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AMERICA IN PROTEST: RECORDS OF ANTI-VIETNAM WAR ORGANIZATIONS, THE VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR



The Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) started in 1967 with six Vietnam veterans marching for peace in New York City. The purpose of the organization was to give voice to the returning servicemen who opposed the on-going war in Southeast Asia. From six soldiers in 1967, the ranks of the membership eventually grew to over 30,000. This publication consists of FBI reports dealing with every aspect of antiwar work carried out by the VVAW. The collection also includes surveillance on a variety of other antiwar groups and individuals, with an emphasis on student groups and Communist organizations.

Date Range: 1967-1975

Content: 20,117 images

Source Library: Federal Bureau of Investigation Library

Detailed Description:

The Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) started in 1967 with six Vietnam veterans marching for peace in New York City. The purpose of the organization was to give voice to the returning servicemen who opposed the on-going war in Southeast Asia. From six soldiers in 1967, the ranks of the membership eventually grew to over 30,000. Over four decades later this organization still exists, which makes this collection of over 21,000 pages relevant for those interested in today's antiwar movement and its history during the Vietnam War era. In an attempt to keep this group under close watch, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) maintained diligent surveillance of the VVAW almost from the inception of the group's activities and running through 1975, when the United States ended its presence in Vietnam.

This Archives Unbound publication consists of FBI reports dealing with every aspect of antiwar work carried out by the VVAW. The collection also includes surveillance on a variety of other antiwar groups and individuals, with an emphasis on student groups and Communist organizations.

The collection opens with numerous reports, newsletters, and position papers, as well as an FBI historical overview on the leading antiwar organizations during the Vietnam War

era. Some of the more in-depth reports compiled by the FBI include detailed surveillance of national and steering committee meetings, where major decisions, debates, and elections took place. At these meetings the VVAW generalized experiences from local chapters, organized for demonstrations and campaigns, and formulated plans for working within the broad Antiwar Movement. In addition, financial decisions, elections of officers, and updates on legal cases were reviewed at these meetings.

The collection includes a wide range of position papers written by antiwar movement activists. The papers in many instances were open letters to the broad Antiwar Movement, and included topics such as sexism and racism in the movement, the struggle for amnesty, and the debate on pacifism as a strategic tactic. The anti-imperialism controversy was an ever-present debate in the movement and can be found in numerous position papers in the collection.

The FBI maintained extensive surveillance on college and university campuses with informants reporting on the slightest activity by antiwar groups and individuals. VVAW campus chapters were monitored closely in states such as Florida, New York, California, Texas, and Ohio. The FBI kept close watch on other groups and organizations on campus, most notably the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Detailed information on the rise and eventual split of the SDS are covered in the collection. There is also documentation on the Kent State shootings and subsequent campus strikes.

Wherever Communist and Socialist organizations were involved in antiwar activities, the FBI made certain that they were closely followed and this is highlighted throughout the collection. Detailed reports by informants and internal FBI memos discussed the "danger" of Marxist groups and their influence inside the VVAW, in particular, and the Antiwar Movement in general. The Communist Party USA and the Socialist Workers Party, including their youth and "front" groups, received a tremendous amount of attention by the FBI. Specific radical groups, particularly the Revolutionary Union, receive extensive coverage in the FBI reports, because they were "blamed" for some of the most serious conflicts inside the VVAW.

In 1972, the VVAW, along with many other antiwar groups, planned demonstrations for the Republican National Convention in Miami. The VVAW's showpiece demonstration in Miami was the successful silent march of over 1500 Vietnam veterans through downtown Miami Beach to President Nixon's hotel, where VVAW leaders demanded the immediate improvement of treatment for returning Vietnam veterans and the withdrawal of the remaining troops in Southeast Asia immediately. Numerous other demonstrations during this time, including the so-called "Battle of Miami," led to arrests of many veterans.

The uncovering of the Watergate scandal in 1973-1974 reinvigorated the antiwar movement, with much of the activity revolving around the call for Nixon's impeachment. The FBI collected reports from every region of the country regarding the protests and rallies surrounding the Nixon impeachment.

This publication includes a number of legal cases revolving around constitutional rights, wiretapping, and civil rights. Plaintiffs in the cases included students, veterans, and

activists who sued on the grounds that their civil liberties were infringed upon by the federal government. William Kunstler represented veterans who fought for their rights in New Mexico, while the prisoners from the Attica Uprising entered what would become landmark decades-long litigation. The National Lawyers Guild represented hundreds of antiwar organizations and members in the 1982-1989 case against the U.S. Attorney General for the illegal monitoring of Vietnam War protestors.

The FBI made certain to keep close surveillance of some of the more well-known and famous antiwar activists such as Jane Fonda and John Kerry. Their public appearances, speeches, and movements were extensively monitored—these detailed reports are found throughout the collection. Surveillance reports on the prolific antiwar writer and historian Howard Zinn are also well represented.

The final segment of the collection has a significant amount of material from 1975, and offers some fascinating documents surrounding expulsions, resignations and debates in the VVAW, as well as other antiwar organizations. A major discussion found at the conclusion of the collection relates to the future of the VVAW. As American involvement in Vietnam came to an end in the spring of 1975, the VVAW struggled with the future of their purpose—do they continue to oppose "all imperialist wars" or do they simply fold now that the Vietnam War had ended. Final documents include in-depth and lengthy letters of resignations by some of the more experienced leaders of the VVAW.

Publisher's Note:

This collection comprises the content of the microfilm collection of the same name.

The materials in this publication have been released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Under FOIA regulations, the FBI and other federal agencies reserve the right to withhold or delete any documents or segments of documents due to privacy concerns, confidentiality of sources, and/or matters of national security. There are documents in this collection that have portions withheld. Primary Source Media has microfilmed these documents in their entirety, as released.

The FBI's file designation system consists of three parts. The first three numbers indicate the kind of offense the FBI was investigating when it opened the file. In the case of the VVAW surveillance, the file number begins with "100" and thus would be classification 100, or an investigation into domestic security. The numbers following 100 signify further internal FBI identification for each particular file.

Publisher's Note: This collection comprises, in its entirety, the Primary Source Media microfilm collection entitled *America in Protest, Records of Anti-Vietnam War Organizations, Part 1: Vietnam Veterans Against the War, 1968-1975*.