

WHAT ARE YOU FIGHTING FOR?

A 2ND STORY STUDY GUIDE
INSPIRED BY THE ORIGINAL STORY BY
DION



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CONTENTS

pg. 2

START TALKING

ACTIVITY: Questions for a guided conversation.

pg. 3

THE VIETNAM WAR: A TIMELINE

This timeline outlines pivotal moments leading up to and during the Vietnam War.

pg. 7

HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD IF WE DON'T LOOK BACK?

An intimate and candid conversation with artist and storyteller Dion.

pg. 8

WHAT IS "THE DRAFT"?

An overview of the United States Draft, from its introduction in 1917 through to how it is used today.

pg. 9

ANTI-WAR PROTESTS & ANTI-WAR ART

As long as war has existed, so too have movements against it. This article explores the protests that shaped the Anti-Vietnam War movement, as well as how artists use art to speak out.

pg. 10

WHAT'S YOUR STORY

ACTIVITY: Writing prompts connected to the themes of the story.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to our study guide.

2nd Story is a collective of story-makers and story-lovers committed to building a more empathetic world by sharing one great story at a time. We believe in the unique power of sharing one's personal story.

This guide takes a closer look at a true story told by the person who lived the experience.

Dion's story *Your Hair, Where's Your Hair?* explores a moment of self realization in the name of self preservation. When faced with being recruited for the United States military during the Vietnam War, Dion both makes a bold statement and finds himself.

Inside this study guide, you will find activities, an interview with Dion, and historical and contextual information that will add to your understanding of his story. On our website, you can find additional resources and related learning standards.

To use this guide in any capacity, please start by listening to the story, available on the 2nd Story website at 2ndStory.com/studyguides.

We advise listening to Dion's story first before playing it for your classroom so you can make an informed decision about the content and language of the story.

Happy listening! Happy learning!

The 2nd Story Collective

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2nd Story's study guides are made possible with generous support from **The Lupo Family**.



Photo credit: Bernard Gotfryd, Anti-draft demonstration in Central Park, NYC, 1968.

START TALKING.

2nd Story uses **true, first-person stories** as an entry-point for conversation. After listening to Dion's *Your Hair, Where's Your Hair?*, use the following questions for a guided discussion.

GROUP AGREEMENTS

When sharing personal narratives, stories, and sensitive information, we begin by establishing the following agreements with participants. Before beginning your discussion, we recommend going over the following group agreements. When finished, ask, "Do you agree?" and then have participants collectively and vocally respond with "I agree."

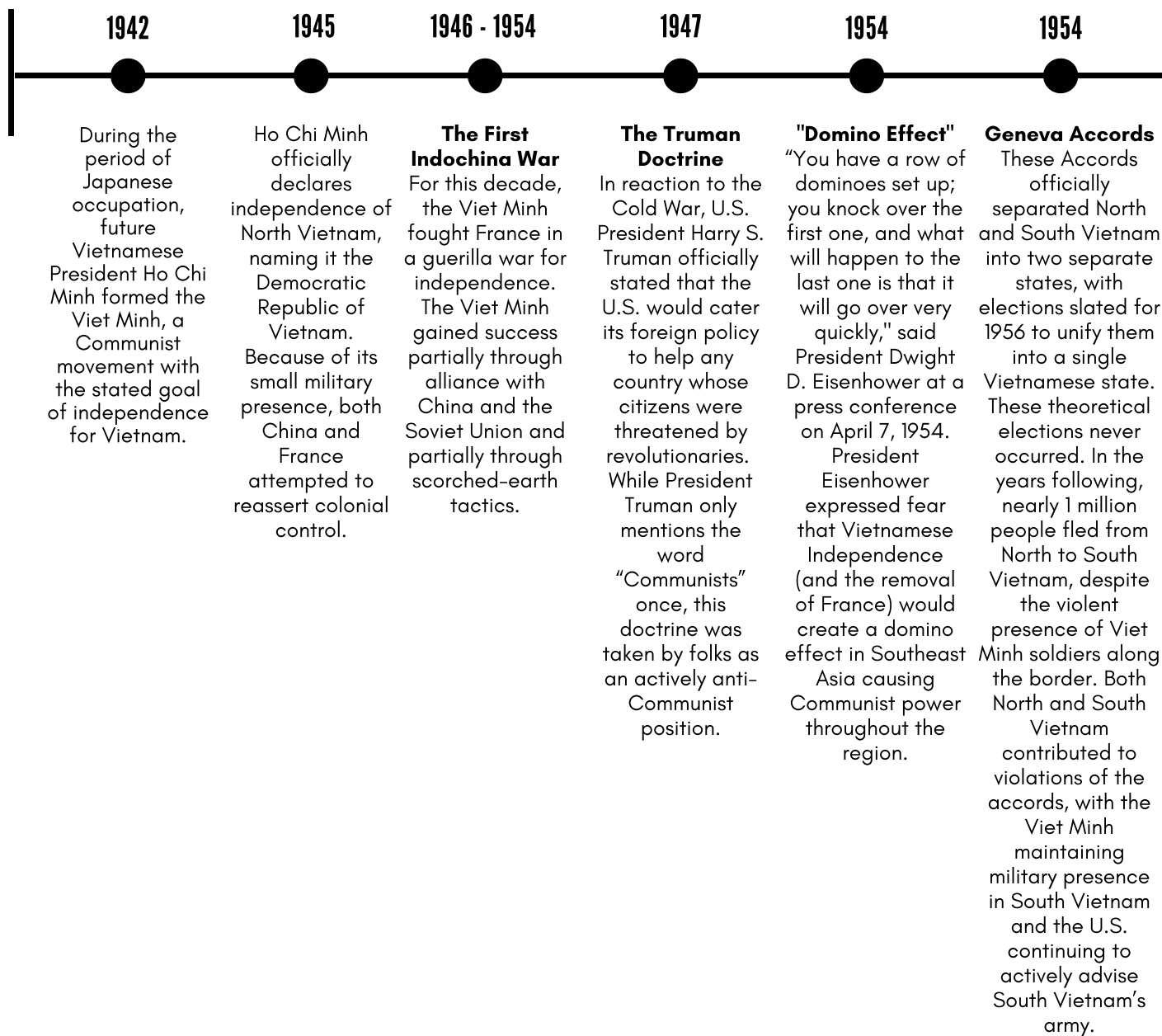
1. What is learned here leaves here. What is said here stays here.
2. Take care of yourself.
3. Practice equity by sharing the floor.
4. Replace judgment with curiosity.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is something new you learned from this story?
- What moments from the story feel familiar to you and your life? Why?
- How does Dion's identity evolve over the course of his story?
- What are the stakes of this experience for Dion?
- What happens if he gets drafted?
- What happens as a result of his choice to come out?
- What do you notice about the reactions of the people at the draft office to Dion?

THE VIETNAM WAR: A TIMELINE

For decades prior to what we know as the Vietnam War, Vietnam had been under French colonialist rule – part of a region called Indochina by France. In the midst of World War II, when Nazi Germany took control of France, Japan successfully invaded and occupied Vietnam. By 1945, Japanese troops fully deposed all French governments in Indochina and gave it independence. However, Japan's defeat in WWII led to a power vacuum in Vietnam that France attempted to fill. This fight for independence is the spark that led to the Vietnam War.



“NOW WE HAVE A PROBLEM IN TRYING TO MAKE OUR POWER CREDIBLE, AND VIETNAM LOOKS LIKE THE PLACE.”

—PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY IN A JUNE 1961 INTERVIEW WITH THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER JAMES RESTON.

1954-1960

The Viet Minh, through Ho Chi Minh's rule, continue guerilla warfare attacks against South Vietnam.

SEPT - DEC
1960

Ho Chi Minh steps down as leader of North Vietnam. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed in South Vietnam by North Vietnamese insurgents. The NLF sought to unify Vietnam under Northern, Communist rule. The NLF became known as the Viet Cong internationally, an attempt by the U.S. to brand them as communists.

1961

U.S. President John F. Kennedy (JFK), having suffered several defeats in the U.S. fight against communism, actively chose Vietnam as an opportunity to rebuild the U.S.'s international reputation. JFK sent small groups of special forces to South Vietnam to assist South Vietnam's forces, rather than winning the war for them.

1962

Operation Ranch Hand

This operation, which lasted until 1971, was an act of biological warfare enacted by the U.S. The U.S. Air Force sprayed "Agent Orange," a chemical weapon designed to destroy foliage and prevent further growth. The stated purpose of this operation was to limit the Viet Cong's ability to hide in dense forests and grow their own food. From the very beginning, this use of chemical weapons was extremely controversial for its effects on both the land itself and the people who lived there. Approx. 4.8 million Vietnamese people were exposed to Agent Orange during its use, and about a quarter of Vietnam was defoliated by Operation Ranch Hand.

NOV 22,
1963

JFK Assassination

On November 22, 1963, JFK was assassinated and his Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson in inaugurated as president. President Johnson took a much more aggressive approach to the Vietnam War, fully believing in the domino effect.

1964

Gulf of Tonkin

In August, the USS Maddox fired upon several boats that had been following it in the Gulf of Tonkin. At the time, it was reported that two U.S. ships were fired at two days later. However, a paper declassified in 2005 revealed this to be a fabrication. The false second attack gave Congress and President Johnson an excuse to greatly increase airstrikes and bombings on North Vietnam. In retaliation, North Vietnam began greatly increasing its support for the Viet Cong, both in supplies and numbers.

“THE PICTURE OF THE WORLD’S GREATEST SUPERPOWER KILLING OR SERIOUSLY INJURING 1,000 NON-COMBATANTS A WEEK, WHILE TRYING TO POUND A TINY, BACKWARD NATION INTO SUBMISSION ON AN ISSUE WHOSE MERITS ARE HOTLY DISPUTED, IS NOT A PRETTY ONE.”

—SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT MCNAMARA IN A MEMO TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON ON MAY 19, 1967.

MARCH - DEC
1965

The first U.S. ground troops landed in South Vietnam to defend Da Nang Air Base. By December 1965, the number of U.S. ground troops increased from 3,500 to 200,000. In this year, the official U.S. policy changed, and the U.S. army became focused on defeating the Viet Cong. U.S. military officials Westmoreland and McNamara planned to use the body count (number of deaths) to mark success.

1966 -
ONWARD

President Johnson's administration actively kept details of the war's progress from the media, leading to distrust and anger from the public.

1966 - 1968

The U.S. continued to increase its numbers in Vietnam, as well as continuing more aggressive attacks on the Viet Cong and North Vietnam.

1968

Tet Offensive
Beginning in January 1968, the Viet Cong and North Vietnam began a large attack on South Vietnam and U.S. forces. It began on the Vietnamese Lunar New Year (Tet Nguyen Dan), to create the largest impact by hitting urban centers during a holiday period. However, South Vietnam and its allies regrouped and fought back successfully, leading to both a military and political defeat for North Vietnam. The Johnson administration saw this as an opportunity to increase military recruitment efforts, which further decreased U.S. support for the war.

MARCH
1968

May Lai Massacre
U.S. Troops massacred approx. 500 South Vietnam civilians. Only one U.S. soldier was convicted for this war crime, serving only 3 and a half years under house arrest.

NOV
1968

Having faced intense backlash for his policies, President Johnson did not seek reelection. Richard Nixon is elected President.

“THIS WAR HAS ALREADY STRETCHED THE GENERATION GAP SO WIDE THAT IT THREATENS TO PULL THE COUNTRY APART.”

—DEMOCRATIC SENATOR FRANK CHURCH SPEAKING ON THE SENATE FLOOR ON MAY 13, 1970.

DEC
1969

The U.S. instituted a draft lottery in addition to the standard conscription. This lottery determined the order at which any eligible man could be brought into the armed forces. The draft lottery was widely unpopular and increased the amount of dissenters and draft dodgers.

1969 - 1970

Operation Menu
The U.S. secretly bombed suspected communist camps and supply zones in Cambodia. This was kept secret as Cambodia was officially neutral, though it became public knowledge soon after the incursion.

MAY
1970

Kent State Shooting
National Guardsmen fired on anti-war protesters at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine.

JUNE
1971

Pentagon Papers
The New York Times published a series of articles featuring leaked internal documents, showing how the U.S. had continuously increased its involvement in the war despite telling the public otherwise.

DEC
1972

Operation Linebacker
In response to a large-scale offensive from North Vietnam, the U.S. drops 20,000 tons of bombs on densely populated regions of Hanoi and Haiphong. According to various sources, the U.S. killed between 1,600–2,300 civilians in these bombings.

1973

Paris Peace Accords
In January, the U.S. ends its draft and President Nixon signs the Paris Peace Accords. The U.S. officially departs Vietnam and the North Vietnamese accepted a ceasefire with South Vietnam.

1975 - 1995

The fall of Saigon began one of the largest and longest refugee crises in history. Over the next two decades, more than 3 million people fled Vietnam, Laos, & Cambodia. Many died at sea, and over 2.5 million refugees were resettled around the world, including over a million in the U.S.

APRIL
1975

Fall of Saigon
The Viet Cong took Saigon, officially claiming North Vietnamese victory and effectively ending the Vietnam War. While this was a loss for South Vietnam, it led to the reunification of North and South Vietnam into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam over the next few years.

1973 - 1975

Despite the ceasefire, war continued between the North and South Vietnam armies as South Vietnam fought back against Viet Cong encroachment. The North took advantage of the U.S. departure to bolster their supply lines which had been destroyed in U.S. bombings.

HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD IF WE DON'T LOOK BACK?

A CONVERSATION WITH STORYTELLER DION

Dion, originally a theater performer for 25 years, is currently working on his autobiography, "The Happening." A 10-year veteran of 2nd Story and a 15-year veteran of the Goodman Theater's "Generations" program, Dion has also performed along with Tim Miller and Guillermo Gomez-Peña. In addition to being a published writer (OUR LEGACIES: Writings from Chicago's Older Gay Men), he is a singer and working artist that has presented work in art galleries throughout the Chicagoland area.



So, tell me a little about yourself?

Where are you from? What do you do?

I am from Chicago and grew up in the Englewood neighborhood on the Southside of Chicago. I went to Simeon Vocational which is now Simeon Academy. I am 68 years old and retired. Before retiring I wore many hats; I was a female impersonator, a nutritionist, a make-up artist, a photographer, a singer, a writer, a director, and a performer.

How do you identify as an artist? What role does storytelling play in your life?

I don't really know how to answer this question. As with most things, the art just comes to me, and I just do it. I give my body and soul to my art and what happens, happens.

My storytelling has, for the most part, been about my life. For me storytelling is very eye opening and it gives me a chance to see my past and help me with my future. How can we move forward if we don't look back?

Speaking of looking back, why did you want to tell this particular story?

For many reasons. First, I needed to tell this story for me and then I needed to tell this story for future generations. You see, this story took place when I was looking for myself and didn't know where I was going. I was full of self-doubt. Was I gay or straight? Was I ready to go off to war and fight for something I didn't believe in? Or, would I stay home and fight for the rights of my friends? At this point in my life I didn't believe I fit into any one group. I was so alone.

This story takes place during a moment of collective unrest. Did you then and do you currently identify as an activist?

I really don't see myself as an activist, not then or now. But I realized a long time ago that everyday that I'm alive I am protesting. While waiting for a bus, shopping at a grocery store, or just being me. I am a walking, breathing protest sign that the public cannot deny.

Did you see your choice to "come out" as a political act?

At the time I didn't see that because I was just starting to realize who I was, who I wanted to be, and who I really am. Coming out meant far more than any draft. For lack of a better phrase, I had found my box. Back in the day, everyone needed a box to belong.

What was it about that moment that pushed you to come out?

My actions weren't doing it, my clothing wasn't doing it. So, I had to do something when I said it to the physician and he didn't respond, and anger built up inside of me. I was angry because no one ever listened. I felt invisible. So, when he asked the second time, I angrily responded. But, when I did, something inside me changed and I knew. A wave of confidence came over me and I suddenly knew who I was and who I wanted to be!

How did your friends and family respond to you being rejected from the draft?

Remember, it was a different time. We were at war, and most of my friends were overjoyed. Not all, because some were in the army already, some had been drafted, and some had volunteered. I can't really say what they were thinking, but some of my friends may have believed that I was betraying my country. As for my family, like most families back then, they didn't want any family members going to fight in some unknown country. It was one of the few moments in my life when my family was glad I was or appeared to be gay.

Fashion plays a key role in the events of this story. What informed your fashion choices that day?

Fashion? At the time I knew nothing of fashion even though I thought I did! I did realize that people believed what they saw rather than look at the real person. My choice that day was created out of the need to escape the clutches of an unfair government that didn't listen to me or the public. I did this unaware of what I really was feeling deep inside of me.

What do you hope students take away from your story?

The hope now is the same hope that I have wished for everyone since I started my career years ago: To be who you want with no apologies. To inspire to leave an uplifting legacy for the next generation and be all you can be! To be a great day!

WHAT IS "THE DRAFT"?

While the colonial United States had smaller, more independently run militias, the modern armed forces created the **Selective Service System (SSS) or "the draft"** in 1917. The SSS was formed in order to ensure that the U.S. armed forces reached their target number of soldiers to fight in World War I. When active, the draft means all eligible U.S. citizens will be required to enter military service, also known as "conscription." In 1917, the SSS immediately began conscripting all men ages 21-30.

In 1940, the U.S. passed the Selective Training and Service Act, creating a peacetime draft. By 1941, this draft applied to all men between the ages of 18 and 37, for a period of 18 months. Over the next several decades, the length of service would fluctuate. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. declared war on Japan and Nazi Germany and increased the required service period to indefinite, or until the end of World War II. During the Korean War (1950-1953), the U.S. conscripted men for a minimum of 21 months, with a theoretical service period of eight years. In 1969, in the midst of the Vietnam War, President Nixon enacted a change to the conscription process. Rather than choices made by draft boards, individual men would be drafted based on a random lottery. This lasted until 1973, when an official "all-volunteer" armed forces was created.

Today, while active conscription has not occurred since 1973, all male United States citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 must register. Many non-citizens must also register, including permanent residents, asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants, and failure to register can be used as grounds to deny citizenship.

DRAFT DEFERMENTS & EXEMPTIONS

Depending on personal circumstances, men could receive deferments and exemptions during the early years of the draft. Potential draftees in religious positions could also be exempt, though only from combat. During both World War I and World War II, deferment vs. conscription was determined by local draft boards - government officials who would decide whether an individual's personal status meant they qualified for deferment. As such, Black Americans were statistically less likely to receive deferment than White Americans, and often ended up in laborer roles.

The draft has been criticized for being both elitist and classist. For example, during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, men currently enrolled in a university could receive deferment leading wealthier families to enroll their sons in school to avoid the draft.

"DRAFT-DODGING"

During all instances of active conscription, men have sought ways to avoid forced military service. The public unrest over the Vietnam War saw the most vocal and active contingent of draft avoiders in US history. Draft evasion, commonly referred to as "draft-dodging" is any successful attempt to elude military service. Examples include:

- **Early Enlistment**
 - Some men would enlist in the Coast Guard or National Guard to avoid getting drafted for the Army.
- **Medical Disqualification**
 - Men could be deemed ineligible for service due to a wide variety of medical conditions. A famous medical disqualification of the time was "flat feet."
- **Homosexuality**
 - Men could also claim they were homosexual and, if the draft interviewer believed them, they would be excluded from service. Any LGBTQAI+ individuals were officially barred from military service until 1993
- **Emigration**
 - Emigrating to Canada, whether legally or undocumented, was a common strategy during the Vietnam War era for men who did not qualify for official deferment, but did not want to risk prosecution for draft dodging.

ARMED FORCES ELIGIBILITY

Any U.S. citizen, at a minimum age of 17-years old with a high school diploma, is permitted to serve in the armed forces. Women were first able to serve in combat roles during World War II, though they had to serve in separate units from men. In 1994, the Army began training men and women recruits together.

In 1993, President William J. Clinton created **Don't Ask, Don't Tell** as an adjustment to previous policy that restricted any LGBTQ-identified person from serving in the military. This legislation made it illegal for recruiters to ask potential enlistees about their sexual orientation or identity. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was officially repealed in 2011, ending restrictions against LGBTQ-identified folks. Transgender people were able to serve openly from 2016 until 2019, though with slight restrictions depending on how long it had been since they had transitioned. Briefly, from 2019 to 2021, this legislation was revoked and transgender people could no longer enlist, and any transgender person currently serving was restricted to serving as their gender assigned at birth.

ANTI-WAR PROTESTS

In his story, Dion tells of how he had no desire to fight in a war for a cause he didn't believe in. As long as war has existed, so too have movements against it. Opposition to the U.S. involvement in World War II was based on two major fronts - isolationism and anti-semitism. Isolationism is the belief that a given country should not engage in war or foreign engagements that do not directly impact itself. In the case of World War II, isolationists did not want to engage in the war in Europe prior to the direct attack on Pearl Harbor.

Protests to the Vietnam War began out of an opposition to the draft - specifically its undue focus on people of color and lower/middle class folks, however there were a couple of other influential factors. The Vietnam War was the first war to be widely televised, giving citizens a direct view of the horrors of war. A large increase in student activism occurred on college campuses as well. Student activists decried the war as immoral - specifically in response to civilian deaths that the media attempted to downplay and minimize. The "domino theory of communism" also became a subject of criticism, specifically as a scapegoat for U.S. Imperialism.

MAJOR PROTESTS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

**MAY
1965**

The first notable protest was held at the University of California, Berkeley - students burnt their draft cards in protest.

**NOV
1965**

Two anti-war activists set themselves on fire - one in front of the Pentagon and one in front of the UN Headquarters. These men did so in active imitation of Buddhist protestors in South Vietnam who did so as well.

1967

Draft card turn-ins were held across the country, with large packs of draft cards sent to the U.S. Justice Department as civil disobedience.

1969

Two multi-million participant protests were held across the U.S.; they were largely spurred on by an early 1969 issue of *Life Magazine* that contained images of dead American soldiers.

1970

One of the most prominent moments in anti-war history, on May 4, 1970, students at Kent State University held a peace rally against the Vietnam War after days of civil unrest in the area. National Guardsmen arrived to shut down the protest. In the midst of the rally, the guardsmen fired upon the students. In the end, four students were killed and nine others injured.

1971

By this stage of the war, Vietnam Veterans were joining the anti-war movement. In April of 1971, several thousand joined in a protest at the White House.

ANTI-WAR MESSAGING THROUGH ART

The concept of an anti-war film has been largely debated. Francois Truffaut famously stated that "every film about war ends up being pro-war." The desire for films, and all fiction, to create heroes in their protagonists and display an exciting story, often leads to even the most tragic moments being presented with a glorifying angle. Examples of successful anti-war films are often satirical (*Jojo Rabbit*) or gory and bleak (*Full Metal Jacket*).

Many musicians have taken up the mantle of anti-war messaging through their music. Some songs are more obvious, such as Phil Ochs' "Draft Dodger Rag" and Joan Baez's "Saigon Bride," while other songs, like Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA," are much more subtle.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Do you agree with Truffaut's theory that "every film about war ends up being pro-war"? Why or why not?
- What examples do you see today of musicians (or other artists) using their art as a form of protest?
- Do you think there is an inherent connection between artists and activists?

**"I KNEW WE ALL HAD A UNIVERSAL
THOUGHT. WE WERE ABOUT TO BE
SENTENCED, TO BE MANGLED, MAIMED,
SHOT AT, MADE MINDLESS, OR MURDERED.
MURDERED IN A WAR THAT NONE OF US
HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH."**

DION



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