

Due date: Sunday, 27 May 2012, 11:55 PM

Last edited: Sunday, 27 May 2012, 11:50 PM (835 words)

Assignment 2

Part 1 – Turning Point: Out of all the stories in Part Four of Appy's book "Patriots," the story that best illustrates a turning point in the Vietnam War is told by John Douglas Marshall, beginning on page 328 and ending on page 330. Although there are longer, more in depth stories that I could have chosen, I picked Mr. Marshall's story because his personal account of defying his family by withdrawing from the military due to moral objections mirrors the ever growing philosophy of the American public to question and speak out against government institutions and policy, instead of accepting and following it blindly. In his story, Marshall talks about his grandfather, who not only was his role model growing up but was also an outspoken and admired supporter of the Korean and Vietnam wars. Marshall remembers completing ROTC training and enlisting in the military not because he was passionate about defending his country, but because it was what was expected of him by his family. During his first year as an infantry officer, he studied literature and followed leaders of pacifism and nonviolence, and came to the conclusion that the Vietnam War, which he was inevitably going to be sent to fight was wrong, and once coming to this realization he applied to leave the army as a conscientious objector. Marshall knew that by leaving the army he would be disappointing and disgracing his family (once his grandfather found out he had resigned he disowned him), but he stood by his own convictions and did what he felt was morally correct. Even though this is just one person's story, this type of skeptical thinking amongst the American public was a cornerstone of the turning point in the Vietnam War, and was something that was virtually unheard of before the cultural revolution of the 1960's. Regarding anti-war movement and the new mindset that went along with it, Herring states that "Their movement became inextricably linked with the cultural revolution that swept the United States in the late 1960s and challenged the most basic of American values and institutions, leaving divisions that would last into the next century," (Herring, pg. 206). By 1971, the American public's views on the war were obvious,

with the polls showing that 71% of Americans “believed intervention in Vietnam had been a mistake and, remarkably, 58% regarding the war as immoral,” (Appy, pg. 393). In my opinion, it was the American public’s vast disapproval and disgust of the war that motivated Nixon to pull US troops out of Vietnam and that forced us to reach a peace agreement with North Vietnam in 1973. Before the Vietnam War and the Cultural Revolution that coincided with it, American citizens more or less had faith in the government and supported both domestic and foreign policy (this mirrors Marshall’s attitude of joining the military and the ROTC because it was what was expected of him by his family), but during the late ‘60s and early 70’s, we started to question why we were really in Vietnam and realize that maybe it wasn’t in our best interest to be fighting in a war we could not win. Americans spoke out against the policies they believed were impractical or immoral, without regard to the personal consequences they may encounter (as Marshall did when he realized he could not justify fighting a war he believed was wrong, and resigned, knowing the negative impact it would have on his relationship between him and his family). This is why I believe that John Douglas Marshall’s personal testimony is the best example of a turning point in the Vietnam War.

Part 2 – Endings: The best account of the end of the Vietnam War in part 5 of Appy’s book “Patriots” is told by Judith Coburn, beginning on page 407 and ending on page 412. Coburn tells of the mutiny she witnessed while working as a reporter in Vietnam during 1970. Soldiers were unwilling to put their lives at risk for a cause they did not believe in and the majority of the time didn’t even know what it consisted of. Coburn contributed this lack of morale to the Tet offensive and the peace talks that the soldiers knew were underway, but I think it had more to do with the fact that young men were drafted and forced to fight for something they either did not care about or openly opposed. The fact that the Vietnam War has a higher percentage of draft resistance and evasion than any other war in America’s history speaks volumes to back up this claim. The minute that US troops became unwilling to fight the war, whatever their reasons may have been, we lost the war. Coburn sums up this point excellently when she states “When I hear people say we could have won the war, I always think: where were you going to get the soldiers?” (Appy, pg. 409).

Close this window

 [Moodle Docs for this page](#)