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Assignment 1

Part 1

To ask which individual story regarding personal perspective on the Vietnam War impacted me the most was difficult to make a final choice or judgment about, as I found each account to be highly moving and equally relevant. The story which caught my attention and that I chose to write about was by antiwar movement activist Deirdre English for the simple reason that I related on a personal level to her story. We are both women, I too was seemingly ignorant about many serious issues that took place when I was a senior in high school, and like her, I wanted to be informed and take action in areas that mattered.

The fact that in 1966, when the United States was engaged in a war with Vietnam and English, a high school senior at that time, had not only “never heard of Vietnam” but was also one out of “most Americans” in the same boat at the time (p. 30). The fact that she showed a sincere interest in learning and knowing about the war was deeply inspiring. She chose to educate herself and become part of a hugely significant movement in our history. It is unbelievable that she recalled not being told anything about the war from her teachers. Not only did that raise questions for English, but that also raised questions for me as well. Why weren’t teachers informing their students about the war at which time was underway? That she was shocked and appalled by the questions which came up for her at demonstration she attended left me feeling the same way; as if I could have been in her shoes. The museum was glorifying and trivializing that there was an actual war going on by making light of the combat and killings taking place with their “game-like display of dominance,” (p. 30) referring to the helicopters visitors could get inside of and simulate war-like activities directed at Vietnamese communities, particularly peasants.

Like so many others, having seen and heard stories about the Vietnam War and feeling as if I only had a general idea of what it was about; not knowing any of the actual facts as to why we were there, how long we were there, or the numbers of humankind who were killed left me feeling appalled with myself. The fact that the Vietnam War, as English stated, “eventually made people start questioning everything” (p. 31) gave me goose bumps. What a significant time in history to be a part of, to be asking questions of a corrupt government, to be taking a stand for what you believe at many times in the face of adversity. It is amazing, the demonstrations and strikes she took part in. Being one of the first women at her college and barging into classrooms to invite professors and students alike in regards to

participating in the strike against the Vietnam War are both things I admire. Not only was she being an activist for a worthy cause, but the way in which she described the types of things she was a part of brings a thrill to the reader; in a time when “they didn’t even have phones in their dorm rooms.” This story was inspirational and Deirdre English is a woman we should all look up to.

Deirdre English seemed to be highly reliable, trustworthy, and believable in her personal accounts of her story regarding how she became a Vietnam War activist. She never glamorized her story, on the contrary, she openly acknowledged that in the beginning of her journey she had absolutely no idea what was going on. She speaks from a true place of unbiased experience, simply sharing her experiences during a time in history we all want to know more about. Because she was there at that specific moment in time it does give her more credibility. On that note, if I had been there and was telling my story of what I saw, heard, felt, and did; I would have more credibility than someone who had not been there because I would have been a part of it.

English’s accounts are both objective and factual. Objective because she is telling the part she played in history which makes it her experience, but she also speaks about factual accounts and backs up her statements with events we know to be true. As for not recollecting these stories correctly due to the passing of time, pivotal moments such as those that English explained do not get forgotten but instead tend to stay within us burning bright and constant as if no time had passed at all.

Part 2

Rufus Phillips story was a good read. A football player, graduate of Yale, and a member of the CIA eventually “ordered to report to Vietnam” (p. 50), Phillips perspective on the War intrigued me. When he talked about hearing the legendary Edward G. Lansdale speak at the Majestic Hotel, I felt sympathetic when he explained that the response to the clarification of their mission was “find out what the Vietnamese people want and then help them get it” (p. 51). No matter what your age, sex, pride, or qualifications; being in the midst of the Vietnam War without a clue had to be terrifying for anyone specifically when he says how confused he was even after reading the book assigned to him from Lansdale as well as several others. It was moving when he was experiencing so many opposing perspectives of what made Vietnam the way it was; so many contradictions really, and thought “my God, will I ever understand anything about this place” (p. 51)?

A positive lesson from this reading was when “Rufe” Phillips reflected on how, when during

his first assignment he went to retrieve medical kits which were to be distributed in the countryside, when the American official he went to for these supplies denied him saying that the place was already lost; Phillips didn't have that perspective. It was also positive to hear that when he went to speak to the Vietnamese down in Ca Mau that they were there to help them (p. 52). Really, who can be trusted at a time of war? But the Vietnamese trusted Phillips. He spoke of the Vietnamese people in a kind way, acknowledging how they didn't seem to have very much self-confidence due to the French putting them down and that part of their job there was to help build up their confidence; which they did. It was also a good feeling to hear that even though rape and pillaging were expected from the government troops that there was not a single incident among the army and civilians, and furthermore, Phillips said towards the end when the Vietnamese were greeting the troops with bowls of water and that he was moved, admittedly I was teary-eyed. At the end he voiced obvious regrets about pulling out when they did, but also seemed to feel strongly that their efforts made a huge difference in the strength of many areas in Southeast Asia. The examples I named were all displays of "potential for good," "hope," and "compassion."

Part 2 of 2

It was both a struggle and an inspiration to read Vo Nguyen Giap's story. Emotional and moving, the disappointment I felt came from the frustrating way in which he had been treated; serving three years in a French prison for anticolonial activism at the age of eighteen. His story was most probably the most moving to me in the book because he was so accomplished, had endured so much, and spoke with such eloquence, pride, and unwavering conviction. It was disappointing to hear how the Vietnamese people could have been spared from the war altogether had American leaders been wiser, as well as the "insane atrocities inflicted by Americans" including the My Lai massacre and the bombing of the Bach Mai hospital (p. 42). Vo Nguyen Giap's stories are an inspiration, deeply moving and exceptionally spoken. He is a truly great man.

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