The Vietnam War: The Price for Black Civil Rights?

By
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• Convergence of issues rooted in Colonialism
  – Slavery: a by-product of colonialism
  – Revolutionary independence movements
    • Aimed at overthrow of colonial rulers
    • Usually correlated with Communism
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• LBJ and limits of power: How much change?
  – Communism: Invest Presidential prestige in changing views about communism and communists, as Kennedy argued in his speech at American University shortly before the assassination?
    • Revolutionary independence movements: Viewed as a component of communist conspiracy.
  – Slavery: Use Kennedy martyrdom to attain passage of meaningful Civil Rights legislation?
  – Pick One: Communism or Slavery
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• LBJ selects Civil Rights
  – Carve his place in history
  – Interested in domestic affairs
  – Stepping stone for launching Great Society
  – Meeting with James Farmer

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• The price for focusing on Civil Rights and domestic issues.
  – Continuation and expansion of U.S. involvement in Vietnam with no way out
  – Perpetuating the notion of the domino theory
  – Fighting a war he believed unwinnable and unnecessary
  – Wished Vietnamese would accept a Korea solution, or simply just go way so he could focus on the things he enjoyed
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- Evidence against involvement in Vietnam
  - Colonel A. Peter Dewey, September, 1945
  - General Matthew Ridgeway report for Eisenhower
  - Views of Senators Richard Russell and Mike Mansfield
  - Intelligence reports
  - LBJ’s instinct
    - [http://whitehousetapes.net/clips/1964_0707_russell/](http://whitehousetapes.net/clips/1964_0707_russell/)
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• So why fight in Vietnam?
  – Fear of Soft on Communism label
  
  – Opposition could use this label to derail his domestic agenda, most specifically Civil Rights
  
  – Evidence the passion to win Civil Rights encapsulated in Voting Rights speech of March 16, 1965