

War and Injustice: People Speak Out

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Six years have passed since the initial publication of this teaching guide. At that time, the last chapter began with a plea to listen to the voices of those who questioned our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, who asked us to learn from our past mistakes, and who encouraged us to question governmental decisions about committing ourselves to war. Five years later, we have included a new chapter with four voices raising similar questions and concerns. An Iraq War veteran, the mother of a son who was killed in Iraq, the brother who lost his sibling who died of “friendly fire” in Afghanistan, and the twelve-year-old daughter of lesbian parents offer clear evidence that to them and their families, injustice still exists in the United States.

Document-Based Questions

CAMILO MEJÍA

1. Mejía mentions many institutions and issues those in the antiwar movement must confront: corporations, hypocrites, etc. Which of these entities do you think requires the most difficult struggle for the antiwar movement? For whom and why? In what ways could this struggle be resolved?
2. What is your opinion on Mejía’s seven-month confinement for not wanting to fight in “George Bush’s war”? Is his resistance justifiable? If so, on what grounds? If not, why?
3. How do you think the United States should handle situations like Mejía’s?

CINDY SHEEHAN

1. Cindy Sheehan equates the threat of communism in the 1950s to the terrorist threat in present-day America. Do you feel this is a valid comparison or not? Explain.

2. Explain what Cindy Sheehan meant when she said that 58 percent of the public was with her, and if they spoke up, they could stop the war.
3. Do you think Cindy Sheehan's plan to camp in front of George Bush's house was successful? Why or why not?

KEVIN TILLMAN

1. What does Kevin Tillman mean when he states, "Somehow, those afraid to fight an illegal invasion decades ago are allowed to send soldiers to die for an illegal invasion they started"? Agree or disagree with Tillman's statement using examples to back up your position.
2. Does Kevin Tillman's statement to the public leave you more hopeful or less so? Why?
3. In his statement, Kevin Tillman made the point that "Much has happened since we handed over our voice." What did Tillman mean by saying he and his brother handed over their voices? Why would Kevin not be able to speak out against the war before this point? Why did Pat feel that way?

EVANN ORLECK-JETTER

1. What do you think Evann Orleck-Jetter means when she says, "Vermont's Freedom to Marry can help us get back on track"? Do you think Orleck-Jetter makes an effective argument when she says that the people of Vermont have not reached the "promised land" envisioned by civil rights leader Martin Luther King as a result of not allowing same-sex marriage? Support your answer.
2. Why do you think gay marriage laws have yet to be passed in all fifty states?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 25, "War and Injustice: People Speak Out"

1. The voices of religious and corporate interests play a significant role in the "democratic" process of policy making in the United States.

2. When corporations and the wealthy are allowed more say in the government, common people sacrifice their civil liberties.
3. Civil rights are not freely given but rather require protection by ordinary people.
4. In the words of Martin Luther King, “We have yet to reach the Promised Land.”
5. The government of the United States is a government of the people. If you aren’t happy with what it’s doing, it is your right and obligation to change it.

General Discussion Questions For *Voices*

The following questions can be used to stimulate class discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 25. They could also be rewritten or designed to serve as an evaluation tool.

1. Which voices best reinforce the main idea behind this quote by Andy Rooney: “I wish we could dedicate Memorial Day, not to the memory of those who have died at war, but to the idea of saving the lives of the young people who are going to die in the future if we don’t find some new way . . . that takes war out of our lives.” How and why do they support Rooney’s statement?
2. Whose voice do you think reaches a wider U.S. audience? Why? Whose voice do you think reaches a limited U.S. audience? Why?
3. In her speech, Orleck-Jetter mentions that she has been studying the civil rights movement. Do you think that her fight for marriage equality is part of the same movement, or is it an entirely new civil rights issue?
4. Do you think twenty-first century Americans are more apathetic about war and civil rights compared to Americans in the late twentieth century? Why or why not?
5. Mejía and Sheehan both refer to similarities between Cold War rhetoric and that which politicians use today. Who do you think makes a better argument? Why is it more effective?

6. How would you create an antiwar activity in your community? Who do you think would be the most difficult group of people in your community to get involved in this activity? Why? What would be the group most open to involvement? Why?
7. Have you ever been involved in a protest activity? If so, how and why? If not, is there any issue that might convince you to be involved in a protest action?

Evaluation Tools

These assignments can be used as any type of assessment—homework, short- or long-term research projects, group or individual work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities.

1. Learn more about the “hot war” between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan. Do you think the current presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan is a new conflict or a continuation from the past? Explain your answer.
2. Read a book review on *State of Denial* by Bob Woodward. Did this review give you any information about the Bush administration’s handling of the war in Iraq?
3. Research the history of same-sex marriage propositions in the United States. How many times have they appeared on ballots and what seems to be the deciding factor of the outcome?
4. Create a chronology documenting same-sex marriage court cases and the significance of their outcome. Include the decision, reasoning, and end result.
5. Imagine that you are Cindy Sheehan. Then, write a letter to your congressman explaining your feelings about the war. Make sure you explain the reasons you are against it and what you expect your congressman to do about it.
6. Research at least three different antiwar movement groups that have organized within the last fifty years. What are the different tactics each group uses to initiate change? Which method do you think is most effective?

Why? Which would you choose to join and why? Which would you not choose and why?

7. Learn more about the confinement of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. When did their imprisonment begin and upon what grounds were most people imprisoned? How many remain at Guantánamo and why are they still being held? What are the current problems related to those who remain? Based upon what you learned, write President Barack Obama a letter that supports some action about those remaining in Guantánamo.
8. Learn more about the history of corporate personhood in the United States. When did it begin and how has it evolved? What rights do corporations currently have that are the same rights to which all are entitled?

Suggested Essay Questions

1. What does Mejía mean when he writes, “No longer able to rely on the rhetoric of the Cold War, the corporate warmongers need this global terrorism to justify the spread of its empire.” Agree or disagree with this statement. What were the justifications and goals of the United States during the Cold War?
2. Take a position for or against the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. You must use strong evidence from your reading to support your position.
3. Do you agree that “the so-called American Dream, to many poor people, is tied to the obligation to fight in a war for corporate domination”? Why or why not? Does this statement apply to previous wars? How and why? Defend your opinion with actual examples of wars for corporate domination.
4. What do you believe Camilo Mejía meant by writing the following: “Poverty and oppression around the world provide the building blocks for an empire. Poverty and oppression at home provide the building blocks to build an imperial army.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. Cindy Sheehan claims that she is part of the “silent majority,” just as President Richard Nixon claimed his supporters were the “silent majority.” In what ways are Sheehan and Nixon’s silent majorities similar and in what ways are they different? Would you consider yourself a part of Sheehan’s silent majority? Why or why not?

6. How would you describe America's "War on Terrorism"? Is this a war you can support? Why or why not?

Simulations and Other Creative Approaches

1. Conduct a survey in which you ask ten people four important questions: Why did the United States go to war with Afghanistan? Do you support such reasons? Why did the United States go to war with Iraq? Do you support such reasons? Then ask them their personal feelings toward the two wars. Write a paper discussing what you find.
2. Assume the role of a military recruitment officer. Based on what you know about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, try to persuade an eighteen-year-old high school graduate to enlist.
3. Assume the role of an antiwar protestor. Based on what you know about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, try and persuade an eighteen-year-old high school graduate to join your cause.
4. Stage a debate between Cindy Sheehan and George W. Bush in which Sheehan wants to bring the troops home and Bush justifies the war's cause.
5. Before the passage of same-sex marriage, Vermont was confronted with one major question: should the state grant same-sex couples the right to marry, or should it maintain a "separate but equal" policy by providing for civil unions or domestic partnerships? This "separate but equal" issue was first raised in a legal context in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and was repealed in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Learn more about the court's decision on "separate but equal" in both court cases. Then, compare the decisions with the recent case of *Baker v. State of Vermont* on same-sex marriage. Create a graphic portrayal of how these three cases compare and contrast in terms of "separate but equal."
6. Conduct a classroom debate on this issue: domestic partnerships are equal to traditional marriage.
7. Stage a debate on this issue: the war in Iraq is the twenty-first century equivalent to the war in Vietnam.