry, formerly of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, now U.S. senator, called "not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command." Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 1971, Kerry said, "Over one hundred and fifty honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia." He went on to retell how American troops "had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam." All this

was "in addition to the normal ravage of war," as Kerry pointed out in his testimony.¹⁴

Only *Discovering American History*, the oldest textbook in my sample, treats the My Lai massacre as anything but an isolated incident. *The Americans* has a perfectly adequate paragraph on My Lai, far better than any other new book, but it never mentions that attacks on civilians were a general problem. In addition to leaving students ignorant of the history of the war, textbook silence on this matter also makes the antiwar movement incomprehensible.

Two textbook authors, James West Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, are on record elsewhere as knowing of the importance of My Lai. "The American strategy had atrocity built into it," Lytle said to me. Davidson and Lytle devote most of a chapter to the My Lai massacre in their book *After the Fact*. There they tell how news of the massacre stunned the United States. "One thing was certain," they write, "the encounter became a defining moment in the public's perception of the war."¹⁵ Plainly they do not think high school students need to know about it, however, for their high school history textbook, *The United States—A History of the Republic*, like ten other textbooks in my sample, never mentions My Lai.¹⁶

If textbooks omit the important photographs of the Vietnam War, what images *do* they include? Uncontroversial shots, for the most part—servicemen



The only photograph of troops in *Triumph of the American Nation* shows them happily surrounding President Johnson when he visited the American base at Cam Ranh Bay during the war.

on patrol, walking through swamps, or jumping from helicopters. Ten books show refugees or damage caused by the *other* side, but since such damage was usually less extensive than that caused by our bombardment, the pictures are not very dramatic.

This is an outrage, and there is no excuse for it. Joy Hakim shows we can do better in her textbook *A History of US*, intended for about fifth grade. She includes the police chief shooting the terrified man, another image of a guard threatening a Vietnamese POW with a knife, a photograph of a town destroyed by "our side," and the most famous image of the My Lai massacre. Surprisingly, Hakim also gives her readers the image of the little girl running naked down Highway I. This is surprising because textbook publishers typically follow the rule of "no nudity"; as one editor told me, "in elementary books *cows* don't have udders." Yet her series has been a bestseller—perhaps because it also reads better than most standard textbooks.

What about their prose? Sadly, most textbook authors also leave out all the memorable quotations of the era. No textbook quotes the trademark cadences of Martin Luther King Jr., the first major leader to come out against the war, reproduced at the head of this chapter.¹⁷ Even more famous was the dissent of Muhammad Ali, then heavyweight boxing champion of the world. Ali refused induction into the military, for which his title was stripped from him, and said, "No Vietcong ever called me 'nigger.'" All eighteen textbooks leave out that line, too. After the Tet offensive, a U.S. army officer involved in retaking Ben Tre said, "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it." For millions of Americans, this statement summarized America's impact on Vietnam. No textbook supplies it.¹⁸ Nor does any textbook quote John Kerry's plea for immediate withdrawal: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"¹⁹ Most books also exclude the antiwar songs, the chants—"Hell, no; we won't go!" and "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?"—and, above all, the emotions. Indeed, the entire antiwar movement becomes unintelligible in many textbooks, because they do not allow it to speak for itself. Virtually the only people who do get quoted are Presidents Johnson and Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.²⁰

Three new books do better. The new *Pageant* and *We Americans* include the chants from the opposition. They as well as *Pathways to the Present* give more space to the antiwar movement and to the dirty underside of the war than did older texts. The improvement may reflect that, with the passage of time, the Vietnam War is no longer very recent or very controversial, as we shall see below. Authors

may be coming to treat the war more forthrightly, as they now treat slavery, now that the Cold War, like formal segregation against African Americans, has ended.

However, their coverage is jerky, perhaps reflecting the multiple authors who probably wrote it. Chapter 12 explains that the authors listed on the covers of high school American history textbooks often did not write them, especially in their later editions. Two competing books show this problem in their treatment of Vietnam.

Because some of the enemy lived amidst the civilian population, it was difficult for U.S. troops to discern friend from foe. A woman selling soft drinks to U.S. soldiers might be a Vietcong spy. A boy standing on the corner might be ready to throw a grenade.

—*The Americans*

American troops . . . never could be sure who was a friend and who was an enemy. The Vietnamese woman selling soft drinks by the roadside might be a Viet Cong ally, counting government soldiers as they passed. A child peddling candy might be concealing a live grenade.

—*Pathways to the Present*

It is hardly likely that independent authors wrote these two passages. Did Gerald Danzer (or one of his “coauthors”) copy and modify from *Pathways*? Did Alan Winkler (or one of his “coauthors”) copy and modify from *The Americans*? If so, one should charge the other with plagiarism. No one ever does, however—not about high school textbooks—because everyone in the publishing industry knows that their “authors” did not really write them. Probably the publishers of *Pathways* and *The Americans* happened to hire the same freelancer to write or update both books. Still other unnamed clerks add photos and write captions and teaching suggestions.

Using different unnamed authors for different chapters, different features, and different updates is not only misleading, since school systems choose textbooks partly because they think distinguished historians wrote them. It also makes textbooks less coherent. Often different paragraphs in the core narrative contradict each other. To present contrasting viewpoints would be fine, but that is not what textbooks do. Instead, their treatments of the war amount to one thing after another, displaying little overall organization and no point of view

or interpretation. They cannot be organized, because they were written by what amount to disorganized sequential committees that never met. That's why Frances FitzGerald, who, in addition to *America Revised* wrote *Fire in the Lake*, a fine book about Vietnam, called the textbooks she reviewed in 1979 "neither hawkish nor dovish on the war—they are simply evasive." She went on to say, "Since it is really quite hard to discuss the war and evade all the major issues, their Vietnam sections make remarkable reading."²¹

To some degree, defining the issues is a matter of interpretation, and I would not want to fault textbooks for holding a different interpretation from my own. Perhaps we can agree that any reasonable treatment of the Vietnam War would discuss at least these six questions:

Why did the United States fight in Vietnam?

What was the war like before the United States entered it? How did we change it?

How did the war change the United States?

Why did an antiwar movement become so strong in the United States? What were its criticisms of the war in Vietnam? Were they right?

Why did the United States lose the war?

What lesson(s) should we take from the experience?

Simply to list these questions is to recognize that each of them is still controversial. Take the first. Some people still argue that the United States fought in Vietnam to secure access to the country's valuable natural resources. The "international good guy" approach noted in the last chapter would claim that we fought to bring democracy to Vietnam's people. Perhaps more common are analyses of our internal politics: Democratic Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, having seen how Republicans castigated Truman for "losing" China, did not want to be seen as "losing" Vietnam. One realpolitik approach stresses the domino theory: while we know now that Vietnam's communists are antagonists of China, we didn't then, and some leaders believed that if Vietnam "fell" to the communists, so would Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Yet another view is that America felt its prestige was on the line, so it did not want a defeat in Vietnam, lest Pax Americana be threatened in Africa, South America, or elsewhere in the world.²² Some conspiracy theorists go even further and claim that big business fomented the war to help the economy. Other historians take a longer view, arguing that our intervention in Vietnam derives from a cultural pattern of racism and imperialism that began with the first Indian war in

Virginia in 1622, continued in the nineteenth century with "Manifest Destiny," and is now winding down in the "American century." They point out that GIs in Vietnam collected and displayed Vietnamese ears just as British colonists in North America collected and displayed Indian scalps.²³ A final view might be that there was no clear cause and certainly no clear purpose, that we blundered into the war because no subsequent administration had the courage to undo our 1946 mistake of opposing a popular independence movement. "The fundamental blunder with respect to Indochina was made after 1945," wrote Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, when "our Government allowed itself to be persuaded" by the French and British "to restore France's colonial position in Indochina."²⁴

Perhaps the seeds of America's tragic involvement with Vietnam were sown at Versailles in 1918, when Woodrow Wilson failed to hear Ho Chi Minh's plea for his country's independence. Perhaps they germinated when FDR's policy of not helping the French recolonize Southeast Asia after World War II terminated with his death. Since textbooks rarely suggest that the events of one period caused events of the next, unsurprisingly, none of the textbooks I surveyed looks before the 1950s to explain the Vietnam War.

Within the 1950s and 1960s, the historical evidence for some of these conflicting interpretations is much weaker than for others, although I will not choose sides here.²⁵ Textbook authors need not choose sides, either. They could present several interpretations, along with an overview of the historical support for each, and invite students to come to their own conclusions. Such challenges are not the textbook authors' style, however. They seem compelled to present the "right" answer to all questions, even unresolved controversies.

So which interpretation do they choose? None of the above! Most textbooks simply dodge the issue. Here is a representative analysis, from *American Adventures*: "Later in the 1950s, war broke out in South Vietnam. This time the United States gave aid to the South Vietnamese government." "War broke out"—what could be simpler? *Adventures* devotes four pages to discussing why we got into the War of 1812 but just these two sentences to why we fought in Vietnam. Newer textbooks simply rely on anticommunism to explain U.S. involvement.

Teachers are unlikely to make up for the deficiencies in their textbooks' treatment of the war. According to Linda McNeil, most teachers particularly don't want to teach about Vietnam. "Their memories of the Vietnam War era made them wish to avoid topics on which the students were likely to disagree

with their views or that would make the students 'cynical' about American institutions." Therefore, in the 1980s, the average teacher granted the Vietnam War 0 to 4.5 minutes in the entire school year. Coverage has not increased much since then; many college students report that their high school history courses wound down about the time of the Korean War.²⁶

Neither our textbooks nor most teachers help students think critically about the Vietnam War and marshal historical evidence to support their conclusions. Never do they raise questions like "Was the war right? Was it ethical?" Some books appear to raise moral issues but veer away. For example, *Challenge of Freedom* asks, "Why did the United States use so much military power in South Vietnam?" Attempting to answer this question could get interesting: Because our antagonists weren't white? Because they couldn't strike at the United States? Because we had it available? Because the United States has a history of imperialism vis-à-vis "primitive" peoples from our Indian wars through the Philippine-American War of 1899–1913 to Vietnam? Because, like most other nations, we behave not by standards of morality but of realpolitik? The answer that *Challenge* suggests to teachers, however, shows that the authors don't really want students to think about why we intervened and certainly not about whether we should have done so, but merely to regurgitate President Johnson's stated rationale for so much bombing, which the book has previously supplied: "To show the Vietcong and their ally, North Vietnam, that they could not win the war." This answer is mystifying, since the Vietcong and North Vietnam *did* win the war; moreover, the authors' claim to know Johnson's motivation arrives without evidence. In the rhetorical climate created by this textbook, for a teacher to raise a moral question would come across as a violation of classroom norms.

Similarly, Boorstin and Kelley mostly ask regurgitation items like "Identify Dean Rusk," occasionally interspersed with "Critical Thinking" questions like "How did the Tonkin Gulf incident lead to our increased involvement in Vietnam?" In fact, on August 2, 1964, a U.S. destroyer, *Maddox*, was cruising the Tonkin Gulf four miles from islands belonging to North Vietnam. At the same time, smaller U.S. boats were ferrying South Vietnamese commandos to attack some of those islands. Three North Vietnamese patrol boats fired torpedos at *Maddox*, missing; the destroyer crippled two of them and sank the third. North Vietnam protested to the International Control Commission. The next day, as the smaller U.S. boats ferried South Vietnamese commandos to attack mainland targets this time, *Maddox* returned, thought it was again attacked, and fired

in all directions. Soon it became fairly clear that the attacks were phantoms caused by weather and misinterpretations of sonar. Nevertheless, President Johnson professed outrage and sent what came to be called the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution" to Congress, where it passed overwhelmingly. This resolution authorized the president to do whatever he wanted in Vietnam, and he used it immediately to begin bombing North Vietnam. Real "critical thinking" might lead students to conclude that the question has it backward: our increased involvement in Vietnam led to the Tonkin Gulf incident, especially since the second attack on *Maddox*, upon which "our increased involvement in Vietnam" was predicated, never happened. (As Johnson confided to an aide at the time, "Those dumb stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish."²⁷) Unfortunately, except for the old *Discovering American History*, published in 1974, all high school history textbooks I surveyed shy away from actually prompting students to think critically about the Vietnam War.

Ironically, students could probably get away with critical thinking without upsetting their parents. At least 70 percent of Americans now consider the Vietnam War to have been morally wrong as well as tactically inept.²⁸ That's quite a consensus. Nevertheless, the strident arguments about the military records of George W. Bush and John Kerry in the 2004 presidential campaign showed that the war can still be controversial. Fear of controversy may be why Florida's Disney World, in its "American Adventure" exhibit, a twenty-nine-minute history of the United States, completely, if awkwardly, leaves out the Vietnam War. And it may explain why history textbooks omit the images and the issues that might trouble students—or their parents—today.

Mystifying the Vietnam War has left students unable to understand much public discourse since then. Politicians across the political spectrum invoked "the lessons of Vietnam" as they debated intervening in Angola, Lebanon, Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia, and, most recently, Iraq. Bumper stickers reading EL SALVADOR IS SPANISH FOR VIETNAM helped block sending U.S. troops to that nation. John Dumbrell and David Ryan's *Vietnam in Iraq* and Robert Brigham's *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* draw specific parallels between those two seemingly endless wars.²⁹ In 2006 Henry Kissinger used his perverse misreading of our Vietnam debacle—he blames Congress for pulling out—to advise George W. Bush to "stay the course" in Iraq.³⁰ "The lessons of Vietnam" have also been used to inform or mislead discussions about secrecy, the press, how the federal government

operates, and even whether the military should admit gays. High school graduates have a right to enough knowledge about the Vietnam War to participate intelligently in such debates. After all, they are the people who will be called upon to fight in our next (and our ongoing) war—whether it resembles Vietnam or not.³¹