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Bakalářská práce

Portrayals of the Vietnam War in
Afro-American Identity and during the African-American Civil
Rights Movement in Selected Examples of Film and Literature

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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1 Introduction

Thurston Clarke, an American historian and journalist, writes in his book *The Last Campaign* that “in 1968, America was a wounded nation. The wounds were moral ones; the Vietnam War and three summers of inner-city riots had inflicted them on the national soul, challenging Americans' belief that they were a uniquely noble and honorable people.” [1] His words nicely illustrate the period of time under question in this thesis and correspond with several difficult situations in one of the most unforgettable years in American history. A political execution of one of the most influential civil rights leaders, Martin Luther King Jr., an assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, a New York Senator and presidential candidate, or the Tet Offensive, one of the largest Vietnamese military campaigns against U.S. Army – they all took place in 1968. However, the list is far from to be complete. This set of circumstances helped to build American identity, as we know it today. [2]

In the past four decades, hundreds of films and documentaries have been produced and thousands of pages have been written that approach the Civil Rights Movement, war combat and portrayals of American history during the Vietnam War. Such books and movies are the instruments of creating the legacy of people that fought for their rights and lived during that period of history.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, the terms commonly used in connection to the topic of the Vietnam War, its history, African-American identity and Civil Rights Movement will be explained and it will be shown how these all intertwine. The objective of the thesis is to display the Afro-American identity during the Vietnam War, how the war affected Afro-Americans, their behaviour and how they are shown in selected movies and literature related to the Vietnam War. We will work with a book *Bloods* and compare it with several films, showing dissimilarities and also some resemblances of discrimination of black soldiers and their struggle in fighting against segregation.

2 Key Terms Definitions

Initially, it is important to set the framework and introduce the key terms and concepts that will be later used in the thesis. The attention will be paid firstly to the explanation of terms commonly associated with the African American history. The Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement are issues widely discussed in public, but actually hardly anyone has deeper knowledge of the matter. Several words, special terms and also events and political groups exist that should be explained in more detail or reminded for better understanding. These terms and concepts thus provide background information about the topic.

2.1 African Americans

“Black or African American“ term applies to a person, who has roots in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The majority of African-Americans are the direct descendants of enslaved Africans, who survived the slavery era in United States. There were many events and issues, both resolved and ongoing, that African-Americans faced. Some of these were slavery, development of the African-American community, participation in the great military conflicts of the United States, racial segregation and the Civil Rights Movement. [3, 4]

2.2 Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party for Self Defense was established by two Merritt Junior college students in the circumstances of Malcolm X murder in 1965. It was the largest African-American revolutionary organization that has ever existed. It was formed as a reaction to the turn of events of the Civil Rights Movement, which had already been going on for a decade. [5, 6]

The original role of the party was to keep guard on African-American neighbourhoods and to keep safe all its residents from police brutality. The Black Panther Party started more than 35 Survival Programs and grants help to the community, such as education, tuberculosis testing, legal aid, transportation assistance, ambulance service, and the manufacture and distribution of free shoes to poor people. Its member wore black leather jackets and black berets and often exposed weapons on public. [7, 8]

2.3 Sit-in Movement

The fundamental plan of the sit-ins was that a group of students would go to a lunch buffet and they asked to be served. If they were, they would move on to the next lunch counter. If they were not, they waited and sat quietly despite threats. In case of apprehension, a new group would take their place. The students always remained polite, and well mannered. Sit-in organizers believed that world would understand their cause if they will see that brute force is exercised only by white community. [9]

Before the end of the school year, over 1500 black demonstrators were arrested. But their perseverance brought results. At a slow pace, but without doubt, restaurants all over the South began to give up their policies of segregation. [10]

2.4 Freedom Riders

On May 4, 1961, a group of 13 African-American and white civil rights activists set in motion the Freedom Rides, a series of bus journeys across the South of the U.S. to demonstrate against segregation in interstate bus terminals. The Congress of Racial Equality mustered the Freedom Riders. Protesters departed from Washington, D.C., they strived for cancellation of the segregation in facilities at bus terminals through the way into the Deep South. During their travel, the riders encountered aggressive resistance in the Deep South, attracting large media attention. [11, 12]

2.5 Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

CORE was an interracial American organization formed by James Farmer in 1942. Its goal was to ameliorate race relations and bring an end to unfair, segregational policies through direct-action projects. At the beginning it brought to a focus activities intended to approach the desegregation of public accommodations in Chicago, later enlarging its agenda of nonviolent sit-ins in the South. The Freedom Rides were sponsored by CORE, which helped it to acquire national recognition. In 1960 its main focus was slightly changed towards black nationalism and separatism. [13, 14]

The situation turned out to be more dramatic, when nonviolent demonstrations organized by CORE were met by ferocious mobs of whites. CORE volunteers were attacked, teargassed, and jailed, some of the demonstrators were even murdered. [15]

2.6 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

SNCC was founded in 1960 by four young activists. It is an American political organization that took central part in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. It started as an interracial group supporting nonviolence. It embraced greater militancy late in the decade, showing nationwide movement in black activism. It played big role in Freedom Rides and Sit-in movements. [16, 17]

2.7 Black Power

Stokely Carmichael was the first one who used the expression "Black Power" as a social and race-related as a popular slogan. Civil Rights Movement had obtained national influence through the 1950s and 1960s, which helped The Black Power movement to grow. The movement was acclaimed as a supportive and proactive effort intended for helping blacks achieve full equality with whites, but it was criticized by some people as a militant, occasionally violent faction whose main objective was to put a an obstacle between whites and blacks. [18, 19]

Its greatest importance was took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, emphasizing racial self-respect and the creation of black political and cultural organizations to support and promote black collective concerns. [20]

2.8 Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

The Ku Klux Klan is a supremacist organization that was founded in 1866 and that extended into almost every southern state by 1870. Its primal goal was to reestablish the white supremacy by acts of terrorism, including murders or lynching of African-Americans. Only native-born, white Protestant citizens of U.S. could be its members. [21, 22]

The beginning looked harmless at first. A party of six young men living near Nashville, Tennessee created a social club to relieve their boredom. Its purpose was to frighten Blacks by their horses, torches and scary outfits made of a sheet (see Appendix 1). With the use of suppression by federal troops the clan was countered in 1871. [23]

The KKK was resurrected after the World War I by white Protestant nativists from Atlanta, Georgia. They were motivated by their romantic view of Old South as well as by the book „The Clansman“ by Thomas Dixon. By the 1920 the number of

members had climbed up to 3-4 millions. The second generation was not only against Afro-Americans but they also opposed Roman Catholics, Jews, foreigners and organized labor. In the late 1920s a counteraction against the KKK developed. Its brutality became unsympathetic to public and its membership decreased to about 40 000. Simultaneously Louisiana, Michigan, and Oklahoma passed the anti-mask laws aimed to dash Klan's activity. [24, 25]

During the 1960s the KKK encountered a further, less triumphant revival as African-American gained more civil rights advantage and it played a large role during the desegregation of black people. Between 1975 and 1979, Klan membership surged from 6,500 to 10,000 with an estimated 75,000 active sympathizers who read Klan literature or attended rallies. The Klan's commitment involved bombings, beatings and shootings of black and white civil rights activists. At the same time another supremacist movement grabbed attention, the neo-Nazis, who also believed in supremacy of white race. In early 1990s, the clan had approximately 6000-10000 members, mainly in the Deep South of U.S. [26, 27, 28]

2.9 National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP)

National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People was founded in 1909 in New York by a group of white and black intellectuals. It was one of the first and most authoritative civil rights organizations in the United States. During its early years NAACP paid attention to legal strategies tailored to defy critical civil rights problems of the day. At the present time their goal is to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to abolish race-based discrimination. [29, 30]

2.10 Viet Cong

Viet Cong was a military force of the National Liberation Front during the Vietnam War. The name was used for the first time by South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to disparage the rebels. The primary goal of the movement was to reunite Vietnam. Viet Cong fought for reestablishment of communism, which U.S. Army and its ally, South Vietnam, opposed. It involved usual army forces, teams of people; who coordinated local peasants, as well as guerrilla units; special small groups of combatants, who realized hit-and-run tactics, ambushes or sabotages. [31, 32]

3 Black Leaders

Civil rights leaders and their crucial ideas took big part in the movement. They were influential figures, heroes of their time and also role models. They did their best to achieve freedom, race equality or right to vote for everyone. They motivated millions of people to fight for their rights and will always be remembered as people who changed the world, as we know it today. This chapter will be addressed to several of the main leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

3.1 Stokely Carmichael

Stokely Carmichael (see Appendix 2) was born on 29 of June 1941, he was a civil rights activist and national chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1966 and 1967. He is mostly associated with popularizing the expression "Black Power." In spite of the fact that his active involvement in strive for the civil rights lasted hardly a decade, he was a charismatic person in an unstable time, when real violence and inhumanity built up on both sides of the colour line. [33, 34]

In his first year at the university, in 1961, he took part in the Freedom Rides of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to desegregate the bus station restaurants alongside U.S. Route 40 between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. and was constantly apprehended, spending time in prison. He was arrested so many times for his activism that he lost count, sometimes roughly calculated at least 29 or 32. [35]

He believed that accepting beatings, dog bites and fire-hosing would ease America's heart and motivate the nation to say no to segregation. [36]

He died at age of 57 of prostate cancer. He once said that his cancer *"was given to him by forces of American imperialism and others who conspired with them."* [37]

3.2 Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King (see Appendix 2) Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. King, both a Baptist minister and civil-rights activist, had an enormous influence on race segregation in the United States, beginning in the mid-1950s. Among many achievements, King was the leader of nonviolent organization named Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His activism reflected the crucial role in ending of the lawful segregation of African-American citizens. He is mostly

known for his speech „I have a dream“. In 1964 he was given the Nobel Peace Prize among several other awards. [38]

King long opposed American involvement in the Vietnam War, He thought that America's participation in Vietnam was not politically sustainable. He searched for more people to expand his base by forming a multi-race alliance that was supposed to deal with economic and unemployment issues of all disadvantaged people. [39, 40]

By 1968 he lived under persistent threat of death. He was struck by a sniper's bullet the same year. His assassination encouraged many people from more than hundred cities to riots and demonstrations. King remains remembered as one of the most admired African-American leaders in history. [41]

3.3 Malcolm X

Born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm X (see Appendix 2) was an important and well-known black-nationalist leader who worked as a representative for the Nation of Islam during the 1950s and '60s. Born Malcolm Little, he changed his last name to X to express his rejection of his “slave” name. He dropped out school at the age of fifteen and lived criminal life. He was sentenced to ten years in prison for robbery. He started to transform his life by finding his new religion while in prison. The new Islamic religion thought him that white people are evil and they should separate from black civilization. [42, 42, 44]

After he was freed he worked for Nation of Islam and became the minister of Temple 7. in Harlem thanks to his great speech capabilities. When he found out that his hero and mentor Elijah Muhammad had many extramarital affairs he traveled to Mecca, where he discovered that orthodox Muslims equal all races the same. He gave up the argument that white people are devils and realized that racism perished the spirit of America and only black could free themselves. [45, 46, 47]

He was assassinated during his speech in 1965. He had predicted his death and thought he would be more important dead than alive. To a great extent influenced by Malcolm X, members of SNCC called for black power for black people during the summer of 1966. [48, 49, 50]

3.4 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

Born on November 29, 1908, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (see Appendix 2) was a Baptist pastor and an American politician. After obtaining degree in religious education from Columbia University, he got into local politics in New York City. He was socially more accepted because of his lighter skin, despite his African-American origins. He was a political activist and fought for job opportunities and fair housing. [51, 52]

His unpredictable and controversial opinions and a slogan “*Keep the faith, baby*“ helped him to be voted and elected as the first black to serve on the Council in 1941. In 1944 he became the first black Congressman, representing Harlem, New York City, in the United States House of Representatives. During his service, he called for rights equality and end of lynching. He provoked other congressmen by entering congressional restaurants or recreational facilities that were segregated at that time. [53, 54]

Due to accusation of tax evasion and his frequent absences he gained negative publicity in mid-1960. He retired to Bimini, Bahamas, where he was diagnosed with cancer. He died on April 4, 1972, in Miami, Florida. [55, 56]

4 History of the Civil Rights Movement

In this chapter, there will be introduced key events in the history of the United States during the period of civil rights movement from 1954 to 1964 with more complex view of the Vietnam War. These years had were crucial in the development of desegregation of black and white people and also witnessed the formation of the spirit of people of America and that is why the movements aiming to obtain civil rights for African-Americans have had remarkable historical significance. The modern period of civil rights movement can be split up into several phases, each starting with separated, small-sized protests which in long term cause the rise of new, more fierce movements, leaders, and organizations.

4.1 Basic Overview

Before the American Civil War, almost four million blacks lived in slavery, only white men owning a property could vote. Under the Reconstruction Era, United States tried to establish free labor and civil rights of freedmen. Black people were given some basic rights after approval of the Fourteenth amendment (citizenship for African-Americans in 1868) and Fifteenth amendment (right to vote for black males in 1870) to the U.S. constitution. Many white people opposed the social reorganization, which led to anti-segregation movement such as Ku Klux Klan to gain power. [57]

Until the mid-1950s the segregation remained almost untouched. However, in the upcoming years, schools started to follow the decision from *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which was made by Supreme Court and declared that separate public schools for black and white students were unconstitutional. This verdict gave Afro-Americans hope once again. [58, 59]

4.2 Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955–1956

In December 1955 NAACP activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man while on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, which evoked and motivated large-scale protests. She was arrested and fined. Roughly 40 000 black riders from Montgomery boycotted the bus system the following day. Afro-Americans gained the support of black leaders as the story of the boycott spread. Leaders and activists living nearby formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to accomplish their achievements. Martin Luther King Jr. was selected as the President of the organization

thanks to his extraordinary oratorical skills. Not being affected by the bombing of his house, King was able to support the boycott until November 1956, when Supreme Court canceled the bus segregation. To sustain local protests, King and his supporters established Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. This organization was created to support civil rights. [60, 61, 62]

4.3 Desegregating Little Rock Central High School, 1957

In 1957 nine African-American students tried to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. These students, also known as Little Rock Nine, were recruited to the school thanks to their excellent grades. On September 4, on their first day of school they got surrounded by an angry mob of thousand white protesters, who gathered in front of the school. This protest brought the Little Rock to national and even international attention. The crowd tried to prevent them from entering the building even though segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Students had to be protected by military escorts. [63, 64, 65]

Black students attended high school under Spartan conditions. They were harassed, pushed down of stairs, they could not participate in certain school activities, one of them was expelled for calling a girl “white trash” after the girl taunted her and hit her with a purse. [66, 67]

At the end of the school year, Ernes Green became the first Afro-American graduate from the Central High School, even Martin Luther King was present at his graduation ceremony. The following year, all four public schools in Little Rock were closed rather than continue in the integration. [68, 69]

4.4 Greensboro Sit-ins, 1960

The first sit-in of second half of the century began on 1 February 1960, when four black students from North Carolina took a seat at a Woolworth lunch counter in downtown Greensboro (see appendix 3). They sat in the reserved area for white people; a waitress asked them to leave but they refused in well-behaved way and to their surprise they were not arrested. The next morning dozens of Afro-American students joined the sit-in movement, which had drawn attention of local media. By the end of the month, sit-ins were spread nationwide, taking place in 7 states, and by the end of April almost 50 000 students were involved. The same month Martin Luther King Jr. supported the

movement and discussed strategy at a conference with the activists. As a result, students from all over the country met and established SNCC with Stokely Carmichael as its leader. [70, 71]

4.5 Freedom Rides, 1961

In 1946, the U.S. Supreme Court made interstate bus segregation unconstitutional. A group of more than 400 people were recruited by the CORE organization to test new decision of the Supreme Court from 1960, which extended the previous statute to involve desegregation on bus terminals, in restrooms and other establishments related to interstate travel. The group, also known as Freedom Riders, attempted to ride on a bus from Washington, D.C. all the way into Deep South. They run into enormous violence from white protestors and drew international attention as well. Demonstrators shouted, threw cans and lit cigarettes at the freedom riders and also spat on them. [72, 73]

On May 14, 1961 an angry mob of around 200 white people encircled the first bus in Anniston, Alabama. Local authorities endorsed the Ku Klux Klan to attack the Greyhound bus (see Appendix 3) without anxiety of detention. The bus with Freedom Riders onboard did not stop and passed the bus station, but the mob followed the bus in automobiles. They firebombed the bus and brutally beat the fleeing passengers. The following day, photos of the ignited bus were seen on the front pages of newspapers all around the world. [74, 75, 76]

After several months of Freedom Rides, on November 1, 1961, John F. Kennedy issued a new desegregation order. Black passengers were allowed to sit wherever they desired and "white" and "coloured" signs were put down in the bus terminals, restrooms or lunch counters. [77, 78]

4.6 Birmingham Campaign, 1963

In the spring of 1963, civil rights activists in Birmingham, Alabama began the desegregation campaign. Birmingham was known as the city of white supremacy. The protest started with series of lunch counter sit-ins, marches on City Hall and kneel-ins at local churches. Black people were brutally beaten; Martin Luther King Jr. and many others that participated were put in prison. [79, 80]

On May 2, coordinated group of more than 6000 black children and teenagers not more than 16 years old marched in the streets of Birmingham. On national television cameras, Birmingham police released ruthless dogs on helpless children as they knelt and prayed to the God. Police used fire hoses, dogs and clubs against pregnant woman and children. [81, 82]

People of America were disgusted by the repulsive spectacle. Protests against the police brutality were held all over the United States, thousands of people protested in San Francisco and Detroit to show unity and solidarity with the freedom fighters. The Kennedy administration finally stepped in; the government set free all prisoners and requested locals have to hire people on a "nondiscriminatory basis." Birmingham Campaign created some of the most famous and iconic images of the Civil Rights Movement and also been one of the most successful events of its time. [83, 84]

4.7 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963

On 28 August 1963, more than 200,000 activists gathered in the capital of U.S. to march for their rights (see Appendix 4). They called for equality of jobs and civil rights. This political rally was a great success, people enjoyed that cheerful day full of speeches, songs, performances and prayers performed by civil rights leaders, artists, politicians or common people. Its best-known moment was the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. that became an expression of hope of the civil rights activists. The event was held without violence, no marchers were taken in custody and no disturbance occurred. [85, 86, 87]

After the march President Kennedy came face to face with civil rights leaders at the White House and they debated about the necessity of civil rights support. In correspondence with the demands of the march, Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 provisions were passed. [88]

4.8 Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964

Freedom Summer was a nonviolent attempt by civil rights activists to integrate Mississippi's segregated political system. The campaign was organized by CORE, NAACP and SNCC. The main program was the establishment of Mississippi Freedom Party (MFP) and preparation of volunteers to register black voters. More than 80 000 Mississippians joined the new party, which was a challenge to the all-white Democratic

Party. It drew national attention, when Democratic National Convention refused to seat slate of delegates elected by MFP. [89, 90, 91]

The summer project also set up more than 40 schools. As well as math and other standard subjects students were taught black history and the ideology of civil rights leaders. [92]

During 1964 More than 1,000 volunteers from different states took part in Freedom Summer as well as thousands of citizens from Mississippi. Most of them were teenage from the North, ninety percent were white, and also many of them were Jewish. Extraordinary violence was exercised on locals and volunteers, including killings, church bombings and kidnappings and also torment. All of this was broadcasted on the national television. It attracted huge attention to this matter because also white activists were murdered. [93, 94]

4.9 Civil Rights Act of 1964

President John F. Kennedy urged a fair and equal treatment for every American without regard to race. Soon after his assassination Congress passed a public law, which banned segregation in public places such as theatres, restaurants, hotels, swimming pools or public schools. The passage of the bill was not simple, it was almost repressed by the opposition in the House Rules Committee, but at the end it passed with 73 to 27 votes in favor of the bill. Despite the fight against racism still continued, the passage helped to crush legal segregation. [95, 96, 97]

4.10 Selma Voting Rights Movement and the Voting Rights Act, 1965

On 25 March 1965 a protest march from Selma to the state capital Montgomery was led by Martin Luther King Jr. Its center of attention was the registration of black voters in South. From the beginning the march developed with mass arrests but little violence, however it changed in the following month when state troopers started to build blockades and attacked the marchers. The violence provoked national outrage. [98, 99, 100]

All of this gave the foundation to the Voting Rights Act that was intended to stop the legal discrimination in voting to the Constitution of the United States. Congress actually passed the Act and assured African-Americans a right to vote, it also canceled literacy tests, because most blacks were illiterate, a results of centuries of persecution.

Black people were often said that they had gotten the date, time or polling place wrong or that their application was invalid, so their vote was not accepted. It affected greatly the gap between black and white voters. The number of black voters increased from 6 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1969. Together with the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act was one of the biggest successes of civil rights legislation in American history. [101, 102, 103]

5 History of the Vietnam War

Over one million of African-Americans were called to duty during the Second World War. After they defeated the fascism threat, they returned home and were still denied basic human rights. The war against communism took place in Vietnam and once again black people of America were involved. They fought for democracy, which their families were hardly given some at home in America. Their participation in the war raised the black consciousness in the matter of discrimination. This chapter is dedicated to the Vietnam War background, its history and after-effects on the American and Vietnamese society.

5.1 Overview of the War

In 1858, Europe was in the age of expanding: Vietnam was invaded by France in order of Napoleon III. It took more than 16 years to conquer whole country, which then became French protectorate. Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam together shaped French Indochina, the main sources of rice, coal and rare minerals. [104]

In 1940, Vietnam was occupied by Japan. To fight both Japan and France, Viet Minh or the League for the Independence of Vietnam was created. The coalition was mostly influenced by Soviet and Chinese communism. Few years later a deep famine broke-out and Japan was defeated by World War II Allies. When France got under control of Nazis, the last French-appointed emperor of Vietnam Bao Dai, called for the independence of the country. Communist administration was shut down and Democratic Republic of Vietnam was declared. France tried to regain the power of the province and established the State of Vietnam in South Vietnam. However, French forces were defeated by Viet Minh in 1954 during the Dien Bien Phu battle. [105, 106, 107]

5.2 U.S. Involvement in the War

During the Cold War, U.S. had toughened its strategy against Soviet Union and its allies, by 1955, U.S. provided training and equipment to Ngo Dinh Diem, a Prime Minister of State of Vietnam, and his sympathizers. Viet Minh supporters were tracked down by Diem's security forces, many of them were tormented or executed. In 1960, his opponents founded the National Liberation Front (NLF) to suppress the regime of Diem. President John F. Kennedy sent a special team of military advisors that should have evaluated the situation in South Vietnam. They suggested to expand the military

and technical aid to be able to face the resistance. The number of U.S. troops had risen from 800 to 9000 during the 1950s. [108]

In 1964 U.S. army began bombing militia targets in North Vietnam soon after U.S. Navy's destroyer was attacked by torpedo boats. Since that aircrafts of the U.S Air Force have continued in the bombings more frequently. President Johnson decided to rapidly increase the involvement in war and he allied with Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Philippines, who also sent soldiers to Vietnam. The U.S. provided important support to the allied armies. During this period of "Americanization" Johnson sent almost 500 000 troops to fight against communism in South Vietnam in 1968. U.S. planes had been bombing North Vietnam and troopers fighting in South Vietnam for 3 years, however they did not weaken the strength of Viet Cong. [109, 110, 111]

After seeing the pictures of the bombings on televisions, American citizens took a dislike to the war, more then 35 000 people started a anti-war protest in front of the Pentagon in October 1967. [112]

5.3 Tet Offensive, 1968

The Tet Offensive consisted of unexpected attack waves exercised by soldiers of Viet Cong on cities in South Vietnam (see Appendix 5). The name comes from the Têt holiday, which is the celebration of Vietnamese New Year, the period of time when the attacks started. There were huge casualties on both sides. The U.S. and South Vietnamese forces eliminated most of the Viet Cong forces and won back the lost territory, but media shocked the American public, when William Westmoreland, a United States Army general, announced that 200 000 more troops was required to finish the defeat. The massive public disagreement led to the end of the war. The offensive was considered as one of the most important turning point of the Vietnam War, which brought the end of war. [113, 114, 115,116]

5.4 Withdrawal of U.S. Troops

Robert Nixon, the President of U.S. at that time, started the first troops removal from Vietnam in 1969. He was forced to withdraw more soldiers due to My Lai Massacre, in which U.S. Army platoon raped and killed civilians. In 1973, the United States and all three Vietnamese factions (South Vietnam, North Vietnam and Viet

Cong) had signed a peace treaty. It ordered the U.S. to entirely withdraw all its soldiers from Vietnam within 60 days. This act was also called the "Vietnamization." [117, 118] (for more information see Appendix 7)

5.5 Aftermath of the War

The extensive conflict had a negative effect on the major part of Vietnamese population. Civilian war casualties range around 587 000 deaths. In total, approximately 2 million Vietnamese died. Even today, many children are still born with divers diseases caused by harmful chemical weapons. The war had also huge impact on the country's economy and infrastructure and the restoration advanced slowly and took many years to recover. During the 1970s, the country was affected by floods, which seriously limited the food production. [119, 120, 121]

On the side of U.S., more than 58 000 soldiers were killed, which are ludicrous casualties compared to the ones of Viet Cong and NLF. Thousands of veterans suffered from psychological repercussions. Also its economy suffered, U.S. government spent between \$350 billion to \$900 billion on the war, which heavily weakened its financial management. The people of American lost their trust and confidence in the action of the government. [122]

6 Portrayals of Afro-Americans in Literature and Movies during the Vietnam War

Black soldiers have served in every armed conflict involving United States, such as War of 1812, Mexican-American War or the war in Afghanistan. They participated as slaves in American Revolutionary War or in the Second World War in segregated units. During the Vietnam War, the proportion of Afro-Americans soldiers was the highest ever in any battle combat. However, the continuous internal conflicts of black and white Americans within the United States were also reflected in the Vietnam War. Between 1968 and 1969, the war was becoming more unpopular and Black Power era was on its rise. The draft of people sent to Vietnam was mainly focused on poverty-stricken, undereducated, mostly blue-collar workers or jobless people. *“Eventually, these programs led to changing the phrase that had been coined during the Civil War by white soldiers as being “a rich man's war, poor man's fight“ to a “white man's war, black man's fight“ during the Vietnam War.”* [123] Both white and black Americans were against the war, some thought that the draft was simply a covert genocide set up by U.S. government. These are the reasons why the Vietnam War affected African-American community so much. In early years of the war, 41% of troops were black, by 1967 the total black population in U.S. was about 11%. [124, 125, 126]

Many citizens of all racial and ethnic groups fought against the draft. Especially among blacks, movements and groups such as SNCC and Black Panthers criticized the war policies. *“Black Americans burned their draft cards in public and one man escaped to Canada, exclaiming: “I'm not a draft evader, I'm a runaway slave.”* [127] A lot of the black soldiers were Civil Rights Movement veterans, arrested during the riots. They were told by judges to either join the army or go to jail. [128]

As a backlash of the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, thousands of black Americans demonstrated in the streets of U.S. cities, as well as riots appeared among the military units in Vietnam. But many white troops cheered at his death, some of them even dressed in the Ku Klux Klan robes. Together with high drug and alcohol use in the barracks, this set of circumstances led to lack of discipline and authority and occasional racism became regular, exercised daily. [129, 130]

In this chapter, we will have a close look at the book *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War (1984)* by Wallace Terry, which belongs to a non-fiction genre and

constitutes a collection of true oral stories of black soldiers from the Vietnam War. We will compare the facts given in the book to several movies about Vietnam War, such as *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987) or *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which were filmed soon after the end of the war and were inspired by true events. We will also work with an article *War Within War* by James Maycock written for The Guardian. We will mainly focus on the language, appearance and language of African-Americans and how they are treated by white soldiers. We will also mention similarities and principal differences between the book and the movies. Firstly, we need to introduce the films shortly. [131] (see Appendix 6)

6.1 Overview of the Analysed Text and Movies

This subchapter presents basic information about the films and literature, which play a pivotal role in this thesis. The movies were chosen on the basis of their reviews found on the internet.

6.1.1 Wallace Terry's *Bloods*

Wallace Terry was an Afro-American journalist, historian and Vietnam-veteran advocate. He recorded documentary movies about black soldiers for the U.S. Marines Corps and was in service as a race-relations specialist to U.S. Air Force. His articles were published in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. He was given the President's Award in recognition of his contribution to American culture. [132]

He is best known for his book *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War* which was published in 1984. In his work, he assembled stories of twenty black veterans from Vietnam War. He wrote about their war experiences from historical, racial and military point of view. [133]

6.1.2 *Apocalypse Now* (1979)

Apocalypse Now is a war movie with drama aspects directed by Francis Ford Coppola, who produced many famous movies, such as The Godfather trilogy. The movie tells a story about a U.S. Army Captain Willard (played by Marlon Brando), who has to complete a secret mission: to find and eliminate Colonel Walter Kurtz, who deserted from the war and forms a private army of primitive natives. He is sent up the Nung River on a patrol boat. During his voyage, he and his crew encounter the most

cruel and odd aspects of the war. This cult movie is considered to be one of the best films about the Vietnam War. [134]

6.1.3 *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)

During his life, Stanley Kubrick directed many popular movies, for example: *The Shining* or a *Clockwork Orange*. *Full Metal Jacket* is one of them, too. This film is divided into 2 chapters. In the first one, the main character, called Joker (played by Matthew Modine), experiences the army training in a boot camp in South Carolina. They are under the command of punishing and brutal drill instructor, Sergeant Hartman.

The second part takes place in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive. Joker is a war correspondent; he takes pictures and records of his squad during fights. [135]

6.1.4 *Hamburger Hill* (1987)

Hamburger Hill is directed by John Irvi. It is an interpretation of one of the bloodiest battles during the Vietnam War. The film shows a story of a platoon of soldiers trying to conquer the mountain "Hill 937" in Vietnam. [136]

6.1.5 *Platoon* (1986)

Written and directed by Oliver Stone, the movie *Platoon* received 4 Academy Awards for best Picture, Director, Sound Mixing and Editing. The film shows a story of a young man, Chris Taylor, (played by Charlie Sheen), who volunteers for combat in Vietnam War. As the war continues, Chris faces psychological meltdown. There are also conflicts inside his Platoon after some men illegally kill villagers. He realizes that there is additional war within his platoon. During a battle, most of the Platoon is killed and Taylor survives. [137]

6.2 Comparative Analysis

Even though the films are inspired by true events, they are not realistic in many aspects. Following example shows that the literature and movies are interconnected. In Wallace Terry's book, one of the interviewed soldiers gives details of the movie *Apocalypse Now*, which he had seen soon after the end of the war. He criticizes the movie because it does not tell the truth about the war and he says that some of the

scenes are ridiculous. There is a scene, where helicopters attack a Vietnamese village while playing opera song *The Ride of the Valkyries* by Richard Wagner out loud from the megaphones of the aircrafts to scare the villagers before an air raid. He explains that before a helicopter attack, there would always be napalm or plane attack first and that the music coming from above would not be possible to be heard. He also disagrees with some visuals of certain scenes, for example: during one night, the team arrives to Do Long bridge, which is the last U.S. outpost on the river. (See the scene 1:36:15-1:36:30) There are lights and lamps all over the bridge, Edwards says that it would not look so ridiculous and that it is absurd. [138] (see Appendix 8)

This subchapter displays the major differences and some similarities of the mentioned book and movies. We provide this information by finding and comparing the examples of certain scenes and stories. There will also be mentioned the impact on the mentality of soldiers during and after the war.

6.2.1 Racial Prejudice

On the battlefield, the racial prejudices were set aside. We can see it in the first chapter of *Bloods*, which is devoted to Reginald Edwards, U.S. Marine Corps rifleman. He describes his days spent in Marine Corps boot camp in 1963. He knows that people from South behaved badly towards blacks, but he hopes their behaviour has changed in the training camps, as all soldiers of all races have to cooperate. However things do not change, he makes only black or Mexican friends, white people call him a chocolate bunny or a Brillo¹ head. This is what often happened in barracks, but hardly sometimes on the battlefield, because there were many moments, when all soldiers of no matter what race had to depend on each other. *“The racial incidents didn’t happen in the field. Just when we went to the back. It wasn’t so much that they were against us. It was just that we felt that we were being taken advantage of, ’cause it seemed like more blacks in the field than in the rear.”* [133] Wallace Terry also writes about a soldier and a member of Ku Klux Klan, who is saved by a black troop during a Viet Cong ambush. After his rescue, he says that this act *“has changed his perception of what black people were about.”* [140] Also there is shown how a black soldier stands up for a white one during an argument in the *Full Metal Jacket*. After the dispute they both sit down together and chat. [141] There is a lot of examples, where white soldiers communicate

¹ Brillo is a brand producing scourers. Scourers are made of steel wool, they resemble the hair of African-Americans. This is why people used it as an insult.

with black soldiers in the barracks or outposts in the movies. This is where the book and films slightly vary from each other. An example is given in the following paragraph.

In some occasions, the racial discrimination was exercised also on the battlefield. Edwards calls the Vietnam War, a war of a white man, because he had seen many Confederate flags in Vietnam, a sign of slavery and segregation. Showing a Confederate flag in combat was an act of rudeness to any human being of a colour. There is a scene in *The Full Metal Jacket*, where the squad of soldiers gets lost and the leader has the Confederate flag on his helmet. (See Appendix 8) He gives an order to a black soldier, called Eightball, to scout the hostile area. Eightball leaves with words: “*Put a nigger behind the trigger*“. He gets shot and dies soon after. [142]

Edward once ends up in prison due to a conflict within the barracks. He says that “*if he had been white, he would never have went to jail for fighting. That would have been impossible*“. [143] According to Terry, black people could not do any intellectually stimulating activity, such as drawing or reading while in prison. But also there were no African-American book or music tapes in the outpost libraries and trading posts. The Armed Forces Radio Network played only country or rock music, soul music was overlooked. In comparison with the movie *Platoon*, there are several people in a room, a bunker situated somewhere in their base. They are both black and white. They use drugs and all together dance to a 1965 hit song “*The Tracks of My Tears*” by the *Miracles* band. (See the scene 0:35:30-0:36:28) All of the band members were African-Americans. This example shows a big difference between the movie and the literature. According to the article *War Within War* from the Guardian, white people would not even pop their fingers to black music, but in the movie they also dance together with African-Americans. [144, 145]

When it came to ranks and special privileges, black servicemen were often left out. It was not easy to get promoted for African-Americans. If so, hardly anyone could achieve high ranks. In *Hamburger Hill* movie, there are also three African-American veteran soldiers in the unit, they are all familiar with first-hand discrimination practiced in the U.S. army. When they receive a message that they will be sent to fight again, one of the black soldiers attempts to persuade his sergeant to let him stay, because they have a better job for him at the headquarters. The other black soldier tells him that “*they do not take niggers back at headquarters, brother. All the white motherfuckers are back*

there.” (See the scene 0:16:30-0:17:05) Sergeant denies his request and the black soldier is killed later in the movie. [146]

6.2.2 Appearance and Language

In the very first scene of the movie *Full Metal Jacket*, there are several shots of an army barber cutting hair of people, who are soon after sent to train how to fight to a boot camp. All of their hair is cut short. There are also African-Americans. (See the scene 0:00:17-0:01:33) In Vietnam, barbers were not trained to cut black hair. Black soldiers were often penalized for having long hair, in some cases even sent to prison. One of the soldiers interviewed by Terry said that *“black guys would put on sunglasses walking in the jungle. Think about it, now. It was ridiculous. But we want to show how bad we are. How we’re not scared. We be saying, “ The Communists haven’t made a bullet that can kill me.” We had this attitude that I don’t give a damn. That made us more aggressive, more ruthless and more careless. Also a little more luckier than the person that was scared“*. [147] In the selected movies, African-Americans are shown with short hair only, which confirms the statement mentioned above. In *Apocalypse Now*, there is one of the black motorboat crew members wearing sunglasses, but it is sunny, so we cannot really distinguish, if he puts them on just to look more severe or not. Their commander wears pilot sunglasses, cowboy hat instead of a helmet and a yellow scarf around his neck during an attack on a Vietnamese village. He is older, white man and a strict chief. The fight takes place on a beach, everyone is taking cover except of him, he just walks around the battlefield like there is no war. His image and appearance actually help him to look even more like a fearless man, whom everybody respects. [148]

As we have mentioned in the beginning of chapter 6, African-American soldiers were more often drafted and sent to Vietnam than white ones. It was due to the draft system, which was primarily focused on undereducated and poor people. That is why the black community was so angry about the war. This can also be seen in the *Hamburger Hill* movie, while men of the platoon are spending their free time in a brothel. A black soldier asks his white comrade: *“What you doin’ in Vietnam, boy?”* he replies: *“Volunteered, bro.”*, the black soldiers comments on it: *“You know, the brothers is here because we black and undereducated.”* Another white man shouts out loud: *“That’s bullshit!”* The black soldier punches him in the face, because it makes

him angry. (See the scene 0:31:35-0:34:35) This gives us an idea of how African-Americans were affected by the struggle of Civil Rights Movement.

This example also shows the way of how the language of African-Americans is displayed in the films, which is a part of their identity. Their English is slightly different compared to American English dialect. They often left out the suitable form of the verb *be*, like in the example above: *“because we black“*. The shortened forms of verbs in present continuous, such as *doin’*, which is often shown up in the movies and in the book too. We can find the missing verb *be* in present continuous tense in an example from *Bloods*: *“you hoping all that’s gonna change.“* [149], which is what one of the interviewed man says. Also the shortened form of *going to* – *gonna* is a slang term. Terry also uses the wrong form of the verb *be* in first person of plural, such as in following example: *And we was just gonna run in, shoot through the walls.* [150] This style of spoken and written language can be very useful to readers and spectators. It gives them an image of the family or community background of involved characters.

6.2.3 Impact of the War

According to the book, Vietnam War had a huge impact on the way of thinking and personalities of African-Americans. Not only it had mental health consequences but it also showed them the equality of human beings of white, black or Asian race. One of discussed soldiers, named Charles Strong, says that after the war he goes on a university, where *“he studies to be a computer programmer, which does not make him better person than a garbage man. Vietnam gave him a respect of human life. He values people. He feels equal to everyone“*. [151] Another soldier stopped going to church and lost his faith in God after his experience in Vietnam. Another one of them ends up in the therapy sessions because of his mental issues. [152]

Soldiers often used drugs. Soldiers smoked marihuana, hashish or opium. Not only in the barracks, but also on the battlefield. The war was putting high stress on their mental condition. Drugs helped them to avoid nervous breakdowns. While under the effect of drugs, they felt more relaxed. This is also shown in *Apocalypse Now*, when the Captain gets off the patrol boat with one of the members of his crew. They go seek information about their target at the outpost on the Do Long Bridge. The crewman acts in a strange way, because he had taken LSD, a psychedelic drug. (See the scene 1:36:30-1:44:40) [152, 153, 154] These problems do not relate only to African-

Americans, but to all soldiers of all races. The war gave some white soldiers a reason to equal all races the same, as they saw that on battlefield their lives were worth the same as a life of an African-American.

6 Conclusion

African-Americans were greatly influenced by the Vietnam War. They fought on two battlefronts; one was in Vietnam and the second in the United States. They fought for freedom in Asia, but they barely received it at home in America. This thesis shows how hard their fight was from the beginning of having nothing to the end of having their well-deserved victory.

In the first part of this thesis, we introduced special terminology, which was then used in its following chapters. It helps readers to have better knowledge of the background of the Civil Rights Movement and also gives them a brief history of involved organizations, parties and movements, which was very important for deeper understanding of the whole topic. Also there is mentioned concise information about four iconic and world-famous African-American individuals, who fought for the freedom of their people. Their conscientious personalities inspired millions of people and gave huge assistance to the end of desegregation and this is why they will never be forgotten.

The second part is focused on the history of Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War to fully understand the depth of this topic. It shows the most important events of this period of time. It gives details of how hard it was for African-Americans to fight for their rights and how big was the struggle they had to go through. But also it displays the goals, which they slowly earned step by step, even though it costed many of their lives. It was a high price for something people nowadays assume as a matter of course.

Finally, the last part is devoted to comparison of literature and movies related to the Vietnam War. It includes general information about the selected films and book. Movies repeatedly show African-Americans as undereducated stereotypes, they are targets of discrimination and often provoked. In the book *Bloods*, it appears that discrimination has deep roots in the attitudes of white soldiers, but it does not always seem the same in the movies, actually in some cases it seems just the opposite; black and white soldiers chat together or even dance together, as shown in *Platoon*. They treated African-Americans badly during the war and even thought it had negative impact on them, blacks achieved their recognition by being brave and excellent fighters.

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- picture 16 *Apocalypse Now* (1:36:25)
- picture 17 Full Metal Jacket (1:29:18)

9 Abstract

The purpose of this Bachelors thesis is to demonstrate, how African-Americans are shown in movies and literature and how does these two differ from each other, even though they relate to the same theme, in this case it is the Vietnam War. In the theoretical part, great amount of attention is paid to the history of African-American Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. The overview and mentioning the key events and terminology give the needed sources to better analyze this topic. The final part of the thesis is focused on the comparison of selected afterwar films and literature. It gives details of appearance and language of African-Americans, how they are treated in army and how the war influenced them.

10 Resumé

Cílem této Bakalářské práce je ukázat, jak jsou Afroameričani vyobrazeni ve filmech a literatuře a jak se tyto filmy a knihy od sebe liší i přesto, že souvisí se stejným tématem, v tomto případě s Vietnamskou Válkou. V teoretických kapitolách je značná část věnována historii afroamerického Hnutí za lidská práva a válce ve Vietnamu. K hlubší analýze tohoto tématu je důležité zmínění historického přehledu klíčových událostí a terminologie. Poslední část práce je zaměřena na srovnání vybraných poválečných filmů a literatury. Blíže se v ní dozvíme, jak je popisován vzhled a jazyk Afroameričanů, jak s nimi bylo zacházeno v armádě a jak je ovlivnila válka.

11 Appendices

Appendix 1 - KKK

Picture 1 - Ku Klux Klan members wearing robes made of sheet.



Picture 2 - Cross, a symbol of KKK



Appendix 2 – Civil Rights Movement Leaders

Pictures 3 and 4 - Stokely Carmichael on left, Martin Luther King Jr. on right



Pictures 5 and 6 - Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. on left, Malcolm X on right



Appendix 3 – Civil Rights Movement Protests

Picture 7 - Attacks on one of the Freedom Ride buses



Picture 8 - Sit-in movement



Appendix 4 - March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

Picture 9 View from the Lincoln Memorial toward the Washington Monument



Appendix 5 - American troops fighting in Vietnam

Picture 10 Helicopter Attack

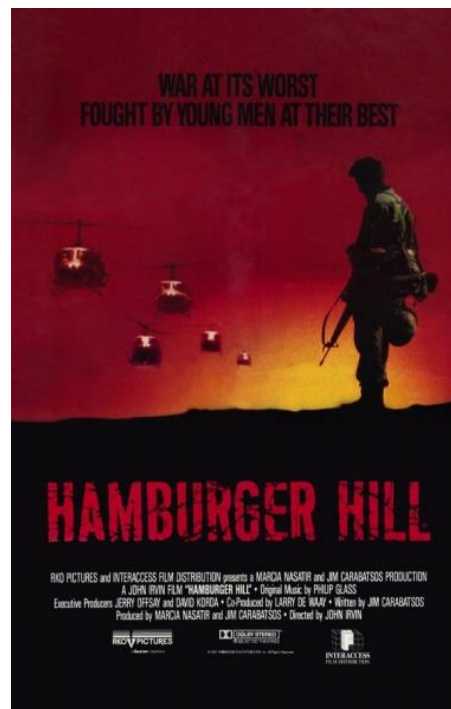


Appendix 6 – Movie Posters

Picture 11 Apocalypse (on left), Picture 12 Platoon (on right)



Picture 13 Full Metal Jacket (on left), Picture 14 Hamburger Hill (on right)



Appendix 7 - Vietnam War timeline

Picture 15 Vietnam War timeline



Appendix 8 Movie Scenes

Picture 16 Do Long Bridge from Apocalypse Now



Picture 17 Sergeant wearing a Confederate flag on his helmet

