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Tony Francisco
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Paper 2

Zealotry

Growing up during the aftermath of September 11th, I am able to see the effects of zealotry firsthand. After the terrorist hijackings occurred, America came together in a wave of fanatical patriotism. Parallels between our war today and the Vietnam war are numerous but none I find more fascinating and important than zealotry. For my generation, America solidified for a time before splintering off into the pro-war and anti-war movements just as it happened in Vietnam. The one recollection I recall the most from our readings is also a prime example of zealotry. In Charles Cooper's recollection where President Johnson explodes in a tirade of outrage at the idea of starting World War III, Johnson appears to be so blinded by his own fury and pent up rage that he can't even think straight. In that one instant, nobody can pretend to know what it felt like to be President Johnson. But at that point the only thing I see is a man caught in the wave of his own war, unable to break the surface, unable to breathe.

Throughout all of the readings that we were assigned, there were many different themes and points that seemed to tie together through all of the stories, but zealotry is the only one that really stood out to me with any real tangibility.

My first selection is from the section Trails to War, and is Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy's recollection. Chuy's memories evoke a sense of despair and finality that are hard to bear upon reading. Her life seems so average for people on the North's side during the war. With literally 5 people eradicated by a bomb in front of her eyes, her abject horror takes the backseat to her duty to her people and the job they have given her. Chuy and the other Youth Volunteers gave up their love lives, health, and frequently their actual lives in their fanatical battle against the south. Chuy wasn't even an actual soldier, yet here she is zealously giving up everything she has in the name of her cause.

My second selection is James Thomson's. The Vietnam war is one of the most controversial topics in recent history and people like James Thomson only ignite that fire of controversy even more. How is an aide to an elected official given so much power without even knowing or understanding what it is that he really is doing? This account boggles the mind and makes me unable to think about what this means for our government now. I am ashamed of Thomson for him being unable to realize what was actually happening, however, his zealousness for peace later on I do approve of. The dichotic pro- and anti-war movements are both given up to fanaticism. Zealousness by one side, say, the numerous people who were so pro war that they couldn't take the time to explain to Thomson what was really happening, is countered by the equally fanatical anti-war movement in the form of his friend Jonathan Mirsky and his students blocking a bus of draftees.

Zeal is around us in all of our lives a part of all of us. My generation can use the thousands of soldiers that enlisted in the armed forces after September 11th as an example of zealotry. On the other hand, there are just as many people whose families lived through the horrors of Vietnam and feared for their children's lives and the thought of a new draft who fervently fought the war with every ounce of gusto they could muster. Being dedicated to a cause does not make it a worthwhile cause by any means, as you can have fanatics on both sides of a war who both believe that what they are doing is right.

My final selection is from Julian Bond. I found the point of view of a person of color to be incredibly fascinating as I had never really given that a huge amount of thought. The final quote at the end of the selection by Muhammad Ali, "No Viet Cong never called me a nigger," was brilliant. I found this to be an eye opener as all of this is happening during the era of civil rights. I like how the minorities were divided as what to do with the Vietnam war and how to go about handling it. It seems that maybe half wanted to announce their firm unsupportive stance of the war, while the other half fervently wanted to not not lob in their cause with the war and wanted to stay completely out of the governments way.

Throughout this war and all wars there is always going to be a wave of fanaticism one way or the other. It is as much a part of history as is the war itself. When you look back at Vietnam, you see Lyndon B. Johnson who was arguably a man of peace before the war, transformed into a caricature of his own over enthusiasm for the war. Zealousness is ever around us, and firmly embedded in to

the annals of history.

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