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History 195

Nathan Houser's story represented the turning point in the war. Nathan really focused on Kennedy's assassination and how it shook his faith in the government. "Kennedy's assassination had an enormous impact on me...that's when I began taking a critical stance toward our government." (336) Kennedy's assassination, with all the government conspiracies and misconceptions behind it really made Americans question their government. If our government had more to do with Kennedy's assassination then it was confessing to there must be more that they are covering up. America had been shocked by the brutality inside of its country when someone dared to shoot the president. This really opened the eyes of so many people. Suddenly the government wasn't the good guy.

Nathan Houser went from being an all American patriot to fleeing to Canada to avoid being drafted into a war he didn't believe in. "...that the American way of life was the right and just one...I fully shared a typical Midwestern attitude that somehow war was glorious and being a soldier was the pinnacle of bravery." (335) Nathan didn't go to Canada because he was afraid to fight. Quite the opposite he says he was very comfortable with fighting. It was the cause American that he was over there fighting for that he questioned. "I felt it was wrong. It was clear we weren't fighting for democracy." (337) Nathan didn't believe it was right for the government to force him to fight a war he didn't think was right. This was a time where so many people were experiencing the same feelings as Nathan and the war was becoming unpopular. "The way the war was being conducted, the veil of secrecy that the media cloaked itself in, and the music of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez..." (337)

The peace movement had become popular and began to sweep up America, which combined with Kennedy's assassination began to change the popular opinion on the Vietnam War. Many Americans began to question their government and why men were losing their lives for a cause they were having a hard time understanding. The Domino Theory made the war in Vietnam seem absolutely necessary. But this theory may be all wrong. After all Vietnam was a tiny country clustered in between so many big countries. People began to wonder if it was really feasible that such a small country could matter so much in the grand scheme of things. The late 1960's was also a time when the media had begun to turn against the war in Vietnam. The public began to hear about the horrible deaths of thousands of Vietnamese citizens. While America began to promote peace, the war escalated and more Vietnamese citizens were killed.

Martin Luther King who was a big promoter of peace had been assassinated during the war in Vietnam. Martin Luther King's assassination combined with Kennedy's assassination along with the war in Vietnam began to overwhelm America. There was so much strife in America and needless bloodshed. Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, the general public and the government were divided. A nation divided is never at its strongest. Nathan's brother volunteered to go to Vietnam and Nathan fled to Canada. Although both brothers weren't sure how honest the cause Vietnam was Nathan's brother still fought. Nathan refused to fight for a cause he didn't believe in. All over the country this kind of strife was in American families. Ideals were changing; hawks and doves were constantly opposing each other. As time went on the strife in our nation just got worse. The turning point in the war was long in coming but for most American's it was the Kennedy assassination in 1963. From that time on many American began to raise some serious doubts about the war. The protests started slowly but with a few years' time they became enormous. These protests were big enough that the government could no longer ignore them.

Le Minh Khue's story was especially touching. It seemed like the perfect story to use when speaking about the end of the war from the Vietnamese point of view. America was able to just leave the mess they had made. The Vietnamese were the one who had to clean it all up. Although, the Vietnamese won the war they had a lot of

damage and bloodshed that even now thirty plus years later they are still recovering from.

Khue was one of the first to witness the liberation of Danang in 1975. "As we approached, southern soldiers were fleeing the city in their shorts and undershirts...they didn't make any effort to resist. They waved to us. It meant the war was over. What an unbelievable feeling."(511) She joined the volunteer youth corps when she was only 16 and was a part of the war until the very end. She was raised by communist foster parents but she has a different understanding. "We learned to distinguish truth from falsehood, rectitude from corruption."(509) Khue's whole life has been surrounded by war and unjust actions. Her parents were killed by communists and then she was raised by communist favoring family. She witnessed unbelievable bloodshed but she kept on fighting the war to reunite her country. She never lost faith in her cause even though in the end she was left worse off than before. All the Vietnamese were left with was a divided country and a ruined country.

The people in the north thought the cities in the south were beautiful and very nice. However upon entering the city of Danang it was obvious that this wasn't true. "It was just another impoverished city."(511) All the Vietnamese had fought so hard to keep their country. They were left with improvised cities and countless dead Vietnamese in the end. The Vietnamese people are strong and they have a will to survive. "Thanks to their purity of motive and their zeal they survived the war and even won a victory."(509) The cost of this victory was so high. Khue mentions that she used to get letters from many young soldiers. "Now the letters remain but the senders are gone forever."(510)

After the liberation of Saigon things began to change dramatically. Things were so different, after all the Vietnamese had finally forced American to withdraw its army. After decades of fighting for their country now the Vietnamese could finally breathe easy for a while. There was little time to really celebrate the victory because as Khue soon discovered the country was in very bad shape. "The ten years after the liberation were a nightmare. Something had broken down; something had fallen apart. People had no money but money was the master. We lacked everything even soap and rice. It was terrible." (511) The war was over but now the Vietnamese faced another challenge rebuilding their economy. Villages and fields had been burned down. Cities had been bombed to the ground. Agent Orange had destroyed the plant life and the health of countless Vietnamese The war had been won at a great cost.

Despite all Khue has lost she still managed to find beauty even in the midst of a war. "Even in such chaotic times we enjoyed moments of peace and beauty. You know, the jungle was so beautiful."(510) It's hard to believe to believe that after witnessing such devastation and so much bloodshed that any Vietnamese citizen could still find beauty in it all. All the soldiers she once knew are long gone, her family is gone, and the land she fought so hard for is destroyed. What an amazing testimony. The war in Vietnam hurt so every single citizen in some way or another. Too often I think we forget the level of devastation they have to deal with every day. In some of the accounts in *Patriots* the American soldiers called the Vietnamese gooks. When you hear of a story like Khue's it makes you remember that they too are human and they can feel everything we can. Khue was not a gook she fought hard and bravely for her country. The American soldiers fought hard and bravely for their country. Although there are some stark differences in reality we are all just alike.

Khue's story was a good example about the end of the war because it represented a more personal Vietnamese view. Khue's was specifically chosen because Vietnamese. America's had many losses because of the war but not even close to how many losses and devastation the Vietnamese had. It's important to remember that the Vietnamese are human to. They are just like us. I chose Nathan Houser's story because he brought attention to Kennedy's assassination and how it directly affected his views. He was not alone in this. Soon after the assassination the peace movements really swept through America. This all influenced the war. The assassination caused the American to question the war and the government more heavily than ever before. All these questions led to the opposition against the war in Vietnam.

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