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Turning Points and Endings

There are many events which could easily be classified as ~~a~~ turning point in the Vietnam War; many people think of the Tet Offensive of 1968 as the clearest example. However, one event also stands out high among the others – the My Lai Massacre on March 16th, 1968. The Massacre occurred in one of the subhamlets of Son My Village. Charlie Company went through and killed about 500 Vietnamese civilians, only to later report that they had had “a successful firefight in which 128 ‘Viet Cong’ had been killed in action.” (Appy 343) However, photos were taken, and witnesses came forward to show this atrocity to the world, revealing the many flaws with the war and the necessity of leaving it behind. Ank

One of the biggest problems the My Lai Massacre revealed to the public was the “scale” by which U.S. military officials measured combat success. This scale was the “body count”: the more Viet Cong that were killed, the better off the U.S. military was doing. The only problem was, the Viet Cong had a way of blending in with civilians, and many civilians themselves were supporters of the Viet Cong. So where do soldiers draw the line? Often times it was not drawn, especially when corrupt leaders were involved, such as Lieutenant Calley of Charlie Company. While there were many American soldier who never committed a single atrocity against innocent civilians, the idea of “body count” only made it easier for those corrupt such as Calley to go in and say, “Hey, I hate what these Vietnamese have done, I need to take out my anger somewhere.” As Larry Colburn tells in his account of the My Lai Massacre, “‘The only things I remember feeling back then was that these guys were really out for revenge. They’d lost men to booby traps and snipers and they were ready to engage.’” (Appy 348) The sad part was, if there were not witnesses to this kind of atrocity, it was easy for soldiers to tell officials, “Yes, well, today we killed such-and-such number of Viet Cong,” then everything was okay. With this in mind, it became clear that My Lai was probably not an isolated incident, just one that happened to have witnesses willing to come out. Ank
quote

When this senseless violence was revealed to the public, it had not only activists talking, but everyday Americans. “Millions who had believed the war a misguided policy or a tragic mistake began to consider the possibility that it was fundamentally unjust and immoral. That claim had long been a staple of speeches at antiwar rallies and articles in underground newspapers, but now it was debated for the first time in small-town coffee shops, executive offices, and mass-circulation magazines.” (Appy 344) Many more people were becoming less and less comfortable with a war that used body count as a measure of success and which seemed increasingly about imposing U.S. power in places where it was not needed. Therefore, the My Lai Massacre definitely represents a turning point – it brought the idea of the immorality of Vietnam to the forefront of the U.S. population; it was now not consolidated primarily to the antiwar movement.

good point

When it comes to the end of the War, many people look at the fall of Saigon in 1975, but there are many things which were also triggers. The release of the Pentagon Papers by Daniel Ellsberg in June 1971, and the subsequent Watergate Scandal in 1972, can together be considered a final tipping point of the American peoples’ patience with the U.S. government’s intentions. Throughout the entire Vietnam War era, presidents had been hiding motives and plans from the public, (and even from Congress), since the very beginning.

because that is a "flaw" we were
Ellsberg decided it was essentially his patriotic duty to release the Pentagon papers and reveal to the American public what their presidents had been hiding from them. Although he did not release any papers concerning anything more recent than the Johnson administration, his goal was to make Nixon paranoid that he might release something about him, and therefore attempt to change his policy. "Nixon wasn't worried about the actual release of the Pentagon Papers. They weren't embarrassing to him. ... The reason he was so preoccupied with me had entirely to do with his fears that I would release information about his plans to escalate the war ... so he had to shut me up." (Appy 434) Nixon's increasing paranoia caused by Ellsberg's actions were ultimately his downfall.

Far before Ellsberg released the papers, Nixon had already "authorized illegal wiretaps to be placed on the phones of government officials and journalists suspected of leaking information about the covert escalation and expansion of the war." (Appy 430) These activities came to light after Nixon's "Plumbers" were caught trying to sabotage his Democratic Party opponents. Ellsberg firmly believes that "without Watergate, I think Nixon might have been able to keep up the bombing of Vietnam indefinitely," (Appy 436) and eventually, leading to further escalation. Essentially speaking, without Watergate, the U.S. could have been in Vietnam much longer. The Pentagon Papers opened the public's eyes to the fact that presidents lied – and lied very frequently. They lead not only to "a delegitimization of the war, [and] an impatience with its continuation," (Appy 436) but also contributed to Nixon's sense of paranoia and desperation not to be the president that "lost" Vietnam, thanks to the undermining of the "doves" or suspected Communist sympathizers.

Therefore, the Watergate Scandal and Pentagon Papers both ended the chance of a prolonging of the war, and possibly even helped shorten it as well. In that way, it can definitely be seen as a trigger for the ending. The public was finally saying, "enough is enough." The flaws of the Vietnam War and the way in which it was run can be represented clearly in the events of the My Lai Massacre, and the Watergate/Pentagon Papers scandals. The first opened the public's eyes, and the latter confirmed suspicions and marked an end to patience.

Works Cited

Appy, Christian G. Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Careful about trying to "prove" "what if" scenarios that never happened. Eg. Nixon pledged to bring home the troops. He did in 1973.

Overall good paper an improvement from paper #1