



During the 1960s, leaders of the U.S. federal government worried about the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. It was, at least theoretically, the reason why several presidential administrations turned their collective attention to Vietnam.

Not only did they turn their attention to countries in Southeast Asia—such as Vietnam—several U.S. Presidents sent military men to support one side of Vietnam's civil war (South Vietnam). First Americans served as unarmed advisers and non-combatants. Then they served as armed advisers and fully-engaged combatants.

By the time Richard Nixon was president, the “domino theory” was still a worry:

Editorial cartoon shows President Nixon and a military officer walking past a graveyard labeled “Viet War Dead,” filled with gravestones looking like dominoes. A vulture watches from a bare tree branch. The officer lectures the President saying, “... and, of course, if Cambodia fell then Laos would fall, and if Laos fell ...”

The domino theory, which predicted that if one country fell to the Communists, others in the area would do likewise, much as the fall of the first domino in a line would knockdown its neighbors, was used by the U.S. government during the Cold War to justify military activity in Korea, Vietnam, and other places. (See article at the Library of Congress, entitled “--And, of course, if Cambodia fell, then Laos would fall, and if Laos fell”)

This political cartoon zeroes-in on the domino theory but gives it a different (almost back-firing) application.

To prevent the “domino theory” from harming the countries of Southeast Asia, the U.S. federal government sent hundreds of thousands of American servicemen to fight in Vietnam. Of those individuals, 58,286 (at least) died as a direct result of that war.

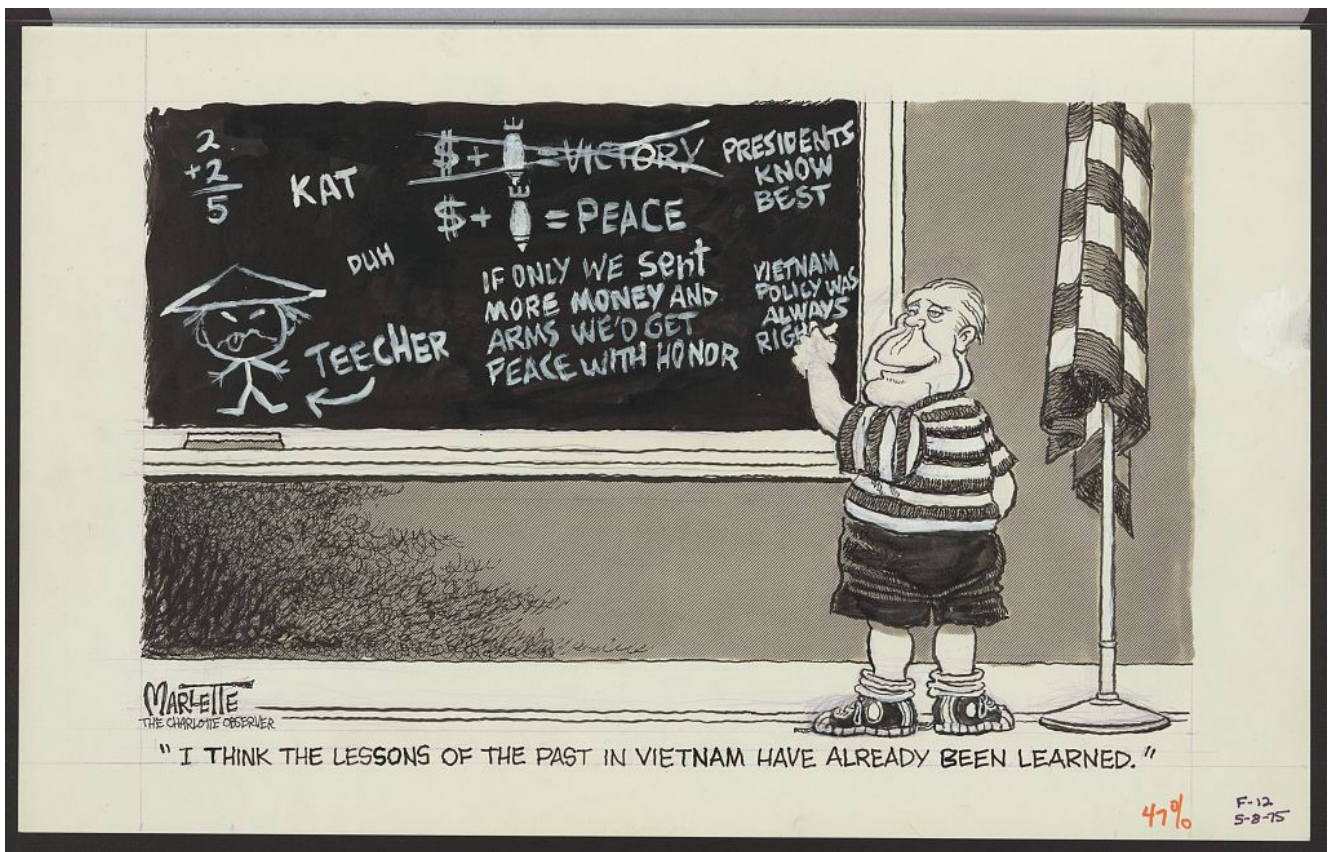
Doug Marlette created this cartoon with its interesting twist. The Library of Congress, which maintains a copy of the cartoon, tells us [more about him](#):

Marlette drew cartoons for the Charlotte Observer and other southern newspapers from 1972 until his death in 2007 and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. He also drew the popular comic strip Kudzu.

Which, do you think, is the better application of the domino theory?

Marlette—like other political cartoonists who are able to visually depict conflict in a single illustration—also turned his sights on President Ford. After the fall of Saigon, in late April of 1975, Ford refused to open an investigation into what had gone wrong in Vietnam.

Perhaps, wondered Marlette, Ford had spent a lifetime making wrong decisions?



Marlette's editorial cartoon, depicting Ford saying that "the lessons of the past in Vietnam have already been learned," expressed the frustrations of many Americans at the time (and later).

Credits:

Political cartoon, by Doug Marlette, created circa 1972. Online via the "Art Wood Collection of Cartoon and Caricature" at the [Library of Congress](http://www.loc.gov/rr/educ/artwood/).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Domino-Effect-If-Cambodia-Fell-then-Laos...>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Domino-Effect-If-Cambodia-Fell-then-Laos...>