

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

My Perspective on the Event
& on the Media

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Historians deal with historic events all the times.
Sometimes, we even associate events of
our own personal life to historic dates.



At national level,
Odd question: **How well**
do we really remember
events of the past???

What were you doing on Nov 22, 1963 at 12:30pm ?

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*Q: What were you doing
on Nov 22, 1963 at 12:30pm
when President Kennedy
was assassinated?*

According to non-scientific surveys:

In 1983: 20 years after the assassination:

the majority of people could give a precise answer

In 2003: 40 years after the tragedy: only 30% could.

The senior citizens' answers:...

The youngster: "I wasn't born yet"

In a similar line of thinking, we can ask:³

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

What happened during the Tết Offensive of 1968?

Many people will say:

- I was not there or
- I was not born yet

Old events need to be told for future generations

This presentation is a piece of oral history

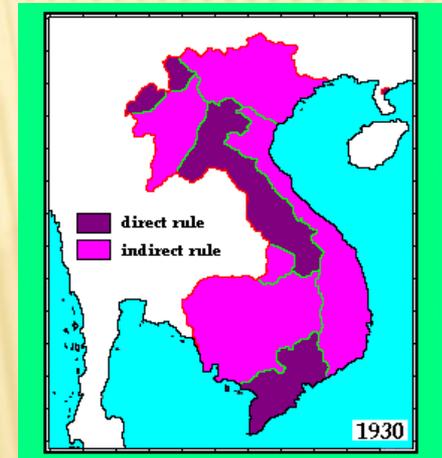
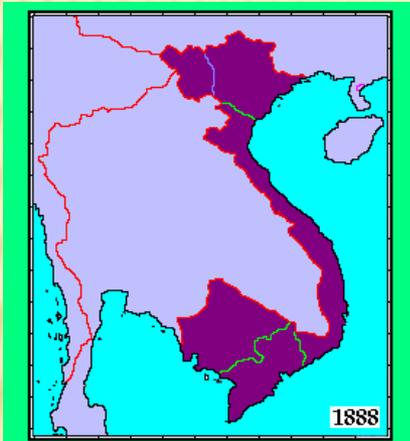
- 1- Review of **chain of events in my lifetime** leading to the Tết offensive and to my attitude change
- 2- **How much** the media influence my thoughts during the offensive
- 3- Use of old photos as **flashback**

Let's start from the beginning

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Part 1: ADMIRATION

I was born a child of a colonized country in the 1930's



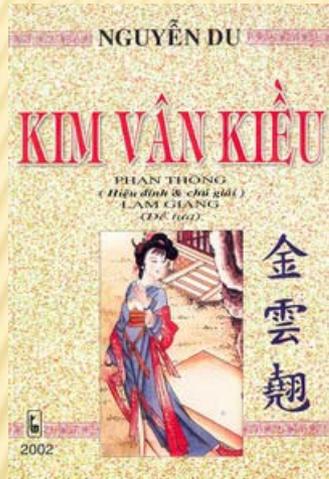
French Indochina: 5 countries

so was my father, at the turn of the century

France had imposed The Accords of Protectorate to Việt-Nam in 1883 after the massacre at the port Thuận-an.

In my family, we cultivated our identity by studying Vietnamese humanities and Vietnamese history. Children were encouraged to read two books always readily available in the house

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE



Book#1- The story of Kiều: our national masterpiece



So bề tài sắc lại là phần hơn



Thanh-minh trong tiết tháng ba



Trơ như đá vững như đồng

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The Story of
Kiều was
celebrated and
illustrated by
Phạm-Quỳnh
(1892-1945)

Publisher of Nam-Phong, President of Society
for Mutual Instruction Tri-tri, advocate for a
Constitutional Monarchy, and Prime minister 32-45



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Book #2:

Abridged History of Việt-Nam

By Trần-Trọng-Kim,
Teacher, Historian,
Author and Prime Minister

My hero: **King Hàm-Nghi**, the 13 y/o king who, from the jungle, called for the general uprising Cần-vương Movement; he ended in exile in Algeria



At an early age, I developed
ADMIRATION

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

At an early age, I developed **admiration** for several individuals, who worked diligently to build-up Việt-Nameese culture and enhance Việt-Nameese identity i.e. Trần-Trọng-Kim, Phạm-Quỳnh, Nguyễn- Văn-Tổ, HM Bảo-Đại, Prof. Hoàng-Xuân-Hãn, Nhất-Linh, Nguyễn-Mạnh-Tường,



Trần-Trọng-Kim,
Prime Minister, of the
FIRST government
of Free Việt-Nam

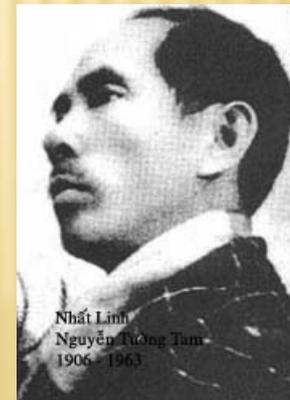
Phạm-Quỳnh
wrote the **FIRST Declaration of Independence** in March 1945,
(signed by Bảo-Đại and the royal government)
P.D.Tổn & N-V-Vinh



Bảo-Đại
N.V.Tổ



HOANG XUAN HAN
(1908 - 1996)
H-X-Hãn



Nhất-Linh



N.M.Tường

...While those individuals had been around for a while



x

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Nguyễn Phúc Vĩnh Thụy

(1913-1997)

(Modern) King Bảo-Đại: 1925 – 1945

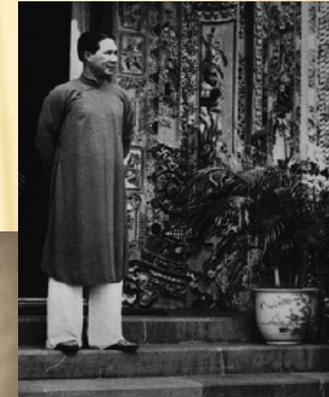
Head of State: 1948-1955

Declaration of Independence

March 1945

Unification of Việt-Nam

August 1945



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Nguyễn-Văn-Tổ
(1889-1947)

Researcher, EFEO

Head, **Counter-Illiteracy Movement**
(1938-1945)

Minister for Social Services
(Sep 1945-Mar 1946)

President, National Assembly
(Mar 1946-Aug 1946)

Minister without folio
(Aug 1946-Oct 1947)

Killed by French in Oct 1947



Gia đình xúc động nhận hài cốt liệt sỹ Nguyễn Văn Tổ

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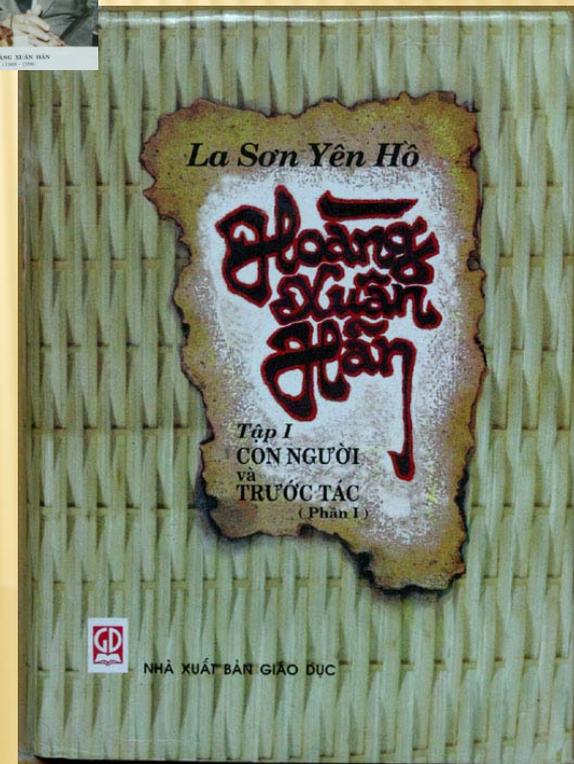
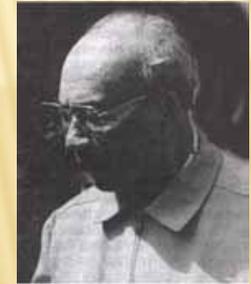
Hoàng-Xuân-Hãn
(1908-1996)

Ecole Normal Superieure
Polytechnique
Ponts et Chaussée
Researcher, Writer

Minister of Education
(Mar-Aug 1945)

Introduced Vietnamese as language vehicle
in the National Educational System

Dictionary of technical
and scientific terminology



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Nguyễn-Tường-Tam

Nhất-Linh

(1905-1963)

Writer (Self reliance Group)

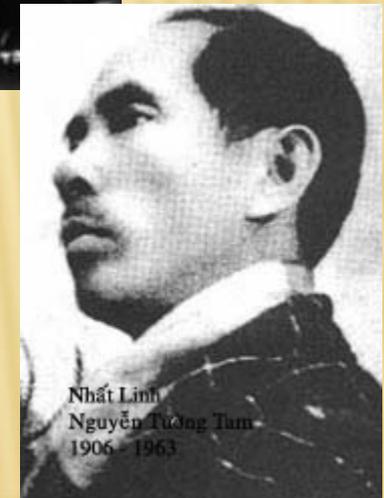
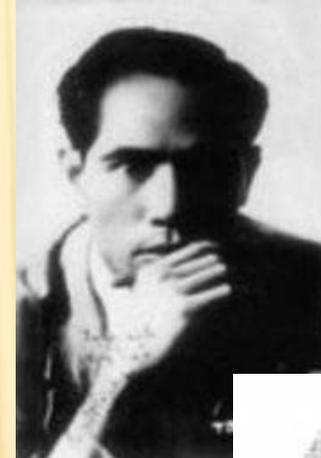
Tự-lực văn-đoàn

Reformed Vietnamese prose

Vietnamese Nationalist Party

Foreign Minister

(Mar-Aug 1946)



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Nguyễn-Mạnh-Tường
(1908-1997)

Văn Phạm Việt Nam (cùng Bùi Kỳ,
Trần Trọng Kim) (1941)

* Việt Nam Tự Điển (Hội Khai Trí
Tiến Đức)

* Construction de l'Orient (1937)

* Sourires et Larmes d'une
Jeunesse (1937)

* Pierres de France (1940)

* Apprentissage de la Méditerranée
(1940)

* Le Voyage et le Sentiment (1940)

* Một Cuộc Hành Trình (1955)

* **Un Excommunié**-Hà Nội: 1954-
1991: Procès d'un intellectuel (Kẻ bị
khai trừ - Hà Nội 54-92: Bản án một
người trí thức) Quê Mẹ Paris xuất
bản 1992

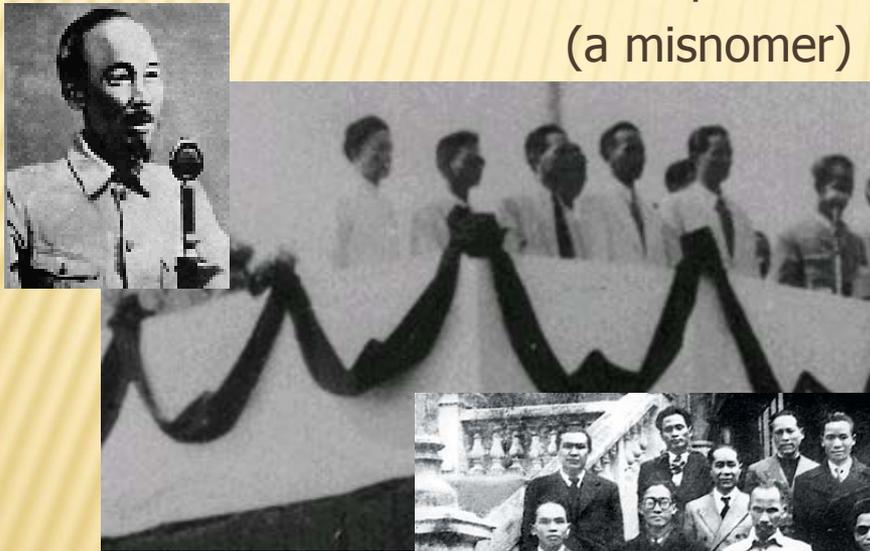
* Lý luận giáo dục châu Âu: Từ
Érasme tới Rousseau thế kỷ XVI,
XVII, XVIII - Nhà Xuất bản Khoa học
Xã hội - 1994) - 530 trang

* Aikhylos (Eschyle) và bi kịch cổ đại
Hi Lạp - Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục
(1996)

* Virgile - nhà thơ vĩ đại của thời kỳ
La mã cổ đại- Nhà xuất bản Khoa học
Xã hội (1996) - 342 trang

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While those individuals have been around for sometimes, in Aug 1945, the list of my heroes augmented with an **INSTANT celebrity**: Hồ-Chí-Minh who gave the September 1945 Declaration known as of Independence (a misnomer)



A Declaration of Independence had been made several months earlier by Bảo-Đại and Phạm-Quỳnh

“France had left; Japan surrendered (to the Allied)” so said Minh. He did not wrestle the power from them

Actually, Bảo-Đại abdicated and transferred the power to a Republican government

The so-called Declaration of Independence on Sep 2nd, 1945 was in fact for the **Founding of the Republic.**

That Declaration of the Republic was signed by the whole Provisional Government.

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Ex-King Bảo-Đại became the Supreme Councilor

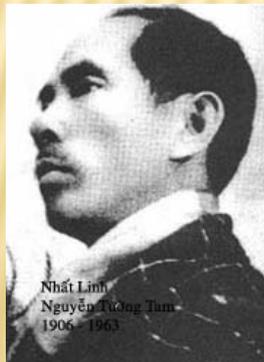


H-C-Minh had fought for the country, founded the Republic and was able to surround himself with respectable and respected individuals in the government as well as in the team going to the Đà-lạt Preliminary Conference

The reseacher Tố, min. Soc.Affairs



Nhất-Linh, Foreign Minister



Hãn, Political Chief, Đà-lạt



Tường, cultural Chief, Đà-lạt



Giáp, Deputy Head of delegation



For a while, the country was united behind Minh

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Soon, from admiration, I experienced **pain** as I watched my heroes and leaders fight bitterly among themselves.

PART 2: PAIN

Many men and women of my generation felt trapped as children in a dysfunctional family

The Saga of children in a Dysfunctional family

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

The Unity Government collapsed by the mid-1946

The Supreme Councilor was sent to China then ordered to stay there
(he would be judged in absentia in 1948)

Vice-P.M. Nguyễn-Hải-Thần (VNCMDMH) and Foreign Minister Nguyễn-Tường-Tam (VNQDD) left

Other non-Communist politicians disappeared
News of Phạm-Quỳnh being taken prisoner then “disappeared”:

The Non-Communist leaders entertained the idea of forming a new Nationalist front. Many of them resurfaced around Bảo-Đại. France took advantage of the situation: The State of Việt-Nam was created



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

The country was divided in July 1954

Families became divided. By choice? by chance? by circumstances?

PAIN: The Saga of a divided country: the 1954 exodus



Photo # 80-G-709239 Sign welcomes Vietnamese refugees on board USS Bayfield, Sept. 1954



Chaplain assists Vietnamese refugees on USS Bayfield, 1954



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PAIN:
The Saga of Divided People
TO LEAVE or **NOT TO LEAVE**
That was the question



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

The Pain

The Saga Of A Broken Family

My parents became communist comrades and my parents-in-law became anti-Communist fighters. Not by choice but by family circumstances.

(for this quilt show) I created a Vietnamese map, cutting the map in half at the 17th parallel to represent the Split in 1954. In the process of creating this quilt, I made every effort to stitch the split back together. It will take immense effort, tireless work and many stitches to heal the spirit.

I hope our generation and generations to come will work together
to heal our historical pain

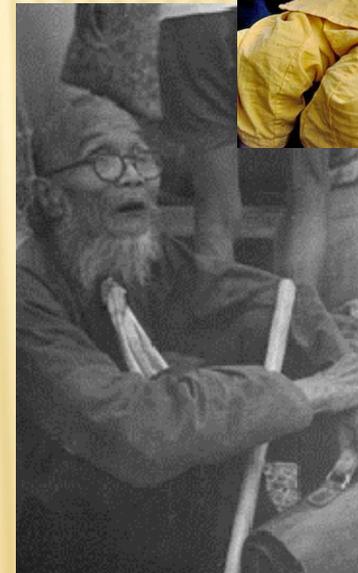
Chau Thuy Huynh graduated from UC Berkeley in May, 2006



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PAIN:

The Saga of a divided people affected old and young
To Stay or To Leave?



PAIN :

The Saga of a Symbol:
The FLAG



Anh hy sinh, lá cờ in vết đạn
Em vá cờ, em vá mảnh giang san..

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PAIN: The Saga of a Broken Country: **The Story of the Two Flags**



Growing up in Việt-Nam, every Monday at school, I had to salute the Communist Việt-Nameese flag, I felt extremely proud of being Việt-Nameese and extremely proud of the flag.

When I came to the US, I witnessed a different attitude... The Việt-Nameese-Americans were (also as proud) saluting "their" own flag, as I would be when saluting mine.

I soon came to realize their perspective and developed a sense of respect for both flags.

Chau Thuy Huynh, UC Bekerly



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The flags have different patterns, but they use the same two colors: red and yellow. In this quilt, I combined the two flags. The two flags are of the same origin and when combined, they balance each other and make each other more beautiful

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Following the **Admiration**, came the **Pain** of a Divided Nation
In 1954: my family moved from Hà-nội to Sài-gòn.

Part 3: DISILLUSION

Disillusion filled my heart as I learned about
what was happening in North Việt-Nam

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LAND REFORM & DENUNCIATION PROGRAM

LAND REDISTRIBUTION & CLASS STRUGGLE

PHOTOS BY DMITRI BALTERMANT



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

bshieu 1/1/2008

RESULTS OF LAND REFORM AND CLASS DENUNCIATION PROGRAM

| Category | # killed | # wrongly condemned | % |
|---|----------|---------------------|-------|
| Exploiting Landowners | 26,453 | 20,493 | 77.4 |
| (Plain) Landowners | 82,777 | 51,480 | 62 |
| Landowners (having participated in Revolution and Resistance) | 586 | 290 | 49 |
| Rich Farmers (Not owning land) | 62,192 | 51,003 | 82 |
| All categories | 172,008 | 123,226 | 71,66 |

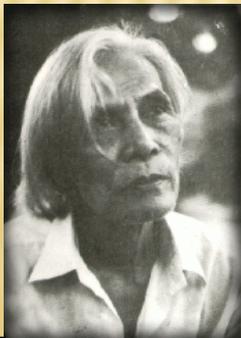
OUT OF FOUR VICTIMS, 3 WERE WRONGLY KILLED

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One-hundred flowers affair

Repression of intellectuals and writers who demanded freedom of thought and of expression

Bị xử phạt nặng nhất là Thụy An và Nguyễn Hữu Đang. Bà Thụy An bị kết tội làm gián điệp với kết án: "mụ phù thủy hiện nguyên hình rắn độc", bị kết án 15 năm tù cùng với Nguyễn Hữu Đang trong phiên tòa ngày 21/1/1960 tại Hà Nội. Mãi đến năm 1974 hai người mới được ra tù nhưng bị quản thúc thêm một thời gian nữa



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

ONE-HUNDRED-FLOWERS AFFAIR

Expelled from Professional Associations, no further professional creative activity

Khai trừ vĩnh-viễn (definitively):

Phan Khôi, Trương Tửu, Thụy An (Hội Nhà Văn), Trần Duy (Hội Mỹ Thuật)

Khai trừ ba năm (3 yrs):

Trần Dần, Lê Đạt (Hội Nhà văn), Tử Phác và Đặng Đình Hưng (Hội Nhạc sĩ)

Khai trừ một năm (1 yr):

Hoàng Cầm và Phùng Quán ra khỏi (Hội Nhà Văn)

I was bewildered at the harsh treatment inflicted to intellectuals because of their demand for free thought and expression

Jail time & banishment

Thụy-An, Nguyễn-Hữu Đang, Trần Duy bị kết án từ 12 đến 15 năm tù.

Removed from office and placed under house arrest /social & economical isolation

Các giáo sư đại học như Trương Tửu, Trần Đức Thảo, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường, Đào Duy Anh... bị cách chức và bị quản thúc

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With **pain** and **disillusion** in my heart, nevertheless, I still hoped that the two sides of my then divided country would enter a peaceful competition to provide greater freedom, richer economy, better education, brighter opportunities and overall more fulfillment in the lives of our people.

Part 4: AWAKENING

Instead, the 1968 Tết Offensive produced a **rude awakening** for the nation: North Việt-Nam had only chosen the war option

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

AWAKENING

On New Year, **during the ceasefire**, North Việt-Nameese forces attacked some forty cities and strategic points with two main objectives:

- 1- to upset SVN administration, hoping to trigger a general uprising
- 2- militarily, to obtain some land and a city to serve as capital for the Việt-cộng: they chose the city of Huế



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

The general uprising failed to occur
The enemy was pushed back

Nevertheless, North Việt-Nam
claimed victory at Huế; they issued a
commemorative stamp which says:
BRAVO FOR HUẾ GREAT VICTORY

Death and desolation were not
reported in North Việt-Nam



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Soon after the battle:

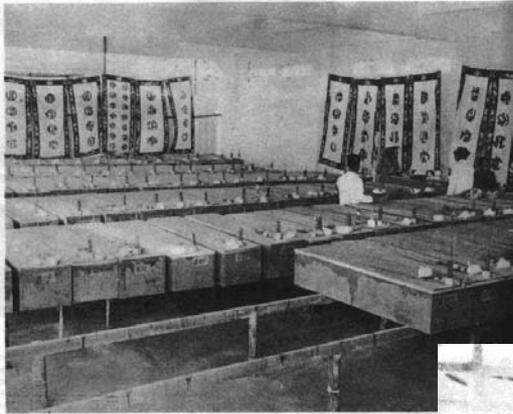
- Mass graves were found
- Mass execution, discovered
- Some victims, found even buried alive



We watched on TV, days after days, **exhumation of bodies**, we grieved with **mourning families**

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

I felt rage and disbelief at the exposed atrocities
My journey from Admiration to Pain, to Disillusion then
Awakening was personal; but I feel that many men and
women of my generation went through the same process



The Huế Massacre

Reported by Douglas Pike,
Don Oberdorfer
Denied by Gareth Porter
and associates
Confirmed by Stanley Karnow,
Marilyn B. Young, etc.

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

Role of the Media? The Saigon government has made negligible propaganda use of the massacre.
(Time Magazine, Oct 1969)

The media did fuel a **surge of patriotism**, build up a sense of urgency and fortify the general commitment to the struggle.

Feb 1st: Declaration of **martial law**

June 15: the National Assembly ordered a **general mobilization** (a decree that had failed to pass only five months previously)

In the aftermath of the Offensive, every body everywhere had firsthand witnessed Communist treachery and cruelty.

No media/TV was necessary to appreciate those facts.



(J. Willbanks: dawn of 24 Feb 68: 2nd battalion, 3rd regiment, ARVN)

Military mobilization, anti-corruption campaigns, demonstrations of political unity, and administrative reforms were quickly carried out; new determination exhibited among the ordinary citizens.

The Tết Offensive **heightened rather than **dampened** our spirit**

THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

In the US, the same Tết Offensive was reported in a much more negative way. TV showed daily war reports of devastation and death

(Our) most important guerrilla ally during the war was the America press." (Võ Nguyên Giáp)

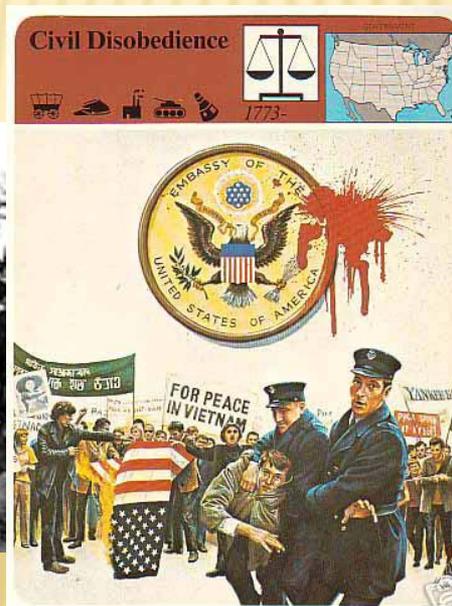
In fact, the media fuel antiwar movement

In all honesty, we didn't achieve our main objective, which was to spur uprisings throughout the South. As for making an impact in the United States, it had not been our intention but it turned out to be a fortunate result. (Gen. Trần-Độ)

Despite the outcome of the battle, the American people and their leaders came to perceive the Việt-Nam war as lost.



*Advisor Rostow & Def. Sec. Clifford
Clifford replaced McNamara
De-Escalation policy gained acceptance
Troop Request denied
Abrams replaced Westmoreland*



THE 1968 TẾT OFFENSIVE

In N. Việt-Nam, the government-controlled media reported "*the victory of Huế*" without any mention of destruction, death and despair that N-VN forces had brought along

In 1975, Xuân-Phượng, head of film propaganda unit, while filming the so-called liberation of South Việt-Nam, **wondered why Huế people ran away** from the "liberating" NVN forces.



Three million Vietnamese people were killed during the Vietnam War. These women and children are praying over the clothing remains of people buried in a mass grave during the Tet Offensive.



Fifteen years later, writing her autobiography, in a foot note, she gave the finally-found explanation: *I, as the people of North Việt-Nam, had had no knowledge of the Huế Massacre.*

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Conclusions:

1- The media, also called the 4th power, can do magic trick

| South Việt-Nam Optimism General mobilization | USA Pessimism Mood for Withdrawal | North Việt-Nam State controlled media Black out =No information |
|--|---|---|
| Give the media | half a glass of water; | it can |
| make it half FULL | or half EMPTY or even | make it DISAPPEAR |

A question arises: **Should there be a 5th power to control the 4th one, and assure its veracity and its impartiality?**

(Reed Irvine's AIM? or Ignacio Ramonet's 5th power?)

2- My journey **Admiration-Pain-Disillusion-Awakening** is personal
However, my story resonates with many men and women of my generation