

The Teacher's Guide  
for  
**THE FOG OF WAR**  
An Errol Morris Film

was developed by

The Choices Program and the Critical Oral History Project  
Watson Institute for International Studies  
Brown University



Primary sources and other resources  
to accompany the teacher's guide  
are available online at  
[www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).

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“IF THERE IS ONE MOVIE THAT OUGHT TO BE STUDIED BY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERS AROUND THE WORLD AT THIS TREACHEROUS HISTORICAL MOMENT, IT IS ‘THE FOG OF WAR,’ ERROL MORRIS’S PORTRAIT OF FORMER UNITED STATES DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT S. MCNAMARA.”

-Stephen Holden, THE NEW YORK TIMES

“SMART AND COMPLETELY FASCINATING!”

-Kenneth Turan, LOS ANGELES TIMES

“STUNNING! SUPERBLY MADE!”

-Desson Howe, WASHINGTON POST

“SPLENDID! A MASTERPIECE!”

-Roger Ebert, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

OFFICIAL  
**TEACHER’S GUIDE**

for

**THE FOG  
OF WAR**

An Errol Morris Film

[www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar)

[www.fogofwarmovie.com](http://www.fogofwarmovie.com)



## NOTE TO TEACHERS

This critically acclaimed movie by filmmaker Errol Morris examines issues of war and peace in the 20th century through the lens of one of the century's pivotal figures. Robert S. McNamara offers his account of the century just past, as he remembers participating in it, as well as his reflections on its meaning for the 21st century. Delivered with the conviction and intensity that marked his years as defense secretary for presidents Kennedy and Johnson, McNamara's message compels us to pay attention to our own roles in the 21st century. Some of what McNamara says in the film is highly controversial—the thoughts of one man reflecting on his own history and the history of his era. That other accounts, other reflections, may differ markedly from McNamara's makes the film all the more provocative for your students.

This study guide, prepared by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program and the Critical Oral History Project—both at Brown University—offers eight lesson plans to be used in conjunction with the film. These lessons will help your students to connect the film and its message to 20th century history and to consider McNamara's role as a political and military figure. In a final

activity, "What kind of world do we want for the 21st century?" students will have the opportunity to define their own hopes for the future.

The material is designed to be flexible. The lesson plans can build on one another, or be used as stand-alone activities. They can be used whether you and your students watch the whole film or only selections from it. You should feel free to duplicate materials for your students

and for colleagues who might be interested. Although the lessons are designed for a fifty minute class period, you may wish to devote more or less time to certain aspects. We encourage you to adapt the materials to meet the needs of your classroom. However you adapt them, we believe

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At my age, 85, I'm at [an] age  
where I can look back  
and derive some conclusions  
about my actions. My rule has been  
to try to learn, try to understand  
what happened. Develop the  
lessons and pass them on.

—Robert McNamara, *The Fog of War*

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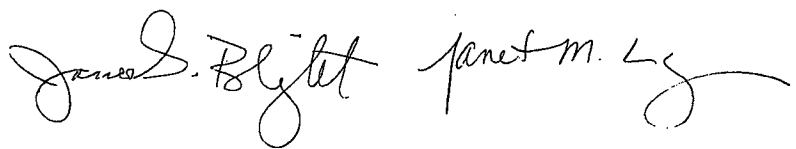
the lessons will encourage your students, who must soon take charge of the 21st century, to engage in a conversation with a man who was centrally involved in shaping the 20th.

We hope you and your students enjoy viewing this film and that you find the materials in this guide a provocative and useful way to engage your students in a vicarious conversation with Robert McNamara about his past and their future.

Sincerely,



Susan Graseck, Director  
The Choices Program  
Watson Institute for International Studies  
Brown University



James G. Blight & Janet M. Lang, Co-Directors  
The Critical Oral History Project  
Watson Institute for International Studies  
Brown University

### THE CHOICES PROGRAM

Explore the Past... Shape the Future  
History and Current Issues for the Classroom



critical oral history

## INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS

Synopsis .....	3
Brief Historical Context for <i>The Fog of War</i> .....	4
Before Viewing the Film: Suggestions .....	5
After Viewing the Film: Suggestions .....	5

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

• Activities 1, 2 .....	6
• Activities 3, 4 .....	7
• Activities 5, 6 .....	8
• Activities 7, 8 .....	9

## REPRODUCIBLE STUDENT HANDOUTS

1. "Empathize with your enemy." .....	10
2. "Rationality will not save us." .....	11
3. "Belief and seeing are both often wrong." .....	12
4. "Proportionality should be a guideline in war." .....	14
5. Just War and Proportionality.....	15
6. Oral History and the Vietnam Experience .....	16
7. Film as Media .....	17
8. What kind of world do we want for the 21st century?.....	19
<b>Behind the Scenes—<i>Critical Oral History</i></b> .....	22
<b>About the Choices Program</b> .....	23

On DVD 5.11.04.  
Available on [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).  
Check out "[www.sonypictures.com/fogofwar](http://www.sonypictures.com/fogofwar)" for more details.

*The Fog of War* forces viewers to come to terms with some of the most significant contributions to, and implications of, a singular fact about the 20th century: roughly 160 million human beings were killed by other human beings in violent conflict. It was the bloodiest century in human history. The film further challenges us to look closely at that tragic century for clues as to how we might avoid a repetition of it in the 21st century.

The film takes the form of a one-on-one conversation between filmmaker Errol Morris (who is behind the camera) and former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (who is on-camera). The conversation traces McNamara's vast and varied experience: from the end of World War I, through the course of World War II, and the unfolding of the Cold War in Cuba, Vietnam, and around the world. We are encouraged to experience the 20th century vicariously as the filmmaker and his subject walk us through the experiences of leaders involved in these seminal events. Extensive archival footage of events throughout



the 20th century and recently declassified tape recordings of presidential conversations help the viewer to place McNamara, now eighty-five years old, in the chapters of history he discusses.

Cut from more than twenty hours of dialogue, the 107-minute film is organized around eleven distinct "lessons" which Morris believes should be derived from

McNamara's experience. The lessons underline the importance of empathy toward one's adversary, the limits of human rationality in foreign policy decision-making, the painful moral choices necessary in the conduct of international affairs, and the overriding danger of nuclear war.

Ultimately, the lessons come as cautions to future generations. McNamara relives the horrors and triumphs of the 20th century as the basis for a discussion about what humanity wants for the 21st century. Above all, McNamara challenges viewers to confront the role that conflict, and in particular nuclear conflict, might play in the society of tomorrow.

## THE FOG OF WAR

*The Fog of War* illuminates some of the most defining moments in U.S. history. From Woodrow Wilson's vision for a world without war, to the fire-bombing of Japan in World War II, the world's brush with nuclear catastrophe during the Cuban missile crisis, and the war in Vietnam, this chapter in history is far-reaching and, in an important sense, still unfolding.

**World War I** – The First World War was a catastrophe of global proportion. Nine million people died fighting on battlefields that stretched across Europe, parts of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the world's oceans. Nations and empires crumbled. As the war came to an end, President Wilson proposed the creation of a League of Nations to enhance international cooperation and to ensure peace. Without U.S. involvement, the League proved weak and ineffective and was unable to prevent the outbreak of World War II.

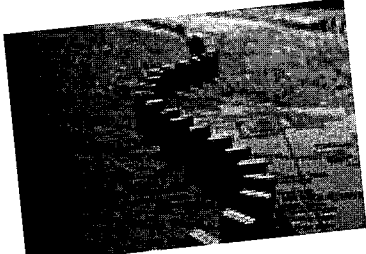
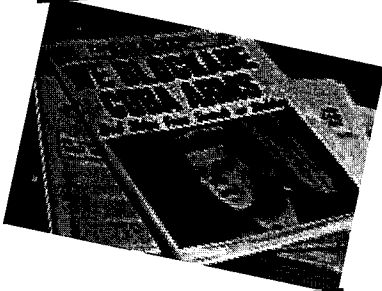
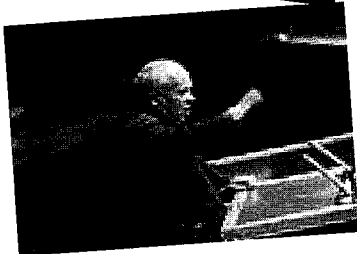
**Strategic Bombing in World War II** – World War II was even more deadly than World War I. Air power was an integral element of the military strategy of both the Allied and Axis sides. The use of aerial bombing escalated as the war progressed. The policy of dropping bombs to destroy an adversary's will and capacity to fight became known as "strategic bombing." Millions of civilians died in Europe and the Pacific, especially in Japan, as a result. The bombing culminated in the firebombing of more than sixty Japanese cities. The use of two nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked the introduction of nuclear weapons into warfare.

**Cold War** – From the end of World War II until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, world politics was dominated by the East-West Cold War: a tense and dangerous peace between the Great Powers. While East and West were caught in a nuclear stand-off, lethal "proxy" wars were fought all over the globe between allies of the U.S. and allies of the Soviet Union and/or the People's Republic of China.

**Cuban Missile Crisis** – When the Soviet Union placed nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba in 1962, a thirteen-day superpower showdown ensued. The crisis has come to be recognized as the most dangerous confrontation of the Cold War; the U.S. and the Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear war. Disaster was avoided only at the last moment when Soviet Premier Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles, U.S. President Kennedy agreed not to attack Cuba, and Cuban President Castro agreed to permit the Soviets to remove the weapons. October 1962 was a moment so frightening and dangerous that its reverberations are still felt today.

**Vietnam War** – In the mid-1950s, the U.S. intervened militarily in Vietnam, beginning what has been called a "crisis in slow motion." Americans, convinced that the fall of South Vietnam to Communism would eventually result in the "fall" of all of Southeast Asia, believed this war was an effort to prevent North Vietnam from unifying North and South Vietnam under Communist leadership. To the combined Communist forces of the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front the war was a sign of U.S. imperial ambitions in the South. The war stretched across several generations and killed more than three million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans. There was intense international opposition to the war and widespread protest at home. The U.S. loss in Vietnam dealt a profound psychological blow to America.

**Nuclear Weapons** – Two nuclear bombs dropped by the United States on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 killed more than 150,000 people. By 1946, the atomic bomb was being called "the ultimate weapon," a force of unprecedented destructiveness. In 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear device. A nuclear arms race ensued, as each side threatened the other with thousands of nuclear weapons. Today the U.S. and Russia, while ostensibly allies, still threaten each other with roughly 28,800 of the 30,000 currently known to exist. At least six additional countries now possess nuclear weapons and others are attempting to obtain them.



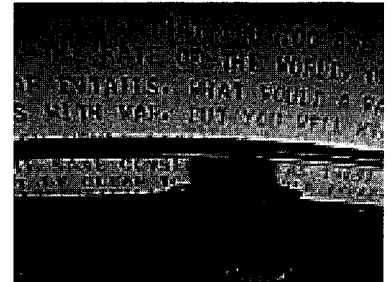
*Extensive background on each of these topics is available on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).*

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Write the following key terms on the board and ask students to suggest definitions. Then instruct them to take notes on these terms as they view the movie.

appeasement	morality
collective security	power
colonialism	proportionality
containment	rationality
domino theory	responsibility
empathy	unilateral
ethics	values
just war	war criminals

2. Ask students to read the film's synopsis and the historical context to familiarize themselves with the content of the film. In-depth discussions of each of the historical topics described are available on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar) and may be assigned as homework prior to viewing the film.
3. Ask students to recall anything they have learned about Robert McNamara, either from assignments in their history classes or from their relatives who might have lived during the time he was Secretary of Defense. What adjectives do people use to characterize him? How is his tenure remembered? For homework prior to viewing, ask students to research Robert McNamara. Suggest that they include at least one interview with someone who lived through this period.
4. Ask students to characterize World War II. What kind of war was it? What about the Vietnam War? Ask students to identify at least three similarities and /or differences.
5. Viewing the Film: Instruct students to select one question or challenge that Robert McNamara presents to us in *The Fog of War* and be prepared to share this in class.



### **THE FOG OF WAR**

is built around eleven lessons from the life of Robert McNamara.

- Lesson #1: Empathize with your enemy.
- Lesson #2: Rationality will not save us.
- Lesson #3: There's something beyond one's self.
- Lesson #4: Maximize efficiency.
- Lesson #5: Proportionality should be a guideline in war.
- Lesson #6: Get the data.
- Lesson #7: Belief and seeing are both often wrong.
- Lesson #8: Be prepared to reexamine your reasoning.
- Lesson #9: In order to do good, you may have to engage in evil.
- Lesson #10: Never say never.
- Lesson #11: You can't change human nature.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Ask students to recall the most striking elements of the film. Why do students remember those parts especially?
2. Which one of McNamara's questions or challenges is of most interest or concern to students? Why?
3. Which of the eleven lessons were most interesting and important to students? With which do they disagree? Which do they think will have the most impact on the 21st century? Why?
4. What did students learn about the time periods discussed in the film? What did they learn about Robert McNamara? What impression do they have of him now that they have seen the film? What impression do they have of World War II, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Vietnam War now that they have seen the film?
5. Choose one or more of the activities described in this guide to connect the film to topics you may be covering in your classes.
6. Refer students to the resources available from the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).

# TEACHING STRATEGIES

## ACTIVITY 1: "EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR ENEMY." COMPARING CUBA AND VIETNAM



*We must try to put ourselves inside their skin and look at us through their eyes, just to understand the thoughts that lie behind their decisions and their actions.*  
—The Fog of War

### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Is there a down side to empathy?  
What might that be?

### OBJECTIVES

- Understand what empathy means.
- Evaluate McNamara's claims for the value of empathy.
- Examine the use of empathy as a foreign policy tool.

### HANDOUTS

- "Empathy and Foreign Policy" (p 10)

### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Ask students to think about an enemy—personal, national, international. Have them construct a description of that person, group, or nation. Would that person, group, or nation feel this is accurate?
2. Form groups of three to four students and distribute copies of "Empathy and Foreign Policy" to each student. Instruct the groups to work collectively to develop their responses to the questions and historical events presented in the worksheet.
3. After the groups have completed the worksheet, call on them to share their responses. Encourage discussion among groups with conflicting viewpoints. How might empathy affect decision-making? McNamara states in the movie that rationality will fail us. Do students think that empathy might also fail us? What are the implications of this?

## ACTIVITY 2: "RATIONALITY WILL NOT SAVE US." THE CASE OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS



*At the end we lucked out. It was luck that prevented nuclear war... Rational individuals came that close to total destruction of their societies.*  
—The Fog of War

### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Ask students to read Castro's letter to Khrushchev outlining his position. Students should determine if the United States would have acted differently if it knew and understood Castro's position at the time.

### OBJECTIVES

- Analyze and interpret the most important documents of the missile crisis.
- Gain insight into the policy choices facing U.S. and Soviet leaders.
- Consider McNamara's interpretation of the crisis.

### HANDOUTS

- "The Khrushchev Letters—How to Respond" (p 11)
- Khrushchev's letters to Kennedy (10/26/62 and 10/27/62)
- Kennedy's letter to Khrushchev (10/27/62)
- Castro's letter to Khrushchev (10/26/62)

These letters are on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar). The most significant paragraphs are highlighted for educational purposes.

### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Ask students to compare the styles of the two Khrushchev letters. Note that the first letter has a personal, emotional tone. While the second letter states the case directly and succinctly. What are the primary differences in the substance of the two letters? Call on students to explain the significance of the highlighted paragraphs. Form small groups and ask students to discuss how they would advise President Kennedy to respond. Have groups share their responses with the class.
2. Instruct students to read Kennedy's response of 10/27. In small groups, discuss the questions posed on the worksheet. Ask students to assume Khrushchev's perspective in considering Kennedy's response. Should Khrushchev have accepted Kennedy's offer? What were the primary concerns affecting his decision?
3. Ask students to consider some or all of the bulleted questions posed on the second half of the handout. Invite groups to share their responses.

### ACTIVITY 3: "BELIEF AND SEEING ARE BOTH OFTEN WRONG." THE TONKIN GULF

#### OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the significance of the Tonkin Gulf incident on U.S. policy.
- Weigh the options available to U.S. leaders at the time of the Tonkin Gulf incident.

#### HANDOUTS

- "Tonkin Gulf—Case Study" (pp 12-13)

#### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Distribute copies of "Tonkin Gulf—Case Study." Instruct students to read the handout.
2. Call on students to share with the class their responses to the "Questions for Class Discussion" in the handout.
3. Ask students:
  - Why did the Tonkin Gulf incident represent a turning point for U.S. policy in Vietnam?
  - How did the U.S. position in Vietnam in the summer of 1964 fit into the overall strategy of U.S. foreign policy?
  - Why did the Tonkin Gulf Resolution encounter virtually no opposition in Congress?
  - What lesson does Robert McNamara draw from the events of the Tonkin Gulf?
  - What lessons do you draw from this chapter of our history?



*President Johnson authorized bombing in response to what he thought had been the second attack... We were wrong, but we had in our minds a mindset that led to that action. And it carried such heavy costs. We see incorrectly or we see only half of the story at times.*  
—*The Fog of War*

#### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Explore the larger context of the Tonkin Gulf incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. See *The Tonkin Gulf—Case Study* on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).

### ACTIVITY 4: "PROPORTIONALITY SHOULD BE A GUIDELINE IN WAR."

#### OBJECTIVES

- Delineate the values surrounding international efforts to regulate war.
- Analyze the role of bombing in modern warfare.
- Evaluate the role of ethics and proportionality in warfare.

#### HANDOUTS

- "Values in a Time of War" (p 14)

#### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Form groups of three to four students and distribute copies of "Values in a Time of War" to each student. Instruct the groups to work collaboratively to develop their responses to the questions and the twelve scenarios presented in the worksheet.
2. Call on students to share their responses. Encourage debate among groups with conflicting viewpoints. Ask the groups to discuss how their decisions would be affected by the actions of the enemy. For example, would an enemy attack on a high school prompt a retaliatory strike? How would the duration of the war affect decision-making? Would students be less likely to justify the bombing of civilian targets in the first months of a war? Would the prospect of extensive "collateral damage" (unintended civilian casualties) lead to a change in policy? Are there any circumstances in which the U.S. would be justified in using nuclear weapons?
3. Ask students to consider some or all of the following questions:
  - Was the destruction of the Japanese cities described in the film indiscriminate killing? Could the end (victory over Japan) have been achieved with fewer Japanese deaths? What role does intent play in this? Does it matter if the civilian deaths are accidental?
  - McNamara quotes LeMay as saying he would have been accused of war crimes if the United States had not won the war. Are LeMay's actions more moral because he was on the winning side?
  - Today the U.S. describes some of its arsenal as "smart weapons"—weapons that are intended to hit very precise targets. How does the use of "smart weapons" affect the issue of proportionality?



*LeMay said, "If we'd lost the war, we'd all have been prosecuted as war criminals." And I think he's right. He, and I'd say I, were behaving as war criminals... But what makes it immoral if you lose and not immoral if you win?*  
—*The Fog of War*

#### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Choose an historical or recent example of bombing and write a page on the reason for the bombing. Write a second page imagining that you are at the bombing location. You hate it; but what will your response be?



## ACTIVITY 5: JUST WAR AND PROPORTIONALITY



*Should you kill 100,000 people in one night, by firebombing or any other way? LeMay's answer would be clearly "Yes."  
—The Fog of War*

### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Are the “rules of war” enforceable? What happens to leaders who violate them? Investigate an example of a violation and write about what happened to the leaders. Does it matter what country the leaders are from?

### OBJECTIVES

- Explore a framework for analyzing political violence and war.
- Apply this framework with their classmates to *The Fog of War*.

### HANDOUTS

- “Just War and Proportionality” (p 15)

### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Have students read the handout. Ask them to identify the standards the international community has established for when and how force may be used. Have them list several examples of political violence, citing either examples from wars or terrorist acts. Explore these examples in terms of the decisions to use violence and how violence was employed. Are there examples of unjustifiable decisions to use force? Are there examples when the decision to use force was justifiable, but the kind of force used was not? Finally, ask them if 9/11 has changed the way they view justifiable force. Do they think it has influenced the views of others? Should it influence our views?
2. Ask the students to consider McNamara’s questions to them (See handout). Do students believe the context of killing matters? How do they think McNamara would answer his own questions?

## ACTIVITY 6: “ORAL HISTORY AND THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE”

### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

- Ask students to use their interviews as the basis of a written report. Suggest that they develop a magazine-style profile of the interviewee focusing on how the Vietnam War influenced the direction of his or her life.
- Ask students to consider similarities and differences between the Vietnam War and the war with Iraq.

### OBJECTIVES

- Explore a personal perspective of the Vietnam War by interviewing a person who experienced it.
- Compare the perspective of an average American with that of Robert McNamara.
- Gain familiarity with the techniques of oral history.

### HANDOUTS

- “Oral History and the Vietnam Experience” (to be completed before the lesson) (p 16)

### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Call on students to summarize their interviews. What common attitudes and experiences do the interview subjects share? Ask students to compare the experiences of veterans with those of non-veterans. How do attitudes toward the war differ between the two groups? What specifically did your interviewee say about Robert McNamara?
2. Ask students how their own attitudes toward the Vietnam War changed as a result of their interviews. How did talking with veterans affect their views of military service in Vietnam? How did talking with non-veterans affect their views? Ask students how they think they might have responded to a draft notice during the Vietnam War.



## ACTIVITY 7: FILM AS MEDIA

### OBJECTIVES

- Investigate the role the film's structure and form play in its meaning.
- Consider the choices the director made.
- Discuss the film's genre—history or memoir?

### HANDOUTS

- "Film as Media" (p 17-18)

### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. In the large group, ask students to recall some of the striking moments of the film. What made those moments striking? Encourage students to consider elements such as camera technique, music, use of audio tapes and archival footage. Develop a list on the board of the types of things students noticed.
2. Distribute the handout and lead a large-group discussion around each of the five topics provided. Alternatively, you may wish to break your class into five smaller groups and assign each one of the five topics to discuss as a group. Then have each group lead a discussion on their topic with the rest of the class.
3. Ask students to find two or three reviews of *The Fog of War*, evaluate the places where they appeared, and compare their own perspective on the movie with those of the critics.



*Now I remember exactly the sentence  
I left off on. I remember how it started,  
and I was cut off in the middle.  
But you can fix it up some way.  
—The Fog of War*

**EXTRA CHALLENGE** –  
The "Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert McNamara" are not those that McNamara has identified himself. Have students compare McNamara's lessons with those derived by Errol Morris. McNamara's lessons are available on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).

## ACTIVITY 8: WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE WANT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

### OBJECTIVES

- Students are challenged to come to terms with their own views on America's future role in the world.

### HANDOUTS

- "What kind of world do we want for the 21st Century?" (pp 19-21)

### IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Have students read "What kind of world do we want for the 21st Century?" and fill out "What do you think?"
2. Students should craft their own responses to one or more of the questions or statements McNamara presents in the film to challenge us to think about the 21st century. Examples:
  - *Should you kill 100,000 people in one night, by firebombing or any other way?*
  - *What makes it immoral if you lose and not immoral if you win?*
  - *Is it right and proper that today there are 7,500 strategic offensive nuclear warheads, of which 2,500 are on 15 minute alert, to be launched by the decision of one human being?*
  - *I think the human race needs to think more about killing, about conflict. Is that what we want in this 21st Century?*



*I think the human race needs to think more  
about killing, about conflict.  
Is that what we want in this  
21st Century?  
—The Fog of War*

### GIVING VOICE TO STUDENT VIEWS

Have students go online [www.choices.edu/USroleBallot](http://www.choices.edu/USroleBallot) and record their views on America's role in the world. They will be joining others across the country in expressing their views. A report on student views will be developed and shared with elected officials.

What kind of a world are we creating as we enter into the new century? What kind of world do you want? And what are you willing to work for? Have students frame their response as a letter to Robert McNamara.

## ACTIVITY 1: "EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR ENEMY."



*In Thompson's mind was this thought: Khrushchev's gotten himself in a hell of a fix. He would then think to himself, "My God, if I can get out of this with a deal that I can say to the Russian people: Kennedy was going to destroy Castro and I prevented it." Thompson, knowing Khrushchev as he did, thought Khrushchev will accept that. And Thompson was right.*  
—*The Fog of War*

*In the Cuban missile crisis, at the end, I think we did put ourselves in the skin of the Soviets. In the case of Vietnam, we didn't know them well enough to empathize. And there was total misunderstanding as a result. They believed that we had simply replaced the French as a colonial power, and we were seeking to subject South and North Vietnam to our colonial interests, which was absolutely absurd. And we, we saw Vietnam as an element of the Cold War. Not what they saw it as: a civil war.*  
—*The Fog of War*

### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Is there a down side to empathy?  
What might that be?

## EMPATHY AND FOREIGN POLICY

1. In *The Fog of War*, McNamara says that empathy was present in the Cuban missile crisis but absent in Vietnam. What examples of empathy, or lack of empathy, does McNamara mention for each case? What does McNamara believe the consequences are in each case?

### Cuba

Example of Empathy:

Consequences:

### Vietnam

Example of Empathy:

Consequences:

2. McNamara does not discuss empathy in terms of the Second World War. Why do you think this is so? Write a short paragraph where you develop an empathic view of the United States' adversaries, in this case Germany or Japan. What are they fighting for? How did they perceive the United States and its allies?
3. Choose a current conflict in which the U.S. is involved—directly or indirectly. Examples might include Al Qaeda and the United States, Israel and the Palestinians, or various factions within Iraq. What would empathy look like in this situation? What would the situation look like without the benefit of empathy? Write a short empathic view of one or more of the other parties involved. Does an empathic viewpoint lead to certain policy recommendations?

**Conflict** \_\_\_\_\_

Empathic Viewpoint:

Policy Recommendations:



**McNamara's talking to you. *What do you think?***

*We must try to put ourselves inside their skin and look at us through their eyes, just to understand the thoughts that lie behind their decisions and their actions.*

## ACTIVITY 2: "RATIONALITY WILL NOT SAVE US."

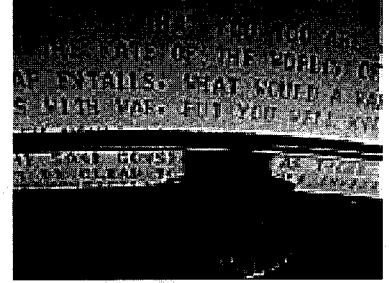
### THE KHRUSHCHEV LETTERS—HOW TO RESPOND

1. What were the relative strengths and weaknesses of the United States and the Soviet Union at the time?
2. After reading Chairman Khrushchev's October 26 and October 27 letters to President Kennedy, compare the styles and the substance of the two letters. Which are the most meaningful paragraphs of the letters? Why do you think Khrushchev sent two letters? How would you advise Kennedy to respond?
3. Read Kennedy's response of October 27. What factors led Kennedy to address only the October 26 letter while ignoring the October 27 letter? What was the difficulty for Kennedy in considering Khrushchev's proposal in the October 27 letter to trade the removal of missiles from Cuba for the removal of missiles from Turkey? Why did Kennedy and his advisers conclude that the first letter represented Khrushchev's personal sentiments while the second letter reflected a consensus of top Soviet leaders? [NOTE: Most ExComm members did not believe Khrushchev would accept Kennedy's proposal. Additionally, some ExComm members saw the second letter as evidence of a power struggle within the Kremlin.]
4. Assume Khrushchev's perspective in considering Kennedy's response. Should Khrushchev have accepted Kennedy's offer? What were the primary concerns affecting his decision?

### MCNAMARA'S ACCOUNT OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

In *The Fog of War*, McNamara suggests that the leaders in the United States disagreed on how to respond to the two letters. He commends Ambassador Llewellyn (Tommy) Thompson for standing up to President Kennedy when he urged the President to respond to Khrushchev's first message. He also recalls that, thirty years later, he learned for the first time that tactical nuclear warheads were on Cuba at the time of the crisis.

- What do you now know about how leaders in the Kennedy administration made decisions? Does the process seem reasonable, rational to you?
- If Kennedy and the ExComm had known that the warheads were already in Cuba, do you think they would have acted differently?
- Why was McNamara surprised to learn that the missiles were already on the island? Why had the ExComm not considered the possibility of tactical nuclear weapons as part of the Soviet deployment in 1962? Why was this significant?
- McNamara says, "It was luck that prevented nuclear war." Why luck? Many have said that the U.S. "won" this conflict with the Soviet Union, causing the USSR to "back down." Why does McNamara see the situation differently?
- Compare McNamara's comments on the Kennedy tapes to his comments about the crisis today. Has he changed his position about how the U.S. should have responded in the situation? Why or why not?



*On that critical Saturday, October 27th, we had two Khrushchev messages in front of us. One had come in Friday night, and it had been dictated by a man who was either drunk or under tremendous stress. Basically, he said, "If you'll guarantee you won't invade Cuba, we'll take the missiles out." Then before we could respond, we had a second message that had been dictated by a bunch of hard-liners. And it said, in effect, "If you attack, we're prepared to confront you with masses of military power." So, what to do?*  
—The Fog of War

*It wasn't until January, 1992, in a meeting chaired by Castro in Havana, Cuba, that I learned 162 nuclear warheads, including 90 tactical warheads, were on the island at the time of this critical moment of the crisis. I couldn't believe what I was hearing...*  
—The Fog of War

**EXTRA CHALLENGE –**  
Read Castro's letter to Khrushchev outlining his position. Would the United States have acted differently if it had known and understood Castro's position at the time? Recall McNamara's response upon learning, in 1992, that Castro would have been willing to "pull the temple down on his head."



### McNamara's talking to you. *What do you think?*

*At the end we lucked out. It was luck that prevented nuclear war... Rational individuals came that close to total destruction of their societies. And that danger exists today. The major lesson of the Cuban missile crisis is this: the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons will destroy nations.*

- How dangerous do you think the Cuban missile crisis was? Why?
- How do you think McNamara's experience in the Cuban missile crisis contributed to his views on nuclear weapons?

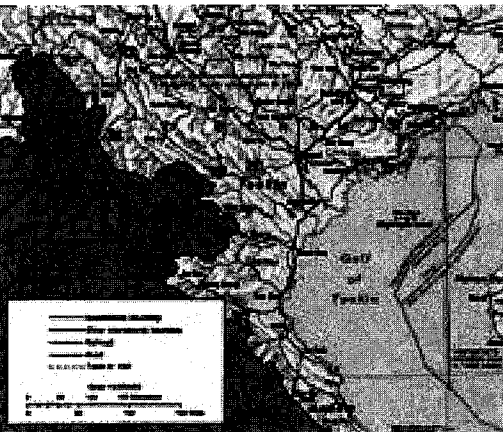
### ACTIVITY 3: "BELIEF AND SEEING ARE BOTH OFTEN WRONG."



*There were sonar soundings, torpedoes had been detected – other indications of attack from patrol boats. We spent about ten hours that day trying to find out what in the hell had happened. At one point, the commander of the ship said, "We're not certain of the attack." At another point they said, "Yes, we're absolutely positive." And then finally late in the day, Admiral Sharp said, "Yes, we're certain it happened."  
—The Fog of War*



*Now America wins the wars that she undertakes. Make no mistake about it. And we have declared war on tyranny and aggression.  
—President Johnson, June 10, 1965*



## TONKIN GULF—CASE STUDY

### THE REQUEST

On the evening of August 4, the day of the controversial second "attack" on U.S. naval vessels in the Tonkin Gulf, President Johnson went on national television to announce that he had ordered reprisal bombing of North Vietnamese naval facilities and to declare that "repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with positive reply." The next day the following resolution was sent to Congress for action:

"Whereas the naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace;

"Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom;

"Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way. Now therefore, be it

"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled that the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

"Sec. 2 The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of the international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state [South Vietnam] of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

"Sec. 3 This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress."

#### Question for Class Discussion:

- Sometime later, Johnson remarked to aides that this resolution was "like grandma's nightshirt — it covered everything." What did he mean by this?



## THE ACTION

After two days of debate, both Houses of Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, with only Senators Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening dissenting. This congressional action would be cited by the administration as the necessary and sufficient legal authority for its actions in Vietnam during the next several years. Subsequent annual requests for funds to continue the war were regularly approved by Congress. Even congressmen who opposed the war were reluctant to deny the funds and resources necessary to support the U.S. effort. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was repealed by the Senate in June 1970. U.S. involvement in the war continued until January 1973, although no formal declaration of war was ever requested.

### Question for Class Discussion:

- If the administration had foreseen how long and costly the war would be, do you think that it would have chosen the same means to obtain congressional support and legal authority?

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

One reason to study history is to make connections, discover recurring patterns, and consider the relevance for our world today. Consider the following issues and events.

- The incident that sparked the declaration of war against Mexico in 1846 and Congressman Lincoln's "spot resolutions"
- The sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana harbor in 1898 and the subsequent war with Spain
- The attack on the destroyer Greer by a German submarine in September 1941 when the United States was still a neutral nation
- The current controversy surrounding weapons of mass destruction and the U.S.-led war against Iraq
- Current issues concerning weapons of mass destruction in Iran and/or North Korea

### Question for Class Discussion:

- What comparisons can you make with the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution?

*Ultimately, President Johnson authorized bombing in response to what he thought had been the second attack.... And it carried such heavy costs. We see incorrectly or we see only half of the story at times.... Belief and seeing, they're both often wrong.  
—The Fog of War*

**EXTRA CHALLENGE –**  
Explore the larger context of the Tonkin Gulf incident and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. See The Tonkin Gulf—Case Study on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).



## McNamara's talking to you. *What do you think?*

*He [President Johnson] authorized the attack on the assumption it had occurred, and his belief that it was a conscious decision on the part of the North Vietnamese political and military leaders to escalate the conflict and an indication they would not stop short of winning. We were wrong, but we had in our minds a mindset that led to that action.*

- What made Johnson think this was a signal of escalation from the North Vietnamese government?
- Was this a logical or necessary conclusion?

## ACTIVITY 4: "PROPORTIONALITY SHOULD BE A GUIDELINE IN WAR."

### VALUES IN A TIME OF WAR

"War is hell!" That was the declaration of General William Tecumseh Sherman in early 1865 as he surveyed the devastation brought by his 60,000 Union troops to the people of Georgia during the closing months of the Civil War.

War raises agonizing moral questions. When a democratic society goes to war, the decisions made and actions taken are not just the responsibility of those in authority, but are the collective responsibility of the people. Once war has begun, few Americans would question that bringing the conflict to a speedy conclusion is a justifiable goal, or end. The moral difficulty comes in deciding which military actions, or means, should be employed to attain a worthy end. McNamara talks about this issue during *The Fog of War*.

- Do morals have a place in war?
- What do you think McNamara means by "proportionality?"
- Does proportionality matter more or less depending on whether you win or lose a war?

Below is a list of potential bombing targets for your air force. Your assignment is to consider each of the targets in terms of its military significance and moral implications. Your task is to decide whether the means of aerial bombardment are justified by the ends, or goals. Rate each potential target on a scale of 1 (completely unjustified) to 10 (completely justified). Explain your group's reasoning for each rating.

POTENTIAL TARGET	RATING	POTENTIAL TARGET	RATING
1. Enemy troops in the field <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____	7. Military hospitals <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____
2. Military training camps <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____	8. Residential neighborhoods of major cities. <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____
3. Factories (in cities) producing military supplies <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____	9. Trains and ships carrying troops <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____
4. Homes of civilians working in military factories <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____	10. Trains and ships carrying both civilians and troops. <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____
5. Food supplies for the military <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____	11. High schools <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____
6. Food supplies for civilians <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____	12. Universities involved in military-related research. <i>Reason for rating.</i>	_____



#### McNamara's talking to you. *What do you think?*

*LeMay said, "If we'd lost the war, we'd all have been prosecuted as war criminals." And I think he's right. He, and I'd say I, were behaving as war criminals. LeMay recognized that what he was doing would be thought immoral if his side had lost. But what makes it immoral if you lose and not immoral if you win?*

## ACTIVITY 5:

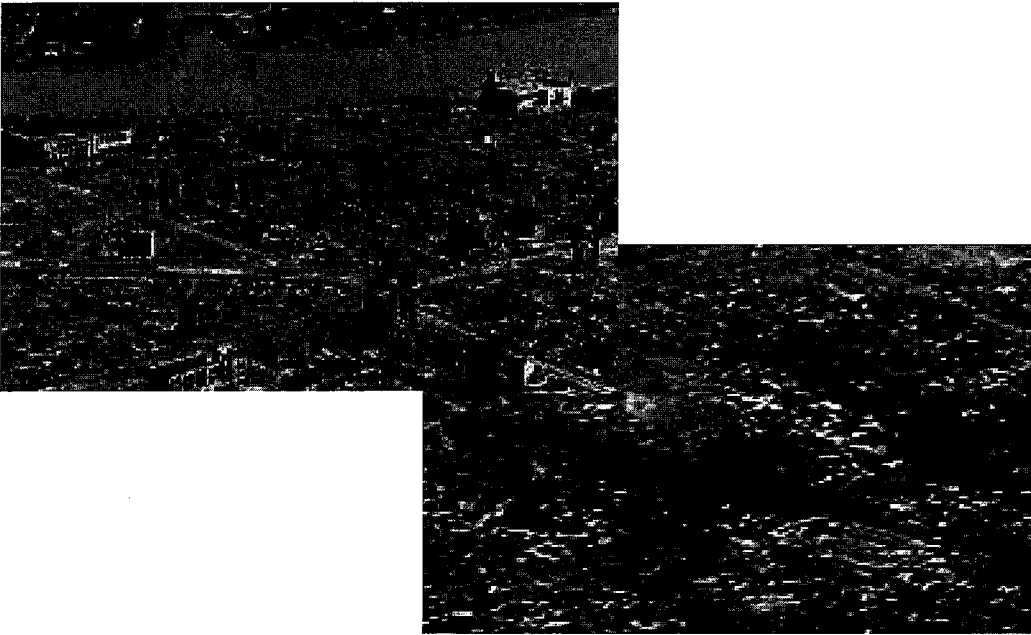
# JUST WAR AND PROPORTIONALITY

Throughout history, the world has known political violence and war. For centuries political and religious thinkers from many traditions have wrestled with two key questions. When is the use of force acceptable? What principles govern how force may be used? These two questions are central to something known as “just war” theory.

Today, just war theory underlies much of accepted international law concerning the use of force by states. International law is explicit about when states may use force. For example, states may use force in self-defense against an armed attack. International law also addresses how force may be used. For example, force may not be used against non-combatants. Despite these laws and norms, there are those who oppose the use of violence under any circumstances.

Over the years, the international community has been working to better define the rules of war. The Geneva Conventions established in the aftermath of World War II introduced new internationally accepted regulations on the conduct of war between states. These rules protect non-combatants, govern the treatment of prisoners of war, prohibit hostage-taking, and respect diplomatic immunity.

In addition, the concept of proportionality—long a part of just war theory—has gained new importance as the weapons of war have become increasingly destructive. Proportionality argues that it is wrong to use more force than is necessary to achieve success.



**EXTRA CHALLENGE –**  
Are the “rules of war” enforceable? What happens to leaders who violate them? Investigate an example of a violation and write about what happened to the leaders. Does it matter what country the leaders are from?



### McNamara’s talking to you. *What do you think?*

In the film, *The Fog of War*, Robert McNamara asks the viewer several questions.

- *How much evil must we do in order to do good? We have certain ideals, certain responsibilities. Recognize that at times you will have to engage in evil, but minimize it.*
- *I think the issue is, in order to win a war should you kill 100,000 people in one night, by firebombing or any other way? LeMay’s answer would be clearly “Yes.”*
- *McNamara, do you mean to say that instead of killing 100,000, burning to death 100,000 Japanese civilians in that one night, we should have burned to death a lesser number or none? And then had our soldiers cross the beaches in Tokyo and been slaughtered in the tens of thousands? Is that what you’re proposing? Is that moral? Is that wise?*

What do you think? Do you believe that the context of killing matters? For example, might it be moral to burn to death 100,000 Japanese during the Second World War, but not in another specific case? What does McNamara mean by “evil?” What do you think he means by “good?” What are the responsibilities that McNamara refers to? How do you think McNamara would answer his own questions?



## ACTIVITY 6:

# ORAL HISTORY AND THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE



Robert McNamara was the Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War. He participated at the highest levels, in the decision-making that led to the eventual deployment of over five hundred thousand ground troops. As U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated, he became the subject of increasing controversy.

The Vietnam War years were a period of intense controversy and turmoil in the United States. More than 2.5 million Americans served in Vietnam from 1961 to 1972. Of those who did not serve, some worked to support the war from here at home; others were involved in protesting the war and working to change U.S. policy. Together their experiences and recollections are as much a part of the history of the Vietnam War as the fighting in Vietnam.



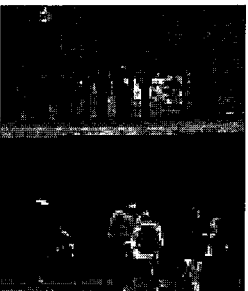
**Instructions:** To appreciate the human side of the war, you will be asked to talk with people who lived through this controversial period. The Vietnam War is still a very painful memory for many Americans. Sensitivity and respect on your part are essential during the interview process. Do not interrupt as people tell their stories. Using a tape recorder may help you avoid distractions during the interview. Not all of the questions below are applicable to both those who served and those who did not. Several of the questions are intended to compare your interviewee's perspective and memories with those of Robert McNamara. Be prepared to discuss the results of your interview in class.



Whom did you interview? \_\_\_\_\_



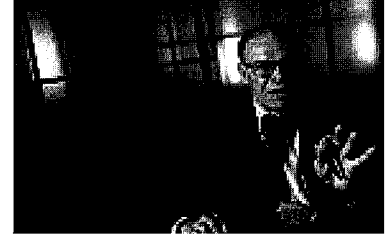
1. What were you doing during the period of the Vietnam War? If you were in the U.S. military, were you drafted or did you enlist? When did you serve? If you were not in the military, where were you and what did you think about military service?
2. At the time, what did you think about the United States' involvement in Vietnam? Why did you think the U.S. was at war?
3. How did you feel about the draft? Were you or was anyone close to you drafted?
4. If you were serving in the military, what did you understand your purpose to be? How do you now view your service in Vietnam and the reasons for which you were sent?
5. Did your view of the war and U.S. policy change as the war unfolded? Did any personal experiences during the war years significantly shape your views? Have your views changed since the war ended?
6. During the war years, did you believe that President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara correctly analyzed the situation in Southeast Asia and pursued the appropriate course in escalating war efforts? What do you think now?
7. What do you think of the following issues raised by McNamara in the film:
  - a. Norman Morrison, a Quaker, killed himself on the Pentagon grounds in protest of the Vietnam War. After his death his wife stated, "Human beings must stop killing other human beings." In the film McNamara claims, "That's a belief that I shared. I shared it then and believe it even more strongly today."
  - b. In the film McNamara states, "How much evil must we do in order to do good? We have certain ideals, certain responsibilities. Recognize that at times you will have to engage in evil, but minimize it."
8. What other memories from this period could you share?
9. What lessons for Americans today do you see in the Vietnam War experience?



## ACTIVITY 7:

### FILM AS MEDIA

The way a film tells its story can have as much bearing on how we understand the film as the words spoken and the action on the screen. This critically acclaimed movie by the renowned filmmaker Errol Morris examines issues of war and peace in the 20th century through the lens of one of the century's pivotal figures. In *The Fog of War*, Robert McNamara offers his account of the century just passed, as he remembers participating in it, as well as his reflections on its meaning for the 21st century. He delivers his reflections with the conviction and intensity that marked his years as Secretary of Defense for presidents Kennedy and Johnson.



### THE INTERVIEW

*The Fog of War* is a conversation with Robert McNamara drawn from more than twenty hours of interviews conducted by Errol Morris. Traditional interview technique would have Errol Morris and Robert McNamara talking together with a camera recording the conversation. Errol Morris has done hundreds of on-camera interviews over the years. Over time he became frustrated with the impersonality of the approach. To capture one-on-one conversation without the distance created by the third person (the camera) he invented the Interrotron. This device allows Morris to remain in a separate space while his image is projected onto the camera, talking directly with his subject. He is not competing with the camera for eye contact with his subject. In this way the subject is looking directly into the camera. It's almost as if you the viewer are asking the questions.



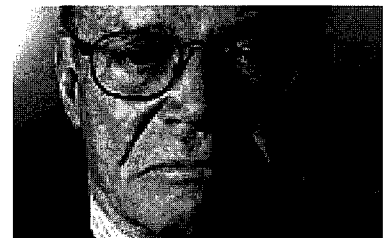
- Some contend that technology works at cross purposes with intimacy. Errol Morris developed the Interrotron not to dilute the intimacy of conversation but to intensify it. What do you think? What effect does the Interrotron have on Morris' interview with McNamara and on your experience of it?
- The movie's epilogue shows McNamara driving in Washington rather than in dialogue with us. The voice is from a phone interview. What do you think is the significance of this?



### IMAGES

Film is not only about people and events. It is also about images and how they are used. Teletype clicking across the screen, numbers falling from the skies over Japan, declassified documents, and dominoes tumbling across a map. These are just a few of the images used in *The Fog of War*. What is the significance of these images? Can you think of others?

- How does the filmmaker use the images of numbers fluttering down onto an aerial photograph of Tokyo? Were there other similar images used in the film? What was the message conveyed?
- When Morris shows dominoes cascading across the map of Southeast Asia and later erecting themselves again as he runs the film in reverse, what is his message? How does this image relate to the "Domino Theory" that was widely accepted as a reason for continuing the war in Vietnam?
- Social scientists sometimes talk about counterfactuals—"what ifs?"—and there are varying opinions about the value of these. To what extent does this kind of thinking appear in *The Fog of War*? How does Morris communicate this?





### EXTRA CHALLENGE –

Morris organizes his film around a series of eleven distinct “lessons” that he believes should be derived from the life of Robert McNamara. These are not McNamara’s lessons. Compare McNamara’s lessons with those identified by Errol Morris. McNamara’s lessons are available on the web at [www.choices.edu/fogofwar](http://www.choices.edu/fogofwar).

## INTERPRETING EVENTS

Filmmaker Errol Morris has said of *The Fog of War* that “it’s history from the inside out rather than from the outside in.” Robert McNamara is the only interviewee in the film—the only person who tells his story. Morris supplements this one-on-one conversation with archival footage, recently released tape recordings of conversations with McNamara made by presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and an original score by the composer Philip Glass.

- What do you think Morris means by “history from the inside out?” Why doesn’t Morris interview anyone else in this film? Does the absence of any other interviewee affect the accuracy of the film as history? Why or why not? Does this matter?
- What does McNamara want us to believe? Is he explaining history as he remembers it or telling us what he wants us to think? Can he tell the difference? Can you?
- What about the role of archival footage and tape recordings? Do these help you to sort facts, memory, and meaning or can they mislead you? How?
- Our understanding of history can be as much about what is left out as what is included. Errol Morris has drawn the content of his interview with Robert McNamara from more than twenty hours of tape. What do you think might have been left on the cutting room floor? And what might never have been said? We can identify omissions but we can only speculate as to who made the choices and why. What do you think?
- Morris has referred to this film a 20th century fable. What is a fable? Do you agree with him?

## WHY MAKE THIS FILM

In *The Fog of War*, the filmmaker moves back and forth between time periods. We talk with McNamara today, a man in his eighties reflecting on his life, on the lessons he’s learned, and on the contributions he can still make to our future as we shape the 21st century. And we witness an earlier McNamara—the small boy on Armistice Day, a college student fascinated by philosophy, a young military man in the Pacific theater in World War II, a successful young leader in the business world, and Secretary of Defense to two presidents.

In the epilogue (not presented as an on-screen interview), McNamara says, “I’m not going to say any more than I have.... You don’t know what I know about how inflammatory my words can appear....” “Is it the feeling that you’re damned if you do, and if you don’t, no matter what,” asks Morris. “Yeah, that’s right,” he responds. “And I’d rather be damned if I don’t.”

- What do you think it was about Robert McNamara that captured Errol Morris’ attention? Why do you think Robert McNamara agreed to participate in this project? Why would he be willing to participate in one-on-one interviews for more than twenty hours and then leave the presentation of his life and message to the filmmaker?
- In the film we hear the older McNamara react to the life of the younger. How do you think the younger would respond to the thoughts of the older?

## THE TITLE

Errol Morris considered several titles for his film before deciding on *The Fog of War*. First he considered *The Fog of War*, then *The Logic of War*, and *Only the Beginning*, and McNamara’s *Century*, and *Wilson’s Ghost* before returning again to *The Fog of War*. What do you think Errol Morris had in mind with each possible title? Which one would you pick – one of the others or something else? Why?



## ACTIVITY 8:

# WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE WANT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

In *The Fog of War*, Robert McNamara focuses on war and peace: "...the human race," he says, "needs to think more about killing, about conflict. Is that what we want in this 21st Century?"

Robert McNamara's life has spanned many of the most significant historical events of the 20th century; he has played a major role in some of the most controversial and important moments in the history of the United States. Since his retirement from public life, he has devoted much of his energy to reexamining the past – his past. McNamara has met with former adversaries and written extensively about his interpretation of history and his hopes for the future.

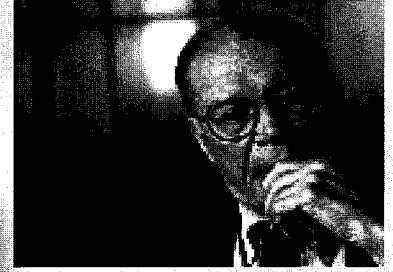
President Woodrow Wilson was one of the first leaders of the 20th century to sense that without political change, the human race might destroy itself in catastrophic wars of ever-greater destructiveness. The key requirements to avoid such a catastrophe, he believed, were to make a *moral priority* of reducing killing, and to take a *multilateral approach* to issues of international security. The world was not ready to implement Wilson's objectives. Wilson died before global conflict flared again, but in a sense "Wilson's ghost" has haunted the rest of the 20th century: in the Second World War, in the Cold War, and in the numerous conflicts that exist today. Robert McNamara and James Blight, in their book, *Wilson's Ghost*, endorse and update Wilson's moral and multilateral priorities. Moreover, in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, they add *empathy* to Wilson's priorities. They urge that greater effort be made by all sides to grasp reality as experienced by others before misperception leads to greater violence and conflict.

So the failure of empathy in the West and among its opponents has been a core reason that the 20th century was the bloodiest in all of human history and—to use Wilson's own image—a heartbreaking century. Yet in spite of the deaths of some 160 million human beings by violent conflict, in spite of all that unending heartbreak, the world was not destroyed. But that was then, and this is now. We have known for at least fifty years that we, the human race, possess the physical ability to destroy ourselves and the world as we know it in a nuclear war. We have known for more than forty years, since the Cuban missile crisis, that a lack of empathy between nations can lead us to the brink of a nuclear war and, but for luck, even over the brink into total catastrophe. Now, after 9/11, we can be absolutely certain that people we do not understand, but who feel intense hatred toward us, wish to destroy us and have proved they are well-organized, resourceful, and ruthless—such people are seeking the most efficient available means of carrying out our destruction, that is, with nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight  
*Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the  
Risk of Conflict, Killing,  
and Catastrophe in the 21st Century*



In *The Fog of War*, Robert McNamara addresses his question to all of us regardless of where we are from and where we live. What do you think? What are the challenges before us? What are the hopes? What are the dangers? What kind of world will we create? What kind of world do you want? And what are you willing to work for?



*We are the strongest nation in the world today. I do not believe that we should ever apply that economic, political, and military power unilaterally. If we had followed that rule in Vietnam, we wouldn't have been there. None of our allies supported us. Not Japan, not Germany, not Britain or France. If we can't persuade nations with comparable values of the merit of our cause, we'd better reexamine our reasoning.*  
—*The Fog of War*

*Is it right and proper that today there are 7,500 strategic offensive nuclear warheads, of which 2,500 are on 15 minute alert, to be launched by the decision of one human being?*  
—*The Fog of War*



**McNamara's talking to you. *What do you think?***

*I think the human race needs to think more about killing, about conflict. Is that what we want in this 21st Century?*

## MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD –

You can enter your responses to this questionnaire online at [www.choices.edu/USroleBallot](http://www.choices.edu/USroleBallot). Add your voice to those of others. The results of this online ballot will be tabulated and shared with elected officials nationwide following the 2004 national elections.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Think about Robert McNamara's challenge to us from your perspective, living in the United States at the dawn of the new century. What do you consider the most important international challenges facing the United States over the next ten years and beyond? What do you think we should do about these? What do you think about McNamara's concerns? Do you share them? Do you have different concerns? And what do you think we should do about them?

Use this worksheet to help clarify what concerns you and what is important to you. Then write a letter addressed to Robert McNamara. Think of this as a letter responding to one or more of the questions or challenges he presents in *The Fog of War*.

### PART I: WHAT MOST CONCERNS YOU? PLEASE CHECK ONLY THREE.

- 1. A clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world.
- 2. The gulf between the developed and developing worlds will widen, making it increasingly difficult to address common problems.
- 3. Increasing immigration will worsen strains in our society.
- 4. U.S. jobs will be lost to other countries.
- 5. Loose border controls will threaten our security.
- 6. The United States will act unilaterally and the international community will turn against us.
- 7. Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate and end up in the hands of terrorists.
- 8. The United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems.
- 9. The United States will lose access to oil and other key resources abroad.
- 10. U.S. troops will get bogged down in conflicts abroad.
- 11. Damage to the global environment will become irreparable.
- 12. More Americans will die at the hands of terrorists.
- 13. Participation in international organizations will force the U.S. to follow costly or risky policies.

### PART II: WHAT BELIEFS DRIVE YOUR THINKING? RATE EACH OF THE STATEMENTS BELOW ACCORDING TO YOUR PERSONAL BELIEFS.

1 = Strongly Support; 2 = Support; 3 = Oppose; 4 = Strongly Oppose; 5 = Undecided

- In today's interconnected world, many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation.
- We will always have to compete with the world's other nations for power.
- Any nation acting alone has neither the moral authority nor the capacity to right the world's wrongs.

- \_\_\_ The United States should not do business with countries that grossly abuse the human rights of their citizens.
- \_\_\_ Our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home.
- \_\_\_ We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way.
- \_\_\_ The greatest threat to our civil liberties comes from the limits we put on ourselves because of our fear of others.
- \_\_\_ Using our economic and military power around the world creates more enemies than friends.
- \_\_\_ Trying to make deep changes in the way the world works is naive and dangerous.
- \_\_\_ As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world.
- \_\_\_ Free trade and open economies are the best way to foster economic growth at home and around the world.

**PART III: WHAT SHOULD WE DO? RATE EACH OF THE STATEMENTS BELOW ACCORDING TO YOUR BELIEFS.**

1 = Strongly Support; 2 = Support; 3 = Oppose; 4 = Strongly Oppose; 5 = Undecided

- \_\_\_ The United States should spend what is necessary to remain a military superpower, even if this means having less domestic spending, larger deficits, or higher taxes than we would like.
- \_\_\_ The United States should support broadening the mandate of the UN and other international organizations, even if this means we are bound by the decisions of this community of nations and cannot act unilaterally except to defend our homeland.
- \_\_\_ The United States should use military force to protect access to oil and other important raw materials, even if this places us in opposition to our traditional allies and the broader international community.
- \_\_\_ The United States should commit itself to the elimination of nuclear weapons, even if this means that we will need to rethink our defense strategy.
- \_\_\_ The United States should impose trade sanctions on countries that threaten their neighbors with aggression or contribute to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, even if such sanctions harm U.S. trade relations.
- \_\_\_ The United States should increase financial aid to countries where poverty and despair are creating the breeding grounds of discontent, even if money needs to be diverted from domestic programs.
- \_\_\_ The United States should help negotiate strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats, even if compliance forces us to pay more for cars, gasoline, and other products that contribute to pollution.
- \_\_\_ The United States should accept fewer immigrants, in addition to cracking down on illegal immigration, even if this deprives the American work force of the talent and ambitions of newcomers and fuels anti-American sentiments abroad.
- \_\_\_ The United States should use its military-alone if necessary-to stop gross human rights violations, even if this may isolate us from our traditional allies or the broader international community.

## BEHIND THE SCENES—CRITICAL ORAL HISTORY

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard pointed out long ago that we live life forward, groping in the dark, unaware of its ultimate outcome, yet we're forced to understand events in reverse, working our way retrospectively backward to their supposed causes. This creates a profound disconnect between lived experience and our understanding of that experience. Caught in the moment, decision-makers often feel confused, unsure, and sometimes even afraid. But the scholarly (after the fact) study of decision-making usually removes the confusion and fear, focusing simply on explanations of outcomes. "Critical oral history" was developed to build a bridge between the confusion of experience and the relatively cut and dried rendering of that experience. It does so by combining, in structured conferences, (1) decision-makers, (2) scholars, and (3) declassified documents (which provide added accuracy and authenticity to the conversation). *Critical oral history* often yields rich and surprising insights into what it was really like for decision-makers, then and there, thus yielding more accurate analysis and applicable lessons for decision-making, here and now.

*Critical oral history* can sometimes reveal information and perspectives so startling that the participants can scarcely comprehend what they are being told.

Such a moment occurred at our January 1992 conference in Havana on the Cuban missile crisis. General Anatoly Gribkov revealed that the Soviets had deployed short-range tactical nuclear warheads in Cuba, and that if the expected U.S. attack and invasion had come, the Soviet commander would probably have used them. Cuban President Fidel Castro added that he had urged the Soviets to do just that. Upon hearing this, several U.S. participants, led by Robert McNamara, literally went pale and temporarily speechless, their eyes wide with disbelief. The Americans knew that the attack may have been just hours away, but they did not know that ships carrying the invading forces would likely have been destroyed and any U.S. marines making it to the beaches would have been incinerated. It was a rare moment: decision-makers on all three sides were literally thrown into a time machine and the others present could watch and palpably feel, as if watching an instant replay thirty years later, some of the horror, revulsion and despair the leaders felt at the time, as the clock seemed to tick down toward nuclear holocaust.



*The Cuban missile crisis conference,  
Havana, January 1992*



*The Vietnam War conference,  
Hanoi, June 1997*



*The book that  
inspired the movie*

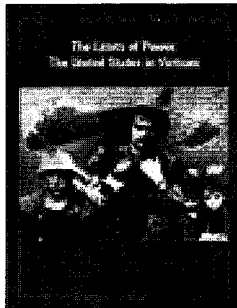
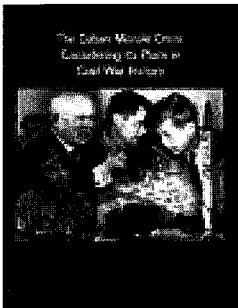
The decision-makers who come to the table for a *critical oral history* conference take risks in doing so. At any time, revelations can indicate that they were mistaken in critical respects, and even that their mistakes led to tragedy. To agree to participate, their curiosity about what they might learn must overwhelm their fears about the effects possible revelations might have on their reputations. One such moment of truth occurred at our June 1997 conference in Hanoi. Vietnamese General Dang Vu Hiep revealed that an attack on U.S. forces in the Central Highlands at Pleiku, on February 7, 1965 was not ordered by Hanoi, as Americans had always believed. In this short statement, General Hiep (who was present at the attack site in 1965) refuted the American rationale for initiating the bombing of North Vietnam, bombing that was begun in response to the Pleiku raid, and thus inadvertently forced the Americans to shoulder a far greater share of the burden for the more than three million people killed in that war. The U.S. had been mistaken, and the mistake had tragic consequences.

Robert McNamara's remarks in *The Fog of War* are inspired in large measure by the book, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing and Catastrophe in the 21st Century*, by McNamara and James Blight (Public Affairs, 2001). In *Wilson's Ghost*, McNamara and Blight outline the lessons of McNamara's experience in public life and combine them with the lessons learned in the *critical oral history* projects on the Cuban missile crisis and Vietnam War that Blight has directed. The renowned filmmaker Errol Morris read *Wilson's Ghost*, and approached McNamara for a half-hour interview for a cable TV show. But in the first five minutes on camera, McNamara told Morris that if the U.S. had lost the war in the Pacific, in which he had participated, he had no doubt that he and his superiors would have, and should have, been tried for crimes against humanity due to their role in the firebombing of more than sixty Japanese cities. Morris, startled by McNamara's directness and energy, immediately concluded this topic warranted a full-length documentary. McNamara agreed, giving Morris nearly 24 hours of interviews, over three long sessions. As Morris has said, *The Fog of War* is in essence a conversation between two Bob McNamara's—a forty-something decision-maker and an eighty-something scholar—about the meaning of his experience with violent conflict in the 20th century.

## ABOUT THE CHOICES PROGRAM

The Choices for the 21st Century Education Program is a national education initiative of Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. The program provides a vehicle for secondary school students to grapple with significant international issues and thus encourages a renewal of civic engagement among American youth. The Choices Program incorporates cutting-edge scholarship into curriculum resources on a wide range of international topics, provides professional development for teachers, and organizes educational programs for students.

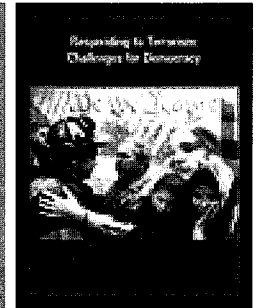
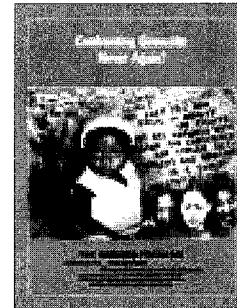
The Choices Program curricular resources involve students in a dynamic conversation between the past and the present, and provide students with the tools to make reasoned and informed judgments about the future. Drawing from both contemporary and historical events, each unit focuses on a critical turning point in international public policy. More than twenty-five titles are available. The Choices Program has several principal objectives: to increase the international content in the core curriculum at the secondary level; to encourage students to consider the contemporary relevance of critical turning points in history; and to illuminate for students the singular importance of human decisionmaking in directing and altering the course of history. By engaging students in critical thinking, shared deliberation, and informed decisionmaking, the Choices Program approach to classroom teaching creates a solid foundation for civic and international education within the core curriculum. Choices curricular resources are currently used in 6,500 schools nationwide.



### THE CHOICES PROGRAM

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## CREDITS

### Writers

Andrew Blackadar  
Sarah Cleveland Fox  
Lucy Mueller

James G. Blight  
Susan Graseck  
Madeline Otis

Langan Courtney  
Janet M. Lang  
Laura Viscomi

### Reviewers

Matthew Heys  
Millard West High School  
Omaha, Nebraska

Kelly Keogh  
Normal Community High School  
Normal, Illinois

Nicole Robinson  
Granite High School  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Sarah Roeske  
Stafford High School  
Falmouth, Virginia

Todd Wallingford  
Hudson High School  
Hudson, Massachusetts

### Production Assistance

Adam Kosberg

### Design

Cardinal Communications USA

### Distribution

Sony Pictures Classics

### Resources

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