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**Losing Hearts and Minds:
The Cultural Mediation of the Vietnam War Experience in America**

by
Kenneth B. Cunningham

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2000

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Losing Hearts and Minds: The Cultural Mediation of the Vietnam War Experience in America.

by

Ken Cunningham

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The political-cultural legacy of the Vietnam War in America has been analyzed and debated across the political spectrum, and to varying degrees within the scholarly disciplines. Through the current period, debates about the “lessons” and “legacies” of Vietnam continue to shape U.S. political culture and foreign policy. This dissertation examines the cultural transmission and mediation of knowledge and beliefs about the Vietnam War and American politics, drawing on historical, public opinion, and interview data. The core of this study consists of thirty-five interviews of seventeen young people and separate interviews with their parents, some of whom are Vietnam veterans, and some of whom opposed the war in Vietnam. Through frame analysis and interpretation of the attitudes and beliefs of the parents and children, the study examines the relationship of the war to American political culture and the effects of generational differences and family socialization. Lasting criticism and distrust of the U.S. government are two of the most consistent findings of this study, for both parents and children. Implications for the further study of the interaction between war-making and political culture are also addressed.

Acknowledgments

This project has been many, many years in germination and development, during which I have been inspired, guided, aided and abetted by a great number of friends, colleagues and loved ones. This work would not have been possible without the willing participation of the thirty-five individuals I interviewed who make up the primary data for the study. I am grateful for their openness and trust and the rich thoughts and insights which fill these pages.

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given all a mother's love, care, nurturance and more -- our many walks were my solace and catharsis. I wish that my father, Charles Cunningham, were here to celebrate the completion of this work -- you inspired me more than you can ever know. Thanks so much to Diana Doroghazy. Thanks to Greg Bergmark ("home slice") -- a true organic intellectual in the Gramscian vein.

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- Chapter 1 -

- Introduction -

The Vietnam Debate: "Argument Without End"¹

In the wake of the Persian Gulf War, on March 1, 1991, President George Bush declared, "It's a proud day for American's and, by God, we've licked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all" (cited in Summers 1994).

In striking contrast to Bush's triumphant assertion, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara explains in his preface why he decided to write his book In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam:

"But why now? Why after all these years of silence am I convinced I should speak? There are many reasons; the main one is that I have grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt with which so many people view our political institutions and leaders" (1995:xix).

Two declarations by former top government leaders with very different perceptions of the relationship between the Vietnam war experience and American political culture. One asserting Vietnam as healed ("licked syndrome"), resolved, over and done with, "once and for all", with an implied revived sense of national unity, pride and purpose. In medical analogy, the image is Vietnam as healed wound (The Scar that Binds, in the title of one recent work [Beattie 1998]). The second quote represents the impact of Vietnam as

1. cf. Robert McNamara's (1999) Argument Without End: in Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy.

continuing, unresolved, contested, (partial) cause of cynicism and contempt toward our government and political institutions. The medical analogy is Vietnam as open wound, unhealthy, unhealed.

Both of these declarations, and the motives behind them, are open to debate and interpretation, and indeed have received extensive critical interrogation from many quarters.² Yet, they highlight important questions for sociology and the study of American political culture: more broadly, what is the relationship between foreign policy, particularly war-making, and domestic political culture? More specifically, what *are* the lessons and legacies of the Vietnam war, and how are they being transmitted culturally with the passage of time since the war? How is the Vietnam experience continuing to influence and shape American political culture, attitudes and national identity at the millennium?

This dissertation addresses these questions with a specific focus on the political-cultural legacy of the Vietnam war experience in the contemporary United States. The study focuses on three levels of analysis: the macro level of culture, the meso level of social generations, and the micro level of family socialization. Despite the large number of volumes that have been written on Vietnam, there appears to be very little research that attempts to integrate these three levels of analysis. To my knowledge, there are no qualitative, interpretive studies using interviewing to examine these processes at all three

2. The flood of vociferous debate following the publication of McNamara's book which filled the editorial pages, letters-to-the-editor, news magazines and other sources of media commentary was itself reflective of the depth and intensity of feelings about the Vietnam war more than twenty years after the American withdrawal. The 1995 Vintage paperback edition of the book carries an appendix of 102 pages of reprints of some of this commentary.

levels -- What lasting effects is the war having on American political culture? How is it understood by the Vietnam and post-Vietnam generations? What do young people know and think about Vietnam? How is the war's meaning being transmitted to, and interpreted by, the next generation? How is it mediated within the family?

The core of this study consists of interviews examining the transmission and interpretation of the Vietnam experience between Vietnam-era parents and their college-aged children focusing on two important spheres of political socialization: the family and social generation.

In brief, this study employs the notion of hegemony from the work of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and others, and the notion of legitimation from Jurgen Habermas, to argue that the hegemonic political-cultural "consensus" of the pre-Vietnam period was seriously undermined and de-legitimated by the war experience. The central argument is that the Vietnam experience created a "lasting rupture in American political culture" which continues to be manifested in various ways in the current period. The rise in political skepticism and distrust during the war have continued to permeate, and be transmitted through, US political culture.

There is a literature in American political science which has long argued (e.g. Gabriel Almond, Philip Converse, and others since) that ordinary Americans are irrational, moody, volatile and uninformed when it comes to public affairs and/or foreign policy. This view has been increasingly challenged and reassessed in more recent years (Knopf 1998; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Page and Shapiro 1992). I believe that the findings of this study also do not

support the older view. Rather, this study reveals sensible, reasonable individuals who care about Vietnam and American politics, and have interesting, reflective and thoughtful things to say. William Gamson in Talking Politics, a study of American public attitudes on politics, makes the pithy assertion, "Three themes run throughout the analyses of political talk in this book:

- a. People are not so passive,
- b. People are not so dumb,..." (1992:4).

(Gamson's third theme concerns interpretation of media messages and is not relevant here.)

My findings are consistent with these themes, particularly the second. Borrowing an aphorism from Charles Tilly (made in reference to social movements,) I argue that the ordinary Americans of this study "are at least as rational as the people who study them." The people interviewed here reveal a practical rationality toward politics which is ultimately encouraging, notwithstanding what is made of the significant levels of distrust, skepticism and disaffection with "the government" -- ultimately encouraging because it shows that most of them care about and think about the issues (i.e. the Vietnam war and American politics and culture.)

The theory, literature review and summary of findings are expanded in the next chapter. The research design and methods are summarized in chapter three.

"But Why Another Vietnam War Study?..."

Yet, all the foregoing begs the prior question: why (continue to) study and debate the Vietnam war? Hasn't it been done enough? Isn't it time to "put Vietnam behind us", as

George Bush and so many others have urged (including every president since Gerald Ford.)

There are many possible answers to these questions; I suggest just a few briefly here: more broadly, the importance of the relationship between war and culture, the relative lacuna of this area within the field of sociology, and the importance of significant and contentious historical events for the present (the historiographical issue.) More specifically, Vietnam is still highly salient and hotly debated in the American public sphere and national consciousness (and perhaps collective unconscious.)

Of War and Culture

On the first point above, the question of the relationship between war and culture, it has been argued that the twentieth century has been humankind's deadliest in warfare, by far (Renner 1999:10), and that modern war-making is deeply intermeshed with culture (Sherry 1995; Nordstrom and Martin 1992; Hunt 1987) as well as economic, social and political forces (Howard 1988). In general categorical terms, all nation-states which contemplate war-making (and most other foreign policies) face the task of legitimating these actions within their existing political cultures. This idea has a long history within political philosophy, political theory and international relations.³ War is culturally and ideologically legitimated

3. cf. Machiavelli's The Prince, Clausewitz's On War, and Hans Morgenthau's Politics Among Nations. Machiavelli (1995) views "good arms" and war-making as the Prince's most important task, and stresses repeatedly the importance of the Prince having the support or "goodwill" of the people to rule effectively. Clausewitz writes at length about war as a "political act" involving "beliefs", "emotions", "passions", etc. For Clausewitz, "The political object" of war must "bear in mind its influence on the masses which it is to affect. Accordingly, the character of these masses must be considered" (1962:71). For Morgenthau "national character cannot fail to influence national power... in war and peace", including "public opinion" and all "those intellectual and moral qualities which

within an existing, evolving socio-cultural environment, within a particular national history, and, at the same time, warfare interacts with and changes that culture and history. War is constituted within, and constitutive of, evolving culture.

Indeed it can be argued that state "success" and legitimation and war "success" and legitimation often go hand-in-hand and rise and fall together (notwithstanding significant variance in definitions of success.) In recent decades a number of social scientists have studied the intimate relationship between war, revolution and state formation and expansion (cf. Tilly 1992; Giddens 1987; Skocpol 1979; Mills 1959). Yet, the question can be asked: how central is the serious human/social problem of war and political violence as an object of study within the entire field of sociology?

"Are Peace and War on the Sociological Agenda?"

-- Panel title at the 1997 ASA Annual Meeting.

Despite the continuing prevalence of war since the end of the Cold war, in the Persian Gulf, central Africa, the former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, war and militarism appear remarkably marginal to the field of sociology as a whole. Various commentators have made this argument from time to time. British sociologist Martin Shaw, for example, has suggested:

Central though the experience of war and war-preparation has been to society in the twentieth century, it has been determinedly marginalized in our intellectual culture. Sociology's neglect has been remarked whenever its writers have finally brought themselves round to the subject. This has, however, been far from an exceptional situation. Indicative, perhaps, is the

make up the national character" (1978:138). Jean Elshtain's (1987) Women and War offers a fascinating feminist consideration of this question.

volume of keywords compiled by Raymond Williams -- a writer who straddled literature, sociology and politics with great authority -- which simply does not include 'war' or 'militarism' among the central concepts of our age. To confirm the typicality of this experience, simply turn to the index of almost any general book on culture, society or politics and observe the gaps where these terms should be (1991:5).

Certain American sociologists have likewise argued for the importance of understanding war in the contemporary human experience. A well-known book by the eminent American sociologist Robert Nisbet (1988), The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America, discusses "The Prevalence of War" as the first of three broad problem areas of great significance to America.

But what is the receptivity to this view within the profession? The 1999 Annual Meeting Program of the American Sociological Association (ASA) lists seven sessions on Peace/War/World Conflict out of a total of over 600 sessions. By contrast, Race/Ethnicity for example has 78 sessions. Numerous issues of the ASA "Peace, War and Social Conflict Section" Newsletter in the past few years have discussed the problem that it may lose section status within the field of sociology due to insufficient membership.

Another noteworthy recent example of the war lacuna is the 1996 ASA book by Felice Levine and Katherine Rosich, Social Causes of Violence: Crafting a Science Agenda. Despite the title, the preface reveals that the book is "intended as a guide and resource for those interested in producing knowledge that can answer the basic question: What causes violence *in U.S. society?*" (vii, emphasis added). After defining violence, the introduction acknowledges: "Although it is not a point of emphasis here, such a definition does not exclude state sanctioned or institutional violence (e.g., deadly force by law enforcement

officials) or violence perpetrated by groups with legitimate power in the United States or elsewhere" (p. 4). Although the book contains no index, this appears to be the only (somewhat ambiguous) reference to violence which might include war or militarism. Even granting that the problem may be one of needing to limit the scope of the report to US society, there is no mention anywhere of the question of how war and militarism might act as independent or interacting cultural and political variables in contributing to societal violence. Even the short section which discusses violence in the mass media refers only to the generic term "violence."

In the wake of the Littleton, Colorado, Columbine High School massacre and a wave of other high-profile violent events in 1999, the debate over the problem of "violence" has heated up again in the US, but again there appears to be relatively little serious consideration of the ways in which political violence and war-making and "domestic" violence may be related, particularly through a general American culture of violence (cf. Steven Levy 1999:39).

In any case, there appears to be sufficient *prima facie* evidence to warrant more serious contemplation of Martin Shaw's assertion.

None of this is meant to suggest that sociology has not given attention to the problem of war, as acknowledged in my literature review in chapter two, but the question has been, and remains, one of emphasis. While Karl Marx and Max Weber, for example, address political violence, through revolution, imperialism, and their theories of the state and conflict, neither of them can really be said to have developed a thorough-going theory of war,

or its cultural and ideological mediation. Later generations of sociologists have attempted to fill the gap to some extent, but, I argue, still insufficiently addressing the interaction of war, culture and ideology.

"Who Controls the Past Controls the Future. Who Controls the Present Controls the Past." -- George Orwell, 1984.

The third reason cited above for the continuing importance of studying the Vietnam war is the historiographical issue. Contestation over historical meanings, interpretations and representations of significant events are also political struggles, battlegrounds over ideological hegemony, even national "identity" or "mythology." Of course, it is possible to argue either that "doing history" is a positivist, detached, value-neutral "science" in which politics has no place, and/or that historical events are unique and therefore of very limited heuristic utility, i.e. cannot really teach "lessons" for the present and future. Both of these positions are age-old debates (cf. Collingwood 1956; Carr 1961; Best 1995; Wood and Foster 1997), which can't be fully engaged here, but both are incorrect in my view -- the epistemological standpoint grounding my study draws from the German hermeneutic tradition of human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) of Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans Gadamer, and the "verstehen" sociological tradition of Max Weber and critical theory.

A number of highly contested historiographical debates of recent years belie the value-neutrality claim: a few of the more publicized are continuing debate over the legacy of Nazism and the holocaust, from "the Historians' Debate" of the 1980s in Germany (Habermas 1989), to Daniel Goldhagen's (1996) provocative Hitler's Willing Executioners:

Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, to the more recent contentiousness of Peter Novick's The Holocaust in American Life in 1999 (see Sharlet 1999; cf. Lipstadt 1993). In the US, the politics of history was drawn into sharp relief in the early 1990s with broad-ranging controversy over the 500-year "anniversary" of the "arrival"/"invasion" of Columbus and the Europeans (Chomsky 1993a), as well as the 1994-95 flare-up over the planned Smithsonian Institution "commemoration" of the Enola Gay mission and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (Benford 1996). A number of studies in the past decade have examined the politics of historical memory and commemoration in the US, particularly the difficult struggles over the meanings of highly contested, dissentious phenomena like the Vietnam war (Lembcke 1998; Sturken 1997; Chomsky 1993b; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991; Hagopian 1994), Watergate (Schudson 1992), the New Left (Gitlin 1980), and US culture since Vietnam (Engelhardt 1995; Gibson 1994.)

The debate over the degree to which history can teach lessons is ancient and cannot be reviewed here.⁴ Eric Hobsbawm (1997) and many others (not least Marx and the Marxist tradition) have argued that it is indeed possible and desirable to learn important lessons from history, about human social processes, patterns, tendencies and trends. This is the position taken in this study, which is supported by most of the participants in the study -- i.e., that there *are* lessons to be learned from the Vietnam war.

In a basic sense, all historiography is "revisionist" -- historical (re)interpretation and representation is always also a struggle over how "we" understand ourselves, "our" past, our

4. As just one example of the negative view, on the argument over the role of the holocaust in American life, Peter Novick recently stated, "Along with most historians, I'm skeptical about the so-called lessons of history" (cited in Sharlet 1999).

place in the world, and our future. Contention over how Vietnam is understood, how it is taught in our schools, how it is presented in film and television -- these are all an integral part of the larger processes of national identity-formation and national political will-formation. Understanding the processes of transmission and socialization of contested events (in this case Vietnam) to succeeding generations is central to understanding political culture, beliefs, behavior, and ultimately action, including monumental action like future war-making. The extent to which Americans in general, and young Americans in particular, either subscribe to hegemonic (state-legitimizing) representations of the Vietnam war (as "noble cause," etc), or largely distrust and reject these representations and develop more critical views, is absolutely salient to future national trajectory, including government policy, international relations and war-mobilization.

Vietnam and the "Civic Crisis" Debate

The last, more specific reason for the relevance of this study is that Vietnam is still widely recognized in our public discourse and debate as a watershed in US history. The Vietnam experience has been variously described as national trauma, turning point in US history, political-cultural rupture, national failure, national shame, the end of the American Century, and more -- the great number of analysts who view Vietnam in these ways are too numerous to catalogue (cf. Beattie 1998; Kung 1998:11; Levy 1995; Schneiderman 1995; Gibson 1994; Wells 1994; Martin 1993:5; Dionne 1991; Destler, Gelb and Lake 1984).

But it is particularly germane to consider the Vietnam legacy in relation to the extensive debate in recent years about America's "civic crisis", variously conceived in terms

of decline in civil society, civic engagement, citizenship, social capital and the public sphere, falling political participation and trust in government, etc. (Fukuyama 1999, 1995; Foley and Edwards 1997; Lewis 1996; Wright 1996; Putnam 1995; Bellah et al. 1992; Dionne 1991). It can be argued, and there is substantial supporting evidence in my view (e.g. Nye et al. 1997; Engelhardt 1995) that the watershed event of the Vietnam war has had a significant, lasting and continuing impact on American political culture which is partially expressed in the civic crisis debate (notwithstanding where one ultimately stands on that debate).⁵ What is clear is that there is a solid body of hard evidence today that trust and confidence in government in the past few decades have been at levels consistently below half of what they were in the mid-1960s (Nye et al. 1997; Fukuyama 1999) -- the great debate is over the origins and causes.

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature, and develops and discusses in more detail the theoretical approach of frame analysis used in this study. Chapter three presents the research design and methodology of the study. Chapter four examines the Vietnam war experience and American political culture in the views of the respondents. Chapter five compares the two social generations on views of the war. Chapter six examines the transmission of the Vietnam legacy through family socialization by comparing parent-child pairs. Chapter seven offers conclusions about the war experience, US political culture, social

5. Of course there are many important historical events impacting US political culture in the past three-and-a-half decades -- my study does not deny this, nor does it try to disaggregate or "weigh" the great multiplicity of factors. Rather, the argument is made in the following chapters that the Vietnam war was one definitively important and lasting experience of the past 35 years.

generations and family socialization, and also offers reflections for further study of the interaction between war-making and political culture.

- Chapter 2 -

The Vietnam War and American Political Culture: Literature Review and Theoretical Overview

This chapter presents a literature review and theoretical overview of my research and situates it in relation to existing scholarly work. I begin with a statement of the research questions and the findings. I then present an attempt to situate the project in relation to the three levels of analysis of the study, and give a summary of my own theoretical framework in view of these different levels. This is followed by a discussion and literature review of the study of the Vietnam war and American political culture. The last part of the chapter reviews the meso level of social generations, and the micro level of family socialization, and presents an explication of the "cultural mediation" and "framing" approaches to the data.

Summary of Research Questions and Findings

My research examines the legacy of the Vietnam war and US political culture through a process I call "cultural mediation" (discussed below.) This research relates to the broader questions mentioned in the Introduction of the relationship between war-making, political culture and ideology. However, though I situate my project theoretically in relation to these fundamental questions, this work cannot attempt any solid answer on this larger topic. Rather, this research focuses on the US and the Vietnam war experience, with the hope that it may also suggest some ways of thinking about the broader questions.

Nearly every military intervention since Vietnam has raised referents and debates about "another Vietnam," or of "quagmire." Fears and debates about the Vietnam legacy and lessons recur in relation to places like the Persian Gulf, the former Yugoslavia, central Africa

and Somalia, and in terms like "the Vietnam Syndrome." The meanings of Vietnam have become a central touchstone in American foreign policy. Some analysts have argued that the "Munich analogy" was the defining frame of American foreign policy from World War Two until Vietnam, and that Vietnam has been the defining frame since (see Holsti 1996, Holsti and Rosenau 1980).

At the same time, there have been major declines in trust and confidence in government in the US, which many have linked to the Vietnam period (Nye, et al. 1997; Engelhardt 1995; Kaase 1988). Discussion of these shifts are often situated within a web of contemporary debates about social/cultural capital, civil society, the public sphere, citizenship, civic "crisis", communitarianism and, more broadly, "culture wars." For the sake of brevity, when speaking of these discourses as a whole, I will refer to them as the "political culture debates."

What is the link between the Vietnam war and American political culture today? What more lasting effects has the war experience had on attitudes toward government in the present? And how are the perceived lessons of the war applied by ordinary Americans in their thinking about foreign policy today, about the US role in the world?

In addition to examining these questions in relation to the macro level of US political culture, this study also examines two key social spheres, social generations and family socialization, which other scholars (Holsti 1996, Eyerman and Turner 1998, Ichilov et al. 1990) have identified as important in understanding the connections between political culture, values and foreign policy. The primary data of this study consists of a set of 35 interviews which examine interpretations and beliefs of Vietnam-era parents and their college-aged "post-Vietnam" children, by comparing two subsets of parent-child pairs on Vietnam and American politics: one subset consists of eight young people with fathers who

are Vietnam veterans, and the other subset consists of nine young people with parents (some mothers and some fathers) who opposed the Vietnam war. (The design is explained more fully in the next chapter.) Focusing on the three levels, culture, generation and family, my interviews are framed around the questions: What are the beliefs and interpretations of the legacies and lessons of Vietnam and American politics that are shared by the parents and children? In both groups, is there a linkage between the Vietnam experience and attitudes about government, politics and foreign policy today? How do the participants view the question of social generations and generational differences? And how do the two generational groups appear to differ on views of the war? What are the family socialization processes with the Vietnam war; how are beliefs and information transmitted or not transmitted between the parent-child pairs?

As alluded to in the Introduction, the findings of this study, are, first, that ordinary Americans have intelligent, thought-out positions and views about the Vietnam war and politics which reveal complexity, ambiguity, and nuance. This issue will be expanded below in the section on public opinion and foreign policy. Second, the findings are consistent with the view that Vietnam continues to be significant in American political culture. Almost all of the participants in this study view the war quite critically. Virtually all criticize the US government. Particularly, the study revealed a strong theme of distrust and skepticism toward the government which many related to the Vietnam war and which many still hold strongly today. A few feminist scholars have described their critique of reason as a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (see Ruddick 1990). This phrase might be appropriated as an apt description of the attitude today of a large number of Americans toward their government. Most of the participants in this study view their government with a skeptical, suspicious eye, to which the Vietnam war appears an important contributing factor.

Secondary data on these themes is discussed below. Presentation and discussion of the primary interview data is taken up in chapters four, five and six.

All but a few of the people in this study also identify with the idea of social generations, though parents see their generation more definitively and see Vietnam and civil rights as important defining experiences. Most youth see their generation as more diffuse, diverse and disunited, without clear unifying or defining issues or events. Family socialization appeared important for most of the parents and children of this study. Those who reported talking more with each other about Vietnam were closer overall in their views. These findings are expanded upon in the chapters on generations and family socialization.

A Hermeneutics of Macro, Meso and Micro Analysis

Any study of complex social and political processes of the kind in this study requires a theoretical and methodological sensitivity to the complexities of multiple levels of analysis within the totality. As stated in chapter one, this study is informed epistemologically by the interpretive, hermeneutic tradition of social analysis associated with Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, Hans Gadamer and the "Hegelian-Marxist" critical theory of Georg Lukacs and the Frankfurt School. The category of totality in this context has a history of development from Hegel, through Marx, Lukacs and the Frankfurt School, and others like Jean-Paul Sartre (see Marcuse 1960; Jay 1984). In simplified terms, the project here, from Marx forward, was to transform the abstract, "mystical" dialectic of Hegel into a dialectical analysis of concrete (material) and dynamic social reality.¹ One tack in this tradition entails a "hermeneutic

1. Louis Althusser presents an interesting excursus on this problem, analyzing Marx's cryptic argument in the Afterward to the second edition of Capital I, that with Hegel, the dialectic "is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again if you would

circle" involving the analysis of relations of the whole to the parts in a dialectical, theoretical movement. In relation to the problem of attempting historical understanding, Gadamer states:

At this point a traditional hermeneutical rule comes to our aid. It was formulated for the first time by the romantic hermeneutics, but its origin dates back to ancient rhetoric. It concerns the circular relation between the whole and its parts: the anticipated meaning of a whole is understood through the parts, but it is in light of the whole that the parts take on their illuminating function (1979:146).

The hermeneutic tradition shares affinities, then, with the interpretive "verstehen" approach to sociology associated with Max Weber and the Weberian tradition (Weber 1978:3ff; cf. Gerth and Mills 1977:55-61; and Bendix 1984).

In keeping with the notion of a hermeneutic circle, in this chapter I attempt to situate my specific research focus in relation to broader theoretical levels of analysis. In basic terms I try to maintain a fluid, dialectical sensitivity to, and movement between, macro, meso and micro levels of analysis.² I suggest my own multi-level theory in this chapter, conceptualizing culture at the macro level, generations at the meso level, and family socialization at the micro level. And in the interviews themselves, I also asked the respondents to speak to issues at all three levels, i.e. their thoughts about American culture

discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (cited in Althusser 1990:90).

2. To be sure, there is a substantial history of attention to the problematic of levels of analysis within social analysis, from Parsonian "grand theory", to Mertonian "theories of the middle range", to the "micro-interactionist" approaches of Mead, Goffman, and many others. Moreover, the problem also comes under fire on different terrain in many postmodern analyses and criticisms (e.g. Lyotard 1984; Foucault 1980:80ff). For discussions, see Collins (1994), Best and Kellner (1991), and Jay (1996) on the Frankfurt School. For an in-depth treatment of these issues and distinctions, using somewhat different language applied to theories of the state, see Alford and Friedland (1985).

and global politics, generations, and family interaction, etc.

In this study, the micro level refers to person-to-person or very small group interaction. For the most part the study at this level focuses on parent-child interaction. Some respondents also spoke of socialization in the larger family unit, or important friends of the family. This will be specified in the chapters on findings. The meso level of analysis in my study refers to intermediate groups, institutions or socializing agents. In this study this particularly includes the generational group, though participants also discussed schools, peer group and the media.

The peer group and generational group are connected though distinct; the former is viewed as part of a larger generation. The peer group can be considered to be that group within the age cohort of the respondent which is perceived to be a part of his or her life, or with which he or she identifies. A generation is an age cohort conceived at the societal or national level, or even, in a few cases, at the international level. However, questions of levels, definition, periodization, sub-groups, etc, make the generational idea more complicated -- this will be expanded upon in the section on generations later in this chapter.

The macro level of analysis refers to the national and international levels. In this study, this refers to the US: to American culture, "national interests", foreign policy, Vietnam and relations with the US, and broader international issues (such as the Cold War, the domino theory, imperialism, etc.) In the next section, I sketch out the working theory of the relation between the levels of analysis, the whole and the parts, in this project.

Macro Theoretical Framework

This research project fits within a larger, macro-level scholarly project in the work of a number of sociologists of the past twenty years, notably some of the work of Anthony Giddens, Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Michael Klare, Martin Shaw (and the earlier work of C. Wright Mills.) In broadest terms, a central problematic addressed by much of this work is the question of the relationships between: 1) the modern national-security state and military apparatus, 2) its interconnected political-economic structures and networks (what some, following President Dwight Eisenhower, have called "the military-industrial complex"), and 3) the cultural/ideological superstructure of this web of phenomena. In relation to the US, for example, this means examining the political-cultural legitimations of militarism and war-making (America as "Superpower", "defender of democracy and/or the free world", etc), and American perceptions about "our role in the world", as well as the representations of political violence/war-making in the media, popular culture, children's toys, etc. While the first two components above (the state/military and military-economic) have been studied to a significant extent (by C. Wright Mills, Morris Janowitz, Richard Barnet, Sam Marullo, Seymour Melman, Ann Markusen, Michael Klare, among others), it is the third component (cultural/ideological) which warrants further development in relation to Vietnam and the American experience.

At the macro level of analysis, my theoretical scheme draws from Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1977; Sassoon 1982; Forgacs 1988); Jurgen Habermas' theory of legitimation crisis (1975; cf. also 1987 and 1996); and Anthony

Giddens' structuration theory (1979, 1984). There has been a wide range of usage of the concept of "hegemony"; my usage draws fairly directly from Gramsci (1971:12). In this scheme, hegemony consists of the capacity of "dominant" or "leading" groups to generate "spontaneous consent" of subaltern groups (e.g., in this case, the broad American public) due to the prestige ("expertise") and structural position of the leading groups, in this case government and foreign policy elites. Raymond Williams and others have made the important point that hegemony is never static nor fixed; "It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged..." (1977:112). What I suggest is that from World War II to the late 1960s there was a relatively high degree of consensus among foreign-policy-making and US ruling elites about US "interests", purposes, and role in the world (this point has been made by others [cf. Destler, et al. 1984; Kolko 1994; Levy 1995]). These views were hegemonic to a high extent before the late 1960s, i.e. widely shared, or at least widely accepted, by a majority of the general public (as supported, for example, in the public opinion data cited below from John Mueller [1973].)

The experience (or "trauma") of the Vietnam War, over time, led to a rupturing of both the elite consensus (for example, in early 1968, most of Lyndon Johnson's top advisers [the "Wise Men"] telling him to get the US out of Vietnam), and, at the same time, protest and opposition to the war expressed a de-legitimation of the hegemonic views about US foreign policy and America's role in the world (i.e. a fragmenting of the majority position of public support or "consent.")

Drawing from the theory of Jurgen Habermas (1975), it is further argued that the

Vietnam experience, the declines in trust and confidence in government, and contention about foreign policy goals and interests, have contributed to more lasting legitimation problems for the American polity more generally. The war expressed and accentuated conflicts between the political, socio-cultural, and economic spheres, and diminished the "steering capacity" of political elites, particularly in the realm of foreign policy, but also with broader effects in the general political culture (Habermas 1975:45-77). To theorize a bit further, using Habermas' later terminology, the legitimation problems represented an "uncoupling" of the instrumental rationality of the political system (e.g. "Realist" foreign policy imperatives) from the values rationality of the moral lifeworld (1987:113ff). That is to say, these conflicts represented a clash between what most Americans took to be America's most basic values (the cultural lifeworld) -- "what America stands for", at least conceived as an ideal or mythic narrative -- and increasing public awareness of what the US was really doing in Vietnam; actual US policy and conduct (the foreign policy system.)³ The Vietnam conflict manifested a schism between what America said it stood for, or what most citizens believed it stood for or ought to stand for, and what we/it (or the government, in the name of the people) was actually doing. During the war this conflict was expressed in terms of an increasing government "credibility gap", moral outrage, disillusionment, etc. This schism created legitimation problems, and arguably a crisis of political values and persistent distrust, even problems of the functioning of the political system (Habermas' "steering problems") which have well-outlasted the war itself, into the current period.

3. Some participants in this study, like Julian in chapter four, express this perception, this revelation quite explicitly.

Notwithstanding many efforts, under President Reagan and others, to make America "proud and strong" again, the distrust and disillusionment of the Vietnam period has not been eliminated, or even significantly diminished (despite claims like George Bush's cited in the Introduction.) The hegemony of the pre-Vietnam national foreign policy narrative has not been re-established. The historical and public opinion evidence supporting this argument will be expanded later in this chapter.

The question remains of how these processes conceptualized at the macro theoretical level can be studied empirically at the three levels: macro, meso and micro. To what extent has the American political system and its elites been able to manage or control or "steer" the political-cultural mediations and interpretations of Vietnam, or in what ways has this capacity been diminished? To what extent have American political elites been able to, or not able to, engender consent (exercise hegemony) over American public understandings of the war, which support or coincide with the interests and imperatives of the political system/elites?

Attempting to answer these questions requires some effort to bridge the different levels of analysis. How can the different levels be reconciled? On the one hand, much macro level theory (Habermas being a case in point) is vague in specifying how "steering" occurs. On the other hand, much micro level analysis suffers its own aporias. I contend that a significant weakness of much socialization research is the conceptual bracketing (as "exogenous") the historical and cultural situatedness of the human subject. Rather, it is important to attempt to theoretically situate and understand socialization at the micro, meso

and macro levels, i.e. intersubjectively, culturally, structurally and historically.

Yet, the complex relationship between agency and structure, between the conscious, developing, individual human subject and existing society (in its cultural and historical context) is anything but simple, and has long been recognized as one of the central problems/concerns of social analysis (Marx 1978; Dilthey 1961; Freud 1961; Mead 1962; Parsons 1951).⁴

Anthony Giddens' (1979, 1984) "structuration theory" marks one well-known effort of the past two decades to theorize this problem anew, and has generated considerable scholarly attention and modification since (Sewell 1992; Cohen 1987). Giddens coined the term "structuration" to denote the relation of agency and structure as dynamic and mutually forming -- what Giddens calls the "duality of structure":

The concept of structuration involves that of the duality of structure, which relates to the fundamentally recursive character of social life, and expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency (1979:69).

For Giddens, human subjects are always-already situated in "time and space", within particular social, structural contexts. Yet the activities of "situated actors" not only reproduce existing structures, rules, practices, etc, but also engage, challenge, "recursively" modify and change those structures and practices (1984:25). In my project, then, American citizens are conceived to perceive the Vietnam war within an existing American political culture at that time (1960s-70s) which both shaped American responses to the war, and, in turn, has been recursively shaped by that experience since that time.

4. Various formulations of this dialectic are central throughout the work of Karl Marx (1978), e.g. in The German Ideology, the truncated schema of the preface to The Critique of Political Economy, and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.

With Giddens, however, as with Habermas, we encounter the same lacuna of concrete specification of these processes: How are the "situated actors" themselves actually socialized? How do they learn and develop? Through which concrete socialization agents and processes? These theories remain at a level of theoretical abstraction which leaves unclear how they might be applied empirically.

Recognizing the duality of structure, what individual agents actually learn and believe within any given structure, within a certain complex social context, time and space, is, in the end, an empirical question. In this context, the legacy of Vietnam in US political culture, and the inter-generational transmission of Vietnam "lessons" and attitudes about the government are important areas for concrete social research. In the next section, we move to a more concrete level of specification of US political culture and socialization and their relation to the Vietnam war experience, in an attempt to begin to reveal some empirical connections.

The Macro Level: American Political Culture and the Vietnam War

A great deal has been written about the history of the American experience with the Vietnam War, and the antiwar movement, the New Left, etc, at various levels of analysis (Beattie 1998; Lembcke 1998; Anderson 1995; Wells 1994; Kolko 1994; Gitlin 1993; Young 1991; DeBenedetti 1990; Frey-Wouters and Laufer 1986; Gibson 1986; Baritz 1985; Karnow 1984). A New York Times article of November 1997 (Bryce 1997) suggested that a "second wave" of scholarship on Vietnam is "exploring the war's ramifications in everything from popular culture to contemporary politics" (p. EL30).

At the same time, it has been pointed out (Rowe and Berg 1991) that a great number

of American studies on the Vietnam war ignore or marginalize the Vietnamese experience without acknowledging this, as if the US experience *was* the war. It is a disturbing irony that much of the American scholarship reproduces the same US-centrism and myopia toward the Vietnamese "Other" which was a fundamental and persistent flaw of US war planners *during* the war (Vlastos 1991:54). I wish to explicitly recognize that the research here focuses on the US experience, while in no way intending to diminish or dismiss the Vietnamese experience. I expressly acknowledge the terribleness of the Vietnamese experience in the war.

Until fairly recently scholarly attention has been somewhat uneven on the interaction of the war and American political culture, and the impact of the war experience on subsequent culture, values, attitudes, and beliefs. A number of the works cited above address some of these factors to varying degrees, but not with the specific foci of this study. It is necessary, then, to give some discussion to the notion of political culture, its meaning, its application to the American case, and its relation to the Vietnam war.

Forms of the notion of political culture can be found in the modern political philosophy of works like Montesquieu's The Spirit of Laws, Rousseau's The Social Contract, and Tocqueville's Democracy in America, among many others. Culture and ideology have also been important in the study of war, political violence and politics, as for example in canonical modern theorists like Machiavelli (1995), Karl von Clausewitz (1962), and Karl Marx (1978). Noam Chomsky is perhaps the most renowned contemporary analyst and critic in this area, particularly the ideology or political culture of American foreign policy (1993b, 1992, 1987).

At least since the 1950s, a growing body of work has cross-cut traditional disciplinary boundaries in political science and sociology developing the study of political culture and the related phenomenon of political socialization. Work in these areas by Louis Hartz (1955), Herbert Hyman ([1959] 1969) Seymour Martin Lipset ([1959] 1963, 1967) and Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963), among others, furthered scholarly interest and debate on these concepts. More recent decades have seen a proliferation of contributions in the study of political culture and socialization, not only from the academic mainstream (e.g. Farnen 1996; Lipset 1996; Richard Ellis 1993; Renshon 1992, 1977; Ichilov 1990; Huntington 1981; Devine 1972), but also a whole range of challenges from feminist, postmodern, cultural and multicultural studies, and critical theory positions (e.g. Habermas 1996; Storey 1996; Nicholson and Seidman 1995; Tronto 1993). A related engagement in recent years is the lively debate on social capital, civil society, citizenship, trust and the public sphere (Putnam 1995; Fukuyama 1995; Calhoun 1997; Foley and Edwards 1997; Schudson 1998). Broadly conceived, this literature is vast, and beyond the scope of this study to review and critically engage. Yet in differing ways they all relate to the study of political culture and political socialization in general, and, for our purposes, the political culture of post-Vietnam America in particular. As suggested in the Introduction, and to be resumed in the Conclusion, I argue that these current debates in the American context cannot be properly understood in the absence of a deep understanding of the impact of the Vietnam experience on US political culture.

But what is culture? The study of culture itself has experienced a great surge of

interest in the past 30 years or so, with the rise of cultural studies, identity politics, semiotics, much of poststructuralism and postmodernism, the so-called "Culture Wars" and so on. There is striking variation just in the definitions and conceptions of culture, along with related concepts like ideology (cf. Smith 1998, Storey 1996, and Eagleton 1991) -- for good summary discussions see Rotberg (1999) and Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1992).

Clifford Geertz (1973) presented a prescient review of the problems with the then prevailing social scientific approaches to culture and ideology. In his chapter on "Ideology as a Cultural System", he criticized the limitations of "interest" and "strain" approaches, and issued a call for more nuanced, complex, symbolic approaches drawing from the fertile grounds of linguistics and literary criticism. One fairly typical distinction between culture and ideology, which I adopt here, is that culture is broader, more general, less systematic, while ideology is a more systematic set of beliefs about a phenomenon, a social or political system, etc. In this view, ideologies are a part, or a subset, of culture.

Ann Swidler (1986) offers one useful effort at theorizing the two concepts and their relationship. Swidler suggests that,

Since the seminal work of Clifford Geertz (1973), the older definition of culture as the entire way of life of a people,... have been displaced in favor of defining culture as the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning. For the purposes of this paper, culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. (1986:273)

Swidler suggests conceiving of culture as a sort of "tool kit" of symbols, stories, world-views for understanding the world which people use to formulate strategies of action, to solve problems, to act in the world. Like Geertz, Swidler is critical of "interest" approaches to

culture of, for example, Max Weber, and "core values" approaches in the tradition of people like Talcott Parsons and Seymour Martin Lipset, which she argues have little explanatory power. Swidler, akin to Geertz, argues for a thicker conception, which depends on "habits, moods, sensibilities, and views of the world", and which recognizes that "all real cultures contain diverse, often conflicting symbols, rituals, stories, and guides to action.... A culture is not a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction. Rather it is more like a 'tool kit'..." (1986:277).

As the efforts of Swidler, Geertz and others reveal, part of the culture debate is precisely the difficulty in clear defining and using it in social analysis. It appears to be both a centrally important concept, and at the same time elusive -- defined too narrowly, it becomes mechanistic, superficial, or leaves too much out; defined too broadly it becomes vague, all-encompassing; by attempting to explain too much, it may explain very little.

One of the obstacles with the debate may also be that so many theorists, Swidler included, seem to be trying to formulate a sort of "master-key" theory of culture. As Geertz himself points out, this is probably an unachievable, quixotic pursuit:

The major theoretical contributions [to cultural analysis] not only lie in specific studies -- that is true in almost any field -- but they are very difficult to abstract from such studies and integrate into anything one might call "culture theory" as such.one cannot write a "General Theory of Cultural Interpretation." (1973:25-26).

It may be the case, then, that the relative utility of the different approaches to culture (and political culture) very much depends on the context and phenomena under study. At certain times or under certain conditions, culture may operate more as a "tool kit"; at other times it may be manifested more as a set of values; at still other times it may become more

ideological, more systematic, and so forth. Thus, the approach used in this study is pragmatic.

Having said this, I largely share Swidlers' and Geertz' notions of "symbolic" definitions. For the purposes of this study, political culture is defined as consisting of the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, norms and feelings that people of a group or society hold about politics and political objects (governments, institutions, etc.) very broadly defined. Socialization consists of the processes by which human beings acquire the beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, standards of behavior, norms, rules and values of their social world (cf. Outhwaite and Bottomore 1993; Renshon 1992). Put briefly, socialization is the processes by which people acquire or learn culture. Thus, in simplest terms, political socialization consists of the processes by which people acquire political culture.

It is important to recognize a few important qualifications, however. The first is that socialization is a complex, interactive, life-long process of learning (Farnen et al. 1996; Arnett 1995). It is best seen as multi-faceted and multi-directional, consisting of both explicit and latent teaching and learning (that is, it may be conscious, "formal", didactic, as well as the on-going, often taken-for-granted absorption of knowledge, beliefs, practices, etc, in everyday life). Referring again to Giddens' notion of the duality of structure, it entails interaction with existing social structures as well as conscious critical engagement and reflexivity (agency) on the part of the social actor. Socialization can be conceived as occurring through the full range of socializing agents: the family (broadly defined), peers, schools, the media, and other intermediate institutions (churches, clubs, the workplace.)

The second important qualification is that neither socialization nor culture are static

nor fixed, nor are they total.⁵ Rather, both are dynamic, dialectical, and complexly interrelated with other spheres or systems of the social world. Socialization occurs within an existing culture, which is at the same time changing in interaction with socio-historical change (technological, economic, demographic, etc.)

Swidler's article (1986) suggests two models of cultural influence, situated in time: periods of relative continuity, of "settled lives"; and periods of social transformation and change, of "unsettled lives." Swidler argues that it is during "unsettled" times that ideologies tend to displace everyday "settled" cultures -- people begin to jettison older, more traditional or "common sense" cultural strategies of action for new ideologies, which "offer a unified answer to problems of social action" (p. 278-79). Swidler's notion of periods of change and unsettledness can be applied to the thesis of Vietnam as "rupture" in American culture suggested earlier. If the Vietnam war created cultural rupture, unsettledness, a breakdown of hegemony, and even perhaps increased ideological struggle and shift (at least for a certain portion of the population), then the question is raised: how have these changes played out in the 25 years since the war? Using Swidler's model raises several concrete questions which her approach doesn't address (or not clearly): how do societies move from unsettled to settled periods? What are the processes of cultural and ideological transmission and socialization (what I will later call "mediation") by which new culture/ideology is assimilated (becomes the new "common sense"), integrated, or rejected? Finally, in relation to the Vietnam rupture thesis, isn't it plausible that relatively unsettled periods can be extended out over time, over

5. For a classic statement of this point, see Dennis Wrong's (1961) article, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology."

a few decades; isn't it plausible that US culture is still largely unsettled, or fractured by the Vietnam tragedy?

These are some questions that the rest of this study attempts to address and shed light on. The answer I suggest to the last question is a qualified "yes". I believe there is significant evidence that there are lasting levels of disagreement, disunity, dissensus, etc, in American political culture today, which can be substantially attributed to the Vietnam experience. Interview data in chapters four and five support this view.

It is necessary, then, to try to specify American political culture a bit more concretely, and to look at some of the relevant historical and public opinion data on Vietnam and US political culture which, I believe, support the lasting rupture thesis.

"The War Within:" Vietnam and American Political Attitudes.

The literature of personal accounts on Vietnam is filled with expressions of shock, disillusionment and feelings of anger, distrust, and betrayal, both by those "in-country," and by citizens in the U.S. (Citizens Commission of Inquiry 1972; Kovic 1976; Fraser 1988; Greene 1989; Harris 1996). Indeed, a sampling of the titles of several major books on the war and the anti-war movements is revealing of these tensions, and of the continuation of the legacy: A Bright Shining Lie, An American Ordeal, Coming Apart, The Time of Illusion, The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam, The Unfinished War, Argument Without End. As social histories of the period reveal, these feelings and beliefs became increasingly widespread as the war went on, and became increasingly manifested in greater protest, and more active forms of resistance and unrest (e.g. "draft resistance," street fighting, campus

occupations, and ultimately "guerrilla" activity of groups like the Weathermen.) In fact, in the late 1960s the Weathermen and other groups embraced the strategy of "bringing the war home" -- that is, raising the costs of the war for the "establishment" by literally bringing the violence, destruction and guerrilla warfare of Vietnam into the American heartland in the form of "trashing," street fighting, burning and bombing banks, ROTC centers and other establishment targets (Gitlin 1993). While these violent groups remained a small minority, increasing numbers of Americans turned against the war.

Many of the numerous histories on the Vietnam experience (Anderson 1995; Wells 1994; Gitlin 1993; Karnow 1984) share a considerable degree of consensus in the view that certain seminal events -- growing government deception about "the light at the end of the tunnel" and body counts (the "credibility gap"), the Tet offensive, My Lai, the invasion of Cambodia, the Pentagon Papers -- all contributed by the late 1960s or early 1970s to *both* growing opposition *and* growing skepticism, distrust, and disillusionment about the government (including the military.) Many analysts see the Tet Offensive as the turning point in American attitudes about the war. Historian Terry Anderson summarizes the impact of Tet:

During Tet, General Westmoreland appeared on television and assured Americans that the enemy suffered heavy casualties and had been defeated. That was true, but it was also irrelevant. For America, Tet was a military victory and a psychological defeat.... At the same time the offensive stunned Americans. After hearing national leaders throughout 1967 proclaiming victory, "the light at the end of the tunnel," the public felt the enemy's ability to launch a massive attack was surely a defeat for the United States.... [t]he offensive also raised the question of the Johnson Administration's credibility and policy. "I thought we were winning the war," CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite confessed to millions of viewers. Had the administration been telling the truth? "The American people have been pushed beyond the limits of gullibility," declared the New York Times. The credibility gap

became a canyon (1995:184-185).

Many other authors concur on the impact of Tet, the media coverage, and the shift in public opinion. Sociologist Tom Wells assesses the offensive similarly:

Privately, officials were agitated, frightened.... According to Under Secretary of the Air Force Townsend Hoopes, "One thing was clear to us all: the Tet Offensive was the eloquent counterpoint to the effusive optimism of November. It showed conclusively that the U.S. did not in fact control the situation, that it was not in fact winning..." Only one month earlier, the invitations for the New Year's Eve Party at the American embassy had read, "Come see the light at the end of the tunnel."...

The Tet offensive was dubbed a disaster by the American media.... On February 27, Cronkite solemnly told nine million Americans that the United States should negotiate an end to the stalemated war... Washington was horrified. [Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs] William Bundy thought Cronkite's defection "an absolute landmark" in declining domestic support for the war. "Palpably, you were in a different ball game" (1994:241-242).

While public opinion had been turning against the war before Tet, the opposition accelerated during 1968. Many Americans began to see the war as unwinnable. President Johnson's decision in March not to run for re-election underscored the nation's growing sense of frustration and exhaustion with the war.

Other seminal events further shocked, outraged and divided the American people on Vietnam and their government. Revelations in 1969 about the My Lai massacre and the ensuing investigation and trial, and the shock and controversy about the publication by the New York Times of the Pentagon Papers fueled the sense of division and distrust, if not crisis, over Vietnam.⁶

As public opinion turned against the war, active protest against the war also

6. Tom Wells offers good discussions of the impact of the My Lai revelations and the Pentagon Papers; see the index of The War Within. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U. of California, 1994.

continued to escalate in 1968, 1969 and 1970. Indeed, by the spring of 1970, unprecedented nationwide upheavals followed President Nixon's revelation of the invasion of Cambodia. The protest included the famous Kent State shootings, but also involved some four million students and 350,000 faculty on at least 80% of college and university campuses (Katsiaficas 1987:120). These upheavals were assessed by President Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest, in September 1970, in striking terms:

The crisis on American campuses has no parallel in the history of the nation. This crisis has roots in divisions of American society as deep as any since the Civil War. The divisions are reflected in violent acts and harsh rhetoric, and in the enmity of those Americans who see themselves as occupying opposing camps. Campus unrest reflects and increases a more profound crisis in the nation as a whole... We fear new violence and growing enmity... If this trend continues, if this crisis of understanding endures, the very survival of the nation will be threatened (cited in Katsiaficas 1987:117).

That a Presidential commission would suggest that the survival of the nation is at risk indicates a conflict and a "crisis of understanding" of a severe magnitude, largely due to the Vietnam war (the precipitating context for the round of unrest leading to this report.) For the present study, the question is: what happened to this "crisis of understanding" over time?

American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy.

Debate over public opinion, foreign policy and Vietnam involves two levels: 1) the broader debate over the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy generally; and 2) the specific analysis of public opinion on Vietnam. I address the broader question first.

Debates about public opinion in general, and public opinion and foreign policy in particular, have a long and contentious history which continues to the present day. In the

American experience, at the nation's inception the rationale for the Declaration of Independence was given in the opening paragraph as "a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind..." The problem has received renewed urgency at various points throughout the twentieth century, particularly during and following each new level of mass mobilization for war. Walter Lippmann's series of influential monographs in the 1920s, Liberty and the News (1920), Public Opinion (1922), and The Phantom Public (1925) analyzed the current landscape of the phenomena in the wake of the colossal mobilization and slaughter of World War I (see Holsti 1996, for a good short review of this history.) Lippman offered a pessimistic view of the public's ability to be the informed and engaged citizens on foreign policy as envisaged by mainstream liberal theory (expressed classically, for example, in the core faith in public opinion expressed by Woodrow Wilson during the war and in the Fourteen Points promulgated for the League of Nations.)

The dimensions and complexities of the question intensified with the development of modern "scientific" public opinion polling from the mid-1930s onward (the American Institute of Public Opinion, more commonly known as the Gallup poll, was established in 1935) -- debates have continued through the present both on substantive issues (of what the public knows and thinks, and why, etc) and on the full range of methodological issues of measurement, validity, reliability, what such polls actually "mean" or indicate, if anything (see, for example, Herbert Blumer's early critique "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling" [1948]).

One of the central, ongoing substantive debates on public opinion and foreign policy, which has been framed in terms of "traditionalists" and "revisionists", has been over the

levels of knowledge, rationality and stability or volatility of attitudes. The traditionalists, e.g. people like Walter Lippmann, Gabriel Almond, George Kennan and Philip Converse, have argued that regarding foreign policy, the American public is poorly informed, emotional or "moody", prone to being disengaged and indifferent, and then overreacting (i.e. "volatile"). Some scholars refer to this as the "Almond-Lippmann thesis." In more recent years, growing out of the upheaval of the Vietnam experience, a group of revisionists, people like Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, Eugene Wittkopf, Ole Holsti, and Bruce Jentleson and Rebecca Britton, have significantly challenged the traditionalists.⁷ Jeffrey Knopf (1998) and Ole Holsti (1996) provide useful summaries of the traditionalist-revisionist debate. The core of the traditionalist argument has been that because most of the American public is poorly informed and disengaged from foreign affairs, they tend to react too slowly to problems, until they become "crises", and they then tend to overreact -- they are prone to "mood" swings, or volatility (Knopf 1998).

Page and Shapiro (1992) have provided perhaps the most comprehensive challenge to the traditionalists in their 500-page study The Rational Public. Page and Shapiro's main argument, for which they present a wealth of public opinion data, is that:

the collective policy preferences of the American public are predominantly *rational*, in the sense that they are *real* -- not meaningless, random "nonattitudes"; that they are generally *stable*, seldom changing by large amounts and rarely fluctuating back and forth; that they form *coherent* and mutually consistent (not self-contradictory) patterns, involving meaningful distinctions; that these patterns *make sense* in terms of underlying values and available information; that, when collective policy

7. It is interesting to note that Walter Lippmann, in the last ten years of his life, when he served as a renowned sort of elder statesman in American politics, became an extremely harsh critic of US policy in Vietnam (in and after early 1965), and became more sympathetic to the antiwar movement and the American public (Steel 1980:557ff).

preferences change, they almost always do so in *understandable* and, indeed, *predictable* ways, reacting in consistent fashion to international events and social and economic changes as reported by the mass media; and, finally, that the opinion changes generally constitute *sensible* adjustments to the new conditions and new information that are communicated to the public (1992:xi, emphasis in the original).

Thus, on public opinion and the Vietnam war, Page and Shapiro argue persuasively that opinion changed in sensible, understandable ways, in response to events and available information, not as mood swings, or volatility. They show that support for the war and US policies declined steadily from 1965 to the early 1970s (I return to public opinion data on Vietnam in the next sub-section.)

It is noteworthy that one point on which all the analysts seem to agree (i.e., agree that the evidence shows), is that the American public is poorly informed:

Yet one cannot help but be sobered by the most consistent finding to emerge from the vast literature on public opinion -- Americans are poorly informed about most aspects of international affairs (Holsti 1996:215).

Holsti and Jentleson and others theorize that Americans use a set of "rules of thumb" to (reasonably successfully) judge international affairs about which they have little concrete information or knowledge. However, the current study does not address or assess this particular issue; i.e. the levels of concrete factual knowledge of the study participants.

In any case, the revisionists have shown that most Americans care about and rationally think about foreign policy (even if they don't know much detail.) Eugene Wittkopf (1990) and Ole Holsti (1996) make convincing cases that most Americans are "internationalist", not "isolationist", and believe the US should play an active role in world affairs (see figure 1).

The traditionalist-revisionist debate still continues as a lively argument, with the balance of evidence and scholarly support now seeming to favor the revisionist position fairly strongly. However, some, like Jeffrey Knopf, argue that a new consensus is premature and that parts of the argument require further study, and more empirical evidence. In "How Rational is 'The Rational Public'?" Knopf (1998) argues that some key parts of the traditionalist argument have not been adequately addressed by the revisionists. In particular, in this article Knopf attempts to test the view (using data on public opinion on military spending) that public reaction to foreign threats tends to be too slow, and then too strong -- a contention that the revisionists haven't sufficiently addressed, in his view. Knopf notes the irony of his finding that the Vietnam war seems to be the one case in his data that perhaps provides some support to the "delay" and "overreaction" theses (i.e. that public opinion shifts on military spending lagged after the war, and may have "overreacted." However, he points out that these shifts can also be interpreted as rational in that public opinion changed before, and against the resistance of, much of the US leadership, and is understandable in that context. Knopf finds that, "overall, the regression results clearly offer greater support to the rational public perspective" (p. 565), and "that public reactions were generally moderate in magnitude and did not appear to be overreactions" (p. 566). Of particular relevance to this study, as issues for further research, Knopf concludes that "it would be useful to examine other issues besides military spending and to conduct case studies as a complement to the quantitative methods used here" (p. 566). The present study is one such effort.

One other revisionist position is of particular relevance to this study. Bruce Jentleson (1992) and, updated, Jentleson and Rebecca Britton (1998) have developed the overall

characterization of US public opinion on foreign policy as "pretty prudent." Jentleson and Britton examine public opinion data on six major cases of the use or possible use of force in the post-Cold war era (Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq, North Korea, and Rwanda), and find that the American public is "still pretty prudent" -- by which they mean, "the public seemed to be showing 'good judgement in the use of resources' and 'caution and circumspection as to danger and risk.'" This, they hold, "runs counter to" the traditionalist view of the public, and "is consistent with and reinforces the work of Page and Shapiro... and others on the rational and reasoning public" (1998:396-398).

Jentleson and Britton (1998:396) argue that the best model for understanding variations in public support for military force is the variable of the principal policy objective (PPO), which they break down into three main categories: humanitarian intervention (HI), foreign policy restraint (FPR), and internal political change (IPC). HI is force used to provide "emergency relief... to people suffering from... humanitarian disasters" (1998:399); FPR is force used to coerce restraint "by an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the United States, its citizens, or its interests"; and IPC is force used "to engineer internal political change in another country's government", such as "an effort to overthrow a government considered an adversary" (1998:397). Jentleson and Britton find greater public support for HI (64%), than for FPR (55%), and least for IPC (36%) (p. 401). The authors conclude with the caveats that, "in general, the American public is less interested in foreign policy than it was during the Cold war", and that, "if given a choice, the public almost always prefers other options to military force", including "diplomacy and negotiations; economic pressure..." etc (p. 415). They argue that the American public learned prudent lessons of

restraint from "the Vietnam trauma", but is today also "not invariably opposed" to the use of force -- that today the American public is "neither trigger happy nor gun shy -- in its basic dispositions as to when and when not to use military force" (1998:396).⁸ The interviews findings in the present study, particularly presented in chapter four on views of the US role in the world today, seem consistent with the findings of Jentleson and Britton. The people in this study seem to fit the "pretty prudent" assessment, as well as the patterns of being most supportive of humanitarian interventions and least supportive of internal-political-change interventions (like intervening in "civil wars" [such as Vietnam], argued against by many participants in this study.)

On the broader question of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy, the revisionists seem to have a compelling case that the public can be considered rational, coherent, sensible, and "pretty prudent" -- or, as William Gamson puts it (in chapter one), "People are not so dumb." What is the evidence more specifically on public opinion and the Vietnam war?

Public Opinion and the Vietnam War.

Public opinion data supports the correspondence of two related trends during the Vietnam period: the diminution of public support for the war, and the diminution in trust and confidence in American government institutions. A wide variety of studies and measures are

8. Other scholars (Oneal, Lian and Joyner 1996) have attempted to extend the "pretty prudent public" thesis further back in time, and argue that the public has been prudent and discriminating on foreign policy throughout the Cold war. They conclude that Jentleson is "mistaken in believing that this is a recent phenomenon", but that, overall, "Jentleson's (1992) nuanced characterization seems apt: The public is 'pretty prudent.'" (p.273-274).

available on these issues, with varying designs and types of questions; I discuss only a few which seem fairly representative. On attitudes about the war, John Mueller (1973) offers a wealth of data and analysis, from different polls and questions over time. The overall downward trends in public support and trust are quite clear.

For example, Gallup polls on the "mistake" question (asking whether respondents think "the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam") show a consistent decline in support of the U.S. involvement in the war; from 61% in support and 24% opposed in August 1965 (15% don't know), to 28% in support and 61% opposed in May 1971 (11% don't know.) Thus, support fell by more than half over these six years, while opposition rose by more than two-and-a-half times (Mueller p. 54-55). Similarly, by January of 1971, 72% of respondents supported a Congressional *requirement* for withdrawal by the end of 1971, while only 20% opposed such a requirement (Mueller p. 97). In the 1980s and 1990s, according to Gallup polls, from 63% to 74% of Americans still viewed the war as a mistake (see figure 2).

Paralleling the drops in support for the war were significant declines in the level of "political trust" among U.S. citizens towards their government (see figure 3), and in the proportion of the public expressing a "great deal of confidence" in government institutions (Nye et al. 1997; Miller and Borrelli 1991; Kaase 1988; Merkl 1988).

In a summary of "trust" studies (including separate studies by Paul Abramson and by Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider [cited in Kaase]), Max Kaase reaches the following conclusion about the U.S.:

There was a massive and steady decline in political trust from the mid-1960s until 1980. There is no question that the downward change from a high of about 75 percent in 1964 to about 30 percent in 1980 truly deserves to be called spectacular.... [The data] suggest that the substantial decline in political trust in the United States has not been paralleled in all Western democracies.... it seems that the shattering events of the Vietnam War and the Watergate affair have left a special mark on the political beliefs of people in the United States (1988:126-127).

As noted already, the question at hand is the nature of the "special mark" of Vietnam on American political beliefs and culture, and the ways in which that legacy has evolved since the war. What were the effects of the Vietnam experience on U.S. political culture and attitudes, and how did these evolve in the 1980s and 1990s?

One of the best, most comprehensive collection of analyses on the decline in trust and confidence in government is the volume edited by Joseph Nye, Philip Zelikow and David King (1997) Why People Don't Trust Government. Nye et al. review a great range of data, too extensive to review here, which presents a quite convincing picture of substantial decline in trust in all kinds of government activities and institutions, at many different levels. I present just a few graphic depictions from the book which are relevant to the argument here (see figures 4 and 5.) In all cases, there is substantial change from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s -- trust and confidence in the government (Executive and Congress) have gone way down, and belief in government corruption and crookedness have gone up.

Nye et al. present a wide range of factors, theories and hypotheses for what explains these shifts from the 1960s to 1990s, also too extensive to fully review, but which include the scope and performance of government, economic causes of dissatisfaction (economic

slowdown, globalization, etc), social and cultural causes (decline of social capital, the family, etc), and political causes, including the "Vietnam war" and "Watergate", as well as the "growth of corruption and dishonesty", various political realignments, and "the changing role of the media" (1997:1-18). In the concluding chapter, "Reflections, Conjectures, and Puzzles", Nye attempts to offer some assessment of the competing theories. He argues that "The set of events we associate with Vietnam and Watergate played precipitating roles" in the decline of trust and confidence; that the Vietnam/Watergate thesis fits well with the onset of the changes, but needs an auxiliary hypothesis to explain the persistence (p. 268-269). Nye concludes, "The short form of this story is that historical events in the 1960s and early 1970s (Vietnam and Watergate) precipitated a drop in confidence in the US government, but the effects (as well as the cross-national analogues) have been broader and long-lasting..." (p. 275-276).

Nye's reference to "cross-national analogues" raises one final major point, which is probably most associated with the work of Ronald Inglehart (presented in a chapter in the book and in numerous other works [Inglehart 1997a, 1997b; Inglehart, Basanez, and Moreno 1998]), that many broad cultural and political shifts since the 1960s, including declines in trust and confidence in government, have occurred to a large extent cross-nationally. Inglehart presents evidence that "the phenomenon goes beyond the United States: we are witnessing a downward trend of trust in government and confidence in leaders across most industrialized societies" (1997a:218). Inglehart's explanation for this is a broad shift to postmaterialism and "postmaterialist values", which is part of "a broader postmodern shift" in the world (1997a:220). Once again, it is simply not feasible to offer here a full review and

engagement with these arguments. For the purposes of the present study, I simply suggest that the postmaterialism argument is compatible with the argument made here, of the Vietnam war as precipitating a lasting cultural rupture in the US. That is to say, it seems reasonable to believe that these factors and forces *interact* -- that the Vietnam experience interacted with and intensified or accelerated political, cultural, and economic shifts that were already occurring in the US (and elsewhere) -- a theory which also seems compatible with Nye's conclusions above.

The Conflict of the Vietnam War with American Core Values.

The quantitative data and the many social-historical accounts raise the interpretive question for social analysis: what are these changes (the declines in support, trust, and confidence) actually expressing? What moral/political/cultural conflicts do they represent?

The basic theoretical argument here is that these changes express an expanding and intensifying conflict between what I term US "core political values" and growing public awareness of actual US political and military conduct and policy.

Seymour Martin Lipset (1996, 1967) and Samuel Huntington (1981) both develop schemas which attempt to theorize the tension between consensus and conflict, but which assert certain core political values, or what they both call "the American creed." Huntington's (1981) American Politics: the Promise of Disharmony begins by reviewing conflict, consensus, and pluralist theories of American politics, but argues that they all over-emphasize structural factors:

The structural paradigms of American politics are not totally wrong, but they

are limited. They omit almost entirely the role that political ideas and idealism, moral causes, and creedal passions have played in American politics. Almost everyone agrees that the United States was conceived in terms of certain political ideals and inspired by the promise or dream of liberty and equality. These political ideals are central to American national identity and have played a critical role in shaping American political evolution and development (p. 10).

Huntington argues that since the late eighteenth century, the US has had a core of "basic political values and ideas" which have been broadly shared, relatively stable over time, and can be thought of as the "American Creed," which includes: "liberty, equality, individualism, democracy, and the rule of law under the constitution" (p. 14). Similarly, for Lipset (1996) the American Creed consists of "liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism and laissez-faire" (p. 19). If populism is understood as the idea that sovereignty rests with "the people", then the fourth values cited by Huntington and Lipset (democracy and populism) seem close enough for our purposes here. The fifth core value is the one that seems somewhat different. Since both authors present evidence for their "Creed", for the purposes here I treat the core values as consisting of the six: liberty, equality, individualism, democracy/populism, the rule of law, and laissez-faire. It should be noted that both Huntington and Lipset stress that the core values idea does not mean that US history has been consensual. Lipset argues that both he and Huntington, "among many, have stressed the United States is distinguished by an emphasis on adversarial relations among groups, and by intense, morally based conflicts about public policy, precisely because its people quarrel sharply about how to apply the basic principles of Americanism they purport to agree about" (1996:26). I use the core values construct with the caveat that I recognize that it is a contested concept -- there is much room for debate over the extent to which it exists, or does not, or even serves as a hegemonic

construct (cf. Beattie 1998; Martin 1993). The argument here is that the values comprising "the American core values" asserted by Huntington and Lipset seem widely enough shared (while recognizing great variation in perceptions of how widely they are *practiced*), that the construct appears to have utility for social analysis. I employ the construct advisedly in this study; i.e. partially to test it as a construct. My conclusion is that it does seem to have a certain utility in this type of study.

Continuing with the argument, then, Huntington identifies four periods in American history of high "creedal passion," including the 1960s. During the 1960s/early 1970s a significant number of people (especially youth) became increasingly convinced, and mobilized by the idea, that America was straying from its creed, that the war in Vietnam did not seem to be furthering "liberty, equality, democracy or the rule of law." This sentiment is captured well in the English Oration at Harvard's commencement in 1969 by law student Meldon Levine:

We are NOT... conspiring to destroy America. We are attempting to do precisely the reverse: we are affirming the values which you have instilled in us and which you have taught us to respect. You have told us repeatedly that trust and courage were standards to emulate. You have convinced us that equality and justice were inviolable concepts. You have taught us that authority should be guided by reason and tempered by fairness. AND WE HAVE TAKEN YOU SERIOUSLY.... We have tried to put into practice your principles.... [All we ask is that] you allow us to realize the very values which you have held forth (cited in Huntington, p. 2).

Levine said that the younger generation questioned "your war, your repression... in the name of your basic values" (p. 2).

The expression of these basic attitudes, of youth attempting to "practice your principles," are similarly supported by a few of the authoritative social histories of the 1960s

(Gitlin 1993; Miller 1987). Todd Gitlin, for example, in his Introduction to The Sixties, summarizes his leitmotifs of the 1960s:

- * The movement had to find the right relation to the American nation; having taken America's dream of itself seriously, it was quick to feel betrayed when the dream turned into nightmare....
- * The movement took liberalism for granted, but at crucial junctures found itself obstructed by liberals. Once liberalism had sacrificed itself on the altar of the Vietnam war and race polarization, what were radicals to do? (1993:6).

As the war went on, the conflict between values and US conduct intensified; greater numbers of citizens felt it more acutely. Huntington, drawing from Gunnar Myrdal, calls this the "IvI Gap" -- "the widespread gap between American political ideals and institutions" (1981:39), as expressed, for example, in the practice versus principles distinction articulated above by Meldon Levine.

To return to the schema laid out earlier in this chapter, at the macro level the argument is that during the Vietnam war US policies and conduct, legitimated by a hegemonic foreign policy narrative of consensus, came increasingly into conflict with American core values in the perception of increasing numbers of the American public. This led to a lasting rupture in American political culture in the form of the de-legitimation and distrust of the US government, and changed attitudes about foreign policy, and politics more broadly.

This is the framework with which I examine the qualitative interview data on political culture, social generations and family socialization in the substantive chapters.

The Meso Level: Social Generations

This section reviews the literature on the notion of social generations in social analysis. Like the concepts of political culture and socialization, the notion of generations has a long history. Since ancient times philosophers and social theorists such as Plato and Aristotle have reflected on the idea of generations as a useful and meaningful category of social analysis (Feuer 1969:27-30). Interest in the idea of generations has continued in the modern period, at least since Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill (Marias 1968, 1970). Jose Ortega y Gasset ([1923] 1961) and Karl Mannheim ([1928] 1972) and others renewed interest this century. The idea of generations enjoyed a lively revival during the 1960s and '70s with the tremendous resurgence of youth activism, social upheaval, the countercultures and the popular currency of notions like the "generation gap", etc (cf. Keniston 1965, 1968, 1971; Klein 1969; Feuer 1969; Flacks 1971).

After somewhat of a decline from the mid 1970s to mid 1990s (Pilcher 1994), the idea of generations appears to have entered a period of renewed interest in the past few years (Eyerman and Turner 1998; Males 1996, 1999; Strauss and Howe 1997; Austin and Willard 1998; Brokaw 1998). It would seem that the concept of generations itself follows a generational cycle of scholarly interest.

Today, it is evident that generations is a widely used, though usually under-specified, notion within a broad range commentary and analysis. Indeed, when cued to this referent, it is striking how often one encounters the idea in newspapers, magazines, television, music and other forms of popular culture, as well as everyday conversation. One of the more notable recent examples is Tom Brokaw's (1998) best-selling book of the World War II era,

The Greatest Generation.

Yet the question remains of the idea's utility in social-scientific analysis, where it has a somewhat uneven history of use. Some scholarly debate has centered around comparisons to other widely used categories of social analysis, such as social class, gender, or ethnicity (Mannheim [1928] 1972; Esler 1984), and whether social generations are as "real" as these other categories. Though there are some difficulties with the concept, it is argued in this study that it can be a useful category of analysis if it is qualified in certain ways and claims of its power are not over-stated.

One important analytic distinction often made in generational research is between age effects and period effects (see, for example, Jennings and Niemi 1981.) Age effects, also sometimes called life-cycle or life-stage effects, are those effects or changes associated with particular stages of the life of the individual. This notion assumes that all or most people go through particular stages of development in the life cycle, generally associated with particular ages or a zone of ages (cf. Piaget 1995). An example of this idea, cited in chapter five, is the view that "adolescents rebel against their parents." Period effects refer essentially to historical effects, effects that are associated with a particular period and place in history (e.g. "living through the Vietnam war changed my view of the government.") As we shall see in chapter five, the question of generations and generational effects often turns on perceptions of the relationships between age and period effects. That is, generational views generally entail some sort of synthesis of age and period effects, with different types of emphasis. In this sense a social generation can be considered as a socializing agent, and a historical context or location. Strictly speaking, one's generational *peers* are socializing agents; and

the generation or generation unit is the "peer group" very broadly extended and historically situated.

A few of the problems with the generations concept are those of definition, boundaries and/or periodization (cf. Pilcher's solid overview [1994]; Esler 1984; Knoke 1984). How are generations defined; how are the boundaries between one and the next determined? A number of theorists make the important distinction between biological and social generations. According to Julian Marias:

Attempts to formulate a sociological theory of generations in the biological sense of kinship descent have been unproductive because the temporal continuity of births makes impossible any determination of social generations so long as "generation" is understood in a purely biological sense. It is therefore necessary to arrive at a strictly social and historical interpretation of the generation concept in order for it to acquire relevance in the field of the social sciences (1968:88).

Mannheim ([1928] 1972) uses the term "actual generation" for essentially the same idea as social generation. This is the sense in which the term is used in this study. A social generation is a group of coevals "shaped by the common experience of growing up within a particular society and a common span of history" (Esler 1984:100). Coevals are approximate age contemporaries; or people born in the same "zone of dates" (Ortega y Gasset 1958). Mannheim suggested that coming of age in a particular period and society, being exposed to the same trends and key events, the same mores and political-cultural milieu, tends to produce a social generation as sociologically "real" and meaningful as social class or ethnic identity (Esler 1984:100).

A major claim of the generational approach is that coevals of a particular social location are influenced by historical experiences in distinctive ways, and specifically that

young people are shaped into generations by important "formative events" during crucial "formative years" of their youth. This idea is shared by most theorists of social generations (Rintala 1968; Keniston 1971; Eyerman and Turner 1998) and is often seen as late adolescence and early adulthood. According to Marvin Rintala:

It is argued that late adolescence and early adulthood are the formative years during which a distinctive personal outlook on politics emerges, which remains essentially unchanged through old age. The crucial years are regarded as approximately 17 to 25.... It is during the formative years that the youth discovers his own identity. When he defines who he is in terms of society, he defines his political outlook as well (1968:93).

These are a few of the assumptions of the concept of social generations. The claim that generational "outlooks" remain "essentially unchanged" is, roughly, the persistence thesis referred to below (i.e. the belief that attitudes persist over time.) The extent to which these assumptions hold remains an open question. There is at least some research which suggests that generations or generation units do retain a distinctive, lasting political identity, even later in life (Whalen and Flacks 1989).

In a three-wave panel study, conducted in 1965, 1973, and 1982, Kent Jennings (1987) tested the generational thesis with respect to the Vietnam era protest movement. Jennings found that there were "erosion effects" in more contemporary events, and that "time often has a way of smoothing out certain prior differences within a population, including those of a generational sort" (p. 381), but he concluded that generational identity persists, and "the protest generation remains quite distinct" (p. 367). In a related study, Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi (1981) arrived at more complex findings and conclusions: that "both change and stability abound" in generational attitudes, for youth and adults (p. 380). While they

expected to find fluctuation and changeability in the youth (which they did), "more striking was the lability observed among parents" (p. 380). The authors used the term "lifelong openness" to describe this condition of changeability, which they connected with "mixed quantities" of "life-cycle, generational, and period effects" (p. 381). They state that their results suggest "an enormous potential for change", which they find particularly striking amongst the adult portion of their sample (p. 381-386). They conclude:

Just as major political events occurring prior to the advent of maturity can deflect a new generation from the paths set down by the previous one, events can shake up existing generations, including the older members of those generations. Indeed, it would be surprising if events as momentous as the war in Vietnam did not impinge on the mature adults' political views (1981:389).

Another study by Joseph DeMartini (1985) further problematizes the relationship between social change, family socialization and intergenerational relationships. DeMartini asserts that the generational approach has tended to view social change as an expression of the breakdown of socialization, as a rejection by the younger generation of the socialization of the parent generation. Using longitudinal data (comparing 1965 and 1973) from a national probability sample of parent-child pairs on eight measures of political orientation, DeMartini found: 1) that "a good deal of change occurred for all four cohorts"; 2) that differences between cohorts increased between 1965 and 1973; and 3) that parents and children moved in the same direction on six of eight measures. In other words: all the cohorts experienced quite a bit of change in attitudes (which suggests a significant period effect); the youth tended to move further on many measures, so that gaps with parents tended to increase; but that in six of eight instances parents and children did move in the same direction (the children simply moved further.) Thus, DeMartini concludes that there is little support for the view

of youth rejecting or abandoning their parents ideas and ideals. The author suggests:

The result is a condition which amends Mannheim's view of generations as change agents, that is, generation units "work up the material of their common experience" by using rather than rejecting the values of parental generations to interpret this experience....

The data reviewed here along with earlier studies of political socialization and social movement participants suggest the need to refine Mannheim's concern with intergenerational tension and conflict in order to make room for intergenerational continuity. In light of this refinement, the problem of generations becomes one of understanding the relationship between socialization and social change rather than viewing change as a result of breakdown in the socialization process (1985:13).

The present study is one effort to further examine these questions. By comparing the parent and child generational cohorts on views of the Vietnam war, this study examines intergenerational differences, as well as some similarities in some parent-child pairs, through family socialization. The studies reviewed above suggest that the relationships between family socialization, social generations and political attitudes and beliefs are complex and contingent upon a host of interacting factors. The core of the generational thesis itself remains an open question: that age coevals experience certain formative events at a key formative age (about 17-25) which shape their views, beliefs and generational "identity," and which persist to a significant extent over time. I return to this question at the end of this section.

Another issue with the generations idea has to do with how generations are demarcated or periodized. In the American case, generational labels have been applied to our entire history -- and, for example, there have been various generational tags of the past 60-70 years (sometimes referred to by decade, sometimes by specific names:) the Depression

Generation, the World War II Generation (what Tom Brokaw calls The Greatest Generation), the Silent Generation, the Fifties Generation, the Sixties Generation, the Babyboomers, the Vietnam Generation, Generation X, and, just in recent years, some references to Generation Y.

But how are generations demarcated? Ortega y Gasset (1958) suggested that generations are approximately 15 years in length, but presented this view on philosophical and theoretical grounds (what might be characterized more as a Weberian "ideal type"), rather than historical or empirical. Other scholars have argued that the boundaries and length of a generations are socially and historically determined (Rintala 1968; Feuer 1969) -- i.e. they will vary from place to place and time to time. Marvin Rintala points out that the secular trend in cultures undergoing rapid social change may be an acceleration of effects and a compression of generational time span and distinctness. He suggests, "The most reasonable estimate for the time span of a political generation in twentieth-century Western society is probably ten to fifteen years" (1968:94).

The two social generations posited in this study are the 1960s or babyboomer generation, and the 1990s or Generation X. Both terms for each generation will be used interchangeably. If the generational concept has any social-analytic utility, a good case can be made for the 1960s generation. With the "formative experiences" idea, it is suggested that nearly every young American who was coming of age during the Vietnam war was strongly affected by that experience. Thus, they constitute a social or "actual generation" in the Mannheimian sense. At the same time, it is clear that young people were affected in different ways, and responded in different ways, just as people in older age groups at that time also

responded in various ways (as suggested by Jennings and Niemi [1981] above.) Every person brings an always evolving social, political orientation or worldview ("Weltanschauung" in the hermeneutic tradition) into his/her historical and cultural context. Each is coming of age in a complex family, class, gender, ethnic context, in which age and historical period are just a few factors. Thus the historical period is shared, but the responses to it vary.

The case for an actual Generation X is more problematic, and has been more debated on a variety of grounds (cf. Coupland 1991; Giles 1994 Time; Strong 1994 NYT). The seeming paradox of Generation X is that more than anything it may be the "postmodern generation"; that is, most characterized by disunity, diversity, fragmentation, absence of "unified subjectivity." Anthony Esler (1984) has suggested expanding the generational notion by thinking of generations more as "collective mentalities" than the narrower view of shared formative experiences. Esler finds forms of this idea in earlier theorists like Dilthey, Ortega y Gasset and Mannheim, but argues that it has been largely lost or ignored in more recent approaches. Esler argues that the French Annales School has developed fruitful directions in "collective mentalities" work which can be usefully applied to generational studies and theorizing about generational consciousness. This broader approach is the sense in which Generation X may be considered a generation: more as a relatively shared sensibility, ethos or (postmodern) mood of disunity and skepticism, than as any set of easily identified formative events or discrete experiences. This idea is taken up again and expanded in chapter five.

The findings of this study seem to give some moderate support to the generations idea

with the two age cohorts (though I would not try to make strong claims here.) The findings suggest that there are certain themes (such as distrust) which are widely shared at the cultural level (i.e. with both age cohorts) as "cultural rupture", and that there are other themes which are more generational (explicated in chapter five.) Thus, there is some support for the "persistence thesis" above, that there is some persistence of views among the babyboomers from formative events of the Vietnam period, but also that this is tempered or moderated by "openness" and "changeability." There seems to be support for DeMartini's notion that children often use rather than reject their parents' values and experiences -- that there are different generational experiences, but also that, through socialization, there is communication and transmission *between* generations, which makes the "total" process fairly complex.

The Micro Level: Family Socialization

The debate over the influence of the family in the socialization of youth is age-old, not only within a wide range of scholarly disciplines but also within the "common sense" and "conventional wisdom" of the broader American lay culture (cf. Newsweek, May 10, 1999). This section reviews some of the literature relevant to socialization on political events like the Vietnam war, also identifying some of the limitations of this literature for our purposes.

The preponderant view within social science scholarship until the past few decades was that the family was the primary and most important socializing agent in an individual's life, not only generally (Parsons and Bales 1955; cf. Coser 1964 for an anthology of social scientific views; Bellah et al. 1985), but also specifically for political socialization (Hyman

[1959] 1969; Dennis 1973). In recent decades, this view has been increasingly challenged and problematized (Jennings and Niemi 1968; Renshon 1977; Dawson et al. 1977; Glass et al. 1986; Ichilov 1990; Dietrich and Picou 1998). Yet, the debate on socialization remains open and live -- contention over patterns and persistence of socialization, the relative influence of the various socializing agents, the complexity of the process and the importance of cultural variation and the impact of history.

The intensity of the family socialization debate was re-ignited in 1998 by the publication of Judith Rich Harris' well-publicized and highly controversial book, The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do. Harris' book stimulated considerable critical response, favorable and unfavorable.⁹ A full engagement of the debate and the evidence is beyond the scope of this study, but some discussion will help explicate my own analysis.

Harris' central argument is that, despite the vast corpus of studies arguing for the central influence of parents in a child's socialization, this evidence is inconclusive and unconvincing. According to Harris, genetics and environment (the so-called "nature vs. nurture" debate) are about equally important in determining individual personality. The more controversial part of her argument concerns the question of environmental influences. She argues for the importance of peers as socializing agents, as against the influence of parents.

9. Harris' book sparked commentary and debate in a wide range of venues. As of November, 1998, the book had received reviews in at least twelve different major print media publications, including Time, Newsweek, US News and World Report, the Nation, the New York Times Book Review, the New York Review of Books, the Economist, and others. The September 7, 1998, cover story in Newsweek, "Do Parents Matter?" gives a solid overview of the argument and the "bonfire of controversy" it set off.

Harris suggests that the term "nurture" in the conventional dichotomy is itself misleading, because it implies the nurturance or care-giving of parents -- this is what she calls the "nurture assumption." Summarizing and synthesizing an extensive and impressive range of studies (particularly in psychology, behavioral genetics and anthropology), Harris concludes that the nurture assumption has become an article of faith in social science and conventional (popular) wisdom unsupported by the empirical evidence.

But there are other problems with Harris' book. As Ann Crittenden (1998) points out, "buried in the fine print of The Nurture Assumption are so many caveats that the book's thesis virtually evaporates" (p. 56). According to Crittenden, Harris concedes that "early relationships" and "familiar caregivers -- parents or parent substitutes --" are essential to "normal social development", that "parents determine their child's neighborhood and peer group" and schools, that "parents have the power to make childhood happy or miserable; and... inhabit our conscious minds, our thoughts and our memories all our lives...", and, finally, that they provide such things as "diet and healthcare" (p. 56). Crittenden is persuasive that Harris' thesis is overstated in light of the qualifications she herself provides.

Howard Gardner (1998) also finds a number of problems with Harris' position. I draw from Crittenden's and Gardner's critiques in the criticisms I present here. The overarching problem with her book, in my view, is the inconsistent form of her argument, particularly regarding its "scientificity." Harris gives a great deal of attention to reviewing study after study of "good scientific evidence" which she claims do not support the nurture assumption. She repeatedly marshals the authority of "good science" against the myth of, or faith in, the nurture assumption. Yet, in numerous places in the book, she acknowledges that

evidence for her own arguments is "speculative" or "anecdotal", and she herself relies heavily on "reason" and "logical" argumentation repeatedly, rather than solid and conclusive evidence. For example, Harris is quite fond of citing novels and other fiction, fairy tales, anecdotes, including quite a few from her own experience as a parent, and quite a lot of anthropological studies on groups like the Yanomamo Indians of Venezuela to support her arguments. It seems that Harris invokes "science" and its authority selectively, when it suits her purpose of undermining the nurture assumption, but never acknowledges her own interested or biased positions.

The fact that Harris is able to present a case that the evidence is inconclusive or weak for the primacy of the family in socialization does not constitute evidence for her own peer-influence argument (or what she calls "group socialization theory".) In logical terms, this constitutes a fallacy of the undistributed middle -- other explanations are possible for the problems she identifies besides her own favored alternative. She elides the shift from "other explanations are possible" to "my theory is the correct one," without the necessary evidence. Her "evidence" for group socialization theory (for example, that immigrant children and children of the deaf learn the language and culture of their peers) is itself certainly inconclusive, and in the end she admits that the necessary and "useful" research for her theory "has not yet been done" (Harris 1998:353).

Gardner suggests that the ambiguity of the family socialization evidence has more to do with the difficulty of studying and measuring this type of phenomena, these types of "soft variables" (1998:20). His point is well-taken that studying such human characteristics as sentiments, longings, fears and feelings (and their origins) is inherently difficult to quantify

and measure. As Gardner points out, Harris "argues that 'peers' are the real instrument of socialization. She may be right; but she does not have the evidence to show this" (1998:20). Gardner's conclusion, with which I agree, is that a robust skepticism is justified regarding Harris' argument. He suggests that she has over-stated her case and that the existing literature suggests that parents and peers have more of a "complementary" influence on children -- each play different but interacting and important roles. According to Gardner, "to suggest, with little foundation, that parents are not important in socialization borders on the irresponsible.... A social science... that largely left out parents after birth would be absurd. So would a society" (1998:22).

Harris' thesis mostly remains at the level of an interesting and challenging hypothesis or assertion. As discussed below, my findings seem to counter her thesis, and seem to give support to the view (with Gardner) that family socialization is certainly important in a variety of complex ways, and seems to work in complementary, interactive ways with others factors and forces like peer group, the Media, etc.

For the purposes of the discussion here, the main significance of Harris' book is that, even if many of the particulars of her case are unconvincing and the thesis is overstated, it highlights the fact that the debate within the social sciences about socialization (and the relative influence of the various socializing agents) remains open, contentious and unsettled.

Other research supports this view. One study of family socialization across generations, by Jennifer Glass et al. (1986), found, against some views in existing theory, that parent-child attitudes on politics, gender and religion do not converge over time; that attitude differences between the pairs were fairly small and fairly constant over time; that

status factors interact with parents' attitudes as predictors of children's attitudes; and that parent-child influence is reciprocal, working in both directions, and also relatively constant over time. Glass et al. conclude that family socialization is dynamic and "that the family may act as an agent of change, not an impediment to change"; that "variability in the impact of parent-child relations across social ideologies should be acknowledged"; and, finally, that "it is clear that the family is neither a monolithic nor necessarily conservative source of influence on attitudes or beliefs past childhood" (1986:696).

Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi are two major, long-time figures in the study of both socialization (particularly political) and generations (and the interaction of these two.) After a series of weighty studies dating from the mid-1960s (some referred to again in the section below on generations), Jennings and Niemi concluded in 1981:

At the time our initial research was launched [1965] it was widely believed that the family was the dominant socializing agent. Although our research left the role of the family quite strong relative to the other agents examined, both the direct and indirect effects of the family appeared to be markedly lower and more variable than had been assumed.... A major conclusion reached was that the process of socialization is so complex and dependent upon unique individual capacities and histories as to weaken the bonds of direct transmission from parent to child. Subsequent research has done little to alter this conclusion (1981:76).

One notable trend within the family and political socialization literature has been a strong tendency to develop models, classifications, and typologies: of family types, communication styles, patterns, cultures, identities, and more. One line of approach has attempted to classify family types as authoritarian and non-authoritarian (Adorno et al. 1950; Godina 1991), while a related body of work referred to as the Family Communication Patterns approach (Ritchie 1991; Chaffee et al. 1973) classifies families in terms of

supportiveness and openness of communication ("concept-orientation"), as opposed to parental assertion of power and control ("socio-orientation.") Still other analysts have theorized in terms of a egalitarian and hierarchical relations (Lane 1972; Thompson et al. 1990). Similarly, Jeffrey Arnett (1995) has articulated a theory of broad and narrow socialization which attempts to situate family socialization in relation to other socializing agents and applied to "a culture as a whole" (p. 618). According to Arnett, "Cultures characterized by broad socialization encourage individualism, independence and self-expression.... In contrast, cultures characterized by narrow socialization hold obedience and conformity as the highest values..." (p. 617). The families in the current study appear compatible with the "concept orientation" in the sense that they seem to support open communication generally, and none appeared to support a model of "parental control." A few families (discussed in chapter six) reported not talking much about Vietnam, but there was no indication that these families were "parent controlled" as a whole. The approach used in chapter six identifies the parent/child pairs as "talkers" or "non-talkers" on the Vietnam war, without typing the families in general. The families of this study also seem consistent with the idea of a culture of broad socialization: that is, all of the family members appeared open to many sources of socialization, including the Media (movies, TV, journalism), school, peers, etc. There were no indicators of narrow socialization in the sense suggested by Arnett.

Cultural Mediation and Framing: Theory and Method

This study is limited to a small group within a particular city within American (multi-)culture (itself highly diverse) and is further limited in terms of racial and ethnic diversity,

as discussed in the methods section. I recognize its cultural particularity and exploratory nature and do not attempt to make claims for "other" cultures.

Drawing from interactionist, hermeneutic and cultural studies traditions, my theoretical model uses the idea of cultural mediation as a holistic process entailing the interpretation, transmission, reception and (re)interpretation of culture, particularly symbolic culture, i.e. ideas, beliefs, meaning. Conceiving the process in this way is, I believe, an improvement over approaches which specify the more simple, one-dimensional "transmission." A great deal of work in linguistics and cultural studies has pointed up the limitations of the simple transmission view (Saussure 1966; Grossberg 1986; Hall 1993; Ang 1996).¹⁰ Each of the four components is a necessary part of the whole process of mediation, yet they are also distinct moments and not equivalent.¹¹ Mediation involves the four components and it entails all the different sources or agents of transmission or socialization. That is, the four-stage mediation process applies for all agencies of socialization (family, school, books, the commercial media, etc), though, of course, in different forms. In order

10. Given that certain cultural studies theorists have stressed this point and given it significant attention, it is striking to note that one of the limitations, in my view, of many recent studies of American popular (and political) culture and the Vietnam war (e.g. Engelhardt 1995, Turner 1996, Gibson 1994) is that they seem to give inordinate weight to 'dominant' cultural discourse and transmission (particularly in the commercial media) without giving sufficient attention to analysis of the reception and interpretation of these discourses. As Abercrombie, et al. (1990) have argued, many cultural theorists have asserted a 'dominant ideology' analysis of contemporary capitalist societies without substantiating this thesis empirically.

11. Stuart Hall (1993) advances a quite similar 'semiotic paradigm', but using a different terminology of encoding, discourse, decoding, and frameworks of knowledge, all of which are 'determinate' but also 'relatively autonomous.' My discussion in this section is indebted to his framework; see his essay for greater depth.

for an event to be transmitted, it must be made "storyable", interpreted and converted or coded into some message or narrative form. Transmission occurs by verbal and non-verbal communicative acts; non-verbal forms include written, visual images, facial expressions, etc. In the case of my interviews, the verbal form of communication ("speech acts") is the focus of study, though many subjects also talk about the importance of film, television and, to a lesser extent, print media -- these additional forms and their interrelationships will be discussed in the results chapters, where appropriate.

Once an event is transmitted, various conditions determine the process of reception. Among the conditions, participants must be within "ear-shot", speak the same language, and have the will to communicate (for example, the receiver must have some degree of attentiveness and desire to listen to the transmitter in order to receive a message [e.g. if the child is in the habit of "tuning out" the parent's "rap", the quality of reception of the message will be affected.]) As Hall (1993) points out, there is no "immediate identity" in the communication; there are varying levels of "asymmetry" between "meaning structures", or interpretations of each person, of transmitter and receiver. These differences vary according to pre-existing "frameworks of knowledge", and/or frames of reference (including such fundamental factors as varying understandings of words, terms, language itself.)¹² How each person interprets or frames the event will be influenced and shaped by life history, past

12. Some words may be literally not understood, while most are at least understood somewhat differently. It can be argued that there is *never* an exact identity of understanding even of individual words. Perhaps the most famous, or infamous, recent manifestation of this notion was President Bill Clinton's answer to a question in his testimony on his relationship with Monica Lewinsky on August 17, 1998: "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

experience, generational experience, personality structure, mood, etc. In the case of my study, how do the parents interpret for themselves, transmit to their children, and receive from their children; and how do the children interpret, receive from their parents, and transmit to their parents? What and how do both groups mediate from other agents or media?

The entire process of interpretation, transmission, reception and interpretation, which is interactive and bi-directional, I refer to as cultural mediation. The process of mediation is viewed as interactive, somewhat more akin to an on-going "conversation", in which meaning is negotiated by each subject, as well as intersubjectively.¹³

I use the notion of framing to examine the social and cognitive processes of cultural mediation and meaning construction; that is, as a theoretical approach for examining how my research subjects actually think about and talk about the Vietnam war experience. Framing can be considered as a conceptualization of the *means* of cultural mediation. The concepts of framing, frame analysis and discursive frames have developed a wide usage within social science in the past 30 years across a number of disciplines, in psychiatry and psychology (Piaget 1995; Bateson 1972; Rudes et al. 1997; Gale et al. 1996), sociology (Goffman 1974; McLean 1998; and cf. Parsons' "action frame of reference", 1951), postmodernism (Rattansi 1995), and feminist analysis (Naples 1997), etc. My usage derives, as a form of synthesis, primarily from the sociological approaches of Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980), Snow and

13. Rivka Ribak (1997) articulates an interesting, suggestive model of socialization as 'conversation', in "Socialization As and Through Conversation: Political Discourse in Israeli Families," using a model similar to my own which views processes of family socialization as interactive, dialectical, evolving, and negotiated in multi-faceted ways.

Benford (1992), Gamson (1992), and McLean (1998).

Frames, according to Goffman (1974), are the "principles of organization which govern events... and our subjective involvement in them..." (p. 11); a frame allows us to make events "meaningful" and "...to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms" (p. 21). According to McLean (1998), framing implies "...both negotiated meaning and ...strategic" thinking; "Frames organize experience, but not in any simple unidirectional path.... Rather, culture is better understood as a multidimensional cognitive space in which a variety of frames are deployable" (p. 55).

The challenge for the social analyst is unpacking or interpreting this "multidimensional cognitive space" and its frames. My usage of the notion of frame is in a quite broad sense. Frames (as a noun) are the understandings or interpretations which make our world meaningful or understandable to us. Framing (as a verb) is the cognitive processes by which we form understandings or interpretations. Framing is "making sense of" or "making an interpretation of" an event or set of events. Frames are based on or composed of beliefs, opinions, attitudes, assumptions and/or knowledge (each of these varying in degrees of accuracy, or truth value.) The research presented here is not primarily concerned with the truth value or factual accuracy of the beliefs or frames of the subjects, though I will comment at points about degrees of factual knowledge, particularly noting differences in this regard between the parents and children in my sample. In other words, I am primarily interested in what people believe and what it means to them, rather than whether it is factually "true."

It should be noted that the framing approach as it is used in this study is deliberately broad. It is suggested here for whatever analytical usefulness or illumination it may provide. In keeping with the exploratory nature of this research project, it is not intended as a precise, technical instrument, but rather as a heuristic approach. As such, the relations of associated terms and definitions are imprecise but suggestive.

For our own purposes of analysis, we can also make a distinction between "analytic frames" and "normative (or evaluative) frames" (although in practice there is not always a clear separation between these two in the understanding of the subject.) An analytic frame is an understanding which interprets an event "objectively", i.e. without a normative judgment (e.g. "The US went to Vietnam to stop communism.") A normative frame includes an evaluation of some kind (e.g. "The US went to Vietnam to stop communism, but it was a big mistake -- we had no business being there.") Analytic frames are based upon knowledge, assumptions or beliefs (in the objective sense; e.g. "I believe the US had strong economic interests in Asia.") Normative frames are based more upon values, feelings and beliefs (in the normative sense; e.g. "I believe in democracy.") Thus, for example, a respondent says: "We went to Vietnam to stop communism and build democracy (analytic frame.) Yes, I think we were justified; we had to help our allies and stop communism..." (A normative frame, and also at least implicitly suggesting certain values: that democracy is better than communism [to a degree worth fighting for], and that we ought to 'help' our friends. Again, this leaves aside drawing an conclusions here about the 'truth' of these values, or of US motives, or of the feasibility of realizing them, or the costs involved, etc.)

There is one further distinction that is useful for the analysis I develop. This is what

I term "themes". These are the basic notions or referents that most commonly recur in the course of interviewing. Thus, for example, common themes in the interviews on views of the Vietnam war were: anticommunism, the commercial media, protesters, lying and distrust, economic interests, and others, which will be discussed below. Thus, in my schema, though any number of interviewees might raise any given theme, they all frame it differently, some very differently.

One additional point on framing and frame analysis that is important to underscore is that, for the researcher, this is an explicitly hermeneutical exercise; s/he has no privileged subjective (nor "objective") capacity to render necessarily "correct" or "real" interpretations of any given frame; other interpretations or readings are always possible. In other words, the researcher is engaged in making his or her own interpretations of interpretations. The interview itself is a mediation process, yet it is argued that it can still provide "real", meaningful data and insights: ideas, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, however constructed they may be. The focus of analysis in this study is on the cultural mediation and framing of each participant of a specific, contentious historical event: the Vietnam war.

The next chapter explains the methods and research design in more detail. Following that, we move to the three substantive chapters, on political culture, social generations and family socialization.

- Chapter 3 -

Methodology, Research Design and a Note on Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents the methodology, research design, procedures and some comments on the presentation of findings. As stated in chapter two, the design of this study is qualitative, using interviews to examine the cultural mediation of opinions and beliefs about the Vietnam war, at three levels of analysis: political culture, social generations and family socialization. The works of many other scholars (Silverman 1997; Reinharz 1992; King et al. 1994; Strauss 1987) have contributed to the formulation of the research design and methodology of this study, but I am particularly indebted to the mentorship and scholarly craft wisdom of Robert Alford, through several years as a student in his "Logics of Inquiry" seminars, under his supervision for the dissertation, and as presented in his (1998) The Craft of Inquiry.

Focus, Method, and Fit of Method to Theory

As presented in the previous two chapters, the focus of this study is to hermeneutically examine and interpret what babyboomer parents and their generation X children think and believe about the Vietnam war, why they think what they do, and how they actually talk about it (or don't talk about it) with each other. Semi-structured depth interviews are well-suited to this purpose (Reinharz 1992, especially chapter two). There are a number of reasons why this effort with this specific method is important.

First, as touched on in chapter one, many of the studies on public opinion and foreign

policy (e.g. war-making) use large, quantitative opinion surveys (Holsti 1996; Page and Shapiro 1992; Mueller 1973; Converse 1964) which have the advantage of representative samples and standardized questions which show snap-shots of "what people think" on given issues, in response to given questions (although they tend to create a degree of clarity that is not real.) But the disadvantage is that they do not reveal *why* people think what they do (Silverman 1997), or the complexity and richness of their ideas, thought processes and ways of thinking (psycho-dynamics,) underlying values, etc.¹

Second, as discussed in chapter two, there is a political as well as a methodological choice involved in focusing on "subaltern" voices (in Gayatri Spivak's Gramscian terms [Landry and MacLean 1996]). Interviewing "ordinary (subaltern) Americans" is giving voice and validation to the historically "voiceless" or under-represented. It is valorizing what Michel Foucault called "local, subjugated knowledges" against dominant, hegemonic, "systematizing" discourses (1980:78ff.) This choice of focus is political also vis-a-vis that significant body of Cultural Studies literature, mentioned in the previous chapter, which focuses on the various (commercial) Media of ideological representation (that is to say, mass forms of cultural *transmission*), particularly forms of commercial popular culture (such as

1. An excellent example of this problem in relation to public opinion surveys on the Vietnam war is the commonly asked "mistake" question. Though the question varies somewhat, the basic form is something like: "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?" (Gallup, in Mueller 1973). While the data shows the percentage answering "yes" went from 24% in 1965 to 61% in 1971, it does not reveal *why* people believe so: how many think it was morally wrong; or that we never should have gone; how many think it was a mistake, in retrospect, *because* we lost; how many think it was a mistake because we *didn't go far enough* (i.e. "the military's hands were tied"), that we should have done *more*?

TV and film), while tending to neglect the *reception* and critical interpretation of those "texts" by ordinary people, i.e. their own frames and understandings. These types of studies (e.g. Beattie 1998; Engelhardt 1995; Gibson 1994) are important, as far as they go -- they are often interesting and fruitful in illuminating just that: popular-cultural representations of events (e.g. the Vietnam war) -- but it is problematic when they elide the distinction between these representations and individual consciousness and belief; it is a mistake to assume that these representations translate in any direct, facile way into "what Americans believe."² As reviewed in chapter two, it is an open question as to whether and in what ways individuals consent to, adopt or reject "hegemonic narratives" -- this is a necessary and important qualification embodied in the notion of hegemony as developed by Raymond Williams (1977) and others (cf. Nordstrom and Martin 1992:6ff) -- i.e. that hegemony is a complex, fluid process of renewal, modification, challenge and contestation.

The semi-structured depth interview is an excellent empirical method for approaching this theoretical problematic. It allows in-depth exploration and probing of the richness and diversity of complex subjective processes. It is an attempt, with a limited scope, to get at "what people actually believe" and "how they actually talk about" a highly contentious event like the Vietnam war, as filtered through all the various forms of mediation or socialization.

The limitation of this approach is that the typicality of the participants and the data

2. A similar argument can be made, I believe, in relation to the work of Noam Chomsky (1987) and others who focus in great depth on critiquing the commercial media (e.g. Herman and Chomsky's "Propaganda Model" in [1988] *Manufacturing Consent*), but often seem to assume and/or imply that media coverage is one-and-the-same with what people actually believe.

is indeterminable -- they may or may not be relatively typical of "ordinary Americans" -- and therefore the ability to generalize is quite limited, or at least highly speculative (cf. Gamson 1992). In this sense, this study is exploratory, and follows a logic of discovery, rather than a logic of verification. It is hoped that the study reveals interesting findings and ways of thinking among these particular parent-child pairs, which may shed some light on larger patterns of political socialization and political culture, and may warrant further study, with larger, more representative samples, and more rigorous controls.

Sampling, Selection and Recruitment of Participants

The selection of participants in this study used what has been called "purposive" or "selective" sampling. According to Leonard Schatzman, "selective sampling refers to the calculated decision to sample a specific locale or type of interviewee according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions (such as time, space, identity) which are worked out in advance for a study" (cited in Strauss 1987:39).

The term "sample" in this case is used with the caveat that it is explicitly recognized as a non-scientific, non-random, non-representative sample. It is a small group purposely selected with members who fit into certain categories, but it is not scientific in its selection or composition.

To examine the research questions of this study, stated in chapter two, the basic requirement was to select the appropriate "lineage age groups" -- i.e., groups of parent-child pairs consisting of a babyboom generation parent and a generation X child. This would provide the opportunity to examine and compare both family socialization and generational

factors in relation to the Vietnam war. However, the further decision was made to specifically select only parents from two particular groups: Vietnam veterans and parents who had been antiwar during the war (the selection process is explained below.) The rationale for this choice was that this would accentuate and highlight comparative differences between the two groups of parents and their interaction with their children. It was assumed that these two groups of parents would tend to have stronger feelings and beliefs about the war and its interaction with their values and perceptions of American culture and politics; and it was assumed the veterans would be more "supportive of the war", as a clear contrast to the "antiwar" parents. It was thought that it would be illuminating to examine how they shared, or avoided sharing, these with their children. These two subsets of parents would be less typical of the baby boom generation as a whole -- the large mass of people of that generation who were neither veterans nor clearly antiwar are selected out of the sample -- but, again, this was justified on the grounds that the study is exploratory and non-representative and the two selected groups of parents were expected, in their atypicality, to provide a more full range of interesting findings. An interesting (and unanticipated) finding among the two groups of parents (expanded in the next chapter) was that of the eight veterans, four were now pretty strongly "not supportive" of the war, two were somewhat "mixed", and two remained "supportive." Thus, one of the original assumptions of the study, that veterans would tend to be more war supportive, and therefore a good contrast with antiwar parents, was partially vitiated by the actual finding that half of the veterans were antiwar. But, in my view, this finding itself was of interest, and illuminating in other ways, and of other issues (for example, for the veterans who are antiwar, how did they talk about

or explain this to their children, or not? How did the children interpret this conflict?)

Of course, it should be noted that the characterization of participants as "war supportive" or "not war supportive", or any such classification in a study of this type, is a matter of interpretation and judgment. As noted, half of the sample of parents were selectively sampled as self-identified "antiwar." The way this worked is that in the recruitment process (described below), since most of the initial contacts were with the children, I asked the children if they were interested in participating, and if they had a parent who they thought was, or may have been, antiwar during the war. If the answers were affirmative, I followed up with a phone call to the parent, described the research project, and asked if they would describe themselves as war supportive, or antiwar, or neither, during the war. Those who were self-described as "antiwar" were recruited.

For the remainder of the subjects, these judgments were made in this study within the overall context of the interview. In many cases the participants described themselves very explicitly as war supportive or antiwar. Participants who really appeared not to favor one position over the other, who expressed opinions on "both sides", etc, were classified as "mixed". For some related discussion of this classification issue, see Thomas Beamish, et al. (1995).

The baby-boom parents in this study were born between 1942 and 1955. If we add 21 years to these dates (based on the assertion discussed in chapter two that the generational formative years are 17-25; then 21 being a rough "mean"), this means these parents were "coming of political age" (i.e. having these key formative experiences) between 1963 and

1976. This span is just slightly larger than the major period of US involvement in Vietnam, from the major escalation of 1965 to the withdrawal of troops in 1973. All of these parents, however, would have lived at least some of their "formative years" during the period of the US war.

The generation X children of this study were born between 1972 and 1980; which means they were all too young to have any direct experience or memories of the war (assuming that three years is too young in this regard.) Thus, all of the gen Xers were coming of political age in the 1990s, and they were in (or just completed) the generational "formative age" span during the time of interviewing (ranging in age from 18 to 26.) They were of the same ages, as a group, as their parents were during the Vietnam war, the period under study. Thus, roughly speaking, the parents in the study were comparing themselves at their child's age to their child today (and the two generations); and the children were comparing themselves to their parents when they were the child's age (and the generations.)

It should be noted that the interviews were conducted between November 1997 and March 1998, and the ages listed in the substantive chapters are the ages of the participants at the time of the interviews.

To the initial core research questions, a set of more specific questions were elaborated: On political culture: What did each participant perceive as the US motives for getting involved in Vietnam? Why did the US lose the war? What are the lessons and legacies of the war in US political culture? What should be the US role in the world today? On generations: How did each participant view the "generational idea" itself (i.e. do they believe there are actual generations; that there are certain things that define an age group as

a generation?) How did each participant see their own age group or generation? And how did they see the other generation (i.e how did children view their parents' generation, and vice versa?) What effects did each participant think the Vietnam experience had on their own generation, and on American culture and politics more generally? To what extent could I discern generational similarities in the children's views, and in the parents' views? On family socialization: Were there observable differences between the two groups of parents in how they view the Vietnam war? In turn, were there differences in the ways the two groups related with their children about the war? Were there differences in the way the children of each group view the war? In the substantive chapters and the Conclusion I address the extent to which, and in what ways, these questions were answered.

The basic data of this study consisted of 35 semi-structured interviews ranging from one to two hours with 35 participants in the metropolitan area of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico, conducted between November 1997 and March 1998. The 35 total consisted of 16 parent-child pairs, and one trio in which I interviewed the child and *both* parents (separately,) since the father was a Vietnam veteran and the mother was a Laotian expatriate (-- hereafter, for simplicity, all the groups will be referred to as "pairs".) The decision was made to try to get about half the sample of parents as fathers who are Vietnam vets, and half as a parent who had been antiwar. Further, it was decided to recruit participants at the University of New Mexico (UNM) and the Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute (TVI, the local community college.) The rationale behind this decision was that participants with some college or community college attendance would tend to have a level of education,

knowledge, skills and range of experiences to have substantive thoughts and views on an historical event like the Vietnam war -- and, at the same time, such a group is not a-typical of the general American population since a majority of adult Americans now have some level of college attendance. It was also decided to try to get a mix of participants along other demographic lines, i.e. roughly half male and female (with the exception that all the veteran parents were male,) some degree of ethnic/racial diversity, and a range of income levels. A table breaking down the demographics of the sample is included as "appendix 1". In summary, the sample included: eight veteran fathers, 10 anti-war non-veteran parents, and 17 children; 21 males and 14 females; 24 white, 6 hispanic, 3 Asian, and 2 Native American subjects. Ten subjects were higher income, 17 were middle income, and 8 were lower income (see appendix 1.) Efforts were made to recruit some African American participants, including running a targeted advertisement in the college newspaper, and distributing 200 flyers and visiting selected classes at UNM, but these efforts were unsuccessful. At the time of planning the study I had hoped that recruiting a "mixed" sample along gender, race and class lines might reveal interesting findings along these lines, but after collecting the data it became clear that analysis on these dimensions was not really feasible because of the small size of the sample.

Recruiting of participants was attempted through four means: 1) short appeals made in the classes of other college faculty; 2) a snowball approach in the case of the Vietnam

veterans (who were a slightly harder group to locate and recruit³); 3) posting of flyers around the campuses of UNM and TVI; 4) an advertisement in the UNM college newspaper. Fourteen pairs were recruited through classes; two pairs were recruited by snowball; one pair was recruited through the flyers; none were attained by the advertisement. The classes in which I recruited were general subjects (Philosophy, the Modern Legacy, etc) -- any course that included coverage of the Vietnam war was avoided so as not to pre-select bias on the topic. After about half the interviews were done, when I decided to post flyers, run the ad, and recruit some students at TVI, I began offering participants a token fee of \$10.00. About a quarter of participants were paid this fee (some declined it.) Since I was recruiting in colleges, all but two of the initial contacts were with the children (one exception was one of the snowball veterans; the other was a parent who was a student in a community college class in which I recruited, but who had a daughter at the university.) My short recruitment pitch in classes was just a few minutes, in which I introduced myself, gave a very brief description of my research project and said I wanted to do interviews with young people if they had a parent who was either a Vietnam veteran or had been anti-war during the war, who might also be willing to be interviewed separately. I asked those who were interested and who had a parent who might be interested to sign a sign-up sheet, but I also asked them not to talk with their parent about the war substantively until after I had done the interviews. Most

3. I expected the Vietnam veteran fathers to be more difficult to recruit, partially because they are fewer in number than the other groups, and partially because of a possible greater discomfort or lack of desire to "revisit" the Vietnam war. Therefore, with veterans recruited through other means I decided to ask them, at the end of our own interview, if they knew any other veterans who might be willing to participate. Two of the eight veterans (and their child) were recruited in this way.

interviews were scheduled within a week or so of the initial contact. All the interviews were conducted separately and in private, i.e. one-on-one with the child and one-on-one with the parent, so that the subjects would not bias one another.

The Interview Schedule and the Interviews

The interview schedule consisted of about 23 main questions (often each having several follow-up questions.) The versions for parents and children were quite similar, though with a few modifications for age difference, generations, etc. (a sample of the interview schedule for the parents is included as "appendix 2".) The first nine questions were of a factual nature, to get a sense of what the respondent knew about the Vietnam war; the next eight questions dealt with perceptions of the war, why the US went to Vietnam, why we lost, what the lessons were, and the last few asked about how the respondent learned about the war and how it was addressed/ talked about their family; the next few questions asked about social generations and the war; and the last few questions asked about the person's more general political views and views about the US role in the world today.

The interviews were scheduled by phone at the convenience of the participants, either in my office at the University of New Mexico, or at the participant's home, or, in a few cases, at the participant's work place. They ranged from one to two hours, but the majority lasted about one-and-a-half hours. I made a conscious effort to establish a good, relaxed rapport with the participants, which was at the same time neutral and professional, and I think this was almost always achieved. During the phone call to set up the interviews, and often again when we first met for the interview, I explained briefly and pleasantly what the project was

about and answered any questions or concerns that they had. Participants were asked to read and sign a research consent form. Full confidentiality was assured. I usually also spent a few moments at the beginning of the interview "ice-breaking" with the participant, talking a bit about their parent or child, their nice home, their work, my work, etc. All of the interviews were tape-recorded and I also took extensive personal notes during the interviews.

Since my intention was that the interviews be semi-structured, fluid, and exploratory, not every interview covered all of the questions. Leeway was taken in following interesting lines of questioning, asking respondents to elaborate certain points and to "feel free to add things that come to mind, or that you think are important, even if I don't ask specifically about them..."

I made a strong effort to be sensitive and empathetic to the feelings and views of the respondents, while trying to maintain my neutrality by refraining from expressing my own views about a particular issue or question. The Vietnam war is still emotionally charged from many people. Several respondents expressed emotions of anger and frustration; one veteran began crying while describing his anger with one of the American presidents. In all cases I attempted to be empathetic, without showing approval or disapproval, and I used considerable discretion at times in deciding whether to pursue a particular topic further -- there were a few cases where I did not pursue what was an intrinsically interesting topic where it appeared to be emotionally difficult for the respondent.

Procedures and Analysis Following the Interviews

As pointed out in the previous chapter, this study is explicitly interpretive and

hermeneutic. The interviews themselves are a process of joint framing and joint meaning construction, as well as situation definition, presentation of self, impression management and so forth (Goffman 1959, 1974). The next, secondary process of interpretation takes place as the investigator begins to try to "make sense" of the data, the interviews, using the tools, insights and wisdom of social-scientific analysis.

In this study, this occurred through several stages. While interviews were still on-going I began to further identify and focus in on certain themes recurring in the interviews. After all the interviews were finished, I went through all the detailed written notes of the interviews identifying and "coding" themes, as well as interesting or striking comments, whether shared or unique.⁴ I also constructed the demographics table at this time. The next step was to transfer all of the coded materials from the written notes to master sheets of key comments and codes under the following topics: family socialization, other socialization on the war, images of the war, generations, US motives in Vietnam, why the US lost, lessons and legacies of the war, personal ideology, and US role in the world today. The last five topics were later constituted as components or expressions of US political culture. For each of the topics I recorded between 20-200 key comments and phrases, each of which was coded to anywhere from one to 15 different interviews. Altogether, I estimate that this produced master code sheets with a total of about 4,100 coded items, at this stage of the process.

The next stage of the process was to go through the code sheets and (re-)identify

4. The form of coding I used was modified from an approach laid out by Anselm Strauss and similar approaches by others. Rather than giving a review of this approach, which is fairly detailed and fairly dry, I refer interested readers to Strauss' (1987) Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists.

themes and clusters of themes. I initially did this under three major headings: family socialization, generations, and political culture and beliefs (sub-divided in relation to domestic and international issues.) Under each of these headings, I created from 6 to 14 themes or clusters of themes. These were derived from the most noteworthy themes from the master code sheets. Essentially, these lists of themes constituted outlines for the substantive chapters.

The next stage of the process was to type transcripts of the interviews (from the tapes) using the lists of themes and the master code sheets. This was done for each of the themes in each of the substantive chapters: family socialization, generations and political culture. Throughout this process, I continued critical analysis and interpretation of the material, using the mediation and framing approach laid out in chapter two. Analytic commentary was typed with each section of transcripts, in a dialectical back-and-forth process (see Alford 1998). Once all the empirical interview excerpts had been typed for each chapter, along with their critical commentary sections, the overall shape and meaning and significance of the findings was clarified in relation to the research questions and the research project as a whole. Editorial decisions, cuts, connections, transitions, analysis and argumentation constituted this last stage of the project, which entailed several drafts of each chapter.

A Few Final Notes on the Presentation of Findings

In the following three substantive chapters on political culture, social generations and family socialization, much of the data is discussed qualitatively and/or in terms of particular cases. However, there are many points at which it has been worthwhile to speak of the data

as a whole, comparatively or in proportional terms. For this purpose, rather than repeatedly referring to numbers of cases, percentages or fractions, it seemed useful to specify a "scale" of proportions to be used uniformly in the substantive chapters. In the written commentary comparing cases in these chapters, the scale (out of 35 total cases) is as follows: "virtually none" means 1 or 2; "a few" means 3-6; "about a quarter" means 7-10; "about a third" means 11-13; "nearly half" means 14-16; "half" means 17-18; "slightly more than half" means 19-21; "about two-thirds" means 22-24; "about three-quarters" means 25-28; "all but a few" means 29-32; and "virtually all" means 33-34. In some cases in the discussion, not all respondents spoke to a particular question or issue; in other cases I refer to a subset of the entire sample (for example: only the children, or only the parents) -- in these cases, the same terms as above may be employed to correspond to an *equivalent proportion* of the total number of respondents on the issue. It should be noted that this scale will be used where and insofar as it is useful, not necessarily at all times. So, for example, there are points at which data is being summarized for several issues and the totals are less precise, in which case a slightly less precise phrase may be used, like "a large majority." It is hoped that this flexible approach of using the scale where possible, and less precise phrases when necessary, will provide sufficient clarity to the presentation.

I have chosen in the cited passages throughout the text to put key phrases and terms into bold relief for clearer emphasis and ease of reading or skimming; the terms in bold are those that seem particularly salient in each passage and/or those to which I give attention in the discussion and analysis.

Finally, it should also be noted for all three of the substantive chapters, that because

of the nature of interview data, each selected block of quotation often raises a number of themes and ideas which are not necessarily limited to the specific issue/topic of focus in that section. That is, for example in chapter four, in the section on the question of why the US lost the war in Vietnam, respondents often make comments which may relate, e.g., to why the US lost, what are some lessons, and what US policy should be today (in the wake of Vietnam), which are all treated in separate sections. In some cases, it is feasible to separate some of these comments and present them in the different sections on the different topics, but other times, in the interest of the continuity, integrity, and flow of the comments, it seems better to present them as they are, as they were articulated. In such cases, it is hoped that the reader may note where the respondent is speaking to several identified topics of this study, even though a particular block of quotation may be presented only in one section.

- Chapter 4 -

The Vietnam War and American Political Culture

This chapter examines the political-cultural legacies and lessons of the Vietnam war experience at the macro level of analysis. Using the theoretical framework laid out in chapter two, the chapter looks at the cultural mediation of the war according to the framings of the study participants, looking specifically at several key interpretive issues in relation to the war: what were the US motives or purposes in intervening in Vietnam; why did the US lose the war; what are the lessons and legacies of the war for the US; and what should be the US role in the world today, including foreign policy lessons of the war?

As stated in chapters one and two, a core argument of this study is that the Vietnam war experience resulted in a lasting rupture in American political culture, in terms of attitudes about politics, about the government, and about the US and its role in the world. This rupture represented increasing conflict between widely shared American core values -- views about "what America means, stands for, is about" -- and the actual conduct of the war. The war weakened hegemonic discourses of US politics and "national identity" and resulted in lasting legitimation problems (suspicion, skepticism, distrust, etc) for the political system. In the model of Ann Swidler (1986), the war contributed to an extended period of "unsettled culture" and contestation in American politics.

The interview data in this chapter is intended to get at and illuminate manifestations of these processes. I believe that the qualitative data, the ideas and beliefs, presented here support the argument. As noted below, many of the respondents evaluated the war, US

motives, lessons, and the US role in the world in terms of American core values presented in chapter two. The most widespread findings are: distrust and criticism of the government, belief that the war was a mistake, that it provides important lessons for the US, and that the US should play an active and humanitarian role in the world.

In the sections below I present interesting selections from the respondents on the main themes and frames on the Vietnam war and political culture. In most cases, the quotations selected are fairly typical (in my judgment) of the group of respondents on that theme or frame -- I make note where a particular response is less typical (but may be quoted because of intrinsic interest on a particular point[s]).

Motives and Purposes -- Why the US Intervened in Vietnam

As discussed in chapter two, there has been a great range of interpretations on how and why the US got involved in Vietnam, whether the war was justified or not, how and why the US lost, and the lessons and legacies of the war -- the debates have become, as the title of Robert McNamara's recent book (1999) puts it, an Argument Without End. However, though there is much variation in views, and certainly in particular narrative formulations, there are also many common themes.

All of the subjects in the study were asked what they thought were the US's motives or purposes in Vietnam, and their views on whether, or to what extent, this was justified or not (whether or not the war was a "mistake.") The one motive/purpose, mentioned in some form or variation by virtually all the subjects, was the analytic frame of "stopping communism" (e.g., also "stopping the Russians", "the domino theory", etc.) In the case of

my sample, it was clear that the dominant ("official") discursive frame of the Cold War as a struggle on the part of the US to stop or "contain" communism had been learned and retained by virtually all the subjects, notwithstanding how they personally evaluated or re-framed this theme themselves. Indeed, the subjects varied significantly on their own framing of the truth value of the "stopping communism" theme, i.e. especially how "real" they thought this motive was (as opposed to other underlying "real" motives mentioned by several, discussed below) or whether they thought this motive justified or necessitated US military intervention.

A second common motive, cited by half the respondents, and connected by some people to the first, but usually framed in more "altruistic" terms, was that we went to Vietnam because we were "trying to help." This was sometimes cast in this fairly non-specified way, simply as "we wanted to help" or "to help Vietnam"; and sometimes was specified a bit further, e.g. "we were helping our ally fight the communists", or "we wanted to help bring democracy to the Vietnamese."

A third motive mentioned also by half of the subjects, again in varying formulations, were "economic interests" or "resources." This "economic interests" theme ranged from "defending American business interests" or "US corporations", to a few who said we went to Vietnam for "rubber" or "oil." Relatedly, a number of other subjects mentioned that the war itself was "good for US businesses" or "US corporations made a lot of money off the war." As noted below, several subjects made a specific distinction between what they called "official" or "formal" motives of fighting communism, and the "real" or "underlying" economic interests.

A few other motive themes, articulated by smaller numbers of respondents, were things like: the weapons industry (a subset of economic interests, cited by five), the motives were never really clear (cited by three), and the military wanted the war (cited by three).

As explained in chapter three, the parents in the sample were initially selected in two basic groups: Vietnam veterans, and non-veterans who were anti-war during the Vietnam period.¹ Another interesting artifact of this set of interviews with the veterans was that a quarter of the veterans (two out of eight) were still clearly "supportive" of the war; two were fairly "mixed" in their evaluation; and the other four were pretty clearly "not supportive" of the war, thought it was a mistake, and/or that the US shouldn't have gone to Vietnam.² Without exception, the veterans I interviewed were critical of the US government and its handling of the war. (As noted, the other 10 parents were selected *because* they were antiwar, as a contrast with the veterans.) Of the children, three were pretty clearly war "supportive"; four were fairly "mixed"; and 10 were "not supportive" of the war. These findings can be interpreted in various ways, but one reading would be the following: If one excludes the 10 "antiwar" parents, since they constitute a selective sample of "antiwar", and if one excludes the six "mixed" opinions (as, in a sense, "no (clear) opinion" or position),

1. See the discussion of the sample selection process in the Methods Section, chapter three.

2. The characterization of participants as "war supportive" or "antiwar", or any such classification in a study of this type is, of course, a matter of interpretation and judgment. These judgments were made in this study considering the overall context of the interview. In cases where opinions are strong and clearly stated (e.g. "I think the war was a huge mistake; we never should have been there...") the issue is pretty straightforward; others require more judgment by the researcher. Participants who really appeared more ambivalent or expressed opinions on "both sides", etc, were classified as "mixed." For some related discussion of this classification issue, see Thomas Beamish, et al. (1995).

then 14 of the remaining 19 (or about three-quarters) are pretty clearly "not supportive" of the war (believe it was a mistake, we shouldn't have gone, etc), and five are pretty clearly "supportive" of the war. Of course, no claim is made that these numbers, or this sample, is "scientific"; nonetheless, these proportions are pretty close to the percentage of Americans (71%) in public opinion polls in recent years (cited in chapter two) who (still) view the war as "a mistake."

"Containment Culture": The US Went to Vietnam to Stop the Reds

Though virtually all respondents identified communism as a stated main motive for the US involvement in the war, they varied considerably in their own normative framings or assessments of that motive.

The US Motive to Stop Communism was Right or Legitimate.

A few respondents who articulated the motive of stopping communism are still war "supportive" and believe that the war was justified or legitimate or not a mistake.

Karl, a 52-year-old Vietnam veteran, gave the following response to the question of the US's purposes or motives in getting involved in Vietnam, and whether it was justified:

Karl:

We were trying to **shore up an ally**. We felt, at some point, that the country would evolve into some sort of a **democratic form** of government. And we were simply trying to **stop communist aggression**. Yes, **our purposes were justified**. Very definitely. The people in south Vietnam were not satisfied with their government.... but the ones that I knew and the general population that I saw did not want to live under the North Vietnamese domination; under a North Vietnamese government.

Karl followed a little bit later with some further thoughts on what the US was trying to do,

and his feelings about it, his normative framing of those purposes:

I believed in the military. I joined the army; became an officer; I believed in it.... I didn't think we were losing; we had seen some very promising things, as far as the military and as far as the civil government -- we were seeing the **birthing pains of democracy**.... I believed very strongly in what we were doing; I could see what we were trying to do and I could see it taking effect.... I felt, and I feel today, that we were **doing the right thing**, that we should have been there, and that it was working, but just not quickly enough.

Karl frames the US war effort partially in terms of helping an ally, partially in terms of stopping communist aggression (Realist self interest), and partially in terms of American core values: i.e. trying to support or develop democracy -- the overall project of which he normatively frames as trying to "do the right thing."

Carla is a 25-year-old daughter of a Vietnam veteran, Roger. As we shall see later on (and in chapter six), they are an interesting case of a parent-child pair that doesn't talk about the war, and where the veteran father is very critical of the war ("not war supportive"), while Carla is war "supportive", i.e. thinks "it was legitimate", that the US "should have gone" and "the intent was good."

Q: "What do you think were the US's purposes or motives in Vietnam; why do you think we got involved?"

Carla:

I think they wanted to **stop the spread of communism**. I think that's the main overbearing factor. I think once they got in, it was really hard for them to get out, for a lot of political reasons, but I think, starting out, that was their goal.

Q: "And do you think that that motive or purpose was justified; do you think that was a just, or legitimate, or valid reason for going?"

Carla:

I think **it was legitimate**. Whether it was worth as many American men dying as did

for that, I'm not sure. But I think their **original intent was good**. The way I think of it, the people of the North believed in communism; the southern Vietnamese were not, and that if South Vietnam won, then the non-communist type of government would have taken over, and therefore Vietnam would not be a communist country. It didn't work that way, but I think that's what they thought would happen if they helped the South win.

Thus Carla's normative frame is that the US intent was good and that the motive of stopping communism (analytic frame) was legitimate grounds for US intervention. This perception seems to gibe with efforts, by President Reagan (and others), to frame the US role in Vietnam as a "noble cause" or a "just cause."³

Critical Assessments of the Containment Motive.

In contrast to Karl and Carla, all of the following respondents give more mixed and/or critical assessments of the containment motive; ranging from the view that it was valid or understandable at the time if not in retrospect, to the view that it was "stupid" from the beginning and was never justified.

Steve, 25, is on active duty in the military, and the son of Karl. Like his father, Steve also defends the American war effort in Vietnam, though he gives more qualification in his framing: he begins by saying that the fear of communism was "pathological," but he then articulates a fairly typical account of the domino theory as the justification, with the conclusion that the US motives were justified overall, given the historical context of the Cold War (which was "very terrifying" at the time):

3. President Reagan used both phrases in speeches in 1980 and 1982 respectively; the first cited in Rowe and Berg (1991:10), the second cited in Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991:378).

Steve:

I think that in the context of the times, there was a **pathological fear of communism**... we saw it as this all- encompassing, almost unstoppable force that supposedly was going to take over the world. When you look at the situation in Europe, all the Eastern countries being gobbled up and forced into communist systems, and then in Asia, China turning communist, I believe there was a very embattled, bunker-type mentality; **we saw the threat everywhere**. We had just fought the war in Korea. We saw it ideologically.... I think the same sort of thing started happening in Vietnam, we saw it again as a threat, we have to do something, we have to staunch the flow, the whole **Domino Theory** and all that. While in hindsight, **it seems silly**, then it was **very terrifying**. We believed we were helping them, and at the same time helping ourselves. We thought we had to stop it.

When asked if he felt the war were a mistake, Steve's response reveals some ambivalence or uncertainty between several competing frames of the war, weighing the personal experiences of his father, and altruistic core values motives like "self determination", against the loss of a lot of lives. As he speaks, he clarifies his own thoughts on the question, coming to a sort of compromise conclusion between the two narrative frames: that the war was not a mistake for the time and historical moment (a similar interpretation is also suggested below by Josh and Roger), that perhaps it showed American resolve which may have deterred the Soviet Union and China, while allowing for the widespread belief that it was a mistake with the benefit of hindsight (e.g., as suggested above, it turns out now that our fears of communism may have been exaggerated, or "silly.")

Q: "Looking back, do you think the war was a mistake?"

Steve:

That's a difficult question; I mean, my father was over there, he put a lot into it. I don't know. I believe that the people's **right to self-determination** -- that's a **worthy goal**. And also, you never know what effect your actions are having on the other guy... maybe the effort and time we put in, perhaps that had a stalling effect or sobering effect; it at least notified Beijing and Moscow that "this is the expense of doing this." I mean, it's hard to justify a war that didn't change anything but cost a lot of lives, but ultimately I think they went over there with **good intentions**.... so I

think that for that time, the war was not a mistake.

Like his father Karl, Steve invokes a core values justification of the "right to self-determination" (which seems fairly synonymous with the "democracy" core value), and also articulates the same "good intentions" frame as Carla.

Josh, 22, also offers somewhat mixed framings of the anticommunism motive, in some ways similar to Steve's: he talks about the "pervasive political mindset" of America at the time to "eliminate communism", that doesn't hold up in retrospect, but was possibly justified, or at least understandable in the context of the times.

Q: "How do you assess the US motives or purposes in going to Vietnam? Do you think the war was justified, to some extent, not at all, or what...?"

Josh:

The **mindset of America**, I think, was absolutely different, and there was a good guy and a bad guy in the world, at least the way we viewed it, and the bad guy was **communism**. And any encroachment by communism meant the down-fall of Asia, you know, the whole rotten apple idea. So, in terms of the **pervasive political mindset**, you end up with the need to try to solve or to eliminate communism because it was a direct threat to America, even if it wasn't on our borders.

Q: "In your judgment, do you think that was justified, or not really?"

A: **In retrospect, no.** Because, you know, people died, and it wasn't going to lead to this **domino effect**, it wasn't going to happen. But we didn't know that then, so it makes it hard. Anything in retrospect that ended up with casualties and **egregious moral problems**, then, no, **that's not justified**. But when you're looking at it from the perspective of the time, I don't know if it was justified. America needed to be the dominant power in the world, and allowing communism to flourish sidetracked that. So, yes, I would say to a certain minor extent, that in retrospect doesn't hold up, but at the time would have -- that **something needed to be done**. And when it turned out that the costs were enormous, then things should have been reconsidered more quickly.

It is interesting to consider Josh's reference to the "pervasive political mindset" at the time

in relation to the distinction suggested in chapter two between political culture and ideology. Political mindset would seem closer to ideology; a more conscious, more cognitive, way of thinking, also subject to more rapid change or transformation (as Ann Swidler suggests in her discussion of "unsettled" periods [1986]). Indeed, Josh's reference to "egregious moral problems" necessarily implies a (negative) comparison to a set of moral standards or core values.

Roger, 52, a Vietnam combat veteran and Carla's father, said what he remembered about the war was "destruction... needless destruction..." and "...a real sense of desperation." Several times he also expressed a considerable bitterness about the Vietnam war and the way it was handled, especially criticizing the U.S. government. He stated a few times that the war was a mistake; at other points he indicated that the US military was held back and "not allowed to win." As summary, his view was that in hindsight the war was "certainly" a mistake, but also that if the US does intervene militarily, then it should be to win, with a clear plan, and allowing the military to fight the war without "political" meddling.

As with the other interviewees, Roger's first theme cited as the US motives in Vietnam was stopping communism, which he said was "pure enough." He added that "business" interests evolved into a contributing motive, as well as the increasing infiltration of "political" purposes and a desire to "flex muscles" -- he concludes that over time the conflict "snowballed" into bigger things. (Roger's "business interests" argument, which he sees as secondary but helping to perpetuate the war, is addressed by other subjects in the next section in terms of economic interests, which some view as the "real interests.") Roger on why the US got involved in the war in Vietnam:

I think initially it was **pure enough**. The proposed mission, and initially it started out, was to **stop the communists**. It was in the midst of the Cold War, and there were some real lines being drawn in the sand, and I really do feel like they didn't want to see the country go communist, for whatever reasons they had. And there were some valid reasons. The Cold War was on -- **the domino effect**, that if one fell, they would all fall. That was the whole thing. And I honestly believe that initially it wasn't anything more than that.... But the purposes changed over time. I think it was really insidious, it happened over time -- it was a situation where people were making some political hay, and certainly -- it's a nasty statement to make -- but the country always prospers during war. And when I say the country prospers, obviously for the people being killed and families disrupted and those kinds of things, there's no way you can call that prospering, but there's an element, a **business element**, as well as government, if there's a big fat war going on, that gets to crank up and flex its muscles.... Starting out, I don't think the **business interests** were a big motivation, but I think as it grew it becomes like the proverbial **snowball** rolling down, and it just gets bigger.

Roger then talked about a variety of factors which led to the US defeat (quoted later in this chapter), including lack of US commitment, lack of a clear plan, and misjudging the will and determination of "your opponent." This was followed by the question on whether the war was a mistake.

Q: "Given that, what you've just said, do you then think the war was a mistake in some way, or..."

A: **Oh certainly**. In hindsight, it's 20/20 you know, you can't make an argument for **anything positive that came out of the Vietnam war**. And I say that as an Army brat, a military officer, as a regular army guy myself, as a guy who volunteered to go to Vietnam. I have no qualms at all, in hindsight, that if anybody had had a lick of sense, we wouldn't have been there in the first place; and I mean that very sincerely. **We should NOT have been there**.

Nancy is a 49-year-old mother who is highly critical of the war and of the US government. Her daughter Monica, 18, is more uncertain about the war, but ends up concluding it was not a mistake. Monica's dream is to join the Navy and fly fighter jets.

Both Nancy and Monica cite the theme of anticommunism as one of the main reasons

for the US getting involved in the Vietnam war, but they frame this motive differently: Nancy is quite critical of the decision, saying the communist threat was exaggerated, that she never supported the war, and stressing the awfulness of war in general, while Monica somewhat qualifies her answer but concludes that the war was justified. Nancy on why the US got involved in the war in Vietnam:

I think we were trying to live up to a Napoleonic promise to help the French, for some stupid reason. I'm not sure. We **didn't want a communist country**, the communists to take over Vietnam, because then they would have that whole slice... they were just going to swarm us, but when you look at the map I'm not really sure why that was such a big deal. **I never supported the war**. I can remember as a sophomore [in high school] when Kennedy was killed and all of the guys who wanted to go and enlist, right away, because they were sure it was a terrorist attack, and it was a communist, and so they were going to enlist and whatever country we were fighting to go and **stop the communists**, in retaliation for them shooting Kennedy. And I was like, "does this make sense? This is stupid." And so every big kneejerk reaction, whether it was Kennedy getting shot, or "we need to send some advisors over", there was this whole rush of "We're going off to march in war; isn't this great!" It's like, "**um, this is ludicrous, you go to war and you get shot! There's nothing wonderful about war**. What is this?" My father was in the navy and so the stories I had heard about war were not glamorous.... My thought was, "**war is distasteful**; no one wins and you pay for it forever, so why are we making such a big parade of this?"

Nancy perceived the awful, "distasteful", unglamorous reality of war even in high school, in contrast to many of her (male) peers who showed enthusiasm -- a theme that is presented over and over in so much of the literature of (particularly young male) perceptions of the war (Engelhardt 1995; Gibson 1994; Jeffords 1989). Yet Nancy's own views on war are not unambiguous -- in the section below on the US role in the world today, she indicates that in the 1991 Gulf War perhaps the US should have used nuclear weapons against Saddam Hussein.

Like Nancy, Monica cites the theme of stopping communism as a main reason the US

got involved in the war in Vietnam. She also mentions the theme of wanting to "help the Vietnamese" and the core values motive (like Karl and Steve) of trying to "develop democracy":

Monica:

The only thing I understand about why we went was to try and **stop communism** and to **help the Vietnamese** -- to end the persecution of the Vietcong, and **develop a democracy**. That would be my only guess.

Q: "Do you think those purposes were justified?"

A: To a point. It wasn't necessarily our battle to fight, but other communist countries were helping the Vietcong and **someone needed to help the Vietnamese**, but I don't know if it was necessarily our job to do it. But we're very prone to doing things that aren't necessarily our jobs to do.

A bit later, when asked about the lessons of the war, Monica returned to the question of whether the war was justified and said definitively that the US "should have been there," which she grounded strongly in a core values frame of supporting "freedom and inalienable rights."

Monica:

....I think **we should have been there** because **our country believes in**, you know, **freedom and inalienable rights** given to everyone, and the whole constitution and bill of rights, and so on, give our country our freedom, but also, from that, we feel that everyone should have those freedoms. And if people are going to be persecuted and discriminated against and forced to live under a certain rule, and we feel that that shouldn't be, as a world community it was **our responsibility to help them**. Not necessarily fight the war for them, but to help them attain what freedoms they wanted. So, to a point, I think we should have been there.... **I don't think the war itself was a mistake**, I just think it could have been handled differently.

Monica's notion of "our responsibility" as "a world community" to help people attain freedoms is one take on the more general idea of an active, cooperative internationalist foreign policy discussed in chapter two. The theme is addressed in more detail in the last

section of this chapter on the US role in the world, particularly the question of the conditions under which military action may be justified.

Formal US "Anticommunism" and Real Economic Interests.

In addition to virtually all who cited anticommunism, half of the respondents in this study (17) cited economic interests as a key US motive in Vietnam, and most of these (11) also suggested that economics was the stronger motive or the "real" motive, which was masked other motives: by anticommunism, or "high ideals", etc. The fact that a large number of respondents cite economic motives suggests that they connect the motive of anticommunism not just with certain American ideals or core values, but also with American "national (economic) interests" -- i.e. that they perceive that the US (or US elites) pursued anticommunism not (or not only), for example, to "defend freedom" and/or "democracy", but as a means to promote/defend US economic interests; or, as Josh puts it below, "Capitalism."

Julian, 56, was a conscientious objector and protester against the Vietnam war in the 1960s-70s. He is still highly critical of the war, and of US motives. His son, David, 23, is also quite critical of the war. The framings of Julian and David on the Vietnam experience were quite similar on many points. Both identified fighting communism as a factor or theme, but also believe underlying economic interests were important motives for the US involvement in Vietnam, and neither believed the motives were justified. Julian articulated in greater detail the view that powerful economic interests dominate and corrupt American politics and foreign policy, and he stressed the lasting distrust of the US government for many Americans, as a result of the war. In answer to the question of US motives in getting

involved in Vietnam, Julian discussed the power of "corporate interests", and alluded to anticommunism as a "war cry":

Julian:

I think there were issues around rubber; there were **corporate interests** in development there. I don't think they're justified. I think there was the whole control issue in terms of **anticommunism**. A lot of the time there was talk about the Viet Cong being communist, and how we were protecting the country from being taken over by communists -- I think that was often a **war cry** in this country to incite people and get them motivated to be willing to let their kids go to defend this country, and in reality it was **more to protect the corporate interests of our country**. I think the other thing that comes into play in the economy here is that there are pieces of industry that are very dependent on war, and I think that influences how decisions get made. I don't think I understand it all, but I think the **war economy** stimulates other pieces of our economy. These interests are very dominant in terms of policy making. You have international monetary issues, and you have national monetary issues, and they're all intertwined. **I think the multinational corporations have incredible influence**. They have influenced decisions in this country in a lot of ways that I don't think the common person actually does understand -- I sure don't.

Although his views are less definitive and less detailed, David's opinions of the war motives have a number of commonalities with Julian's views. David, too, identified fighting communism, with "underlying economic concerns" and "resources."

Q: "What do you think were the American purposes in getting involved in Vietnam; and do you think those purposes were justified?"

David:

It never seemed altogether clear. I guess **communism** was one of the issues. But I think there were **underlying economic concerns**. Southeast Asia was a growing interest -- there were a lot of resources in Vietnam, and I think in surrounding areas as well. I think the US wanted to establish a presence and saw that as one place that its presence was threatened. **But I don't think it was justified**.

Rachel, 43, became antiwar and a protester as a teenager during the Vietnam war.

She is critical of the war, the motives of the people in power, and (as we shall see again later)

highly skeptical and distrusting of the government and the powerful. In her framing below, Rachel makes an interesting distinction between the motives of the people who were "sent to fight", which she sees as genuine, and the motives of the decision-makers, which she "doubts." This distinction seems a fair example of the distinction posited in chapter two between the hegemonic discourses of political elites and the often contesting views of the American public.

Q: "What do you think the US's purposes or motives were in Vietnam; why were we there, why did we go?"

Rachel:

I know that we were told, and the **formal reason** was, to **prevent the spread of communism**. But I guess over the years I've come to believe that it was **largely economic motives**. And I think that during the war it kind of became self-feeding, that we were protecting American interests and **defense manufacturers** and those kind of things, and it just became a vicious circle. And that it just continued, and I just really felt that those lobbies were probably very powerful in this country at that time. And I would have to say to that it was economic reasons.

Q: "You mention sort of 'formal' motives and sort of real motives; so, in your mind were the real motives almost entirely economic, or were there, say, humanitarian, or anti-communist, or...?"

A: I guess I would have to say that I feel that the people who were actually sent there to fight, and the people who were actually, you know, had to be in Vietnam and saw the need for the humanitarian side of it, I really think that their motives were exactly that. But I do feel like the people that were in **power** and ultimately **making the decisions**, I don't think that was their reason for being there -- it was the **public reason** for being there. But I would **doubt those motives**.

Rachel believes that the motives of the ordinary Americans sent to fight were genuine, that they saw "the humanitarian side of it." But she does not believe that those were the motives of the people in power. As we see below, Rachel's daughter Holly's suspicions run even

deeper -- she suggests the war may have been "deliberately prolonged" for economic benefits.

Holly, 18, is the daughter of Rachel. Many of her frames, even certain terms, are quite similar to Rachel's. Later in this chapter Rachel talks about the explicit efforts she and her husband made to discuss and expose their children to politics; the influence is evident in political-cultural beliefs.

Q: "What do you think were the US's purposes or motives in Vietnam; why were we there?"

Holly:

To **prevent the spread of communism, officially**. And I think the concerns were **much more economic**; to boost our economy, and I especially think that's why the war continued as long as it did.

Q: "Could you explain that a bit. When you say 'officially', what do you mean by that?"

A: I think there were **other underlying reasons, that aren't perhaps so noble as the sort of noble justification** for the war, and possibly the one that was used to try and gain public support -- but that that was not the **true motivation** for starting and continuing the war.

Q: "So, when you say 'true motivation' what do you mean by that?"

A: I think the majority of the motivation was **economic**.

Q: "In your opinion, why did the US not win the war?"

Holly:

Because they didn't want to. I think that we very easily could have won the war with the technology and resources that we had available; and that **we fairly deliberately prolonged the war** and didn't bring it to an end.

Q: "Why do you think that was?"

A: Because -- and this is largely **the opinion of my family**; this is what I've heard growing up -- it was because **the economic benefit** to our country was very great, and so they wanted to continue the prosperity.

Q: "And why, then, do you think the war ended when it did; did the US decide at some point that the economic benefits were declining, or...?"

Holly:

Like a point of diminishing return kind of thing? Yes, I think so. And I think people were also really, because **public sentiment was so negative towards the war**, it finally reached a breaking point -- the American public was just not going to put up with it anymore.

Where Roger earlier suggested that business interests may have contributed to prolonging the war, Holly's suspicions go a step further. Though she doesn't fully specify her interpretations of the particular groups or processes (i.e. whether government and/or economic power elites), Holly's distrust of "US" motives is such that she believes that "we deliberately prolonged the war" for economic benefit and the prosperity of the country. As argued in chapter two, what is perhaps most salient here is not the "truth value" of such a belief (i.e. whether one agrees with, or believes there is valid evidence for, the view), but what such a view reveals about US political culture, in this case the degree of suspicion or distrust (by an 18-year-old young woman) of government/elite motives.

The similarity of frames of motives expressed by Rachel and Holly is notable. Rachel speaks of stopping communism as the "formal reason", while Holly describes that as the motive "officially"; Rachel describes the real reasons as "largely economic motives", while Holly describes the "true motivation" as "economic." Holly states explicitly that this was "the opinion of my family... what I've heard growing up." Holly and Rachel seem to represent a pretty solid case of fairly strong, open family communication on Vietnam (what has been designated by some as the "concept-orientation" to family socialization, as noted in chapter two, and which is expanded in chapter six) -- Holly explicitly recognizes the

influence of her family on her views, and at the same time states them as her own; i.e. that she has largely appropriated or taken on her parents' views.

Zach, 47, was in ROTC and became a conscientious objector during the war. He is very definitive in his belief that the "real reasons" for going to Vietnam were the interests of corporations and "the military-industrial complex." He is very critical of President Kennedy and other leaders and their motives, and he states that "the military wanted the war." Yet, like Nancy, his attitudes about US military intervention in the current period are somewhat counter-intuitive given his extreme criticism of Vietnam and the government then -- I discuss this further in the last section of this chapter, and consider whether Zach and/or Nancy may seem to fit the "irrationality" or "overreaction" theses of the Almond-Lippmann position summarized in chapter two.

Q: "What do you think were the US purposes or motives in going to Vietnam; why do you think we were there?"

Zach:

Well, the publicized theory was what was commonly referred to at the time as **the Domino Theory**. That was kind of a left-over from the Korean War; it was the feeling that **communism had to be contained**, if it wasn't contained it would spread like a virus. And the physical location of Vietnam, that is North Vietnam adjoins China and is adjacent to Laos and Cambodia, and the concern was that the Southeast Asian peninsula would easily fall under communist control, which would then threaten Australia, the supposed free world.

What do I think **the real reasons were**? The real reasons were that the United States was in **an economic malaise**. President Kennedy was a piece of shit just like everyone else. He had made the decision to be a strong president and **confront communism**, having made his initial statement with the Berlin airlift.

Q: "You mentioned that the US was in an economic malaise, are you

saying that that contributed...?"

A: I'm saying that part two is this: if you look at who elects presidents in this country, **corporations** elect presidents, and it's not coincidental that Skorsky Helicopter made a fortune during the war, that several of the aircraft manufacturers made a fortune during the war, because in essence we experimented with lots of different aircraft and used up all our old shit, and got it shot down and blown up, and got rid of our ordnance. Grumann-Northrop made a fortune. The **military-industrial complex**, which I believe is a real and operating threat in this country, owned John Kennedy, by virtue of the fact that I believe he had to buy his election over an equally unscrupulous Richard Nixon.... By the time Johnson was in, he owed them big and the thing snow-balled out of control. Plus the military wanted the war. They very much wanted the war. And the **market was hurting, and a little war always helps**. I think we just made a mistake. What I'm saying is I think a lot of the major defense corporations that are big employers, that are the kind of things that turn economies around, were very much in favor of the war. I've also read several things to indicate that there was a strong feeling amongst the **oil companies** that there was this **vast untapped resource environment in Vietnam**.

Maria, 21, is Zach's daughter. She starts out saying that she isn't certain why the US got involved in Vietnam, except that "there was this huge thing against communism." But, to a follow-up question, she adds that war is "good for the economy", and then suggests that war is also a way to "skim off a large portion of the population" so there are fewer people to support. As with Holly's comments earlier, Maria's comment, in my view, reveals a quite severe level of distrust; a view that the government and/or the powers-that-be are capable of being thoroughly callous (calculatingly so) in their own interests -- one might even argue mass murderous, or sociopathic.

Q: "What do you think were the US's purposes or motives in Vietnam; why were we there; why did we get involved?"

Maria:

I don't know why we got involved. I know that there was a huge thing against **communism**, and the less communists there are in the world, the better for us, for some reason, because obviously communism is like absolutely contradictory to

capitalism. So communism becoming popular and working anywhere would be a definite disadvantage for the US.

Q: "And can you think of other things you think were involved in the US going to Vietnam; do you think there were other factors?"

Maria:

I'm not sure what the factors were specifically, but of course it's always good for **the economy** to get into a war, and to provide guns and ammunition, and also **skim off a large portion of the population** so there's less people to support. It's always good for the economy to do that, so that could have been a factor...

Q: "Could you clarify the last point a little bit; that it's good to skim off a certain number of people, what do you mean by that?"

A: I think that when opportunities within the country are getting fewer, you know like job opportunities and like the amount of capital we have to spread around, that it's really advantageous to **get rid of a lot of the young males** so that it makes for less people to support and less people to please and less people to share the resources with, so that your standard of living can still appear to be just as good...

Q: "And do you think that that was to some extent a conscious motivation, or that's more an *effect* of war -- I mean do you think the people who were planning the war, the decision-makers and what-have-you, that on some level there is sort of an understanding of what you're saying -- I mean, how do you see that working?"

Maria:

I think that a lot of the people, if they really look at it, knew that, you know the experts in that field. But also I think that their primary motivation was probably the **production of bullets and guns and other war items**; you know, just, like, boosting production. I don't think any of them would have, like, really even let themselves entertain that notion, because there's this thing whenever the United States -- the United States just **pretends** we have like these really **high principles**, and that just wouldn't be acceptable.

Q: "And it sounds like, from the way you're saying that, when you say that the US pretends that we have high principles, it sounds like you're saying that we don't really, or it's

false, or... what do you think?"

Maria:

I think **it's definitely false**. My thinking on that is that, you know, the thing of people coming over to this country and wanting to form a more perfect union, and I think that in that attempt they were trying to say "yes, we're better than these other countries we came from and we want to make it a better place to live", and so they started making all these **high ideals** that really weren't as high as we kinda consider them today; like "**liberty and justice for all**" -- well, white men who own property, you know -- ...And I think it was a lot kind of **an image** we wanted to present to the rest of the world and especially Europe, as, like, a **very moral society, a very free society**.

Maria is quite explicit that she views American "high principles" and "high ideals" as "pretend" and "false", as an image America tries to present. It seems that Maria fits the delegitimation pattern quite well; that she rejects the dominant, hegemonic national myth or narrative of America as "The City on the Hill" (cf. Baritz 1985). However, she also adds that she thinks the elites believe the myth, and that they perceived increasing disunity or discontent in America and tried to use Vietnam to "bring our country together" -- but the effort backfired.

Q: "And coming back to the elites, or experts, the people making the Vietnam war or whatever major decisions, what do you think those people think -- do they believe that sort of official, 'high morals and principles' view of the US, or only partially, or they don't really...?"

Maria:

I think they do, and I think that's the problem. Like I think, I speculate that the fibers were coming undone, and it's like, **what better way to bring our country together than to get into a war?** And then it backfired on them because it didn't bring the country together at all. It brought some people together, but separate groups -- it wasn't the desired effect, which is **patriotism**; that's not what happened; anti-patriotism took over. Whereas, it worked in world war II.

The argument over the extent to which the rupture and disunity of the Vietnam period have continued into the present period is (as stated) a central focus of this study, and is taken up again in chapter five, and in the conclusion.

Why the US Lost the Vietnam War

This short section looks at some of the most commonly shared interpretations in this study of why the US lost the war in Vietnam. Though the specific framings vary, I believe all of the respondents in this section lend credence to Jentleson's "pretty prudent public" thesis (1992, 1998) as reviewed in chapter two. The people here appear capable of sensible and critical assessment of foreign policy; e.g., as David and Julian put it below, the public learned to develop their own views and not to "blindly trust" the government.

The most widely shared reason given for the US defeat was criticism of the US handling of the war, which was cited by about two-thirds of respondents. Specific framings were things like the US government "really handled the war extremely poorly", and "militarily it was a joke." Social scientists typically theorize a strong linkage between perceptions of government effectiveness or performance and perceptions of legitimacy (e.g. Lipset [1959] 1963). Thus widespread perceptions of poor effectiveness/performance would also contribute to the legitimation problems theorized in chapter two.

Half of the subjects in the sample also cited loss or lack of public support (including the active form: protest) as a reason for the US defeat.

A third shared reason mentioned by nearly half of the respondents was the will/determination and/or ability of the Vietnamese opposition. About a third of respondents

also suggested that another reason for the loss was that the US held back in some way (the government, or the military, etc.) About a quarter of subjects also cited the media and media coverage as a reason for the American defeat.

Roger, a Vietnam veteran, articulated a number of these main themes. He talked about the lack of US commitment and lack of a hard plan, the "force of will" of the enemy, that militarily it was "a joke", and misjudgments on the part of the US (e.g. not understanding the Vietnamese, their values and determination.

Q: "Why do you think the US didn't win the war?"

Roger:

There was no commitment to win the war. If we had desired to achieve a military victory in Vietnam, we had the manpower, the equipment, etcetera, to go in and take the country.... **The enemy won the war by force of will,** because there was a reason in their mind to win the war. It became painfully obvious to us that it was too far away.... **Militarily it was a joke,** and I don't say that lightly, but you have to go in with a hard plan, do the plan, and then quit.

Q: "And why do you think that was?"

A: **The biggest problem is, unless you're totally committed to war,** you shouldn't be in it. The second biggest problem is that the occidental and oriental mind do not function and reason the same way; **the value system of the average American,** rightly or wrongly, is so different, so out-of-tune with the value system of the average oriental that there's not a chance of a mesh there.... The biggest problem really was not knowing your opponent; **seriously misjudging their will, their determination.**

Roger's daughter Carla articulates some of the other shared themes, including the loss of public support, growing protest, and extremely poor handling by the American Presidents.

Q: "Why do you think the US didn't win the war?"

Carla:

I think the further the US got into the war, **the less and less support they had to be there.** So I don't think they ended up **having the political backing, or the support, that**

they needed to be successful.... The longer the war lasted, the **less positive news** was coming back. I think people were having more and more negative feelings about being there. I think the **protest** got louder and more in number, the more people had died and the less well we did.... The **US government was increasingly feeling pressure** from both sides, from the American people, as well as everything that was actually happening in Vietnam.

This was followed up with a question to Carla about her views of what happened during the war in the US, about the way the government handled the war in the US, and about the antiwar movement:

....The presidents probably really **handled it extremely poorly**.... I think the government probably started out with a very set foreign and domestic policy and yet got into this, and it did become very emotional and started going poorly, in Vietnam as well as being **protested fairly strongly** here.... I don't think there is anything else they could have done to win the war, and I think they probably should have realized that **no matter how good their intentions** and how important this particular cause of **stopping communism** was to them, that they probably should have cut their losses and gotten out. They were kind of just feeding a problem and it wasn't working....

It is interesting to note the difference between Roger's view (and that of some earlier interviewees like Holly) that the US had the means and power to win (but lacked commitment), and the conclusion by Carla that there was nothing else that could have been done to win the war ("no matter how good their intentions.")

As to why the US lost the war, Julian articulated a combination of factors (a number of which are among the common themes listed above:) the inherent injustice of the cause, the skill and determination of the Vietnamese militarily, the antiwar opposition in the US and critical media coverage, race and class issues in the war, the lack of international support for the US policy, and ultimately the increasing questioning of the war by middle America.

Q: "And why do you think the US didn't win the war in Vietnam?"

Julian:

I think there were a lot of issues; but I think that it was such **an unjust war**, and I think the common people of Vietnam weren't going to be taken over. The French were there before us, and I think the people there were prepared, I think there was a lot of support to resist, there was **incredible resistance**. They were much wiser fighters in the jungle, and had much more skilled military leadership than we ever gave them credit for.

I also think there was a lot of momentum in this country in **opposition to the war**, that brought about such a change in the national perspective.... I think there were changes internally in this country that allowed **the media** to really give a more honest account, which it didn't do for many years. I think it stimulated enough interest in this country among the citizens, enough young people resisted, enough young people influenced their parents, that it influenced the whole country -- there were **multi-generations that started critically asking questions** and analyzing what was being said to them -- that never had happened before. I don't think people ever questioned the government in the past. In the past, wars seemed appropriate -- You're fighting against Hitler, you're fighting against the Japanese who bombed Pearl Harbor; but in this case we were going to a country that had never done anything to provoke us.... So, **people started challenging the government**, which they had not done before.... Even someone like my mother, who never would have thought it was okay to challenge our government, was concerned when she saw news accounts; and she didn't just say "oh, those crazy kids." **She didn't just blindly support the country**. She's an immigrant, so anything the US did was right, before that time -- but at that point she **started questioning the US**, that they **didn't always tell the truth**.

Julian's interpretation of growing opposition and questioning of the government is interesting in suggesting the process of diffusion or dissemination from young people like himself to their parents, to mainstream Americans "like my mother." Julian's account seems a good example of the point made in chapter two about processes of family socialization and cultural mediation being multi-directional; children are influenced by their parents, and parents are influenced by their children. We examine these dynamics in more depth in chapter six.

Julian's son David gives his own framing of the US loss, with a few comments strikingly similar to his father's, particularly about people questioning the government in ways they hadn't before, and people learning to move beyond "blind trust."

Q: "And in your opinion, why did the US lose the war in Vietnam?"

David:

There was poor strategic planning from military leaders, and also when there's **no set goal**, there's no real reason for fighting. The US soldiers who were over there had no vision of what they were fighting for, and **a lack of motivation....** I think the war polarized the US more. In some ways, people started questioning authority a lot more, and **values**, in terms of where the government was spending their money, and **questioning the government** in ways that we hadn't before -- making it a little bit more accountable. I think it was an important step in our history. It's necessary to have your government accountable to the people. They shouldn't be able to just flippantly make decisions like that, going to war, without the public's input. I think it was pretty much an economic decision and people resisted that. I think in the past there was just **blind trust, blind faith** -- there was more faith in the politicians making decisions. I think for a lot of people the war changed that. **That's positive....** I think the government was fairly misguided during Vietnam.... From my understanding, Vietnam was the first war that was really covered on a live scale by **the news media**. There was television cameras there filming every day. And in some ways that probably led to the public's discontent -- they were finally aware of **what was truly happening**. That was positive; you're informing your public about what's happening and that's important.

David's account seems to fit with several points suggested in chapter two: in his view, before Vietnam the public tended to have blind trust and faith in the government and the conduct of foreign policy; but the conduct of the war, and the public becoming "finally aware of what was truly happening" (with the aid of the media) created "public discontent" and polarization. I.e. many people began to question the (hegemonic) government representations and actual practices of the war -- as David says, "questioning authority" and "values", meaning government authority and values. The statement about questioning government "values" necessarily implies that the values are being questioned *in terms of, or in relation to* a different set of values, i.e. one's own values, or possibly one's perception of "American" or "our values" -- and deciding to make the government "more accountable to the people" -- which David describes as an important step in our history.

Victor is a 71-year-old army veteran and father of Tamara, 26. Like the other subjects in this section, Victor speaks to several of the common themes from this study on why the US lost the war, including mishandling ("supporting a dictatorship and calling it a democracy", and a related allusion to the corruption 'in country', "equipment disappearing", etc); and the resistance, determination and resourcefulness of the Vietnamese.

Q: "What do you think were the lessons of the war for the US?"

Victor:

That's a tough one. I don't ever want my son to do anything like that, I know that. We were a lot more committed to that than maybe we are to our present-day problems. The lessons maybe are that we shouldn't be volunteering our help to these people who are maybe not that anxious to receive it. **We shouldn't be supporting a dictatorship and calling it a democracy.** ...And we should never under-estimate any people, no matter how small their numbers. I mean, to me, those people showed **remarkable stamina, and remarkable resistance, and they just never gave up.** They were **fighting for a belief**, and maybe our belief was deluded -- **democracy** didn't seem so important when actually they had a dictatorship, and so much money was changing hands, and equipment was disappearing. To follow money with troops is not something good -- just because we have money invested we shouldn't start sending our own sons to do battle.

And the other thing is that for thousands of years these countries were always fighting, it's maybe part of their heritage; they've always been in conflict. There are Vietnamese I know, they found a way to come here and make themselves very successful, and I have friends who live on the street and say "they're taking our jobs," but I say "no, they're not, **they're very resourceful people.**"

Victor's comment on supporting dictatorship and calling it democracy is another core values reference. He suggests that perhaps this was deluded and/or misconceived; i.e. not what we were really doing, or what was really happening; but his view also suggests, again, that "we" (presumably, in this context, the government or decision-makers) perceived the need to legitimate the policy, the decision to get (more) involved in Vietnam, in terms of supporting "democracy."

Victor's comments, cast as reasons the US lost and as lessons, make a good segue into the next section on the lessons and legacy of the war and its impact on US political culture.

Lessons and Legacies of Vietnam on American Political Culture

All of the subjects in this study were asked what they thought were the lessons and/or the legacies of the Vietnam war for the United States.

Though there were a wide range of specific framings on this question, all but a few of the subjects, both parents and children, characterized Vietnam in various ways as still overall quite important, both for their generation (as we see in the next chapter), and for American culture, thinking and history more broadly.

As suggested in chapter two, a central argument of this study is that there is considerable evidence that hegemonic elite narratives of the Vietnam war were delegitimated, and efforts to re-assert a consensus view on Vietnam in American political culture have been largely unsuccessful in significant ways. I believe much of the material in this section is supportive of this view. Ordinary Americans, young and old, view the Vietnam war in significantly negative ways (which is also shown in public opinion data.) Few in this study seem to have "bought the government propaganda" on the war. Many argue in a host of ways that the Vietnam experience continues to have lasting and important effects on US attitudes, beliefs and political culture.

All but a few of the subjects in this study criticize the US government. They question, doubt, and/or reject hegemonic ("government" or "official") frames of the war, US purposes, motives and conduct. A large number of subjects framed the Vietnam impact in

terms of contributing to skepticism and distrust toward the government, and politics more generally; and many say that they believe this continues into the present.

In speaking of lessons of the Vietnam war, about three-quarters of the interviewees, parents and children alike, in a rich variety of ways, explicitly expressed some form of distrust frame toward the government, and the importance of challenging and questioning the government. Participants articulated forms of distrust of the government with things like "the government are a bunch of crooks", "the government is evil", "I have lasting distrust" of the government, the government "lies", are "liars", and "I learned to be anti-government." The remaining quarter didn't specifically speak to this issue, or not clearly -- but in no cases did any participants explicitly express that they *do* trust government. In other words, of all those who spoke to the issue, *all* expressed some form of distrust frame. However, about two-thirds of those who were explicitly anti-government were parents; that is, the parents were more likely to express explicit distrust-of-government frames. One interesting metaphor in relation to trust that is used over and over by respondents in the following section is the importance of not being "blind" to real government intentions, interests, actions, policies -- i.e. the importance of learning to see these "as they really are."

As noted earlier in this chapter, the majority of interviewees view the war as a mistake (about three-quarters, by one reading), and draw lessons on this basis. In other words, all but a few subjects criticize the government, even though a few still support the war.

Another shared theme as a lesson, cited by about two-thirds of respondents, is the importance of restraint, of the US recognizing limitations in our power and our actions, even

a sort of humility (e.g., in the framings of some subjects, that we're "mortal", "not gods", etc.) This theme appears consistent with the "prudent public" thesis summarized in chapter two (Jentleson 1992, 1998). As an interesting subset of the restraint theme, nearly half of respondents articulated some form of the notion of not going to war unless you're "fully committed", and if you do go, "then don't hold back." Some respondents are cited on the restraint theme here, and/or in the next section on the US role in the world today (Roger, for example, cites restraint as a key lesson of Vietnam, and return to it as a guide for foreign policy.)

Nearly half of the interviewees also discussed the importance of protest as another lesson or legacy of the war.

About a third of respondents also talked about the bad treatment of the Vietnam veterans as an important (and negative or shameful) legacy. These framings might be considered in relation to the now substantial literature on this issue; on the status and experiences of veterans, and on the ways in which struggles over representations of veterans and their "treatment" are also battles over the legacy of the war (Jeffords 1989; Turner 1996; Beattie 1998; Lembcke 1998).

Criticisms of the Government, Distrust and Skepticism.

Nancy's core views of the war itself are framed by trauma, distrust, jadedness, and a sense of profound loss. Nancy described herself as strongly opposed to the Vietnam War from early on, from "about 1963", even though she came from a largely military family.

When asked near the beginning of the interview what images she had of the Vietnam

War, she said, "My best friend coming back in a body bag." Her description of this experience is expressed with sadness, and a feeling of unreality and the bizarre; it gives a feel for her sense of the tragedy of the experience:

Nancy:

I remember hearing about Vietnam in high school; in about 10th grade. The guys started talking about "The Green Berets".... After we graduated, my best friends Joe and Brenda were engaged to get married. Joe went into the Marines, and went to Vietnam in 1966.... In the spring [1967] we got a call that Joe had been killed. His dad had been **very proud** of him going, and had erected this huge, fifteen foot flagpole, with this huge flag that you'd see every day. And the day he heard Joe had been killed, he ran out and ripped the flag down, tore this flagpole out of the ground, **in his grieving....**

At the funeral I fainted. Roy, my future husband, caught me; walked me down to the car. We had just met about three days before at Joe's house. He was my friend's brother's best friend. **All I remember is how bizarre it was...** After the funeral, we all drove back to Albuquerque [from Santa Fe]; and Brenda was chattering the whole way -- she had all these veils on -- and she just chattered about what a neat guy Roy was, and wouldn't I like to go on a date with him, and isn't this wonderful that we've finally met... It was so bizarre; I'm driving, and I'm like, "What is wrong with this picture?" It was like being in La-La land. **We were all like zombies....**

Nancy noted one result of the Vietnam experience as, "My distrust is very strong; and it's continued." She described herself as very distrusting of government, in particular: "You see it and it's all crooked. I'm real jaded." Nancy talks below about some of the origins of her strong distrust, expressed through the normative frame of shock at the atrocities being committed by the US in Vietnam ("that our guys were doing"), and her growing jadedness and disillusionment with American government. With a sense of growing bitterness, she describes the emerging realization that the government was lying, and that she even began to entertain the idea that Lyndon Johnson might have had a role in John F. Kennedy's assassination:

Nancy:

I worked at a radio station where they would hang onto some of the news, and it's like, "**what's really true?**", and then stuff would be recanted, one day after another. Or these terrible atrocities that our guys were doing, killing total villages and stuff, and it was like, "this is not what you do for the nobility of war." This is just killing for the sake of killing. This is **rape and rampage and pillage and plunder**, and the villages are so poor, what is there to plunder? It's like, this **does not make sense** -- what are we winning?.... I just see us out there killing just to annihilate people, and on top of that we are annihilating half of our core of young people.... I **guess I'm jaded and bitter** -- they weren't telling the truth, **they WEREN'T telling the truth**.... I think I really started questioning when Kennedy got shot. It was from the owner of the radio station where I worked that I first heard the inkling that maybe Johnson wanted to be president so badly that he commandeered Kennedy getting shot in Texas and blaming it on some guy and making it look like a communist attack.... I thought, this is so way out in left field, but coming from who it's coming from, he doesn't make stuff up. I think that's when I started to think, you know, not all presidents are on the up-and-up. Maybe this is a sleazy type thing.... What we held up as **being truthful, ethical and righteous**, and all that good stuff, really was **tarnished**.... You can go down with Kennedy, or with Johnson, or wait awhile and go down with Nixon, or then there will be Carter and Ford, and wait for Clinton -- there's a different scenario each time and who knows if what they're telling is the truth, because three years later it comes out in an expose that says, "guess what, **they were lying!** we knew it all the time."

Q: "Are those feelings still true for you today?"

Nancy:

That they're lying? Yes, very true, very true.... You see all this and you think, you know, "**I guess all of life is crooked**." It's not what you think; life isn't really what it seems to look like. So I guess, yea, **I'm real jaded**.... I think me and a lot of my friends felt that way. I think a lot of it stemmed from when Joe died, because our little "Happy Days and Fonzi" dream was over. The bubble got burst. It was like, this is real life, and it hurts. And **we got lied to**....

Nancy added that she thinks many of her friends share similar views, which she attributed largely to the Vietnam period:

Nancy:

I would say that most of my friends... are just as **jaded**. Some of them even called me a "Kennedy kid" as late as five years ago [when she was lobbying the state legislature on children's issues], like "haven't you learned yet that this is fake enthusiasm; it's not going to get you anywhere; it's a waste of time, why bother?" I

see less and less of my friends having their kids in scouting; less and less are into any religious organizations because it's like "In God we trust? I don't think so". Yea, **I think they're jaded.**

Although expressed more strongly and repeatedly than some of the others, Nancy's distrust of the government associated with the Vietnam war is fairly typical of many respondents in its form, i.e. that the government lied, mishandled the war and its conduct, and that the resulting distrust continues. Nancy's comments about US conduct not being ethical or righteous is another core values frame; its presupposes that US policy and conduct *ought to be* ethical and righteous -- i.e. the "practice versus principles" tension cited in chapter two.

Yolanda, 48, thinks that a "good" legacy of the war is that it has taught people to "question everything" (what in chapter two was characterized as "the hermeneutics of suspicion.")

Q: "During the sixties there was talk of a sixties generation, the baby boomers, and a generation gap with their parents' generation, and so on -- do you think there are certain things that sort of define or characterize your generation?"

Yolanda:

.... In the sixties and seventies we had the hippies, and they kinda said, "we ain't gonna listen to nobody, don't trust anybody over thirty, and **to hell with government**, and just let us live our lives." It was all **protest**. And I think a lot of the protest was a combination of fighting the establishment, whether it be parents, or your boss, or the government, and that **drew on the Vietnam war** -- it all fed off eachother -- which caused a lot of the internal strife and turmoil in this country. If the government would have gone ahead and either finished the war, or gotten the hell out of it, it would have stopped a lot of ill will and ill feelings. To this day you've got a **great deal of people that will question everything. Which is good.** That's very good. It keeps people on their toes.... **But today, nobody trusts anybody.** And it's very sad; it should not be that way. I don't think the government's left us a lot of options of trust. You know, they get their backs up against a wall, their shackles up, and they go "oh, well, you're questioning." **You're darn right we're questioning!** Because how many times do we get contradictory answers? They've earned that

stature -- big time.

Yolanda thinks it's sad that "nobody trusts anybody" anymore, which she seems to believe is also partially a legacy of the 1960s and Vietnam (and all the "turmoil.") But her attitude toward the government is vigilant and defiant; her message to the government, "you're darn right we're questioning!" Like David earlier, she sees the distrust and questioning as good/positive -- which the government has "earned."

Yolanda's son, Lawrence, 26, a recent navy veteran, also articulates interesting frames of distrust, government-blaming and "government-bashing", particularly in his experiences with Vietnam veterans. He suggests that during the war the government was using "a lot of propaganda" and "excuses" with the American people. He also discusses the divisiveness of the period (how it "divided the country"), and the contradiction between the government discourse of non-violence in the US and the violent policies in Vietnam:

Q: "What do you think about what happened during the war in this country, specifically what do you think about the antiwar movement, the protesters, and what do you think about the way the American government handled the war domestically?"

Lawrence:

I think the government was using **a lot of propaganda**, you know, that they were trying to say that we're there for a reason -- they kept trying to convince all the **protesters** that they were in Vietnam for a reason, and it seems like the more **excuses** they came up with, the worse our country was looking, in the eyes of the American people.

I think the protesters divided the country. It was almost like pitting brother against brother. You know, you have one brother over there fighting the war, and then you have another one over here saying "why are we there?", you know, "bring my brother back." And the other brother is over there trying to fight. It's like they have a conflict of interest. The one doesn't have a say-so; the government is **telling** them "you have to go over there and you have to fight and **you have to kill.**" But yet, over here, our government is telling our younger generation, you know, "**don't be**

violent, we can resolve this in a more humanistic manner", but yet over there they're telling everybody "the only way we can solve this is by killing." So they were contradicting themselves, in that manner, I think.

Like Yolanda, and some of the other respondents, Lawrence talks about the government "contradicting themselves." His description here also elicits the sense of the practice-versus-principles conflict discussed in chapter two: the US government was expousing non-violence to young people in America, and at the same time sending them to engage in massive violence in Vietnam.⁴

Despite his view that the protests divided the country, Lawrence approves of the protests, expressing the core democratic value that "the people need to be heard", and the belief that the protesters probably shortened the war:

Q: "And how do you, yourself, evaluate the protesters? Do you think that that was an appropriate thing to do, or not really?"

Lawrence:

Yea, I approve of the protests, I really do. I think that the people need to be heard, you know. If they didn't protest then I think we might have even stayed there longer. I think all the protest is what finally got a lot of our troops out of there. Our people were saying, "look, you need to get them out. If you don't get them out, there's going to be trouble at home, on the home front, not only over there."

Q: "Do you remember sort of how you learned about Vietnam; was it covered in school, was it covered in high school...?"

A: It was covered in high school a little bit. One of my teachers actually served in Vietnam, and he would go off on tangents just talking about how bloody it was, how he lost his friends. Basically all the people I've talked to that have been in Vietnam

4. It is interesting to note that this contradiction was perceived and challenged early in the war in the 1960s by various civil rights groups and leaders. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, for example, issued a position paper against the war in 1966, articulating and condemning precisely this problem (Albert and Albert 1984:117-118).

were **anti-government**, they **blame the government**, the people that I've spoken with.

Q: "And have you spoken with many people about it?"

A: It's a fairly large group of people. **They're anti-government because of the war.**

Q: "This group of people you're talking about, where have you come in contact with them, were they people you met through your family, or in the military, or...?"

Lawrence:

They were people I met in the military, and just some acquaintances -- you know, things come up. You know, if they're wearing like a military shirt or a jacket, then the military comes up, and if they say they served in the Vietnam war, then **they just government-bash.**

Q: "I know you're talking about different people, but if you had to generalize, I mean, what sorts of things do they say?"

A: They would say that basically the government, or the **politicians are just a bunch of crooks** that are out for themselves, and if **they** had children over there, you know, then they would probably have a different view, and they'd probably get them pulled out a lot sooner. They said that if they were a son of a politician or something there's no way that they would have been sent over. So, basically they were sending America's strongest and some of the brightest over there to die for **a senseless war.**

Lawrence's framing of Vietnam veteran views of the war and the government seems consistent with other studies, both empirical (Frey-Wouters and Laufer 1986) and interpretive (Turner 1996). I would characterize it not only as critical of the government, but also as a form of distrust frame. The distrust may be viewed as fairly deep in that it expresses a categorical position of government-bashing. The view that "politicians are just a bunch of crooks" seems to imply that crookedness is inherent to politics and that there is not much hope for change in this. Lawrence did not precisely specify how much of this framing he himself subscribes to, though the context of the rest of our interview suggested

that he is fairly skeptical, if not cynical, toward the government.

Rachel, 43, mother of Holly, an 18-year-old daughter, discusses a process of disenchantment with the war, of learning to question and distrust the government, of struggling with her own frame definition (since her father was a military veteran) and arriving at a position of rejecting government representations of the war. Like David and Yolanda, Rachel normatively frames the attitude of distrust as a good thing, though she articulates what she sees as a downside, which is the loss of social solidarity in America, a "breakdown" of faith and care and pride in being connected to one another, and a sense of being "a family."

Q: "What sorts of images come to your mind when you think of the Vietnam war?"

Rachel:

As a child I can still remember the nightly news reels, you know, of the terrible slaughter, on both sides, and **a feeling that that was wrong**, that there was no right and wrong. I never had a sense that we were on some noble mission, and it just seemed to get worse and worse the older I got and the more aware I was of the carnage that was going on.... I remember the daily visual assault of seeing people being killed and maimed. I have images of the protests here. And I remember it being **fairly confusing** for awhile as an adolescent, because my father was a military veteran and had been wounded in World War II -- I was certainly raised with a respect for our country and for people who served in the military. I think it took a long time for me to come to the point where I realized that we were dealing with different wars and different motivations. I guess I've finally come to live with it.

One of the things I remember the most is when Nixon was president, and I remember having **no faith and confidence** in him, and his comments and speeches about the war. I can remember feeling **absolute distrust**, and that we were totally being conned. I remember that being a **disappointed feeling**.

There is a sense of disillusionment in this passage, as discussed in chapter two. Rachel speaks of the confusion of seeing "the terrible slaughter" of the Vietnam war while having

been raised with respect "for our country" and "people who served in the military." It was a process over time through which she realized Vietnam was a "different war", that she felt absolute distrust with President Nixon, and that that was "a disappointed feeling."

Q: "What do you think were the lessons of the Vietnam war for the US?"

Rachel:

As a young person at that time I think it made me a **great questioner**. I think it taught me to look at all sides of things and to not accept things at face value. I would not go so far as to say that I feel negative of our government, but I *question* our government. I feel like that's a healthy thing to do, because I realize that as in any other kind of endeavor, it's human beings, and human beings have many motivations for doing things. And I think in any type of our intervention in a foreign country I am **very suspicious** usually. Because it seems to me that often times our official reasons and the underlying reasons are very different. And to that end I think I am **not probably just a faithful blind follower** of the government and political line; I do question, and I don't know if I had not experienced that in adolescence I don't know if I would be that way now. And I do think that Vietnam has made our country, and politicians, **more careful**. I don't know if it's made them any wiser, but I think they are more careful, about at least the perception of what they're doing to the American people. Not that we have not done things that aren't wonderful in that time, but I think that it was a turning point in that what they do was going to be **questioned and looked at**, and that **their word was not God's**. So I think probably it had **enormous influence on the future**. And I think that's a **positive change** -- at great cost....

From what I remember as a small child, I remember if the president came on and made a speech, it seemed to me anyway, at that point, that everyone believed it, and **there was no questioning** and that's the way it was. I don't see that anymore; I think in general people do a lot more thinking on their own, and analyze what's being told to them. I think there is **much more skepticism now than before the Vietnam war**. I think that's a **good thing**.

Q: "What lasting effects do you see in the Vietnam war for your generation?"

Rachel:

I think one of the saddest things is that **I don't think we view ourselves as much as a group anymore**, as a country. I think you can be loyal to the United States, but I'm not sure that there's the same sense of what it means to be an American anymore. I think that the **Vietnam war** forced us to look at ourselves in a **negative light** somewhat and maybe, you know, **I don't think we've recovered from that**. As a child I remember believing that **Americans were the best**, we were wonderful, we didn't do wrong things. We went about the world solving all the problems and taking

care of everything. I don't feel that anymore, and **I don't sense that in our country anymore.** And I don't sense that the world thinks that of us either, and I truly as a young child believed that, I believed that to be American was just the best thing you could be.

Rachel's description of a loss of innocence here resonates with much of the social-historical literature of youth in the 1960s (Gitlin 1993; Fraser 1988), of disillusionment and the contradiction between learned American principles and realization of American practice (Huntington 1981, cf. the discussion in chapter two). Rachel seems to believe that that sense of disillusionment has largely been taken on by generation X, the general trend of which she normatively frames as "bad for us as a country":

Q: "And are you saying that you generalize that change, out there in our society, and among young people too?"

Rachel:

I think so. I do. And I think so **for young people too**, absolutely. And I think that that leads to that feeling of self-importance, of focusing on me, because of, you know, "I don't feel good as being part of this big group," and there's no feeling of, you know, the country as a family, as a group that's pulling together, and I think that goes to our communities, and our schools, and I think it's just a breakdown of all of that. Because we don't have care and pride in each other and tolerance for each other and diversity, then it's hard to be part of the whole.**I think that's bad for us as a country.** I don't think that it would be good to go back to not questioning; I don't think that it would be good to go back to being sheep being led, I don't mean that. But I think that, as in a family, people can be allowed to have different points of view, and be accepted, to be celebrated, to have their views and their cultures and their diversities celebrated and encouraged, and that they can all work together for society's good. I truly believe that. I don't think that we have to remain separate. I think that there's got to be some way back to **not blindly being led**, but to **some common goals** and some common objectives, which I think is what makes families work well, and I think that that's the same for communities, and schools, and our country.

For Rachel, the legacy of Vietnam and the challenge facing America seems to be how to maintain a critical, questioning, vigilant attitude toward the government ("a good thing"),

while not becoming disengaged, self-absorbed and socially fragmented. Her framing poses the question of how to cultivate a skeptical yet socially and civically engaged attitude which seeks common ground and connectedness while valuing diversity. These fundamental aporias seem to coincide strongly with many of the central issues in much of the scholarly work of recent years on citizenship, civil society and the public sphere, referred to in the Introduction and chapter two (Fukuyama 1999; Putnam 1995; Bellah et al. 1992; etc.) Her comment about "not blindly being led" echoes similar views above by Julian and David.

Julian, too, articulated a strong distrust frame, not only for himself, but for ordinary citizens. As was shown earlier, in his view increasing numbers of Americans began critically questioning their government during the war; there was a shift in attitudes among many people from "blind" support and trust to a greater willingness to question. There was a concomitant expansion of more diverse and more critical information about the war and US policy. When I asked Julian what he thinks the lessons or legacy of the war are for the US today, he suggested that there is "incredible distrust" in the current period, but also that people have become dissociated and disengaged from politics:

Julian:

Today there's still **questioning and challenging**, but politics have gotten such that you see such little difference between Republicans and Democrats and politics is so dominated by big business and lobbyists and how they raise funds -- it's hard to get ten percent of the people out to vote; people just don't think there are good choices. There's a real dissociation of people today from politics. There's an **incredible distrust of politics today**, no matter what side of the political spectrum you're on, but people aren't engaged. And people don't like government at all levels. People don't engage because they don't see choices for themselves.... I think the **distrust has persisted**, but I think the **engagement or involvement has not**... You had all this organized opposition to the war, you had the government putting out lies, you had the

CIA and the FBI investigating people, and undermining other countries. All this stuff was coming out.... We all started realizing that what the government was doing wasn't okay.

As for the lessons of the war, Julian's views of the government and of the primacy of economic interests haven't changed much. He believes that the "same mistakes" are still being made, that distrust is still strong, and that big money still controls and corrupts politics.

Q: "What do you think are the lessons of the war for US?:"

Julian:

It's very complicated. I don't know if we've learned the lessons, because I think **we're still making the same mistakes**. I think our corporations are going into countries and oppressing people. It's not the same form of colonialism, but you get cheap labor, you have poor working conditions -- I think that's going on still. **I don't think we're as quick to go to war, yet we go to war, all the time**, whether it's in the Gulf area -- now it's around oil. Before it was around rubber or around fruit -- United Fruit Company in Central America, **protecting their interests**. There are all kinds of things still going on. So, **I don't think it's changed**. It's still very dependent on a multi-national corporate structure. It's **still dishonest politics....** The fact that it's dependent on fund-raising, that it's controlled by big money, doesn't make it run as a democracy. Some of the positive is that there's a more open media than there was before; it's **still owned by people with wealth...** I don't think you get the truth; you get it the way the sponsors want it to be presented. I think people who buy ads control what's said.... I think that's still going on; and yet I hope that there's more information in people's hands. I think a lot of the same stuff is going on. I think the **drive for money** still controls a lot of decisions, **as opposed to doing what's right**.

Though Julian doesn't explicitly articulate "what's right", his statement can be interpreted as a core values frame, in the context of his other comments about democracy and justice. As with Nancy earlier, his framing implies that US policy and conduct *ought* to be governed by values like democracy and justice and "doing what's right."

Maria, 21, draws the lesson from the Vietnam experience that "it's not always a good thing to trust your government" and that "blind patriotism is the scariest thing." She asserts

the categorical importance of needing to "question even our most valued things, because if we don't, then something like Vietnam will happen."

Q: "What do you think are the lessons of the Vietnam war for the US?"

Maria:

The one major one is that it's not any outside country's business to get involved in a civil war, and it can't really be won that way. And that it's **not always a good thing to trust your government** to do the right thing. And I think there is a very important place that like patriotism and pride in your country hold, I think it's very useful, but I think the way that it's applied most often is in a way that says "I **don't need to think**, I can just rely on my country to do it, because it's the best," and that's just not the case. I think just **blind patriotism is the scariest thing**. It reminds me of, like, Hitler's followers, you know, because it's unquestioning. I think we have to remember that no matter what it is, even if it's the Christian church, we need to **question even our most valued things**, because if we don't, then **something like Vietnam will happen**. And I think that's a result of not questioning for a certain amount of time, until it was just too hard to ignore.

Like Julian, Maria indicates that governments *ought* "to do the right thing", but that since they often don't, they have to be watched and questioned -- Maria's sentiment evokes the famous maxim of the abolitionist Wendell Phillips: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Lessons of Restraint, Limitations and Humility.

Bruce, 49, like so many others, believes that the Vietnam war has taught "distrust in the government." But he also recognizes limits on American power (that "we're mortal and death can come pretty easily") and that the Vietnam experience has engendered some restraint in relation to "the government thinking they know when it's right to intervene in other countries", and perhaps letting "people do their own thing."

Q: "What lasting effects, if any, do you think the Vietnam war had on your generation?"

Bruce:

I think it brought **distrust in the government, in general**, on decisions in worldly affairs, especially in the area of the government thinking that they know when it's right to intervene in other countries. And that probably spilled over into all other aspects. I mean, the **federal government made a big mistake**; I think that's understood by most people, and probably the authority of the federal government lost a lot of respect.... And actually war, and death -- World War I, World War II, the Civil War, the Revolutionary War in the US -- they all had the same lessons of "**God, we're mortal**, and death can come pretty easily." And the thing with **Vietnam** was here we were interfering with some other country, and maybe we ought to **let people do their own thing over there. That has shaped my opinion.**

For Bruce, the war brought "distrust" in the government regarding worldly affairs, but also probably "spilled over into all other aspects." This is consistent with the general de-legitimation argument presented in chapter two, and the belief that the Vietnam experience has had a more general impact on the "political culture debates" of recent years over trust, civic engagement and the like. In Bruce's view, "most people" understand the government made "a big mistake" in Vietnam, and lost a lot of respect.

Nancy, 49, sees the lessons of the Vietnam experience in terms of restraint and humility, perhaps less arrogance; that we should "know our place", are not "God", don't "own the world", and aren't "better than everybody else." And she does not see these things as incompatible with being an American; she is "patriotic" and has "pride for my country."

Q: "What do you think are the lessons or legacy of the Vietnam war for the US; what lessons do you think we've learned, or should have learned?"

Nancy:

Know our place. Is this our place? Are we supposed to be over there? Who appointed us king of the mountain? **When did God die and appoint us God**, and we could go over and do what we want?.... I'm not sure that we're not playing Napoleon. We're not taking over these countries, but **we're imposing our will on all these countries**, and if they don't follow our will we impose sanctions on them;

we make it economically detrimental if they don't abide by what we want...

I'm still an American, I'm patriotic.... I can remember Vietnam and still have feelings of pride for my country, but I don't want my kids going down the street, or across town, or across the ocean being rude because they are "**number one**", because they think "We are Americans, therefore you will bow, and you will treat us with a special treatment because we're the saviors of this country, we're the **saviors of the world**" -- I don't buy that! **They don't own the world**, and they can't claim that, and we don't have any right to claim that, that's not our place. And I think our country practices that, we preach it, we allude to it, **we think we're better than everybody else.**

The next three subjects in this section, Roger, Karl and Walt, are all Vietnam veterans and all articulate different forms of the restraint lesson. Roger frames his views both normatively and analytically (both what the US shouldn't do, as well as what didn't work in Vietnam and why), whereas Karl frames the lesson analytically as an observation on the kinds of wars Americans will and won't support. Walt speaks of the legacy of struggle for veterans, and draws the lessons of Vietnam in terms of restraints on American dreams and ideals.

Similarly to Nancy's sentiment above, Roger believes that a lesson of the war is that we shouldn't try to police the world and impose "what WE think is correct." The US "can't be everybody's big brother." Roger's lesson, in short, seems to be that the US had too much *hubris* in Vietnam, which led to "playing big brother", and "a lot of dumb-ass" and "counter-productive" things.

Q: "What do you think are the lessons of the Vietnam war for the US; what do you hope or think we should have learned, as a country?"

Roger:

Well, I would hope, and I mean this sincerely, that you don't get yourself into

situations for the wrong reasons: playing big brother, **policeman to the world**, if you will, that we're going to be the last bastion of democracy, and we're going to make sure that another country has **what WE think is correct**. It's their country. They should be able to run it. We should probably have a moral obligation in certain instances to step in, if things are being done that are not humanitarian, and some things like that.... But, I would **hope that we've learned our lesson that you can't be everybody's big brother**, and the days of Teddy Roosevelt, "speak softly and carry a big stick", don't necessarily hold fast.

You know, number one, in hindsight, we had **no business being there**. Secondly, we certainly need to know now that if we see something start to go South on us, we need to get the heck out.We got into **a lot of dumb-ass things over there**; the Phoenix program and some of that nonsense. It was almost like you **turned the loonies loose** in the toy store for awhile, and by the time people realized that there were things going on that were counter-productive, we'd gone down all these paths. There was **no continuity**; there was **no consensus**; and the end result demonstrates all of that just all too clearly.

Karl, too, identifies a certain sort of restraint from the war specifically in the area of foreign policy. When asked what he thought were the lessons of Vietnam for the US, Karl drew an interesting connection between our "fast food" culture and the extension of this mind-set in the realm of foreign policy -- i.e. Americans expect "fast wars." He believes that Americans like to win; they want clear, successful results, and they want them quickly.

Karl:

The first lesson, which I think we have learned for the most part, is that **you have to have a goal**. The idea of simply holding is not a goal. If you're going to expect the American public to back something, you have to give them **results**, and you have to give them results in a reasonably **quick amount of time**. That's a result of **our society and our culture**. If we have **fast food**, we ought to have **fast wars**. **We like to win**. We have to go in to something and accomplish it, in a way that we can demonstrate that we won.

Fewer Dreams, Lowered Ideals, and Bad Treatment of Veterans.

Walt, 51, a Vietnam veteran, talks about the continuing struggle of Vietnam veterans, and sees the legacy of the Vietnam war for America as a diminution of dreams and

aspirations and "our ideals." Although the question was asked in relation to his generation, Walt generalizes his answer to the "whole nation." The themes of loss of hope (and loss of unity) are taken up again in more depth in the next chapter on generational effects.

Q: "What lasting effects do you think the Vietnam experience had more generally on your generation?"

Walt:

I know that the veterans that I talk to, that I'm in this program with, **we're still all struggling with trying to sort it out**, we're struggling with feelings that we haven't allowed ourselves to feel, or we've numbed, through drinking or whatever.... These veterans are my only friends, and they're still struggling with what the lasting effects are. The sadness is the toll that it took on people's emotions. ...But, in hindsight, I think maybe **we don't dream as much**, maybe **this whole nation doesn't dream as much** about what could be. We don't have as many aspirations, which maybe made America great, the aspirations we had.... Maybe our ideals are different now, maybe it **lowered our ideals**, maybe it lowered our expectations of what we expect of ourselves **as a country**, and **what we expect of our leaders**.

For Walt, the US after Vietnam has perhaps lost some of its dreams, belief in itself and its ideals (or core values.) In relation to the scheme suggested in chapter two, Walt's position raises the possibility not only that the hegemonic national narrative was ruptured by the war, but that perhaps the core values and ideals themselves have lost some of their luster. One gets not so much a sense of skepticism or cynicism or distrust from Walt, as a feeling of loss of hope or optimism, loss of belief in the American "dream" or promise, a "disenchantment" of the American myth.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, one legacy of the war that about a third of respondents talked about was the bad treatment of Vietnam veterans. Carla, 26, described the treatment of returning veterans as "awful" and argued that, whatever one thinks of the

war, the veterans deserve respect for "fighting for our country."

Q: "You mentioned a little while ago that one of the images you have is of soldiers or veterans coming home and not getting a good welcome; what do you think about that?"

Carla:

I think it was awful. Because, I think whether you agree with it or not, here are these people, men and women (who were nurses and so on and so forth) who are **sacrificing** who knows what -- my dad sacrificed college to go -- they put their lives in danger to represent the United States, and they were fighting for our country, and so I think that **deserves respect** whether you agree with the actual cause or not. And so when somebody has put their life in danger for you I think you should show them some sort of appreciation. The fact that **these men came home**, in my understanding, **to nothing**, I don't agree with that.

This issue is addressed again in the chapter on family socialization in the section on Steve and Karl, where Steve describes the very difficult, painful experience of his father, Karl, when he returned home from the war.

The US Role in World Today: Opinions on Foreign Policy

All of the participants in this study were asked what they think should be the US role in the world today in broad terms, broad contours. This part of the interviews was intended to get a picture of views and attitudes about the US role, what respondents believe the role ought to be, what kinds of criteria or values or guidelines should guide our actions and policies. This section was not intended to test foreign affairs expertise, or to work through detailed information, to probe all conceivable scenarios, or to ask about a laundry list of potential "hot spots".

Thus, respondents were asked what they thought the US role should be, both military and non-military, the rules or factors that should determine these, and they were asked about

some examples (like Bosnia, Somalia, or the Gulf war) or examples or cases that they raised or alluded to.

Overall the findings in this section seem consistent with a number of points on foreign policy summarized in chapter two: 1) the findings of Ole Holsti (1996) and Eugene Wittkopf (1996) and others that most Americans favor an active, engaged, humanitarian foreign policy; and 2) Bruce Jentleson's and Rebecca Britton's (1998) "pretty prudent public" thesis -- i.e. "prudent" meaning using good judgment and caution, and "neither trigger happy, nor gun shy." Consistent with Jentleson and Britton, my findings suggest that support is highest for "humanitarian intervention", less so for action to coerce "foreign policy restraint", and least for "internal political change" (e.g., as summarized below, many subjects were against intervening in "civil wars", but many supported various action or intervention for human rights.) Consistent with the post-Vietnam context, most people in this study are discriminating, cautious, prudent, but not isolationist.

My findings generally seem to favor the revisionist view of the American public as rational, coherent and sensible (Page and Shapiro 1992) over the traditionalist Almond-Lippmann view of the public as irrational, moody, and/or prone to favoring inaction and then overreaction (Knopf 1998). With a few notable exceptions (discussed below), I believe the participants in this study display views that are "pretty prudent", reasonable, coherent and sensible.

Virtually all (33) of the respondents in this study said that the US should play a humanitarian role (including many who viewed this as a justification for military action), should "help" and/or "share" with other nations, and/or give foreign aid. However, of these,

nine subjects pointed out that the US should give "its own problems" priority, and "help others" as a lower priority. "Humanitarianism" and "Helping" would seem to fit well with the political-cultural "ethic of care" articulated by Joan Tronto and others discussed in chapter two (Tronto 1993). Though "humanitarianism" or "helping" (altruism) are not among the American core values argued by Lipset and Huntington (chapter two), the argument can be made that they are consistent with, or closely related to, the core value of "equality" or egalitarianism. I won't attempt to fully develop this argument (with all the nuanced debate between equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome, etc), but it bears consideration -- if one has a core commitment to equality and a global or internationalist "worldview" (that "we" are all part of a global community, "global village", etc), then some commitment to "trying to help others", or at least trying to improve their conditions for "helping themselves" (equality of opportunity) would seem to follow.

About three-quarters of the sample expressed that the US should be active, and/or "a leader", and/or "a good example" in world affairs. This is consistent with the 60-70% of the public in recent years favoring an "active role" in world affairs (Holsti 1996:42). Relatedly, half said the US should work cooperatively with other nations and/or the United Nations.

Slightly more than half of the participants stated that US military action is justified to stop aggression and/or to stop weapons of mass destruction. About a quarter identified peace-keeping as a justification for military action. Interestingly, also only about a quarter identified defense of the US itself as grounds for military action, but I strongly suspect that this is the one justification that is assumed and taken for granted, i.e. "goes without saying."

Half of the respondents in the study echoed the "restraint" theme from the previous

section of this chapter (commonly cited also as a Vietnam lesson), saying that US power is limited, and things like "we can't enforce our way", and "shouldn't go where we're not wanted."

Finally, about a third of the sample identified US "economic interests" and "trade" as key concerns of US foreign policy.

Even more so than in the earlier sections, the quotations on foreign policy from each respondent tend to jump around and often touch on many of the themes above in fairly dense passages, which makes separating or classifying them by discrete theme somewhat difficult. So, for the sake of presentation I have tried to group them *roughly* according to which themes are *most* prominent in any particular passage, explicitly recognizing (as readers will note) that references are often made to numerous themes.

All of the respondents cited in this section identify certain conditions under which US military action is/may be justified; in this sense, none of them are pure or strict isolationist (or pacifist). However they vary in degrees of military action they would support; generally moving from subjects with more restrictive views of intervention to subjects with less restrictive views of intervention later in the section.

The US Role: Active. Cooperative. Humanitarian. Helping.

Roger is a perfect example of the caveat just made; he covers a large number of themes above, in dense, thoughtful discourse, and often moves back and forth, 'covering a lot of the bases.' For this reason, I believe his responses are particularly interesting and rich for what they illuminate on the important issues of an active, prudent US foreign policy and

skeptical political culture.

Q: "What do you think should be the US role in the world today? For example, do you think US military involvement is sometimes justified, and, if so, under what conditions?"

A: I think certainly US military involvement is justified, number one, in **defense of the shores of this country**. It also is justified in defense of the citizens of this country, wherever they may be. To my mind, it is justified in certain other instances; i.e. I think the Gulf war situation is another case where I think the US's involvement was certainly justified. We probably have a role to play with the situation in Bosnia. Unfortunately that's the kind of role that falls to us.... I say that, as long as the role we play is the one that it is now, which is a **peace-keeping situation**, and seems to be working as such; as, if you will, the benevolent magistrate. I'm not sure that I'd feel it's justified if all of a sudden it escalates, and becomes obvious that it's going to take a toll in American lives. Then it goes back to, it's a **civil war** and it's a much longer, on-going one than we'll ever understand, and we probably don't belong in the middle of it.

Roger also indicated that in a situation like Somalia "something needed to be done", but with allies like Canada and Britain.

Q: "So, whether it's say through something like the UN, or NATO perhaps, or some different formation, you think perhaps in general, in international crisis situations, we should try to get our other allies involved?"

A: Absolutely. **We cannot stand alone out there**; you don't want to. You've got to have unity. You know, the coalition is what made the Gulf situation work -- it was a classic case of getting everybody together, forming a coalition, for a specific purpose, with specific goals, for a specific period of time; and it worked very, very nicely. When you don't have those sorts of things, then you put yourself at risk of the on-going, bottomless pit kind of situation -- how far do we go, and when do we stop, and my gosh we're in so far now, how do we get out?...

I guess what I'm saying is I think probably **we should become a more active part**, and demand more active participation by **our allies**, and **not try to be**, we cannot be, nor should we even want to be, **the world's watchdog**.

Roger normatively frames several of the themes discussed at the beginning of this section:

that the US should be active and involved in world affairs, in coalitions/alliances, perhaps

for peace-keeping, but not get involved in civil wars, and not try to be the "world's watchdog." Below he emphasizes that the US can't be isolationist in today's world.

Q: "You mentioned earlier the term 'isolationism' with Teddy Roosevelt, it sounds to me like you're saying we should be active in world affairs, but with other parties involved...?"

A: Yes, I think you have to be. I don't think you can be active economically and socially and culturally without understanding that you're going to have to be **active in all aspects**; I think that comes with it. I think it's a mistake; I think the world we live in is too open, the communication, the inter-relations are such that **you can't be an isolationist and survive**. So, you're forced to be out there in the market, if you will. So you need to be in it as strongly and as smartly as you know how.

Roger extends his framing below, from military policies, to foreign policy more broadly. He draws a distinction between "the haves and the have-nots" of the world, and articulates a strong frame of the US having "a responsibility" to help the less fortunate of the world, an obligation to do "some humanitarian things."

Q: "We've talked about the military side. Are there other things that the US should do, other forms of action or aid that you think are also important, foreign aid, etc?"

A: I think it comes more as a **sense of responsibility**, more of a sense of the **haves and the have-nots**. We certainly are fortunate in this country to be a have, by any standard. I think some obligation comes with that. Hopefully you don't attempt to be all things to all people, because you can't be, but I think that if we're going to prosper economically in the world market, that the responsibilities come with **doing some humanitarian things**. I would hope not only humanitarian, but cultural things, and some other things.... Humanitarian should include food, medical, expertise, things like the Peace Corps, which certainly serves some real needs.

Q: "So, it sounds like you're saying that you think, beyond sort of our own interests, you think we have some obligation in a way, as a rich country, as a powerful country, to provide perhaps some leadership, or to give to the less fortunate...?"

A: Yes. Yes I do. **I think we owe it to share some of the fortune that we have.** I

think we certainly should make our expertise available, I'm not saying we should force it on anyone, but it should be there and should be available; at a nominal price -- we shouldn't be always or necessarily ever looking for something back; it ought to be there in the sense that if we do it, **the good it does will give us back what we're really looking for. I think there's some validity to that. So, yes I do, I think **we have an obligation to do some things.****

As discussed in the introduction to this section, Roger's normative framings would seem to fit solidly within an ethos of humanitarianism linked with the core value of egalitarianism. A comment like "we owe it to share some of the fortune that we have" because of "the good that it does" seems to be arguably a form of egalitarianism, as well as "an ethic of care" (Tronto 1993).

Maria, like Roger, believes the US has a "responsibility within the world system" to "provide for other areas of the world" and "aid people that need it." But at the same time, the US should not play "Big Brother" and should respect the "rights" and "freedoms" of other nations.

Q: "What do you think is the US role in the world today, particularly in terms of foreign policy, and as a second part of the question, are there conditions under which US military action is necessary or justified, and if so, what are those?"

Maria:

Well our country has the most natural resources still, even though we exploit them to the highest degree, we still have the most of any country I think, and very fertile land that's capable of growing a lot of food -- and I think **our responsibility within the world system** is that we would be the most exemplary land stewards and **provide for other areas of the world** that don't have the resources to create food and shelter for themselves. And I think that our country is so big and so fertile that we have more than enough room to grow more than we need, and so I think we should be neutral, for one, in terms of like wars, and the only time that it would be necessary for us to **intervene** would be when there was a large population of **starving people,**

or huge illness -- like, use our resources that we have, like, so much more than any other group of people in the world, use those to provide for, not only for our citizens, which we're not even doing yet, but **aid people that need it.**

But that's a **really idealistic view; I don't know if that's really possible.** But if we believe we're creating a more perfect union by doing these things, then I think that we should believe that **the rights that we have** in this country, that it would be desirable to have those rights protected in other countries as well... So I think that's one role we need to play in the world system, is **not as Big Brother** saying what you can and can't do. Because we should **respect other nations** with the same respect we respect ourselves with, and not infringe on their freedom of religion or speech or right to assemble.

Q: "Given that view, when do you think US military action is justified? You said it's not justified to play Big Brother, but may be for starvation or large-scale suffering -- so maybe we can take a few concrete examples, like perhaps Somalia or Bosnia...?"

A: My impression of Bosnia is that that's a **civil war**, so I would say "no". And in Somalia I would say "yes", but it doesn't need to be military; I'm saying just **aid is necessary**, not military action. I think the only time that we're at all justified in military action is when someone is trying to do **military action on our country**, otherwise I don't think it's really very necessary.

Maria's framings seem to reveal at least some ambiguity or uncertainty about when US military action may be justified. She is clear that the US should be active, humanitarian and "helping", and she states that military action is justified if the US is being attacked militarily, but the question of "humanitarian interventions" is less clear. She says at first that in wars the US should remain neutral, *except* for cases of large-scale starvation or huge illness; but she modifies in the follow-up comment that even in such cases (e.g. Somalia), that "aid is necessary, [but] not military action."

The US Role: Humanitarian and Militarily Assertive.

Holly, like Roger and Maria, articulates a strong humanitarian role for the US ("a

responsibility to share, globally"), but also suggests a much more active, assertive military role for the US, in the form of humanitarian interventions (HI), discussed earlier in Jentleson and Britton's schema (1998). Yet Holly recognizes limitations, and, for example, doesn't think military action is justified for human rights in China, since that is "their culture" and would involve destroying their "system of government" -- she suggests there is a "fine line" in these judgments. Holly's distinction again would seem to fit with Jentleson and Britton's distinction between humanitarian intervention (which most people support) and intervention for "internal political change" (which most people do not support.)

Q: "What do you think the US role should be in the world today, in terms of foreign policy?"

Holly:

I think that we should **support humanitarian efforts** whenever we can. I think that we should, for instance, have gone into Bosnia much earlier, to prevent the genocide there. I think that we should have gone into Somalia and helped eliminate famine and starvation. I think we have an incredible amount of power and resources, and I think we **have a responsibility to share them, globally**. I realize that can be a tricky issue, because, like, **human rights** issues in China, I think we should have condemned, like, the army's actions in Tienanmen Square much more harshly than we have. But at the same time, do I think we should go into China, and sort of dislodge people that are in power and create that sense of, you know, overthrow the communist government? No. Because I think that's **interfering too much**; I mean that's their culture and that's what they decided to do, then I guess we don't have to approve of it, but I don't think we have the right to just go in and destroy their system of government entirely. So there's a fine line. But an issue like where people are **starving**, or when people are being **slaughtered unmercifully**, at alarming rates, we **definitely have a responsibility to go in and help them**.

Q: "Do you think the US should play a leadership role in the world today?"

A: I think we have an incredible amount of power. And so I think, whether we want to or not, I think we're going to have to **take the leadership position**, just because people seem to look to us to see what we do. And like the kind of situation in Iraq, even if the UN doesn't support our action, they're not really going to condemn us if

we bomb Saddam Hussein. So, we're kind of untouchable, in that sense, I think. What we do is maybe not going to be liked, but accepted. So I think we do have a very large role in the leadership of the globe -- in the global sense.

Holly's framing here is interesting in that she believes the US has incredible power and leadership responsibility, but is also somewhat "untouchable" in terms of what it decides to do in world affairs -- that is, that other nations have limited power to stop or constrain US action, that US action may not be liked, but will be "accepted."

US Role: Either Stay Out/Restraint, or Use Decisive Force.

As mentioned above, slightly more than half of respondents justified US military action to stop aggression or weapons of mass destruction, while about half articulated views of restraint and limitation. Some subjects, like Nancy, below, combined some of these themes in intriguing and somewhat ambiguous ways. A few subjects in the study specifically and strongly articulated the necessity of killing (Monica) or "whacking" (Zach) Saddam Hussein. At the end of this sub-section, I will consider the extent to which these views may fit with the Almond-Lippmann "irrationality" or "overreaction" theses.

It was very clear throughout our interview that Nancy was heavily critical of the Vietnam war and very distrusting of the U.S. government, but it also became clear that her views were not generally antiwar in any simple way; she revealed a complex set of attitudes and feelings about war itself. Near the beginning of the interview, as cited above, Nancy expressed the opinion that "war is distasteful; no one wins...." She talked about how devastated several members of her family had been by their war experiences; that her uncle was "in terrible shape" from World War II, and that her father never said much about his

experience. However, her views on the US role in the world today provide an interesting contrast -- she seems to argue for taking care of "our own people" (or at least North America), and both restraint and the view that if the US does go to war, it should go all out.

Q: "What ought to be the US role in the world today? That's in sort of two parts: militarily, are we ever justified in going to war, and if so, under what conditions; and more broadly, what should be our role, with other kinds of aid, etc?"

Nancy:

Well I think that **we've played Big Brother for so long** that we are viewed as the savior of the world, that we have this excess food that we are sending to so many people. But I think we are doing it at the **detriment of our own people**. We should not have any hungry, we should not have any poor. We could be a model country, and help Canada and Mexico, **start with our own little spread here**, to where we were prosperous and sharing with Canada and Mexico, that we could cut out, with prosperity, **cut out poverty**. If you cut out poverty, we could cut out a lot of the drugs, you cut out a lot of the domestic violence, the violence to women and children, you cut out the self-esteem issues, you raise education, you raise genius....

I hate to see us be the big gun. Because I'm not sure that it's worth it, Vietnam being a prime example. I'm not sure that going to Bosnia is our role, or Saudi Arabia. **I think Desert Storm was a lie**. It was almost a publicity event for a thousand days. We didn't take care of what we were supposed to take care of. Hussein is still there. **We could have done another Hiroshima and been done**. It would have been over. But we didn't. So now we're having a repeat. I think the next time, and the next time are **going to be worse and worse**. And pretty soon it's going to end up on our front porch, because we've agitated powers that are becoming as big as we are. I think China, if we don't work our cards right, could be our biggest threat.

Q: "When you said, 'we could have done another Hiroshima', are you saying that you think that's what we should have done, or that's...?"

A: **I think they knew where Hussein was, and it was in the last days, why did we back off?... If you're going to go, you do it. Do your job**. We weren't having a party.

This passage is striking. Nancy's conclusion on Desert Storm is about the same as Vietnam, that it "was a lie" (i.e. don't trust the government when it comes to this kind of thing.) At the

same time, the logic seems to be that the US shouldn't "be the big gun", but also "if you're going to go, you do it", even if it means "another Hiroshima." One possible interpretation of Nancy's position is a sort of "Realist" view: that war is horrible, and yet may sometimes be unavoidable; a sometimes necessary evil in an insecure and anarchic world system. Nonetheless, her willingness to countenance "another Hiroshima" by the US government is striking in light of her high distrust and self-described "jadedness" about government lying and deception.

Also, in light of their divergent perceptions on Vietnam, it is interesting that Nancy's views about the Gulf War and Iraq, and particularly the belief in getting "Hussein", are somewhat paralleled by Monica's (though Monica doesn't mention using nuclear weapons.)

According to Monica, on the US role in the world:

Q: "And what about a situation like Iraq...?"

Monica:

I think we should just go kill him. I think we should **just kill Saddam Hussein**. I think he is one of the most evil men in the world. And, I think it's wrong to kill civilians; and to kill people who are not involved in it. But, I just think it's wrong to have biological warfare. And nuclear warfare is bad; biological I feel is even worse. 'Cause nuclear warfare can kill you in a second; biological is going to take a long time. I just think he's been pulling the chain too long and someone needs to **just yank it back and kill him**.

Zach, 47, presents a particularly striking case on the question of the relationship between the Vietnam war experience and US foreign policy. On the one hand, he was extremely critical of the Vietnam war, became a conscientious objector and resister, and had contempt for the US leaders and the conduct of the war; on the other hand, in the passages

below, he is quite militant in his support of US force in the Middle East and places like Panama. He appears to hold the seemingly conflicting positions of strong distrust of the government, and what seems to be a pretty blunt sort of "realist" position on contemporary US foreign policy: i.e. that it should defend "American interests", and, when deemed necessary, have no trepidation about using major force, including the assassination (or "whacking") of foreign leaders. It appears that there is no lasting Vietnam-induced foreign policy restraint in Zach's views today. Indeed, in relation to the discussion in chapter two, the relevant analogy for Zach's views on the Middle East seem closer to the Munich analogy (against appeasement) than the Vietnam analogy of caution and restraint. Whatever delegitimations and distrust Zach associates with the Vietnam period do not appear to carry over to US policy today.

Zach also articulates a pretty strong racist view of foreign affairs, both in his own comments about Arabs, and also in his explanation for why the US intervenes in Bosnia but not Africa (because the US cares about white people, but doesn't "give a shit" about black people.)

Regarding his views on US foreign policy, Zach stated:

I had a strong opinion about **the Gulf War**; I thought that was **one we had to fight**; you can't let fuckin' Arabs get away with shit. I mean, with what they did to us to in Iran, we're paying the price for Iran; that's what the Gulf war was. ...I think **Ronald Reagan was a hero**. You know, you get some fuckin' two-bit little country that takes American students and says "we're going to hold them hostage" -- I don't think so. "You little pissant! We'll see you later!" You know, **Manuel Noriega** was a perfect example of the difference between George Bush and Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan would have whacked him -- would have just gone in there and **whacked him!** You **don't fuck around with guys like that**. You don't give them a little bit; you **don't negotiate with those people**. You don't negotiate with Saddam Hussein. And even George Bush, he simply had no idea what the fuck he was doing. Saddam Hussein

was the singular reason for that war, so when you got a pimple you lance it. You don't stop the war until you **whack the guy**. And it cost him his presidency.

.....

Q: "What do you think the US role should be in the world today, particularly in terms of foreign policy?"

Zach:

George Bush is a man who I have no respect for, but he did the right thing in **the Gulf war**. A massive undertaking needs to be a **United Nations undertaking**. It needs to involve some kind of commonality of understanding. I think that was a very important concept. That kind of **consensus-building** and criminalization of Saddam Hussein was the right thing to do. Not getting Hussein was the wrong thing to do, because we'll just have to go get him again. There are people you simply cannot deal with, even though you'd like to....

Q: "What about, for example, Bosnia?"

A: Well, the reason that we went into Bosnia, and that we didn't go into Zimbabwe, South Africa, or Barundi, or Rwanda, is because **these people are white people**. The United States has an interest in making sure that white people don't kill each other. If brown people are killing each other, they don't give a shit. Iran and Iraq? "Fuckin' Arabs; let 'em kill each other." **Barundi? "Black people; fuck 'em; let them kill each other."** But no, in Croatia we're talking white people; we better do something -- I mean, from our government's standpoint I think that's the bottom-line. Would I go into Croatia? Never. Not in a million fucking years! ...I think **it's not my fight**. There is no American interest there. What's going to get cut off? The supply of what, mohair coats? What does Croatia do? Croatia doesn't do shit! It's Yugoslavia -- we didn't care about Yugoslavia when Tito was there; why do we now suddenly care about the Islamic people living in Sarajevo? **We don't give a shit about them**. I don't know what the hell is going on here; there's **no American interest**.

It is not completely clear when Zach is articulating his own views, his own normative frames, and when he is expressing his (somewhat Machiavellian) understanding of how US policy really works (i.e. what "we" care about, and what "we don't give a shit about.") At the least, however, it seems clear that Zach supports things like "whacking" enemy leaders under

certain conditions, and that US policy is and should be about defending identifiable "American interests."

Josh, 22, also sees the US role in the world as first and foremost about defending and promoting US interests, particularly and very emphatically economic and corporate interests and "trade." Josh suggests that some Vietnam lessons (i.e. risk aversion, and particularly aversion to casualties) were "too well learned", and are hurting the US, or US interests.

Q: "What do you think are the lessons of the Vietnam war for the US, or for the American people?"

Josh:

I think some of the lessons were too well learned. Like casualties -- nowadays, we want to go and be a big world police force; but we can't do anything, and we have our hands tied because **everyone is so averse to casualties.** If anybody dies, in any sort of military action, be it Bosnia, or Somalia, or Persian Gulf, or wherever, **if anybody dies** or gets hurt it's a **huge political fiasco.** So, I'd say that lesson has been learned too well, because then it ties the hands of America. But that was definitely learned, you know, that you don't put "little Johnny" in danger for some sort of political purpose. If there's something, you know, like Mexico decides to invade, I think America would stand up and fight.

.....

Q: "I want to ask a few questions on what you think the US role should be in the world today. Do you think US military action is justified under certain conditions, and if so, under what conditions? And, in what other ways should we be involved; what should we be doing, if anything, in terms of foreign aid, etc?"

Josh:

Well, I think the economical purpose of a nation is to increase the standard of living of its inhabitants and that involves increasing productivity. So, increasing productivity definitely means you have to have someone to sell it to. So, I think

going out there and making sure that Ford, or whomever, **has a market** in some places is a good thing for the government to do....

The **government** should try to go out there and keep a positive political stance in terms of the rest of the world, and **make sure** that if whoever, **GM or GE or Microsoft**, decides to go and sell something someplace, they **shouldn't be excluded** just because they're Americans; **that should never, ever, ever happen**. So the political stance of America definitely should be political -- we should go out there and press palms and all that sort of stuff, to be able to make sure that the corporations that actually increase the productivity and the economic stance of the nation are allowed to do that, that are allowed to perform their function. And for them to be allowed to perform their function, the **government has to be able to play a role in making sure that the world is accepting of them**.

Q: "So, you think the US role should be sort of promoting free trade and business, in general, or more specifically we should promote American companies and businesses...?"

Josh:

American. And that's the whole idea. And that's the same -- that the Japanese government should be supporting Japanese companies, and the Germans should be supporting German. And that's fine, you know, America shouldn't be spending its tax dollars making sure that, you know, Saab gets a manufacturing plant in South Africa; there's no need for that. **We should be supporting our own**. So, that's what I view it as doing. Definitely American, **particularly American**.

And how should we do that? There needs to be some sort of **world police idea**. And it would be great if the UN could solve that, because **human rights are a big deal**, and if people aren't getting fed that's a big deal. And it'd be great if you could make the whole world better. But the thing is, though, as **cold-hearted** as this is, if there isn't an economical advantage in it, then it probably shouldn't be done. But the thing is that somebody's who's eating, somebody who isn't at war -- it's great the way economics works, because often times when something **isn't economically efficient**, it often **isn't also morally efficient**, and that sort of thing. Well, just like I said, when someone in Ethiopia isn't getting fed, not only does it pull the heart strings of the rest of the world, hopefully, it also isn't economically efficient because what can they buy, what can they do? If they can't even feed themselves, what are they adding to the world in terms of productivity? Nothing. So, you end up with a two-fold advantage, the **moralistic** one, as well as the **economical** one, by going out and solving these problems. So, the **government should do some things that are military oriented**. But the thing is, though, as I said before, **our hands are tied** because of the idea that **you can't have casualties**.

Q: "Let's take the example of the intervention in Somalia; would that be justified in your

view, and if so, under what conditions? Is the US justified in intervening in a situation like Somalia?"

Josh:

I would say "yes", but it's just **practically impossible**. I mean, it would be great if we could solve these sorts of problems, you know. And we could, it's definitely possible, we could go in there and **kick the crap out** of all those war lords, and make sure that everybody got food, that's possible. But the thing is, though, it just can't happen, because when the tanks rolled onto the seashore, you know, there were 15 cameras from CNN and **every god-forsaken media system** in the world, right there. So, **when mom and dad see "little Johnny" get shot, it's a big political mess**. And that was kind of **the deal with Vietnam too**; it was all on TV. So you end up seeing it. You know, **war exists a lot better** for a nation when it only happens in your head **with propaganda**. When you're really seeing death and you're seeing carnage, it's never, ever going to work. So **America can't do that anymore because it just turns into a political fiasco immediately**.

.... When I really think about it, I don't know if it's appropriate to go in there [to a place like Somalia], because I don't think there should be **colonial powers of America**. We **shouldn't have this sort of thing**. What ends up happening is if we do go in there and it turns out right -- like Haiti for instance -- but it's hard because America ends up setting up these **puppet governments** to support the things that I was saying before that America should go out there and try to support. But when they start setting up these puppet things, there's no way that's going to last, because the people weren't in support of it. And just because you ship in, you know, **Toys-R-Us** down there, **that isn't going to make people happier**. And then you end up just **postponing another sort of popular revolution**. So those things should probably be allowed to generally **run their course**.

Q: "And are you saying, where possible, we should try to provide sort of humanitarian aid, food aid, that type of thing?"

A: Or, we should at least allow **tax deductions** for somebody who wants to do it. Not **necessarily the US government**, you know, taking taxes and money from people who **don't give a crap about Somalia**. It should be a little more **market-driven** than it is. If the market decides it wants to go and do this thing, that's cool. And if the market decides it's not; they don't want to pay for shipping out tankers full of wheat to somebody, then, **as horrible as that is for the people that don't get fed**, that's a **perfect democracy** in terms of the fact that, alright, the people didn't want it, and **I apologize, but there it is**. And, it's just plain **horrible** that, you know, you weren't **born American and you got screwed in this life and I'm sorry**.

It is probably important to note that Josh's views are somewhat atypical for the sample on a number of the positions he takes. He is certainly at the more extreme end of the sample in terms of the primacy he gives to economic interests and "market" mechanisms. Nonetheless, his views are illuminating. Josh, at 22, worries that the legacy of Vietnam is now too constraining of US action and interests -- he sounds a bit put off by what he seems to perceive as an overemphasis on the well-being of "little Johnny." In contrast to the argument of Jentleson and Britton (1998), Josh seems to feel that the post-Vietnam US is still overly "gun shy" and "risk averse."

Traditionalists vs. Revisionists: Almond-Lippmann Revisited.

For the most part I would argue that the respondents as reported in this chapter do well in terms of the revisionist position on public opinion and foreign policy; that is that, in the main, they come across as sensible, reasonable, thoughtful, and pretty prudent, as delineated by Page and Shapiro (1992) and Jentleson and Britton (1998). However there is some room for debate. It would seem that perhaps the most striking cases for the traditionalist, Almond-Lippmann position (as summarized in Knopf 1998) would be the "overreaction thesis" applied to Nancy, Monica and Zach in their views on Saddam Hussein, and "whacking" foreign leaders. From the way these views were expressed, they did not appear as "moody" or "emotional" -- rather they seemed thought out, and were expressed in the calm of the interview setting. But a case can be made that they constitute, and give some validation to the fear of, overreaction. The rebuttal perhaps may be that these were minority views in relation to the sample of 35 participants.

Conclusion: The Vietnam War Legacy and US Political Culture

This chapter has reviewed a substantial body of interview data on the Vietnam war and American political culture, revealing a full range of broad, rich, complex points-of-view, which are not revealed in public opinion and other kinds of quantitative data. Taken altogether, I believe the material here, in all its complexity and nuance, gives support to the themes and argument laid out in chapters one and two, and referred to at the start of this chapter: that the Vietnam war experience had a major, lasting impact on American political culture, attitudes about government, the US role in the world, and national identity. The evidence in this chapter seems consistent with the thesis that the Vietnam war produced a lasting rupture in American political culture which continues, in various ways, in the current period.

In the next two substantive chapters, we move from the macro level of political culture, to the meso level of social generations, and then to the micro level of family socialization.

- Chapter 5 -

Vietnam: The Next Generation

This chapter examines the views, interpretations and opinions of the parents and children on the Vietnam war at the meso level of analysis, using a generational perspective. Specifically, the frames of each generation on the Vietnam war are discussed. As suggested in chapter one, there has been a great deal written on baby-boom generation views of the war, so this chapter gives stronger emphasis to examination of the views of generation X -- the parent's generation is used for contrast and where it enhances the analysis. It is argued that the generational findings of this chapter are consistent with the "lasting cultural rupture thesis" of this study; that both generations experience the rupture and its effects, but tend to experience it differently, as generations (and as individuals, of course.)

The chapter begins with a summary of a few key findings, and a consideration of the extent to which, and ways in which, the respondents *do* view their age group as a generation. This is followed by a section examining perceptions of the impact of the Vietnam war on the generations; a section on the key theme of the widespread rise of skepticism and distrust in the two generations; and a section on the related themes of disunity and difference, particularly within generation X. A final section offers conclusions on the Vietnam war, the two generations and contemporary American political culture.

As discussed in chapter two, the second major axis of analysis in this study is the category of social generations and generational comparisons. In light of the contested history

of this idea, it seemed appropriate to begin the set of interview questions on generations by asking the respondents what they thought of the *idea* of generations: i.e., do they exist, is it possible and/or useful to generalize about age groups or cohorts in this way? (Hereafter, I refer to this as "the generational question.")¹ As discussed below, all but a few of the participants in both generational groups did subscribe to the generational idea.

The findings of my study presented in this chapter are consistent with the "formative-experiences" framework discussed in chapter two (i.e. that generations are shaped by important formative experiences -- this was construed broadly to include a shared "generational mentality" [Esler 1984], particularly in reference to generation X.) All but a few of the baby-boomer parents spoke of the formative importance in their lives of the 1960s generally, and the Vietnam war and the civil rights movement especially. Consistent with the findings in chapter four on "lessons and legacies of Vietnam", many babyboomers made statements indicating that the Vietnam war experience had "really changed my generation", how they view government, that it made them "jaded", "very distrusting", less hopeful, and that "it's still with us." This data seems to give support to the "persistence thesis" on generations cited in chapter two: that formative experiences tend to persist with generations

1. There were minor variations in the way this question was asked, but the basic form was: To the parents: "During the 1960s some people talked about a generation gap, and a distinctive young generation, or the baby-boom generation -- do you think there *are* certain things that define 'your generation', or is it mostly not really possible to generalize in that way?" To the children: "In the 1960s and since, some people have talked about the baby-boom generation, and in more recent years we've heard in the media and elsewhere some talk about 'generation X' and so forth -- when you think of young people today -- say between 18-26 years old -- do you think there are certain things that define 'your generation', or is it mostly not really possible to generalize about young people as a group?"

over time, and influence their later perceptions, views and judgments.

About three-quarters of the generation X children also identified and spoke about consistent formative experiences or themes. One of the strong themes (consistent with the conventional "generation X" tag) is precisely the feeling of less unity, fewer unifying events, "lack of a Vietnam or civil rights" to bring them together, the importance of diversity and difference. About two-thirds of the Xers spoke in some way about general distrust, skepticism and or cynicism, which most traced, at least partially, to "the Vietnam war", through the influence it had on their parents and therefore on them, and/or the more general influence it had on the US, on culture, politics and "our history."

"Talkin' About My Generation..."

In this study, there were basically three different positions on the generational question: 1) a few subjects who pretty flatly did not subscribe to the generational idea (the "no" position) and/or spoke only of age effects; 2) the majority who articulated "integrated" views that combined generational (period) effects with life-stage (age) effects (a "yes" answer); and 3) a few subjects who spoke mostly or entirely in terms of generational differences, but didn't really speak to age or life-stage effects (also a "yes" answer.) Thus, all but a few respondents, in both age cohorts, in various ways did subscribe to the generational idea. Nearly all respondents talked about differences between generations; both between the sixties generation and generation X, and a few of the sixties generation also contrasting theirs with their parent's generation (i.e. the 1930s and '40s "Depression and World War II generations.")

Group One: No Generations.

Four subjects out of 35, two children and two parents (none related,) said fairly directly that they did not really subscribe to the notion of generations ("non-generationists.") These few did not suggest that there were no differences between the people we were talking about, children and their age group compared to parents and their age group; rather, they tended to speak in terms of age effects and/or family dynamics ("children rebel against their parents"), and/or with an individualistic framing ("people are just different; you can't really generalize about groups." Richard, a 49-year-old father, framed the issue essentially in terms of age effects and the stages of life, rather than as generational differences (with any significant historical specificity.) To the question of whether there are generations, Richard replied in a way pretty typical of the four non-generationists:

No, I don't think so. At the time, yes, when the young group is at that age, say 14 to 24, the older generation looks back and sees some things that it saw in itself sometimes that it doesn't like very much, and so it gets a name, and a label, and a consciousness. It's a part of the **chaos** -- everybody goes through it, everybody gleans something from the process that's helpful.... But I think it's really a **misnomer** to say that there are **lasting effects of those years on a society**. I think it happens every place. So, I don't think so, I don't think that people growing up in college age in the sixties are really basically any different than their parents. I think people question structure, authority, morals, and, whether we're conscious of it or not, for the most part we want things to be better.

Richard's view seems to be that there is more of an on-going flow or "chaos" to history, that it's a continual life process that happens in all times and places, and that people aren't "basically any different than their parents." This position would seem to be not a-historical, it recognizes the flow of history, but just that there are not discernable "lasting effects" which shape or define generations. Rather, in his view, it's more that people create labels (like

generational names), perhaps to pigeonhole, or create some cognitive clarity out of the "chaos." Richard is one of the few respondents who appear not to support the "persistence thesis."

Group Two: Integrated Period/Age Views on Generations.

Many subjects responded to the generational question in ways that revealed a process of thinking through the question and the relationship of different factors, consistent with the view discussed in chapter two of political thinking as an active, hermeneutic process. Many gave answers that to varying degrees combine age effects and period effects, usually in some form of broad, elaborated generational view -- I refer to these types of answers as "integrated views." For example, Richard's son Josh, 22, combined life-stage/age effects and the idea that "generations go in cycles", and period effects (like not having "civil rights or Vietnam" to "get motivated about.") When asked why he thought the US didn't win in Vietnam, Josh discussed two reasons: "the Perseverance of the Viet Cong" and "American public opinion." After talking a bit about the first reason, I asked a follow-up question on the second factor.

Q: "And coming back to the second reason you gave, of public opinion and opposition to the war, why do you think that happened; what changed, or what caused that?"

Josh:

I kind of believe that **generations go in cycles**, and that you have a conservative generation that's immediately followed by a liberal generation, that's followed by another conservative generation. And I would say that, without question, **my generation is far more conservative** than were the baby boomers. And that's just kind of the general cycle. And then, as education became more prevalent, and the standard of living was excellent in America during the '50s and '60s and, you know, people had enough money to be able to think. And once you had something -- you know, **every person who's my age** is going to love to put their shoulder up against

something and try to move it, and it's just the age that you're at, you know, **you want to change**. And when you have something that is very clear, and very obviously amoral, in terms of, you know, "why the hell are we down there?" -- that's just a great question to ask; what do we care about Vietnam? Nobody even probably knew what Vietnam was before 1950. So you end up with **a bunch of kids who want to change the world, just like every kid does**, and not only do they want to change the world like anybody who's 20 to 30 wants to, just naturally, they also had something obvious to change and they were **a liberal generation**. Like **nowadays, there's nothing substantial for me to go out there and change**. You know, I can get heated up about the environment, or about politics, or something like that, but there's not one thing, not one thing for me to get motivated about. But for that time, you know, civil rights, Man! what a huge change that was! There were big, monumental changes going on that you could point a finger at; and nowadays there aren't. **Back then, there were two big ones: civil rights and Vietnam**. And once you got something to put your shoulder up against and feel it moving, then you're going to keep pushing.

This passage raises a number of themes and frames which recurred amongst other respondents: 1) that generation X is more conservative than the baby boomers; 2) that young people want to contribute to positive social change in the world ("put your shoulder up against something" in Josh's terms); and 3) that Xers have less to unite them in comparison to the baby boomers, who had "civil rights and Vietnam." This last view in particular was very common and is treated in more depth in a separate section below.

A bit later, Josh returned to the generational question, adding to some of the ideas above, and speaking in terms which evoke what might be called a sort of "Freudian" frame (that children "naturally" rebel against their parents.) He also expanded on generational differences, suggesting that Xer children are less hedonistic, and more "me-centered" than their parents; and that Xers want to "make the world a better place" if they can, but care ("underneath") first and foremost about personal comfort and material well-being. To the generational question Josh responded:

People try to rebel against their parents; that's kind of just the natural tendency of children. I grew up in Santa Fe, and I don't know if it's all that different from the rest of America, but there were a lot of my friends whose names were things like Chamisa, and Blue Sky, and you know they were the product of their parents who were out in the back smoking pot when we were kids -- that sort of thing. It's amazing to me how I can still go to some parties and the kids of the parents will be sitting and paying attention and having scholastic conversations, while their parents will actually be out smoking weed, getting drunk, partying, that sort of thing, while the kids aren't. And the kids don't mind, but they don't appreciate it the same way -- and that's just going to amplify as they get older. So, I think that we are definitely more conservative in terms of some things; I think we're more attuned with making *us* comfortable, like *me*. It's a lot more personal. Like the big ideas of philanthropy -- you know "let's go change the world for the better" -- it's there of course, and you know everybody wants to be able to make the world a better place, but I think underneath all of that, **my generation is far more "me"-centered. That's what matters. Everybody I know wants to go out there and **change the world** and have everybody have food, that sort of thing, because that's good, you know, who the hell wouldn't? But, I think when they actually do something with themselves, it's going to be very much, you know, **401K plans and stuff like that**.**

This passage raises some interesting points. First, the "Freudian" idea that parent-child differences ("naturally") take the form of kids rebelling against their parents, as a sort of unresolved Oedipal conflict, has a tradition in the literature on generations, perhaps presented most extensively (but rather unconvincingly) in Lewis Feuer's (1969) voluminous tome The Conflict of Generations. But the Freudian rebellion frame expressed here by Josh, when considered along with the previous passage, takes a more subtle and nuanced form than the fairly negative, stereotyped line of argument presented in some of the literature on this idea that, for example, youth rebellion is infantile, irrational, the result of spoiling by parents, etc. (Feuer 1969, cf. Lane 1972). Rather, in keeping with the view of rationality argued in chapter two, the youth "rebellion" in Josh's framing seems to be more about individuation and differentiation from one's parent's; that young people want to "make a difference" in the world, want to define themselves, and want to put their shoulders up against "something" and

try to move it (for positive social change.)

Second, Josh differentiates his generation as less hedonistic than their parents, but stops short of any evaluative framing or (negative) judgment of the parents; he limits his frame to analytic difference. If he is critical of the parents here, the criticism is only implicit. Likewise he offers no normative evaluation of his generation's "me"-centeredness, whether this is good, bad, neither, or mixed.

Josh's framings seem consistent with the view of generational interaction suggested in chapter two by Jennings and Niemi (1981) and DeMartini (1985), that the interaction is open and dynamic, and that children "use", rather than necessarily clearly "reject", their parents values and experiences, but that they "work them up" in their own ways.

Gayle, 21, also presents an "integrated" view on generations, sounding as if she is thinking about and clarifying the relationships as she articulates them. As she speaks, she fleshes out a frame with both generational-historical differences (referring to "World War II" and "Vietnam"), and age effects (making a number of interesting points that "depend on your age" and "cycles" of life), and concludes that "things are more complex today." Gayle responding to the generational question:

A: That's a hard one. I think for me personally I'm just starting to develop who I think I am.... But, you know, I have friends who are scattered all over on what their interests are, and some aren't even going to school, because they don't like it.... I think the situation of **our times are different**. Like, when you say "**baby boomers**", what I think of is how after world war II all these men came home, marriage rates went up, a lot more kids. Then you jump to the **Vietnam war** and you hear of **protesting**. But you don't really hear of them afterwards, so I don't know if their identity has changed -- are those still the people who are working in the government, lobbying and stuff? I don't know -- or if they've settled down as well,

like their parents did after world war II. Maybe it's almost more of a cycle. You know, we had our rebellious stage, and **maybe we were slackers**, and we don't vote, but maybe as time goes on, and we finish up our education as well and start having families and such, then maybe we'll end up in the same mold as everyone else.... And it depends on your age too. I think **when you're younger you're more willing to chance things a little bit**; you almost have that sense of immortality. When you're just out of high school, it's "hey another protest" -- I'd go! I'd go even if I wasn't protesting just to watch it; just to see what's going on around you. As you get older, things start changing; your priorities change, you have more education, you've experienced more things in life; you may be getting married and having children, and that's going to change your direction.

Within the context here, Gayle's statement that "maybe it's almost more of a cycle" seems to mean a *life* cycle; that (most) young people move through a rebellious stage, and "as time goes on" they will "end up in the same mold as everyone else." As one gets older, priorities change and one develops more responsibilities and commitments, like marriage and family. Her comment about going to protests is also interesting in suggesting an implicit value in gaining experience, in just seeing "what's going on around you."

Group Three: Strong Generational Differences.

A few respondents answered the generational question almost entirely in terms of period effects, with little or no reference to age effects. Monica fit into this group, saying that generational differences were due to "different times" and differences in family socialization. That is, she argues that people are "raised differently, with different things going on", and are shaped by everything their parents went through ("like Vietnam".) Monica articulates a view that there were no real formative events for her generation, which creates less of a sense of unity. This is a central theme of the younger age group, to which we return later in the chapter.

Q: "When you think of people your age, say 18-26, do you think there are certain things that characterize and define your generation?"

Monica:

I think **generations are different, and times are different**. I mean, every generation is different, and people just have to learn to accept it. Everyone was raised differently, with different things going on. The president sleeping with women in Kennedy's day was not that big of a deal because you didn't hear about it. Now you've got television, mass media; it makes what's going on today a lot more known.

The whole **generation gap** and all that stuff, you know, of course there's going to be gaps -- **you grew up in different times**.

Q: "In a lot of what I've read about the 1960s there's this idea that certain big events, like Vietnam or civil rights, shaped that generation. Do you think there are any sort of big events or issues that kind of shaped your age group?"

Monica:

I don't think so. Maybe that's one of our problems; there's nothing that has shaped us -- you know, **no big, catastrophic event** that's allowed society to place a name on us -- that, since there was **no big event**, society says "okay, you're slackers. There's no big event, so you're just a slacker." But, to me, I don't think there's any event that's really shaped our lives; I can't think of anything.... I think what's affected us is just community, culture, family and religion -- that's basically what **shaped our generation**. And, you know, what our parents were taught and what events shaped them -- things that changed our parents' lives is what changed ours. I think **we were shaped by our parents, and peers**; and what our parents had gone through shaped us, and what our friends' parents went through shaped them, and in turn they help shape us, and we shape them. But, as far as any particular event, like any wars or anything, I don't think that shaped us.

Q: "When you say that your parents and their experiences shaped you, how do you mean?"

Monica:

I think that the way our parents react, and who they were before, and who they became **after events like Vietnam**, and everything **in the sixties**, like civil rights and integration and all that jazz; like everything that they were taught, and everything that they went through led them to be the people who they were, who raised us, which, in turn, **shaped our lives**. That's just how I see **the cycle of life**.

Monica's comment about the problem that there's "no big, catastrophic event" that has shaped her age group was a common theme on the generational question, especially among the children, and has been widely discussed in the literature on generation X (indeed, it has been treated, in various ways, as the defining trait of the Xers.) I discuss this further as "the disunity theme" in a separate section below. It is relevant to note, as well, that this idea speaks directly to the question of the importance of "formative events" in defining or forming generations discussed in chapter two, and discussed further below.

The Impact of the Vietnam War in the Eyes of Generation X

This section focuses on the views specifically of the children on the impact of the Vietnam war on the US and on their generation. The section focuses on the children for two main reasons: first is that many of the babyboomer parents expressed the impact of Vietnam in more general cultural terms, and are addressed in chapter four; second is that, as noted in chapter two, there has been a great deal published to date on babyboomer perceptions of the war, whereas there is little written on the views of generation X.

The first major substantive theme was on the children's perceptions of the Vietnam war experience. To what extent and in what ways, in their perceptions, is Vietnam shaping the thinking of young people today? How significant is the war's legacy? Is it seen by the children as important for their age group, or more as "history", something that's fading into the past?

Various sociologists, particularly in the field of study of social movements (Snow and Benford 1992; Gamson 1992; Goldberg 1991) employ the notions of resonance or salience

to refer to the extent to which a particular frame or issue resonates with, or is perceived to be proximate or immediate to, the lifeworld of an individual or group. This notion of resonance was applied to the generational perceptions and framings of the war.

Though there were a range of specific framings on this question, about three-quarters of the children characterized Vietnam in various ways as still important for their generation. The war was framed variously as very negative but important; that it was "gross", "very negative", a "bad thing" and "all these people died for nothing"; and/or that it provided very important lessons for the US or the American people; and/or that it was important, but in a sort of unconscious way (several subjects, cited below, alluded to Vietnam as "just sort of there", a sort of underlying, pervading "trauma" in US history.)

As suggested in chapter two, a central argument of this study is that there is considerable evidence that the Vietnam war marked a lasting rupture in American political culture. I believe much of the material in this section is supportive of this view.

A few of the children, did say that they see the Vietnam war more "as history", and less salient to their generation today compared to some more recent issues or events, but, as we shall see, most of these still see it as important for US history.

Xers Who See Vietnam as an Important Lesson.

Maria, 21, sees her generation as "impacted by [Vietnam] a lot", through the influence it had on her parents' generation (presenting an interesting family-socialization frame on "how they raised us"), and also by "just being around for the after-effects."

Q: "Generalizing beyond your own experience, how important do you think the Vietnam

war experience is to young people today, to your generation today? Do you think it's had a significant effect on your generation, or not so much, that it's history, it's in the past, that most young people haven't been impacted by it much?"

Maria:

I think we've been **impacted by it a lot**, just because our parents were impacted by it, whether or not they supported it or whatever, you know, they were impacted by it, and so that impact carries down to us, in a way. Because, whatever it did to them, that's going to affect how they raised us. I also think that being around, growing up and being a small kid right after the **Vietnam war** and having your friends' parents be disabled by the war in one way or another, you know, some of them crazy, and seeing a lot of homeless people on the street begging, and they say Vietnam vet on their shirt, and they're horribly disfigured, or obviously incapable of functioning in society anymore, **I think that's how it's affected us as a generation -- just being around for the after-affects**. I think that, even though we don't think about them a lot, they're very present.

The following 18-year-old young woman, Celia, articulates the impact of Vietnam in terms of the feelings it evokes, articulating a frame employing a physiological language of "this lump in your stomach", and feeling "gross":

Q: "Generalizing beyond your own views, how important do you think Vietnam is for your own generation; is it still relevant, do people think about it, or is it more seen as part of the past, part of history?"

Celia:

I think every once in awhile **Vietnam will pop up**, like when something big is going on, to oppose war, like today with the protests against bombing Iraq. And just to learn about it, that it actually happened, especially the way it was taught to us in school, it just kind of **sits there inside you**, like this lump in your stomach that won't digest. It's just there, and it's just kind of **a creepy feeling**. I can't really do anything about it, it happened so long ago. But to learn that so many people died, and it was probably not necessary. And yet it happened so recently, you know, it's my parent's generation. I think wars have that effect on me, you know... **you just feel gross**, like how could that happen? It just kind of stays with you, because you know that it happened and it's always there in your head, and you just don't think about it every day. It's like it's in your brain's computer and **it's under file, you know**.

Celia's framing of the war here evokes a sense that the war is "always there", not only for her personally, but also (implied) in some sort of shared consciousness, the social-psychic background ("you just don't think about it every day.") But the war is "under file", perhaps a bit like Fredric Jameson's (1981) notion of "the political unconscious. "Celia's use of the more general pronoun "you" rather than "I" in describing the war's effects implies not only the first but also the third person (i.e. "not only does the war stay with me, but it stays with other people too.")

Austin, a 20-year-old male, spoke of "the Vietnam Syndrome starting to go away" for his generation, but followed this up by suggesting that Vietnam is still important as a way for America to learn from its mistakes, that losing engenders more critical reflection than winning, and that war, in general, "isn't necessarily a solution to anything" and many people "die in vain." Yet Austin also indicated that he thought the impact and power of these lessons of Vietnam may be declining for his generation, relative to things like the Gulf War.

Q: "What major events or things, if any, do you think have affected your generation's views about the world?"

Austin:

I think the Gulf War might have re-established faith in the army in our generation, like the feeling that we're number one again -- you know, "Don't mess with us." I guess **the Vietnam Syndrome**, or whatever, might be **starting to go away**. They feel that we're on top, and they don't see that when we go to war people die and stuff like that.

Q: "You've talked some about your own interest in the Vietnam war. How would you generalize that for your own age group or generation -- how important for your generation do you think Vietnam is as an historical event?"

Austin:

I think it's important, you know, because you learn from your mistakes. If I was going to teach it or explain it to a younger generation, I would pretty much give them all the facts, without putting a negative or a positive spin on it, if I could; try to let them decide for themselves.

But also, I think it was maybe kind of a milestone in American society because it was the first time we lost a war. I guess maybe it taught the American people that we aren't number one, all the time, like there are times when you have to lose. And anytime when you do lose, you always, no matter what, the reaction is "oh, it was because of this and this, and it was a bad idea in the first place", but when you win, you automatically assume that it was a good idea, and that it did work out for the best. So, if we had won the war, I think people would have been like "**oh yea, I remember Vietnam -- we swept up communism in that one.**" But, since we lost the war, they realize how bad war is. So, it's actually significant in teaching that war is not necessarily the means for anything. So, people realize that you can die in vain, you know. Like, if you see that war, and you see that we did lose, and you see that all these people died and you're like "**oh, all these people died for nothing**" -- well, every war people die pretty much, or almost for nothing. It's the first time that the Americans have lost, so it's the first time they realized that we can lose, that we're not number one.

Austin and all but a few of the subjects in my sample believe that the Vietnam war experience does have important lessons for the US, and Austin posits the additional tenet that we (as a nation) look harder and learn more from our failures or mistakes than from our successes or "victories." Vietnam taught America, for the first time, that "we're not number one."

Ervin, 20, subscribes to the idea that Vietnam provides important lessons to his generation and to the American people, particularly about the value of vigilance and dissent toward the government.

Q: "What are the events or issues that you think have particularly affected your generation, or your generation's views of the world?"

Ervin:

I think **Vietnam is a key one**. I think the crumbling of communism, I don't think it was the keystone, but I think it definitely was an event that shaped the rest of the world and affected us in some way....

In my opinion, I think that there's a large population of my generation who is very anti-aggression, antiwar, that there's other means for resolving issues -- instead of, you know, let's pick up the big sticks and go use force, by any means, to obtain any means. I think there's a minority of people who are super patriotic, you know, 'wannabe' soldiers, you know, "let's go have war" -- but I think the majority of our generation has basically **learned the mistakes of the past**, and are trying to implement a better world, just for the future.

Q: "Generalizing beyond your own views, how significant do you think the Vietnam war experience is for your generation, today?"

Ervin:

I think it's pretty important. I think it definitely **shows us the mistakes that a government can make when they're not listening to their citizens....** It kind of taught us that, you know, if you are very vocal about your opinions, or if you're against something, you should vocalize those opinions and make sure that people hear you. I would say that there are portions of my generation that probably don't know too much about the war, don't care too much about the war. I think they've kind of missed the boat, and they're going about their lives in a different route. But I think there is a good number of my generation who sincerely **learned that the Vietnam war was a conflict that didn't need to happen**, and we should use it as a learning tool for the future when dealing with those kinds of issues.

To Ervin, the war didn't need to happen, but it should be a "learning tool" for his generation and for the future.

Xers Who See Vietnam as Less Resonant or Salient.

About a quarter of the young people said that they viewed the Vietnam war experience as less important to their generation, for various reasons, than more recent events.

Lawrence, 26, a navy veteran, addresses the lessons-of-history theme as had Austin and Ervin, but takes the more doubtful view that many young people are not learning the right

lessons, and that, in an echo of the famous maxim attributed to George Santayana, we may be "doomed to make the same mistakes again."

Q: "If you had to generalize about your generation on the Vietnam war, do you think they've been influenced much by Vietnam and that experience, or are there other sort of current events that are much more important?"

Lawrence:

I don't think Vietnam has a lot of effect on the younger generation today; it should, but I don't think it does. Because people learn from their past. If we don't study history, you know, we're basically doomed to make the same mistakes again. If we don't evaluate what we did before, then we're going to do it again. So, I feel that it is important, but a lot of people are concerned with the now. You know, they're concerned with global warming, and pollution, drugs, trying to get people through re-habilitation, trying to figure out what's wrong with them. But I think a lot of people in my generation don't know much about Vietnam. All they know about Vietnam was it was one of the worst wars and that a lot of people died, and nobody really won. And that's all that a lot of people really know about it; my age anyway. And that's not good at all. I think we need to be more educated, especially on something such as war.

Lawrence believes young people *ought* to learn from the past, so they don't repeat mistakes, but he feels that "a lot of people" are more concerned with the present, with contemporary problems. Yet, as mentioned below, it is noteworthy that Lawrence does think that most people of his generation do know that "it was one of the worst wars." He may be saying that they don't know much of the detail or substance or concrete history of the war, but they know it was bad.

Holly, 18, speaks of her generation "being a little bit past" Vietnam, at least in terms of any immediate resonance or importance in the conversations, consciousness or everyday lives of young people. She adds, however, that her generation views Vietnam as very important and very negative in US national history. She also gives an interesting (and

somewhat disturbing) framing of the Persian Gulf war as "a novelty" and something that would be "neat" to be able to say you had lived through, since they had "heard so much talk from our parents about the war they lived through." This suggests not only a seeming insensitivity to the real suffering and horror of the Gulf War, on its own terms, but also suggests the continuing relevance of Vietnam as the historical and inter-generational point of reference (at least regarding war.)

Q: "Do you think there are certain events that have sort of shaped your generation as a generation? I mean some people have suggested that the Vietnam war shaped the '60s generation, do you see anything like that, like you mentioned Bosnia, or maybe the Gulf war, that has shaped your generation?"

Holly:

No, I don't think so -- especially not the Persian Gulf war, I don't think that had much impact on our generation at all, except it was kind of a novelty for us -- we heard so much talk from our parents **about the war that they lived through**, it was kind of neat to be able to say that, well you lived through a war too -- but then you start realizing they don't really equate, in terms of human suffering, or in the way it divided the nation. And I was kind of shocked during the Gulf war that more people didn't raise concerns about why we were actually going there. Of course, it was mentioned that maybe our reason was only to protect our interests in the oil industry or whatever, but there was not any large-scale discussion of that. I remember people opposing our going there, but not on a large scale.

Q: "Generalizing about you own generation, how important do you think Vietnam is for your generation? Do they see it as important, or not really?"

Holly:

I think that unless you have a family that's really vocal about it, one way or the other, **I don't think it's really significant for our generation**; I think we're a little bit past it. I mean I'm eighteen, so maybe for people who are a little older it's different. But, it's never been a topic of a discussion or something that anyone consciously acknowledges shaping their ideals, in my experience. It may, but not that anyone consciously acknowledges.... I think **my generation views Vietnam as a very**

important experience in our national history, but I don't think they view it as one that has a lot of direct impact on their life now. I think most people, my peers and stuff, view it in a very negative light, they don't think it was a good thing, and they don't want it to be repeated. But that's about the extent that I see people worrying about it or considering it -- it was a bad time for our nation, and we don't want it to happen again.

Like Lawrence, Holly thinks the war doesn't have a strong resonance for her generation, at least not "consciously", but they know "it was a bad time" and "don't want it to happen again."

Carla, 25, offers a similar "it's-history" framing of Vietnam, describing it as "bizarre events", although, as we saw in chapter four, she also feels and is personally moved by its significance and importance in her father's life.

Q: "Generalizing beyond your own views and experience to your age group, overall how important or significant do you think the Vietnam war experience is to young people today?"

Carla:

I think, **sadly, it's more a part of history.** I don't think, especially for people a little younger than I am whose parents may not have even been there, it's something you study about maybe in history, if you get that far. **It's these bizarre events** in the '60s and early '70s, that, you know, had flower power hippies protesting. So, you know, it's probably something that we study in history as a learning event. But I don't think it affects our lives nearly like it did for people who are older than I am.

To Carla, the war has little resonance for her generation except, perhaps, for its bizarreness.

Yet her comment that "*sadly*, it's more a part of history" implies that she, like Lawrence, thinks it *ought* to have more resonance or importance.

Finally, Gerard, 20, also offers an "it's-history" framing, giving particular weight to the lack of "memories" of he and his peers about the war.

Q: "Generalizing beyond your own experience, how significant do you think the

Vietnam experience has been for your generation more broadly? Do you think young people as a whole care much, or know much about the war, or more that it's now 'history' and contemporary things are much more important?"

Gerard:

I think it's definitely seen as history, because for my generation it happened before our memories began. There's nothing in my memory that relates to the Vietnam war, so it was before my time, and I don't think a lot of people of my generation know a whole lot about the war, other than history majors. But I think everyone knows *about it*, and they know a lot of attitudes and perceptions which was, like, it was **this giant failure for the United States, this really embarrassing moment, and, like, there were all these antiwar protesters who were our age at the time, so *they* must have been *right* -- you know, that **the war was this bad thing** and Americans were just killing innocent little Vietnamese natives running around. But you know, you can't really blame them for having that kind of perception, if that's all they have to go on.**

It's difficult to tell quite what is intended by Gerard's comments that the protesters "*must* have been right" and that Americans were "just killing innocent little Vietnamese natives" -- from his tone of voice and presentation it sounded as if he were being ironic, or even perhaps cynical, but the meaning and intention were ambiguous.

It is interesting to note that three of the four young people in this section who start out by saying that they see Vietnam as having less resonance, less effect or less significance for their generation, qualify this frame in important ways by saying that young people see it as one of the worst wars, in which a lot of people died, that it is a very important and very negative experience in our national history, that they don't want it to happen again, and that it was a giant failure, really embarrassing and a bad thing for the US. There is a nuanced distinction to be made here. None of these framings suggest that Vietnam is not important for the US and American national identity and self-understanding; in fact they explicitly

recognize that it *is* an important part of US history. They seem to be saying that Vietnam has less immediate resonance or salience for many young people, but is still important for our history and political culture. Only Carla says pretty directly that Vietnam is "more a part of history", "bizarre events" studied as "a learning event."

Xers Who See Cynicism and Distrust.

As presented in chapter four, cynicism, skepticism and particularly distrust were common themes on the impact of the Vietnam war on American political culture more broadly. They were also themes cited by many gen Xers particularly framed in reference to their own generation.

A few Xers talked positively about the cynicism and distrust of their generation. Celia, 18, framed being cynical as something she likes, and sees as very widespread in her generation, and in society. And she appears to conceive cynicism consistent with the sense offered earlier, as a deep, generalized, not-very-hopeful lack of trust ("no one trusts anyone anymore.") In the end she describes distrust as "all hell breaking loose" since the 1960s and being "passed along to us" from her parents generation. Her frame contestation takes the form of looking for "hidden motives", the difference between expressed and actual motivations (or the practice versus principles discrepancy) referred to by Rachel, Julian and a few other subjects in this study. Her view expresses dominant-frame rejection and government de-legitimation in the sense that she suggests that this cynical attitude is justified and sensible, that it is a rational, understandable response to lived experience, particularly vis-a-vis the "corruption" of politics.

Q: "Do you think there's any truth to any of the stereotypes that we hear about Generation X, as slackers, or non-conformists, or cynics, etc?"

Celia:

I think there could be. I mean, I don't consider myself a **slacker**, but I have friends that are. I have a friend who was raised differently from me; her parents were like, you know, "oh, do whatever you want to do honey, it's okay, no big deal." There were no barriers on her. She can do whatever she wants to do; but, then again, she's not doing much. Some parents raise their kids that way, I think coming out of the '60s and '70s they raised them to be slackers, in a sense. **I'm cynical**. I like being cynical; I like not taking things as they're given to me, trying to figure out, "okay, yea, what's the hidden motive?" I think a lot of people think that way, there's a lot of mistrust running around. There's not much trust at all. **No one trusts anyone anymore**. It creates a cynical generation. I don't think anyone trusts public figures or the government. Anyone outside of their family unit and their friends, it's hard to trust people. It makes us cynical. It makes me cynical when it seems like you have to have like a DWI to be a senator or a representative in this state. I think there's a lot of corruption in political figures.

Q: "What do you think has created or contributed to these things that you mentioned, to that sense of cynicism and distrust?"

Celia:

I don't really know. Maybe I watch too much "X-Files." Maybe because there's nothing else to do; maybe we're cynical because it occupies time. I think we got some of it from our parents. You know, like it started with Vietnam, and a lot of people didn't want Vietnam. And then the Watergate. And that was like complete mistrust of the government. Now **all hell is breaking loose and we don't trust anyone anymore**, and it's kind of passed along to us....

Celia's framing suggests that "some" of today's cynicism and distrust probably came from Vietnam and Watergate, but she implies there are probably other things which contribute ("Now all hell is breaking loose") -- possibly even to some extent "because it occupies time."²

2. For an in-depth discourse on the cultural complexity of the contemporary development of American cynicism, see Jeffrey Goldfarb's (1991) The Cynical Society.

Like Celia, Josh, 22, also sees cynicism as understandable in his generation, saying "the world definitely caters to cynicism these days," and going on to talk about the feeling of helplessness and a host of concrete cynicism-inducing factors. Josh explains these trends as the result of a society that has "run out of myths" and also discusses the impact of a lack of a unifying ideology or larger "spiritual thing" to give people purpose (a main theme discussed in the next section of this chapter.) Josh describes the existential problem today of the lack of a "substantial belief system", or, in an echo of Marx's theory of alienation, "something all your own."

Q: "What do you think about some of the stereotypes of generation X, as, say, slackers, or cynical, or apathetic, or nonconformist, etc? What do you think of any or all of those things?"

Josh:

I think that's what happens to a society when you really **run out of myths**. We don't have any sort of unifying, great ideology. So, when we don't have that sort of thing, you know, what do you have? You have to be somewhat cynical. And **the world definitely caters to cynicism these days**, you know with Bill Clinton and this kind of bullshit, in terms of people saying something, and then absolutely turning around and doing something else. And you see it all the time; in our courts, in the judicial system, and in politics, as well as in big business. You know, big business says they're out there for betterment, and then they do something, you know lay off 20,000 workers. This all really leaves the individual feeling helpless. And with the lack of a myth, with the lack of some sort of substantial belief system, that science doesn't fulfill, politics obviously doesn't fulfill, getting a job in corporate America doesn't fulfill -- those aren't myths, they're just ways to live your life -- and **without a myth, what do you have**, other than just to kind of talk about the world and come up with something that's all your own? And coming up with something that's all your own is tough, so people won't, so **you end up being a little bit cynical**. And, by something all your own, I mean some sort of moral foundation, something like that, and we don't really have it. So, I would say that those stereotypes are stereotypes, obviously, and you're going to run into all sorts of different people, but, in general, I think there's some truth behind them, that we are definitely following those general sorts of patterns....

And there's **no real spiritual something-or-other** to be able to really guide us to be able to do something. And that spiritual thing could come from **something like Vietnam**, or the civil rights movement, or something to fight for.

In a follow-up question, Josh returns to the distrust ("disenchantment with government") and cynicism frames and suggests that Watergate and Vietnam "really affected" his generation, though expressing some uncertainty about where that influence came from.

Q: "What events, if any, do you think have particularly affected your generation?"

Josh:

(Josh talked a bit about the importance of "technological stuff", then moved to Watergate and Vietnam:)

.... I'd actually say that the whole Watergate thing, and Vietnam -- despite that it wasn't our generation -- and all this, like just the **disenchantment with government**, that's really affected us. It's definitely affected my generation. Maybe through that there's **cynicism** in terms of that sort of thing, you know government and "Oh, you know the president's full of crap; we don't believe him anyway." Who knows where the influence came from; if it was actually from the fact of Watergate and we thought about it ourselves, or our parents thought about it for us and told us.

In another follow-up question, Josh gives an interesting characterization of the disenchantment with government (as "the glass has been broken"), which implies that the baby boomers experienced a loss of innocence and disillusionment in the Vietnam/Watergate period which became, to a significant extent, the *already existing* political-cultural context in which the Xers grew up. This may be a significant difference in the experiences of the of the two generations: that the baby boomers were children of the American myth (as stated by several baby boomers previously, like Rachel and Nancy) who experienced the disjuncture or shock of disillusionment as part of their coming of age, whereas the Xers were largely children of a distrusting milieu. In Josh's terms, the original events are "the biggest shattering" and "now things happen and you just don't take it as serious anymore." This, too,

would seem to me to tend more toward the cynical attitude.

Q: "And how would you compare the impact of those things, like Watergate and Vietnam, with later events, like say the Iran-Contra Affair or the current scandal with Clinton? Do you think those things are on a similar level, or lesser, or greater, or what?"

Josh:

I don't know. **Once the glass has been broken, it's already broken, and that's the biggest shattering. And now things happen and you just don't take it as serious anymore.** So, you know, the first time it happens is a big deal, and now it's not. A good example, I think, is how Kennedy actually was out there sleeping with everybody and their goldfish, but nobody talked about it, because the glass hadn't been broken yet -- like, you know, the attitude was "you can't destroy the presidency through something like *this*" -- but nowadays, something like this thing with Clinton; okay, so fine it's morally horrible, but it's not about the state. I don't view the morals of the president -- they aren't a moral ruler for me; they're just a ruler, someone who takes charge. But nowadays it's like they're just digging into the president for anything. He's so much **de-mythologized**, because of *all* of this stuff that's happened.

In Josh's view, for his generation American politics has been "de-mythologized" (in the context in which he articulates this idea, speaking about "the glass" being broken, I would argue this broader interpretation is warranted, though he uses the term specifically in relation to President Clinton, as an example of the broader phenomenon.)

Holly, 18, expressed one of the stronger hopelessness frames of any of the respondents. She describes her generation as "very hopeless", that "they don't believe they have the power to change things, or that anything's going to change." Speculating on why this might be, Holly gives an answer suggesting a strong (negative) inter-generational learning process: that it's because of the failures of the baby-boomers who thought they "could fix everything", and the young people look at their experience and feel like they "really messed things up."

Q: "In the 1960s many people talked about generational differences or a generation gap. When you think of young people today, your age, do you think there are certain things that define or characterize that group, your generation?"

Holly:

.... I think people today, **my generation**, especially my friends, **have a very hopeless attitude**, very existentialist maybe. They don't believe they have the **power** to change things, or that anything's going to change. I think that's pretty widespread in my generation. I even see it manifesting itself in things like drug use and smoking -- smoking especially -- in that, my generation is one of the first to know every negative side effect of smoking and drug use, I mean they can list them for you, with fancy medical terms and everything, but they still choose to do it. It's not like my granddad's generation where they smoked, and found out later that they were going to die as a result of it. **This generation knows, and they don't care.**

Q: "Why do you think that is?"

Holly:

I don't know. I think it comes from, like, that our parents were off in that **baby-boomer generation** that could fix everything, that had the ability, and "gosh darn it, there wasn't anything we couldn't do." And I think **our generation is looking at that and saying "You really messed things up! You didn't fix everything, and you weren't capable of it. You were just very egotistical, and had a very self-inflated opinion."** And I think maybe that's where some of it comes from; the idea that it didn't work, and you can't fix everything. I hear people say that all the time, "we're going to die anyway, so **what's the point?**" I hear a lot of that kind of thing being expressed.

Lisa, 19, also articulates a fairly strong influence of cynicism ("bred" from "Vietnam"), which has translated into a "trust no one; question everything view" which she thinks is "pretty prominent" within her age group (Lisa also was one of the four respondents who said she did not see her age group "as a generation.") She described what she sees as a strong, generalized distrust in her age group (that "anyone could be lying to you") which is held "in a kind of bitter way", that "someone's always trying to trick you." But it's also interesting to note that, in contrast to most other respondents, she doesn't particularly single

out the US government as the cause of cynicism or the object of distrust.

Q: "Generalizing beyond your own experience, do you think that people in your age group have been affected much by the Vietnam experience, or are other things more important?"

Lisa:

I think that Vietnam bred kind of a **cynical untrustworthiness**, which has definitely carried through, and the whole "trust no one; question everything" view, to a degree, I would say. And in just about everything, the fact that anyone could be lying to you, for any number of reasons, is pretty prominent within my age group. And it's **in a kind of bitter way**, I would say -- in a way that everyone's trying to pull a number on you, not necessarily just that there are differences of opinions and you can see it in a different way, but more that someone's always trying to trick you, and you need to be watching your back all the time.

Q: "Do you think there are certain events that have particularly impacted your age group, or not as much?"

Lisa:

No, I don't. And maybe **that's what's lacking**; why I don't really feel like there is a connection of, like, **a generation** with certain characteristics -- because we haven't really had any major tragedy, or event, that would bring us all together, **to look for something in common**.

This view about the lack of unifying events to characterize her generation is consistent with the discussion of generational definitions in chapter two; that is, understood in the narrower sense as unifying events, Lisa thinks her age group doesn't qualify. Others see the sense of disunity and skepticism as generational, understood more as a shared mentality or ethos.

About a quarter of the children in my sample talked in some way about the importance of being politically concerned, engaged, or active. Several also talked about wanting to be politically active, but having difficulty doing so, because of economic

pressures (to work, "get ahead", etc), or lack of unifying issues (treated in the next section), lack of time, or lack of a feeling of political efficacy. These framings seem not quite the same as the label of apathy often applied to gen Xers; that is, none of these attitudes or views suggest indifference, that young people "don't care" about politics. There were only a few Xers who did make this type of claim (that they don't care about politics), but this was certainly a minority of the sample.

Ervin, 20, who was quoted earlier, and who is a political activist, is one example of an Xer who sees some apathy and cynicism and disenchantment with politics in his generation (as "disgusted and sick of what's been going on"), but in his view the answer is not withdrawal but rather "proactive means to fix the situation."

Q: "A couple of the things that one hears, or that I've read about generation X is, you know, as the slacker generation, or that they're less trusting, or more sort of cynical in a way. What do you think of any of those things?"

Ervin:

I would definitely agree with maybe **the cynical issue....** I think we have the ability to be one of the strongest generations, and yet we remain one of the most apathetic. I think this **cynicism** is almost like "**Who cares? Politics is crap!**" So they've kind of disassociated themselves from the whole political arena, and I don't necessarily think that's the answer. I think if you're disgusted or sick of what's been going on, I think you need to **take proactive means** to fix the situation.

When considered along with his earlier remarks, Ervin appears to fit the pattern discussed in chapter two of engaged skepticism. He is skeptical of the government, but believes that it's necessary to work proactively in the political arena.

Disunity, Difference, and the Postmodern Present Condition

As already noted, all but a few of the people in this study agreed with the idea that their age group could be thought of as a generation. However, the baby boomers were much clearer in seeing their generation as largely defined by significant formative events or experiences like the Vietnam war.

One of the interesting, though somewhat ambiguous, findings on the generational question was that about two-thirds of the subjects, particularly the children, characterized the younger generation in the negative (or perhaps "postmodern") sense as lacking unity or coherence (-- in postmodern terms, "de-centered", lacking a "unified subjectivity", though the subjects of course didn't use these terms.) A number of scholars in recent years have advanced forms of this argument, either about contemporary society more broadly (Inglehart 1997b; Steigerwald 1995), and/or about youth or generation X particularly (Moore 1998). In other words, a fair number of respondents said that what defines generation X was lack of unity or unifying experiences. A few suggested that this is perhaps what the term "Generation X" denotes: absence of a defining or signifying name, an indeterminate or vague label that denotes but doesn't identify.

Gen Xers on Disunity, Difference, Uncertainty and Economic Fears.

When asked if she thought there were certain things that defined her age group, Carla, a twenty-five-year-old woman, said, "No. I think that's why they call us Generation X, because we don't have a Vietnam... there's so many different things going on that I think it's so hard to put anyone into a category, or define us. But I think maybe the lack of definition

gives us a definition."

Thus, in doing the interviews, it became clear that the conceptualization of social generations (as discussed in chapter two) requires an important qualification when applied to generation X. If the definition of generations is conceived (more narrowly) to entail a wide sharing of certain important formative *events*, like a war or depression, then the diversified experiences of generation X would seem not to qualify, or to qualify perhaps in a weak sense (on certain apparently less impactful events, like the end of the Cold War, mentioned by about a quarter of respondents.) However, if social generations are conceived to be defined more by a certain (historically-constituted) mindset or sensibility or "zeitgeist"³, then precisely the sense of disunity, fragmentation, de-centering, and diversity would seem to characterize generation X. Several commentators have formulated the question along these lines.

A majority of Xers in my sample actually characterize their generation in this way, as reported below. This "disunity" theme was one of the most consistent characterizations of generation X, and of this study. And it was often framed by subjects in relation to other themes of the study discussed earlier, such as distrust, hopelessness and cynicism -- many respondents connected many of these themes in their generational interpretations.

Interestingly, a few Xers also described their generation in a way quite reminiscent

3. Karl Mannheim ([1928] 1972) uses the term "Zeitgeist" in this sense in his famous essay on generations. In an apparently similar usage, Todd Gitlin (1993) refers repeatedly to the notion of "zeitgeist" in his best-selling history *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Though he doesn't explicate or flesh out the idea theoretically, by his discussion he seems to mean a "spirit-of-the-times" at least partially determined along generational lines.

of the 1960s, saying that their generation was very non-conformist and into "doing their own thing."

It is also worth noting that about a quarter of the parents suggested that the Xers are "slackers", and/or have it quite a bit easier than they had it as young people (a few of the parents used the term "spoiled" to describe their kids and/or their kids' generation.) About a quarter of baby-boomer parents suggested that their generation was more "political", more involved with "causes", and/or that Xers don't "take stands." A few Xers also saw their generation as slackers, though most rejected this frame. About half of the Xers talked about feelings of economic insecurity, about times being tougher today and being worried about getting decent jobs. About a quarter talked about being socially or politically concerned, and nearly half talked about having less hope and/or less time to give to "social causes."

Twenty-one-year-old Maria frames her generation as "floundering", without a "unifying factor" or "much to grab onto." She also suggest that a segment of her generation (actually more of a generation unit, as defined in chapter two) has been significantly shaped by her parent's generational experience as "hippies" against the Vietnam war. But this experience has made the children of hippies feel like "outsiders."

Maria on the generational question:

I think our generation feels that we're really floundering, with not really much to grab onto as something to become unified around, like the Vietnam war was for our parent's generation as, you know, on one side or the other. There just is not any sort of unifying factor for us. It's much more divided -- divided by name brand, and cliques, and like the cliques are determined by which brands you wear, and which vocabulary you use. It's really disturbing. I think we live in a strange period; there's definitely the remnants of the Vietnam war that affected us, especially

those of us who had the more hippie parents, more liberal parents. I think that really affected how we grew up. We were like outcasts, because **we were different**, we looked different and we acted different, because our parents looked different and acted different. And it was very clear, we just didn't fit in. And not just me; like my friend Kim whose parents were like hardcore hippies, like naturalists, and she didn't have a TV when she was growing up, and that really affected how she related to other kids. In fact it really hindered her, it made her like really weird, because one of the main topics of conversation is TV shows.... It was just made really apparent to us that we were outsiders.

Maria's description appears to present a case where the effects of family socialization were more influential than generational experience or peer influence; that is, she describes the experience of being the children of hippies as defining for her identity and her friends like Kim (who was also "a little hippie.")

Josh, 22, expands on the disunity frame, first saying that his generation has "had it pretty easy", then adding the intriguing claim made by several gen Xers that in the current period "there's nothing to fight for" as there was with Vietnam and civil rights, that "things are too amorphous these days." Josh discusses the loss of the drug "mystique" and changes in thinking and ideology, but concludes that the "world is tumultuous" and that technological changes are having "profound effects." The notion, suggested in various terms by about a quarter of the Xers (but none of the parents), that there's nothing, or not much to fight for today might be viewed as the acceptance of a hegemonic (status-quo-maintaining) frame that all the major or important social problems of the day have been essentially solved, or are at least under control and/or under effective managerial-technocratic administration.⁴ It might

4. Perhaps the most visible and controversial recent statement of this argument was Francis Fukuyama's (1992) greatly debated The End of History and the Last Man. Much of the burgeoning literature on citizenship, civil society and social responsibility takes up similar debates, usually from different standpoints and with very different conclusions (Bellah et al. 1992; Putnam 1995; Society Magazine, March/April 1998).

be also be argued that this view is more a result of the low resonance of many social problems with the lived experience of middle-class college students, particularly of a privileged race and gender. Certainly many other points of view contest the "nothing-to-fight-for" framing. As we have seen, many of the young people in this study offer opposing frames: that there are *too many* problems today, that young people feel overwhelmed, or that they feel bitter, disgusted, frustrated, disempowered and/or cynical about government and politics. It would seem that this is a theme with high frame contestation and little cohesion or agreement. In response to the generational question, Josh said:

Americans, and especially my generation, have **had it pretty easy**. When we get out there in the rest of the world, I don't know what we're really going to do. I mean we'll get jobs, and do all the same things other people do, but, and I think this is a really important but sad aspect of living nowadays is the fact that **there's nothing to fight for**. Like you can't take LSD and chill out when there are AK-47s out there -- that really takes the glamour of that away; drugs really have a different mystique today... And you can't be a revolutionary **without a Vietnam**, or without civil rights, or something obvious. Things are too amorphous these days. It's hard to fight for the environment, or political reform, when things are working okay. And that makes us more I-centered as opposed to we-centered.... My generation is more conservative politically and socially too. You know, communism is down; we don't have that sort of ideology that we should give all of our money away to the poor, and so in terms of taxation and that sort of thing, we want, the individual wants, a bigger piece, especially the one who's paying. We don't want to give it away. And socially as well, I think the chances that my generation will take won't be quite as dramatic. **The world is tumultuous....** But **we're just kind of riding the wave**; as opposed to say protesting, or doing big monumental things.

To Josh, Americans have it easy, there's nothing to fight for, and this tends to make young people more "I-centered", more conservative, and content to just "ride the wave" rather than protesting or doing big things.

Holly, 18, speaks to the disunity theme in terms of the absence of any "single cause" in a "more diffused period" in which there are "lots of issues." She suggests that her

generation is not very interested in "policing the globe" and concludes that she "can't see anything that compares to" the Vietnam war for her generation. Holly, on the generational question:

.... I'm trying to think of things that I think have influenced us. And maybe that's *why* we are like we are, because we **haven't had anything that has united us** in a single cause against one thing that could be seen as the enemy -- I don't know, maybe that's part of it. I think we're in a more diffused period. I think there are lots of issues. I don't think there's one that just really grabs the attention of the whole nation. And as far as global issues are concerned, I don't think that my generation is very concerned with policing the globe. Like with the human rights abuses in Bosnia, no one could really decide if we should go there and stop it, or if we shouldn't. And in Somalia, it took a long time before we finally went there. I mean, I have the opinion we should have gone much sooner, but I heard the argument that we couldn't take care of the whole world. But those don't loom as large in my mind as **anything like the Vietnam war**; I just can't see anything that compares to that, for us.

To Holly nothing looms as large for her generation as the Vietnam war did in the past. Her comments are quite consistent with the lack-of-unifying-events view noted earlier.

Celia, 18, also underscores the lack of any "central unifying thing" for her generation. Rather, Celia describes her generation as "mellow", but with the capacity to find out what they like to do and how to make themselves "happy."

Q: "When you think of young people today, say 18 to 26, do you think that there are certain things that sort of define or characterize your generation, or not really?"

Celia:

I think we're basically **the generation without a big event** to characterize us. I think that it's very mellow. There's not a big war, and there's not a depression, and I think it gives a lot of time to do stuff, besides thinking about what's going on, or about crises. I think that there's a lot of hope that we can do stuff. It's not like a general movement as a whole, but individually we can do what we want, and kind of make ourselves happy.

.... I think one of the most important characteristics of my generation is that **there isn't a central unifying thing**.... I don't think there's anybody trying to achieve great things in my generation right now, but I think that we all have the capacity and the

technology and the knowledge out there that makes it possible for us to be happy and that we all can find what we want to do with our lives, find out what we like to do.

Tamara, 26, combines a strong skeptical distrust frame with a disunity frame ("we got nothing to hold onto.") Tamara says her generation has nothing to "wave the flag about." She gives an interesting contrast between the Gulf war (which many saw as "dumb") with "catastrophic things like Vietnam" which "*was a war*" (implying that the Gulf war wasn't, or not really.)

Q: "What events, or what things, do you think have most affected your generation's views of the world?"

Tamara:

The "X-Files" [laughs]. It's like generation X who came up with the "X-Files", because we got the taste of the grandparents from World War II, and the taste of the hippie generation, and we have evolved into "**Question Everything! Absolutely. Absolutely!**" Either that, or you get the other extreme, the one's who don't even care at all. But that's true in any generation. You have people who do want to do something with their lives, and you have people who it doesn't really matter. And I've always thought why we are generation X is that we got **nothing to hold onto**; we got nothing we can wave the flag about. The Gulf war and everything, there were some who just thought, you know, "well that's kind of dumb." Is it really a war? It didn't seem like a war. We're used to hearing, like, catastrophic things, like Vietnam, and things that happened in World War II, and stuff. The **Vietnam war was a war, you know – gruesome things happened**. Over in the Gulf, okay gruesome things happened too, but in a biological sense, biological agents being used, or you know, just to be hateful Saddam set all the things on fire. You know, he's an ego maniac, that little man, which could get scary. But just, you know, send in the mafia, they'll take care of it -- not a problem.

Tamara's question whether the Gulf war was "really a war?" and that it didn't seem like a war evokes the argument made by Jean Baudrillard (1995), Noam Chomsky (1994), and others (Bennett and Paletz 1994) that this is one of the most disturbing trends of modern, media-managed, techno-war by the US -- that wars which are extremely real where they are fought

potentially take on an increasing "unreality" to the American public.

About half of the children in the sample explicitly raised the issue of economic difficulties, concerns and insecurities for their generation, framed in various ways, but which were often articulated as an important contributing factor in why their generation is less political, less active, feel that they have less time, and/or are less hopeful.

Gayle, 21, gave a particularly interesting and multi-faceted expression of this type of framing. She starts by talking about economic concerns in her generation ("it's scary"), then adds that there are no unifying issues, suggests there's nothing worthwhile or salient to protest about (as Josh did earlier), and then returns to the economic insecurity frame (which means "there's no leeway to go smoke weed and have free love.") Gayle, continuing on the generational question from the portion presented earlier in this chapter:

Gayle:

.... I think **economics have changed too**. You know, with us, one parent would stay home. With my peers just making it, just the ability to survive, to make sure you get an education and you get a job is really important, because none of us want to be on welfare -- it's scary. And because **there's nothing to distract our attention** from that, that's the general flow of things. You go to school with the expectation that you're going to make something of yourself and that's it. And I'm not saying that we don't have strong opinions about things; we do. And then I think too, you know, **during the 1960s you have such important issues, such as civil rights and the Vietnam war**; these are big things that have big implications for a lot of people around the world. And right now, as I'm at the age of these people who protested, I'm watching Bill Clinton and his sex scandal on every single TV. Now you tell me what **I'm going to protest about**. I could care less about his sex life....

So, how are you going to get someone to rally around something when your main concern is taking care of yourself? And I think every generation has had that -- but back then taking care of yourself involved the Vietnam war; people's lives were lost. Taking care of yourself now does not involve Bill Clinton and his sex life.... I think my generation has **more fear about the economic situation today** -- to know, especially as a female, that I have a very small chance of having the ability to stay home with my children, or even just work part time. I almost know that if I get married, both of us are going to have to work. There's **no leeway to go smoke weed**

and have free love. It's scary.... The Vietnam war was what was the big issue in the 1960s, so people were concerned with it.

With the next question, Gayle gives the increasing sense that her generation faces complex, scary, difficult, even perhaps overwhelming problems and worries. As she speaks she spins an expanding list of issues and concerns that gives an increasing feeling of resignation, frustration, or perhaps the modern existential theme of a generalized dread or angst (of Kierkegaard and Heidegger.)

Q: "We talked a little bit earlier about certain important events that sort of shaped you parent's generation; do you think there are particular events that have shaped your generation, or not really?"

Gayle:

I just think that **nowadays it's complex**. There's so much information going around. Take the Persian Gulf war. The thing that hits me the most is this whole idea of biological and chemical weapons. We know that a nuclear war will kill everybody, so that's not going to be beneficial, because you can't win. So, the idea of having nuclear and chemical warfare; that's scary....

You aren't confined to what's within your own borders as issues of importance. Everything is going to affect you everywhere.... Environmental issues are important; now that we're more aware of what everybody is doing, and know that we're destroying everything. It makes me start thinking about, like, pesticides. I mean **there's so much stuff** that we do to our bodies, that we put into our bodies, and we don't even know that we're doing it. And you kind of just have to take it for granted because there's so much information out there that you can't check everything yourself; you have to expect some authority figure to be making the right decisions for you. I don't know if that's good or bad; to have a leap of faith that the government are doing the right thing, and they aren't just doing it for some sort of individual benefit. You don't really know. In one of my classes we were talking about how we all just **want to search for the truth**, but you **don't have enough time** to search for truth in everything. That's kind of scary in itself; there's so much out there, there's no way to know everything. So, you have to take that leap of faith. You're concerned all the time about "what is the government doing? What actions are they taking in protecting our citizens? What else are they doing to protect the citizens of other countries?" Are they protecting the citizens of other countries too, or is it just that we're just going to take care of ourselves? And can you do that in this day and age?....

It's almost as if there's too much. I don't like that. But I just kind of feel that I've just got to keep going and going and going, because I don't know who's going to **stab me in the back**, you know? With anything you name, you just don't know if you're making, or they're making the right decision for you.

Gayle's framing echoes Lisa's earlier with the fear that you don't know who's going to "stab you in the back." This viewpoint does not evince much of a sense of hope or optimism or feeling of control in the world, or even in one's own life -- she uses the term "scary" repeatedly, in reference to weapons of mass destruction, and in reference to the feeling that there isn't even enough time to "search for the truth."

Austin, 20, also presents a disunity framing; that there is less to unify his generation compared to the '60s generation, with the interesting interpretation (adopting one of the fairly hackneyed stereotypes of the 1960s) that the "hippies were concerned about peace and love and stuff like that" whereas young people today learn about aggression and competition, and so he concludes that things are getting "segregated" and "stratified" again, which he sees as "bad."

Q: "Some people have talked about how in the 1960s there was a sixties generation, or baby boom generation, that was different from previous generations. Do you think it is possible to generalize about your generation in that way; are there things that characterize or define your generation?"

Austin:

.... As far as defining the generation... **we don't have any, like, thing to unify us, like the war maybe unified their generation.** I don't see that there's anything to unify us, as far as defining us or anything. It seems like everyone has a lot of different interests and stuff....

The hippies were concerned about **peace and love and stuff like that**, and not necessarily that the first thing they saw was that they were trying to stop the war; the first thing they saw was that everyone else was being peaceful and loving, and

stuff. Well, **that's not around anymore**. And I think that today, like the first things that children, like males mostly, the first thing they see right away is like sports, or "American Gladiators", or boxing, and stuff like that, just these masculine things. They see like the proof of bravery first off, and not the idea of **loving your neighbors** and stuff like that.... I can't say for sure if it's more that way now than in the '60s, because I wasn't alive back then, but it seems like in the 1960s being loving and hippie and being at peace and all that stuff was the trend, it was the thing to do. And that's not around anymore, that type of feeling that kind of **defined that generation**. It seems like more and more that things are getting segregated again, and stratified. **It seems like there's less unity today**. I sort of see these changes as bad in the sense that it just teaches you to have prejudices against different things and ideas.

Austin's response here suggests the importance for him of socialization influences other than the family, particularly the media. Men, in particular, are socialized toward bravery and competition rather than "loving your neighbor" and "being at peace," which "kind of defined that generation."

Lawrence, 26, thinks it is hard to generalize about his generation because of its heterogeneity ("a mixture of everything") and degrees of difference. Lawrence characterizes his generation as "a melting pot within a melting pot."

Q: "During the 1960s, there was this idea of generations, of a baby boom generation that was a separate generation, that they were different from their parents, etc. Applying that same idea to your own age group, do you think there are certain things that sort of characterize or define *your* generation?"

Lawrence:

I don't know. It's kind of hard to generalize, to put one title on our generation because we're kind of **a mixture of everything**, you know. We're getting exposed to a **bunch of different things**: war, drugs, different diseases that are coming out -- it's just that we have to be aware of so many different things, like the information age, you know. It's kind of hard to define; if I had to define our generation it would be really hard. They said like at the beginning of the United States we were like a big melting pot, you know, people from all over the world are coming to the United

States -- well **we're like a melting pot within a melting pot**; there are so many different things you can be nowadays, there's so many different lives.

In answer to the same question immediately above, of what things characterize his generation, Gerard, 20, alluded to a number of earlier themes, including lack of unifying events, and spoke in terms of period effects (historical "circumstances" define generations) and described his as "a slacker generation":

Gerard:

I think that in general people are pretty much the same; and the circumstances define the categorizations that you get put into. Like, the hippie generation had **the Vietnam war** that they could react against. But the slacker generation doesn't have any huge, burgeoning crisis that they can protest against. The generation that grew up during the great depression had this incredible time of need that developed a work ethic for them. And **the slacker generation**, we're growing up during a time of prosperity, so we figure we don't have to work that hard. I saw an article about how the slacker generation really aren't slackers, and how there are all these people who aren't -- but you know, I feel that I'm a slacker, and most of my friends are, so I think it is a slacker generation, and there are just certain people who work fantastically hard; but they'll always be there. There will be deviations in any generation I guess.

In a follow-up question, Gerard frames his generation as more cynical than his parents'. He ascribes some of the difference to changes in media coverage, and the claim that today people focus more on "the negative" which "engenders cynicism" and the feeling that "the world's full of crap, so what can I do?"

Q: "Beyond that characterization of some degree of slacker-ness, are there other things, or other ways that you would characterize your generation?"

Gerard:

I think **the world is different today**, and I guess part of it might be a result of generational differences. Like, in terms of **cynicism**, I guess you could say that our generation is **more cynical** than my parents' generation was at this age. But there's still idealism in my generation too. Like I said earlier, there's always variations, and they're still people who trust a lot, and they're people who don't trust anything. And there's a lot of crime and violence and you have to be wary of that... A lot of it has

to do with what the media focuses on. Today, people are focusing on the negative. I don't know if it's a positive or a negative thing, because focusing on the bad things forces you to look at them and try to change them, but then focusing on the bad things also **engenders that cynicism** -- because, like you say "**all the world's full of crap, so what can I do?**" So, it's another double-edged sword.

There is a striking similarity between Gerard's comment here and Ervin's earlier comment that the "cynicism [of some of his generation] is almost like 'who cares? Politics is crap!'" Both Gerard and Ervin recognize it as a dilemma for their generation; between inactive cynicism and actively trying to work for positive change.

We conclude this section with David, 23, who gives a brief, concise framing of his generation that touches on several of the key themes already articulated: uncertainty, less activism, lack of unifying issues, insecurity ("concern about how you're going to make it"), and instability. If any one statement can capture the anxious sense of the current, postmodern period, it might be David's last: "it just seems like a real unsettled time."

Q: "Do you think that there are certain things that define your generation or age group? Or not really, that you can't really generalize?"

David:

It seems like there's a **lot of indecision and uncertainty among my age group**; that there's not a lot of focus. I think my generation is less active politically. I think that part of it is that it's easy when there's one issue to focus on, like a war, to unite people in protest, or support, or what not. **Today there isn't one issue**; there's are a **lot of issues** now that people have interests in. And maybe people are still concerned, but I don't think there's the general awareness -- there's less of an awareness now among young. It's harder; I don't find myself talking to people my age a whole lot.

Q: "Why do you think that is?"

A: There's this whole issue where, you know, most people aren't going to be as successful as their parents, right? I think... there's more of a concern about how you're going to make it, your job, where your stability is going to come from. **I see a lot of instability**. I see it even in personal relationships; I don't see too many really healthy

relationships of people my age, like couples and stuff; it's just really transient. It just seems like it's hard to be really committed, because you don't know where you're going to be in a year. **It just seems like a real unsettled time.**

This last statement has the ring of a declaration for the postmodern generation.

Boomers Who See a Lack of Causes, Less Idealism, Fewer Dreams:

As we've seen in the previous sections, all but a few of the Xers see less unity, hope, trust, or sense of political efficacy in their generation, and in these times. There were also about a quarter of the parents who talked about seeing less commitment to political causes, less idealism, and/or fewer dreams in the younger generation.

Rachel, 43, claims that her generation "all had causes" when they were younger and she doesn't see causes ("something that you really, truly care about") in her children's generation. But, responding to a follow-up question, she adds that she thinks her own generation has become more materialistic and self-oriented as they've matured. She suggests that perhaps her generation hasn't done a very good job of instilling civic, social solidaristic values and concerns in their children.

Q: "In the 1960s people talked a lot about generations, the generation gap, etc. -- do you think that there are certain things that sort of define your generation, the baby-boom generation?"

Rachel:

This is something that we have talked about with the kids a lot. I think one thing that we feel is that **we don't see causes in young people now** that are our children's ages.... When I was younger we all had causes, whether it was antiwar, or support of long hair, or whatever it was, **everyone had a cause that they believed in**, that they truly did. Now I don't see that amongst a lot of young people. Our children do happen to have a few things that they are really involved in, like the environment,

and Holly is very involved in politics now. I think that's important, and we've wanted them to have an awareness and a focus of what's important to them, and how it relates to the world around them. And we have talked about that. You know, our kids have made comments "well, he gets in trouble because **he isn't involved in anything**", and I think that goes further than whether or not he's on the soccer team. I think it's whether or not he has a perception of the world around him....

I see a lack of causes today, or cares, I guess, something that you really, truly care about.

Q: "It sounds like you're saying that you see that more with the younger generation, or do you also see that more now in your generation, do you see a decline in that? You said earlier that during that time you all had causes..."

A: Yea, I think we did, and I think that as we matured and got older I think we all became more self-motivated and I think we probably have focused more on material things and our own small worlds around us. I think we probably got away from that a great deal and so I think that maybe **we've not done a very good job of instilling that in our children**. I mean it's something that my husband and I have done specifically, have worked on really hard, and that we hope that our kids we hope that we've exposed them to a lot of different situations politically and economically and personally, that **they can make a difference**, that they have a voice, that they *do* matter. But I think that that's been an effort on our part; I don't see that as a focus in our society. And I think that's true of **my generation too**; I think that the focus has become personal, greatly. And I think that things have to come back to the personal attention of people, to become involved. And that's too bad....

Rachel's comments relate well to the debate referred to in the Introduction and chapter two about America's civic crisis or decline in citizenship and social capital. Not only does Rachel seem to largely agree with this analysis, but she gives it an explicit intergenerational dimension by attributing a large part of the decline to the failure of her generation to "instill" (socialize) these values in the younger generation.

Like Gayle earlier, in the following passages Nancy, 49, discourses through a wide range of reflections and opinions about generational differences and the contemporary ennui. Nancy talks about the hope and confidence and idealism of her generation in youth (and like

Rachel, talks about the importance of finding "a cause.") This discourse provides a strong contrast with her very critical view of today's youth: that they are spoiled, have "no work ethic whatsoever", are unwilling to "struggle", don't seem to care much about anything (she's "hard pressed" to find what it might be), and they "don't have a clue."

Q: "During the sixties, and since that time, there was quite a bit of discussion about the 'sixties generation' or the 'baby-boom generation', and so on and comparisons with their parents' generation, the depression-era generation, or what have you -- do you think that there are certain things that kind of define or characterize your generation, or not really...?"

Nancy:

Oh yea. We were raised with that depression ethic of "you've got to work, dawn to dusk, save every penny, don't fritter away your time or your money, know your place." There was definitely a class system. I think **in the '60s** we were sort of like little cocoon babies; we were starting to feel our wings, and we thought we could fly, and that everything we'd been told was a lie, that **we could make a difference**, we thought we **could change the world**. We were such idealists. We didn't have limits; if we found a cause that we believed in, we could do it.... We were just becoming aware of Gandhi and Martin Luther King -- we couldn't understand the color issue; we had a black cheerleader, several black football players, tons of every ethnic group, and it was like "what's the problem?" and our *parents* were part of the problem. [laughs] They didn't want us bringing any of "those kind" here; didn't we know "our place?" And to us it was like "what place?" We didn't get it. So, **there was a big difference**.

Q: "Let me ask you to make the same comparison now to your kid's generation; do you see differences with their generation and yours?"

Nancy:

I think our generation thought we could do anything. We could be anything. All it would take is some work, and a couple of years of college, but that we would make a difference. I think our kids, **this generation** -- and I'm going to school with a bunch of nineteen-year-olds -- and some of them think the world owes them everything, that they should be accommodated; that they are *so special* that they should be accommodated. They have **no work ethic whatsoever**; they have no idea of what struggling, making some sacrifices means. I have worked for twenty years,

scrounging, for all this garage-sale furniture -- this whole house is a testimony to garage sales and estate sales.... To me, kids today, it's like, "**you don't have a real grip on reality here.**" There are *other* kids living with their boyfriends, they've got one or two kids, they're living on welfare, and they've figured out the system, that if they have another kid they can make more money.... Abortion is easier. **Life doesn't mean as much to them.** I don't think the sexual freedom is any different than it was in the sixties, which wasn't any different than it was in the forties. If they were gonna do it, they were gonna do it; and they did. It was just not as out in the open. There's been sexual promiscuity all along. Nowadays AIDS is talked about, but I don't think these kids are afraid of AIDS. I'm not sure if they're idealists, or if they're fatalists, but they think "well, if I get it, I get it, no big deal." I'm hard pressed to find out what they think is a big deal.... I think many of these kids have missed a lot. **They don't get it. They don't have a clue.**

In the previous chapter, Nancy was cited extensively about her distrust, jadedness, disappointment and disapproval toward the government. From the above, it sounds as if her disappointment and disapproval extend to a large extent to "young people today." She thinks "life doesn't mean as much to them" and "they don't get it."⁵

Walt, 51, a Vietnam veteran, talks about the diminution of dreams since his youth, and between his generation and his son's generation. From Walt, one gets a sense of a loss of hopefulness. When they were young, Walt says of his generation, "whatever our dreams were... we believed that we could do it." But today, he says his dreams are gone, and he thinks maybe they're also gone for his son's generation. When asked what he thinks explains these changes, Walt talks about the changes in the US since his youth, the inability (or misguided "priorities") of the country to take care of basic social problems like homelessness and hunger.

Q: "There was a lot of talk in the sixties and since the sixties about a generation gap,

5. A full discussion of these types of attitudes, and their origins, is beyond the scope of this study, but scholar Mike Males has recently presented an extensive case (1996, 1999) that there has been a process of significant scapegoating of youth in recent years.

about the baby-boomer generation, do you think that there are certain things that sort of define your generation?"

Walt:

It's different in that, I'm sure my son has dreams now, but I think **we had dreams** that, whatever our dreams were and however outrageous they were, however heavenly and unbelievable they were, **we believed that we could do it**. We believed that, no matter what, we could make our dreams a reality. I think now that's gone for me and maybe that's gone for my son's generation. They have dreams, but they're a little more practical and they have maybe **a little less idealism**, I think.

Q: "Why do you think that is? Why are they different in that way?"

Walt:

I don't know. Maybe because of **what's happened in the country between the time I was growing up and the time he was growing up**; I mean maybe it's the very country which we live in, and how we can get a man on the moon but we can't take care of these homeless and hungry people on our streets. You know, it's our priorities I think in this country. He sees this. ... My son's a lot more practical than I am, but I think he has a lot **fewer idealistic dreams** than I did. Now I'm not saying that all my dreams came true or that I accomplished all my idealistic notions in my head. But at least I had those thoughts, and maybe he's more of a fatalist now.

Here, Walt refers to historical period effects ("what's happened in the country...") as a possible explanation for the difference between his own generation's greater "idealism" and his son's generation being more "practical" and having "fewer dreams." The American cultural rupture since the 1960s, for Walt, entails disillusionment, disenchantment, loss of hope.

Conclusion: Generations at the Millennium

There are a number of interesting observations about the generations and the Vietnam war experience supported by the material in this chapter. All but a few of both groups subscribe to the generational idea and do view their age groups as generations. The

conventional view in the generational literature about the importance of "formative experiences" for generational identity seems to receive support from this study regarding the 1960s generation. Both age groups spoke extensively about the formative influence of Vietnam (and other events of the 1960s more broadly, like civil rights) for the parents' generation, and indirectly transmitted to the children. Much evidence seemed also to support the "persistence thesis", that the impact of the formative events has continued, has stayed with the babyboomers, with the culture, and is being transmitted to the children.

About two-thirds of the respondents also spoke about the lack of unity, and greater degree of difference and diversity for generation X, but this seems consistent with the generational idea more broadly understood (that is, if we focus more on the importance of cultural experience, sensibility, or "zeitgeist" for the younger generation, rather than "unifying *events*.")

The political culture of the post-Vietnam period appears significantly marked, for almost everyone in both generations, but particularly for the youth, by notable levels of distrust, skepticism and cynicism toward the government and politics in general. There is a high level of government-frame contestation and rejection of hegemonic discourses. Government de-legitimation is widespread in all but a few participants, in both groups. Hope, confidence and belief in political efficacy, where they appeared, were overshadowed by the more pessimistic and distrusting frames. About three-quarters of respondents make some connection between these trends and the Vietnam war experience. The overall mood of a similar majority of the interviewees was generally pretty pessimistic, or at least not very hopeful, about American government and politics.

A solid majority of the generation Xers were also pessimistic or anxious about the broader "state of the world": about the future, their job and career prospects, environmental destruction, the "anomic" effects of technological change, etc. All but a few of the total sample of respondents felt their were important lessons of the Vietnam war for their generation, and/or for America generally. About a third of respondents fear that the lessons of the war were not being learned by the younger generation, and/or the resonance of the war was waning for the US.

Taken all together, this chapter supports the thesis that the Vietnam war is, and remains, an important formative historical experience in American political culture, not only for the "Vietnam generation", the baby boomers who "lived through" the war in the full range of ways, but also for their children, for the generation Xers who have no direct, personal experience with the war.

- Chapter 6 -

Family Socialization and the Vietnam War

This chapter examines family socialization and interaction of the parent-child pairs on the Vietnam war experience and American politics, at the micro level of analysis, specifically by reporting what the participants said about their family interaction on the war. Drawing on the theoretical framework laid out in the preceding chapters, this chapter examines family socialization as a central sphere of the mediation of political culture. I begin with a short summary of the overall findings on family socialization. Then, the bulk of the chapter focuses on a more in-depth presentation and analysis of four key parent-child pairs. The rationale for this is explained below. I conclude with some brief general observations about family socialization and the Vietnam war.

Summary of Findings on Family Socialization and the War

As explained in chapter two, the logic of this study was to look at multiple levels of analysis of a complex historical event, the Vietnam war. As noted, much macro level theory, such as works cited by Habermas (1975) and Giddens (1984, 1979), can be somewhat non-specific or abstract regarding how things like political-cultural mediation, or de-legitimation, actually occur in everyday life. This is a key part of the rationale for attempting a more multi-level approach in this study. How are political-cultural interpretations or social memories of historically specific events, particularly highly contentious events, transmitted at the micro-level? For the purposes of this study, it was decided to focus the micro level on

family socialization.

One of the most interesting findings on family socialization on the Vietnam war was the variation on level of communication on the war. Each subject in the study was asked about the ways they learned about the war, and was asked several questions about the degree and form of transmission/reception on Vietnam in their family, i.e. whether, and how much, they talked in their family about the Vietnam experience: in what ways, what they remembered about it, how they talked about it. Responses ranged from "we talked about it a lot" and subjects reporting many particular memories of discussion, to "we never talked about it." Again, subjects gave a range of reasons for why they did, or didn't, talk about the war. For simplicity, I've chosen the basic labels for this continuum of "talkers" and "non-talkers." These terms seem most neutral and descriptive of any of the alternatives (e.g. "engagers" and "avoiders", or "sharers" and "non-sharers", which carry evaluative connotations.) Obviously, the actual subjects ranged along the continuum rather than fitting neatly into the dichotomy (although many were close to the two poles,) but in the discussion below I present more specifically what the subjects actually said on this dimension. It should be noted that I am using these terms to refer to each *pair* since it refers to how much they talked *with each other*. In the pairs discussed below, each subject in each pair characterized the pair very similarly to his/her partner (i.e I had no pairs in which one person said they were "talkers" and the other partner said they were not.)¹

1. The similarity of descriptions on the talker/non-talker continuum was notable for all the interviewees in the study, not just the eight discussed below. All of the parents and children described their levels of 'engagement' on Vietnam quite similarly; there were none in which parent and child really disagreed.

Though I have focused on four pairs below, the talker/non-talker pattern held to a large extent for the entire sample. There are 11 pairs of talkers who have the same position on the war (nine that are antiwar, two that are pro-war.) There are two pairs of talkers who are slightly different on the war (one member is antiwar, and one is "mixed" or "in the middle.") There are three pairs of non-talkers who are different on the war (i.e. one member pro-war, and one antiwar.) There are two pairs of non-talkers who are the same on the war (all four members are antiwar.) Thus, many more of the talker pairs see the war essentially the same (11 out of 13); whereas more of the non-talkers see the war differently than the same (three versus two.)²

For purposes of useful comparison and discussion, the parents of the four parent/child pairs I've chosen to present below cover the four groups, veterans and antiwar non-veterans, and talkers and non-talkers. I've chosen to concentrate on these four pairs to enable a greater depth of presentation -- these four pairs offer an optimal combination of a full range of the different positions and views of the study sample, and many particularly interesting positions and points. They provide an intriguing window into family socialization and the Vietnam war.

The Four Pairs on Family Socialization and the Vietnam War

The first father was one of the two war-supportive Vietnam veterans, and his active-

2. The one child in the parent-child "trio" (see Methods section) was counted twice, in comparison with the mother *and* with the father. True to the pattern, the son (pro-war) was in agreement with his father (pro-war), both of whom reported being talkers with one another; while the mother (anti-war) reported being a non-talker (with which the son agreed, saying she never talked much about the war.)

duty military son, who are "talkers." The second father was an antiwar non-vet, and his son, who were also "talkers." The third mother was an antiwar non-vet, and her daughter, who are "non-talkers." The fourth father was an antiwar veteran, and his daughter, who are also "non-talkers." The views and beliefs of each child and each parent are discussed together.

In terms of family socialization patterns, perhaps the single most interesting finding in the pairs presented here is that in the two talker pairs, both of the parents and children agree on support or opposition to the war; while in the two non-talker pairs, both of the parents and children *disagree* on this central frame of the war. That is, in the first talker pair, both support the war; in the second talker pair both are anti-Vietnam-war; while in both non-talker pairs the parent is anti-Vietnam-war while the child supports the war. If there is any lesson here, it would seem to be that in the pairs which have not talked about the war, the children have ended up with views about the "rightness" or "justification" of the war quite different from the parents (even in one pair, "Roger" and "Carla" discussed below, where the daughter is quite certain that their views are the same.) In both of the non-talker cases the child is unaware of the parent's strong criticism and non-support of the war.

I begin the presentation of the four pairs with a brief introduction, and discuss what the parent and child reported about their family socialization pattern on Vietnam, i.e whether and in what ways it was discussed as the child was growing up. Then I present their views of the Vietnam war itself: why they think the US got involved in the war, why the US lost the war, and what are the lessons of the war for the US.

Karl and Steve:

Karl is a 52-year-old Vietnam veteran whose son, Steve, is in his mid twenties and is currently on active duty in the Army. As we saw in chapter four, both men believe the US involvement in the war was justified. Of all the people interviewed for this research, Karl makes perhaps the strongest defense of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam (the "just cause" frame.) Steve reveals a greater ambivalence about the war and talked about how hard it was on his father and mother (and criticized the Army's treatment of Karl, especially when he returned to the states.) Yet, notwithstanding his criticisms, Steve also believes that the war was justified.

Karl believes the war effort was definitely justified and he expresses no regrets about being involved in the war. His normative framing here evokes the notions of "pride" and "duty": "I enlisted.... My dad had been in World War II. I believed in the military.... I believed in what we were trying to do.... We were doing the right thing." His criticisms of the war are with the American leadership, with the media coverage ("skewed"), and with his generational peers (not wanting to be "inconvenienced.") Karl volunteered for service in Vietnam, did several tours of duty between the late '60s and early '70s, saw quite a bit of combat, and had hoped to be a career officer (a hope quashed by the Army when his re-enlistment was denied during the 'draw-down' of the early 1970s.) Karl is also quite open and willing to talk about the war -- in addition to talking a lot over many years with his son, he said that he also speaks publicly about the war from time to time, for example going to talk to high school classes and presenting a positive normative frame: "I tell them what I think; that we did good things."

It was clear from the interviews that Karl and Steve are "talkers" about the Vietnam war. Karl has communicated a great deal with his son about his experiences, feelings and views of the war. He believes he has influenced his son:

I talked about the war. My wife accuses me of raising my son to be a soldier, and I guess I did. Her father was in World War II, retired out of the Air Force, and from the time my son can remember we sat and told war stories at the table after dinner, and **gave him lessons** on command and control and leadership. And when he was about to get commissioned I said, 'You don't have to do this for me.' And he said, 'hey, what else can I do with my life? **I don't know anything else.**' I hope he was halfway joking.

Karl expressed how proud he is of his son for serving in Korea and for being in the Army. Steve's account of Karl's influence is equally clear-cut. When asked about how he learned about the Vietnam war, Steve said:

My grandfather's a military officer; my father's a military officer -- I grew up hearing a lot of stories about the Vietnam war.... I had grown up always very interested in the war. When I was about six or seven I began to understand and grasp what people were saying about it, what it meant; I mean at that point it was still relatively fresh for my dad. **I was real proud** of the fact that he was in the war. What's funny is that I didn't know we had lost the war until I was about nine. I had a good friend; I remember talking to his dad and he said that we lost. I said, "you've got to be kidding," and he said "no." I remember going home and **asking my dad, "Why? Why did Mr. Walker say that?"** And he said, "**Well... America came in second.**"

I always asked my dad about Vietnam. My dad's a great story-teller. Here I am, I'm young, I'm watching John Wayne movies, playing war with my friends. And he would tell me all these stories of stuff that actually happened. **He didn't tell me the bad stuff, until later.** I would ask him about it all the time. I can remember some times he would get cranked up; he was very passionate.

Steve explicitly talks about the importance of stories and story-telling in the family socialization on Vietnam. Also interesting is that the father, Karl, apparently for a long time didn't want to tell his son that America lost the war. When confronted with the question directly, he comes up with the creative re-framing "Well... America came in second."

Yet Steve's perceptions of the war did change as he got older -- his views became more complex, mixed and nuanced. According to Steve, Karl began to modify his own framing and presentation of the war, giving more of its negative effects. However, it is striking that Steve attributes Karl's frame changing to his mother's intervention; suggesting that, out of concern for her son, she prevailed upon the father to give the son a more balanced view of the war. Steve's description of Karl's experiences revealed a depth of understanding that suggests the war carries affective weight in the family, and that he has devoted considerable time to thinking about the war on many different levels, from the global to the very personal. He expressed sensitivity to the effects of the war on his parents, saying that his mother put his father "back together" after the war (a frame which Karl made no mention of.) In Steve's comments there is a sense of betrayal or lack of appreciation of his father and other vets by the military and "the whole nation." According to Steve:

Immediately following the war there were big reductions. They would take whole cohorts of officers, when they completed their terms of service, a blanket statement went out, which was referred to as **the "fuck-you letter"** -- like, everyone in my Dad's unit got one, and it wasn't based on experience or ability, or anything like that. It was more that the Army's an institution, and the nation wanted to forget the Vietnam war.... So a lot of officers with that type of experience were cut. My dad had wanted to be a career military officer. That **affected my dad** a great deal. And it **affected my mom** a great deal because he went through this whole ordeal in Vietnam and she put him back together when he came back; and then this whole thing with the Army, and **the whole nation's attitude**, was kinda like "yea, you went over there and you suffered these terrible emotional issues in doing this job and you come back and **we don't like you -- you suck** -- and, by the way, go find a job." My mom's got to be the strongest person alive, and she really put him back together after the whole thing....

As I got more interested in Vietnam, it made my mother very nervous -- (laughs) it still makes her nervous that I'm in -- because she saw what war did to my dad. And she thought he was encouraging me to go in. So what he started doing, as I got older, and we kept talking about this stuff, he was **trying to give me a broader perspective**. I mean, I used to be the most right-wing, conservative, my-country-

right-or-wrong type guy, like the military's never wrong, and by the way, the cavalry didn't shoot any Indians either, you know. So he **started telling me some stuff that I was shocked to hear....** He started telling me **the bad part of it too**, to give me a more broad perspective, and it kind of made me reconsider some of it.

The last paragraph is interesting here in that Steve recognizes that his own views of the war were somewhat skewed in a too positive, gung-ho direction, and that his father (at his mother's prompting) consciously began altering his own framing of the war, to moderate Steve's understandings (give him a "broader perspective") -- which induced Steve to "reconsider some of it." Steve's reference to his father's termination being "referred to as 'the fuck-you letter'" suggests that the war experience was talked about openly and, at least at times, with strong language.

These comments were followed up by asking Steve how his mother felt and how she reacted when he decided to join the Army:

Steve:

Her view was that if you pursue that occupation, nobody cares about you, and **the institution may screw you, and the nation may screw you**, and when it's over then you still have to get a real job. She really encouraged me to go to college, get an engineering degree. But when I committed to the ROTC I think she accepted it. And she's very supportive now. Both of my parents are very supportive. And I think she understands that **the military has changed, in a lot of ways.**

Both Karl and Steve concur that the Vietnam experience was important in their lives -- Karl directly, and Steve through socialization and mediation, learning about the war from his parents, hearing all the stories, playing war as a child, and coming later to a deeper understanding of the complexity of the war, including the negative aspects, in addition to what had seemed exciting as a youngster. Steve came to see the pain and difficulty the war caused for his parents, for the US, and also for Vietnam (in our interview he described

learning as he got older some of the specific horrible things, suffering, torture, etc, that happened in the war.) It is clear that Steve was strongly influenced by his father's experience and stories of the war. Karl raised his son to be "a soldier," and both men carry a certain pride about military service.

Julian and David:

Julian and David represent a second father-son pair of "talkers" who provide an interesting contrast to Karl and Steve. Julian, 56, strongly opposed the Vietnam war during the war, becoming a conscientious objector and an active protester. He still considers himself a "radical" today, is still politically active, and is still very critical of the US role in Vietnam, and in the world today (believing that US corporations are still "going into countries and oppressing people.") Just as Steve described Karl as "passionate" about Vietnam, Julian is still quite passionate as an opponent of the war. Julian's son David, like Steve, is somewhat less passionate than his father, but also stressed the centrality of all the "story-telling" in his home about Vietnam and the 1960s. David, 23, says that he has also been strongly influenced by his parents, especially his father, in his political views and values, and perceptions of Vietnam.

Both Julian and David were asked about the processes of their family socialization on Vietnam. Julian first offered thoughtful reflections on the experience of family socialization more generally:

Julian:

I don't know if it's conscious, but I think you live a life and you convey things to your kids. I don't know that I consciously thought, "oh, I'm going to teach them a

lesson." I think we consciously are aware of day to day issues politically -- we listen to the news, we get the Nation, there are publications that are always in the house. I think as issues came up **we talked about them**; I don't think it was the idea of "okay, I'm going to teach you something", but as a parent you're always teaching. I think the question was more around **sharing values** than it was around telling what I did, or Sara [my wife] did, or what we thought.... So, the same thing came out about war, and about politics, you're sitting hearing Reagan talk, or Bush talk, and you make comments, and your kids hear those comments. David didn't ask a lot of questions, but my daughter asked lots of questions, she has a real different sense of involvement in social action than David, who probably shares many of our values, but doesn't go out to demonstrate. We took him to a couple of Martin Luther King Day marches, and took him to some things about Central America, and he never wanted to go, so we stopped taking him.... So, when you ask "did you teach them that?", I think, you know, you listen to NPR, you hear an interview, you listen to certain people, they'd listen, it would be on the radio. I think **those things influence kids**, they'd listen to what someone was saying, they'd form their own opinions....

For Julian, parental socialization is not so much "consciously" teaching, not directly didactic, but that you "live a life" in a thoughtful, interactive way with your children, and "those things influence kids", though they "form their own opinions." Later, David corroborates this characterization, saying "I think they tried to show both sides." This view seems to be consistent with the "concept orientation" of the Family Communications Pattern model of family socialization discussed in chapter two -- that family socialization is open, interactive, and supportive of open communication and formation of one's own opinions and beliefs. Julian's reference here to taking David to Martin Luther King Day marches and Central America events is interesting; later in his own comments David comments that "they were always dragging me to things." The intergenerational framing of this issue is interesting. To Julian: we "took him to things", but David is not like his sister who "has a real different sense of involvement in social action." But for David it felt like being "dragged to things." The resolution was: "so we stopped taking him." David established his own way of being on this

(i.e. not being an active protestor), but Julian "would bet that we share a lot of values."

I asked Julian if he remembered talking about the Vietnam war and the 1960s with his children; if they talked about the war in the family while the children were growing up:

Julian:

I don't think it was anything I said directly... I think other people were in the house talking about things and he heard it; people would visit us, maybe people I helped get out of the military, and we'd sit and talk about it and he'd listen; I don't think it was a conversation that we had.... I don't think I consciously said "hey David, this is how you need to think about these things"... I think he probably votes as far left as there is a candidate for; I never ask him that, but I have the feeling. I think he thinks about justice.... Some of his friends still come here to talk about things -- you know they're talking about some of the social issues of our time, for a reason, they're bringing it up, **they want to know what you're thinking. I think that exchange is positive. I would bet that **we share a lot of values** that are the same. I don't think he acts it out the same way.**

David gave a strikingly similar account of how Vietnam, and politics more generally, were addressed in the family. He, too, emphasized not direct communication of views and "lessons" but rather the importance of story-telling and being a part of his parents' lives and experiences and conversations; that this all came out "in passing" over a long period of time.

His knowledge of his parents' experiences was quite extensive:

David:

Both of my parents opposed the war, pretty strongly. My dad maybe was a little bit more active. I know they participated in demonstrations -- they lived in the bay area in '67, '68. My father refused military service and was put on trial. He had the choice of going to Canada or jail. He was a conscientious objector. They finally dropped the case against him. It wasn't always so spoken about growing up, but I was aware of it. I was more aware of their activities.... I know my dad worked with the Black Panthers, organizing and doing some medical service for them. I mean, they're all forms of resistance. One thing I remember they always said is "we weren't hippies." It always looked like they were. But they were a little bit resistant to that -- I don't understand it all. I mean, they described themselves definitely as antiwar activists. I remember stories of my dad saying how at demonstrations he was getting clubbed. It all just slowly came out I guess -- a lot just came out in passing. There were probably a few times when I had a class project or something and I would

talk to my parents. But I think more it was, we always had friends coming over; there were a few friends who were actually, you know, "underground", who would come over to the house. This was all when I was growing up. And it was just like it **continued**, they were still active -- later, you know, they would try to get people to get together to ban pesticides; it was a continuation. They were big into the nuclear freeze, and they were **always dragging me to things**. So, it's not like it was a separate life, to me -- it was just like it continued on. Today they're not as political -- well, they're definitely very political in some ways -- but they're not as active.... I mean, back then they considered themselves radicals, or leftists; I don't know how they would actually label themselves now, I don't know if they would consider themselves less left -- just probably a little less active, I think.

I followed David's description with a question about his own thoughts about this family history. He light-heartedly called it "the accepted propaganda" of his house, while describing himself quite close to his parents ideologically and politically.

Q: "And what did you think about all this? I mean, did you agree with it, or..."

David:

Yea, I agreed with it. That was like the accepted propaganda in my house; that's what I grew up with. But, I think they tried to show both sides, or, I think we had friends who were Vietnam vets as well. But, there was always like a **hostility towards authority**, towards the police, towards the military. I remember, since my dad refused military service, and then he was a physician, but only worked like two days a week and didn't make much money, and the FBI was investigating him -- so there was always a little bit of tension and hostility, from my parents toward the government. **I guess I picked that up in some ways.** I don't think I'm nearly as active as they were -- but, our generation isn't either. But I think my political philosophy is more in line with theirs. I'm fairly left.

The two pairs of fathers and sons reveal some interesting comparisons and contrasts. As revealed in the rest of their interviews, some of which is reported in chapter four, each of the sons is fairly close to his father in sharing a number of similar frames of the war, and in their overall assessment of the US involvement in Vietnam and its lessons. Both Karl and Steve believe the war was justified, while Julian and David believe it was not. Not

surprisingly, both of the sons feel somewhat less passionately than their fathers about the war. All four of the men acknowledge that story-telling and talking about the past were important in the family socialization process and significantly influenced the sons. Karl described consciously telling stories and teaching Steve about military service, while Julian and David described more of a pattern of on-going open family discussion of issues and politics, including Vietnam and the 1960s -- that this process of interaction was an organic part of the family life.

In the case of these two child-parent pairs, the fathers feel strongly in their views about Vietnam, feel still today that their actions and beliefs during that time were justified, and that they shared their experiences with their sons, who have developed political views and beliefs quite similar to their fathers in a number of ways. It is appropriate in this kind of study to question the extent to which inferences can be drawn between similarity of views and influence. It is suggested here that (at least provisional) inferences of influence can be made if both participants say they have talked a lot about the war (here identified as "talkers") and particularly where members (in this case, the two sons) explicitly talk about being influenced by the family interaction ("story-telling" and "the accepted propaganda.")

Nancy and Monica:

Nancy is a 49-year-old married mother of four and a part-time community college student, whose family has a long history of military service (her father and an uncle served in World War II [her uncle survived the Bataan Death March]; and a number of cousins served in Vietnam.) Her daughter, Monica, is an eighteen-year-old college student. Nancy

and Monica represent an interesting example of a pair of non-talkers with significantly different frames of the Vietnam war -- we might say they exhibit a sort of "don't ask, don't tell" approach to the war. Though the war holds a lot of important meanings for Nancy, Monica knows little about it, or her mother's experiences or feelings. And they reveal significantly different perceptions of Vietnam, despite Nancy's strongly expressed concern that her children understand her past and her views and beliefs.³ Regarding talking about Vietnam, Nancy said she had chosen to "insulate" her children from "the real world." What Monica picked up is that her parents are "patriotic" and that they believed that "whatever the government said we should do, should be done" -- a perception nearly opposite to what Nancy actually expressed in the interview.

As shown in chapter four, one gets the clear sense with Nancy that she was powerfully affected by her experiences during the Vietnam War and the death of her best friend 'Joe', that she is very critical of the war (and made some strong comments against war in general), and that these Vietnam-era experiences continue to be important in her life (at one point she said, "Vietnam is with us every day"), and in shaping her worldview, particularly making her "jaded" and "very distrusting" of the US government. She made several comments to this effect during our interview. Nancy also expressed a strong desire to be interviewed as a participant for this research.

As also noted in chapter four, Monica expressed a strong desire to be in the Air Force and to fly fighter jets. She said she would love to fly, and that "if we're called to fight, I

3. Nancy requested a copy of the tape of our interview to save for her children, to include with a collection of scrap books she keeps so the children "will be able to understand my life when they get older."

would go fight... I'd love to serve my country." She added that as a woman she'd like to make a name for herself as a fighter pilot, that she would be passionate about it and "try to stand out."

In speaking of their family socialization pattern, both Nancy and Monica reported being non-talkers. Nancy has chosen to share only a very truncated version of her experiences and views, stressing the importance of respect for American institutions, but limiting discussion of personal feelings about the war itself. When asked if she had shared her Vietnam-era experiences with her kids, Nancy said:

No. I think I went overboard the other way... I made my own little world, I guess, is how I coped; and sort of insulated my kids from the real world. I had them in scouts; I had three eagle scouts; my husband was a scoutmaster -- so there was the flag; you know, all that red, white and blue stuff.... We taught them "respect the uniform, respect the office, even if you can't respect the man," that type of thing. That's the lesson for the kids; this is our country. It's been paid for. My uncle bought it. The Bataan marchers bought it. My friend Joe paid for it.

Nancy said that her children knew how she and their father met at the funeral of a friend who had been killed in Vietnam, and her children knew that her friends went to fight in Vietnam "because they thought they were fighting for a good cause, and gave their lives for our country; and we still don't know at what great cost it was." Nancy's answer is framed in terms of "insulating" her kids from the cruel or harsh realities of "the real world", and teaching them to "respect" institutions.

I asked Monica what she knew of her parents' experiences during the Vietnam period:

Monica:

To be honest, I don't know what they did.... I don't know, one way or another, what their views were.... They were having kids. I don't know what their feeling was. I'm sure there was probably a patriotic feeling that, you know, whatever the country needed, that's what needs to be done -- you know, whatever the government

said we should do, should be done, because, you know, the people in both sides of my extended family have been in wars and served to protect our country. But my parents, themselves, **I don't know what they were doing....** I just know that there's a strong patriotism. Heck, on the 4th of July my mom puts out, like, 20-bazillion flags.

Q: "What do you remember learning from your parents about the war? Did you ever ask them about that period of their lives, what they were doing, what they thought about the 1960s, or the war?"

Monica:

Not really. I never really asked. It's never really been one of those big, important things. I know my parents met at a funeral for one of their friends who had died in, I believe it was Vietnam.... **That's all I really remember** about the Vietnam war, from what my parents have told me. And, I remember watching a movie with my parents, "Mr. Holland's Opus", and it said something in it about the Vietnam war, or something about war -- someone was killed because of the Vietnam war -- and I know it had a great impact on both my mom and my dad; I know there's a lot of emotional ties there, but **I never really asked.** I mean, World War II was what I wanted to learn about, because I just thought Vietnam was... well, I don't know what I thought Vietnam was, but I thought World War II was one of the most intriguing situations with all the irony and hypocrisy that went on in that war.

Monica's response reveals that she knows very little about her parents actual views of Vietnam, but she believes they were "patriotic", which she seems to equate with doing what the government says. For Monica, the war and her parents views of it simply are "not important." Her contrast with World War II seems to suggest that in Monica's eyes both wars are simply "history" with no particular personal meaning for her in relation to her parents' experiences. In most schematic form, the family socialization on Vietnam seems to have been: the parents, at least the mother in particular, were strongly affected and disillusioned (made "jaded"), but chose to insulate their children from this by not talking about it. But they still instilled a strong sense of patriotism and respect for "the flag" and "the uniform." The

daughter learned little about Vietnam, but interpreted the "strong patriotism" as support for the government and the military, and therefore the war.

Nancy and Monica raised only a few of the same themes in their views on the Vietnam war (most notably anticommunism as a key motive, and criticism of the US government,) but virtually all of their framings are strikingly different: Nancy stresses the stupidity of the war, the deceit, the sense of loss, the lies, her jadedness, while Monica is much less emphatic and more uncertain overall, but seems to stress patriotism, serving one's country, "helping" other countries, and the importance of military service (e.g. that she would like to be a fighter pilot.) She stated that she had little knowledge and little interest in her parents experiences and views of the Vietnam war. Nancy and Monica's "don't ask, don't tell" approach to the war experience has resulted in a mother and daughter with strikingly different understandings and feelings about the war, despite Nancy saying that she wanted a copy of our interview tape so that her children will understand her life.

Roger and Carla:

Roger is a 52-year-old combat veteran who served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1968, and his daughter Carla is a 25-year-old school teacher. Like Nancy and Monica, Roger and Carla also fit the "non-talker" approach to the war experience; they concur in being quite definite that they have talked very little about the war. Their interviews reveal that they share some similar views on the war, but also some striking differences. Perhaps most striking as a difference is that Carla believes the war *was not a mistake* (largely *because* her father was there) and is certain this is her father's view, when in fact Roger is quite emphatic that he

feels the war *was a major mistake*.

Their case seems to show a family socialization or communication process on Vietnam which is largely subtle or implicit, through which certain frames or meanings are conveyed largely indirectly, resulting in some shared understandings, and some significant differences in views. In terms of the mediation model suggested earlier in this chapter, the transmissions on Vietnam are limited and indirect, and the receptions (particularly by the child) are highly interpretive (Carla says her knowledge is "based on assumptions.") Some frames may be transmitted and picked up or absorbed without much modification, while others are significantly altered, or simply different.

Roger said that he didn't talk much about the war with his children, nor with his wife, and that they don't ask about it, which he indicated he thought was at least partially because they have sensed his reluctance to talk about it. He added that he feels that the war was a "terrible waste", that "it pisses you off", and that it "borders on criminal":

Roger:

I've not talked about it much with them, certainly nothing other than in general terms. Carla's government class her senior year in high school asked me to come and speak and I did; I think it was the only time I've done that. I never felt that it was important for them to know anything other than what they were going to learn about the war. If they had any questions I would try to answer them. They know that I served, and that's really as far as it goes. And I really haven't spoken with my wife at any length, and we've been married 28 years.

Q: "Do they ask about your Vietnam experience, or views of the war, or have they?"

A: **No. And I'm not so sure but that maybe they knew that it was probably something that I would really prefer not to get into. And I really think that's more maybe why they haven't.... It's not something that I've dwelled upon, it's not something that I feel strongly one way or the other about, except that, in hindsight, what a terrible waste that it was. It was a terrible waste. I mean, to have people give up their lives in a combat situation is a bad enough, and when you have them give up their lives in a**

combat situation that is never really given a chance -- for them to give up their lives, and at least their relatives and people could say we won, there was a reason to it, and look, South Vietnam is still South Vietnam, and whatever. I mean I think it really kind of **pisses you off**. You hate to think you went and did your duty and actually it didn't matter, that's bad enough. But for people to lose their lives, for people to be psychologically affected, physically affected, is, to me, **it borders on criminal....**

If you're angry at anybody, **you're angry at the government**. It was the government that got us there. I mean, the American people, either you were for it or against it, or whatever, and that's certainly your right to be.... And the Vietnamese didn't ask us to be there; I have no animosity toward the Vietnamese, I truly do not.

Q: "I asked a moment ago about how you talk about the war with your kids, and I wanted to follow up a quick related question. You described your career in the military, and your dad was career military, did you ever talk about this with your kids, about the possibility of their joining the military?"

Roger:

You know, probably **over the years** it came up about **my son** going into the military, but only casually. **He's never really showed any real interest in it**. It's not something that he's asked me, you know, generally what I thought of the military. I told him that unless there's a reason for him to be there, if he's going to make a career out of it, then there's no point in it. **With my kids there was never a real point**. It just never evolved as something that either one of them were particularly interested in. **As I told my son, as far as Vietnam, he didn't miss a thing**. I think almost anybody who was there would tell you the same thing; if you didn't go you didn't miss anything.

Carla's characterization of the family's communication pattern on Vietnam is quite close to Roger's. Her description clearly fits what I have called the 'non-talker' pattern. Carla concludes that the war must have been "incredibly traumatic" for her father, and that her views are based on "assumptions." When asked to describe how the war and her father's experiences have been addressed in her family, Carla said:

He does not talk about it. He has maybe told one or two stories, that have been completely separate from any fighting, or purpose, or anything like that -- just like,

one of his sergeants had a monkey, you know. Or, some lady, this snake dropped down and this Vietnamese lady just beat the tar out of this snake with her high-heeled shoe and it didn't phase her. My assumption would have to be that **it was incredibly traumatic and difficult**, because he can't, or he chooses not to, speak of it. He doesn't watch those movies. **So everything on my part is an assumption**; I really don't have direct communication with him about how it affected him or made him feel.

Q: "Have you tried to talk to him, or have you wanted to? Or, have you gotten some sense that he didn't want to talk about it...?"

Carla:

Oh, very much so. When someone won't even watch a movie, you have a pretty good indication that there's something there that they would **rather keep in their past**. In high school, he came to speak to my class regarding Vietnam, and again he stuck to all the non-fighting, outside parts. He did say, which really surprised me, "you get scared, and you stay scared, for a really long time." Which I thought was quite interesting. But, I think that I've always gotten the feeling that **it's painful for him**, and I've tried to respect the fact that it's his past and he wants to leave it there. **So, I don't really broach the subject very much.**

Carla perceives the war to have been painful and traumatic for her father, and she made clear that she had tried to respect that he doesn't want to talk about it. She also said that the experience of her mother has been pretty much the same with Roger, adding that her mother had told her that she had wanted to protest the war.

Q: "What about your mother, has she expressed feelings about any of this with you; feelings about your dad's experience?"

Carla:

My mother doesn't know anything either. She was in school. She said that if her dad had let her, she probably would have protested against the war, but she lived at home and her dad would not have that. My mom has always been one of those people who does exactly what she's supposed to, and follows the rules, and so she just kept going to college and doing what she needed to do. My parents met after my dad came home, and my mom did mention that she would never have agreed to marry him had he been still in the war. I think my mother is very much the way I am with my dad, that it's just kind of **something you accept as part of my dad, and he**

doesn't talk to her about it, and never has. So, we don't have much to talk to each other about it, except for the fact that he doesn't say much.

A bit later in the interview Carla returned again to the subtle (almost "subliminal") processes in her family by which she learned about the war. It was here that she asserted that she was sure her father supported the war, and her desire to "back him up", and she explicated a bit further her sense of the subtlety with which the communication on Vietnam occurred in her family:

Carla:

While my dad certainly didn't give specifics, **he always spoke in support of being in Vietnam**, and kind of **gave the feeling that it was a very important cause**, and so I think a lot of my feelings may have come from just his feelings. While not a lot was said, it was, like I said before, the fact that my dad was there and put his life in danger and enlisted because obviously he believed in something very strongly, that I think that a lot of my feelings came from there, even though he didn't talk about it.... **My dad made clear that he supported the war effort.** It certainly wasn't that he ever brought it up, but say a movie was advertised on TV, or my brother and I were studying it in school, or somebody outside made a comment, then he would definitely express support. Somehow over the course of my life we become aware that he won a purple heart, plus a cluster, so we knew that he had been wounded pretty seriously in fighting, and never told us what happened, but I think things like that add to the seriousness of it. The fact that that happened, and he was such a strong supporter, that **you kind of believe in your dad and back him up.** Obscure outside things might trigger some remarks. I'm not going to say it's subliminal, but **it's just kind of there.**

When I asked Carla what images she does have of the war, and where she thought she learned what she knows about the war, she emphasized the centrality of Media, particularly movies and television:

Carla:

I have images out of Vietnam movies, like Platoon and Good Morning Vietnam, with all these very young American soldiers, and people hiding. I think of landmines, and huts and rice patties and little children and old people getting attacked; all sorts of things like that. They're mostly fighting, somewhat **violent images that come to mind.** Lots of gunfire. And soldiers against soldiers, as well as US soldiers like in

the My Lai incident, soldiers burning the huts and shooting innocent bystanders. I also have images of American soldiers being attacked in, like the DMZ, and roads that are supposed to be safe, where bombs will go off, or they'll be ambushed, or that type of thing.... In this country, I have images of **people protesting the war**, with lots of signs and rallies. Lots of news press type images, but mostly TV is what I have in my mind. I can picture American soldiers coming home, probably to a not very welcome type of greeting; just kind of coming home. But mainly the protest, lots of people yelling about the fighting and wanting it to end; that's my picture. It's so hard because I wasn't born yet, so **it's so dependent upon the movies and stuff**.

Later in the interview, the question came up briefly again, and Carla indicated that her learning in school about the Vietnam war was quite limited:

In school we learned a little bit; you know, you go through US history and by the time you get to Vietnam it's practically the end of the year and they're trying to shove all this information into a small period of time. I hate to say it, but probably most of my images and things like that do come from things like movies.

Roger expressed in the interview that the war was a huge mistake. I have every reason to believe he was being honest in our interview, based on the rapport we established, my sense of his character, and the forthrightness with which he spoke. This suggests that Carla's perception of his views is mistaken. One of the more interesting family socialization findings of the study was Carla's response to the question whether she thought the war was a mistake, which reveals an interesting and very personal (in her words "emotional") framing. She essentially concludes that the war was not a mistake *because* her father was involved, and because she believes that he believed in the war. She admits the war was perhaps unwise (and that it was handled poorly), but that the intent was good. Her answer also stressed the theme of duty raised by several of the other interviewees (Roger, Karl, Steve, and Monica.)

Q: "In retrospect, do you think the US involvement in the war was a mistake, in certain ways, or that it was not a mistake, that we should have been there?"

Carla:

I have to say that, in retrospect, **we should have gone**, and I'll tell you why, and I know this is more of **an emotional answer** than a thought answer. **Because my father was there**, and because he believed in what he was fighting in, and because he did that, **I have to believe that**, you know, that the fact that he was there was for **an important reason**. And that it should have happened. It probably wasn't the wisest decision anyone could have made, but I, really in the back of my mind, have to think that -- that the US was there for a purpose, and **it was the right purpose**. Like I said, their intent was probably good, but it just kind of snowballed.

Carla's views and framings of the war reveal a complex set of tensions between 'the personal and the political' which seem common to most of the children of Vietnam veterans interviewed for this research: the tensions between coming to terms with the legacy of Vietnam for the US (the 'political', often viewed negatively, often with criticism of the US government,) and at the same time coming to terms with her/his own father's involvement (the 'personal', usually viewed more positively or sympathetically, that the veterans were doing their duty and often suffered and/or were mistreated in various ways.) So, for example, Carla said the lessons of the war are: that the U.S. can't save everyone, that we can't make other countries like us, and that we have to learn to view bad situations more objectively. But Carla also made comments that appear to conflict with these lessons. When asked if she thought the US going to war in Vietnam was a mistake she said that: we should have gone, we went for a purpose, and the intent was good. Carla's personal feelings about her father appear to justify the war in her mind, even though the war appears to violate some of the lessons she cites (e.g. that we can't save everyone, and shouldn't try to make everyone like us.)

Conclusion: Talking About Vietnam

The four parent/child pairs discussed here varied on their levels of family "talking" (transmission and reception) about Vietnam. In basic schematic terms, Karl and Steve seem to represent a fairly direct "talker" form of transmission (to a significant extent in the form of story-telling), mediated and critically adapted by Steve. Julian and David also fit a pretty direct "talker" transmission and reception pattern, stressing the importance of conversation, and independent reception in the form of reflection, and critical engagement (deciding for oneself.) The basic frames of Julian and David remained quite close. Monica and Nancy express a pattern of truncated "non-talker" transmission, and limited reception, revealing quite dissimilar views and frames in a number of areas. Finally, Roger and Carla evince a slightly different non-talker pattern, a subtle, muted or implicit transmission and a sensitive or nuanced reception on Carla's part. They both say they have talked very little about Vietnam, yet Carla has absorbed quite a bit of the general "feeling", and underlying frames of Roger's experience. What is striking in the two non-talker pairs is that on the key question of whether or not the war was a mistake, the children held views essentially opposite to their parents.

All of the pairs can be fruitfully analyzed using the cultural mediation model; each expresses a distinctive pattern of processes of transmission, reception and interpretation in understanding the complex personal and cultural meanings of the difficult and highly contested political-historical event: the Vietnam war.

My findings also seem to provide some support for the claim (against the recent argument of Judith Harris [1998]) that family socialization is important in the entire process

of socialization of young people, but that the process is complex and varied, as Howard Gardner (1998) and Jennings and Niemi have argued (1981). There is no clear, easy way to separate out these factors in the actual lived experience of parents and children (as Gardner also suggests in stressing the difficulty of studying "soft variables" like feelings, sentiments and views.)

The findings in this chapter also seem consistent with the "rational public" idea. The ideas, views and opinions expressed in discussion in interviews are complex, nuanced and "sensible." Against some of the arguments or implications of the "revisionists", at the micro level of analysis, people seem less readily like "cultural dopes" (cf. Garfinkel 1967), but, rather, have ideas and opinions about important political and historical events and life processes (see Gamson, 1992) which are "rational" and "make sense", according to the varying frames of lived experience.

- Chapter 7 -

- Conclusion -

**“The Past Has a Way of Returning to Haunt You.”
– Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, 1999.**

This conclusion reviews the core argument and motivating logic and design of this study. It recaps the levels of analysis and macro-theoretical framework and historical context of the work. It then summarizes the central findings on the cultural mediation of the Vietnam war and the spheres of family socialization and social generations. I conclude with some reflections on implications of this work for future research in this area, and some final reflections on the place of the Vietnam war experience in American civic and political culture in the current period.

This study has examined the Vietnam war experience in America at three levels of analysis: the political culture, social generations and family socialization. It is argued that the Vietnam war experience led to a lasting rupture and shift in American political culture which continues to influence and shape the American present in important ways -- the war has indeed become “an argument without end”, a lasting socio-historical force, a defining frame or trope in the national political discourse.

The Vietnam war has been studied from a wide range of perspectives: historical, interpretive, qualitative, quantitative, and within many scholarly disciplines. However, it has not been studied at these three levels of analysis, looking at the interconnections between the

cultural, the generational and the familial. This study was intended as a case study within the lacuna in social analysis on the study of war and cultural legitimation.

The particular motivating logic for the study was the following: Major historical events take place within already existing, evolving political cultures, but also impact and change those cultures (and the people who live within them.) These dynamics can be conceptualized and examined at different levels of analysis: micro, meso and macro. However, much existing macro social theory -- in the case of this study, the work of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Jurgen Habermas, and Anthony Giddens, for example -- is somewhat nonspecific or abstract about how the macro processes actually work at the other levels. The Vietnam war was a major event in American history which cross-cut the different levels, interacting deeply with American political culture (the macro level), social generations (the meso level), and family socialization (the micro level.)

One way of viewing this process is the approach advanced by a variety of scholars (Huntington 1981; Lipset 1996; Gitlin 1993) that the war experience, as it developed, entailed an increasing clash between widely shared values (American "core values") of what America is "supposed to be about" (perceived at the micro level), and increasingly wide realization of actual US policy and conduct in the war (the macro level.) That is, there was a growing gap or disjuncture (and equally important, growing *awareness* of disjuncture) between American values/principles and actual policies and practices (the "practice" versus "principles" schism articulated by Meldon Levine in chapter two.) While recognizing questions of variation, range and depth of adherence, etc, this study uses the basic core-values framework argued by other scholars. The six core values identified by Huntington

(1981) and Lipset (1996) are liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, the rule of law and laissez-faire. The first three in particular were identified by a significant number of the participants in this study as important values and some of the motives for the US getting involved in the war, along with values of "patriotism" and "helping" others/allies, cited by some. What most respondents acknowledge is that the war, as it was fought, did not end up furthering these values, for various reasons. This study did not suggest that the participants ended up rejecting the core values, but rather that they perceived that America (and the government in particular) in Vietnam was not practicing or fulfilling those values.

As has been well documented, by the later stages of the war, the practice-versus-principles conflict combined with other factors to create growing and increasingly active opposition to the war, unrest, distrust, disillusionment, even (though for a minority) violent "revolutionary" resistance.

This history and these dynamics raise the important question of how and to what extent these events, interpretations, strong feelings and "lessons learned" are continuing in US culture, and are being mediated by the next generation, by generation X. What are the concrete processes by which macro-level political-cultural events are transmitted and mediated at meso and micro levels; in this case, within particular social generations and within the family?

The macro-theoretical argument in this study is that the period from World War II to the mid-1960s was marked by a relatively high degree of elite consensus and hegemony in relation to the American public on US foreign policy. That is, the effectiveness of state

legitimation and level of acceptance was quite high for a state-defined national political narrative (of "American interests" and "commitments", primarily to "containment" and "stopping communism" as "defender of democracy/the free world.") This is not at all to claim that the US was not engaged in nefarious foreign policy activities before Vietnam (Zinn 1980; Blum 1995), but the salient point here is that *awareness* of, and opposition to, such activities was much less widespread. Strong opposition to US foreign policies was a more marginal position before Vietnam. Even in events like the Korean war where some scholars (Mueller 1973) have shown that opposition to the war increased notably near the end, the argument seems quite solid that the fall-out did not run as deeply in terms of feelings and attitudes toward the government and other US institutions, i.e. more general dynamics of de-legitimation were much more limited.

However, there is strong evidence that the Vietnam period witnessed changes in attitudes and in political culture which have been substantial and lasting, at least within the generations that lived through that period (Nye et al. 1997; Miller and Borrelli 1991; Kaase 1988). Public opinion data is quite conclusive that there has been government de-legitimation in the form of a major, lasting decline in trust of the government, from around 75% in the mid-1960s, to levels in the 20-30% range through most of the period since the mid-1970s (Nye et al. 1997).

Using in-depth interviews, this study has attempted to concretely address the questions: How is Vietnam continuing to shape and influence American political culture and national identity today? What *are* the lessons and legacies of the Vietnam war as perceived

today by baby-boomer parents and generation-X children? How is the war experience being transmitted and mediated by the younger generation? What do young Americans know and think about the war?

No particular scholarly approach to a historical period as complex as the Vietnam war can provide a definitive or full answer to these questions. To date, different approaches have had their limitations: most histories do not attempt to theorize or empirically study the relationship between the war and American political culture; many works in cultural analysis or cultural studies focus mostly or exclusively on popular culture and media representations of the war (Beattie 1998; Lembcke 1998; Engelhardt 1995); other works study public opinion, but do not attempt to examine qualitative, discursive understandings of the war (Mueller 1973; Page and Shapiro 1992; Holsti 1996). A few works (Frey-Wouters and Laufer 1986) attempt both quantitative and qualitative assessments, but do not examine attitudes and beliefs of the younger generation.

This study has examined how generation-X children and baby-boom parents think about and express -- and are expressions of-- political culture, how they actually talk, or don't talk, about the Vietnam war within their families, and how they view the war as members of different social generations.

Overall several central tendencies of the findings of this study are notable. Most generally, the ordinary Americans in this study are not cultural dopes; they are not stupid, irrational, moody, unthinking, or uncaring. The large majority could not be described as apathetic. Rather, the participants in this study care about America, about its future and its

politics. They have ideas, feelings and beliefs. They reveal a sensible, practical rationality, an ability to reason, weigh ambiguous and/or complex issues and choices, and articulate coherent points of view. The participants in the small sample in this study are consistent with much of the public opinion data on political attitudes (Nye et al. 1997). Among these citizens, there is a high degree of skepticism and distrust of the US government in both generations; there is widespread criticism of the US government and of the Vietnam war on a variety of grounds. Almost all of the people in this study view the Vietnam war quite critically. Only two of the veteran parents can be described as still supporting the war, still believing it was not a mistake; while four of the veterans were not supportive of the war, and two were "mixed. Meanwhile, all but seven of the children were pretty clearly "anti-Vietnam war". Of a total of 35 interviewees, only five were fairly supportive of the war today. Twenty-three of the respondents were fairly strongly anti-Vietnam war; while seven were more moderate and mixed in their views.

Virtually all participants in this study were critical of the US government in various ways. About three-quarters of the subjects explicitly expressed some form of distrust of the government; many of them in quite strong terms (saying "I have lasting distrust", the government is "a bunch of liars", and the like.) There were no participants who explicitly said that they *do* trust the government.

Much of the research on family socialization can be too formulaic and/or mechanical, not sufficiently recognizing the complexity of actual family communication processes. Much of the existing research sets up typologies which tend to obscure the richness and depth of

familial interaction and discourse. Many models have tended to view the process somewhat one-dimensionally, often imputing a one-directional "transmission" from parent to child, and often positing continuity or stasis over dynamism and change.

All of the parent-child pairs in this study would fit the patterns of family socialization described in chapter two as "concept orientation" and "broad socialization." That is, they all appeared to be generally open to and supportive of communication, individualism and self-expression, and open to various sources of socialization. There were no families that seemed to fit the description of "authoritarian", "narrow" or "parent controlled."

The majority of pairs in this study reported talking about the Vietnam war with each other to a significant degree (i.e. reported being "talkers" on the war.) Taking the pairs in this study as a whole, there was a pretty clear relationship between the level of talking about the war and the degree of similarity between the parent and child. The large majority (11 of 13) of the pairs who reported being "talkers" on Vietnam were quite close in their views about the war. On the other hand, three out of five pairs who reported being "non-talkers" on the war were very different in their views on the war. Parents' non-talking on Vietnam appeared to correlate in the child with substantially different views and greater uncertainty about the war, at least in the case of the two non-talker pairs discussed in chapter six: Monica and Nancy, and Roger and Carla.

There were both some notable similarities and some differences between the two generations on the Vietnam war. A number of the similarities are summarized above, concerning general criticism of the government and the war, and high distrust and skepticism

toward the government. These appear to be broader political-cultural trends.

All but a few of the baby boomers subscribed to the idea that they constitute a generation, and identified key formative events as important, particularly the Vietnam war and the civil rights movement. About three-quarters of the children also subscribed to the generational view of their age group; though most of them saw lack of unity or unifying events as defining them -- that is, they seem to fit the generational concept more in terms of sharing a certain mood, zeitgeist, or "collective mentality" (Esler 1984), rather than particular central formative events. Among the Xers, there was a significant degree of disunity, diversity and lack of cohesion, as well as high levels of skepticism and distrust. The parents were slightly more likely to express explicit distrust-of-government frames, while some of the children were less specific on this issue.

Not surprisingly, the Vietnam war had greater salience or resonance for the parents, while about a quarter of the children felt the war had less resonance for their generation. However, virtually all of the children, as well as the parents, saw the war as important for its lessons, for US culture and/or for US history.

One notable difference between the generations seems to be that the parents were raised with more of a faith and belief in the US and its purposes, and experienced the sense of shock and disillusionment of the Vietnam period as a part of their generational coming of age. This seems to have given more of the parents a sense of indignation or the belief that things could be different and/or ought to be different, that the government can and should do better. The gen Xers, on the other hand, were raised *within* an existing political culture of distrust and skepticism and diminished hopes. They seem, as a group, to have less sense of

possible better alternatives, or that the government could be better or different. They seem to have less hope about the government, American politics or the possibility of positive change.

What are the implications of this dissertation for future research on American war-making and political culture in the contemporary period? The interviewing method proved quite useful in closely examining what ordinary Americans actually say, how they think about and frame important events, and how they communicate about them. However, there are a number of areas for further study.

First, broader research ought to be conducted which attempts to study these phenomena in relation to the other important agents of socialization which were essentially bracketed for this study: the media, schools, religion, even possibly the work place, etc. More research could be conducted into the interaction between political beliefs and ideology and the cultural mediation of war; particularly examining how these interact and change.

Second, some of the theoretical and methodological tools of this study can be further refined: A) Specifically, a more in-depth development is needed of the theoretical framework drawing on hegemony and legitimation theory, particularly in the work of Jurgen Habermas. There appears to be potential for a fruitful application of Habermas' theory of communicative action and discourse ethics to the object domains of this dissertation. In this view, the increasing differentiation and rationalization of system and lifeworld create increasingly autonomous and incompatible rationalities and imperatives which create conflicts in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. These

conflicts can be potentially mediated, negotiated and/or managed through an authentic, non-reified process of normatively-grounded intersubjective discourse ethics. B) The theory of cultural mediation and framing presented in this study needs further development and elaboration. The use of the framing approach in this study was exploratory and deliberately broad. The full complexity of the framing idea would need to theorize more precisely the relation between feelings, values, ideas, perceptions, attitudes, interpretations, and the like. Likewise, the notion of cultural mediation warrants refinement; the view here is an improvement over more limited "transmission" approaches, but the true complexity of active, real-life mediation needs further development.

The third broad area for further research concerns more in-depth analysis of the idea that the specific cultural shifts addressed in this study are part of broader historical changes in American society and the world, particularly the notion that the specific changes are manifestations of more epochal shifts to a postmodern era (Inglehart 1997b; Steigerwald 1995; West 1993), and/or fundamental changes in American culture and national identity (Fukuyama 1999; Engelhardt 1995; Inglis 1991), and/or "post-materialist" values (Inglehart 1997a, 1997b).

As suggested in the Introduction, there has been wide-ranging debate in recent years over the status of America's civic culture, and debate over a "civic crisis", expressed in declining social capital, falling political participation, an impoverished public sphere, and the like. Various authors have considered the extent to which the Vietnam experience has had an impact on these phenomena (Nye et al. 1997; Fukuyama 1999; Gibson 1994; Shafer

1990). The findings in this study support the view that the Vietnam experience has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on these changes in American political culture. As noted in the Introduction, it is probably not feasible to try to separate or weigh the great multiplicity of factors influencing a complex, macro-level phenomenon like political culture over a period of thirty years. The argument here is that Vietnam is a key factor. Among the participants in this study, the findings show that both baby-boom parents and generation-X children view the Vietnam war as important for its lessons, for its impact on the US and its culture. Likewise, both generations view the government with significant skepticism and distrust. For the issue of civic health and political participation, the Vietnam experience may have a complex, mixed legacy. It may be beneficial to the extent that it created an intensified and engaged skepticism and vigilance toward the government, but it may be detrimental to the extent that it created disengaged cynicism or bitterness and political withdrawal.

The findings of this study are consistent with the argument made by various scholars that the Vietnam war experience has had a lasting impact on the US, on who we are, our national self-perceptions, and view of foreign affairs and our place in the world (e.g. Shafer 1990; Wells 1994; Issacs 1997; Destler et al. 1984). A quarter-century after the end of the war, and ten years after the end of the Cold War which was Vietnam's defining frame for the US, America appears, to a significant extent, to have "lost the hearts and minds" of many of its own citizens in their views of their government. Contrary to President George Bush's hopeful assertion cited at the beginning of this dissertation, the loss of trust, confidence and faith in government in the Vietnam war period appear to continue to substantial degrees, both

for the 1960s parents and the 1990s children of this study. To paraphrase a famous quip by Mark Twain, reports of the death of "the Vietnam Syndrome" and the legacies of the war have been greatly exaggerated.

Should the United States Play an Active Role in World Affairs?

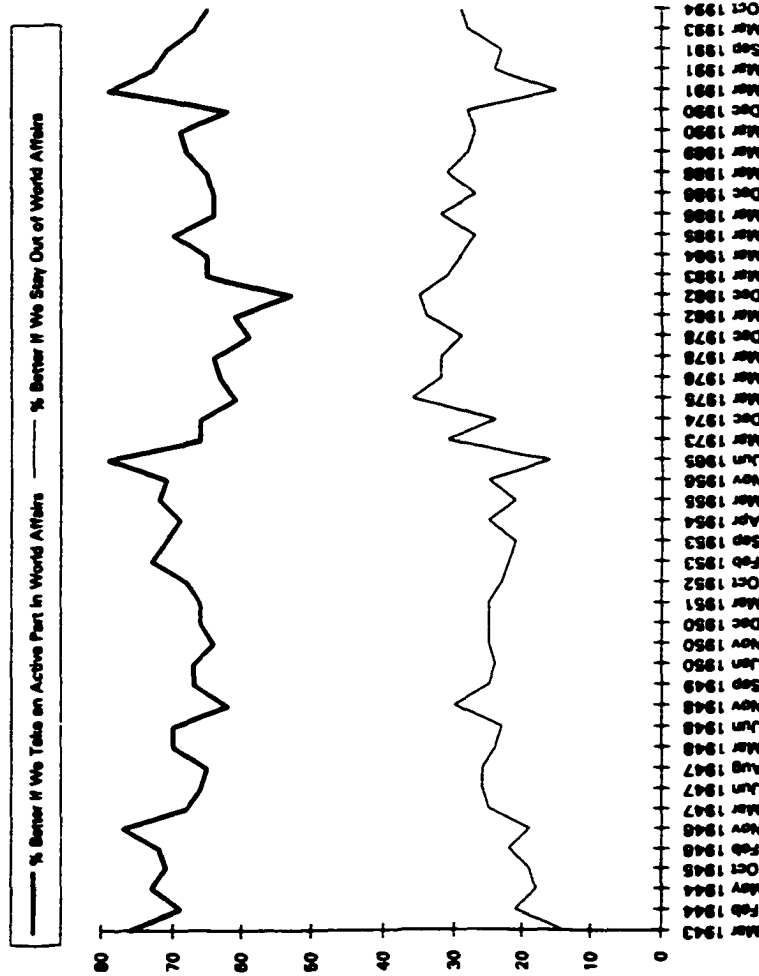


Figure 1. Should the United States play an active role in world affairs, or should it stay out? (1943-94). (Data from Gallup Poll, National Opinion Research Center, Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, *Fortune*, Washington Post. The exact wording of the questions and response options varied somewhat from survey to survey.)

Source: This table taken from Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy, by Ole Holsti. Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 1996.

Percent Who Think the Vietnam War was a Mistake

Question: Do you think the U.S. made a mistake
sending troops to fight in Vietnam?

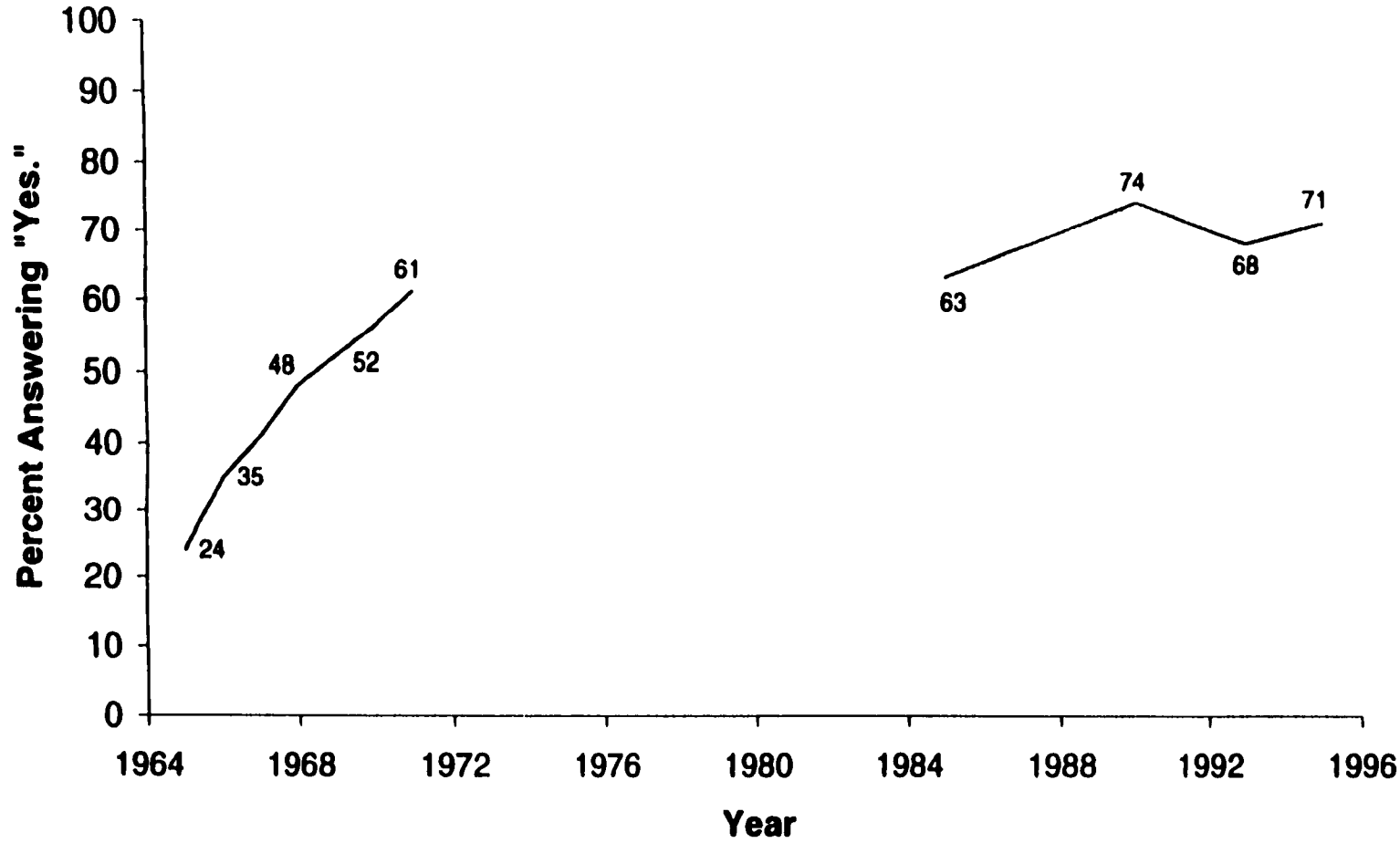


Figure 2.

Source: The Gallup Poll, Scholarly Resources Inc.

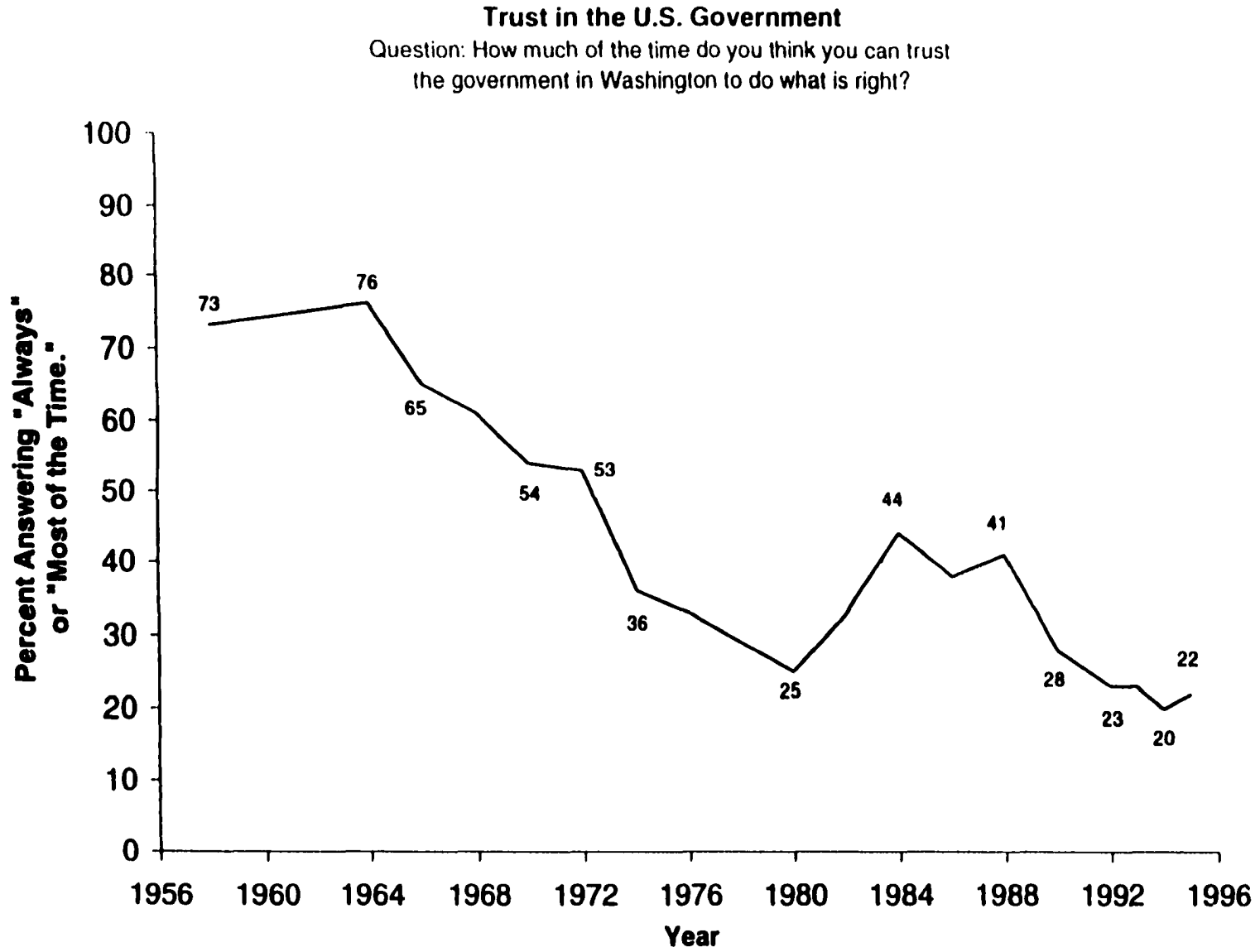


Figure 3.

Source: The Gallup Poll, Scholarly Resources Inc.

Attitudes About Government and Decline in Trust of the Executive Branch and Congress

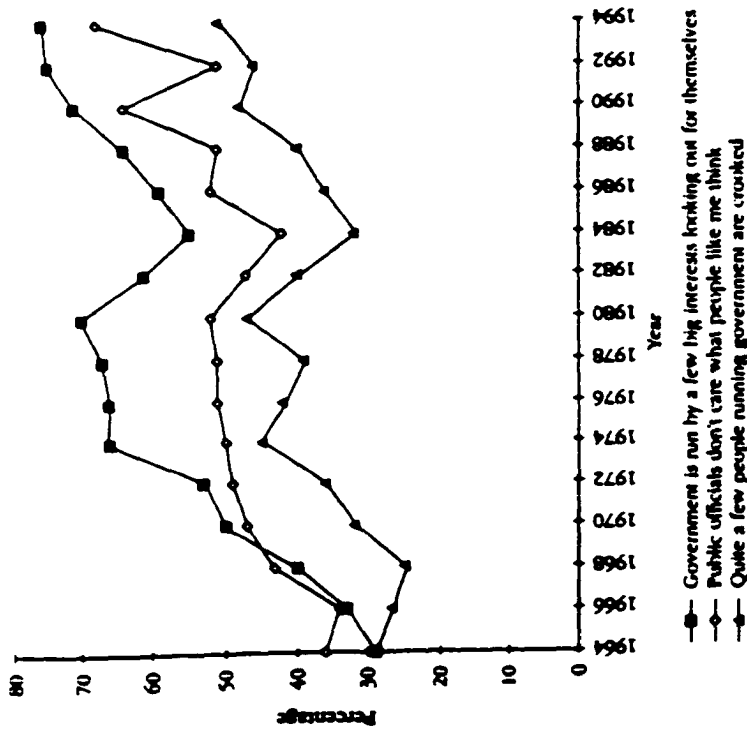


Figure 4. Measures of mistrust and unresponsiveness
Source: American National Election Studies, 1964-1994, University of Michigan

Source: Both tables taken from *Why People Don't Trust Government*, edited by Joseph Nye, Jr., et al. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1997.

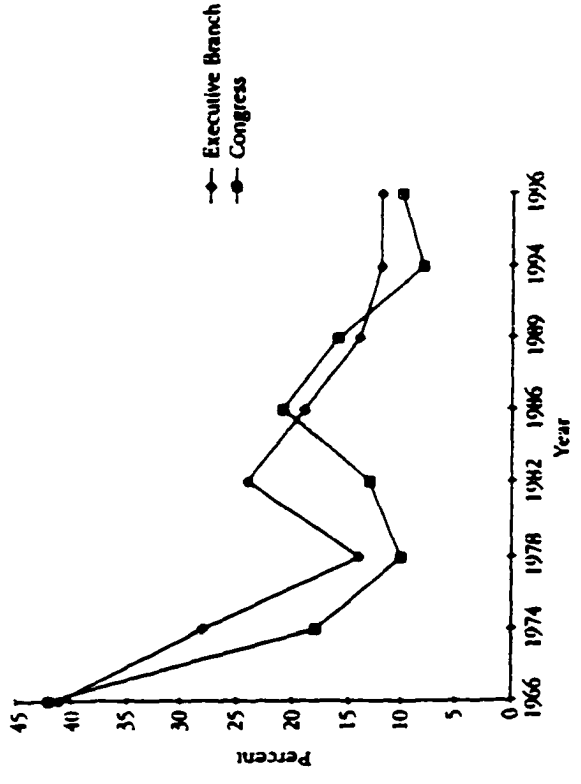


Figure 5. Public confidence in leaders of the executive branch and Congress: Percent saying "a great deal"
Source: Iltis Poll, 1966-96.

"Appendix I."

The Vietnam War Experience and American Political Culture -

Demographics:

Age, Race, Gender, Income, Vet/Non-Vet

Code: 25 - 48 M - 24 * WH A
 - Interview Number
 - Age
 - Income (Below)
 - Partner's Number
 - Mixed Opinion on Vietnam
 - White/Hispanic
 - Asian or White/Asian

		White		Hispanic/Native Am.		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Parents	Pro-War	22-52M-26 29-45M-27				2
	Anti-War	5-52M-9 11-52H-14 17-51H-16 * 23-51L-19		21-71L-18 25-48M-24 *		6
	Anti-War Non-Vets	10-56H-6 12-49H-13 WH 20-49H-15	2-43M-1 28-51M-27 A 31-46M-30 34-49M-33 35-48M-32 *	7-47H-8 (Native Am.)	3-45M-4	10
Children	Pro-War	26-25M-22 27-25L-28,29 A	9-25M-5 33-18M-34 *			4
	Anti-War	6-23H-10 15-22H-20 16-20M-17 A * 19-20L-23 32-26L-35 *	1-18M-2 13-21L-12 WH 14-19H-11 30-18M-31 *	4-20M-3 24-21L-25	18-26L-21 8-21H-7 (Native Am.)	13
		16	11	5	3	35

Income: (for family, or children's parents)
 H = Above \$60,000 (10 cases)
 M = \$30,000 - \$60,000 (17 cases)
 L = Less than \$30,000 (8 cases)

Gender / Race:
 14 = females = 40%
 21 = males = 60%
 22 = white = 63%
 8 = non-white = 23%
 5 = mixed white/non-white = 14%

"Appendix 2."

Ken Cunningham, February 20, 1998.

PARENT

Interview Schedule:

Attitudes on Vietnam and US Foreign Policy

"I'd like to start out by asking you a few factual questions about the Vietnam War -- if you don't know an answer, that's okay -- I'm just trying to get a sense of what people know."

- 1) What year, or about what year, did the US start sending troops to Vietnam?
 - 2) About what year did the US pull out the last of its troops?
 - 3) Can you name the American presidents during the war?
 - 4) Do you have an idea of about how many Americans were killed during the war?
 - 5) Can you name the capitals of North Vietnam and/or South Vietnam during the war?
- "I want to mention a few terms from the war; some of these are a bit more difficult, so don't worry if you don't know them..."
- 6) Are you familiar with the Tonkin Gulf incident; could you describe it briefly?
 - 7) Are you familiar with the Tet offensive (please describe?)
 - 8) Are you familiar with the My Lai incident (please describe?)
 - 9) Are you familiar with the term "the Vietnam Syndrome?" How would you describe the VN Syndrome, in your own words?

"Okay, now I'd like to shift into a bit more in-depth questions on your opinions and interpretations about the war."

- 10) What images come to mind when you think of the Vietnam War?
- 11) What do you think were the US's purposes or motives in Vietnam? Why were we there; how did we get involved? Were these purposes justified? How so?
- 12) In your opinion, why did the US not win the war?

13) How would you describe what happened during the war in the US itself? What do you think about the anti-war movement; the protesters? What do you think about the way the US government handled the war domestically?

What about the role of the media?

14) What do you think are the lessons of the Vietnam War for the US? In what ways was it a success or a failure for the US? Was it a mistake; why?

How well do you think these lessons have been learned by the US as a whole (very well? or have they been largely forgotten?)

"I'd like to ask you a few more general questions about how you have learned about the Vietnam War, and about your own political views."

15) Can you briefly describe for me how you first began to learn about the Vietnam war? Did you learn from: your family, or direct experiences, the media, friends, at school, etc? Can you describe your thoughts and feelings at that time?

16) Can you describe your experience during the war? What sorts of things did you do? What do you think of those things now? i.e. do you view them positively, negatively, mixed?

17) Can you describe how you have dealt with the war with your own children? Have you talked about it much? In what ways? What do you think your kids think of the war?

(Prompt: Have you seen many movies of the war and that period? What do you think of them?)

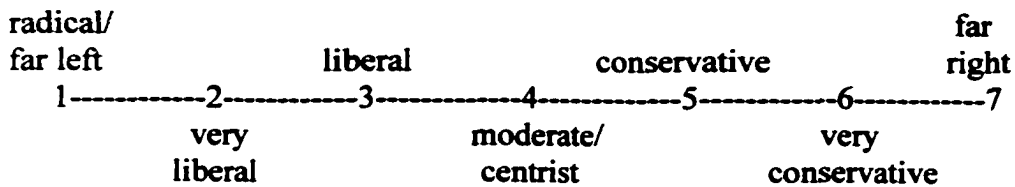
18) During the 1960s people talked about a generation gap, and a distinctive young generation, or the baby-boom generation -- do you think there are certain things that define "your generation," or is it mostly not really possible to generalize in that way?

(Prompt: If there is "your generation," what do you think it cares about most? What events have most affected how you generation views the world?)

19) What lasting affects, if any, do you think the Vietnam War experience had on your generation?

On a related note, what events have most shaped how your generation views US foreign policy, and when, or whether, the US should use military force?

"I'd like to ask a few questions about your political orientation. First, I'd like to have you just place yourself on a simple scale:"



20) To get a clearer sense of what your political orientation means more concretely, I'd like to ask about a few current issues: There's been a lot of debate about welfare reform; what is your opinion? Is there too much welfare, too little, about right, not the right kind, etc? What about taxation: is there too little, too much, are we generally taxed fairly; is the money generally spent well? Do you think the US government has too much power, not enough power, about right, the wrong kinds, or what?)

21) Do you think the Vietnam War experience significantly changed you politically? How so? Do you think it changed your generation much politically?

22) What do you think the US role should be in the world today, in terms of foreign policy? Do you think US military action is justified under certain conditions; under what conditions?

Is military action justified in situations like Bosnia? Against Iraq? Why or why not? On the level of involvement in world affairs, should the US be more active, less active, or it's about right...

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