

# **The Lessons of Vietnam: Social Identity, the Vietnam War, and Contemporary Political Divides**

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How do our experiences color the way we interpret political issues? And how does the way we see political issues color how we interpret our experiences? We use in-depth interviews with people in their early seventies to explore how they make sense of their lives, their experiences with the Vietnam War, and contemporary political events. Hearing how people think and talk about the war today helps us understand how this major event has been deployed in contemporary politics and how it undergirds the identities that people draw on when thinking about politics.

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“With the NFL, and the kneeling at the national anthem. I think it’s disgraceful. Because I know, personally, men who have died. You know? And shed their blood for this country.”

—*White, male Vietnam veteran, graduated from high school in 1965*

“And yet, when these football players [in the NFL] kneel? I get that. I’m for them. They’re not hurting anybody. They’re making a point, and that’s what I fought for.”

—*White, male Vietnam veteran, graduated from high school in 1965*

How do our experiences color the way we interpret political issues? And how does the way we see political issues color how we interpret our experiences?

In this paper we explore these questions by focusing on one of the most searing experiences in recent American history, the Vietnam War. More than 2,700,000 Americans served in the military in Vietnam, and over 58,000 lost their lives. But the war was not only a military struggle; it was also a highly divisive domestic political conflict, with opposition to the war derailing the presidency of Lyndon Johnson and inspiring bloody protests on the nation’s college campuses (Maraniss 2003; Ward and Burns 2017).

By listening closely to how people who lived through the Vietnam War make sense of it, we hope to shed light not only on the contemporary political relevance of that specific historical event but also on the broader question of how historical events are

imbued with meaning. We expect to find that how people interpret past events and their place in them matters for how they make sense of the present—and that those interpretations are both a product and a source of their various more general social identities and worldviews.

We focus on a cohort of Americans whose lives were especially profoundly shaped by the Vietnam War—people who graduated from high school in the spring of 1965. The first U.S. combat units were deployed to defend the U.S. air base at Da Nang a few months before the Class of '65 completed high school. Fighting escalated steadily over the next four years, with American fatalities mounting from 6,000 in 1966 to 11,000 in 1967 and almost 17,000 in 1968 with no victory in sight. When the Nixon administration implemented a draft lottery in December, 1969, young men who had not already enlisted in the military became subject to conscription. Although only men were subject to the draft, some women served in the war as nurses, and many more had spouses, boyfriends, brothers and close friends called into service. Of course, the massive, youth-driven anti-war movement also intensely engaged many members of this cohort.

Our research builds upon the Political Socialization Panel Study, an ambitious long-term study of political attitudes and behavior conducted by M. Kent Jennings in collaboration with Richard G. Niemi, Gregory B. Markus, and Laura Stoker.<sup>1</sup> The Jennings study began in 1965 with interviews of 1,669 high school seniors in 97 schools across the United States and one or both of each student's parents.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The original survey data are publicly available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (Jennings et al. 2005; Jennings 2007).

<sup>2</sup> This study design facilitated the investigators' goal of examining the impact of families and schools on the political socialization of adolescents (Jennings and Niemi 1974). However, a notable defect of the original sample for our purposes here is that it excluded people who left high school before the spring of their senior year—approximately 26% of this cohort. Thus, all

students were re-interviewed in 1973, 1982, and 1997, providing an unprecedented record of stability and change in political attitudes and behavior over more than three decades. Given our interest in the evolution of American politics over the past half-century, we focus on the 935 respondents (56%) who participated in all four waves of the study.<sup>3</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, we focus primarily on in-depth interviews we have been conducting in 2018 and 2019 with a small subsample of these respondents. These interviews enable us to listen to the ways our respondents, now in their early seventies, make sense of their lives, their experiences with the Vietnam War, and contemporary political events. We of course do not know whether the lenses these people use to think about the Vietnam War now are the same as those they used half a century ago. But hearing the way people make sense of the Vietnam War today helps us understand how this major event has been deployed in contemporary politics and how it undergirds the identities that people draw on when thinking about politics.

### **Public support for the war**

The Vietnam War was a tumultuous event for the entire nation, and especially for people graduating from high school in 1965. In the first (spring 1965) wave of the Jennings survey, students were asked, “What kinds of things do you talk about when you talk with other people about public affairs and politics?” Thirty percent mentioned

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of our findings reflect the experiences of the most educated (and, by extension, more affluent and politically interested) three-fourths of the cohort.

<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, sample attrition over the four waves of the study was not entirely random. For example, students who were less interested in politics in 1965 were more likely to drop out of the sample by 1997. In order to minimize the impact of differential attrition on our conclusions we weighted the data to reflect as closely as possible the original distribution of key characteristics. For a description of the weighting scheme and resulting sample weights, see Bartels and Cramer (2018).

Vietnam—second only to civil rights as a topic of discussion.<sup>4</sup> As the American military effort escalated, news coverage of the war became increasingly ubiquitous (Zaller 1991). The coverage was mostly favorable until the Tet Offensive in early 1968, but after that campaign of surprise attacks by the North Vietnamese the volume of messages against the war gained traction, eventually reaching rough parity with pro-war messages (Zaller 1991). Public opinion toward the war roughly tracked the tone of news coverage. The public as a whole was, on balance, supportive of the war when the Class of '65 completed high school (Verba et al. 1967; Zaller 1991), but support declined relatively steadily from that summer through the end of 1970 (Berinsky 2009, 21).

By the time the last U.S. forces were withdrawn from Vietnam in March 1973 the war was broadly unpopular with the American public, and especially unpopular with the young cohort represented in the Jennings data. In the 1973 survey, only one-third of respondents said the U.S. had done the right thing in getting into the fighting. Republicans, people raised in the South, whites, and those from relatively poor family backgrounds were somewhat less strongly opposed, but none of these groups registered even 40% support for the war effort. Even the 103 young men in the survey who had themselves served in Vietnam were more likely than not to say that the U.S. should have stayed out.

Table 1 tracks support for the war in each of these groups over the subsequent 25 years. In every group, the war was even less popular a decade later than it had been when it ended, and in every case but one (a modest but statistically unreliable increase

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<sup>4</sup> “What kinds of things do you talk about when you talk with other people about public affairs and politics?” Up to three mentions were recorded for each respondent. The most popular topics were civil rights (race, segregation, demonstrations, Selma, Montgomery), 45.6%; Vietnam, 29.7%; the Cold War (communism, nuclear war, Cuba, Russia, China, Berlin) and other aspects of world affairs, 23.2%; and national elections (primaries, conventions, candidates), 22.1%.

in support among non-whites) the decline in support continued through the 1980s and '90s. For the public as a whole, the “lesson” that the war had been a mistake became increasingly entrenched with the passage of time. In several cases the declines in support were largest in groups that had previously been relatively supportive; support for the war declined by 16 to 18 percentage points between 1973 and 1997 among whites, southerners, people from low-SES backgrounds, and people who had identified as Republicans in 1973.

**\*\*\* Table 1 \*\*\***

One group in which support for the war remained relatively stable was Vietnam veterans. Even in this group, support declined over time; but it remained considerably higher than in any other group, with almost a third of those who served in the war still saying in 1997 that the U.S. had done the right thing in getting into the fighting.<sup>5</sup> These distinctive views presumably reflect some combination of exposure to positive aspects of the war effort that were out of view of those at home and a natural desire to see meaning in their own sacrifices and those of their fellow combatants.

The figures in Table 1 also shed some light on the shifting relationship between attitudes toward the war and partisanship. In a prominent survey of public opinion fielded in 1966, political scientists found that support for the war was entangled with support for Democratic President Lyndon Johnson. Were Democrats really in favor of the war or were they wanting to express support for a president from their party (Berinsky 2009, 111-119; Verba et al. 1967)? By 1973, with Republican President Richard Nixon having presided over a tortuous four-year withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, there was a clear partisan split in support for the war, with Republicans almost ten percentage points more likely than Democrats to say that we

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<sup>5</sup> The views of people who served in the military but did *not* go to Vietnam (98% of whom were men) look very similar to the views of men who did not serve.

did the right thing getting into the fighting (39.3% versus 29.8%). That difference in support declined to just four percentage points (21.5% versus 17.3%) by 1997, as people who had been Republicans in 1973 increasingly came to see the war as a mistake. However, a more substantial ten-point gap in support (24.8% versus 15.1%) persisted between people who described themselves as Republicans and those who called themselves Democrats *in 1997*. That gap suggests that views about the war probably exercised some long-term impact on the partisanship of the Class of '65, with hawks contributing more than their share to the overall Republican shift in this cohort between 1973 and 1997.

### **The long-term impact of the war**

Previous analyses of the data from the Political Socialization Panel Study have demonstrated that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these young people were actively trying to make sense of the world around them and setting in place attitudes and behaviors which would last well into middle age (Jennings 1989; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Vietnam War had a significant impact on them. For example, the experience of receiving a low draft lottery number (which implied a high likelihood of being drafted) affected the political attitudes of men headed for college. It resulted in a tendency to favor McGovern over Nixon in the 1972 presidential election, more dovish attitudes toward the war, a more liberal self-identification, and “upended” their prior partisan identities—effects which lasted (at least) into their 50s (Erikson and Stoker 2011). Serving in active military duty during the war resulted in higher cynicism toward the federal government and influenced racial prejudice and tolerance for opposing views, at least in the years immediately following (Jennings and Markus 1977). And participation in anti-war protests led to stronger identification with the Democratic Party, higher support for civic tolerance, and more liberal attitudes on a range of measures than those in the cohort who did not engage in protests (Jennings 1987).

Although receiving a low draft number or participating in protests appeared to move people in a particular direction, actually serving in the military at the time affected people in different ways. For example, the Jennings and Markus (1977) analysis of the effect of military service on attitudes found a range of effects on racial tolerance among whites, depending on their pre-existing attitudes. They found in general that the effects of military service were quite modest, given that people from many different political predispositions served in the war, especially after the draft.

### **Social identities, perspectives, and worldviews**

We know in general that a key set of tools that people use to make sense of politics are their social identities. Social identities, or psychological attachments to social groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979), such as partisanship (Huddy and Bankert 2017; Kulinski and Hurley 1996), race (Masuoka and Junn 2013), gender (Huddy, Cassese, and Lizotte 2008), social class (Press and Cole 1999) and place (Cramer 2016) affect what information people pay attention to and influence how they process it. And our sense of ourselves as members of certain social categories likewise influences our key political identity, partisanship, as well as support for specific political candidates and causes (Achen and Bartels 2016; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Mason 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018).

The types of social identity just noted are broad categories that encompass enormous variation. Any given person has attachments to many different social groups. How does the intersection of these various identities combine to influence how a person interprets the political world? Take, for example, the two Vietnam veterans quoted at the start of this paper. Despite important similarities in their backgrounds, the formative life experience of serving in the Vietnam War clearly left these two men with very different interpretations of patriotism and protest. How can we understand that variation?

To address this question, we draw on the concept of *perspective*. The idea that people have perspectives, or worldviews (Luker 1985) or standpoints (Harding 2004) is useful for thinking about how individuals' various psychological attachments to social groups influence how they interpret the world—what they pay attention to and how they perceive the information and experiences to which they are exposed.

Recently, Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler have pointed us to a set of worldviews that they argue map closely onto the current partisan divide. They say that these different ways of viewing the world influence both lifestyle and political choices. The key distinction can be boiled down to a preference for a “fixed” or “fluid” perspective (Hetherington and Weiler 2018, 17-18):

People with what we call a fixed worldview are more fearful of potential dangers, and are likely to prefer clear and unwavering rules to help them navigate all the threats. This mind-set leads them to support social structures in which hierarchy and order prevail, the better to ensure people don't stray too far from the straight and narrow.

By contrast, people with what we call a fluid worldview are less likely to perceive the world as dangerous. By extension, they will endorse social structures that allow individuals to find their own way in life. They are more inclined to believe that a society's well-being requires giving people greater latitude to question, to explore and to discover their authentic selves.

This difference in worldviews is reflected in a range of aspects of daily life, from parenting to morality to consumption. People are not consciously identifying as “fixed” or “fluid” types, most likely; but distinct worldviews are reinforced by a variety of social group attachments ranging well beyond the typical categorizations we refer to in political science (i.e., partisanship, race, class and gender), to include pickup drivers, NASCAR fans, latte drinkers and Ta-Nehisi Coates readers.

Whether we call them perspectives or worldviews, it is important to note that the lenses we use to make sense of the world are informed by our social identities. At the same time, as Hetherington and Weiler (2018, xi) note, they “encompass all sorts of cultural considerations, such as ideas about philosophy and morality.” And they are “also, and even more significantly, shaped by psychological influences such as your emotions and the imprint left by past experiences.”

### **Sitting down with the Class of '65 today**

To date, we have conducted in-depth interviews with 17 of the 935 people who participated in all four waves of the socialization study. We hoped that interviewing these people would give us a deeper understanding of how they have experienced political and social changes over the course of their lifetimes. We have sampled respondents primarily by focusing on specific high schools, so that we can observe in depth how the attitudes and behaviors of people who graduated from the same high school have diverged (or not) over the course of their lives.<sup>6</sup> We have chosen these high schools on the basis of both convenience and characteristics of interest. For example, our first interviewees were those who had attended a high school in the upper Midwest, in relatively close proximity to Cramer, so that we could pilot test our interview protocol and gain practice drawing out stories from this cohort. We then chose to interview people who had graduated from two high schools located near a major city on the East coast, which gave us additional variation in religious and socioeconomic background. (One of these schools was a private boarding school with among the highest SES scores in the original sample.) Next, we chose a high school in the rural South. As we have traveled to interview people from each of these schools we

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<sup>6</sup> Most of the 97 high schools in the original survey were represented by 15-20 students each. The number from each school who completed all four waves ranges from 2 to 16; the average is 9.6.

have tried to include additional participants in the study who live in the same areas, even if they graduated from other schools. In short, our sampling has been driven primarily by a desire for variation on a wide variety of characteristics, as opposed to seeking out specific respondents who fit a particular profile.<sup>7</sup>

In the internet age, locating these respondents has been fairly straightforward. Through agreements with the University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Vanderbilt University human subjects boards, we worked with Kent Jennings and Laura Stoker (co-PIs on the 1997 wave) to obtain the last known address for a subset of respondents we identified by study identification number. A research assistant then searched various online white pages for current addresses and phone numbers.

We approached each interview as a semi-structured conversation; we went in with a set of topics we hoped to discuss, but adapted our questions to the flow of conversation. They were conducted in the spirit of relational interviewing (Fujii 2017), in which we treated each interaction as a conversation in which we were aware of being guests in a person's home, and grateful for their participation in a valuable long-running social science study. We gave of ourselves in the sense of telling the participants about us and our motivation for wanting to learn more about them, with the understanding that they were sharing themselves with us in return. These interactions were fascinating and enjoyable, and we were grateful to have time in their homes to gain a better understanding of their lives.

We have conducted all the interviews in person, and all in the participant's home, except for two cases in which the participant was more comfortable talking with us in a local public library, and one in which the participant preferred to be interviewed by Cramer in her office, located in the same state as his residence. Both authors

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<sup>7</sup> Further interviews are underway, and they will be incorporated into subsequent versions of our analysis.

participated in eight of the interviews; the other nine were conducted by Cramer alone. They have lasted between 68 and 168 minutes, averaging 96 minutes. We recorded the interviews with two digital recorders (in case one failed) and had them transcribed by a human transcriber.

Before going into each interview, we created a summary profile of the respondent using the four waves of survey data on demographics and the major topics of the survey (e.g. attitudes toward economics, trust and faith in government, religion, social order, partisanship, attitudes toward the parties, attitudes about the Vietnam War; Watergate; Civil Rights movement and changing role of women.) We created a verbal summary of the respondents before meeting them. After the interview, we recorded memos about our general impressions of the conversation and the setting in which we had just talked.

Once an interview was transcribed, we merged this with our memos from the experience and the survey response summaries to create an overall respondent memo.

For the present analysis, we combed through each of these overall respondent memos to identify attitudes and responses relevant to the Vietnam War, the military, and anti-war protest.<sup>8</sup> We then analyzed each of these submemos for key points about

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<sup>8</sup> The questions in the study about the Vietnam War specifically include,

1. "People have different views about America's involvement in Vietnam. Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam or should we have stayed out?" [Yes, No, Other/It depends]. Asked in 1973, 1982, and 1997.
2. "Do you think the government handled the Vietnam War as well as it could have?" [Yes, No, Other/Depends]. If No, "What do you think the government should have done?" Asked in 1973; two responses coded.
3. "Did our participation in the Vietnam War cause you to change any of your views about the United States? [Yes, No, Other/Depends]. If Yes: "How did your views change?" Asked in 1973, 1982, and 1997; two responses coded.

the Vietnam War or characteristics that surprised us. For example, we noted that one female respondent who expressed intensely negative feelings about President Donald Trump and reported a high level of attention to the news said that the Vietnam War hardly registered for her and that she had not paid much attention to it at the time.

With these submemos in hand, we then created a spreadsheet that we used to compare across the 17 respondents. More specifically, each row contained data for a particular respondent, and the columns represented different characteristics and attitudes, such as race, gender, childhood SES, current SES, Vietnam War attitudes as expressed in the surveys, Vietnam attitudes expressed in the interview, and experience of the war (i.e., enlisted, drafted, served, or protested).

That analysis revealed some patterns that we expected. For example, the three respondents who engaged in anti-war protests were similar in their quite liberal leanings (Jennings 1987). The two respondents who have persisted in their belief that the United States did the right thing in Vietnam enlisted or tried to enlist in the military after high school. None of the respondents who expressed support for President Trump and his administration protested the Vietnam War. And all of the respondents who said we should have fought harder in our interviews expressed a similar sentiment to the survey interviewer in 1973.

It is the exceptions to what we might expect that are the most illuminating, and so we analyze those in detail here. Respondents whose constellations of views expressed in the in-depth interview and across the surveys surprised us somewhat help us understand the ways in which individuals construct the perspectives they use to make sense of politics. These examinations help us understand the manner in which people craft their own unique perspectives from their multiple social group attachments, and how those understandings coincide (or not) with the packages of attitudes and beliefs propagated by mainstream parties and candidates.

One of the patterns, or lack of patterns, that intrigued us in these responses was that partisan identities did not cleanly match up with a hawk versus dove distinction. As we saw in Table 1, even most Republicans thought the U.S. should have stayed out of Vietnam, and that proportion increased over time.<sup>9</sup> By 1997, only one Republican in four thought “we did the right thing in getting into the fighting.” Thus, there are plenty of examples in our data of people who were, or became, Republicans but opposed the war.

For example, we talked with three women living in the upper Midwest who opposed the war but supported the Republican Party on a variety of other grounds. One opposed the war but explained that she became a Republican because her experience as a public school teacher in an urban middle school convinced her that more emphasis on individual responsibility rather than government programs is the key to solving social problems.

The statistical analyses reported in Table 2 summarize the shifting relationship between partisanship and Vietnam opinion from 1973 to 1997. The analysis presented in the first column of the table relates opinions about the war in 1982 to opinions and partisanship in 1973 and to a variety of social characteristics. The results suggest a good deal of fluidity in views about the war (the estimated impact of lagged opinion is just .456) and a fairly strong tendency for Republicans to remain more supportive over this period.<sup>10</sup> There is also a clear tendency for people who served in Vietnam to

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<sup>9</sup> One respect in which the six men highlighted in this paper are unrepresentative of the broader cohort is that none of them changed their basic views about the war between 1973 and 1997—two said the U.S. “did the right thing” in all three survey waves; the other four consistently said we “should have stayed out” of the war.

<sup>10</sup> Our measure of partisanship ranges from zero for strong Democrats to 100 for strong Republicans. Thus, the statistical analysis implies that the expected difference in support for the war between these two groups, other things being equal, was about 9 percentage points.

remain more supportive of the war, and for women to become more opposed. The analysis reported in the second column displays a rather different pattern, with substantial stability of opinion (the estimated impact of 1982 opinion in 1997 is .852) but, if anything, a tendency for support to erode more strongly among Republicans than among Democrats.

**\*\*\* Table 2 \*\*\***

The analyses reported in the third and fourth columns of Table 2 probe the impact of Vietnam opinion on subsequent changes in partisanship. In both cases there is some evidence that people who believed that the U.S. did the right thing getting into the fighting were somewhat more likely, other things being equal, to gravitate toward the Republican Party. However, as the tabulations presented in Table 1 make clear, these modest effects left plenty of room for mismatches between partisanship and views about the war, especially among Republicans.

In the remainder of this paper we focus on six individuals for whom the Vietnam War seems to have been especially consequential. Table 3 provides an overview of these six respondents' backgrounds and political evolutions.<sup>11</sup> While the table summarizes some of the bare outlines of their lives, we hope to demonstrate that detailed attention to their own words—and especially to the connections they make, or fail to make, between life experiences, social identities, and partisan politics—can give us a much richer understanding of how they came to be the people they are today.

**\*\*\* Table 3 \*\*\***

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<sup>11</sup> The names in Table 3 and in the text are pseudonyms.

## **A military tradition and partisan change: Ron Sutton**

Even when people's political attitudes cohere in expected ways, hearing their own accounts of where they came from can be highly illuminating. That was certainly true of Ron Sutton, a retired businessman managing a vacation property in the rural South. His political views are generally quite conservative. In surveys over the years he consistently placed himself at or near the conservative end of the liberal-conservative scale; he also expressed strong support for the free market and cuts in government spending and opposition to government involvement in guaranteeing jobs and busing schoolchildren to achieve racial integration. In 2019 he expressed concern about the economic impact of immigration and said of Donald Trump, "he's the first politician of either race, of either party that ran on a platform and has tried every way in the world to carry exactly what he said out."

In light of these views, it is not surprising that Sutton evolved from calling himself a "strong Democrat" in high school to calling himself a "strong Republican" later in life. But that evolution seems to have been spurred less by an accumulation of policy disagreements than by the Democratic Party's failure, during and immediately following the Vietnam War, to fulfill one key responsibility of political leadership—exercising military and diplomatic strength on the world stage.

The importance of the military in Sutton's worldview began to emerge in response to our very first question.

*KJC:* We would love to know about your childhood, and what about your childhood do you recall and do you think is important for the person you are now?

*Ron Sutton:* The influence of my father.

*KJC:* Yeah, tell us about him.

*Sutton:* You've heard of the 82nd Airborne Division?

*KJC:* Sure.

*Sutton:* He was an 82nd Airborne paratrooper during World War II.

*KJC:* Wow.

*Sutton:* And he would ... that influence, you know, he was a kind man, but you didn't wanna cross him, you know. They were ... they made four combat jumps in WWII in Europe. They made Sicily, Italy, Normandy, D-Day, and Holland. And out of all the 82nd Airborne paratroopers, there were only four, due to casualties—I mean, sorry, I'm telling you wrong, twelve due to casualties—were able to make all four jumps. He was one of the twelve. And he went on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge in Germany, too.

*KJC:* Wow.

*Sutton:* But I can remember as a kid, we were going through a National Guard Armory, and there was a sign on the wall that said, "There is no excuse for surrender as long as you have a means to resist." And every time they would talk about the Arizona Senator, I'd think of that. And I asked him, I said, "What would you do if you ran out of ammunition?" He said, "I'd take his, and then I'd try to kick him to death." And he meant it.

His father's military service clearly made a profound impression on Sutton, and the family's military tradition extends to the present day. Sutton told us proudly of a son who went to West Point and a nephew "headed to the Middle East" as a Navy pilot "commanding a squadron of F-18s." Not surprisingly, Sutton himself tried to join the Army during the Vietnam War; but he failed the physical due to a devastating college football injury.

Over the years, Sutton consistently said "we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam." But his view of the war involved a significant element of fatalism. Despite his support, and his own willingness to serve, he told us that the war was "a lost cause. We couldn't win in Vietnam."

*KJC:* You think that was the case from the start? Like—

*Sutton:* If we weren't prepared to use nuclear weapons, we couldn't win it from the start.

*KJC:* Do you think we should have gotten involved?

*Sutton:* I do. I really, in a way, in that period of political times, yes. ... We were fighting the Cold War, which we finally won, and that was part of it. Expensive part of it, but that was part of it to me.

*LMB:* But fought harder?

*Sutton:* We couldn't win, I don't care what we did. ... I watched war movies, and there's one, *We Were Soldiers* is the name of the movie, with ... I can't even think of his name now.<sup>12</sup> But anyway, we go in there and we fight them. We take this whole big mountain and hill, and we pull out that night, and they move back in. I mean, you can't win a war like that. You can't fight for a ... take this whole hillside here. Run the enemy off, pull out, and they come back in the next day. If you don't fight and take it and hold it, you're ... that's not military sense.

In talking with us, Sutton attributed his early Democratic identification directly to the influence of his father.

*Sutton:* My father was a die-hard southern Roosevelt Democrat.

*KJC:* Sure.

*Sutton:* Yeah, and without his influence, I would have never been a Democrat. But yes. He was a campaign manager in that county for a lot of Democratic politicians.

Sutton still called himself a ("not strong") Democrat in 1973, despite his generally conservative political views. The breaking point in his relationship with the party of his father came in his early thirties. In talking about that break he drew yet again upon his understanding of military service and its connection to character.

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<sup>12</sup> The 2002 film *We Were Soldiers* starred Mel Gibson.

*Sutton:* I voted for Jimmy Carter because he graduated from the Naval Academy. I thought, well, he'll be tough. He was the biggest coward, the sorriest President we ever had.

*KJC:* Was he?

*Sutton:* To me.

*KJC:* How did you see that?

*Sutton:* Well, there's a joke, and I wish I could remember all of it. Teddy Roosevelt came back and asked Jimmy Carter, said, "Well, how are things going?" He said, "Well," said, "they're not going too bad." Said, "They ..."—What's it they did? Something. And he said, "Russians invaded Afghanistan." And he said, "Well, I guess you sent the army over to stop them." He said, "Well, no. But I wrote them a real strong letter." And then there was another one and another one, and I don't remember what it was. And then finally one of them was, said, "Well, I guess next thing you'll tell me, you gave the Suez Canal away."

*KJC:* Oh dear.

*Sutton:* Okay? I wish I could remember all of it.

*KJC:* Yeah, okay. Wow, Jimmy Carter, okay.

*Sutton:* That was the last Democratic President I ever voted for.

*KJC:* Yeah, okay.

*Sutton:* And I believe as strong a Democrat as my father was, when they ran McGovern, I think he would have changed his votes.

Carter's lack of strength on the world stage not only precipitated Sutton's break with the Democratic Party; in his mind, it also negated his father's long record of party loyalty and activism. Of course, if Carter had not come along he might well have made the same partisan transition at some later point in life, precipitated by some other concern or circumstance. Nonetheless, it seems hard to doubt that Carter's failure of leadership was compounded, for Sutton, by a failure to embody the fundamental

military virtue of tenacity that has played such a central role in Sutton's worldview throughout his life.

### **Conflicting identities and ambivalence: Stan Weber**

Like Ron Sutton, Stan Weber grew up a Democrat but gravitated over the course of his life to the Republican Party. However, he expressed ambivalence about the war and about his partisanship. The manner in which he struggled with these things helps us understand the tools that people grope for to make sense of the contemporary era.

Weber has lived in his hometown, a small city in the upper Midwest, for most of his life. We interviewed him in the modest ranch home he and his wife have owned since the early 1980s. His hometown was a strong union town when he was growing up. Many of his classmates' family members and many members of his own extended family worked for the one large manufacturer in town.

The several generations of Weber's working-class Catholic family were closely knit—or would have been, if not for their varying levels of attachment to the union. When he was growing up, workers at the factory went on strike, and it brought these tensions to the fore. His grandfather was a business agent for the local carpenters union and the strike was a major event.

I remember that as vividly as yesterday, because we had strikers, and what they called scabs in those days. People who crossed the picket line, they lived in our neighborhood. I remember [hearing] hollering and screaming, back and forth .... In our neighborhood, from our next door neighbor, who are strikers, to the people who are crossing the picket line, down the block. They were the most .... Well, many of the words that I knew, I learned from listening to these people hollering back and forth to each other .... I can tell you how life-shattering that strike was. Because my dad's brother-in-law was a [redacted] employee, and so was one of my dad's brothers. My dad's brother-in-law was a striker, my dad's brother crossed the picket line, and

they both had their reasons. [His brother-in-law], who was the striker, was very adamant and very pro-union, and supported everything they were extending. [My dad's brother], who had gone through hell in World War II, Battle of the Bulge, was in Germany ... he was having trouble, after the war, getting financially established. He always said he couldn't afford to go on strike. He had to cross the picket line and work. The long and short of that whole story is, [my dad's brother and brother-in law] did not speak to each other for the rest of their lives. [One] died in the early 2000s, [the other] died just five or six years ago. But while they were both living, they never talked to each other [even though they were related through marriage].... They never talked to each other again.

This split mapped onto political leanings.

My dad was a World War II veteran. Ike was the president, they're running for president in '52, and '56. So, there was conversations, my dad admired Ike, because of the military ties. The union side of the family didn't like Ike, they supported Adlai Stevenson.

Weber's own loyalties were clearly caught up in these tensions. In high school he called himself a strong Democrat, eight years later a Democratic "leaner." Reflecting back in 2018, he interpreted those attachments in personal terms. "I think I probably admired the unions, because I admired my grandfather, and he worked for the unions."

Later in life Weber gravitated to the Republican Party; he reported voting for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and Bob Dole in 1996, and by 1997 he was calling himself a strong Republican. This shift resulted in significant part from changing social ties and perspectives. Working in the local news industry, "I interviewed, over the years, a number of local politicians. I just found that the Republicans I talked to made a little more sense to me." Later, this impression was reinforced by the experience of dealing firsthand with government red tape. "The more I worked in business, the more I saw ... rules and regulations that made it difficult for the small business to function. All of

that led back to the basic premise of the Republican Party, [which] was less government interference.”

But here, too, there were layers of complexity. Weber’s strong Republican partisanship was by no means uncritical,

because there’s so much truth in the fact that they botched up as much as anybody else. They get into power on a national level, they spend more money, or just as much money as the Democrats do. They talk a good game, but they can’t get back to their basic premises.

Weber’s Republican loyalty was further stressed by the emergence of Donald Trump as the party’s leader.

So, it’s evolved, for me, to a point where ... I mean, the last guy who ran for president as a Republican, who’s now the president, both my wife and I did not vote for him. We didn’t vote Democratic, but we voted for a third party candidate. And there were things about him that disgusted me as a Republican. The first thing was, if you looked at his social policies, he was actually more liberal than Hillary Clinton, in regards to how he thought about deficit spending and everything else. But the thing that really turned me off about him was his personality. His lack of respect for women, for minorities, for .... Now, I may be sounding like a Democrat here. But it was, he stood for nothing that I stood for, as what I felt was a Republican.

Character seemed important for Weber, both for how he thought about politicians and for how he thought about himself. This came across in particular in the way he talked about religion. He grew up in a Catholic family, in a Catholic town, but he and his wife “evolved away from that...I think if there is a deity, if somebody is going to judge me, they’re going to have to judge me on whether I was a good person or not. And I felt that I’m a fairly good person. I try to respect other people as best I can, I try to do good.”

Weber's thoughts about the Vietnam War are marked by similar nuance and wrestling with what the war meant for his life. Both his survey responses and our interview with him display ambivalence about the war that he continues to work through to this day. He did not support the war at the time or subsequently, telling interviewers in 1973, 1982 and 1997 that the U.S. should have stayed out. He was drafted, but was granted a deferment due to asthma and was never called back.

In our in-depth interview, Weber recalled a boy who sat behind him in his high school homeroom who died in Vietnam. "He was crossing a river and one of his buddies was swept downstream, and [this guy from my school] jumped in after him, and they both died. I mean, the war struck home."

At one point in our interview he said he was neither in favor nor opposed to the war.

I always said, if I would have passed my physical, I would've gone in. I wasn't going to move to Canada. I didn't have any feelings for or against the war. Like any other guy, you don't want to get killed, but at the same token, I didn't feel passion, one way or another, about that war. I'm glad I didn't have to go, but at the same token, I would have. But I wasn't gung-ho.

I mean, I have relatives, today, who are gung-ho about the service, and I never was that way. I respect them, I mean, I think it's great how we treat our service people today. I mean, when the Vietnam vets came back, they were spat on, and people would hurl insults at them, and what have you. Now, we go to [professional baseball games in the nearest city] and they honor a vet every game. That's great, and I think it's wonderful. It gives me goosebumps to see that.

But as he spoke, he talked about the ways he began to question the war as it went on.

I guess the longer the war went on, ... I was in the media at that time. I had the, "What are we fighting for?" feeling in my head. It never ended.

Then when you looked at the history, I mean, to understand the history of what these people went through .... When you think about the fighting that went on in Vietnam, I mean, with what went on there when the French controlled it. What went on when the Japanese overran it, in World War II. What went on after World War II. I mean, Ho Chi Minh was an ally of the Americans, during World War II, because we were feeding him weapons to fight the Japanese. So, these people have gone through generations and generations of foreign powers. Now, I just found that out last year. ... You think, "What are we fighting for?" I never could define what that was all about. I think that was a legitimate question.

He showed sympathy with an anti-war position, but questioned the behavior of protestors, again reflecting his emphasis on personal character and individual responsibility. The surveys show he was not in favor of the protests at the time of the war, giving "radical students" a feeling thermometer rating of zero in 1973. When asked in our interview about his feeling toward anti-war protestors, he said, "I liked them and I didn't."

*Weber:* Because, like I said, I was a little—You have these patriotic feelings, and at the same time, "Why are we doing this?" But I never could get over the—It was hard to differentiate the people who are protesting, who are just protesting because it's the thing to do, and they're really so daring, want to make a party, and they're having a good time. To those who are really seriously committed to that. I sat at the 1969 Newport Jazz Festival, in Rhode Island, which occurred one month before Woodstock. ... And people who weren't admitted were outside the gates. I remember actually sitting at a concert, at the jazz festival, and this projectile landed in the aisle, which is grass, right next to us. It actually burned holes in the back of my t-shirt that I was wearing that night.

*KJC:* Oh my goodness!

*Weber:* Well, this was the part of the Woodstock generation. It was a little bit ties in, now that I think about it, with the mentality of a lot of the things

we've been talking about. They wanted what they wanted, but if they didn't get their way, all laws and all other thoughts be damned. The people who couldn't get in the jazz festival, what did they do? They rioted outside, because they wanted to get in. They disregarded all the laws, they put people's safety at risk. Sounds familiar. But then again, it's that sense of, who are the committed people, and how can they, more importantly, manipulate the uncommitted for the committed goals? So, there's a lot of that went on then, obviously goes on now. I had sympathy for the protesters, but at the same time I had sympathy for the servicemen, too.

Weber's ambivalence about Vietnam did not result in a disengagement from politics; it was part of a lifelong search for the right way to think about politics. Indeed, he showed a great deal of interest in politics, even running for the state legislature at one point but losing the primary. Still, he exudes a kind of political homelessness, feeling no strong attachment to either party. As he sorted through his attitudes toward the Vietnam War with us, we were reminded that identities other than partisanship were guiding these thoughts.

### **An upbeat hawk: Don Peyton**

Weber's nuanced views of the Vietnam War and contemporary politics seem to reflect a cognitive style rooted in competing identities. In contrast, Don Peyton expressed views about the war and about contemporary politics that might seem from a distance to be in conflict, but on closer inspection display a fundamental coherence and integrity grounded in his distinctive worldview, an energetic moral optimism.

Like his high school classmate Ron Sutton, Don Peyton has lived his entire life in the rural South. He is something of a celebrity in his community due to his long involvement in the local music industry. He's a devout Christian who grew up in the Church of Christ but converted to the Methodist church to accommodate his wife, a loving partner who enthusiastically supports his career.

Like Sutton, Peyton was raised as a Democrat. But unlike Sutton, he remained a Democrat throughout his life. His identification with the Democratic Party is not a confused hold-over from the solid Democratic South of his youth. Although he voted for Richard Nixon, according to the surveys, and told us he “greatly admired Reagan” and Eisenhower, he was an ardent supporter of Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton and wished Al Gore had won in 2000. He expressed firm belief in climate change and in the need for social welfare programs:

For them [the Republicans] not to believe in global warming—hide your head in the sand if you like, but I’m not going to. I’m going to, I’m looking at what’s going on around me. I think I’ve always seen it as the conservatives are for big money interests. The Democrats lift up the downtrodden. They try to help individuals.

He also expressed adamant opposition to President Trump:

We need a new president and we need a president who will listen to the people, who will serve the people’s needs and not just his individual needs. ... I’m scared for our country now and I really would like for the Mueller investigation to come to a conclusion because I think it’s I think it’s going to be eye-opening. ... I do not like him at all and this is going to be a bit radical, there’s going to be a bit radical, but when I’ve watched him growing in popularity, if you will, I looked at what he did, what he said, and the people he surrounded himself with. And I told my wife, I said, this man feels the, fills the bill for the antichrist turning man against man. And that’s what he’s done. He’s turned man against man.

Peyton sees no contradiction at all between his Democratic loyalty and his devout Christianity—or between his political views and his pride in his identity as a military veteran. He enlisted in the Air Force because he always loved cars and airplanes. “I always liked the airplanes, I always loved fast cars and airplanes. I was a hot-rodder growing up.” Like many young men of the era, he enlisted under the shadow of the

draft.<sup>13</sup> A family friend advised him, “If you’re going to go in the military, you better join up now because they’re coming after you.” He did not serve in Vietnam but says he would have been proud to.

Thank God I didn’t have to go to Vietnam, but I was prepared to go. I thought I was going to be going a couple of times. I was in Germany and we were on alert several times, but I never did have to go, but I was prepared to go if need be.

Peyton exudes enthusiasm for his military service. “I’m very patriotic, I was a pretty sharp troop.” He tells stories about his joy in shining his boots, learning to fold a flag tightly, and carrying out his duties around the base. To this day, one of his main leisure-time activities is playing an online tank game, and he celebrates the skill of some of the “killers” he plays with. He has no regrets about his military service, and none about the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. In the 1973, 1982, and 1997 surveys, he consistently said that the U.S. “did the right thing,” and that the U.S. military handled it as well as it could. In his in-depth interview with us in 2019, his responses were unequivocally supportive of the war effort.

I believed it when I was told that we were there to stop the spread of communism and that I did not have a problem with us being there. And of course there was a big uproar about that. Mainly on most of the college campuses and so on. They certainly had the right to do that. But I really think that it’s my opinion that militarily we won the Vietnam War. We won every battle. We just had overwhelming superiority, air and ground and our weaponry but we lost it politically. We lost that war politically. We lost it here at home.

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<sup>13</sup> Of the 212 Jennings respondents who enlisted in the military, 112 said they “definitely” would have been drafted and another 41 said they “probably” would have been drafted.

One way to understand Peyton's views is by using Hetherington and Weiler's (2018) distinction between fixed and fluid worldviews. They used a variety of survey questions to classify members of the public as "fixed," "mixed," or "fluid." One of these questions in particular proved powerful in their work and we adopted it for our interviews. Near the end of each interview, respondents were asked which of the following two statements comes closest to their own view:

1. Our lives are threatened by terrorists, criminals and illegal immigrants and our priority should be to protect ourselves.
2. It's a big, beautiful world, mostly full of good people and we must find a way to embrace each other and not allow ourselves to become isolated. (xi)

By the end of our interview it was very clear to us that Peyton would prefer option 2, "it's a big, beautiful world." When we asked him this question, he said, simply, "Number two in spades. I'll run the flag up for number two." His wife, who had been sitting in on the interview, quipped, "I knew that would be easy."

At first blush that perspective does not help explain Peyton's pro-war stance. But the interview, taken as a whole, revealed a perspective through which it makes sense that a man who sees a big, beautiful world also supported the Vietnam War effort. Our conversation with him revealed a strong emphasis on doing the right thing and treating people well. He spoke repeatedly in a variety of contexts about Christian behavior and kindness. For him, the Vietnam War was about defeating communism and defending the United States. His military service "did make me realize that the military is an arm of our country that we go places to make sure that things are all right."

Peyton's outlook is pervaded by a kind of rose-colored view of life. It comes across in his general exuberance, in his view of the Vietnam War, and in his assessment of the country right now. Despite his deep concerns about the Trump presidency, he had this to say about the legacy of the Vietnam War:

We did lose it, I think, politically, but I think we're maybe a stronger country because of that. Because we've come back together after, you know, some people had ideas about it one way and then some about the other. I think we've come back together after a while and I do like the fact that people—and I do it myself—I thank military people for their service. I've been thanked many times for my service and I will never forget one night when I got home one day and I went to a [pro] football game ... and it was Veteran's day and they asked all of the veterans to stand up and be recognized. First time I'd ever been recognized for serving in the military and it brought tears to my eyes.

Listening closely to Peyton's views helps us see how someone can interpret war—even a war as ugly and unpopular as the one in Vietnam—not as a matter of protecting us from a terrible world, but rather as a worthy struggle to live up to our country's destined leading role in a big, beautiful world.

### **Disillusionment: Mike Dayton**

So far we have heard from men who, for one reason or another, did not serve in Vietnam. But of course, the war had even more profound effects on the people who actually fought it. Of the people we have interviewed so far, three men served in Vietnam. These three veterans have distinct, complex relationships to the war, and in listening to their accounts of those relationships we were struck by how differently their experiences shaped their subsequent lives.

Of these three men, two resembled Don Peyton in having enlisted. Both grew up in the same predominantly Catholic suburb of a major Eastern city. Both identified as strong Democrats growing up and continued to do so throughout their lives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The sole exception was a single “not strong” Democratic identification from Mike Dayton in 1982.

However, despite these important similarities in their backgrounds, their experiences and interpretations of the war were quite different.

Mike Dayton enlisted in the Air Force and spent a year in Vietnam, where he did dangerous night guard duty at an air base during the bloody Tet Offensive. After the war he became a college student, an anti-war protester, and, eventually, a social science professor at a northeastern university. These experiences combined to produce a profound sense of disillusionment with American society and politics.

We began by asking Dayton about his decision to enlist.

*KJC:* You weren't drafted, but you ...

*Dayton:* No, I was too smart for that. I figured, oh, I'll just join. Because in those days, if you get drafted, you're going to get drafted into the army. I didn't like their uniforms. I thought the Air Force had much better uniforms. I joined the Air Force, and then became the most military branch of the Air Force which was Air Force Security. That's what I did in the military in Vietnam.

*KJC:* Okay. How long were you in Vietnam?

*Dayton:* A year, 1968, during the Tet Offensive.

*KJC:* Wow.

*Dayton:* Yeah. We were Air Force Security. ... We only worked at night on the perimeter around the base. We didn't work during the daytime. We were only out there at night. That's when there was any difficulty. That's when it was going to be, at night time.

*KJC:* How do you think that experience affected you, serving in Vietnam?

*Dayton:* Well, it was a dramatic effect I think. Talking to baby boomers that we live through the second half of the 20th century and two big effects for me I think was the assassination of President Kennedy. That was a difficult time because he was one of us. He was an Irish Catholic. Now, of course, he really wasn't. He came from a different social class; but we all thought he was one

of us. ... The assassination of President Kennedy and then the Vietnam war were major life-changing events where you then began questioning about who's telling you what about the government. Then, of course, Vietnam was Neil Sheehan's book, *A Bright and Shining Lie*.<sup>15</sup> Those are two major events where, then, when you look at American adventurism, you go, "Wait a second. I'm not sure what they're telling me here is true," when you ... I don't think any Viet Cong were threatening Irish Catholics in [my hometown]. Those are two big events. Then ... you see what happens when people are taken out of their parameters and their context where you have certain rules and behaviors that you expect. You grew up in a white middle-class neighborhood. You're going to act a certain way. You take something out of those contexts. They can act in completely different ways in a combat zone, then you see behaviors that you would never expect to see. That was changing. Then, of course the racism for me in Vietnam was dramatic because they look different than us, than Americans. They were smaller and brown skin and all. The racism towards them, towards the Vietnamese, was dramatic. All that combines to like, oh, this doesn't seem like a good thing to be doing.

*LMB:* Did you begin to worry about that while you were still stateside, before you went over there? Or was it the experience there that changed you?

*Dayton:* No. One of the things when you grow up as a baby boomer, your father's generation were all World War II guys, and my father wasn't in World War II but not for lack of trying. He was 4F. He had diabetes. He tried to join four different service branches on December 8th in '41. You grow up with World War II, John Wayne, Audie Murphy. You know it's the next generation, which is the baby boomers, that you're going to be in the military. There was that kind of influence as you're experiencing that. I didn't have any political issues when I was in high school. I always tell the story. I was sitting, at lunchtime, with the hockey team. There were two guys

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<sup>15</sup> Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (1988) is a prize-winning account of hubris, self-deceit, and corruption in the U.S. war effort.

down at the end of the table. They were athletes and they were discussing the buildup in Vietnam. I remember saying to those guys, “Hey, you guys should be worrying about who's playing third base for [our local professional baseball team].” Well, a few months after that I wasn't so worried about who's playing third base. I always think that those guys were much more thoughtful than I was. No, I didn't think about it at all. It was once I was there, then you began to see what was going on. You know, a lot less glory in that situation.

Dayton's observation of racism and abhorrent human behavior in Vietnam stuck with him when he returned home.

There was always this myth of Vietnam vets being spit upon when they came back. And it was true, we weren't treated well because the war was so ugly, so racist, with the first world country dominating a third world country, that it was .... and then the baby boomers who were getting drafted were saying, “Hey, I don't want to get drafted to go to this war.” But when I came home, I landed in San Francisco, no one said anything to me. ... I didn't experience that. But I had one more year to do in the military when I came back, so I was in the Strategic Air Command after that. I wasn't in the civilian population after Vietnam.

After completing his Air Force service, Dayton went to college on the G.I. Bill. His academic trajectory was tilted by the atmosphere of rebellion on campus.

*Dayton:* I wasn't sure what the heck I was going to major in, and I showed up to a Psych 101 class and one of the famous anti-war professors was giving the lecture in Psych 101. He had long hair and torn jeans. That was the thing in 1970. He dropped the F-bomb in class.

*KJC:* On the first day?

*Dayton:* Well, pretty much, whatever. And I thought, “That's pretty cool. I think I'd like to do that.”

Dayton became active in the anti-war movement on campus—spurred, perhaps, by his parents' participation in anti-war candlelight vigils while he was still in Vietnam.

In 1970, the war was really heating up. It was two years after the Tet Offensive. It was very clear. ... The war was heating up and that was during the great anti-war protest in the spring of 1970 in Kent State in May of 1970. There was a number of us veterans now on campus at the university. Most of us were involved in the anti-war movement and were part of the Vietnam, the VVAW, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, was led by John Kerry at that point. We had participated in a lot of those protests on campus.

That experience led him to believe in the power of collective action.

You begin to think, well, one person doesn't have that much power but one person with other people, with other people, with other people had an effect. Of course, it did have an effect in causing President Johnson not to run for reelection for '68. Then the protests were having an effect on the American public's view of the Vietnam War. In 1970, the campuses exploded across the country with all sorts of protest and shutting the campuses down.

Despite his experience with protestors collectively affecting policy, Dayton came to believe that politics is out of the hands of ordinary citizens. By the time we talked with him in 2018, his interpretations of events were deeply imbued with distrust of political leaders and institutions.

I don't trust the various institutions. It's funny now because the liberals are all in favor of supporting the FBI and the CIA. Well, it wasn't so long ago we damn sure didn't support them. They were spying on Martin Luther King, the FBI was. God knows what the CIA was doing at the time and still doing. Now, because he [President Trump] has completely attacked these institutions, you have a reaction saying, "Well, maybe the FBI is not doing so bad or the CIA says the Russians interfered." ... Why would you question when now leading up into the Iraq war, the institutions of *New York Times*

didn't do their job and they accepted what the government was saying about and implied that he was involved with 9/11, Hussein. He wasn't. Or that they had a mushroom cloud which Condoleezza Rice said or biological weapons what General Powell said. They were lying. They were absolutely lying. They knew they were lying. Even with Obama, in the Obama administration, those guys are making up stuff. I liked him. He seemed civil and smart. [But] you always have to question him or any of those guys. When you think of like when Trump was saying Obama wasn't born in the United States, he knew that Mitchell McConnell and Paul Ryan, they didn't believe that. Not one minute did they believe that Obama wasn't born—but they used it. They let Trump go wild with that. ... That still means, yes, I would vote for a Democrat. But that's only relative to a Republican. It's less trusting of them because they're getting money from the same people that the Republicans are, maybe just not as much.

*KJC:* How long do you think you've felt distrustful toward the Democrats? Was it Vietnam that ...

*Dayton:* Well, you start to think about it even with the assassination of the president and the Warren Commission, and then all the details that begin to emerge that are in conflict with the Warren Commission's report. Then you say, "Well, who's responsible for this?" [Chief Justice] Warren and Arlen Specter, the magic bullet theory guy. You begin to say, "Wait a second. Who's telling us what?" You go back to even during the war, prior to the American involvement in World War II, and FDR was having the lend-lease program and all that stuff. They're just doing that stuff and Congress wasn't approving that. He was just going to do it and give Winston Churchill weapons and support. They're always making decisions about those sorts of things. I just trust the Republicans [even] less than I trust the Democrats.

Dayton has arrived in his seventies with a profound distaste and distrust of politics, government, and both major political parties. As befits an academic, his disillusionment is the result of sustained engagement and careful thought, not a casual cynicism or "tuning out." Indeed, he looks back on his younger self as insufficiently

thoughtful and engaged in politics. Nonetheless, in talking with him about contemporary politics it is hard not to be struck by how strongly his views have been shaped by the two “major life-changing events” of a half-century earlier, the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam War, that set him on the path of questioning “who’s telling you what about the government.”

### **A thread in the tapestry of life experiences: Ed Bradshaw**

Ed Bradshaw grew up in the same working-class Catholic milieu as Mike Dayton, and he, too, enlisted in the military in hopes of avoiding ground combat as a draftee. As he was about to graduate from high school,

Vietnam was just gearing up pretty good. It was gettin' goin' and a lot of people didn't want to go to Vietnam. I mean nobody wanted to go. I mean you had to be nuts. There were a few I suppose. I was gonna be drafted. Everybody got drafted. ... The Navy guys came around and they gave a talk and they said. “You could go in the Navy while you’re still in school and become a Navy reserve. Then you’d go to reserve meetings one night a week and you get paid.” It was \$44 every three months I think. It was only three hours a night, a week, three hours a week. You were in the Navy. You graduated and you went off to boot camp for two weeks. ... So that’s what I did.

His family was supportive, with his father telling him, ““Oh, do it. Go in the Navy, 'cause you’ll go in the Army otherwise and it’s better to ride than walk.’ ... That was what he said. So, if I’d be on a ship I was riding. I didn’t have to walk.”

Bradshaw served as a radarman on a ship stationed off the coast of Vietnam, feeling somewhat removed from the war.

I was in no more danger than we are right now. I mean, they were shooting at us, but I was on a ship. We were 15 miles away. I mean, they shot at us and they came close to us and I’ve got a picture of a shell splash and all

that. But no, I was not in ... I was not traumatized by it like some people were.

Like Mike Dayton, Bradshaw attended college on the G.I. Bill after leaving the military; but it did not seem to hold his interest. "I got tired of college," he said, so he dropped out and took a job working in a relative's food retail business. He also ran for and won a local public office, and thought for a time that he might make a career in politics. Although his political ambitions receded, he has maintained a lively interest in following public affairs, reading history, and thinking through his own political beliefs.

Bradshaw is a church-goer and a devoted family man; he exudes an enthusiastic contentment with his home and his general quality of life. He has had a variety of jobs, most recently partnering with his son in a small home improvement business. He's written multiple books (mostly unpublished) and eventually returned to school to study filmmaking. He produced his own cable TV show for a time. When we interviewed him, he was actively involved in a local baseball league.

Over the years, Bradshaw has consistently identified himself as a liberal and a Democrat, and his political convictions came across strongly in our interview. He expressed dismay about the influence of money in politics, rampant income inequality, and the lack of civil rights for African-Americans. He applauded the gains made by women over the course of his life. When we asked him Hetherington and Weiler's "fixed or fluid" question, he said, "Do you have to ask that after talking to me for two hours?"

*KJC:* That's such an interesting thing that you said. Yeah, no. It's very interesting how a conversation like this, how you can tell, like, it's number two for you.

*Bradshaw:* Yeah. Absolutely. There is absolutely, believe me, there's almost no threat from terrorists. I mean, I beg your pardon, but how many people have been killed by terrorists? Even counting 9/11. Okay, you know, and except

for 9/11, before that, the biggest act of domestic terrorism, the most devastating, was perpetrated by three white guys. They knocked down a building in Oklahoma and killed a bunch of kids.

*KJC:* Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

*Bradshaw:* That we gotta worry about, you know, no. It's scare tactics by the right. And I don't doubt that some of them, particularly the people that they've frightened, they're really frightened. They really think that Mexicans coming in here are taking all the good jobs, and that's why Americans are poor.

Bradshaw consistently expressed the view that the United States should have stayed out of Vietnam. In his 1973 interview he was only mildly negative toward "radical protestors," giving them a 40-degree rating on the feeling thermometer. But in speaking with us 45 years later, he recalled his feelings differently.

*Bradshaw:* At the time, I hated 'em. I thought they were Communists and out to ruin America, and the spitting on veterans and all that. I hated that. We got catcalls and stuff like that. ... When I was out, a lot of people knew I was a veteran, 'cause I was going to college on the G.I. Bill. And they, a lot of the younger people thought "baby-killer" and all that.

*KJC:* At college?

*Bradshaw:* Yeah, I'd get, "How many babies did you burn when you were in Vietnam?" That kind of thing.

Looking back, Bradshaw offered a mature perspective on where the protestors were coming from, saying, "I get it. I get what they were doing. They didn't know. I wasn't the decision maker. I went because they sent me. I was in the Navy because I didn't want to go in the Army." Characteristically, he also conceded the moral complexity of his own role in the war:

I was 15 miles out of Vietnam [off shore], so I couldn't really answer. But, you know, I probably did [shell civilians]. I mean, who knows what? We shot

our guns all the time. I mean, if we shot in ... I don't know what we were shooting at. For all I know, it was a village. They told us it was missile sites, but they used to put the missile sites in the villages so that we wouldn't shoot at 'em. Well, you can't have that. You can't be shooting our planes down, okay? We don't allow that.

For all his concerns about the morality of the war, and despite his liberal political views, Bradshaw came away with a surprisingly positive understanding of his own military experience.

It gave me a real sense of patriotism, of caring about this country, which I still feel. My oath never expired. I preserve, protect and defend the Constitution, which I'm prepared to do, I mean. If they call me back, I'd go back. ... You're in the Navy, and so it's from the moment you hold your hand up [to take the oath], you know, it's God, Country and ... I mean, they don't ... it's not a class. It's not said to you over and over until you believe it. It's just part of your life. It's accepted. I don't know how else to word it. They didn't have classes in patriotism. It's not like that at all. It's just that you know why you're there. You'll salute the flag. I mean, you don't come anywhere near a flag without saluting it.

For Bradshaw, his time in the Navy seemed to represent a single thread in a complex tapestry of life experiences. He was matter-of-fact about his role ("I went because they sent me") and about the relative safety of being 15 miles off shore ("I've got a picture of a shell splash and all that"). He had clearly thought deeply about the moral complexity of the war, his role in it, and the reactions of those who opposed it. He took from his experience what was personally valuable—"a real sense of patriotism, of caring about this country, which I still feel." And then he got on with his life. That, too, is a time-honored reaction to the experience of war.

## The scars of war: John Schmidt

The one man in our sample who was drafted and served in Vietnam was John Schmidt. He grew up in the upper Midwestern city with the large manufacturer. That context was significant for many of his experiences and views. He himself worked for that manufacturer for almost 40 years, eventually as part of management after earning a B.A. through the G.I. Bill and then a business administration degree. He recalled that the large strike in town made him worry as a child. His dad worked for the company whose workers went on strike.

I do not remember it well, but I remember walking to school and we walked to school then...I remember walking to school and seeing this house covered with paint bombs all over this house....[The owner was a strikebreaker] and the union people had thrown paint bombs all over his house.

*KJC:* Like what color paint? I'm trying to picture what, with red paint, or ...?

*Schmidt:* Oh, reds, yellows, blue, whatever they had. Whatever they had, yeah....So, he had to get his home repainted....But his name was similar [to ours]. So, I, in the back of my mind, I thought [redacted], whoa, are they coming after our house? You know? ...I didn't understand it enough...To really criticize one way or the other. ...At the time, I was just a little fearful that, that could happen to us. You know....Even though we lived in rent.

Schmidt currently lives modestly in a small single-family ranch on the edge of the city with a carefully tended garden. Before our interview, he remarked that he had gone through master gardening training but had declined to obtain the certificate because doing so would have required giving his social security number to the accrediting school. (He also declined to give his social security number to us to obtain the \$100 incentive for participating in the interview.)

He thought of himself as a weak Democrat in 1965, but gradually migrated to the Republican Party, calling himself a weak Republican in 1997. His self-identified

ideology evolved similarly over the years, from “slightly liberal” in 1965 to “conservative” in 1997. He grew up as a Catholic, “then in the ‘80s, it was a period of time where I walked away from the church and didn’t attend ... but God had a way of bringing me back.” He said he was “full of myself” at the time, but his wife and son got involved in a church and “May 9th, 1989, I accepted Christ into my life.” As an Evangelical now, the church plays a big role in his life spiritually and socially.

When the Vietnam War came along, “It was something that I wanted to avoid. However, reflecting back on that time, it was probably the best thing for me ... to go into the Army. To fight and serve for this country. To see life and death situations first hand and to know what it's like ....”

The surveys show that, over the years, Schmidt consistently said that the United States should not have been involved in Vietnam, though in 1973 he added that the United States should have fought to win once it intervened. In our interview he portrayed his experience serving in Vietnam to be mainly positive, but clearly struggled with it. He looked back on the time as a very divisive one.

“The 60s were a period of free love, open drugs, and just protests. But, they’re nothing like today,” he said.

*KJC:* No kidding.

*Schmidt:* I don’t think they were. There was a divide. I know when I came home, after Vietnam, my parents wouldn’t drive to [the major airport in his state]. It’s too far for them to drive. And they didn’t like the traffic in [that city]. So, I took a cab from the airport home. The cab driver, just even, I was in full uniform, was talking about soldiers who were nothing but baby killers, who were ....

*KJC:* The whole way home? [The drive takes about an hour in light traffic on 2019 highways.]

*Schmidt:* Yeah, on the way home that, “You people over there are just baby killers. You have no respect for human life.” So on, and so forth. You know?

*KJC:* What did you do?

*Schmidt:* Nothing. I sat in the cab and ....

*KJC:* That’s a long ride.

*Schmidt:* It was. It was a long ride, yes. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

*KJC:* I’m so sorry to hear it. That’s—what a memory.

*Schmidt:* But, it is a memory yes, and I struggled with Vietnam. I don’t even like to talk about it. But, I did have two of my buddies, two of my friends, die in my arms.

*KJC:* Oh my lord.

*Schmidt:* And, I did ... I did see death first hand.

*KJC:* Sure, I’m so sorry.

*Schmidt:* I don’t know, where was I going with this, it’s just the, oh I know where I was going with it. I struggled with the Vietnam War. I struggled not only with the death, and the killing, and some of the things I had to do there, but I also struggled with our government. Lyndon Baines Johnson refused the second term. He wanted out because he knew it was wrong. Nixon came in, he stopped the bombing in North Vietnam ... which meant we didn’t have a chance. He just kind of left us there. Had he continued that bombing, we would have had a chance of victory, I feel. We went home and it’s a war we never won and it’s not a good feeling to fight for a cause thinking you lost it.

*KJC:* Yeah.

*Schmidt:* So, yeah.

*KJC:* So, you sound to me very patriotic. Tell me more about what that was like to be such a patriot and be so frustrated with our leadership? How did you think about it at the time and how ...

*Schmidt:* At the time, you didn't think. Sure, there was some anger when I heard that they weren't going to be bombing North Vietnam anymore, but you didn't think, you just did. You didn't have enough time to think about all these things that were going on in the world. Plus, you were out of the loop. You heard about the protests in the streets, but you really didn't see them like the Americans who were at home and saw them on their dinner table at night and watched all of these protests, or Kent State, or any of that that took place. So, you weren't privy to that information to the degree that the American person was.

Did that experience make him feel differently about the political parties?

No, parties not at all. ... It had nothing to do politically, I mean LBJ was a Democrat, Nixon was a Republican. We didn't care about that. It was about relationships. Vietnam was the biggest change in my life. It was the best and the worst that had ever happened to me. In my meager 71 years. So, I grew up. I learned what the world was all about, and ... yes, I became more patriotic. I was more interested in voting because I had participated in this. I was ... I didn't really have an allegiance. I always considered myself an independent ... who recently has voted more Republican in the past, I mean in the last 10, 15, 20 years. Something like that, but I have always considered myself an independent. I do not support either party financially.

In the present context, he considers himself "A news TV junkie."

I watch Fox News probably most of the time, and that'll tell you a lot about my political stance and that. They are also ... can I trust them? Sure, why not? But they have their political side, and when I want to, I'll go over to CNN.

He wishes the country would be more supportive of President Trump. He remarked that people used to have more respect for the president. He recalled how upset people were when President John Kennedy was killed, but

In my opinion, if there was an assassination today, many people would be celebrating, and that I think has changed. The respect for our President is no longer there, it seems, and I'm so disappointed the way the country is divided. That does break my heart because once an election is done, we have to support our President whoever he or she might be. Yes.

The interview made it clear that the Vietnam War was a very emotional experience for Schmidt. He had tears in his eyes when talking about losing his comrades, and emphasized that for him the war was not about geopolitics but about relationships. His experience in combat clearly shaped his understanding of race, among other things.

That was a whole new experience for me. But let me tell you, a black man bleeds the same color as a white man, and I've had a black man save my life. I've carried dead black soldiers. There is no difference in my opinion. I don't really have any close black friends, but I do have acquaintances.

He seemed alternately bewildered and dismayed by civil rights protests then, as well as now.

At the time, I just said I don't get it. I don't understand it. We live in this country. Everybody's got a right. I don't get it. Why are they protesting? Now, I understand more why they're protesting. ... Change is slow. Change always takes time, and I feel that the change was needed, I think a lot in a lot of areas, it has improved, but there are still some inequalities that we still have in our country, just as I said. That fear factor when you're walking down the street, you know, that has to be erased, and I don't know if my generation will erase it. The younger generation, it'll take time for that to change, but it will happen.

A final contrast with Ed Bradshaw helps to illuminate the different ways people in our sample linked together their life experiences to arrive at very different perspectives on contemporary events. Despite having been taunted as a "baby-killer"

by anti-war protesters, the patriotic Navy veteran Bradshaw expressed a capacious tolerance for protests:

I mean, to this day, I stand when the flag goes by in a parade. I mean, I was in the Navy .... And yet, when these football players kneel? I get that. I'm for them. They're not hurting anybody. They're making a point, and that's what I fought for. I think if you are complaining about that, you should spend a couple years in a war.

In contrast, the patriotic Army veteran Schmidt had a very different way of linking his military service to the NFL kneeling protests:

With the NFL, and the kneeling at the national anthem. I think it's disgraceful. Because I know, personally, men who have died. You know? And shed their blood for this country.

We can only speculate about the bases of these very different reactions. Schmidt was clearly scarred by the experience of “see[ing] death first hand” in battle—an experience Bradshaw was spared. It is hardly surprising that he would invoke their sacrifice in the context of responding to the NFL protesters. But that experience was not, in itself, determinative of his response. Perhaps it also mattered that he could say of himself, a half-century after learning the fundamental lesson of racial equality serving alongside African-Americans in Vietnam, that “I don't really have any close black friends.” Perhaps his long career in management predisposed him to view the protests from the perspective of team owners rather than players. And of course, the most powerful difference between the two men in this context may be that Bradshaw is a committed liberal who disparagingly compares Donald Trump to “one of those czars that went nuts,” while Schmidt is an evangelical Christian and Fox News viewer who worries that “many people would be celebrating” if the president was assassinated.

It is impossible to specify precisely how each of these men drew upon his varied life experiences and identities in thinking about the contemporary kneeling protests.

Nonetheless, it is clear that their military service, and the understanding they constructed from it of the meaning of patriotism, were relevant to the very different conclusions they reached—for one, perceiving protesting during the national anthem as disgraceful; for the other, seeing it as a powerful demonstration of the right of the people to advocate for change.

## **Conclusion**

When the invaluable Jennings socialization study was begun in 1965, Jennings and his colleagues did not anticipate the Vietnam War growing into the conflict that it did. This intense, controversial and life-changing event interrupted the lives of the respondents who were then about to graduate from high school, and it marked them in multiple ways.

This study has afforded us the opportunity to examine the ways individuals make sense of the impacts of events on their lives over the long haul and the ways these understandings become a part of their broader worldviews. In our in-depth interviews with 17 of the Jennings respondents, we were able to observe people engaging in this act of constructing public opinion. As respondents reflected on their experience of and their thoughts and feelings about the Vietnam War, their comments revealed to us a group of people with a range of interpretations of that exceptional conflict. For some of them, their thoughts about the war now as then correlate with their partisanship in a straightforward way. But for others, the connection between their stances on the war and their partisan identities only became clear to us after talking with them in person. When we had the opportunity to listen to their understandings of themselves and their lives, the connections between demographics, experiences and political attitudes came into view.

One might say, along the lines of criticism made of the ideology Robert Lane reported observing among his New Haven respondents (Lane 1962), that the coherence

we found in our respondents' views was a post-hoc coherence imposed by us. But there is a different way to think of this. The central tendencies we identify as social scientists are the result of averaging across humans. They do not necessarily comport with any one individual's story. When you do listen to their actual stories, you see the elements of which these averages are made. The six different stories we examined in some depth here each show a person making sense of an intense life experience in a way that enables those understandings to fit within their broader constellations of relationships, commitments and identities.

A variant of this value of listening to people in the study of public opinion became apparent to us in our use of the Hetherington and Weiler item measuring fixed vs. fluid worldviews. Whether people easily chose between option #1 or #2 we described above, or struggled to choose between the two, we found this measure very useful for confirming what we perceived to be important to a particular respondent. Our experience with this measure also underscored the value of in-depth interviews with these respondents. After compiling the summaries of respondents from their survey responses over the four waves of the study prior to meeting with them, we guessed which option they would choose. We were often unsure what a respondent would say, despite waves of rich attitudinal data. However, after 60-70 minutes of conversation, their response was often comically obvious, as several of them remarked. ("Do you have to ask that after talking to me for two hours?") In other words, it is difficult to assess worldviews from typical political attitude surveys, much easier to do so with survey items designed specifically to measure them, and quite straightforward to discern their outlines through a relational interview.

One lesson for us as students of social identity is the reminder that identities with broad social categories like Catholics, Democrats, union supporters, and whites are personally defined. People give them meaning by adoring their fathers, accommodating their spouses, reacting to strikes in their hometowns, and recognizing their race in the

midst of racist behavior. Interviewing people in person in their hometowns<sup>16</sup> and in settings of their choosing, typically in their homes, allowed us to observe how they understood themselves and their lives in reference to their daily lives. As social scientists, we might type someone as a middle-class white male lapsed Catholic and a former union supporter, but on the ground this sounds quite different. For example, Stan Weber could be described with those labels, but it was his references to the neighborhoods in which he grew up and currently lives, his personal relationships to union supporters and opponents and orientation to a specific manufacturer in town, and the evolution of understandings shared by himself and his wife that give these various labels meaning.

When we define social identities as psychological attachments to social groups, we often forget that individual people are doing the work of telling themselves a story about what constitutes those connections. People are doing this work for themselves at the same time that political actors at the national level are attempting to impose meaning on events for millions of people.

Maybe it is the fact that it requires individuals connecting themselves up to the parties as well as party leaders making it clear how they connect to individuals' lives that explains why so many of our respondents felt disconnected from both parties. But that sense of lack of representation and weak identification came across even among people who otherwise exhibited a high level of psychological engagement with politics. Ed Bradshaw, Stan Weber, and Mike Dayton in particular showed keen interest in politics, with two of them having actually run for elected office. But at the same time they shared a high level of distrust in national politics and disgust with politicians in general. John Schmidt, who was arguably less politically engaged but nevertheless

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<sup>16</sup> There is one exception in our interviews to date. One of our respondents preferred to be interviewed in one of our offices while on business visiting that campus, which was located in the same state as his residence.

called himself a “news junkie,” said, “I want the government to continue to be a democracy. I want some input in my life with government, okay? I do not want a dictator. I do not want socialism, handout everything; however, as I see it, government has gotten away from the people.” These were people making an effort to connect to the political world, but they were struggling to find it.

Perhaps the contemporary lack of connection has something to do with the strategies national level politicians are pursuing to forge them. Going into this analysis, we expected to see the roots of contemporary partisan divides in the differing interpretations these interviewees were making of the Vietnam War. But that is mostly not what we observed. Yes, those who protested the war leaned left, but none of them identified strongly as Democrats. Nor did we find that people who opposed the war were consistently leaning toward the Democratic Party, or that those who supported it identified strongly with the Republican Party. As the statistical results presented in Table 2 suggested, the causal links between views about the Vietnam War and partisanship over the life course were mostly rather modest.

What struck us instead was the way public narratives of the Vietnam War showed up in the partisan justifications some of our respondents offered. For example, two of our respondents, when asked for their views about Vietnam War protestors, brought up actor and anti-war activist Jane Fonda, “Hanoi Jane,” in describing their distaste for the anti-war movement. Others claimed that Vietnam War veterans they knew were spit upon after returning home.<sup>17</sup> The occurrence of these symbols in our conversations

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<sup>17</sup> The power of these narratives does not depend on typicality or even historical authenticity. In the course of describing his own experience as a Vietnam veteran, our social science professor Mike Dayton pointed us to Jerry Lembcke’s 1998 book, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (NYU Press), which argued that the spitting narrative was largely or wholly mythical. “He said he could find not one person who directly had an experience of being spit upon,” Dayton told us. “It was always ‘I knew this guy’ and ‘my cousin’s friend who got off

suggest that the main story is not that views of the war drove people toward one or the other party, but that partisan actors have used symbols tapping emotions of the war to castigate political opponents.

This is a reminder that in the contemporary era, the work of building and maintaining *anti-identities* (e.g., Gibson and Gouws 2000) grounded in opposition to specific individuals or groups may be as important as that of constructing identities *with* certain groups.

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the plane in San Francisco was with a guy.' It was one of those things, but he could never get to the guy."

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**Table 1: Support for the Vietnam War, 1973-1997**

Percentage of Political Socialization Panel Study respondents saying “we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam” (with standard errors in parentheses).

	<b>1973</b>	<b>1982</b>	<b>1997</b>
All respondents (N=935)	33.6 (1.5)	22.3 (1.3)	19.4 (1.2)
Women (N=476)	34.2 (2.1)	16.7 (1.5)	14.8 (1.5)
Men (N=459)	33.0 (2.1)	27.7 (2.0)	23.8 (1.9)
Served in military (N=284)	35.8 (2.7)	31.0 (2.6)	24.4 (2.4)
Served in Vietnam (N=103)	42.3 (4.8)	38.1 (4.5)	32.2 (4.4)
White (N=862)	34.8 (1.6)	22.9 (1.3)	19.0 (1.3)
Non-white (N=73)	23.1 (4.5)	16.7 (4.2)	22.1 (4.7)
High SES (N=329)	29.2 (2.4)	20.3 (2.1)	16.6 (2.0)
Middle SES (N=268)	34.3 (2.8)	24.2 (2.5)	20.2 (2.3)
Low SES (N=338)	37.0 (2.5)	22.6 (2.0)	21.2 (2.1)
Raised in South (N=189)	39.4 (3.3)	23.3 (2.8)	21.2 (2.8)
Non-South (N=746)	32.3 (1.6)	22.0 (1.4)	18.9 (1.4)
Democrat in 1973 (N=477)	29.8 (2.0)	18.5 (1.7)	17.3 (1.6)
Republican in 1973 (N=282)	39.3 (2.8)	27.4 (2.4)	21.5 (2.4)
Democrat in 1997 (N=444)	28.0 (2.0)	15.5 (1.6)	15.1 (1.6)
Republican in 1997 (N=424)	38.0 (2.3)	30.3 (2.1)	24.8 (2.0)

**Table 2: Partisanship and Support for the Vietnam War, 1973-1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses)  
derived from Political Socialization Panel Study.

	<i>Vietnam opinion</i>		<i>Republican partisanship</i>	
	<b>1982</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1982</b>	<b>1997</b>
Vietnam opinion (lagged)	.456 (.044)	.852 (.067)	.035 (.026)	.084 (.052)
Vietnam service	9.34 (3.86)	-.97 (3.56)	3.43 (2.36)	1.57 (2.77)
Non-white	5.19 (4.47)	4.33 (3.96)	-6.95 (2.75)	-17.29 (3.07)
Female	-10.02 (2.54)	-1.42 (2.35)	-5.03 (1.55)	-5.37 (1.83)
South (1965)	-1.31 (3.12)	-1.78 (2.78)	-3.15 (1.89)	2.87 (2.18)
Church attendance (1965)	.029 (.064)	.047 (.058)	.111 (.039)	.132 (.045)
High school SES	.98 (2.50)	-2.51 (2.24)	5.28 (1.51)	-1.19 (1.75)
College (years)	.742 (.647)	.135 (.570)	-.165 (.394)	-.403 (.444)
Partisanship (lagged)	.089 (.049)	-.097 (.046)	.777 (.030)	.749 (.036)
Intercept	2.89 (5.29)	1.96 (4.57)	7.68 (3.23)	6.95 (3.58)
Standard error of regression	34.27	30.91	20.64	23.94
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.32	.53	.50
<i>N</i>	921	933	907	922

**Table 3: Overview of Highlighted Interviewees**

	<i>Ron Sutton</i>	<i>Stan Weber</i>	<i>Don Peyton</i>	<i>Mike Dayton</i>	<i>Ed Bradshaw</i>	<i>John Schmidt</i>
<b>High school location</b>	Rural South	Small city in upper Midwest	Rural South	Catholic suburb of a major eastern city	Catholic suburb of a major eastern city	Small city in upper Midwest
<b>Current place of residence</b>	Within 50 miles of 1965 residence	Same city as 1965 residence	Within 50 miles of 1965 residence	Same state as 1965 residence	Within 50 miles of 1965 residence	Same city as 1965 residence
<b>Occupation</b>	Manager for national company in power industry (before retirement)	Local media, manager in social welfare organization (before retirement)	Local media and performance	Social science professor (before retirement)	Home remodeling, self-employed	Manager for a large manufacturer
<b>Experience of Vietnam War</b>	Enlisted, but did not pass physical	Drafted, but deferred	Enlisted, served in Europe	Enlisted, served in Vietnam	Enlisted, served in Vietnam	Drafted, served in Vietnam
<b>Support for war in surveys</b>	“Did the right thing” all 3 waves	“Should have stayed out” all 3 waves	“Did the right thing” all 3 waves	“Should have stayed out” all 3 waves	“Should have stayed out” all 3 waves	“Should have stayed out” all 3 waves
<b>Rating of radical students (1973)</b>	0	0	0	NA	40	30
<b>Presidential votes reported in surveys ('64, '72, '80, '96)</b>	Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, Dole	Johnson, McGovern, Reagan, Dole	Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Clinton	Johnson, McGovern, Carter, Clinton	Johnson, Nixon, Anderson, Clinton	Johnson, Nixon, NA, Dole
<b>Partisanship reported in surveys ('65, '73, '82, '97)</b>	Str Dem, Weak Dem, Ind Rep, Str Rep	Str Dem, Ind Dem, Pure Ind, Str Rep	Str Dem, Str Dem, Ind Dem, Str Dem	Str Dem, Str Dem, Ind Dem, Str Dem	Str Dem, Str Dem, Str Dem, Str Dem	Weak Dem, Ind Dem, Ind Dem, Weak Rep
<b>Partisanship 2018-19</b>	Republican; pro-Trump	Republican; anti-Trump	Democrat	Democrat	Democrat	Republican; pro-Trump

Note: All of these respondents are white, currently married men.