

Name: _____

Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Set C

Part I

Instructions: Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. On the **second read**, underline or highlight passages that reveal something important about the author's opinions on the war in Vietnam, views of the "other side" (i.e., the "enemy"), or their personal experiences during the war. Next, work with your partner to fill in the "Analyzing Sources" section of the "Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War." (Note: The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published. Names with "quotation marks" around them are pseudonyms, or false names, used to protect identities.)

1. Name: R. Huynh (2003)

Job or Status: South Vietnamese civilian

[W]hen the Americans came everyone wanted to taste what they had brought to Vietnam. We had the most tasteful coffee in the world [but] people were buying Nescafé on the black market. And it was expensive. I admit that I, too, was attracted to some American products, especially television. I enjoyed *Star Trek*, *The Addams Family*, and *Wild, Wild West*. . . . Our house was in a little street in the center of [Saigon] near an American headquarters. The Americans just blocked off our street on both sides with barbed wire. To get to our house we were searched by military police. It was like we were no longer in our street. It was their street. I remember one time I had a brown bag with oranges. Unfortunately the bag broke and the oranges fell out. All the Americans soldiers dropped to the ground because they thought the oranges were grenades.

2. Name: Dang Thuy Tram (1969)

Job or Status: Doctor in the North Vietnamese army

Oh my God! How hateful the war is; and the more hate, the more the [American] devils are eager to fight. Why do they enjoy shooting and killing a good people like us? How can they have the heart to kill all those youngsters who love life, who are struggling and living for so many hopes? . . . The Americans are just like blood-thirsty demons that bite us when we are not paying attention. When we chase them all away then the blood will stop flowing. . . . All [of Vietnam] is on the way, all the Country has thrown itself into battle, we must defeat the invading American pirates, and for sure they must return our independence and freedom.

3. Name: "Debbie Wong" (1987)

Job or Status: U.S. civilian working for private companies in South Vietnam

I looked [Asian] but I was not [Vietnamese], and because I was not Vietnamese I had more freedom than they did—they were third-class citizens in their own damn country. . . . [As an Asian American,] I would say that the Vietnamese gravitated toward me a lot more than toward non-Asian Americans. Like my maid—when I first hired her, I hired her alone. Then one daughter moved in, and then another daughter, and by the time of the [1968 Tet Offensive] the whole family was living in the kitchen and one little room in the back. . . . We [Americans] didn't stop to learn about the [Vietnamese] culture, we didn't ask the peasants what they wanted, we didn't or wouldn't think. We made beggars out of an entire nation—a nation of very proud people—and then turned around and said, "Ha! Look at these beggars!" We didn't think for one minute that the people of Vietnam had any rights. We [Americans] didn't even think they were human. . . .

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Part II

Instructions: Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. After the **second read**, work with your partner to answer the questions that follow. Underline or highlight passages in the primary sources that help you answer the questions. (**Note:** The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published.)

4. Name: Le Thi Dau (2009)**Job or Status: Nurse in the National Liberation Front (NLF) guerrilla army**

[As a nurse for the NLF,] I was friendly with almost all the women I treated.... The ones who had husbands in the main [NLF guerrilla] force were under terrible stress. They never knew if their husbands were dead or alive. [NLF officials] didn't inform them, and they had to live with the constant uncertainty. Many of these women suffered from chronic depression. Mostly they kept it to themselves. But my good friends would talk to me about it. I couldn't really do anything to comfort or console them—just let them talk, give them sympathy and someone whom they could talk to freely about what they were going through....

When I had my first child, my husband sent me back to Saigon [in 1969] to live with his brother. He thought it would be better not to try to raise the child in the [NLF-controlled] village, that it was too dangerous. But I was unhappy about leaving. I felt a terrible guilt about going back to safety myself and leaving my friends. But of course my husband sent me [away], so I had to go.

Questions

1. Le Thi Dau says, “[Vietnamese women] who had husbands in the main [NLF guerrilla] force were under terrible stress.” How does she describe some of the ways the war specifically affected these women?
2. Le Thi Dau says, “I felt a terrible guilt” about leaving the battlefield when she had a child, but that “my husband sent me [away], so I had to go.” What did her husband's decision reveal about specific societal norms and expectations on Vietnamese women?

5. Name: Lily (Lee) Adams (1987)**Job or Status: Nurse in the U.S. Army**

As far as the issue about my looking Asian, when I was in civilian clothes and walking around the [U.S. military hospital] compound [in South Vietnam] with a guy, the other [American] guys would just assume I was a [prostitute].... [American] guys would say all kinds of things to me—interesting things—that only [prostitutes] get to hear. That used to bother me. I used to feel like telling them, “You guys don't even know that if you came into my hospital I'd be taking care of you—giving you everything I have just to keep you alive.” It made me angry. It made me very angry. Only it wasn't a personal thing; I was more angry because I was thinking, “So that's how you treat Vietnamese women.”

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Questions

1. How did Lily (Lee) Adams' identity as an Asian American woman lead to her being treated differently in comparison to other American women?
2. How did Lily (Lee) Adams' identity as an Asian American woman in the U.S. Army lead her to sympathize with Vietnamese women? What experiences did she share with Vietnamese women?

6. Name: Thuy (2009)**Job or Status: Support Staff in the South Vietnamese military**

I heard that the government was recruiting female army personnel. My two older brothers were already in the army.... I joined the army so that I could give a helping hand.... I heard that with the armed forces you could go here and there, to lots of places. I liked to travel, so I joined up. I was like a tomboy.... My father said: "If she were a boy she would be very active." Even now, I still like to go here and there, I like risky adventures like men.

[My brother] did not want me to join the [South Vietnamese] armed forces. He worked in military communications and he rarely came home to visit my mother.... Every time he came home, I had to hide my uniforms in my neighbor's house. The jeep sent to take me to work had to pick me up at another place instead of in front of my house like usual. I had to change at my neighbor's, I did not dare to wear the uniform in his presence.... My other big brother also forbade me to join the armed forces, but my mother did not voice any opinion about my career so I could still do what I liked, in spite of the fierce opposition from my brothers.

Questions

1. What does Thuy's account reveal about her father's and brother's views on women's roles in the family and South Vietnamese society?
2. According to Thuy, why did she join the South Vietnamese military? How do you think her military service affected how she viewed herself?