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Jesse Kennedy
History 195
Online
Assignment 1

George Watkins's story stood out to me. His story is just so candid that it cuts through all of the rhetoric that was being professed at the time. I especially like the author's comment at the end of the interview about George's request to "fancy it up." George was truthful in his interview about how scared he was and about how little he knew. His honesty gives great credibility to his story. He paints a very vivid picture in my mind of what the life of a grunt in Vietnam might have been like. The situation on the ground would have been profoundly impacted by the instability created by the bureaucracy of a military seemingly improvising at every turn when he says, "...I reckon they just drew a line somewhere on the list and I went to infantry..." The simple fact that he said that losing his legs was nothing when compared with losing his vision struck me with some of the stark realities that soldiers faced in Vietnam.

The account by Malcolm Browne shows us a first person viewpoint into some very critical events and shows some of the double-play that was going on in Vietnam. The "advisory" role of many Americans is put under scrutiny in this account as well as many others, I was particularly disapproving of the account in which Americans were flying bombing runs in Vietnamese planes and that Browne was threatened with expulsion for attempting to report it. I was very disappointed with the censorship that is represented both in this account and that of Le Lieu Browne. America was there in the name of democracy, yet supporting an authoritarian government that was so blatantly out of sync with and abrasive to its own people that Thich Quang Duc burned himself. Although, Malcolm's reputation would benefit from the idea that some potentially explosive reporting was suppressed, I believe that he seemed to genuinely feel for the people of Vietnam. Frankly, his account feels honest. It would be hard to verify some of the assertions he makes, but his account of the monks and his spouse lead me to believe that he is trying to show us how life in Vietnam was.

This analysis was the task in part one, not part two.

During Browne's account there is also a underlying current of the determination of the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese had been fighting for their independence for a thousand years, America was a newcomer to the scene. Browne's account of the Buddhist insurrection and Thich Quang Duc's martyrdom is profoundly moving. I cannot imagine the level of determination that would be required to go through something so painful. The hardest thing to imagine is being in the place of those who loved the man and were watching him suffer, but were so dedicated to the rightness of the cause that they laid down in front of the wheels of the fire truck to ensure that Duc was left in peace. His account ends with the utter failure of American bombing tactics due to the tenacity of Vietnamese fighting spirit, "Of course maybe forty percent had been killed and many had their eardrums shattered, but they were still an effective fighting force." As Giap said in his account of Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese would fight as long as they needed to in order to win their right to self determination.

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Is this the disappointing part, or the part where you see some positive? It seems as if the paper strayed from the original questions..