

**Lincoln, Protest & Patriotism:
Lincoln & the Mexican War
Lesson Plan by Jennifer Erbach**

Prepared for Northern Illinois University's Lincoln Net

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Objectives:

Students will utilize primary source documents to explore arguments surrounding Abraham Lincoln's opposition to the Mexican War.

Students will compare the arguments surrounding Lincoln's opposition to war with those surrounding war protestors during the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Students will consider the definition of patriotism in light of a country's decision to go to war, and write a 1-2 page paper defining and defending their position on the question, Is protest patriotic?

Preparation:

Prior to this assignment, students should read the following documents and write down any questions that they have about the documents.

- ["Background and Context"](#)
- [Document Packet 1: "Lincoln and the Mexican War"](#)

Introduction:

Is protest patriotic? Spend a couple of minutes gathering some initial student responses to the question. Our goal for the next two days is to further explore this question by examining the arguments of ordinary citizens, professors, politicians, and a former president. We'll be examining and comparing arguments surrounding the opposition to two wars in U.S. history: The Mexican War in 1848 and the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Day 1:

Part I:

Review information from the "Background and Context" sheet regarding the Mexican War and Lincoln's objections to that war. Take a few minutes to answer any student questions from the reading.

As a class, discuss the following:

- What was Lincoln's position on the war with Mexico?
- What specifically was his response and how did he justify it?
- How did Lincoln's opponents portray his protest of the war?
- How did his stance on the Mexican war effect Lincoln's later political career?
- What issues seem to have been of particular concern to people? Why do you think these issues were so important to them?
- Look again at Document #1. Did Lincoln believe that those who opposed war ought to speak out while the country was engaged in fighting that war? Why then, did he speak out?

Part II:

In small groups, students should consider the following question:

- In the elections of 1858 and 1860, Democrats tried to paint Lincoln as being unpatriotic for protesting the Mexican War. Do you think that Lincoln's actions were unpatriotic? Why or why not?

After discussing their answer, groups should write 2-3 paragraphs explaining their position. Wherever possible, students should refer to specific documents from the readings. If class time allows, groups should share their answers with the rest of the class and engage in further debate and discussion over the issue.

Preparation:

Students should read Document Packet 2: Patriotism & Protest During the Gulf War for the next class.

Day 2: Introduction:

We've considered arguments surrounding Lincoln's opposition to the Mexican War. Now let's fast forward and look at some modern arguments about protest. In 1991, the U.S. went to war against

Iraq, sparking protests movements, and with them more debate about whether protesting war was patriotic.

Part III:

Review information from the Background and Context sheet on the Persian Gulf War. Review the material discussed in class on the day before, and take a few minutes to answer any student questions about the readings.

As a class, unpack each of the four documents that the students read. On the board, write the position that each author takes as to whether or not protest is patriotic. Underneath, list the reasons given by each author in support of their position.

Now let's compare the arguments in these documents to the readings and discussions from the previous day. As a class, discuss:

- What accusations were leveled against those who protested the Gulf War?
- How do these accusations compare to those leveled at Lincoln?
- How did protesters defend their actions?
- How does this defense compare to Lincoln's?

Part IV:

Get back into your small groups from the previous day. Considering all of the arguments that we have looked at over the past 2 days, discuss the original question, Is protest patriotic?

After about 10-15 minutes, students should use the remaining class time to begin working on a 1-2 page paper in which they will take a position on the question, Is protest patriotic? Students should work on their papers individually, but may use their group members as a sounding board for their ideas. As they build their own argument, students should address at least two of the arguments for and two of the arguments against their position that were raised in the readings from the past two days.

State Standards Addressed:

14.C.4 Describe the meaning of participatory citizenship (e.g., volunteerism, voting) at all levels of government and society in the United States. **16.B.5a (US)** Describe how modern political

positions are affected by differences in ideologies and viewpoints that have developed over time (e.g., political parties' positions on government intervention in the economy).

Notes for the Instructor:

- Time required for this lesson should be about two 50 minute class periods.
- The "[Background and Context](#)" packet can be supplemented with readings from the course textbook on the Mexican War and the 1991 Persian Gulf War.
- Some of the documents in [Document Packet 1](#) have been transcribed with the original grammar, spellings, and crossed out words, which makes them more difficult to read.
- Some of the documents in [Document Packet 2](#) make reference to protests from the Vietnam War. Teachers may want to provide additional background information to students about the nature of protest during the Vietnam War era.

**Lincoln, Patriotism and Protest:
Background and Context
By Jennifer Erbach**

**Prepared for Northern Illinois University's Lincoln/Net
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Introduction:

The documents you will read for this lesson plan discuss protest over two different wars in United States history, The Mexican War (1846-1848) and the Persian Gulf War in 1991. In both of these wars, acts of opposition and protest sparked conflict over whether such actions were unpatriotic. The following paragraphs will provide you with descriptions of both wars and give you background to the documents that will be used in this lesson.

The Mexican War:

In 1844, the U.S. elected James K. Polk, a Democrat, as president of the United States. Key to Polk's agenda was a plan for expanding U.S. territory. After negotiating with the British to secure Oregon territory, he turned his attention to California, which in 1844 was ruled by the Mexican government. Polk's attempts to purchase this territory from Mexico were unsuccessful. At the same time, the recently annexed state of Texas was in a dispute with Mexico over a strip of territory between the Rio Grande and Nueces Rivers (see map). Both Mexico and Texas claimed jurisdiction (the right to govern) over this territory. In 1845, Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to march with his troops to the Rio Grande River. After a skirmish between Mexican and U.S. forces, Polk asked Congress for a declaration of war against Mexico, on the grounds that Mexico provoked the war by shedding U.S. blood on U.S. soil. Congress declared war on Mexico, and the United States invaded Mexico, easily overpowering Mexican forces. In February of 1848 Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which gave the U.S. the territory that today makes up the states of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and Colorado.

Lincoln and War:

In 1846, as the war was beginning, Abraham Lincoln was elected to the United States Congress. Lincoln at that time was a member of the Whig Party (the Republican Party would not be formed for several more years). Lincoln was opposed to the war in Mexico.

President Polk claimed that the blood shed on territory that belonged to the U.S. and that that gave the U.S. the right to go to war with Mexico. Lincoln however, did not believe that all of the territory between the Rio Grande and Nueces Rivers belonged to the United States. In 1847, he called on the President to prove that the territory on which the first blood of the war was shed actually belonged to the United States. He also voted in favor of a resolution that declared the war with Mexico was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President. However, while Lincoln believed that the war was wrong he continued to vote to send necessary supplies to the troops that were fighting the war. Lincoln was criticized for not supporting the war, both by Democrats and by members of his own Whig Party, including his close friend and law partner, William Herndon.

The Persian Gulf War

Events leading up to the Persian Gulf War began in 1990 when the nation of Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, invaded and annexed the neighboring country of Kuwait. Although Iraq claimed its actions were justified, the United Nations passed a resolution ordering Hussein to withdraw its army from Kuwait by January 15, 1991. When Iraq did not comply with this resolution, a coalition of forces including Canada, France, Great Britain, Russia, and the United States went to war with Iraq, to remove them from Kuwait. The coalition's efforts were successful, and a cease-fire was called on February 28, 1991. Iraqi forces were removed from Kuwait, but the damage done to the area was heavy. Although the U.S. Congress had voted to go to war with Iraq, the war sparked a series of protests in the United States.

Lincoln, Patriotism and Protest
Document Packet #1
Lincoln and the Mexican War
By Jennifer Erbach

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1. Speech in the United States House of Representatives:

MR. CHAIRMAN: Some if not all the gentlemen on the other side of the House who have addressed the committee within the last two days have spoken rather complainingly, if I have rightly understood them, of the vote given a week or ten days ago declaring that the war with Mexico was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President. I am one of those who joined in that vote; and I did so under my best impression of the truth of the case. How I got this impression, and how it may possibly be remedied, I will now try to show. When the war began, it was my opinion that all those who because of knowing too little, or because of knowing too much, could not conscientiously oppose the conduct of the President in the beginning of it should nevertheless, as good citizens and patriots, remain silent on that point, at least till the war should be ended?

Besides the continual effort of the President to argue every silent vote given for supplies into an indorsement of the Justice and wisdom of his conduct; besides that singularly candid paragraph in his late message in which he tells us that Congress with great unanimity had declared that "by the act of the Republic of Mexico, a state of war exists between that Government and the United States," besides this open attempt to prove by telling the truth what he could not prove by telling the whole truth besides all this, one of my colleagues [Mr. Richardson] at a very early day in the session brought in a set of resolutions expressly indorsing the original justice of the war on the part of the President. Upon these resolutions when they shall be put on their passage I shall be compelled to vote; so that I cannot be silent if I would. Seeing this, I went about preparing myself to give the vote understandingly when it should come. I carefully examined the President's message, to ascertain what he himself had said and proved upon the point. The result of this examination was to make the impression that, taking for true all the President states as facts, he falls far short of proving his justification; and that the President would have gone farther with his proof if it had not been for the small matter that the

truth would not permit him. Under the impression thus made I gave the vote before mentioned.

Complete text of this speech is available on [Lincoln/Net](http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.1439) at <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.1439>

2. Letter from Abraham Lincoln to William H. Herndon

WASHINGTON, February 1, 1848

Dear William: Your letter of the 19th ultimo was received last night, and for which I am much obliged. The only thing in it that I wish to talk to you at once about is that because of my vote for Ashmun's amendment you fear that you and I disagree about the war. I regret this, not because of any fear we shall remain disagreed after you have read this letter, but because if you misunderstand I fear other good friends may also. That vote affirms that the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President; and I will stake my life that if you had been in my place you would have voted just as I did.

This vote has nothing to do in determining my votes on the questions of supplies. I have always intended, and still intend, to vote supplies; perhaps not in the precise form recommended by the President, but in a better form for all purposes, except Locofoco [1] party purposes. It is in this particular you seem mistaken. The Locos are untiring in their efforts to make the impression that all who vote supplies or take part in the war do of necessity approve the President's conduct in the beginning of it; but the Whigs [2] have from the beginning made and kept the distinction between the two. In the very first act nearly all the Whigs voted against the preamble declaring that war existed by the act of Mexico; and yet nearly all of them voted for the supplies. As to the Whig men who have participated in the war, so far as they have spoken in my hearing, they do not hesitate to pronounce as unjust the President's conduct in the beginning of the war.

1. The slang term for the Democratic party
2. The party to which Lincoln and Herndon belonged.

Complete text of this letter is available on [Lincoln/Net](http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.1433) at <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.1433>

3. Excerpts from the Lincoln-Douglas debate at Ottawa, IL, 1858.

Douglas: In 1846, when Wilmot introduced his celebrated proviso, and the Abolition tornado swept over the country, Lincoln again turned up as a member of Congress from the Sangamon district. I was then in the Senate of the United States, and was glad to welcome my old friend and companion. Whilst in Congress, he distinguished himself by his opposition to the Mexican War, taking the side of the common enemy against his own country; and when he returned home he found that the indignation of the people followed him everywhere, and he was again submerged or obliged to retire into private life, forgotten by his former friends.

Lincoln: And so I think my friend, the judge, is equally at fault when he charges me at the time when I was in Congress of having opposed our soldiers who were fighting in the Mexican War. The judge did not make his charge very distinctly, but I tell you what he can prove, by referring to the record. You remember I was an Old Whig, and whenever the Democratic party tried to get me to vote that the war had been righteously begun by the President, I would not do it. But whenever they asked for any money, or land-warrants, or anything to pay the soldiers there, during all that time, I gave the same vote that Judge Douglas did. You can think as you please as to whether that was consistent. Such is the truth; and the judge has the right to make all he can out of it. But when he, by a general charge, conveys the idea that I withheld supplies from the soldiers who were fighting in the Mexican War, or did anything else to hinder the soldiers, he is, to say the least, grossly and altogether mistaken, as a consultation of the records will prove to him.

Complete text of the Ottawa debate available on [Lincoln/Net](http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.2184) at <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.2184>

4. Excerpts from the Lincoln-Douglas debate at Alton, IL, 1858

Douglas: There is something really refreshing in the thought that Mr. Lincoln is in favor of prosecuting one war vigorously. It is the first war I ever knew him to be in favor of prosecuting. It is the first war that I ever knew him to believe to be just or constitutional. When the Mexican war was being waged, and the American army was surrounded by the enemy in Mexico, he thought the war was unconstitutional, unnecessary, and unjust. He thought it was not commenced on the right spot.

When I made an incidental allusion of that kind in the joint discussion over at Charleston, some weeks ago, Lincoln, in replying, said that I, Douglas, had charged him with voting against supplies for the Mexican war, and then he reared up, full length, and swore that he never voted against the supplies, -- that it was a slander he confessed that he voted that the war was wrong, that our country was in the wrong, and consequently that the Mexicans were in the right; but charged that I had slandered him by saying that he voted against the supplies. I never charged him with voting against the supplies in my life, because I knew that he was not in Congress when they were voted. The war was commenced on the 13th day of May, 1846, and on that day we appropriated in Congress ten millions of dollars and fifty thousand men to prosecute it. During the same session we voted more men and more money, and at the next session we voted more men and more money, so that by the time Mr. Lincoln entered Congress we had enough men and enough money to carry on the war, and had no occasion to vote for any more. When he got into the House, being opposed to the war, and not being able to stop the supplies, because they had all gone forward, all he could do was to prove that the war was not begun on the right spot, and that it was unconstitutional, unnecessary and wrong. Remember, too, that this he did after the war had been begun. It is one thing to be opposed to the declaration of a war, another and very different thing to take sides with the enemy against your own country after the war has been commenced. Our army was in Mexico at the time, many battles had been fought; our citizens, who were defending the honor of their country's flag, were surrounded by the daggers, the guns, and the poison of the enemy. Then it was that Corwin [1] made his speech in which he declared that the American soldiers ought to be welcomed by the Mexicans with bloody hands and hospitable graves; then it was that Ashmun and Lincoln voted in the House of Representatives that the war was unconstitutional and unjust; and Ashmun's resolution, Corwin's speech, and Lincoln's vote were sent to Mexico and read at the head of the Mexican army, to prove to them that there was a Mexican party in the Congress of the United States who were doing all in their power to aid them. That a man who takes sides with the common enemy against his own country in time of war should rejoice in a war being made on me now, is very natural. And in my opinion, no other kind of a man would rejoice in it.

1. Thomas Corwin, a senator from Ohio

*Complete text of the Alton debate available on Lincoln/Net at
[http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-
bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.2913](http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?lincoln.2913)*

5. Letter from William H. Wilson

New York, Oct 29th 1860

Dr Sir

Will you be kind enough to say if you did or did not while you were in congress vote against supplies to the american army while on the Battle fields of Mexico. The charge has been brought forward by your opponents and I have as often charged it to be a falsehood and although opposed to betting I as a last resort have agreed to back my opinion that such was not the fact. This I assure you is not to decide a Bet, for I am satisfied if you thought so you would not give me the information. I merley want to know from you that such is not the case -- I detest making lies out of whole cloth, and I beleve this is one Will you do me the favor, of a reply

& very much oblige
Respectfully I am
Wm H Wilson

*From Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress
[<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>]*

6. Letter from William Honselman, 1860

Monticello October the 21st

Sir Mister lincoln I take this opertunity to ask you two questions and I hope that you will answer them satisfacktorly the first is this did you vote against sending provisions to the soldiers when they was im in mexico or did you prolong or was you the caus of having that time prolonged for the space of 3 months or not. the second is this did you refuse to vote A bill of thanks to the soldiers that fought in mexico did you say that you would not vote A bill of thanks to the soldiers without they would add this amendment to it. that it was an injust war.) this is all that I wish to ask at this time and I hope I hope that I will have the pleasure of reseiving an answer soon as I am undisided yet as an honest man I ask you for the fackts in this matter) I do not ask it for the purpose of making capitol out of it for I am no politician what ever it is for my own benafit that I ask tho you those questions

Adress To William Honselman
Monticello
Piatt Co
Ill
I remain yours truly

From Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress
[<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>]

Lincoln, Patriotism and Protest
Document Packet #2
Patriotism & Protest During the Gulf War
By Jennifer Erbach

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1. "PROTEST: A VITAL PART OF DEMOCRACY" by Peter Brandon Bayer

The onset of war in the Middle East has inspired an outpouring of demonstrations. Adopting the stratagems of a generation ago, protesters are conducting rallies, sit-ins and, perhaps most provocative of all, flag burnings. Already, newspapers' letters columns are brimming with criticism excoriating and impugning the protesters. Labeling demonstrators contemptible, hateful or, most charitably, jerks, some people argue that the protests constitute dangerous and worthless speech, imperiling the solidarity of our commitment to wage war on Iraq and, thus, endangering our fighting men and women. In light of this harsh and furious disapproval - and before intolerance to dissent takes hold in the name of patriotism as it did two decades ago - it is vital to emphasize the significant value of these jarring forms of expression especially in times of war. Indeed, it is during national emergencies that America's fundamental commitment to free speech assumes its greatest importance while facing its greatest jeopardy. First and most obviously, we must not forget that our devotion to freedom, particularly free speech and expression, distinguishes us from our enemies now as well as in conflicts past. Granted, the war with Iraq is not about individual liberty. Rather this war apparently involves preserving the integrity of national borders and preventing a ruthless tyrant from acquiring too much oil wealth. Nevertheless, wherever America fights, it must represent those basic ideals of freedom and personal dignity that set us apart from our foes. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this nation's commitment to liberty is something a Saddam Hussein could never understand - the right of citizens to protest the very war in which their soldiers fight. Furthermore, a thriving democracy depends on continual informed debate. Protest acquaints us with viewpoints contrary to the prevailing opinion, prompting us to examine the strengths and weaknesses of national policies. Weighing the merits of protesters' anti-war arguments, we

may reaffirm that the war with Iraq is necessary and worthwhile. Or, as exemplified by the Vietnam War demonstrations, concerted protest eventually may discredit the legitimacy of this conflict. The educational role of protest, then, is indisputable. Some assert that free speech has its limits, particularly during war. They claim that protests insult and humiliate the soldiers sent to fight and, possibly to die, for this nation. More than that, some argue that protests give aid and comfort to the enemy, weaken our resolve to win and, consequently, endanger both the lives of our armed forces and the success of our foreign policy. These arguments misconceive what is required of a society committed to the principles of freedom and liberty. The right to protest is meaningless if it can be exercised only when it is ineffective or when no significant national interests are at stake. Clearly, free speech demands protection precisely when it challenges important governmental policies, thereby kindling impassioned and volatile reactions. Indeed, our recent experiences with provocative speech in times of war demonstrate that we must safeguard inflammatory protest particularly during national crisis. In the celebrated 1969 opinion, *Tinker vs. Des Moines School District*, the Supreme Court struck down the School District's ban prohibiting students from wearing black arm bands to denounce the Vietnam War. Although acknowledging that wearing arm bands is both controversial and an arguable breach of school decorum, the justices rejoined, "Any departure from absolute regimentation may cause trouble. Any variation from the majority's opinion may inspire fear. . . . But our Constitution says we must take this risk . . . and our history says that is the sort of hazardous freedom - this kind of openness - that is the basis of our national strength."

From St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 25, 1991, FRIDAY, FIVE STAR Edition, Editorial page 3C. Copyright 1991 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Inc.

2."SUPPORT, NOT PROTEST" by William Raspberry

I've just visited Lafayette Park, across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House, trying to understand what motivates the drum-beating, chanting, sign-waving antiwar protesters camped out there.

I still don't get it.

A couple of weeks ago, it made sense to protest President Bush's apparent determination to launch a war against Iraq. Even many of those who accepted the notion of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein

as the embodiment of international evil still thought war was a bad idea, or at least thought it vital not to start shooting until every reasonable alternative had been exhausted.

Even a week ago, it made sense to communicate to Bush the idea that as bad as Saddam is, war is worse -- not merely because war kills but also because this particular war seemed certain to leave nothing settled in the Persian Gulf region and likely to make matters a good deal worse.

I understood the prewar protesters. And at least to some degree, I understand the pacifists among the few hundred demonstrators. What I don't understand -- even after talking to a number of them -- are the people who are protesting continued U.S. involvement in this particular war after the war has started what is the goal of the antiwar protesters? What would they have the president do -- declare a cease-fire and quit the region?

The people I spoke with were unanimous in their view that peace is better than war, but not at all clear that their continuing protest offers no policy alternative that makes sense. They evinced no appreciation of the fact that to suspend military operations now would only help Saddam, who certainly would claim that he had defeated the alliance arrayed against him; that it would endanger our troops, our interests and the prospects for long-term peace.

Some compared the present situation -- inappropriately, I thought -- to Vietnam. Others said the conflict was only about oil or that the politics of the region were none of our business. Still others responded with "give peace a chance" and other '60s-style slogans. None seemed to notice that the Iraqi president had displayed even less interest than his American counterpart in proposals (from interests as varied as France and the PLO) for an international conference. America should just get out, they said.

I didn't argue, but it did seem to me that their position is more likely to prolong the fighting and endanger our fighting forces than to bring an end to the conflict. And it still seems to me that the time has come when protest must give way to support?

*From The Washington Post, January 23, 1991, Wednesday, Final Edition, page A17.
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3. "NEVER SAW A PROTEST I DIDN'T LIKE BUT NOW?" DISSENT IS PATRIOTIC

To the Editor:

I am tired of hearing war protesters described as unpatriotic. It disturbs me to hear tearful relatives of soldiers in the gulf saying protesters will increase American casualties. It is time the American public wakes up to the fact that it isn't the protesters who are killing soldiers in the gulf, it is the politicians who put them there.

We protesters do support the soldiers, and unlike those who support the war, we want to see every one of them return to their homes and families in one piece, alive and healthy in both body and mind. My firm conviction is that the vast majority of Americans do not believe in this war, but are afraid of seeming unpatriotic or being accused of opposing the soldiers if they openly protest it.

A patriot is "a person who loves and loyally or zealously supports his own country." By protesting, we are supporting the people of America and trying to keep the country and people intact?

KATHLEEN RYAN OPON
Covington, Ky., Jan. 18. 1991

From The New York Times, February 3, 1991, Sunday, Late Edition-Final, Section 4; Page 18; Column 4; Editorial Desk. Copyright 1991 The New York Times Company

4. "NEVER SAW A PROTEST I DIDN'T LIKE, BUT NOW?" PRIDE IN AMERICA

To the Editor:

This week's unbelievable events are cause for reflection and retrospect. The fighting in the Persian Gulf is not similar to the Vietnam conflict, nor is Washington's current Administration similar to the Democratic Kennedy-Johnson Administration that so haplessly dragged us into Vietnam. The goals of the war with Iraq are clear, and we have a President and Cabinet fully committed to the swift, decisive resolution of this crisis. Far more is at stake than cheap oil; the balance of power in the Middle East and the preservation of the United Nations' power to prevent militarily strong nations from absorbing smaller ones will be the most important results of this conflict?

It is with much anger and disgust that I see the so-called "peace movement" mobilizing to once again disgrace America by flag-burning, demonstrations and disrupting nonmilitary government operations. The way such "peace activists" treated soldiers who served in Vietnam when they returned home from torturous combat was and still is a national disgrace. This is a different time, a different cause and one hopes we are a different nation. The men and women of our armed forces deserve nothing less than our full support.

CHRIS A. HARMON
White Plains, Jan. 18, 1991

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