**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

I enrolled in History 101 my sophomore year in college. After teaching us about the Second World War, the professor introduced the Vietnam War with a candy dish. As she lectured about the war, she had the students pass the candy dish around and when the candy dish was passed to me, I saw that the candy dish was a small glass warship and I read the words written on the side, “USS MADDOX.” I remember asking myself, why would anyone make a candy dish as memorabilia for the Vietnam War? The professor answered my question without me having to ask it. She said that it was an important symbol for understanding the reason that the United States waged a war in Vietnam. She said that the Johnson Administration became involved in Vietnam because the USS Maddox, a “patrol ship,” had been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in international waters. This was an act of war, she said, and the U.S. responded to it. She also went on to explain that the My Lai massacre was an isolated incident and that it occurred because there had been an error in locating the “Real My Lai.”

I never questioned nor challenged my teacher and accepted the “facts” and “knowledge” presented about the war as truth. At the end of the semester, I received an A in the class. Yet, as I was to discover, the grade I received did not reflect my knowledge of American history; it reflected the problems of the study of history within our educational system. It was in my graduate program that I began to truly understand the reasons why teachers lie to their students. One of the first experiences that opened my eyes was reading a book, “Lies my Teacher Told Me,” by James Loewen. Loewen’s book analyzes the ten American history textbooks that are most often used in American high schools. He argues that teachers take students on a “trip of their own, away from the facts of history, into the realm of myth” (Loewen 1995:30). The educational system, he goes on, reproduces “an outrageous concoction of lies, half-truths, and omissions” of significant historical events in order to support patriotism and the ideas of “freedom and democracy” (Loewen 1995:30).

The professor in this course was certainly guilty of lying, because the truth about the attack on the U.S.S Maddox had been revealed in 1971 when Daniel Ellsberg made the Pentagon Papers available to the public (Pentagon Papers). And the truth about the My Lai massacre had been known and covered up by the military since the moment it happened. The two most important truths about the My Lai massacre, discovered during the military’s own investigation of it, was that it was not an error, but, in fact, a planned operation that only ended when a U.S soldier threatened to shoot the soldiers who were committing the atrocities. And, at least as significantly, the My Lai massacre was not an isolated incident (Zinn).

I learned something about the intentional omissions of our educational system in my graduate program at San Diego State. I learned that the educational system, as Loewen says, not only lies, but omits much. And one of the things it omits is how progressive social movements have shaped American society for the better. It seemed obvious once I was taught about social movements and read about them that the reason our educational system omits them is because such knowledge would lead people to believe that when acting together they had power. As Howard Zinn points out in People’s History of the United States, by the mid-1970s, the power elite in the U.S. were concerned that they were losing control of society because of the wide spread popular participation in the social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. The plan, Zinn says, was to pacify the public, and one group that needed to be pacified, according to the power elite, was students, and there would be no better way to pacify them than by controlling history. As George Orwell says in 1984, “Those who control the present control the past, and those who control the past control the present.”

When my professor lectured on WWII, she omitted any discussion of the Spanish Civil War. This allowed her, of course, not to have to explain the reasons why the United States stood by while those challenging the Fascist government of Francisco Franco where being killed by Franco’s forces, and also the Fascist forces of Nazi Germany and Italy. She also did not have to explain the Abraham Lincoln brigade, American citizens who volunteered to help fight with the anti-fascist forces. Nor did she have to explain Guernica. It is only when I saw Picasso’s painting that I learned there had been a Spanish Civil War and that the forces of democracy and freedom had fought against fascism without the help of the U.S. But I also realized something else when I saw the painting and it had a profound effect on me. It was that art has a political dimension and there is a power to art; the power of the image to reveal lies, untruths, intentional omissions and to depict the atrocities of Guernica and My Lai.

This thesis lies at the intersection of the three themes. In order to understand the truth about the present, the war on terror, we need to reveal the truth about the past. In order to assert our collective power, we need to understand that in the past, collectively, we have changed things for the better. And we need to understand how powerful art, and the image, can be in the struggle for truth and a just society.

Chapter Two titled “The American War” demystifies what Americans call the Vietnam War by looking at the historical evidence. This evidence includes the French colonization of Vietnam, the French Indochina War, Geneva Peace Accords, attempts by the newly formed government of Vietnam to be recognized by the U.S., the documented history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers, and the tactics used by the U.S. in waging the war on the Vietnamese people. The United States, between 1964 and 1972, used its maximum military effort, everything except an atomic bomb, to defeat a nationalist revolutionary movement in Vietnam, a tiny peasant third world country, and lost. The U.S. Administrations presented the war as a fight against communism in order to spread freedom and democracy. Yet, the war in Vietnam was an American war waged on the Vietnamese people and their country.

Perhaps the first Americans to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam were merchant marines who were serving on U.S. ships taking French troops back to Vietnam immediately after WWII (Zinn). They realized the hypocrisy of fighting a war for freedom and self-determination and the “recolonization” by the French of Vietnam. Civil rights groups realized another kind of hypocrisy and they challenged it. They pointed out the contradictions in supposedly fighting a war for freedom ten thousand miles away while at home the law of the land in many places was still unfreedom, de jure segregation. These were not the only groups who opposed U.S. involvement in Vietnam. During the course of the war, the United States experienced the largest antiwar movement in U.S. history. The movement played a critical part in ending the war. Chapter 3, *The Anti-Vietnam War Movement,* examines the antiwar groups and the tactics they used. While there were many groups, a twofold goal was shared by all. The first part of the goal was to reveal the truth about the war, the contradictions, the tactics, and the human and social costs. The second part was to stop the war machine from being able to function. This involved primarily stopping the military’s ability to meet the manpower needs for waging the war.

Chapter 4, *Art and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement,* will examine the role of art, artists and art organizations in the movement. As early as 1966, art collectives such as Art and Writers Protest were organized. After the Tet offensive and the My Lai massacre even more art groups were organized. The Art Workers Coalition and the Guerilla Art Action are examples. They organized events and protests, created and displayed anti-war art, and linked the art world to the military-industrial complex. They also moved art beyond the museum and into the streets with the creation of anti-war political posters that became an important tool for achieving the goal of the movement, informing the public through images about the lies, the tactics and the human and social cost of war.