

Learning from History

A philosopher once said that those who don't know history are destined to repeat it. In other words, history helps us learn lessons so we don't make mistakes in the future. But Lyndon B. Johnson did know history.

Johnson knew that Europe had "appeased" Hitler (gave in to him) and then Hitler saw that as a sign that he could go invade Czechoslovakia, which he did. So Johnson didn't want to "give in" and "appease" Ho Chi Minh and the Communists in Vietnam.

Johnson knew that President Truman was thought to "have lost" China to the Communists, and so he didn't want to "lose" Vietnam.

Johnson knew that World War II might not have been won without the incredible firepower of American planes. And so he thought that bombing North Vietnam would weaken their ability to continue fighting. And we know that the chances of the South in the U.S. Civil War to overpower the military strength of the North was slim if not impossible.

So why did our involvement in Vietnam go so badly? What do we really need to know about a given situation so that we don't mistakes? Was the problem that Johnson used the wrong examples from history? Should he have instead thought about the American Revolution? Or is history is useless in preventing such mistakes? Or did he let other concerns get in the way? What lessons from Vietnam can we learn so as not to make mistakes in the future? Other thoughts?

To what extent should history influence present and future decisions? Or is history useless? Thoughts???

Vietnam is an outstanding example of how the power of the people--especially young people--made a difference and changed government policy. Lyndon B. Johnson--and later Nixon--would abuse power to escalate involvement in Vietnam. But democracy worked. The policy changed because enough Americans spoke up. What were the costs? Is our democracy still--to quote Lincoln--a government of the people, by the people and for the people in the same way it was then? Do YOU have power?

Thoughts?