When Trust Eroded

Wartime events and changing public support

SS24.US2.13c "Describe how significant events in the Vietnam War resulted in a decline of public support for American involvement in the conflict."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each wartime event, circle what Americans learned about it, and draw an arrow to the explanation of why that news weakened support for U.S. involvement.

The War and the News at Home

1. In January 1968, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched the Tet Offensive, striking cities and military targets across South Vietnam. U.S. and South Vietnamese troops eventually pushed the attackers back, and the offensive cost communist forces heavily. Yet television reports showed fighting in places Americans had been told were increasingly secure. For viewers who had heard officials describe progress toward victory, the surprise attacks raised a hard question: Was the war nearly won? The gap between reassuring claims and the fighting on screen shook confidence in official reports. Many Americans began to doubt that continued U.S. involvement would bring a quick end to the war.

2. In March 1968, U.S. soldiers killed hundreds of unarmed civilians in the Vietnamese village of My Lai. The military initially reported a successful battle against enemy fighters, but journalists brought the massacre to national attention in 1969. Accounts of women, children, and older people among the dead challenged the idea that U.S. forces were always protecting civilians. Some Americans asked how a war presented as a defense of freedom could include such violence. Although the crimes of one unit did not represent every soldier, the news deepened moral opposition to the war and distrust of what officials had said about it.

3. In April 1970, President Richard Nixon announced that U.S. troops had entered Cambodia to attack communist bases near the Vietnam border. He said the operation would help bring U.S. soldiers home, but critics saw the move into another country as an expansion of the war. Protests grew; at Kent State University in Ohio, National Guardsmen killed four student protesters in May. The violence made the war's costs feel immediate at home. In 1971, the leaked Pentagon Papers revealed that past officials had privately doubted public claims about progress. Together, these events strengthened fears that the war was widening and that leaders were withholding the truth.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did coverage of the Tet Offensive cause some Americans to question continued U.S. involvement?

2. Why did reports about My Lai deepen opposition to the war?

3. How did the move into Cambodia and the killings at Kent State each add to opposition to the war?

4. How could the Pentagon Papers weaken support for continued U.S. involvement?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 75 to 100 words explaining how two events in the passage together changed public support for U.S. involvement. Explain what people learned from each event and identify a shared reason support declined, without claiming that everyone opposed the war.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.13c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each wartime event, circle what Americans learned about it, and draw an arrow to the explanation of why that news weakened support for U.S. involvement. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did coverage of the Tet Offensive cause some Americans to question continued U.S. involvement?	**Television coverage showed intense fighting in places officials had described as increasingly secure, leading some Americans to doubt claims that victory was near.**
2	Why did reports about My Lai deepen opposition to the war?	**Reports that U.S. soldiers had killed unarmed civilians raised moral objections to the war and undermined trust in the military's earlier account.**
3	How did the move into Cambodia and the killings at Kent State each add to opposition to the war?	**Critics saw the move into Cambodia as an expansion of the war. The killing of four student protesters at Kent State made its costs feel immediate in the United States.**
4	How could the Pentagon Papers weaken support for continued U.S. involvement?	**They revealed that past officials had privately doubted public claims about progress, giving Americans reason to distrust their leaders' accounts of the war.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Television coverage of the Tet Offensive in 1968 showed intense fighting after officials had suggested victory was near. Although U.S. and South Vietnamese forces repelled the attacks, the surprise made promises of progress less convincing. News of the My Lai massacre, reported widely in 1969, exposed the killing of unarmed civilians after the military had described a successful battle. These events raised different doubts, one about whether the war could be won soon and the other about its moral cost. Together, they weakened trust in official accounts and led many, though not all, Americans to question continued involvement.

Accept other supported event pairs in Part 3. Look for a clear connection between what the public learned and why support declined, with no claim that opposition was universal.