



**Vietnam Peace  
Commemoration  
Committee**

## **“THE VIETNAM WAR” A PBS DOCUMENTARY ORGANIZER’S GUIDE FOR PEACE ACTIVISTS**

Beginning in mid-September, PBS will broadcast a 10-part, 18 hour documentary series on “The Vietnam War” produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. It promises to be a significant media and political event that will draw attention to the Vietnam War in a way we haven’t seen for decades.

We encourage peace activists to contribute their personal experiences and perspectives to the national discussion to make sure the positive role and impact of the antiwar movement is accurately reflected, and that critical perspectives on the cause and conduct of the war are heard. VPCC’s goal is to supplement, and if necessary to challenge, the series content, and to promote discussion of the lessons learned for today. See ideas for getting involved below.

We have met and opened up channels of communications with the producers and WETA, the lead presenting PBS station, and they encourage our participation.

Expect to see and hear things in the series you agree with and things you don’t. One reviewer of all 18 hours wrote:

“Burns and Novick manage, simultaneously to offer a thorough indictment of the war, and a dismissal of most of the people who, at the time, committed themselves to ending the war. It’s anti-war and anti-anti-war movement.”

But a long time anti-war activist who is interviewed in the series saw its impact differently:

“Throughout the film the antiwar movement is seen as having been right all along. We are not always portrayed in the most flattering light, although there is plenty of footage in which we are, but we are shown to be patriots who stood up to a government that was thoroughly and completely misguided and dishonest in its pursuit of the war. This isn’t the film we would have made, but this is a film that will further our overall analysis of the war and provide us with the best opportunity we have had in decades to provoke a useful public discussion of the issues involved.”

Another reviewer is more skeptical about historical content:

“The even-handedness, the flag-draped history, bittersweet narrative, redemptive homecomings and the urge toward ‘healing’ rather than truth are cinematic topoi that we have come to expect from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick.”

Airing of the series will be an inescapable public cultural phenomena. Personal life and society changing events will be dramatically and emotionally recalled. Old arguments will be rekindled and new ones emerge based on retrospective interviews and controversial academic research. The ensuing debate could be the last public hurrah of the Vietnam generation. Our children and grandchildren may be intrigued at how much we were shaped by the events portrayed, as well as gain perspective on their generations’ wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

## **SERIES BROADCAST SCHEDULE** (provided by PBS)

The first five episodes will air nightly from Sunday, September 17, through Thursday, September 21, and the final five episodes will air nightly from Sunday, September 24, through Thursday, September 28. Each episode will premiere at 8:00 p.m. ET with a repeat broadcast immediately following the premiere (check local listings).

Beginning Tuesday, October 3, the series will re-air on a weekly basis through November 28, at 9:00 p.m. ET.

On September 17, concurrent with the broadcast premiere, the first five episodes of THE VIETNAM WAR will be available for streaming on all station-branded PBS platforms, including [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org) and PBS apps for iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV and Chromecast, and the final five episodes will be available beginning September 24. All episodes will remain accessible until October 3, when the series begins its weekly rebroadcast. During the rebroadcast period, each episode will be available to stream for two weeks. PBS station members with Passport can view the entire series (all 10 episodes) beginning September 17 (contact your local PBS station for details). The series will also be available with Spanish and Vietnamese subtitles on streaming.

The full series will also be sold as DVD boxed sets for personal and public use. Nearly all of the 350 PBS stations nationwide are supplementing the series with local programming. Public libraries, high schools and universities will show it into 2018 and beyond, with a curriculum available.

## **HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE**

The conversation about the war and the anti-war movement will continue throughout the fall, though it will be especially intense during the last two weeks of September. Following are a variety of ways you can be involved, from the immediate and individual to the prepared and public. Please share with us your experiences, critiques, and ideas so we can add them to this guide and share with others.

Please contact Terry Provance at VPCC if you have questions: [vnpeacecomm@gmail.com](mailto:vnpeacecomm@gmail.com)

### **A. BEFORE THE SERIES IS BROADCAST**

#### **Contact Your Local PBS Station**

PBS stations across the country are planning local engagement activities around the Vietnam series. This could include interviews filmed and broadcast to complement showings (e.g. "The Vietnam War: Oregon Remembers"), as well as public on or off air panel discussions, web-based conversations, and community forums. Because the series includes opponents of the war, most stations will be interested in providing a local dimension to the anti-war movement and should welcome your assistance. NPR stations with a similar audience to PBS will also seek listeners' personal stories.

**It is essential to contact your local stations as soon as possible to learn about their plans and how you can participate.**

Call your local PBS and NPR stations. Ask for the **community outreach** or **marketing staff** person, or whoever is organizing events or interviews around the Vietnam series. Ask to learn about their plans and offer to meet. Try to identify before you call a range of local people who were involved in the antiwar movement, either civilians or veterans, to cite as resources. (VPCC will also have available a national list of academic experts and anti-war movement personalities available to stations.)

Find out who organized local antiwar protests or participated in national demonstrations. Religious institutions may have hosted draft counseling or conducted weekly vigils. Colleges and universities might have been the sites of teach-ins, peaceful or militant demonstrations, student strikes, or the expulsion or destruction of ROTC programs and buildings. Research of newspaper archives from the era, including "underground" papers, as well as conversations with retired professors, ministers and journalists can unearth a rich history that deserves greater recognition.

If the station is not responsive to you, let us know and we will share that with the producers of the series at Florentine Films and WETA who have offered to help in these cases.

**Please keep Terry Provance -- [vnpeacecomm@gmail.com](mailto:vnpeacecomm@gmail.com) – current about what is happening in your area. Contact him right away if there are any problems.**

*Experience of VPCC Committee member Steve Ladd in San Francisco:*

*The community engagement person I spoke with at KQED was quite receptive. KQED is planning several smaller events before the broadcast and one larger town hall afterwards. Other stations may also be doing something similar, but events will vary. The KQED pre-events are: Vietnamese community discussion; a homeless veterans outreach event working with local vets organizations; and an event at the station with antiwar movement folks telling their stories. After I initiated contact, the KQED organizer scheduled the call with me as a potential lead partner for that event. I'll be pulling together for her a range of people locally. My contact at the station was quite happy that I had contacted her since she was looking for someone who could help her bring in people representing the peace movement. So, in calls to stations, I would encourage people not only to ask what the station has planned and how you can participate, but also offer that you could be a partner or resource to suggest people who could be presenters or lead participants in events (as well as encouraging people to attend planned events).*

If your PBS station is not responsive to your calls or participation, consider organizing independent programs for the public and local media that offer personal experiences of veterans, anti-war activists and Indochinese-Americans. Programs can be held at religious institutions, campuses, civic centers or veterans halls. One possibility is a community dialog cosponsored by local peace, veterans and immigrant groups, including Vietnam Veterans of America\*, Vets for Peace\*\* and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Public meetings could be planned on Friday or Saturday evenings (September 22/23, September 29/30) to review and reflect on the five segments shown the preceding Sunday to Thursday.

\* Vietnam Veterans of America [chapter locator](#) (scroll down to "Locate a VVA chapter")

\*\* Vets for Peace [chapter contacts](#)

## Contact Local Media

Stimulated by the series buzz, local newspapers, radio and TV stations other than PBS or NPR may be planning discussions about the Vietnam War and its local legacy, or other coverage around the broadcasts. If not, you could encourage them to do so.

Contact local media outlets to find out what they have planned and how you can participate or offer local voices and other resources. Ask if local newspapers are open to op-ed pieces on the war and peace movement. Ask radio stations if they are planning call-ins or other shows and might interview peace movement activists. And during the series broadcast, be sure to write letters to the editor, as appropriate.

## B. WHEN THE SERIES IS BROADCAST

It is hard to predict the total impact of the 18 hours of content. But anti-war folks who attended several preview events with Ken Burns and Lynn Novick have expressed some concerns, reflected on our [blog here](#):

We also have some published reviews from those who have seen the full series available [here on our site](#).

In broad terms you should be watching for how much the history of the war comports with your understanding and experience, and how fairly the role of the anti-war movement is portrayed. Some viewers will keep their reactions to themselves and discuss with friends; others will be moved to more public expression, which we encourage.

- 1) Think about whether you want to watch alone and with family members/housemates, or whether you prefer a shared viewing with friends and colleagues. If the latter, you might want to rotate the nightly group viewings or have one location host the first week and another the second. House parties offer a chance to share diverse experiences during the war and to discuss ways to follow-up on the series to augment public understanding or to address war legacies at home and in Indochina.
- 2) A weekly binge or preview screening of the series is also possible. Simultaneous with the initial broadcasts in the first two weeks, the other four segments for that week will be available online. This provides an opportunity to do a heads up about content to your contacts, the public and the media if there are episodes worth highlighting or disputed facts and interpretations or omissions.
- 3) Watch every episode and take notes, keeping a record of your reactions and concerns. Some questions and issues raised prior to viewing the series are posted on our website.
- 4) Serious concerns, especially major conflicts with your own experience and knowledge, should be shared online as soon as they occur with your PBS and NPR stations, as well as with other local media. Make use of call-in shows, letters to the editor and on-line comments. If you have previewed the week, raise challenges before shows air. If not, send them immediately after viewing an episode. (VPCC will share its own evaluation of each episode with our network in advance of broadcast.)
- 5) If your PBS station has not already scheduled a public event around the series, suggest it should be done to hear from members of the community who were personally involved in or against the war—or both.
- 6) Follow-up to the series could include film showings with a different or complementary perspective (see list on our website – [www.vietnampeace.org/resources](http://www.vietnampeace.org/resources) )
- 7) Ask your local library if it is planning programs with the series, or would consider doing so. Offer help to resource it. The American Library Association and PBS are awarding sets of DVDs and a discussion guide to 50 public libraries.
- 8) The series will provoke questions about what to do in response. Most immediately that can involve work with veterans still impacted by the war in their own lives and help for the legacies of war in Indochina (Agent Orange, land mines, unexploded ordnance), see below. The White House and Congress need to be pressed to at least maintain, and preferably increase, funding for assistance here and in the countries affected. Longer term the lessons of the Vietnam War should be discussed as they relate to current US military interventions and opposition to them.
- 9) Please tell us what your experiences were, how you responded to the series, and if you have follow-up plans, so we can share with our network.

## Legacies of the Vietnam War

The US war in Indochina is still a current daily reality for the land and the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, where tens of millions of unexploded ordnance (UXO) still litter the countryside killing hundreds a year. Agent Orange remains a pervasive cause of birth defects, cancers and other illnesses. Many American NGOs have been engaged in addressing these problems since the end of the war.

For the past 20 years the US Government has provided humanitarian assistance to clear-up UXO and help those who have been injured. For the past decade the US has worked with the Vietnamese government to remediate the Agent Orange contamination at the Da Nang and Bien Hoa airbases. However, the level of assistance is still paltry, totaling less than what it would have cost in today's dollars for the US to wage just four days of the war in Indochina. Assistance reaches only a small percentage of those still impacted by the war and even that is threatened by US budget cuts: <http://tinyurl.com/legaciescut>

For more information about the constant ongoing human costs of the war and links to organizations working to address those legacies visit the [War Legacies Project](#).

## Future Vietnam War Commemoration Events

Be sure to [sign up on our website](#) to stay informed of these and other VPCC planned events:

**Oct 20-21, 2017** - 50th anniversary of the March on the Pentagon in Washington, DC

**Jan 15, 2018** - Martin Luther King national holiday readings of his Riverside Church antiwar sermon

**March 16, 2018** - 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the My Lai Massacre

**April 4, 2018** - 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of assassination of Martin Luther King & 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary of his Riverside Church antiwar sermon

**For further information and support, please contact:**

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[www.vietnampeace.org](http://www.vietnampeace.org)

