

CURATOR'S CORNER

By Emily Ruby, Curator

Vietnam War Activism

The central image on the *Pittsburgh Press* front page for April 18, 1972, shows a banner with the words “Stop the War” hanging over the edge of a balcony in Three Rivers Stadium as the United States flag is raised on Pirates’ opening day. Other headlines demonstrate the tensions and concerns of the American public, from the ongoing war in Vietnam and the Apollo 16 mission to local fights over school busing.

At the protest that day were two brothers, David Hughes, a local anti-war activist and his younger brother Dan. Like many young people, David’s anti-war activism began in college. Hughes came from a political family that frequently discussed current events. He had initially supported the Vietnam War and believed what Presidents Kennedy and Johnson said in defense of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. His opinions began to change in 1964, after debating the Vietnam War as part of a public speaking class, while studying political science at the University of Pittsburgh. Intrigued by the arguments of a teaching assistant, Hughes studied the Geneva Accords and concluded that U.S. intervention in the 1956 elections to reunify Vietnam

The “Stop the War” banner at the Pirates home opener made the front page of the *Pittsburgh Press* on April 18, 1972. David said that he and other anti-war activists had chosen opening day at Three Rivers Stadium to unveil a protest banner to give the best exposure to their cause. Shortly after dropping the banner over the side of the balcony they were asked by security to take it down

Courtesy of David Hughes.

contradicted the agreements signed at the Geneva Conference. (The Geneva Accords, which came out of the Geneva Conference of 1954, were a series of documents that outlined a plan for Vietnam after the French colonial forces left, among many other issues in Indochina at the time). He also began to question President Lyndon Johnson’s frequent use of the SEATO treaty (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), formed in 1954 by the U.S., France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan. It sought to contain the spread of communism in the region as a justification for the war. Vietnam was not a signatory to the treaty.




The Hughes siblings, c. 1987. Back row from left: Richard (Dick), David, and Joe. Front row from left: Dan, Ginny, Jim, and Liz. David went on to become the local coordinator for the Indochina Peace Campaign, and Joe, who was with Richard in Vietnam during the fall of Saigon, became a staff member at the Merton Center.

Courtesy of David Hughes.

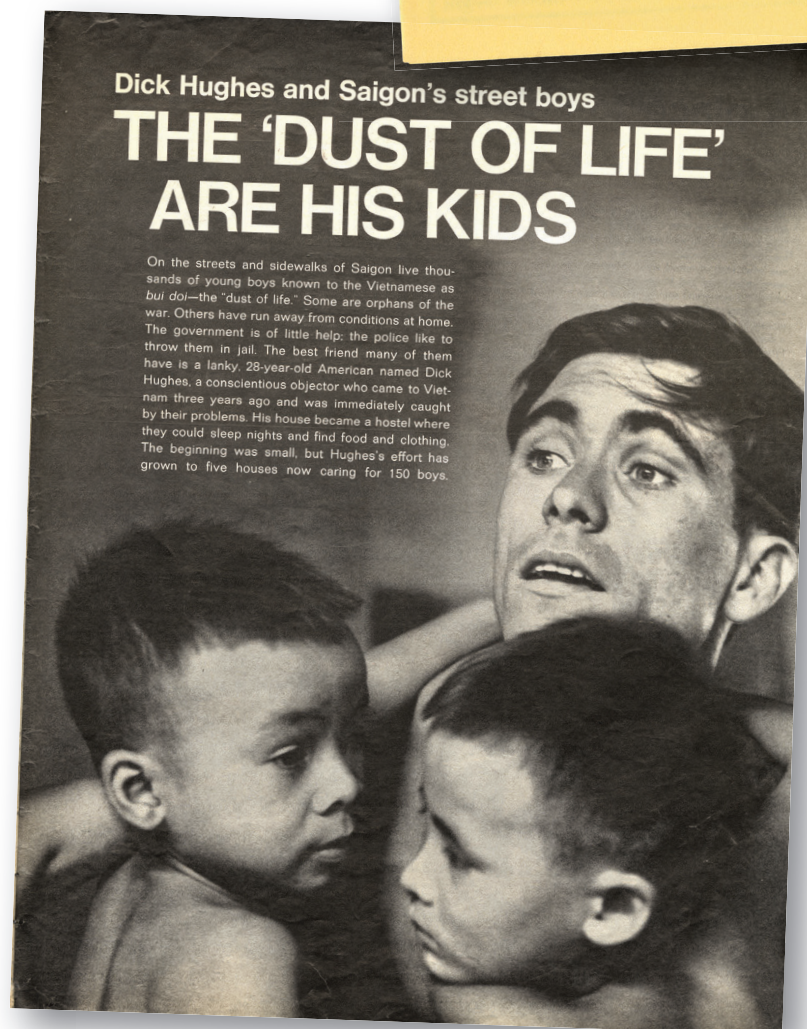
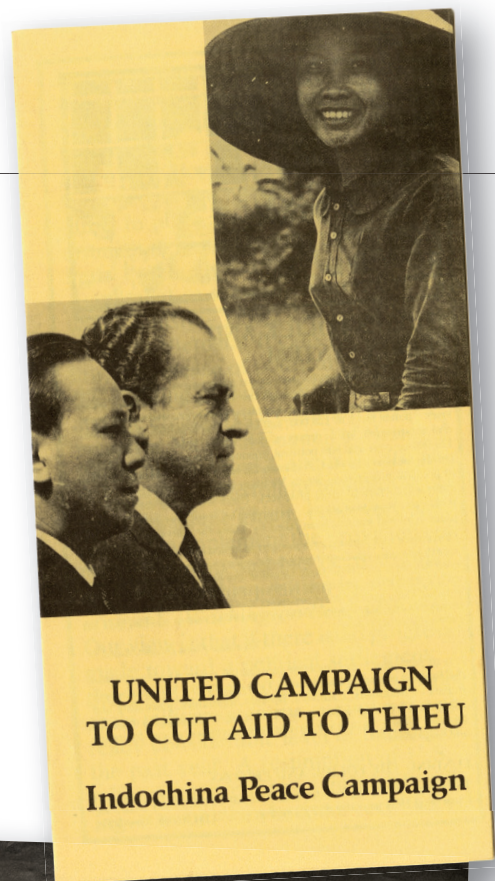
Most of Hughes six siblings were also active in the anti-war movement. His elder brother Richard even achieved some degree of fame during the war. In 1968 his conscientious objector status was revoked and he was drafted into the war. He appealed and while his appeal was pending review, Richard flew to Saigon on a press visa to see the situation in Vietnam first hand. The plight of homeless children in the city touched him. He remained in Saigon, where he sheltered some of the children in his apartment and worked for the *Daily Dispatch* (one of the first news agencies to break the news of the My Lai massacre). By 1972 he had started The Shoeshine Boys Foundation, which housed 150 boys in five facilities throughout South Vietnam. He was featured in *Life* magazine in 1972 and starred in an episode of *This Is Your Life* in 1971, while back in the states to meet with people from the Foundation. His whole family was brought on stage to see him, and then-U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, George H.W. Bush, who thanked him for his work via video. After the war ended, Richard stayed in Saigon for 15 months. He was one of the last Americans to leave the city after the war.

The protest banner shown in the *Pittsburgh Press* photograph is now part of the History Center's collection and is featured in the exhibition, *The Vietnam War: 1945-1975*. David Hughes donated two other Vietnam War protest banners as well as papers that document the work he and his brother Joe did for the anti-war movement. One banner reads, "Stop Nixon, End the War" and the other reads, "200,000 in Thieu's Jails," a reference to Nguyen Van Thieu, who was the President of South Vietnam from 1965 to 1975 and was accused by Amnesty International and other humanitarian organizations of unjustly holding political prisoners in South Vietnamese prisons. These types of collections

help us tell a more nuanced story of reactions to the Vietnam War at home in Western Pennsylvania. 

Pamphlet from the Indochina Peace Campaign. David Hughes ran the local chapter of the IPC from 1972 through 1975. IPC printed many pamphlets and newsletters that highlighted the continued military aid of the United States in Vietnam even after signing the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. They also emphasized the corrupt nature of Thieu's government in South Vietnam.

Courtesy of David Hughes.



Opening page of Richard Hughes' article in *Life* magazine, January 28, 1972.

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