

Year 3:

Unit 4

Voices of the People - The 1960s and Vietnam (1960 - 1973): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

The 1960s was a decade of great social and political change in the United States. The search for stability in the 1950s led to a counterculture movement, people who resisted the conformity of the decade. This counterculture movement spilled into the 1960s, leading the way for marginalized groups to attempt to make their voices heard and gain equal rights, most notably by black Americans in the Civil Rights Movement. In addition to the Civil Rights Movement's fight for equal rights, other politicians and groups of Americans fought to expand rights.

While some groups, such as the Black Panther Party, rejected the peaceful approach of the Civil Rights Movement and resorted to direct action, others used politics and government programs to achieve their ends, such as President Johnson's Great Society or the landmark decisions of the Warren Court. These court decisions and social programs inspired debate about the role of the government in addressing social issues and inspired many other Americans to take a chance on achieving equality for themselves. Women, Native Americans, the gay and lesbian community, migrant farm workers, hippies, and conservatives all exercised their right to have their voices heard, to varying degrees of legislative success.

As many Americans fought for their rights at home, the United States became embroiled in the Vietnam War abroad. Many Americans initially supported the war because of the lingering Cold War and their fear of the spread of Communism around the world. However, as the war dragged on and reports of the atrocities committed during the war began to surface, support began to wane. Many Americans, upon seeing the violent fighting on their televisions and fearing the consequences of the draft, adamantly protested the war as a violation of both American and Vietnamese rights.

Not all Americans, however, supported the activism and protests of the era. Following a year of chaos and mourning, in 1968, Republican Richard Nixon was elected president, proving that many Americans were looking for stability amid the social upheaval of the decade. The social upheaval that culminated in 1968 and the subsequent election of Richard Nixon would ultimately be the first indication that Americans

were losing faith in the U.S. government to effectively address their needs. This lack of faith in the government would worsen over the course of the 1970s.

Unit 4 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 4 Essential Question: *To what extent were the 1960s a decade of progress?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 4 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 4, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 4 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards the UCLA National History Standards United States Era 9 and from the New York State Common Core Social Studies 9–12 Framework.

- **Big Idea 1: Domestic policies during the 1960s became more liberal, beginning to focus on the government’s larger role in eliminating poverty and racial injustice, to limited success.**
 - In an effort to address growing poverty rates, Johnson enacted the Great Society, a set of domestic programs to eliminate poverty by providing government resources like health care and education initiatives to struggling Americans. The Great Society helped lower poverty rates in America and established many social systems still in place today but was met with harsh criticism at the rapidly increasing role of the government in Americans’ lives.
 - The Supreme Court, under the leadership of Earl Warren, led to sweeping victories for Americans’ civil and criminal rights, addressing both poverty and racial injustice with its landmark decisions.
- **Big Idea 2: The Cold War and U.S. involvement in Vietnam tested the democratic system of the United States, ultimately demonstrating the power of American public opinion in reversing foreign policy.**
 - Initially, public support for United States’ intervention in Vietnam was high. The “domino theory” inspired fear of the spread of Communism even further throughout the world and justified the need for the United States to support South Vietnam in the name of democracy and freedom against the Communist aggression of North Vietnam.
 - As the horrific experiences of American soldiers and Vietnamese citizens in the Vietnam War reached mainstream media in the United States, public support began to wane. Some Americans began to protest against the inhumane practices used in the war, including chemical warfare and bombing civilian areas.
 - After the Tet Offensive and reports of the My Lai massacre surfaced, massive protests erupted all over the United States, revealing that many Americans opposed the war and ultimately led President Johnson to de-escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam, although the United States would not officially be out of Vietnam until the next decade.

- **Big Idea 3: The increased participation of Americans in protests during the 1960s put pressure on the government to extend civil liberties to marginalized groups, but the resulting social upheaval ushered in an era of conservatism at the end of the decade.**
 - There was an escalation from civil disobedience to more radical protest in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-to-late 1960s, as black Americans grew impatient with the failure of government to enforce the legislation passed to provide equal opportunities.
 - In response to the “wins” in legislation protecting civil liberties for black Americans, many other marginalized groups formed their own protest movements. Women, native Americans, the gay and lesbian community, migrant farm workers, hippies, and conservatives all exercised their right to have their voices heard, to varying degrees of legislative success.
 - The growing unrest as a result of the protest movements of the decade and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy led to a general lack of faith in the government to effectively handle the social upheaval, ushering in an era of conservatism and the election of Richard Nixon in 1968.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- Black Panther Party
- Lyndon B. Johnson
- The Great Society
- Chief Justice Earl Warren
- Miranda v. Arizona
- Loving v. Virginia
- Gideon v. Wainwright
- Griswold v. Connecticut
- Vietnam War
- Domino theory
- Tet Offensive
- My Lai Massacre
- Anti-Vietnam protest
- Women’s Liberation Movement
- Stonewall Riots
- Hippies
- Occupation of Alcatraz
- Migrant Workers Movement
- 1968 Olympics protest
- 1968 assassinations

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful, you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 4 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 4 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 4:

- Review the 1960s timeline on the PBS website.
- Read the essays “The 1960s,” “Protest Music of the 1960s,” and “Vietnam War and the My Lai Massacre” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website, as well as “Battlefield Vietnam” on the PBS website.
- Explore the following websites: Khan Academy, The 1960s; PBS 60s Site; and History Channel, Vietnam War.
- Watch the videos [Crash Course: The 1960s](#) and [Crash Course: The Cold War in Asia](#) on YouTube.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 4 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: To what extent were the 1960s a decade of progress?

The first lesson transitions from the legislative “wins” of the Civil Rights Movement that scholars learned about in Unit 3 to how the movement evolved over the end of the 1960s. In this lesson, scholars will critically examine the shift from nonviolence to radicalization of the Civil Rights Movement, and by the end of the lesson, scholars will understand that this evolution happened because of the failure of the government to enforce the laws championed by nonviolence advocates. After this lesson, scholars will understand how the evolving Civil Rights Movement inspired other marginalized groups to push to have their voices heard in the 1960s as well.

Lesson 1: Black Power (Video Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did the Civil Rights Movement evolve in the late 1960s?

Lessons 2 through 6 address the government’s shifting role in addressing poverty and racial injustice. These lessons highlight the contention between supporters and critics of the government’s role in solving social issues in the United States. In Lessons 2 through 5, scholars will evaluate President Johnson’s Great Society and determine if it was successful in achieving its ambitious goal of eliminating poverty. Scholars will also evaluate the lasting legacy of these social programs in the United States. In Lesson 6, scholars will examine four of the major Supreme Court decisions made by the Warren Court and evaluate how these decisions ensured that American civil liberties would be protected, no matter a person’s race or socioeconomic

status. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand that the government attempted to eliminate poverty and racial injustice, to limited success.

Lessons 2–4: The Great Society (DBQ Writing)

- **Central Question:** To what extent was the “Great Society” a success?

Lesson 5: The Warren Court (Gallery Walk)

- **Central Question:** How did the decisions of the Warren Court affect American civil liberties?

In Lessons 7 through 9, scholars will explore the U.S. role in the Vietnam War and the evolution of the support for the war by the American people. In Lesson 7, scholars will understand why the United States participated in the Vietnam War and will evaluate whether or not the United States was justified in this participation. Ultimately, scholars will walk away from this lesson understanding that many Americans supported the decision to enter the Vietnam War at that time because of the Cold War and fears of Communism spreading throughout the world. In Lesson 8, scholars will understand the experiences of both American soldiers and Vietnamese citizens during the war, and evaluate how these horrific experiences of chemical and psychological warfare, once they were revealed to the American people, led to a sharp decline in support for U.S. participation in the war. In Lesson 9, scholars will understand how the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre led to massive protests throughout the country, as many Americans opposed continued U.S. participation in the Vietnam War. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand how ordinary Americans were able to influence foreign policy, as Johnson began the process of de-escalating U.S. involvement in the war as a result of this public outcry.

Lesson 6: The Vietnam War (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** To what extent was the United States justified in its participation in the Vietnam War?

Lesson 7: The Impact of the Vietnam War (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did the Vietnam War affect both American soldiers and Vietnamese citizens?

Lesson 8: Vietnam Protests (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did many Americans oppose the Vietnam War?

In Lessons 10 through 13, scholars will explore the many ways in which Americans made their voices heard in the 1960s. In Lessons 10 through 12, scholars will evaluate how a wave of protest movements swept the nation after the legislative success of the Civil Rights Movement, inspiring other marginalized groups to speak up and fight for equal rights. By the end of Lesson 12, scholars will understand that although this was an important shift in American participation, the protest movements caused chaos and fear that the United States was spiraling out of control. In Lesson 13, scholars will evaluate how the chaos culminated in 1968 and spurred the “Silent Majority” to speak up at the polls, ushering conservative President Nixon into office and effectively ending social unrest, at least for the moment. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand the complexity of what progress means, including how people made their voices heard in the 1960s.

Lessons 9–11: Protest Movements (PBL)

- **Central Question:** Why did protest movements gain momentum during the 1960s?

Lesson 12: 1968 (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why was 1968 a turning point in U.S. history?