



INSIDE THE VAULT

Ted Kennedy on Caring for Veterans and
Healing the Nation after the Vietnam War

with Dr. Barbara A. Perry

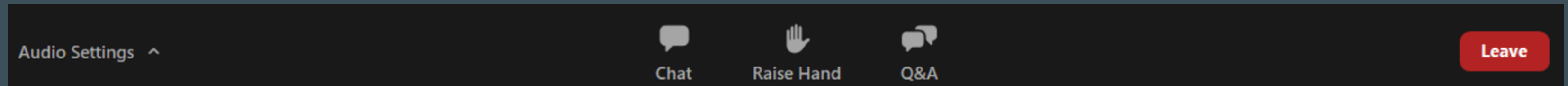
THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2025

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THE
GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE
of
AMERICAN HISTORY

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How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.
- The views expressed here are those of the historian.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.



Today's Document



EDWARD M. KENNEDY
MASSACHUSETTS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510
April 25, 1973

Mr. [REDACTED] Thursby
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Thursby:

Thank you for taking the time to express your views on amnesty.

We all are relieved that the war is finally at an end and that the nation can turn its attention to reconciliation and healing the wounds and bitterness created by this long and costly conflict.

Our first task must be to provide security and comfort to the prisoners of war and to help restore them to American society. A like task lies ahead for the disabled veterans and those who became addicted to drugs while overseas. Some humanitarian relief also must be provided to the people of Southeast Asia in their struggle to rebuild a nation ravaged by war.

As part of this postwar adjustment, we must examine the question of how to treat those who refused induction by going underground or by leaving their country. During hearings held last year by the Senate Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure, the diversity of opinions was symbolized by the national commander of the American Legion in his statement against amnesty, and by the testimony of a young man who had completed a Federal prison sentence for refusing induction. This young man issued a strong plea for amnesty. There was testimony by one father of a young soldier killed in Vietnam against amnesty. Yet another father of a soldier killed in Vietnam testified for unconditional amnesty. The same contradictory recommendations came in testimony from Vietnam veterans themselves.

In seeking to understand how best to proceed, I believe that our nation can look back at the twenty nine instances of amnesty granted by Presidents in the past, including the unconditional amnesty after the Civil War. We often gain wisdom through learning what other men did at other times in our history. It seems that when the nation was most divided against itself, as it was after the Civil War, the end of hostilities was followed by the most sweeping amnesty in an effort to bind the wounds of war.

While the national interest requires reconciliation, there can be no amnesty for those who committed crimes and then deserted, nor for those whose motives had no relationship to the question of conscientious objection. For these, there only can be a return to face whatever judicial proceedings are demanded under the law.

-2-

For the others, these who out of deep belief, felt that they could not maim or kill another human being who was no threat to their lives or the security of their families, another judgment must be made. I believe that we may well examine the view of President Andrew Johnson when he granted at Christmas in 1868 a full pardon to all those who fought against the Union. He said that a "retaliatory or vindictive policy, attended by unnecessary disqualifications, pains, penalties" could only tend to hinder reconciliation among the people.

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Sincerely,

Ed Kennedy
Edward M. Kennedy 7

Letter from Edward M. Kennedy to Mr. Thursby, April 25, 1973.
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09526)

Dr. Barbara A. Perry



Barbara A. Perry is the J. Wilson Newman Professor of Governance at the University of Virginia's Miller Center. She also co-chairs UVA's Presidential Oral History Program. She holds a PhD in Government from UVA, an MA from Oxford, and a BA from Louisville. A former Judicial Fellow at the US Supreme Court, she won the Justice Tom C. Clark Award. Perry has authored or edited 17 books and is currently writing *Strange Bedfellows: How Jack Kennedy and Eleanor Roosevelt Found Common Ground and Launched a Women's Rights Movement*. A frequent media commentator, she served as lead expert for CNN's documentary *The Kennedys*.



Edward "Ted" Kennedy



- Born in 1932
- Attended Harvard University
- Served in the US Army with assignments in France and Germany (1951-1953)
- Graduated from UVA School of Law (1959)
- US senator from Massachusetts (1962-2009)
 - Supported economic and social justice
 - Known for working across the aisle to make compromises

Official Portrait of Ted Kennedy
(Office of US Senator Edward M. Kennedy)

Kennedy in Congress

- Supported universal healthcare
- Pushed for the Twenty-Sixth Amendment
- Involved in legislation that compensated veterans for health issues
 - Agent Orange
 - Carcinogens in drinking water
- Supported civil rights legislation
- Chief sponsor of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Photograph of Ted Kennedy, 1969. (Bernard Gotfryd Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-GB05- 2143)



American Involvement in Vietnam



August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Incident

Attacks on US destroyers by North Vietnamese forces.

1968 Tet Offensive

Series of attacks by the Viet Cong throughout cities in South Vietnam which eventually provoked a shift in American public opinion toward the war.

1973 Withdrawal

Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 27 and the last American combat troops were withdrawn on March 29.

1961-1963

During this period, the number of American military advisors in democratic South Vietnam grew from 1,200 to 16,000.

March 8, 1965 Deployment of American Troops

The US deployed combat troops to Vietnam to fight the spread of communism.

Early 1970s Anti-War Demonstrations

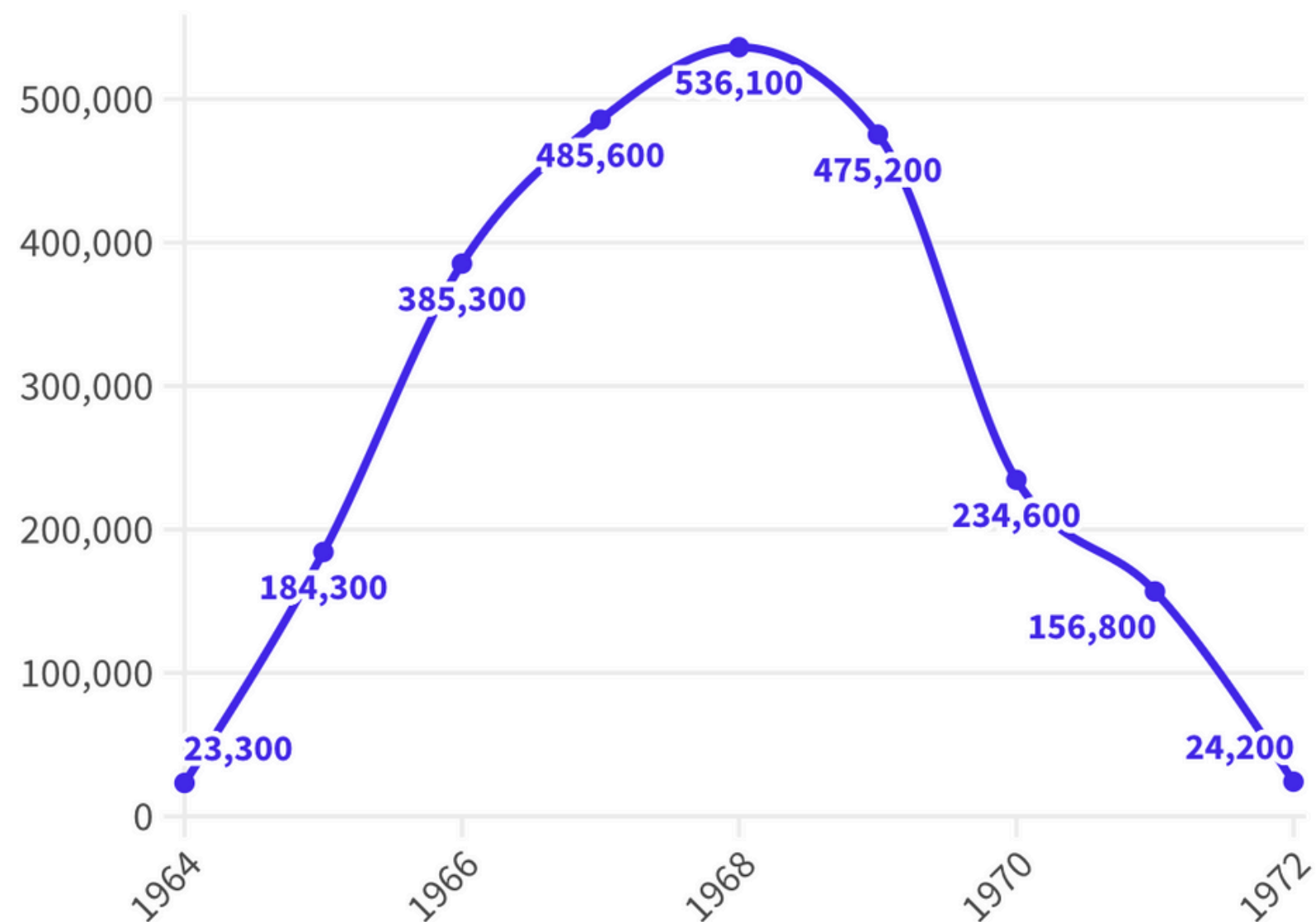
Americans throughout the country protested the US involvement in Vietnam.



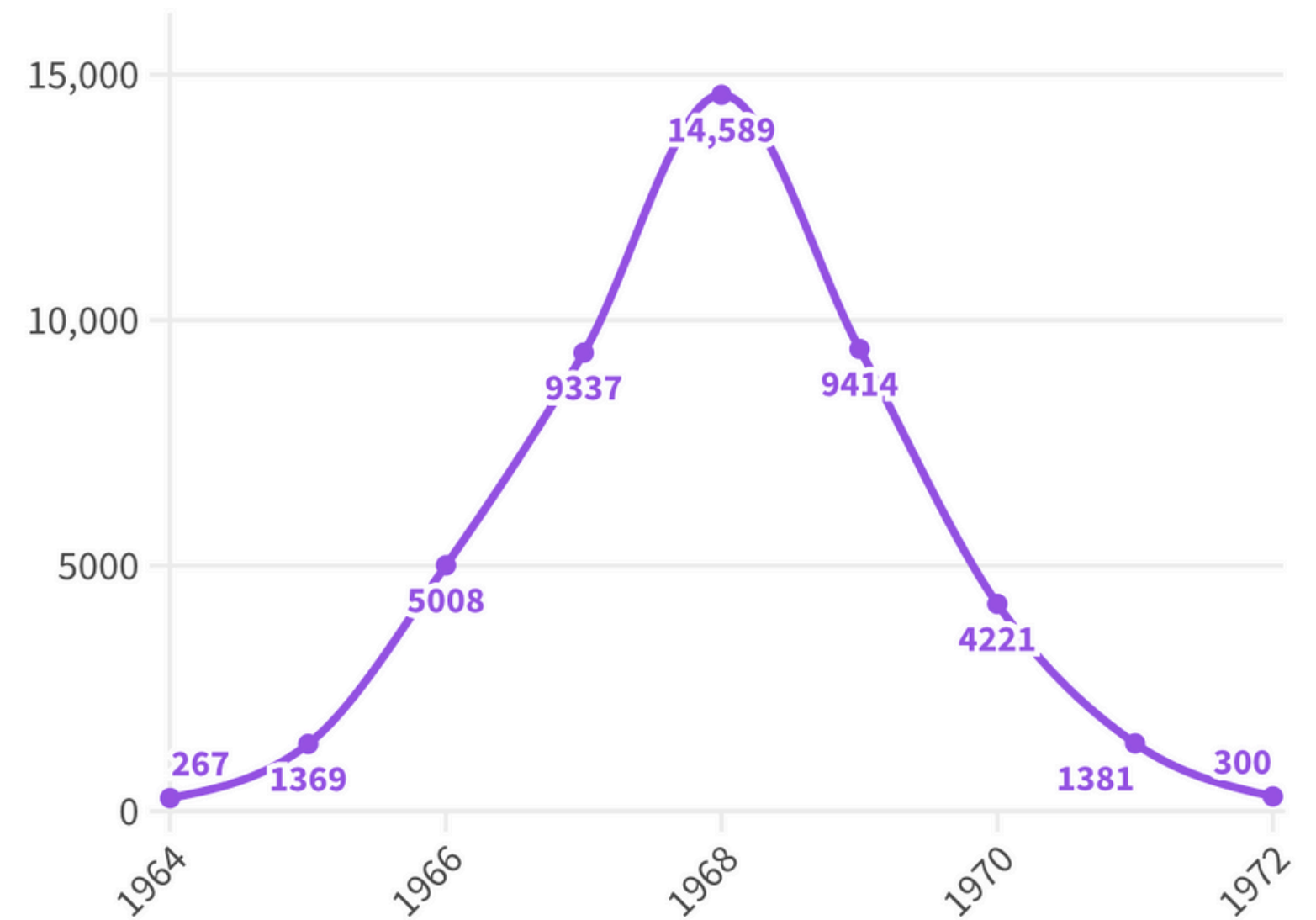
Photograph of American Marines in South Vietnam, March 7, 1966. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09795)

The War by Numbers

US Military Forces in Vietnam, 1964–1972



US Military Battle Deaths in Vietnam, 1964–1972



US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Vietnam Conflict—U.S. Military Forces in Vietnam and Casualties Incurred: 1961 to 1972,” table 590, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1977 (Washington, DC: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980), 369.

1973: The End of American Involvement in Vietnam

President Richard Nixon Preparing to Announce the End of U.S. Involvement in Vietnam on Live Television and Radio, March 29, 1973 (National Archives and Records Administration)

Healing the Nation



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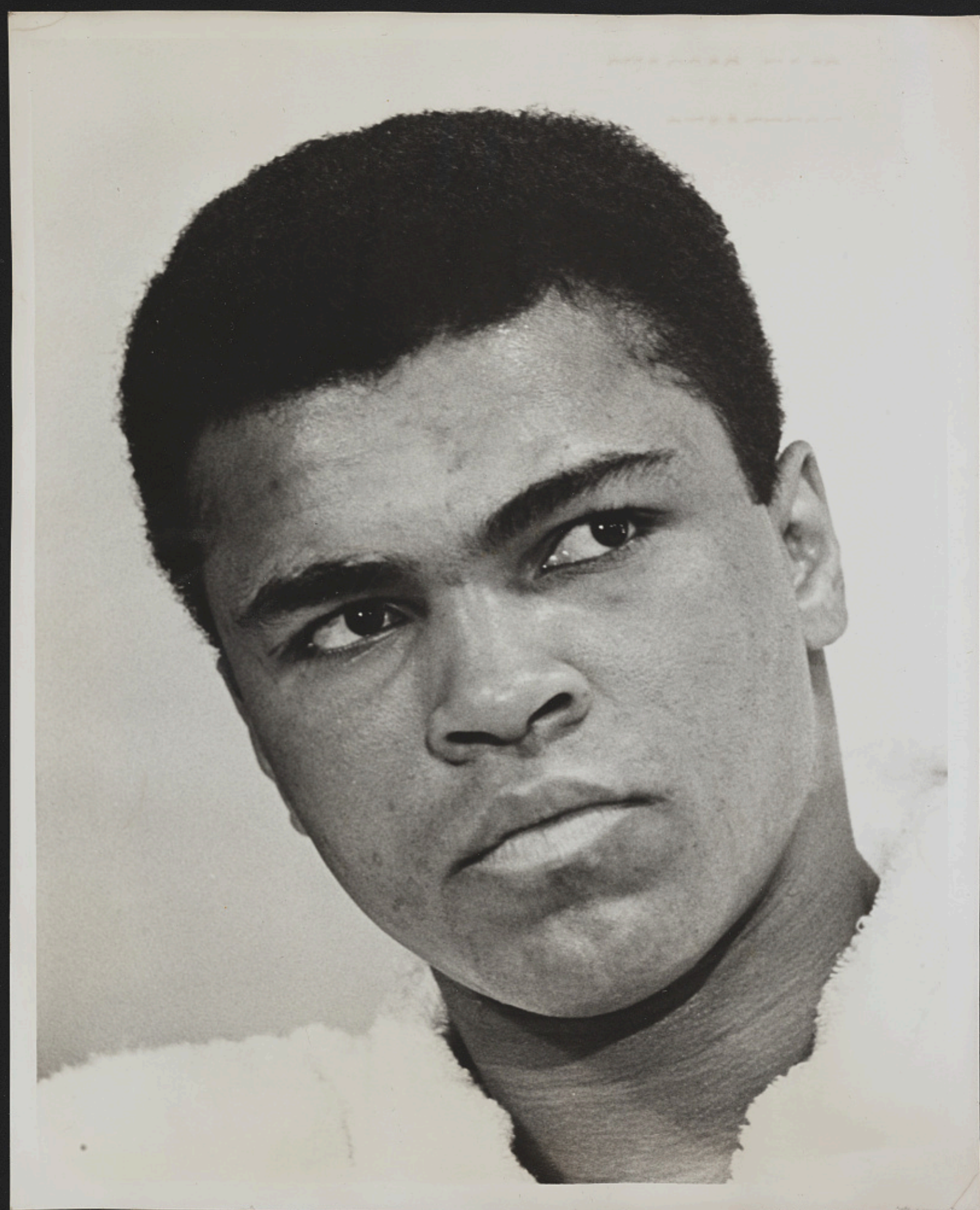
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09526)

Draft Evasion

- Conscientious Objection
- Anti-War Opposition
- Deferments
- Fear of Death or Injury



Photograph of Muhammad Ali, 1967. (Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ds-13998)



Kennedy on Amnesty



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Kennedy on Amnesty

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Caring for Veterans First

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Now Available

Cold War Traveling Exhibition

This new exhibition examines some of the major events of the Cold War between 1945 and 1991. Although there were few direct battles, the US and the USSR engaged in political maneuvering, built up arms, provided economic aid to rival factions, and supported proxy wars in other nations, dividing the world into American or Soviet spheres of influence. This exhibition consists of seven freestanding retractable panels, each 33" x 81", requiring 21 running feet for display. For more information, please visit: www.gilderlehrman.org/programs-and-events/traveling-exhibitions/cold-war

THE COLD WAR BEGINS

In the summer of 1945, US president Harry Truman, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, and British prime minister Winston Churchill (replaced on July 26 by Clement Attlee) met in Potsdam, Germany, to discuss the end of World War II. The United States and its allies wanted to see Europe rebuilt around the principles of democracy and capitalism. They were also concerned that the Soviets would dominate the parts of Eastern Europe conquered during the war, building a security buffer of satellite states at the expense of freedom. The militarized border between the capitalist-oriented West and the communist-oriented East became known as the "Iron Curtain."

2.1 The Potsdam Conference

The Potsdam Conference was intended to be a triumph of the wartime alliance and a codification of control over defeated Germany and its capital of Berlin. However, growing tensions and disagreements between the Soviet Union and the United States laid the groundwork for the Cold War that soon followed.



Map of Germany, Zones of Occupation, ca.1947. (National Archives, 24525994)

2.4 Berlin Airlift

Berlin, Germany, was initially divided in four zones (British, American, French, and Soviet), though ultimately consolidated into East and West Berlin. West Berlin (controlled by the US and its allies) was surrounded by USSR-controlled East Germany. On June 24, 1948, the Soviet Union blocked access to West Berlin, preventing food and fuel from entering the city. This prompted Western nations to send over 2,000,000 metric tons of supplies via air—in the Berlin Airlift—until the USSR ended the blockade on May 12, 1949.



People watching a Berlin Airlift plane land at Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin, August 15, 1948. (Photo by E & O/Ullstein bild via Getty Images)

THE GLOBAL COLD WAR

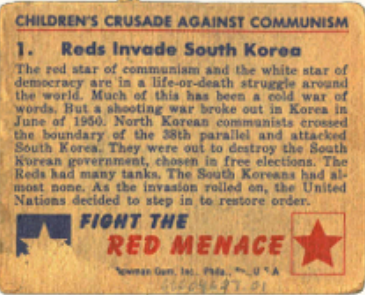
While the US and USSR never engaged in open warfare during the Cold War, both countries led military conflicts and political interventions around the world to advance their interests. From South America to Asia, Europe, and Africa, the Cold War was covertly "fought" on almost every continent. It also led to new intelligence organizations like the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Soviet KGB, each of which operated all over the world. In 1954, the CIA interfered in Guatemalan elections to ensure that American interests would prevail. In 1956, the KGB brutally repressed political dissent in Hungary and Poland. Similar interventions by both sides continued through the 1980s.

4.1 Korean War (1950–1953)

On June 25, 1950, Communist forces from North Korea invaded the Republic of South Korea. Having recently suffered a geopolitical loss with China, US and United Nations forces supported South Korea. They sent troops to counter the Soviet-backed North Koreans. Over the course of the three-year conflict, 2,000,000 people died, including nearly 40,000 Americans. The war never formally ended, but an armistice in 1953 divided the Korean Peninsula essentially as it had been before the war began.



"1. Reds Invade South Korea" trading card from the Fight the Red Menace: The Children's Crusade Against Communism series, published by the Bowman Gum Company, 1951. (The Glider Lehrman Institute, GLC09627.01)



THE COLD WAR AT HOME

The Cold War dramatically shaped the domestic life and politics of each nation. In the US, fear of communism led to restrictions in education, politics, and the arts and influenced the US Civil Rights Movement. Fear of nuclear annihilation led to the creation of bomb shelters and shattered the nation's sense of security. In the Soviet Union, political repression and imprisonment continued.

5.1 Propaganda

Cold War leaders used propaganda to teach their citizens to fear the other side. For example, *Fight the Red Menace: Children's Crusade Against Communism* trading cards were designed to teach American children about the threat of communist and atomic bombs. "Ghost City" and "Ghost City" depict the devastation that a nuclear attack could cause. Meanwhile, a Soviet youth program since the days of the revolution, played an important role in teaching the values of communism to multiple generations.

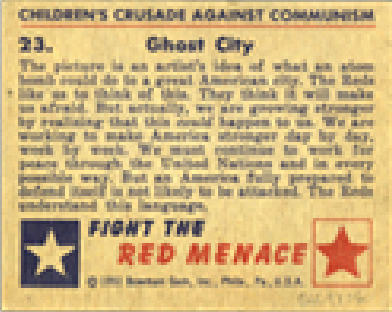
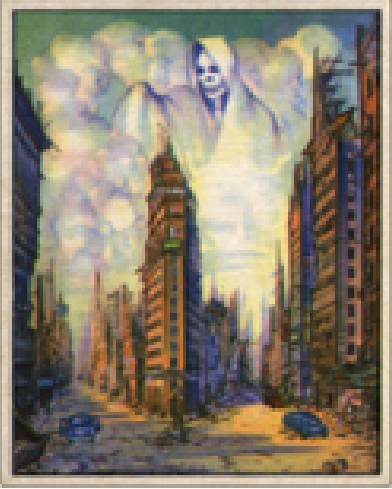


Illustration of a city destroyed by a nuclear bomb, titled "Ghost City" from the Fight the Red Menace: The Children's Crusade Against Communism series, published by the Bowman Gum Company, 1951. (The Glider Lehrman Institute, GLC09627.01)

5.2 "Duck and Cover"

The Cold War Trading cards sponsored the creation of the Civil Defense Agency. After the Soviet Union achieved nuclear technology, American civil leaders prepared for the worst, which means instructing their citizens how to react in a nuclear attack. One of their most popular characters was Bert the Turtle. Bert was responsible for teaching children to "Duck and Cover" (Duck, get under, and cover). Bert was also responsible for teaching children to "Duck and Cover" (Duck, get under, and cover). Bert was also responsible for teaching children to "Duck and Cover" (Duck, get under, and cover).



Illustration of a child ducking under a desk during a nuclear attack, titled "Duck and Cover" from the Fight the Red Menace: The Children's Crusade Against Communism series, published by the Bowman Gum Company, 1951. (The Glider Lehrman Institute, GLC09627.01)

5.3 Truman Loyalty Program

The fear of communism, otherwise known as the "Red Scare," led the United States to act in ways that were not always consistent with their ideals. President Truman signed Executive Order 9835 in 1947. Generally referred to as the first "loyalty program" in US history, it aimed to root out communist influence in the federal government. Being more far-reaching, by the early 1950s Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin launched a widely publicized campaign to investigate communist influence in American life. Even though the Constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and of assembly, many citizens, more specifically, persecuted and denied employment because of any, even alleged, association with communism.



Senator Joseph R. McCarthy points to a map of the United States during a speech, ca. 1950. (The Glider Lehrman Institute, GLC09627.01)

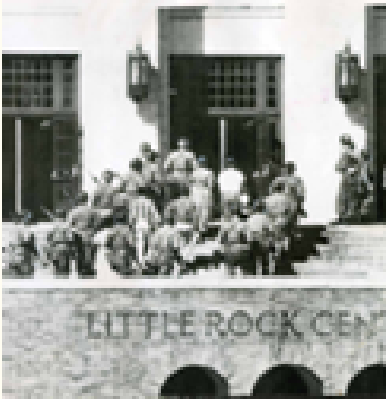
5.4 Civil Rights Movement

The Cold War spotlighted inequality in the United States. For many critics, at home and abroad, US treatment of its own citizens did not match the country's founding principles of democracy and individual rights. On the world stage, this made US look hypocritical. Meanwhile, Soviet leaders turned to the position of communist the secret distribution of financial aid and information, to create state censorship.

"At a time when we face grave situations abroad because of the hatred that communism bears toward a system of government based on human rights, it would be difficult to exaggerate the harm that is being done to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and the world. Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation."

—Eisenhower's Address to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Situation in Little Rock, September 24, 1957

After an angry mob prevented the students from attending Little Rock Central High School, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent the 101st Airborne to enforce students' safety and the school's compliance with desegregation of schools in 1957.

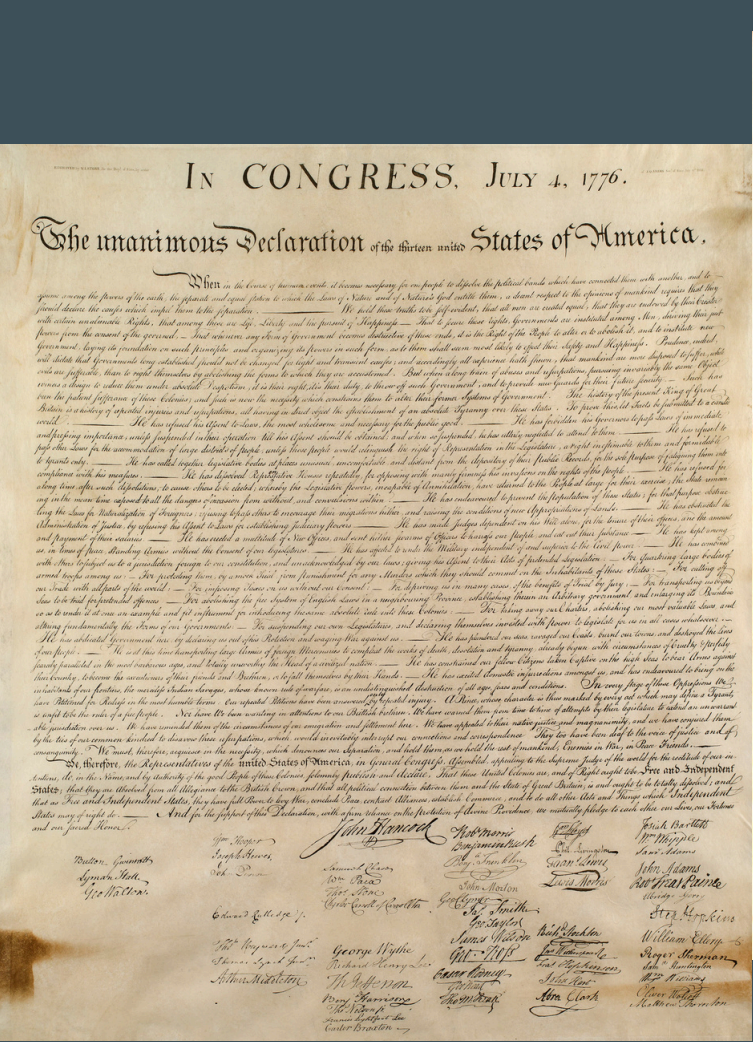


Protesters gathered outside Little Rock Central High School, 1957. (The Glider Lehrman Institute, GLC09627.01)

Pre-Booking Available

DECLARATION 1776 TRAVELING EXHIBITION

When the Declaration of Independence was issued, the idea that “all men are created equal” was revolutionary. With this seminal document, the Founding Fathers unleashed an open-ended driving force that would shape modern history. Around the world, other countries have declared independence taking the US Declaration of 1776 as a model. This exhibition uses primary sources to illustrate how Americans and people across the world have been inspired by the Declaration in their pursuit of equality and self-determination.



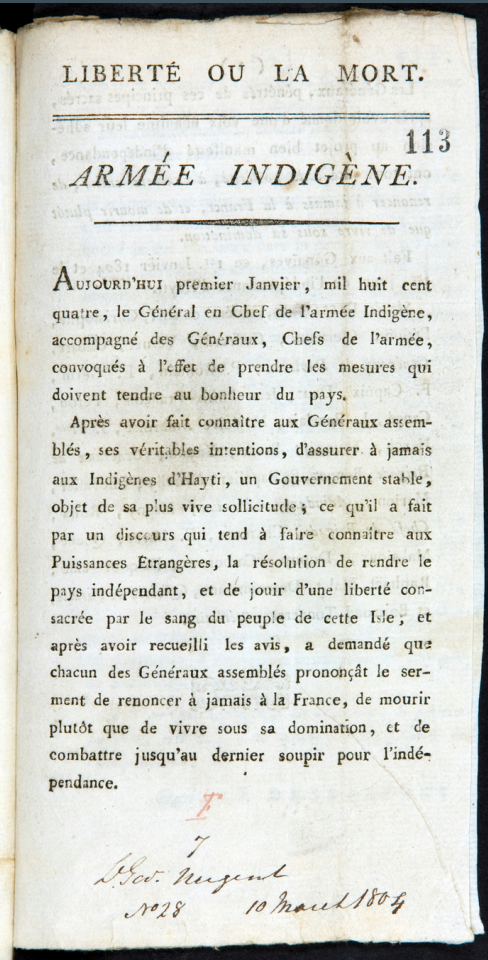
The Declaration of Independence, printed by John Dunlap in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. (Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division)



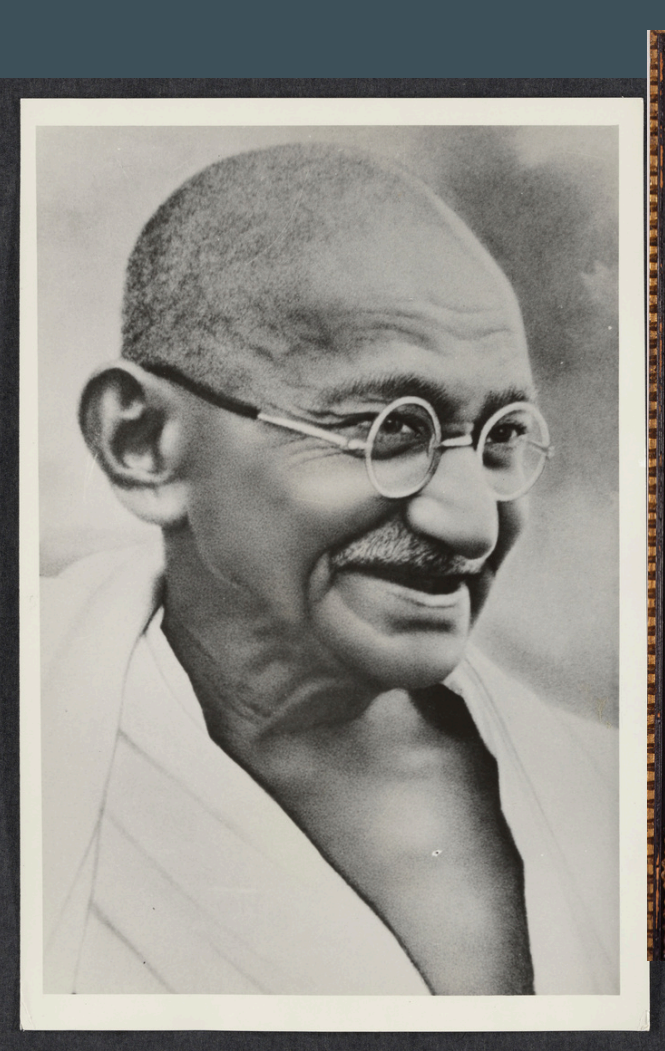
Act of Independence of the Province of Cartagena in New Granada, 1811. (Digital Library of the Ibero-American Heritage)



Twentieth-century painting of Général Jean-Jacques Dessalines, 1957. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library)



Haïtian Declaration of Independence, January 1, 1804 (The National Archives UK).



Mahatma Gandhi, ca. 1940. (UHM Library Digital Image Collections)



Portrait of Abigail Adams by Benjamin Blyth, ca. 1766. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

Upcoming Programs

INSIDE THE VAULT:

June 5 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- Building the Transcontinental Railroad with Dr. Gordon H. Chang, Professor of History, Stanford University

July 3 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- Olive Branch Petition with Dr. Denver Brunsman, Associate Professor of History, George Washington University

BOOK BREAKS: May 4 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- Daniel Schulman will discuss his book *The Money Kings: The Epic Story of the Jewish Immigrants Who Transformed Wall Street and Shaped Modern America*

