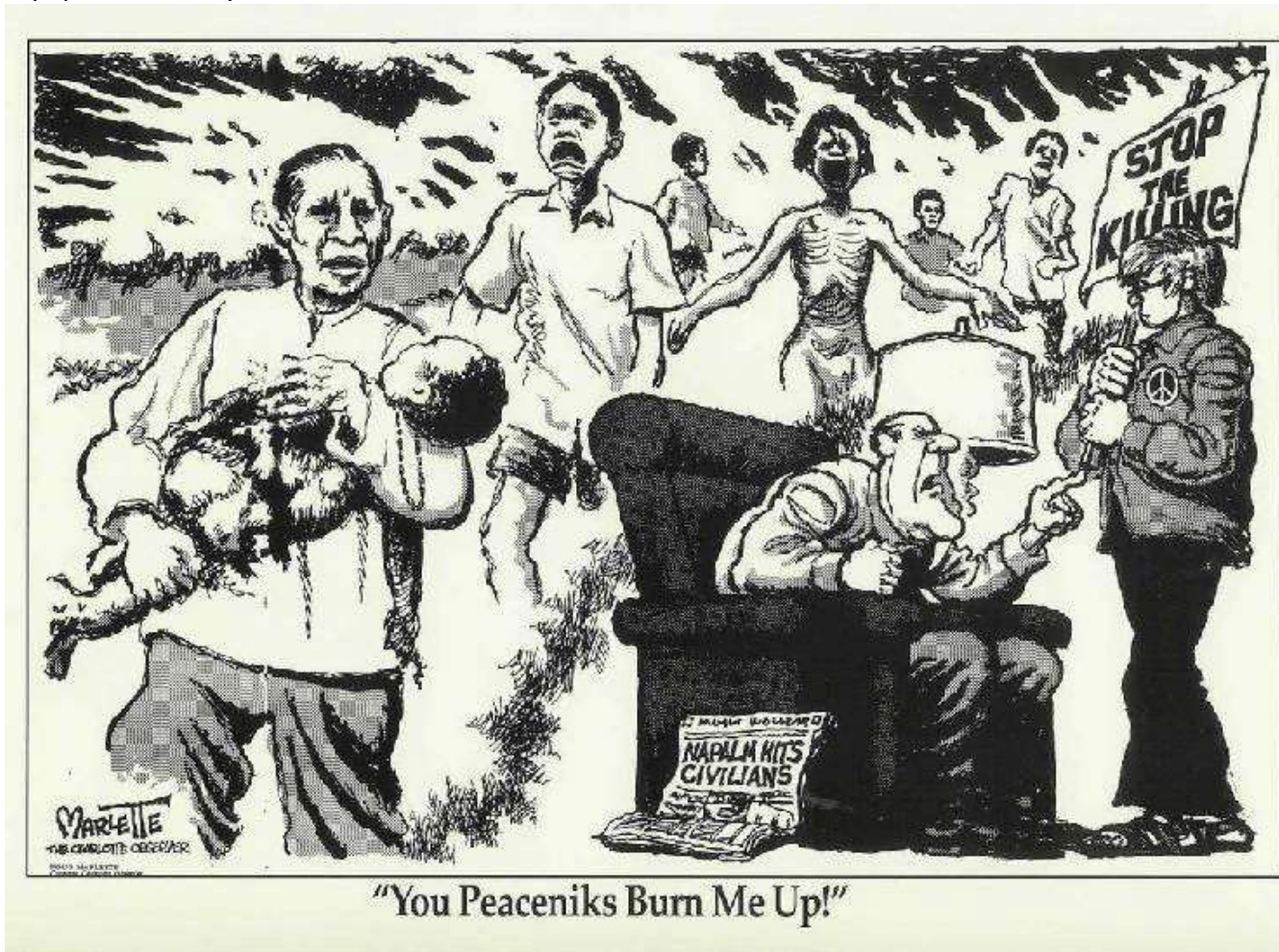


## I.2. The role of the United States during the Cold War

- The Vietnam War (1964-1973)

Key-question : *Why did the USA lose the Vietnam war ?*



*"In the end, anybody who was still in that country was the enemy. The same village you'd gone in to give medical treatment... you could go through that village later and get shot at by a sniper. Go back in and you would not find anybody. Nobody knew anything. We were trying to work with these people, they were basically doing a number on us. You didn't trust them anymore. You didn't trust anybody."*

Fred Widmer, an American soldier speaking in 1969.

## The USA and the Vietnam War

We are going to talk about the role of the United States during the Cold War and more precisely during the Vietnam War.

The first document is a cartoon published by Marlette. It is entitled "*You Peaceniks burn me up*".

The 2nd document is an extract of an American soldier's speech, Fred Widmer in 1969.

Both documents are talking about what happened during the Vietnam War, which began in 1964 and ended in 1973. This war opposed the North Vietnam to the South Vietnam, in a civil and interstate conflict. The United States helped the South whereas a communist movement named the Viet Cong ruled the North (with the leader Ho Chi Minh).

### Why did the United States lose the Vietnam War ?

First of all, let's describe the two documents. In the cartoon, on the left side, there is a quite old man who is holding what looks like a dead child. Behind these two characters we can see several children who are running because they want to escape from the bombing. One is naked and looks like very much to the child of a photograph entitled "The napalm girl" which was taken in 1972.

In the bottom right-hand corner, another situation is represented. Indeed, two American people are speaking. One is sitting in an armchair, he is quite old and he seems to be very angry with the man in front of him, who is certainly his son. This boy is wearing a jacket with the symbol "peace and love" and he is holding a placard where we can read the slogan "Stop the killing". He is probably a hippie. Next to them there is a newspaper on the floor with an article entitled "Napalm hits Civilians".

Then, in the top left-hand corner, we perceive a city which has just been destroyed because of the bombing. The sky is full of smoke.

In the 2nd document, the American soldier is describing how was the situation in Vietnam during the war and he evokes the absurdity of the conflict. He says that nobody knew what was going on and that he

trusted nobody. The soldier also describes what was his role in Vietnam: to give medical treatments in villages.

In a second part we are going to analyze these two documents. To begin, the cartoon shows how the Vietnam War was violent. The old man running with a corpse in his arms is represented to make people aware of the killing which was happening in Vietnam. Indeed, about 1,5 millions Vietnamese died during the conflict, most of them were civilians, women and children... The children and more particularly the naked one are represented to denounce the fact that the US army used Napalm bombs. Napalm is composed by petrol and it's a very powerful weapon because it burns people and make them suffer. This cartoon gives a negative and ashamed image of the United States because it shows that they acted like monsters and unfeeling people. For the international law, these facts are war crimes. This was showed by the medias : hundreds of journalists made reports, articles and pictures of those crimes. The public opinion was horrified. The 2nd part of this cartoon shows another aspect of the war. Indeed, during the war the public opinion was divided. One part of the population supported the army and the other part was against the conflict. By bringing into opposition the man in his armchair and the children, this cartoon takes the side of protesters. In reality, many American were opposed to the war and especially students. They organized peaceful manifestation to protest against the US intervention in Vietnam, they wanted the army to come back in America. However, this cartoon is quite controversial because the cartoonist takes the side of the protesters so his opinion is not neutral.

To conclude, we can say that the USA lost this war because they gave a bad image of themselves and the public opinion became aware. From 1969, the American disengagement began. Pdt Nixon negotiated the end of war. The American evacuated Vietnam in 1973. This war is a real traumatism in the American history.

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