



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Accountability in the My Lai Massacre

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It lasted just a few hours, but the events that transpired on March 18, 1968 have come to represent all that the American Public hated about the Vietnam War. A war that initially received much public support was quickly becoming unpopular; soldiers were no longer respected as war heroes – like their father and grandfathers had been -- but were viewed with disdain and hatred. Misconduct on the grand scale that occurred at My Lai on this fateful date in 1968 merely added to the outrage. But in the end only one man, Lieutenant Calley, was held accountable by the legal system for his role in the massacre. This unit will investigate several essential questions about the incident at My Lai, the government cover up that transpired, and the eventual reprimanding. At the end of the unit students will be prompted to connect the incident at My Lai to the present day war in Iraq and the conduct of soldiers at Hadithia and Abu Ghraib.

To approach this event in history with dignity it is essential that teachers try to be unbiased. This is difficult -- most would consider the incident a Massacre, and defending the actions of the soldiers becomes a difficult task. Laying blame or justifying the actions of the soldiers is not the aim of the unit -- the goal is to think critically about the soldier's actions. The incident occurs in a particular time, in a particular place, with a particular set of circumstances. To evaluate the choices made on that day, the students will first have to examine the events leading up to March 16th -- the collective group experience of C Company. How does C Company come to be who they are? How does this influence the choices that are made in My Lai? Next a Case Study of the incidents will be examined. Students will be asked to think critically about the events of that day, and the subsequent choices made by the soldiers and the commanding officers. The last part of the unit will ask students to apply the ideas and lessons of the My Lai Massacre to the modern day conduct of soldiers.

Essential Questions

1. How ought soldiers behave when conducting war?
2. What differentiates a legal order from an illegal order?
3. When are soldiers allowed to disobey orders?
4. Who is responsible for the actions at My Lai in March 1968: the soldiers, their superior officers

and/or the government?

5. How does My Lai connect to Abu Ghraib and Hadithia?

6. Who is responsible for what happened at Abu Ghraib and Hadithia?

7. What role, if any, did rescuers and bystanders play in these incidents?

Rationale

I mostly teach 11th and 12th grade at New Haven Academy, a small magnet school in New Haven, Connecticut. The size of the school helps to foster an environment rich in intense and close relationships among the members of the school community. Black and Hispanic students make up 80% of the student body, the remaining 20% are Caucasian. Also, roughly 65% of the students are from New Haven while the remaining 35% reside in the suburbs of the city. Finally, a large portion of the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch.

Classes at New Haven Academy are small and are typically are sixty to seventy minutes in length, and in the Humanities Department, they meet daily. Therefore, students are able to spend significant time investigating each unit of study.

New Haven Academy has an intense relationship with an outside organization, Facing History and Ourselves. A not for profit international organization, Facing History's mission as an organization is to foster a critical understanding of the choices we live in and to force students to take responsibility for their community. The Facing History network is large and each member school participates differently with a varying amount of intensity. At New Haven Academy, participation is intense, and we utilize the Facing History curriculum extensively. In the ninth grade students take a seminar titled the Holocaust and Human Behavior. The course is a study of the Weimar Republic and the events that lead to the Holocaust. In the latter parts of the course student look at issues of accountability, and typically put individuals on trial for their participation in the Holocaust. In the past, students have put on trial Walter Stier, a bureaucrat that helped organize the special trains that transported the prisoners to the concentration camps, and Elwira Bauzer, a children's book author who wrote propaganda. In the tenth grade students take a course that applies the scope and sequence of the Holocaust course to three additional atrocities: the Armenian Genocide, Apartheid in South Africa, and the Rwandan Genocide. The basic goal of the second course is to examine the connections and patterns that emerge in history. In the 11th grade year students study the eugenics movement in the United States. In the twelve grade students study the Civil Rights Movement utilizing the documentary film *Eyes on the Prize*.

Scope and Sequence

Facing History and Ourselves provides a particular scope and sequence as a basis for the curriculum that they write. My unit will utilize the same basic framework. This particular unit will be taught to my 11th grade Humanities class. The course is an examination of the United States from Reconstruction to the Present Day using both history and literature. By the time take the 11th grade Humanities course are familiar with the ideas and themes of Facing History.

The unit will have the following framework. It will start with issues of identity. I want students to think critically about how soldiers become soldiers. In one account of My Lai, Ridenhour sees a religious Mormon, a nice guy, turn into a ruthless killer. What causes this transformation to occur? Is it the stress of war? Is the soldier the creation of the army? Is the soldier obligated to give up his humanity? In the early stages of the unit students will investigate group identity as well. Secondly, student will investigate how the enemy is created and how this happens in particular during the Vietnam War. The third part of the unit will be a case study of the incident itself based upon the accounts of the soldiers and the official reports that are filed by the commanders. These three pieces will constitute roughly half of the entire unit.

The second half of the unit will move into issues of judgment and accountability. It will be necessary for students to learn about the rules of war, and an investigation of the Geneva Conventions is required. The goal is to have student learn about how war is to be conducted in the abstract and then apply these ideas to the particulars of My Lai.

It is imperative that whenever and difficult piece of history is investigated, a moment in history when people made poor choices, and atrocities were committed, that students also look at two additional pieces: the roles of bystanders and rescuers. I would like to have student look at the risks and actions that some of the soldiers took that day in an attempt to save villagers.

The final part of the unit will have students read about two contemporary events in the Iraq War -- Hadithia and Abu Ghraib. It would be the goal at this point to have students apply the lessons learned from the My Lai case study to the present day and to evaluate critically the actions of soldiers.

Although the incident at My Lai was planned in advance and covered up in its aftermath by the higher ups of the US Army, individuals carry out the incident by choice. The intent of the unit is to learn what the conditions were that allowed those choices to be made by soldiers not much older than my students. It will hopefully allow students to think critically about the choices that they make each day.

The Process

The unit will follow the above-mentioned scope and sequence. The unit is designed to take place over the course of several weeks, although this can easily be adapted to serve the needs of the individual teacher. Typically, the use of a journal is standard in a Facing History class. The journal is different from a regular notebook. Into the journal go guided student reflections, notes, activities, and handouts. The journal is periodically read and checked by the teacher, and it becomes an instrument for conversation between the

teacher and student. I require that students participate fully in my class. This does not mean that students necessarily have to orally participate in class, this is merely one aspect of what participation means. The journal allows students to participate in a different manner.

Introducing the Unit to the Students

Students will start the unit with an examination of a primary source document. The document is a copy of the official press release written by Jay Roberts in March 1968 and issued by the Public Information Department of the 11th Brigade. When putting this unit together I struggled with the best method of initiation. It is imperative that the teacher not present information that is too biased at the outset of the unit as this would prevent students from thinking critically about the subject and drawing their own conclusions. After much internal conflict, I decided that the best way for student to learn the material is to have it uncovered much in the same manner as the general public would have learned about the incident. Therefore, starting with the official Army press release seems to be a natural starting point. The unit will start with a brief examination of this official account of the events, and then take a step backwards to look at how the soldiers got to that point using the process described above.

Students will be given a copy of the press release. They silently read the document and highlight information that seems to stick and out be important to them. They will also begin to write any questions that they need to have answered. The class should then come together as a whole group and discuss what they have discovered and make a list of the questions that they have developed. In the press release the journalist reported that the village of My Lai was “where, three weeks earlier, another company of the brigade’s Task Force Barker fought its way out of a VC ambush, leaving 80 enemy dead.”¹ This indicates that the area of “pinkville” was a hot zone and begins to justify the actions that the soldiers took on that day. Roberts was a reporter who was attached to the 11th Brigade, and he accompanied Charlie Company during the assault. Also, the language of the release is very clean. He refers to the events as a “running battle” -- a much nicer tone. Also, at the end of the release, he tries to establish the event as a successful military mission, and list the achievements of the men -- the capture of weapons and documents. Students might not necessarily pick up on the intricacies of the document, but they will generate some fundamental questions that need clarification. This is the essence of the exercise, to lead students to generate questions about a historical document.

Examining Identity

How does a soldier become a soldier? What has to happen to person to have the person become a soldier? When a person becomes a soldier how has he changed? Is he still a person capable of acting humanely and with principles or has something inside of him changed? Is there the possibility that war can be carried out humanely? Or is war, by nature, absent of humanity? These are some of the questions that students will begin to answer in the first part of this unit. To keep the unit limited in its scope, some of these questions will not be fleshed out completely.

As previously noted, students already have a firm understanding of the nature of identity, so an examination of identity in the abstract for my classes is not necessary. Therefore, students will begin the next part of the unit by looking at the training of the soldiers in Charlie Company and how a man becomes a soldier. Kenneth Hodges gives insight into the training of soldiers. He was one of the sergeants in charge of training the men of Charlie Company. The following is a description of this process in his own words:

The transition from civilian to soldier is very distinct. It needs very rigorous training. You have to train him to march, you have to train him which is his left foot, which is his right foot, which foot he steps off on and why its important that he does. So orders are a very important part of a soldier's training from the beginning. They are taught how to drill, how to march with weapons. They are taught how to use weapons, how to use weapons to kill. They are taught to be soldiers. They are trained to be killers. They're trained from their early weeks in basic training. They're taught how to use a bayonet. They're taught the spirit of the bayonet. The spirit of the bayonet is to kill. They are taught hand-to-hand fighting, they are taught close-order fighting. They are taught how to deal with the enemy when they come face to face with him. ²

It is clear from this statement that the training of a man to become a soldier is very regimented. Also, it is clear that a man who goes through basic training learns a very different set of codes and standards that is required to live by. Hodges also states that "you learn early in your career that you have to carry out the orders you are given to the letter' and that " there's no time allowed in the heat of combat to question an order. You could be risking the lives of the people around you." ³

In Peter Tauber's account of Army Basic Training, the process of militarization is examined. The memoir is written from the perspective of Tauber, who during his time in basic training scrupulously takes notes about his experience. In the end his writing is a bit comical, and yet very insightful into the live of a common soldier. In the first week of basic training, Tauber is introduced to a simple exercise, the front leaning rest. Essentially, it is a when you hold yourself in the up position of a pushup. Tauber recounts the experience of doing a front leaning rest. "We are holding in the front leaning rest, two hundred of us, at the end of an exercise period. The drill instructors are screaming at us to get our backs straight and our backsides down. The longer we hold, the more drop out of the position. We begin to scream at each other as the drill sergeants tell that we'll remain in the front leaning rest until we all do it correctly." ⁴ At the outset, this difficult activity seems logical, an attempt to teach group accountability and teamwork. However, it quickly becomes an exercise in that destroys the individual's sense of self. The process of becoming a soldier has begun. The pavement is hot, and is burning the hands of the soldiers. The drill instructors summarily instruct the trainees to "kick anyone whose ass is up, turn on your fellow man if he is to weak, because he causes your suffering. All our humanity breaks down as the strong arise to kick the feeble." ⁵ Until this point, Tauber had regarded himself as different from the rest of the soldiers. He was a merely a reservist from New York, and not fully committed to the Army and the cause of the war. But in this moment, as he holds the front leaning rest until he can barely stand it, he is transformed. "I too turn on the weaker ones." ⁶ The training is not only about conditioning and the physical readiness of the man, but it is also about creating a soldier. Tauber is in conflict with himself, and his actions become inexplicable. "One good kick relieves my suffering not at all, makes me no stronger, no more fit, but aware of the weakness of our commitment to the bonds of civilization." ⁷ He can't explain why he makes the choice that he does, but is all too aware of the consequences.

There are other moments in Basic Training in which Tauber's transformation from man to soldier is clear. When he is first given his rifle, he is allowed to spend an hour to play with it, and although he is outwardly resistant to the Army, he lets the "hour of rifle play serve the purpose the Army wants it to. They want us to grow familiar with the weapon, to regard it as another toy, to be comfortable with it. They know what there are those, like myself who resist the brainwashing by remaining strangers with their weapons, who see it as an object, and something quite apart from themselves. After an hour of casual play I unceremoniously pull the trigger and find that I have crossed the line, just that easily." ⁸ A few weeks later, the soldiers are trained in

how to use their weapon. One day they go out to a field and practice “quick kill”, or instinct shooting. Instead of rifles they are issued Daisy Air Rifle BB guns, and they practice shooting from their hips. No aiming is necessary in this exercise. ⁹ It has become clear that the gun, and the killing of an enemy soldier, is an essential part of the Army, and in Basic Training, it has taken on the atmosphere of a game.

Thinking as an individual is not required in the Army. In fact, it is highly discouraged during Basic Training. After the first week of training the soldiers are told that they will be given a written exam: they are given a copy of the test with all the correct answers to study. When it is time to take the exam, a drill sergeant states “We’re a little late so the first five answers are A, C, C, B, D.” He does the same for the rest of the test. ¹⁰ Perhaps a better example of how the need to think and rationalize is not required in the Army occurs later in Basic Training when the recruits are taught how to pack their packs. He explains that “as we struggle with our field gear in a protracted practical exercise in pack-packing, it becomes clear to me that just as the Army’s stupidity is brilliant on one level - everything is so mechanical that the dumbest recruit ever recruited can understand and learn (I mean, even the clothing has sewn-in instructions.) -- It is altogether too easy to be an accidentally good soldier.” ¹¹ He goes on to assert that the course in killing can be absorbed by anyone, without much effort. This transformation becomes apparent at the group level when the recruits are practicing with their bayonets. At one point Tauber describes the group as the June Taylor Dancers, stomping and jabbing in unison. They continue to practice until they are “all sucked into the mass and jabbing and stomping on cue.” ¹² By the time the fifth week of Basic Training arrives, the recruits have become a group, capable of killing with instinct, and without thinking.

This final transformation into the power of a group of soldiers becomes more and more evident. Charlie Company observes the beating of an Alpha Company recruit. Tauber explains the actions, or inaction, of Charlie Company. “We watch, shocked: shocked that it is happening, shocked that we stand idly by like Kitty Genovese’s neighbors, doing nothing, glad that it is not us. The boy rises to his feet, but it kicked to the earth again. It is somehow a test of our fitness not only to accept pain stoically but to accept other’s pain silently.” ¹³ At this point, the soldiers stand idly by because they are either afraid of the consequences of intervention - after all the beating is being performed by a superior officer, or because they feel powerless to stop the incident. Either way, Tauber is aware of his role as a bystander at this point.

The discipline that the Army has instilled in the recruits becomes evident in the seventh week of the training. The soldiers are given the choice to opt out of the remaining weeks of training. They would be required to pass all of the tests at the end of the eighth week, but the daily training could be avoided. However, Tauber explains “we all resign ourselves to actually going to physical training voluntarily, which has to stand as the sucker play of the year.” ¹⁴ Tauber tries to explain why he continues to train, but in the end, there is no real clarity to his reasoning. Whether he is looking for the discipline of the Army, or some greater purpose in having to perform the other mundane tasks that he is required to perform, like rolling his underwear, or shining his shoes, is evident. There is something more. There is the need to perform the job of a soldier, and to belong to the group.

Group Identity and the Expectations of Soldiers

In their account of the My Lai Massacre, Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim described Charlie Company as “very average”. The soldiers came from a variety of backgrounds, and because of the random nature of the Army’s procedures, they were assigned to the company by happenstance. If anything, Charlie Company might be considered to be slightly above average in that it boasted a larger percentage of high school graduates. Only

13 of the soldiers were destined to be a part of McNamara's 100,000, a group of soldiers that were deemed by the army as unlikely to meet peacetime entry qualifications based upon their aptitude and intelligence. Otherwise, Charlie Company was determined to be a typical and normal rifle company. ¹⁵ Two distinct outcomes of this observation can be reached. Either any group of soldiers is capable of committing the atrocities at My Lai, or something particular had to happen to Charlie Company that propelled them towards this destiny. In the end it is some combination of the two: It is quite possible that any company was capable of committing the atrocities at My Lai; but, the individual experiences of the soldiers and the experience of the group in the months leading up to the events, can not be discounted.

What are also present are the traditions of military service and the expectations that many soldiers brought into the war with them. Furthermore, Charlie Company was merely one piece of a new battalion, the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, which was being formed in Hawaii just as the men of Charlie Company were going through Basic Training. This particular unit had had been deactivated years earlier, but had associated with it, a long, historical record of valiant victories. This was the regiment that fought with General Sykes in the Civil War and that marched up San Juan Hill. The unit had a glorified past, and yet, as the NCOs and other personnel arrived in Hawaii, they still were starting from scratch. ¹⁶ However, what is significant are the strong military traditions associated with this unit, and with any unit going into battle. The desire to be great is overwhelming. Certainly, this made a contribution to the events that transpired in March 1968.

In the Peers Commission Report it is stated the Charlie Company suffered from many training deficiencies and that this played a role in the events at My Lai. ¹⁷ This is a strange statement to make, considering that upon their arrival in Hawaii the company improved with irregular efficiency and was recognized with several awards for their achievements, including the "company of the month" award. ¹⁸

The members of Charlie Company all received information on the ideas of the Geneva Convention. According to General Westmoreland, "all soldiers were required to receive 1 hour of training in the Geneva and Hague Conventions during Basic Training," that qualified legal officers conduct refresher training in this subject once each year," and that every soldier arriving in Vietnam was issued "several wallet-sized cards containing instructions pertinent to this and related matters." ¹⁹ However, this training seems to be inadequate, and many of the soldiers testified that they did not remember the training. "Only a few of them had even the vaguest recollection or being instructed in the nature of war crimes." ²⁰ Since the drill sergeants did not particularly stress the Geneva Conventions, the accepted international rules for the humane and proper treatment of enemy combatants and civilians, it is unlikely that soldiers would remember the one hour of training. In Tauber's account of Basic Training, he repeatedly states that many of the classroom activities were disregarded or ignored by the soldiers and drill sergeants alike, and that at times, even the drill sergeants fell asleep in these sessions. It is understandable that when the soldiers spend hundreds of hours learning to obey orders and training to kill, that the hour on the abstract idea of the Geneva Conventions does not hold. Kenneth Hodges, a drill sergeant, states that he "was very pleased with the way they turned out. They turned out to be very good soldiers. The fact that they were able to go into My Lai and carry out the orders that they had been given, I think this is a direct result of the good training that had." ²¹ Perhaps even more insightful is Tauber's description of what he learned about the Geneva Conventions. In that particular training session "brief mention is made, after an elaborate explanation of the Geneva Convention, that everyone we have fought since its signing, or are likely to fight does not recognize it." ²² Two ideas are at play here. First, overwhelmingly, soldiers are trained to kill and obey orders. Second, even if it is not the official view of the US Armed Forces, there is the general feeling that the Geneva Conventions play a little role in the fighting of this war. As a group, this is the character that Charlie Company develops.

Identifying the Enemy: We and They Behavior

The war in Vietnam was unlike any war that had been fought by the United States. In previous war efforts the enemy was easily identifiable; the enemy was the one on the other side of the battlefield. In Vietnam, however, a significant paradigm shift occurs. The enemy is not only there with you in the jungle, but also walking along the side of the road, and in the villages, and can be young, or old. In Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, a fictional memoir, the author creates a metaphor of the war in a game of checkers. He writes that he remembers:

Norman Bowker and Henry Dobbins played checkers every evening before dark. It was ritual for them. They would dig a foxhole and get the board out and play long, silent games as the sky went from pink to purple. The rest of us would sometimes stop by to watch. There was something restful about it, something orderly and reassuring. There were red checkers and black checkers. The playing field was laid out in a strict grid, no tunnels or mountains or jungles. You knew where you stood. You knew the score. The pieces were out on the board, the enemy was visible, you could watch the tactics unfolding into larger strategies. There was a winner and a loser. There were rules. ²³

O'Brien's story is a fictional one, and yet it speaks great truth about the war in Vietnam. A central theme to the novel is the idea that actual occurrence and truth are two different qualifications. Although much of what he writes is made up, and never really happened, he asserts that this is irrelevant. Truth is a different standard for O'Brien. This particular passage is a true description of the situation in Vietnam in 1968. The soldiers crave normalcy and desire the predictability of checkers. The war lacks these qualities, and makes it difficult for the soldiers to operate. It seems that this war is very un-warlike. It does not have the same conditions that a soldier would expect or desire. The conventions of war have been tossed aside. The Peers Commission, the official investigation of the My Lai Massacre, describes the Military Situation in Quang Ngai Province. According to the government, the enemy had 10,000 - 14,000 men divided into three broad categories. Between 2,000 and 4,000 were regular forces, 3,000 and 5,000 were guerrillas, and 5,000 support personnel. ²⁴ The large number of guerilla fighters is astonishing. Certainly, this proportion of guerilla fighters seems out of place. Guerillas fighters typically use tactics that are abnormal, that do not fit into the regular scheme of military training and war operations. Peers goes on to state that these guerilla fighters lead parallel lives. In the daytime they acted as farmers, living in the villages to conceal their identity, while performing the duties of a soldier at night. This makes the ground war confusing and difficult for the American Marine.

In Bilton and Sims's account of My Lai, *Four Hours in My Lai*, two soldiers describe the enemy with frightening accuracy. Varnado Simpson's description is filled with torment and frustration, even twenty years later, according to Bilton and Sims. Simpson wondered, "Who is the enemy? How can you distinguish between the civilians and the noncivilians? The same people who come and work in the bases at daytime, they just want to shoot and kill you at nighttime. So how can you distinguish between the two? The good or the bad? All of them looked the same." Fred Widmer describes the effect of this confusion. He stated that, "When we first started losing members of the company, it was mostly through booby traps and snipers. We never really got into a main conflict per se, where you could see who was shooting and you could actually shoot back." War is difficult to conduct when the enemy is unseen, when there is no one to engage in a battle with. Would this qualify as being unjust by Michael Walzer? In his book, *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer writes about the nature of guerilla war. He states that "surprise is the essential feature of guerilla war," and that the ambush, a

necessity of both guerilla war and conventional war, requires this element. The ability of the enemy to hide and disguise himself is a requisite part of the ambush, and although some military commanders loath this element, it has long been accepted as legitimate. ²⁵ Walzer recounts the story of some French peasants working the potato fields during the occupation in World War Two. As a platoon of German soldiers passes by, the peasants ambush them, and 14 of the Germans are killed. Years later the German commander regards these partisan fighters as murderers. Somehow, when they disguised themselves as civilians, they crossed the line of acceptable camouflage, and broke the rules of engagement. ²⁶ Walzer also asserts that guerillas fight not only with the common people, but among them. That is, the guerillas live among those that they fight for, and also, fight in the same location where they live. There is no established base of operations, easily distinguishable by the enemy. The guerilla does not bare obvious marks of the soldier and carry his weapons in the open, as the War Convention would require. While the enemy might state that terror produces the cooperation of the villagers and consequently their silence, genuine popular support in probably a more realistic conclusion. ²⁷ Therefore, because there were a large number of guerillas present in Quang Ngai, living among the civilian population, and wreaking havoc on the American Army, it is a reasonable to assume that My Lai would have a strong presence of Viet Cong soldiers and guerillas living in the village. This does not justify the actions of the soldiers, but it does begin to explain the mindset of Charlie Company, and how they viewed the enemy.

The Viet Cong was a formidable enemy and they continually presented the United States army with new tactics that were difficult to evade. Perhaps the most difficult obstacle to overcome was the inability of the United States to destroy the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This series of trails and tunnels allowed the Viet Cong to continually resupply its forces. The trail was originally a small footpath that would develop into a network of tens of thousands kilometers. One US briefing manual outlined the strategic importance of the trail and adopted a policy of intense bombing, 32 sorties a day. ²⁸ However, the US was never able to put the trail out of commission. After an attack, the supplies would be rerouted, and almost overnight, the destroyed portion of the trail was rebuilt. Critical to the success of the Viet Cong was their recruitment and use of soldiers with little regard to class or gender. Women played a significant role in the North Vietnamese war effort, from building roads to digging tunnels along the trail; tens of thousands of women were involved. ²⁹ Again, this does not justify the actions of the men at My Lai, nor does it mean that all women living in Vietnam were involved in the war effort. It is important to note that women were soldiers in Vietnam, and that this further confused what was accepted as normal, and made the enemy difficult to define.

The Case Study

It may seem strange that a unit on My Lai has spent such a significant amount of time on other material. However, the time spent looking at the events that cause the atrocities at My Lai cannot be ignored in order for students to evaluate the atrocities accurately. It is this evaluation that is the critical piece of the unit.

The fundamental facts of the case are as follows. Charlie Company was part of a new Battalion being created in Hawaii. Here soldiers received training specific to their mission in Hawaii, and performed well in the exercises. The first few months in Vietnam were uneventful for the group. However, in the two months leading up to My Lai, the Tet offensive began taking a toll on the soldiers. Charlie Company would start to experience losses. Just before My Lai the mood of Charlie Company was dismal. They were subjected to long, arduous patrols, and morale began to plummet. As the early months of 1968 unfolded the level of violence aimed at civilians increased. ³⁰ This type of violence was not sanctioned, but there were no repercussions to their actions. Gregory Olson recounts an attack on a female civilian after one soldier was killed by a booby trap and

another lost his legs. The company responded by attacking the first Vietnamese they encountered. Olson would describe the men who committed this crime as “normal guys; some were friends of mine. For a while they were wild animals. It was murder, and I’m ashamed of myself for not trying to do anything about it.”³¹ It is clear that Olson regarded the incident as inappropriate and immoral. The next night, Captain Medina would assemble the men and brief them on the next day’s mission. He told the men that they would encounter between 250 and 280 VC outside the village of My Lai 4. The hamlet would be empty of civilians who would be away at market. If anyone was in the hamlet when they went in, it was safe to assume that they were VC or VC sympathizers. Here the story gets a little fuzzy because we are not sure if Medina gave specific instructions about how to handle the civilians. Everyone expected stiff enemy resistance and most understood that the village was to be destroyed. Kenneth Hodges recalls that, “it was clearly explained that there were to be no prisoners” and that “the order that was given was to kill everyone in the village.”³² Again, it was assumed that anyone left in the village was the enemy and that civilians had been moved out of the area.

On the morning of the 16th the first helicopter touched down near My Lai 4. Quickly, the soldiers moved into the village and began killing. Most soldiers would not kill civilians, and engaged the population by herding them into open areas to be guarded. Under pressure from Captain Medina, Lieutenant Calley ordered his men to kill the civilians. One man refused, while another joined Calley in a massacre of a large group. The atrocities lasted until just before noon. What is clear is that Lt. Calley gave the soldiers of Charlie Company and Lt. Calley believed he was following orders he was given by Captain Medina. Furthermore, the ranking officer in My Lai not only issued the orders, but also participated in the executions.³³

The case study lends itself nicely to a document based activity. At this stage of the unit students would be well prepared to look at the events that transpired in March 1968. In terms of delivery, I plan on creating a museum activity and gallery walk. A Museum activity works as follows. A collection of documents is posted around the classroom by the teacher (sometimes it is necessary to post duplicate copies to make sure there are not too many students at any one exhibit). For each document there is a specific task or question posted as well. Students are asked to visit each exhibit, and perform the requisite task. Their responses typically go into their journal, or onto museum guide sheet. It is also possible to post the exhibits on chart paper, and to have students write their response on the big paper. In this instance, they then respond to the document, but also to each other’s comments. It is important that the teacher take certain guidelines into account when creating a museum. Typically, only two -- three students fit at one exhibit, so numerous exhibits are needed, or duplicates are necessary. I find it helpful to include non-written documents as well. This helps differentiate instruction. I have included more graphic pictures in some museum activities. Instead of posting these on the wall, I put them inside a folder so that students can look at the exhibit, and then return it to the folder. After students are given adequate time to visit each of the exhibits, the class will debrief the experience and share what they have learned.

Certainly, this case study is considered to be “hard history,” a moment from the past that is emotionally difficult. It is imperative that students be appropriately prepared for this type of activity. This can be a difficult task for the teacher. An essential element for this type of activity is a culture of safety. Students have to be made to feel safe in the classroom so that they can take academic risks. Also, some students have very emotional responses to certain subjects for a variety of reasons. Only if the classroom has been previously established as an area of safety will a student be prepared to take those risks. In a museum activity having student remain silent during the activity preserves this safety. Their responses are placed in their journal, or on chart paper if it is used. This allows them to respond to the documents in a relatively safe manner. It is almost mandatory that the teacher allows adequate time for students to process and debrief this type of hard

history at the end of class.

The documents that would be considered for use in this activity might include:

1. Brief pieces of testimony from the soldiers of Charlie Company
2. the cover of Time magazine
3. descriptions of the days events from villagers
4. official reports filed by the army
5. Ridenhour's letter to Congress
6. Seymour Hersh's newspaper articles
7. a map of the My Lai and the surrounding area.

The Choice to Not Participate

It is important that students also examine soldiers who did not participate in the atrocities at My Lai, who made a different choice. The soldier that stands out the most in this regard is Hugh Thomson, Jr., a helicopter pilot. Bilton and Sims describe him as being cocky and aggressive. They assert "he was also an exceptional pilot who took danger in his stride. If there were enemy to find he would seek them out and kill them. He did not court danger but he was not afraid of confronting the Viet Cong."³⁴ But even being aggressive did not prevent Thompson from being moral. He is a bit of a contradiction. Ruthless in searching out the VC, but he was also very careful to kill them cleanly, with as little unnecessary suffering as possible. He expected his gunners to only fire if they saw a weapon, and any shot had to be a clean shot. And furthermore, a fleeing man was not the enemy, unless that fleeing man carried a weapon.³⁵

On the morning of March 16th, Thompson had initially provided air cover to the ground troops. After the initial onslaught of the US Army, it became clear that they were receiving no enemy fire. Thompson marked several bodies with green smoke, a signal that they were in need of assistance, and left My Lai to refuel. He returned at 9am and immediately noticed that the bodies he had marked as wounded were now dead. From the air he saw a group of soldiers approach a young woman of about 20, one of the victims Thompson had previously marked. She made a feeble gesture with her arm to signal that she was in need of help, and Thompson put his helicopter in a hover position nearby and radioed the ground troops for assistance. Thompson saw one of the troops walk up to the woman, prod her with his foot, and then kill her. Thompson also saw dozens of bodies in an irrigation ditch, some of which appeared to still be living. Nearby a few soldiers had taken off their steel helmets and sat smoking cigarettes. Thompson knew at this point that there was no firefight occurring.³⁶ Thompson would land the helicopter and speak with Lt. Calley and another sergeant. The sergeant stated that the only way to help the villagers in the ditch was to put them out of their misery. Minutes later, after he had taken off, one of Thompson's gunners saw the sergeant shooting the people in the ditch. Witnesses overheard

Lt. Calley say to Thompson that the ground troops were under his command, not Thompson's.

Thompson saw another group of about ten civilians fleeing for cover on the north side of the village. In pursuit of the civilians was a group of soldiers. He landed his aircraft between the soldiers and the civilians and gave an order to Coburn, one of his gunners. If the Americans began to shoot the civilians, Coburn was instructed to turn his gun on the Americans. Colburn turned his gun towards the Americans, but was unsure if he had the capacity to do as ordered. Thompson was able to rescue all 10 of the civilians. Later, as he was leaving the area, he flew over a ditch and saw something moving. Again, he landed his helicopter. This time, the two gunners, Colburn and Andreotta, jumped into the ditch. The bodies were four or five deep, but wading among the cadavers, Andreotta was able to locate what he was searching for. Buried in the bodies was a three-year-old boy. The men evacuated the boy to a local hospital. ³⁷

At 11 am Thompson landed at his base. Along with a group of men, Thompson reported to his commanding officers what had happened at My Lai. Radio surveillance that day indicates that orders to "knock off the killing" to "Stop the killing" or to "Stop killing civilians" are relayed to the troops on the ground. It is unclear as to the exact working of the orders, but they are acknowledged. By chow time, the men on the ground had stopped and were taking a lunch break. ³⁸

There are several ways to present Thompson's story to a room full of teenagers and several resources that can be utilized. The first resource that could be useful is a feature story written in the Pacific Northwest Magazine as part of the Seattle Times in 2003. Follow this link:
<http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/pacificnw/2002/0310/cover.html>.

Another possible resource is a story from All Things Considered on NPR. It is an obituary of Hugh Thompson, who died in 2006. Use the following link to access the piece, where you can access the audio file:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5133444>.

What could be useful is the following link to a transcript from an event at the US Naval Academy which includes the transcript of a 60 minutes segment on Thompson:
http://www.usna.edu/Ethics/Publications/ThompsonPg1-28_Final.pdf.

Whatever choice the teacher makes, the same activity can be used. As students read or possibly watch a segment on Hugh Thompson have them make a list of the risks and actions that Hugh took. Finally, at the following website you will find Hugh Thompson's first hand account of what happened. Also at this website is Ron Ridenhour's experience with My Lai. He was not at the village, but heard about the events second hand. He eventually will write a letter to Congress that would spark an investigation.
http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/MyI_hero.html. A similar activity can be used in discussing Ridenhour and the choices he made.

Judgment and Accountability

Of course the official military justice that is utilized after the incident will be examined. But beyond the court martial of Lt. Calley there are two areas of judgment and accountability that I would like my students to explore in this part of the unit. First, students will examine the Milgram Experiments, in an attempt to understand why people follow orders, and what the consequences of following orders are. This will connect explicitly to Lt. Calley and Captain Medina. Third, students would have examined two individuals who chose to not participate in the massacre, Ridenhour and Thompson. There is a third individual whose participation is in question. The photographer Ronald Haeberle recorded the events of the My Lai Massacre with his camera.

Students will examine what type of culpability, if any, he incurs for his presence there that day.

Students will begin this portion of the unit with an examination of the Milgram Experiments. The film produced by Milgram does a sufficient job of introducing the experiments to the viewer and includes footage of several people participating in the experiments.

Holocaust and Human Behavior, a resource book by Facing History and Ourselves, does a nice job of explaining the Milgram Experiments:

Working with pairs, Milgram designated one volunteer as “teacher” and the other as “learner.” As the “teacher” watched, the “learner” was strapped into a chair with an electrode attached to each wrist. The “learner” was then told to memorize word pairs for a test and warned that wrong answers would result in electric shocks. The “learner” was, in fact, a member of Milgram’s team. The real focus of the experiment was the “teacher.” Each was taken to a separate room and seated before a “shock generator” with switches ranging from 15 volts labeled “slight shock” to 450 volts labeled “danger -- severe shock.” Each “teacher” was told to administer a “shock” for each wrong answer. The shock was to increase by fifteen volts every time the “learner” responded incorrectly. The volunteer received a practice shock before the test began to get an idea of the pain involved. ³⁹

Milgram, and many of his colleagues, hypothesized that most people would stop administering shocks to the learner. However, it was discovered that many participants in the role of teacher did in fact go all the way to 450 volts. All it took to force them to continue were words. The phrase “The experiment requires that you must go on” are repeated several times by the coordinator of the experiment, and despite the screams, the pleas, and the eventual silence, many times the teacher continues to administer the shocks. The experiments are administered several times, with many different variations. Milgram’s conclusions for each variation are different. He determines that proximity to the victim mattered. If the teacher could touch the victim he was less likely to administer the shocks. Also, when other people in the room were participating in the experiment, participation by the teacher increased. When the others ceased to participate, it was unlikely that the teacher would continue.

When using the Milgram Experiments with student it is important to note the following. First, students will initially not understand that the experiment is rigged -- often they begin to try and play the word matching game. Second, students will also have the same initial reaction as many of the participants when the learner begins to resist. Students will laugh, and often have to be reminded to act appropriately. At times, I have seen students become very angry with the participants for continuing the experiment. One of the lessons included in this unit details one way to use the film of the Milgram Experiments, *Obedience*.

On the morning of March 16th, Ronald Haeberle was assigned to Charlie Company, and spent the day taking photographs. When he was drafted he was in his fourth year of university majoring in photography. The Army recognized his talent, and he was assigned to the Public Affairs division. Just before My Lai, he was assigned to work with Jay Roberts to construct a morale-boosting piece about Task Force Barker’s campaign to eliminate the VC from the Batagan Peninsula. They had created several pieces previously, and many had been picked up by the AP service and printed in US Newspapers. On that day he carried with him two cameras: an Army issued black and white Leica and his own 35mm Nikon with Ektachrome color film. ⁴⁰ Many of the pictures

were taken with his own 35mm Nikon. He took pictures of hootches being burned, animals being killed, and grenades being hurled into ground holes. Later he remembered that his instincts as a photographer took over. He stated, "I knew that it was something that shouldn't be happening but yet I was part of it. I think I was in a kind of daze from seeing all of these shootings and not seeing any return fire. Yet the shooting kept going on."

⁴¹ Haeberle realizes that what he is witnessing is not normal, that is it out of the realm of typical battle behavior. His only response is to photograph the events. "I kept taking pictures. That was my job as a photographer, to take pictures, a normal reaction I have with the camera, just picking up and keep on shooting, trying to capture what is happening around me." ⁴² What is intriguing about Haeberle's experience at My Lai is that he took two types of photographs that day. With his Army issued black and white film he took pictures of the men doing typical soldier activities; burning hootches, checking bunkers, interrogating villagers, helping an old man out of a hut before it is set on fire. He took the other photographs with his personal camera. Later, the army would try to confiscate the photos.

What is difficult about Ronald Haeberle is his own culpability in the events that transpired that day. On the one hand he did his duty as a journalist, kept his distance and attempted to remain objective. He took the photos, but chose to not intervene despite his realization that he knew that these events were out of the ordinary. At one point he sees a young boy with an injured foot. His first instinct is to photograph the child. Unfortunately, before he can take the photo, another soldier kills the young boy. ⁴³ On the one hand the journalist is required to be professional and to not intervene in the events, merely to report them. "He was a journalist, exercising the obligatory professional detachment from the event." ⁴⁴ But Haeberle is more than a journalist. He realizes the absurd nature of the events that he is photographing, and goes as far as to distinguish between which photos are appropriate for the Army, and which are for his own personal use. One could say that at some point he ceased to be a journalist and reporter, and merely became a person. As a person, or as a soldier, what then are his obligations? These ideas are detailed in fully developed lesson at the end of this unit.

Lessons Learned for the Modern Day

The movie *The Guardian* details how men and women are trained to be rescue swimmers for the Coast Guard. At one point in the movie the students ask the teacher about how they should decide who to save first in a rescue mission - The teacher, played by Kevin Costner, asks the swimmers in training whether or not they were truly ready to make life and death decisions at the age of 24 -- one cadet answered no -- a response that most of the young men agreed with. He asks point blank whether the young men are ready to be that miracle. This particular clip does a nice job of introducing the ideas of this section of the unit. These soldiers at My Lai are young, between the ages 18 and 22. They have been placed in a difficult situation and are asked to make difficult choices. The overall hope of this unit is to equip students with the critical reasoning skills they need to make a tough decision.

In this piece of the unit students will be asked to examine to pieces of modern history, both from the current war in Iraq. These two incidents are thematically connected to the atrocities at My Lai. Students will be asked to evaluate the incidents in light of what they have learned from their study of My Lai.

The first incident is the atrocities that occur at Abu Ghraib. The best source that I have located is a recent article from the *New Yorker* by Phillip Gourevitch. The story, linked here http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/03/24/080324fa_fact_gourevitch, does a nice job of giving background information about the incident. It also tells the story of the girl who notoriously took many of the photographs of the incidents. It details her emotional and physical response to what is happening at the prison.

The second incident is about a reporter in Afghanistan. He is given the opportunity to interview two would-be suicide bombers. The story is shorter than the Gourevitch piece, but it does a good job of raising some of the moral obligations that we as humans have. In this particular episode, the journalist travels a far distance to interview the men. As he is conducting the interview, they receive a phone call, and leave immediately to carry out their mission. He feels powerless in this situation. The central question in this case is whether he has an obligation to act. And whether he must attempt to intervene and prevent the men from performing their assigned duties. The story is linked here: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/81601>. What is essential in this part of the unit is to allow students to explore these issues independently and to reach their own conclusions about the culpability of these individuals.

Lesson #1: The Milgram Experiments

Student Learning Objectives:

1. Students will view and analyze film
2. Students will identify reasons why people obey orders

Do Now: When students enter the classroom, they should take out their journals. They should spend 5 minutes silently responding to the following prompt: *Why do people obey orders?*

Lesson Development:

1. At the end of the do now, student should share out their ideas. The teacher should list on the board the reasons students come up with. Students should copy the reasons into their journal.
2. The teacher should then spend a few minutes introducing the film. The following facts should be listed on the board:
 - a. The Milgram Experiments were conducted at Yale University in the early 1960s.
 - b. Milgram wanted to know why people chose to follow orders.
 - c. In the experiment the teacher is a volunteer.
 - d. The learner is an employer of Milgram, but the teacher thinks the learner is a volunteer as well.
 - e. The teacher thinks he is teaching the learner a word memory game.
 - f. The learner is pretending.
 - g. The word memory game does not really matter -- do not try to play along.

3. The movie *Obedience* should be cued. The clip starts about 15 minutes in and lasts about 20 minutes. As the students watch the film they should take notes. Students should focus on how the teacher reacts to the learner and how the teacher reacts and responds to the experimenter. How does he respond? What does he say?
4. After the film segment, debrief what has happened by making a list on the board of the student's notes.
5. If time permits, have student watch the short segment that immediately precedes the portion just viewed. In this segment, the man chooses to not go all the way. The students should answer the same two questions as in #3.
6. Again, debrief the film by making a list of the student's responses.
7. A follow up question that can be used is: Suppose that the word game was real and that the teacher was in fact shocking the learner. If the learner were to be injured, who would be at fault? Who would be responsible?
8. At the end of class, as an exit ticket, have the students write 1 paragraph in their journal summarizing the film and what they learned.

Lesson #2: Connections to Today

Student Learning Objectives:

1. Students will read and analyze a secondary source document
2. Students will write a critical essay in response to an article
3. Students will identify another author's thesis
4. Students will list another author's evidence

Lesson Development:

1. Distribute the Article "Why Haditha Matters" to the students. It can be found at the following link:
<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060619/editors2>
2. Distribute the Critical Essay Organizing sheet. This graphic organizer merely gives students space to complete four steps in prepare and write an essay. These steps are:
 - a. Read the essay in its entirety and underline important information
 - b. Complete the following sentence: In this essay the author is trying to prove that . . .
 - c. Identify the author's evidence
 - d. Evaluate the effectiveness of the author's writing. Does he prove his point convincingly? Do you agree with him?
 - e. The last piece is to have student turn their organizing sheet into a coherent essay. The essay should have three main sections:

- i. A brief introduction to the essay and its topic
 - ii. A summary of the author's thesis and an analysis of his evidence
 - iii. Your opinion of the essay, including a relevant connection to the My Lai massacre.
3. To complete the essay, work through the steps with the class as a whole. Start by reading the essay as a whole group.
 4. Have students silently answer the question in letter b and share out their responses.
 5. After identifying the author's thesis, students should spend 10 minutes listing the author's evidence, and then sharing out their ideas in a large group.
 6. Students can then evaluate the effectiveness of the author's writing individually.
 7. Once the material has been reviewed, students should be able to write the essay itself for homework.
To move the students towards independent work, have them then complete the same process using a longer article. One suggestion is to use Philip Gourevitch's article from the New Yorker about Abu Ghraib linked here: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/03/24/080324fa_fact_gourevitch. This article might take the student an entire block period to read and another entire period to write.

Lesson #3: Museum/Document Activity - Exploring Testimonies

Student Learning Objectives:

1. Students will examine and analyze primary source documents
2. Students will make inferences about soldiers and their participation in the My Lai Massacre.

Lesson Development

- There are several ways to create a document activity. This particular method allows student to walk
1. around the room. Also, it forces them to write their responses, and to respond to each other's comment in writing.
 2. When students enter the room the documents should already be posted on the walls.
At each document, student should read the passage or examine the picture. They should also answer the guiding question. I like to mount the documents in the center of a large piece of paper and have students
 3. write their responses on the big paper. Students should spend about 5 minute working with the first exhibit.
 4. After 5 minutes have passed, students should move on to a second exhibit. In this round, and in subsequent rounds, students will respond to both the original documents and each other's responses.
 5. After each of the exhibits has been visited, have student do one more go around so that they can read and respond to any additional remarks.
 6. After they return to their seats debrief the activity.

Here is a selection of documents and testimonies that could be used during the activity. I have included some suggestions for guiding questions. I have used as few as 3 documents and as many as 8. If using post duplicate copies so that students have ample room. The following documents can be found in *My Lai: a Brief*

History with Documents by James Olson and Randy Roberts. It has become the standard collection of primary source documents on the subject.

1. Jay Roberts, Press Release, March 1968 on page 27
 - a. According to Roberts, was the mission a success or a failure?
2. Wallet Cards on page 38
 - a. Which of the nine rules do you think is the most important? Why?
 - b. Which of the "Enemy in Your Hands" guidelines is the most important? Why?
3. Herbert L Carter, Testimony to Peers Commission, 1970 on page 42
 - a. What do you think of Carter's remarks? Do you agree or disagree with him?
4. Harry Stanley, Testimony to US Army C.I.D., 1969 on page 65, Gregory T. Olsen, Testimony to US Army C.I.D., 1969 on page 64, Max D. Huston, Testimony to US Army C.I.D., on page 63, and Ernest L Medina, Testimony to US Army C.I.D., on page 62
 - a. Which of these men is telling the truth? Who would you believe? Why?
5. Hugh Thompson Jr., Testimony to Peers Commission, 1970 on page 115
 - a. What risks did Thompson face in this episode?

Additionally, the following resources can be found in other books and on the web where indicated.

1. Ronald Haeberle, in *4 Hours in My Lai*, by Bolton and Sims, page 124
 - a. Does Haeberle incur any responsibility for the deaths of the villagers? Why?
2. Kenneth Hodges, in *4 Hours in My Lai*, by Bolton and Sims, page 53
 - a. Who is at fault for the deaths of the villagers?

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3. *Ibid.*, 53.
4. Peter Tauber. *The Sunshine Soldiers* (Higganum, CT: Higganum Hill Books, 1971), 37.
5. *Ibid.*, 37.
6. *Ibid.*, 37.
7. *Ibid.*, 38.
8. *Ibid.*, 39.
9. *Ibid.*, 71.
10. *Ibid.*, 43.
11. *Ibid.*, 55.
12. *Ibid.*, 123.
13. *Ibid.*, 84.
14. *Ibid.*, 132.
15. Bilton and Sims, 50-51.
16. *Ibid.*, 52-53.
17. After the My Lai incident, General William Peers was assigned to fully investigate the matter. His investigative body becomes known as the Peers Commission.
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41. Ibid., 124.
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43. Ibid., 133.
44. Olson and Roberts, 22.

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