

HST 195: History of Vietnam War Sp18 (Escobar 41945)

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Week 2 Forum Patriots and PBS

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Patriots and PBS

by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, April 7, 2018, 10:16 AM

This thread is for discussions on the Patriots and PBS topic.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which one of the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Patriots and PBS

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Malcolm Browne and Thich Quang Duc

by [Caitlin Stibbard](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 1:54 PM



by Caitlin Strickland - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 1:54 PM

Reading through the stories in the Appy book, I was stunned by Malcolm Browne's recollection of what he saw as he spent time in Vietnam in the 60s as an American journalist, from the hamlets, slaughters, the Buddhist insurrection, and airstrikes. He captured the iconic image of Thich Quang Duc's symbolic suicide that became the image of resistance against South Vietnam's president Ngo Dinh Diem. Browne describes its lasting impact, saying this picture "was seen on the front-pages of newspapers all around the world...[becoming] one of the two or three most familiar images from the Vietnam War- a robed monk, head shaved, sitting perfectly upright in the middle of a city street, engulfed in flames" (Appy, 64-65). Duc's martyrdom sparked huge protests as Buddhists and students called the American press and used English protest signs and invited American journalists in order to get on television and in newspapers, capturing the attention of the Western world in "the first television war" (Vietnam: A Television History episode 2, 34:30). This important moment, story, and image show the complexity and volatility of social and political relationships among the Vietnamese between the end of the First Indochina War and the beginning of America's direct military engagement and how these conflicts became publicized and internationalized.

These series of protests in 1963 were reactionary to Ngo Dinh Diem's repressive policies and use of violence. Diem, who was appointed by Bao Dai, had few allies in the south. He was frequently supported by the United States government, until his policies grew too controversial and his political power dominated and he was overthrown in a coup (Vietnam: A Television History episode 2, 46:04). Nationalistic Diem's regime became increasingly oppressive in the late 1950s. Not only communists but also those who had aided the French, organized any resistance against them, or even opposed their government were subjected to inhumane treatment, torture, or forced Catholic conversion (Vietnam: A Television History episode 2 18:43). Diem's soldiers killed Buddhist worshippers, raiding temples and arresting Buddhists (Vietnam: A Television History episode 2 34:03). Ngo Dinh Diem was a Catholic, and "there was a broad feeling that the government and all the positions of power were under the control of Diem's Catholic family" (Appy, 67). Diem prohibited flying the Buddhist flag, which acted as the impetus for a mass demonstration in Hue in which any Buddhists were killed. This only exasperated his opposition, and there were constant Buddhist demonstrations and processions of monks (Appy 67). Not only did Diem's policies offend the monks, but all buddhists, including many members of his own army (Vietnam: A Television History episode 2, 39:51). In fact, according to Browne, there was a "depth of anti-Diem sentiment throughout the South, and not just among the Viet Cong" that was underestimated by both the United States and South Vietnamese

governments (Appy 67).

Thich Quang Duc's ultimate sacrifice was one of the most iconic and important non-military developments of the time; it is important because one cannot understand any war without understanding the political situation of each government and their citizens. Browne hauntingly writes "you could see the agony in his expression, but he never cried out. His eyes closed, his lips tightened, and the flames enveloped him. you could smell the burning flesh." When firemen tried to break through to the flaming monk, younger monks lay down in front of their wheels so the trucks could not move without crushing them. Duc's heart was kept in the pagoda where the protest initiated (Appy, 68). Years later, upon revisiting Vietnam, Browne found that this pagoda was unsafe and full of secret police. Thich Tri Quang, a leading monk in anti-Diem protests, was under house arrest and said "that the human rights problems under the Communists were as bad as they had been under Diem" (Appy 72).

The position was so fraught with violence, repression, and anxiety that Browne and his colleague were harshly punished for sending the photographs of Duc's suicide to American media; South Vietnamese police assaulted them with bricks, smashing their cameras and beating them up. They were then charged for attacking the police (Appy 69).

This story shows many key elements shown in the second episode of the Vietnam documentary, especially about Diem's government and the opposition that sprang up in resistance to it. Thich Quang Duc's suicide and other protests, stunning displays of the beliefs and strength of the people, had a huge impact both domestically and internationally on attitudes towards South Vietnam and Ngo Dinh Diem.

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Re: Patriots and PBS

by [Parker Mann](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 8:56 PM

Which single story from Part 1 or 2 of the Appy book is the most significantly related to any event or development which has been presented in either Episode 1 or 2 of the documentary? What is the connection (be specific)? In your analysis, why is this event or development significant?

In the Appy book, the story of Bernard Trainor, Trainor speaks of how the Vietnamese Revolution was similar to the American revolution, in that they would keep fighting

forever. It was to be a war for independence to the death if need (Appy, Pg 7). This similarity to the United States is interesting considering that both nations had been through the same struggles but were fighting each other. This relates to the PBS documentary and how it mentions Ho Chi Ming's original draft of the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence and how it was strikingly similar to the United States'. Using words like 'Liberty', 'Justice', and 'Freedom' and seemingly hoping to model their country after the US politically, but Ironically eventually having to be oppressed/fight them for the freedom that the US once fought for. The PBS documentary also mentions multiple times Ho's admiration for the US and their principles even though they end up somewhat betraying him. I thought this was an interesting parallel because the US' defense originally for the war was to defend small independent countries from communism and let them function independent, while they were actually oppressing the revolution that they claimed to defend.

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Patriotism of Troops

by [Mackenzie Child](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 9:27 PM

The most important connection I've drawn so far has to do with patriotism and nationalism; especially of the Viet Minh. In the first chapter of the documentary the vietnamese people show time and time again their loyalty to a nationalist idea, against the Chinese, the French, the Japanese, whoever wanted to colonize them. In the personal accounts in the App book as well, the Vietnamese soldiers all spoke of fighting to maintain some sort of national pride. The American accounts are sometimes like this too but to quite a much I've noticed. For example in the Appy book, the account of Tran Thi Gung feels largely patriotic, "I wanted to do something to liberate my country"(Appy 16).

I'm a little confused how the format of these responses should look, I appreciate any and all feedback

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Different for US

by [Miles Arnold](#) - Saturday, April 14, 2018, 9:35 PM

I agree with your point about nationalism and pride amongst the Vietnamese fighters. On the other side of that, it seems like the American soldiers are left trying to piece together the meaning of the time they spent in the battlefield watching their friends get killed while also spreading a lot of destruction across the region. They all

seem to have different views and ways of coping.

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1

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Patriotism and Tran Thi Gung

by [Kate Adkisson](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:32 PM

Mackenzie,

I hope your Sunday is going well, and I'm excited to be able to converse with fellow students about our thoughts regarding the readings and videos. Through our different upbringings, worldviews, beliefs and personalities, I believe we can understand just what really happened through a critical lense. I think your forum post is formatted fine, and this is my first time composing responses for Joe, so I'm not entirely sure how long or in depth he wants these responses to be. Hopefully by next week we all understand the requirements and expectations and everyone earns more than 8 points.

Patriotism and love for one's country seems to be time and time again the driving force of the North Vietnamese perserverance, as well as the driving force of American soldiers' eagerness to participate in a conflict they had little understanding of.

You mentioned Tran Thi Gung, a woman who grabbed my attention heavily during the reading. Women in war time is almost an ignored subject, as women are usually either spoils of war or some sort of health care provider. This lady, however, is introduced on page 16 as "the only woman in her unit, a detail that comes up in passing, as if hardly worthy of mention". Suffering from tragedies such as her father's murder, extreme communal poverty, police brutality and living under the aggressive rule of the French, Tran's nationalism and love for her people, her country, grew with each injustice. She notes in Patriots, "I believed my mission in life was to continue my father's cause" (Appy, p.16). Her father, a Viet Cong murdered in her eyes only for the crime of having love for one's country and people, inspired and pushed her to become a guerrilla. She wasn't born out of the womb hating America, wanting to kill for a cause, worshipping communism, she was just born. A girl, a child, a human who wanted peace, stabilitiy, a life. But external influences out of her control built up a patriotic identity, a fighting identity. Does she feel guilty? Should she feel guilty? I don't believe so, and she does not either. "But I never felt guilty about the killing I did. It was war. Wouldn't you shoot me if you saw me holding a weapon and pointing it at you? I think it was justified. But if I went to America and killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to

killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to my country, I don't feel guilty" (Appy, p. 18-19).

After reading her story, I went back to the introduction, in which the author describes a picture taken by Duong Thanh Phong of her, aiming a rifle in a field. I googled and tried to find a picture of her, or that picture of her, and found some pictures but I'm not sure if they are her. But I will include one in the post because putting a face to the name or at least putting some sort of picture to the face is interesting to me.



<- not sure if this is her, but this is what

comes up overwhelmingly on Google images.

-Luna.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

3

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Re: Patriotism and Tran Thi Gung

by [Parker Mann](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:44 PM

Kate, I really agree with your point that women in war is a very ignored subject, and that is why the story told by Tran Thi Gung really stood out to me. It had a really unique perspective and story compared to the other tales in the book in my opinion, and really showed the true grit of the war. Thank you for your great contrasting of world views and circumstances surrounding the identity of Tran Thi Gung, and her story. You bring up an interesting point with this and her quote

of “But I never felt guilty about the killing I did. It was war. Wouldn’t you shoot me if you saw me holding a weapon and pointing it at you? I think it was justified. But if I went to America and killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to my country, I don’t feel guilty” (Appy, p. 18-19). This quote also brings up the issue of USA involvement and that many of soldiers had no idea why they were in this country killing people, and that they didn't know what their goal was. It is good that you highlighted this quote and how it relates to many issues

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A Torch To Light The Struggle

by [Kate Adkisson](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 11:00 PM

In Christian G. Appy’s book *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides*, the reader becomes immersed into the personal thoughts and feelings of the men and women who experienced Vietnam from both sides of the battlefield. The stories not only shed light on the who, what, where, and when, they attempt to answer the puzzling question of “why”. Why did the Americans intervene there in the first place? Why did they stay for so long despite the losses that were obvious to the people fighting and dying on the ground? The PBS documentary series, *Vietnam: A Television History*, visually educates through dramatic imagery, testimony, and informative narration, and is a helpful partner to the *Patriots* book, as the events you have just read about from personal accounts then gets validated and shown to you. Through the readings and videos this class has provided, I’ve noticed that the main theme of this experience is ignorance. Ignorance not only about Vietnam, but its history, its culture, its politics, its wounds and scars. Ignorance that not only existed in the American Soldiers, but in the American government and public as well. Though ignorance is not the only factor, I believe it played a monumental role in keeping America invested in Vietnam’s business. So how do you educate the ignorant country invested in your business about what is actually happening? Media, propaganda, and martyrdom.

Reading Malcolm Browne’s recollection of the events that took place in the spring of 1963 only furthered my understanding of the lengths the Vietnamese Buddhists monks would go to to tell the World (or the West) their stance on the state of South Vietnamese government. In Episode 2 of the PBS series, at 40:00, the protests led by Buddhist monks is explained as a response to South Vietnam’s puppet Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem’s policies and treatment surrounding Buddhists and Buddhism, and the example they provide is the protest of the murder of 8 worshipers by Diem’s soldiers. In Browne’s section, he adds more depth to the overall feelings these monks felt. On page 67 of *Patriots*, Browne states, “I don’t think the intelligence services or the South

Vietnamese government or any outsiders really understood the depth of anti-Diem sentiment throughout the South and not just among the Viet Cong. There was a broad feeling that the government and all the positions of power were under the control of Diem's Catholic family". Their demonstrations grew, but they were ignored not only by Diem but by the West. That all changed when Thich Quang Duc sat himself down in the middle of the road, had gasoline dumped over him, then set himself ablaze, in which a man in the documentary named Thich Tu Hanh describes as Quang Duc dedicating "his body as a torch to light the struggle to preserve religious teaching" (Episode 2, 35:02). In Patriots, Brown expresses his need to take pictures of the event, and that it was important film, but does not explain the extent of the reaction the event created. The film however touches on the fact that "the photos hit the front pages in America, and were on Kennedy's desk on the morning. Quang Duc had become a martyr" (Episode 2, 35:40). As an American, even if you didn't know where Vietnam was on the map, a monk burning alive in protest sure would grab your attention. Episode 2 and Browne's recollection both reiterate an important fact about the monks; they knew the power of American television, of the American Press. They know that they can influence public opinion with media. This is evident in Patriots when Browne says, "Then, one evening June 10, a spokesman for the monks phoned me to say that I should really come to a certain pagoda the following morning at about seven-thirty" (p.68). In Episode 2, starting at 37 minutes in, we are shown film of Buddhists marching and holding banners in English, and a man explains, " Their signs were all in English. Every time they planned a demonstration or a Buddhist burned himself to death, they would call up the American Press, and they appeared, and so they learned to use the American press media for political purposes".

These demonstrations added fuel the anti-Diem movement, and we know how that ultimately ended. I believe the Buddhists' political statements, actions, and knowledge put Vietnam on the map for some Americans who were paying attention, and though it didn't solve all the ignorance in the minds of the West, it shed light on their opposition and struggle.

Literally.

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Initial forum post, Lack of understanding on the part of American policymakers and general populace

by [Taylor Dyer](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 11:52 PM

I thought the story that had the strongest connection with the documentary was

George Watkins story about being drafted and really lacking understanding of his own situation and the overall conflict. He made the claim that he didn't know overmuch about the conflict when he received his draft notice, other than it was the fight against communism, attempted to find out more after, but it was difficult. I thought the connected well with the films because multiple people, including both presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy are shown having a difficult time explaining the exact nature of the conflict, only that the US must support the South Vietnamese against the northern Communists. This is significant because this lack of an overall understanding for both the general public and policymakers strongly contributed to the war progressively growing larger and out of control. If the American public and public officials had a better understanding of the culture in Vietnam, both North and South, a different course of action may have been pressured other than a slow, escalating military build up in defiance of popular support of the local populace. Namely that for the Vietnamese were more concerned with being a unified, independent country than being part of a Soviet or Chinese Communist Bloc.

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Re: Initial forum post, Lack of understanding on the part of American policymakers and general populace

by [Mackenzie Child](#) - Saturday, April 14, 2018, 2:10 PM

Taylor, I thought this was a really important story also. It highlights so much of US involvement in Vietnam; how so many soldiers and US civilians didn't (and still don't) understand the intentions and breadth of our involvement.

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What did we really fight for?

by [Miles Arnold](#) - Saturday, April 14, 2018, 4:13 PM

Although it is early in the reading it seems like the one consistent tone in the interviews with the soldiers on both sides who fought. On the North Vietnamese side all the soldiers express the need to defend their homeland and fight for their independence. Something they had been doing for years. It was something that was almost normal at that point.

The Americans interviewed all seem to have the feeling that they knew at the time why they were there and what they were fighting for. After the fact, they all seem to have a "what were we ACTUALLY fighting for?" type of feeling. One American in the series says, "We had some precarious situations and we lost some people, but we always

won. As I think of it now, I don't know what we won, maybe a box on a map that we left there the next day."

There is a feeling that they are searching for an answer or justification for what they saw happen to them and their friends. George Watkins, in the "Patriots" says, "I don't have much bitterness, well, I don't think I do. I just wish that none of it ever happened.

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Re: What did we really fight for?

by [Parker Mann](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:54 PM

Miles, this is a great response. It is very true, the Vietnamese were just protecting their homeland and people, from others trying to control it (for whatever reason it may have been) and that was their patriotism; standing up against those trying to oppress them. While on the American side, their patriotism seemed to be just killing for their country and "fighting communism". So when the USA say that they won, I disagree with that assessment because as it was pointed out in one of the videos; the Vietnamese successfully defended their country from 3/5 countries permanently on the NATO special council... so that to me is a pretty good indicator who 'won' the war, if anybody actually did.

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