**Chapter 5**

**Conclusion**

In Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel *1984*, the “prols” are controlled in several ways. They are constantly under surveillance by “Big Brother.” Violence, force and psychological techniques are also used to control them. But coercive techniques are not enough to maintain control of a population even in a totalitarian society; consensus is also necessary. Winston Smith, the protagonist, works in a bureaucracy, the Ministry of Truth, the function of which is to manufacture consent. And consent is manufactured in the Ministry by the continuous writing and rewriting of history. Those who have power in the dystopia, the Party, know that history is a weapon that can be used in the manufacture of consent. “Those who control the present, control the past. And those who control the past control the present.” If the history of the United States is written as a history of a peaceful nation, reluctant to intervene militarily in the affairs of other countries, and only doing so as a last resort, self-defense, or support for a weak ally, then Americans are less likely to question U.S. justifications for its interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq or its defining the earth as the theater of battle in a “war on terror”. Also if the history books in U.S. schools omit the story of social movements making America a better society, and instead tell students about “leaders” or “natural progress,” then those students are less likely to believe in the need for collective action, or its efficacy.

This thesis has been an effort to regain control of the present by taking control of the past. The goal is threefold. First, by examining the American War, it attempts to establish context to U.S. foreign policy and U.S military interventions. Second, by examining the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, it hopes to demonstrate the efficacy of collective power. And third, and what is most important to the author, by examining the role of artists, art groups and art works in the anti-war movement, it hopes to demonstrate the power of the image and imagination.

In Chapter Two “The American War,” what Americans continue to call the Vietnam War was examined from the point of view of the Vietnamese people, but also from the point of view of the U.S. government’s documented history of the war, the Pentagon Papers. In this sense, the thesis presents an alternative perspective on American history as a way of taking control of the past. The American people were told that the U.S. was involved in Vietnam in order to protect the tiny democracy of South Vietnam from the invasion by the communist country of North Vietnam. The Americans were told that this was not just a war to save a country that most Americans could not find on a map, but was a war to save the world. For if the U.S. failed to defend South Vietnam, then the rest of Southeast Asia would fall to communism, then Australian and New Zealand, and ultimately the U.S. This theory was called the domino theory. Massive troop build-up which involved a draft, massive bombing of both North and South Vietnam, radical tactics against intransient guerillas, napalm, Agent Orange, search and destroy missions, targeted assassinations, and massive economic expenditures were all necessary to win this crucial war for freedom and against communism.

From the point of view of the vast majority of Vietnamese people this was a war against them, a continuation of the French-Indo China war and a new form of colonialism. Hence the name given to the war by the Vietnamese people, the American War. The Pentagon Papers reveal the truth of the view held by the Vietnamese people. According to the Pentagon Papers, the U.S. was less concerned about the global spread of communism, and more concerned about the global spread of nationalism, because nationalism meant that the people of a country wanted to use their resources for themselves, rather than to be a supplier of raw material and cheap labor to a colonial empire. The real problem with the country of Vietnam, according to the Pentagon Papers, was that if it were allowed to take its own course independent of global power arrangements, it would be serve as an example to other countries pursuing movements of national liberation. It would be what the Pentagon Papers called a “rotten apple.”

The Chapter examined how the American War from the first stages of U.S. involvement was a war waged against the people of Vietnam. First, the U.S. transported French troops back to Vietnam and then supported the French against the Vietnamese war of national liberation. And after the defeat of the French, the U.S supported a dictator who had no popular support, imprisoned and killed his political opponents, and engaged in military attacks against the rural peasants who were rising up against him. His failure to repress the popular uprising was the reason for his removal, not his policies of violence and oppression. After 1964, when the U.S. took over the war completely, the U.S. engaged in acts of war that destroyed much of the country and killed many people that it was supposedly defending. Search and destroy missions, free fire zones and napalm killed many innocent civilians. Agent Orange killed the jungle, crops and animals and poisoned the people. Ninety per cent of the bombs dropped (three times more than in all theaters of war during WWII) were dropped on South Vietnam. The Vietnamese say that the American War killed four million of their people. The American War became more and more unpopular in the U.S. and the largest anti-war movement in the history of the U.S. emerged.

Chapter 3 “The Anti-Vietnam War Movement” examines the movement, its goals, and tactics. The Anti-Vietnam War movement demonstrated the power that people have when they come together collectively. There were two main goals of the movement: the first was to inform the people about the true nature of the war in order to gain more popular support for ending the war and second was to engage in tactics that would prevent the military from being able to wage the war.

Many different and varied groups participated in the movement. Groups ranging from Catholic priests to soldiers themselves played integral roles in the movement. Civil Rights groups were some of the first groups to oppose the war. They saw an irony in the war. The call to war was based on fighting for the freedom of the Vietnamese people, but as was obvious to these groups, such freedom did not exist in the U.S. They argued that no black male should serve in the military and they engaged in forms of draft resistance.

The conventional wisdom in American society is that predominately college students and the educated made up the anti-war movement. As James Loewen points out, the war was less popular with the working class and poor, and resistance to the war, draft resistance in all its forms, emerged from this group. Also when resistance to the war spread to the military itself, poor and working class soldiers, were the first to engage in anti-war tactics.

The anti-war movement did find an institutional base at universities. Students for a Democratic Society wrote a document on participatory democracy strongly influenced by the sociologist C.Wright Mills. The document was called the Port Huron Statement and it became the theoretical basis for the Anti-Vietnam War movement. Students and faculty engaged in various forms of dissent from teach-ins, to student occupation of buildings, to protests of corporate/military recruiters on campus, to protests of ROTC programs.

While the tactics of draft resistance, popular protest, breaking into and destroying draft records were all tactics the goal of which was to make it impossible for the military to wage the war, one of the most successful tactics was that which American soldiers in Vietnam engaged in, the refusal to fight. The reason given was the loss of conviction in what they were doing. As the war proceeded, American soldiers were able to see that they were the instrument of a government that, contrary to what they had been told, was waging a war against the Vietnamese people. As Phillip Caputo, who had served in Vietnam, stated in his book, *A Rumor of War*, “we carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Viet Cong would be quickly beaten and that we were doing something altogether noble and good. We kept the packs and rifles; the convictions, we lost” (Caputo 1977:xiv).

Chapter Four “Art and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement” examines the role of artists, art groups and art works in the movement and in so doing illuminates the transformation of art from the “aesthetic dimension” to the streets. Artists began protesting the war as early as 1959, but became much more involved in the anti-war movement after 1969. One of the best examples of art groups protesting the war was the protest at the Museum of Modern Art. During this protest, artists stood before Picasso’s painting “Guernica” with a poster entitled “Q: And Babies? A: And babies.” Art joined the broader anti-war movement in the form of political posters. The powerful images in the posters depicted the atrocities committed by the U.S. in waging the American War. The “And babies” poster and the “Would You Burn A Child?” poster are powerful and irrefutable images that demystify U.S. propaganda about the war. “And babies” depicts the consequences of search and destroy missions and free fire zones. Infants, children, women and the elderly lie in the dirt under the words of an American soldier who had been involved. And “Would You Burn A Child?” depicts the truth about napalm a weapon that can not be directed accurately at military targets only.

The Anti-Vietnam War movement was successful in both of its goals. The first goal had been to inform the American public of the true nature of the war in order to gather popular support for ending the war. In 1965 sixty-one per cent of American’s supported the war, by 1969 this percentage had been reversed and sixty-one per cent of Americans thought the war was wrong. In fact as early as 1969, the opposition to the war, according to the Pentagon Papers, resulted in Westmorland’s troop request being denied and Johnson’s decision to not run for another term. And Richard Nixon admitted that the tactics of the movement, mainly draft resistance and the undermining of ROTC programs, led to a shortage of manpower which significantly limited his options for continuing the war. And he also acknowledged that popular protest over the bombing of Cambodia was a factor in his decision to seek peace.