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Patriot's Journal #2

At first thought this journal assignment seemed to be an easy one. As I reread through the *Patriot's* book I changed my mind. I found that every story could be considered as being disappointing in some way. Also, many of these could be seen as both disappointing and still give a glimmer of hope at the same time. The story *You could smell the burning flesh* told by Malcolm Browne provided a good example of how something so terrible could still have something positive come from it. The death of Thich Quang Duc by immolation was difficult to read about, but at the same time it did bring a huge amount of attention to the plight of the Buddhists under Diem's rule. This story had the largest emotional impact on me, but there were two other stories that I found to be most disappointing. Both of these stories give a good example of ethnocentrism and ignorance by the people who were making decisions concerning America's position and actions with regard to South and North Vietnam.

The first of these stories is *What's good for Peru is good for Vietnam* told by Paul Kattenburg. Reading through his story I was again struck by how little the people who were at the National Security Counsel Executive Committee knew about the country of Vietnam. They were instead focused upon stopping Communism. Vietnam was just the place this fight was happening at that time with no consideration given to the difficulties Vietnam would present. There was the idea we knew what was best for other nations even if it was not wanted. At various times in the reading this attitude seems to come through, such as when Kattenburg stated "we could manipulate other states and build nations; that we knew all the answers" (p. 82). It was disheartening to see those with opinions that differed from what was expected and punished for expressing their opinions. This is also the case in the second story. In *Dissent which contradicted the public optimism was ignored* told by Evelyn Colbert we find at the Bureau of Intelligence Research at the State Department how information which did not support the "public optimism was ignored" (p. 83). And when statistics the military produced were re-evaluated and showed the Viet Cong were doing better than expected Secretary of Defense McNamara instead of reevaluating his position was upset that the Bureau of Intelligence Research for not having cleared their evaluation with the Defense Department. This struck me as a willful attempt to remain ignorant of the true facts, using only the information which readily supported your views.

From the reading I know this was a different time and place, the focus on Communism was much different at that time, and still today dissent is rarely appreciated when it is seen as detrimental. But, what makes these stories so disappointing was that they show there were some who realized what was going on and where this may lead, and just how these views were ignored or discouraged. It is hard to say if anything would have changed if some of these ideas were listened to. I also wondered if there may have been others with similar opinions who did not wish to speak up because of the way dissent was dealt with by those in positions of power over them.

Just as many of these stories were both disappointing and hopeful at the same time I found the story *She divorced her second husband and waited for me* told by Luyen Nguyen showed how life always will continue on. After being captured by North Vietnamese soldiers he spent twenty-one years imprisoned, many of them in solitary confinement. While his story is more than sad, it was at the end of the story of when he was reunited with his family I found hope for the future. It was the simple statement about seeing his daughter and grandchildren for the first time I realized life goes on even in the worst of times. The

reading for this week tended to be rather negative focusing on the bad decisions made, and the hardships people experienced. These few sentences reminded me life still continues to be worth living.

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