

## African American Masculinity in the Wartime Diaries of Two Vietnam Soldiers

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**Abstract:** In her article "African American Masculinity in the Wartime Diaries of Two Vietnam Soldiers" Sharon D. Raynor discusses an unpublished diary (1967-68) written by her father, Louis Raynor with the diary (1965-66) of David Parks that was revised and published as a memoir. By contextualizing the traditions of African American autographical writing and wartime diaries, Raynor analyzes how African American masculinity permeates the autobiographical structure in the Raynor and Parks diaries as each soldier interweaves a collective experience with a unique personal experience in the Vietnam War. The Vietnam experience challenged their ideologies about racial politics, but affirmed their masculine identity in the face of violence. Raynor focuses on how in these wartime life writings, African American masculine identity is pervasive in the narratives and how it is performed and documented by Raynor and Parks differently.

**Sharon D. RAYNOR**

### **African American Masculinity in the Wartime Diaries of Two Vietnam Soldiers**

Diaries written by African American soldiers during wartime represent historical legacy that depicts life writings by those who are often in a struggle against racial inequalities. Although African American soldiers braved the ultimate testing ground for manhood since the American Revolution, they were still stereotyped negatively. In *Darwin's Athletes*, for example, John Hoberman discusses The War College Report of 1936 and finds that White officers stereotyped the African American soldier as an inherently inferior, child-like, shiftless, careless, irresponsible, emotionally unstable, musically inclined comical figure who lacks physical courage and is guilty of moral turpitude (67). With these prevailing stereotypes, African American masculinity was defined based on the dominant culture's ideologies about manhood. In order to better understand how African American soldiers view themselves during war, scholars explore first-person accounts and military documents to authenticate military history, which include examining diaries written during wartime. For example, William Woodlin, an African American soldier who served in the Eighth Regiment of the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War, kept a diary for an entire year from August 1863 until the end of the war. Woodlin's diary, archived by The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, illustrates how a soldier wanted to leave a memorial to his service, as well as recognition of his race's participation as citizen-soldiers. The writings of autobiographer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, including his *Narrative* and his travel diaries, depict a historical struggle for liberation while also creating a memorial. The manuscripts *Frederick Douglass Diary (Tour of Africa and Europe 1886-1883)* and *Frederick Douglass Diary (Santo Domingo 1871)* housed at The Library of Congress and Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, respectively, are catalogued as travel diaries yet reveal how his methodical style illustrated both mastery of language and reliance on autobiographical traditions. Since a majority of narratives about war are neither written by nor include African Americans, exploring diaries offer a greater insight into how African Americans during a particular era defined and acquired their critical consciousness while fighting for their own liberation.

To continue this tradition of war and life writing by African American soldiers who served in the first fully integrated troop battalions, I analyze two diaries written during the Vietnam War. My goal is to better understand how these texts register performances of African American masculinity, a discourse that is continually reshaped by the influence of mainstream US-American ideologies of manhood, the cultural heritage of African American history, and the traumatic physical consequences of race oppression. As an ultimate struggle over manhood African American soldiers reflected a determination to reclaim and affirm the role of patriarchal provider and protector that white men had historically attempted to deny them (see Kimmel 3-5; Read 528; Wendt 534-46). I discuss a private, unpublished diary (1967-68) written by my father, Louis Raynor, during his tour of duty and the private diary (1965-66) of David Parks, the son of photographer Gordon Parks, that was revised and published as a memoir in 1968. Finally, by contextualizing this exploration in the traditions of African American autobiographical writing and wartime diaries, I analyze how African American masculinity permeates the autobiographical structure in the Raynor and Parks diaries as each soldier interweaves a collective experience with a unique personal experience of being in Vietnam that challenged their ideologies about racial politics but affirmed their masculine identity during the Vietnam War.

Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson suggest that the main reasons why men accepted the draft in Vietnam are 1) patriotism, 2) familial pressure and a tradition of military service, 3) to follow in a father's footsteps of military service, 4) unconsciously attempting to undo the death of a father, uncle or brother in World War II or Korea, 5) the anticipated excitement of war, 6) to develop and refine their masculine identity, 7) to escape boredom, 8) to help find direction in their life, 9) to open avenues to a secure future, and 10) they felt they had no choice but to serve, because of limited options owing to their lower socioeconomic level (140-42). While these reasons hold true for African American soldiers, as well as White recruits, the former also had to deal with other issues that challenged their masculine ideology. Among these issues were fighting in the first fully integrated troop battalions, the "gook identification syndrome," which was a conflict for African Americans fighting against the Vietnamese, another people of color in which they emotionally and psychologically identified with as devalued and helpless, meeting the expectations of being the good soldier by not being the stereotypical soldier described in the War College Report and the enemy's propaganda tactics of racial demoralization during war. James E. Westheider discusses that by the time Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, he already fueled a powerful paradox for the soldiers when he openly opposed sending African American men to fight for someone else's freedom while they still experienced racism and oppression. These challenges were also fueled by their feelings of being twice rejected by the Black community for fighting in Vietnam and then by society in general for doing the same thing (Westheider 5-6).

The first text I analyze is the unpublished diary written by my father, Louis J. Raynor, of Clinton, North Carolina during his tour of duty in Vietnam 1967-68. When I was thirteen years old, I discovered an old diary and collection of photographs hidden away in the back of my parents' bureau, documents which were reminders of a time that my father never talked about with his family since he returned home from Vietnam. Although he did not object to me reading the diary and looking at the photographs, he was not ready to talk to his young daughter about war. Over the next two decades, if I started talking to him about Vietnam, he would answer my questions, but he never initiated the conversation. From that point and throughout my university studies, my curiosity about my father's war

experiences continued to grow. My father's diary also ignited a critical curiosity about wartime writings by other African American Vietnam soldiers.

Raynor served with the 3rd Squad/5th Cavalry, 9th Infantry Division (Black Knights) in the U.S. Army with Track and Wheel Recovery. After being drafted and entering the military in 1966 at age eighteen, he started writing in a small, leather-bound burgundy diary measuring 5.5"x4" which was compact enough for him to keep it in either his footlocker or inside his uniform wrapped in plastic to protect it from rain when he was out in the field. He immediately redefined himself as a soldier by writing on the inside cover of the diary all of his essential and physical information. Inside the front cover of the diary, he wrote his name, rank, unit, date of departure for Vietnam, body measurements, home address, telephone number, as well as the name of his girlfriend who was later to become his wife and my mother. Including the information in the beginning of his diary helped defy the stereotypes that he, as an African American man, would not be ready for military service and combat while also leaving a trace behind in case this was the only evidence that he participated in the war. The first page of the diary begins with 1 January 1967. He recorded the events of each day on that same exact date. On the first page of the diary, he scribbled a note to turn to 24 September. Since his tour of duty began 24 September 1967, the diary begins in the middle of the diary and reads according to the days of his tour from 24 September 1967 to 23 September 1968. Instead of counting the days of his tour in chronological order, from Day 1 to Day 365, Raynor does a backwards countdown indicating his first day in Vietnam as Day 365 and to his last day in Vietnam as Day 1. The very first entry in the diary is 24 September 1967, the day he was supposed to leave for Vietnam, but because of delays at the airport he marks 26 September as Day 365 indicating the day he actually leaves home for a 12-month tour of duty in Vietnam. As Raynor's tour is ending, he wrote the last few days as multiple entries on the same page. He continued to count down until Day 1, 24 September 1968, the only blank page in his diary. On several pages in the back of the diary, he wrote the names and addresses of family and friends. On the inside back cover of the diary, there are tiny, monthly calendars for the years 1967 through 1972, where he marked the days of his time in Vietnam. Raynor ordered the passing of time with the diary's unique organization. Upon my first reading of the diary, I did not quite understand the significance of the numbering of the page entries. Since he was not writing his diary for an audience, the organization and numbering may have only made sense to him, which could be reflective of the chaos of war and how he thought about his time in Vietnam.

The second text I discuss is *G.I. Diary* by David Parks of Minneapolis, Minnesota, who served two years in the military with eight months of combat (1965-67) with the U.S. Army. He kept a private diary he revised and published as a memoir with Harper and Row in 1968. Although he was from an affluent family and the son of the famous photographer, Gordon Parks, he dropped out of college and was drafted into the Army. He served with both Company D, 56th Infantry and later with Company E, 1st Battalion, Mechanized Infantry. While his father suggested that he keep a diary during his tour, he added details and fictionalized the names of people and certain places for the publication of an immediate memoir, written soon after the events. It is divided into two sections: "Part I: Training" and "Part II: Combat" with a few of his own black and white photographs and a map of Vietnam marking camp locations placed in the text. The entries in the memoir are from 21 November 1965 to 3 September 1967. While it was one of the top ten best-selling books of that year, interestingly enough, the reader of the published version is not privileged to know what parts of the diary are added later. He returned home with a diary he could use as points of reflection for his memoir and that depicts more noticeable aspects of autobiographical writing.

Analyzing the Raynor and Parks diaries require knowledge of both African American autobiographical traditions, as well as various narrative strategies in wartime diaries. Referencing Frederick Douglass's diaries provides not only a historical premise for understanding the African Americans' call to literacy and writing during the violence of war, but it also provides insight into the human condition of soldiering and manhood with an undying determination to bear witness to one's own experiences. David Blight describes how Douglass's texts are both historical markers and depict an endurance of the human spirit under oppression (14-25). Douglass's autobiographical book *Narrative* offers important insight about war and life writing because his writings deal with an ensuing struggle over issues of masculinity, including how one affirms manhood especially during violence, and begins to establish a model construction of African American masculinity. Blight further argues that Douglass's writings are self-indulgent, self-revelatory tales of survival and freedom which allows meditations on the meaning of literacy and writing, on the seizure of language and also about acquiring knowledge beyond the boundaries of the writer's current circumstance while attempting to slow, if not, stop the passage of time. Historically, African American masculinity was affirmed in two diametrically contrastive ways, through either violence or literacy, with an attempt to probe one's past life through one's present circumstances. This revisiting of things past, however, leads to the insight that memory is essential yet deceptive in one's self-understanding. William Andrews (*To Tell* 1-2) discusses how the African American autobiography is much more than just a way for a writer to clear up a misunderstanding or a way to restore misrepresentations of the truth. Instead of defining one's self according to traditional cultural norms, it is a way for an African American writer to redefine himself beyond the dominant culture. Morally, it depicts the relationship between the writer and the world; yet besides that, male autobiographers employ strategies that help authenticate their masculinity.

Samuel Hynes describes two distinguishing factors in wartime diaries: immediacy and reflection. The closer the act of recording the event is to the actual occurrence of the event, the greater the immediacy of that narrative. He asserts that diaries often have a limited scope because the diarist speaks only to himself with a bit of introspection and reflection. The writer and audience are typically the same, so the writer shares and confesses feelings, fears, and emotions freely. The diarist records what he witnesses during war, mixes ordinary and familiar events with the unimaginable atrocities of

war writing down everything. Another distinct aspect of wartime diaries is the writer's attempt to reconcile his present life with his previous life by creating himself as he writes because he sees everything with a keen yet innocent eye. Since he writes about what he witnesses, diaries are typically not filtered or mediated by time or an audience. Raynor and Parks utilize three other autobiographical strategies present in diary writing that help them authenticate their war experiences. Christina M. Knopf analyzes how "spatial referencing," an indication of a soldier's location throughout his tour of duty, emphasizes both place and displacement within the experience of war since the activities of war are often shaped by terrain and travel. Keeping track of various locations help Raynor and Parks reorient themselves in the disorienting and chaotic experience of war, which is what William Cartwright describes as personal geographies, that is, narrative strategies which include the description of how soldiers travel to a battle, the preliminary movements, the battle itself and combatants' reflections on what has happened. Victoria Stewart describes one of the apparent advantages of revising a diary to create a memoir: when the act of witnessing events (seeing them happen) is coupled with the act of bearing witness or testifying (describing those events later with the intention of contributing to public understanding of them), which in this particular analysis, it asserts a soldier's survival. Utilizing these specific narrative strategies, Raynor's and Parks's writings depict African American masculine identity performance.

Since the time Woodlin and Douglass fought for the rights of full citizenship and penned their own narratives and since the time of the conflicting philosophies of armed self-defense versus non-violence of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, young African American soldiers believed that manhood was defined by violence. Michael Kimmel discusses that the meaning of manhood in America depends heavily on one's class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, region of the country and can mean different things at different times. Further, Simon Wendt contends that affirmation of African American manhood is often connected to violence, whether it was by armed resistance, the physical necessity to confront racist attackers, the ability to protect one's family, especially the women, from insult or attack, or the ability to disprove and defy racist stereotypes while not acknowledging the actual shaming that racism inflicts. It is important to point out that both Raynor and Parks attempted to develop a sense of self-worth despite the oppressive conditions of war, which Nancy Ehrenreich defines as the most violent and decisive of human acts and a pragmatic masculine performance. Raynor and Parks moved away from the typical, ascribed formulas of writing in order to convey intricate stories that will, similar to Woodlin and Douglass, leave a memorial to their service and a recognition of their fight as citizens-soldiers that otherwise would be difficult to recover. With this understanding, the Raynor and Parks diaries reveal an interesting perspective on African American masculine ideologies during war.

Early in the Raynor and Parks diaries, it is noticeable that each author tackles the issues of African American masculinity differently. Raynor's diary critically depicts what Toni Morrison references as "enforced racelessness" (45), that is, an obvious omission of race within a text. The racial silence of his diary is considered here as a motivated silence with the silence itself depicting race as a profound yet significant way to organize meaning. Silence is a form of discourse that is just as meaningful as language. For Raynor, perhaps, this silence comes from an inadequacy of language in communicating experiences that defy explanation, analysis, or intense reflection at such a young age. Raynor's masculinity is less about his empathy for the Vietnamese and his own racial politics and more about his performance as the good soldier, defying racial stereotypes while also having pride in his service. Once he returned home, he remained silent about his past and who he was as a young soldier to reclaim and affirm the role of patriarchal provider. This motivation enforced the silent aspects of his writings as he continued to perform his masculine identity. Raynor writes mostly about his daily life as a soldier, sharing emotions with a bit of reflection without focusing specifically on any racial politics, being more motivated by survival than by race. In sum, although Raynor does not write about race in his diary, this did not lessen the anguish he experienced as an African American soldier in Vietnam and he still performed a specifically African American masculinity. Raynor's writings reveal how his manhood is connected to violence during the war: he meets the expectations of being a good soldier by defying stereotypes, he authenticates his wartime experiences by tracking his involvement in violent battles, and finally, once he returned home, he reclaims the role of patriarchal provider and protector of his family from insult against Black participation in the Vietnam War. Raynor valued his writing essential to his survival, as well as a distraction from the atrocities of war. In some entries, his reflections are not so much introspective, but reports of the day's events in which he does not deliberate on his experiences, but simply reports what happened. His writings also indicate what he considered important to his survival: a familiarity with his weapons and the terrain, the capability needed in a combat situation, and a determination to return home alive.

Herman Graham discusses how African American men approached the Vietnam War in terms of their own manhood, which was otherwise denied to them in a racist society. Historically, they volunteered for military service at higher rates than White men and were attracted to the military's masculine image because the U.S. military was "selling" manhood during the war and young African Americans were eager to buy. They were also more likely to be conscripted owing to economic disadvantages and the class inequities during the draft, but at the same time the military offered rites of passage, rituals, and symbols by which young men could measure masculine achievement. Raynor had two older brothers who also served in the military and while all three served in the U.S. Army during the Korea and Vietnam wars, he was the only one who fought in Vietnam. Raynor's service continued a generational cycle of seeking greater opportunities in the military rather than dealing with the racial segregation and social immobility at home. His diaries emphasize his integration into his unit, his immediate thrust into the violence of mission patrols, and his pride in his division. For example, "today the 9th Infantry Division, the Old Reliable Academy, was saluted. It has been serving here

in Vietnam one year today, and I have been serving here in Vietnam about eighty days today. The 9th Infantry Division has been on more than forty operations in the past year, and I have been on about four since I have been here."

While Raynor follows some of the conventions of both African American autobiography and wartime diary, he also incorporates other narrative techniques. In his earlier entries, Raynor had confessed his fears about being sad and homesick and some exhilaration about receiving mail from home. He also writes down everything that happens without giving precedence to any incident. For example, receiving mail from home, hearing about bad news, and getting his paycheck are intertwined with the personal geographies of moving from various locations, policing areas, lining up convoys, checking equipment, sleeping in the grass and destroying what they could not carry. Raynor also authenticates his wartime experiences by utilizing personal geographies and spatial referencing by focusing his writings on his preliminary movements, as he was attached to Headquarter Troop, A-Troop, B-Troop and C-Troop, the battles themselves, and his report of the day's events: "We moved out from Blackhorse and came back to Bearcat to leave for the Delta South. We stayed to Bearcat for about six hours to make any repairs needed. Then we moved out for the South. We traveled a night and part of the next day. I rode shotgun on a deuce and a half with a M60 machine gun along with me. I kept my friend the M16." By simply recounting his activities, Raynor orients himself during the chaos of war. He mentions several locations, more than once, indicating that these places were a routine part of his time in Vietnam. Raynor knew that accurately recording his daily movements and locations made his participation in these historical events more convincing.

In addition to being preoccupied with daily details, Raynor was committed to the ideology of the good soldier. Establishing a strong, trustworthy work ethic helped him defy racist stereotypes while, at the same time, allowing him to be fully aware of the intentions of his comrades: "I continued to lend a helping hand to the next man. And it almost caused them to like it. The more I helped, the more they wanted me to help and lend a hand. Just being friendly, maybe I should say nice. It is not that I like work but here it is better to have half of a friend than an enemy. Because if your enemy is not trying to do something good for you, he is trying to kill you. In other words, sometimes, it pays to watch your friends if you know what I mean." Throughout the diary, Raynor mixes the ordinary events of soldiering with the strange or unimaginable. He demonstrates a commitment to his weaponry which is yet another symbol of being a citizen-soldier. His attention shifts from intimate family relationships in earlier entries to his weapons as his new acquaintances, which he appropriately calls his new best friends: the M16 rifle with 7 clips, 18 rounds in each clip, the M60 with 240 rounds, and a clay mortar mine. In a span of just three days, he writes about several injuries and enemy kills: "I haven't gotten any sleep yet. I got paid. I took an engine to B-Troop's location and returned for my tools. C-Troop had lost fourteen men and 20 injured. 186 VC dead so far today. I pulled guard all night. C-Troop killed 6 VC and two G.I.s were injured. It was hot and about 105 degrees today. B-Troop was hit and a couple of G.I.s were injured." While combat losses and injuries are unimaginable and horrific tragedies for readers, he is writing in a seemingly nonchalant way as if recalling a normal day. He even writes, matter-of-factly about being burned in a gas explosion and how this does not cause a major disruption to his daily routine or his attachment to different troop battalions. He writes, "The gas exploded in my face. I was burned. I went to the 18 serge (hospital) I was treated then I returned to my location." It seems clear that he thinks it is his masculine identity that prevented him from succumbing to these wounds. His entries continue as a usual report of his daily routine. In some of the final entries in the diary, he writes about returning to the place where he started his tour, the 90th Replacement Company, where he picked up his boarding pass and prepared for his departure. Raynor's diary ends with a blank page. There are no additional comments or reflections about his time in Vietnam. Once Raynor returned to civilian life, he hid his diary for many years, and thus it is clear that he was still motivated by silence. He returned home with his masculine identity affirmed without ever speaking about the war or the racial politics involved in his service. What is also important is that throughout his tour of duty, he never specifically wrote about race. Leaving the segregated South and his life on a farm defined by Jim Crow laws, perhaps contributed to Raynor's own ideologies about manhood and his masculine identity performance in the face of a different type of violence. His writings depict his life as the good soldier without any further analysis. For Raynor, he knew not to make any unnecessary enemies among his comrades while fighting a war against an almost unrecognizable enemy force, decisions that helped defined his masculine identity during the war.

Unlike Raynor, Parks came from an affluent family accustomed to a home with a forty-foot living room with three fireplaces, a skylight designed for reading books, and a swimming pool. He went with his family to ski vacations and listening to classical music was part of his upbringing. His father knew when Parks decided to report for duty that he would be headed for a place different than his home and a life that often sheltered him from the racial cruelties of society. Being a college dropout placed Parks in the unfortunate circumstances of being drafted. Before reporting for duty, he often listened to his father and several of his draftee friends discuss the racial politics of the time, like communist aggression, civil rights activist Medgar Evers, the Selma to Montgomery marches, and the Ku Klux Klan. For Parks, his racial politics had been asserted even before he arrived in Vietnam and perhaps motivated his behaviors during his tour. Parks performed his masculinity by rejecting regimentation, the mere thought of killing and his defiance of authority (see Wendt). As a memoir, Parks's writing relies on the narrative strategies of the African American autobiography, the wartime diary, personal geographies, spatial referencing, witnessing, and testifying (see Andrews; Cartwright; Knopf; Stewart). While the events in Parks's diary entries are blurred with the reflections of the immediate memoir, he spends a significant amount of time authenticating his experiences by tracking his movements from Fort Hamilton, Fort Dix, Fort Riley and then to Saigon. Interestingly enough, while he admits to fictionalizing

certain aspects of the memoir, he uses the names of actual base camps, an artistic choice that gives validity to his war experiences.

For Parks, it is evident that his identity began to shift once he reported for duty. During training, he admitted being afraid of picking up his weapon since he had never handled a gun before: "The rest of the morning it's weapons classes, M-14. I was actually afraid to pick up mine at first. I've never handled a real gun before. And I don't like the idea now, knowing what's its suppose to do to a person. I don't know. I just can't imagine myself killing anyone with it. I keep dropping the damn thing ... I'm afraid sometimes. I don't like having someone's life in my hands. They expect you to think in math terms, and I'm not too hot in that department. Besides, the mortar is an erratic weapon. I pray all the time that I never make a mistake" (20-85). As training continued and despite being punished with push-ups every time he dropped his weapon, he attempted to embrace the regimentation and began to feel more confident about becoming a soldier. Parks's writings reflect how he identified with his affluent background, his education, his physicality, and his awareness. He takes great pride in having better test scores than his fellow soldiers insinuating that being an independent thinker in the Army had left him with pride, but no rank. He repeatedly writes about finishing drills in a timely fashion, winning shooting contests, and his success on the football field gaining the nickname "the great gridiron," while his fellow soldiers were out in the field. His bragging continues throughout the narrative in order to establish his individuality. For example, he is amused yet slightly annoyed by disgusting behavior, improper diction, and lack of intelligence of his fellow soldiers regardless of race. He even brags about protecting a few Vietnamese from Viet Cong snipers in their own village. His prideful and self-indulgent attitude demonstrates that he felt superior to others.

Parks reflects on racial confrontations during his training and that lasted throughout his tour of duty (on matters of race in the U.S. army during the Vietnam War see, e.g., Graham). Parks notes that he does not sympathize with other African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans who received the worst detail duties and browbeating because they act obsequiously instead of fighting back. Parks performs his masculinity as a disinterested soldier who resents, as Jenn Dunnaway explains, the exclusionary hierarchy and politics of White privilege (15). Parks believes that the other African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and American Mexicans are not complaining enough about their unfair treatment. After being singled out by a sergeant for responding to being called "you-all" and ordered to do push-ups, Parks writes that "on the tenth one I gave him a jolt. I let out a fart that you could hear all the way to the Oklahoma border. The whole line broke up with laughter. That's how I pulled Kitchen Patrol" (34-35). After being fired from one task and reassigned, Parks reveals how he developed his to-hell-with-it attitude. From his experiences, he knew that the top officers did not like him, that the commanding officer would not promote him, and that he was unable to get transferred to another unit: "Sgt. Paulson is a real ass. He's always telling me that Negroes are lazy and won't help themselves, etc. I tell him he's full of shit and end up filling sandbags" (87). Parks admits that while his attitude toward his commanding officers and the army in general may have been wrong and inappropriate, being at the bottom is good enough for him. Even in his defiance to authority he is shocked by the poverty of the Vietnamese and puzzled about his purpose in Vietnam. He points out how harshly the Vietnamese are treated by White soldiers, a conflict that was later termed the gook identification syndrome:

I sometimes wonder if we are helping or hurting these poor people. If you've never seen poverty, come to Vietnam. This is a real poor country. Everywhere you go people are on their knees begging. We're riding along and there's a group of hungry kids. Someone throws a piece of bread on the road. The kids go for it like a pack of wolves. Often one of them gets hit by a track or several get hurt in the scramble. It's a bad scene. You never see a soul [an African American soldier] do anything like that. While we were making a body count Sgt. Young kicked a VC body to see if he was really dead. Bullets had punctured him from head to toe. Young asked for my knife. I gave it to him and watched him cut off the VC's finger and remove a gold ring. I walked away real quick. I didn't wait for my knife because I was too sick. (84-85)

Parks's identification with the Vietnamese prevented him from participating in such atrocities. He writes about what he is not willing to do as an African American soldier. As he sorts through his racial politics and encounters, he is burdened by his own marginal place in Vietnam and a strong desire to survive.

Parks's diary shifted as his writings became less self-indulgent and more about surviving a war which he considered purposeless. Being alienated by unfair treatment and witnessing death first-hand contributed to his feelings of animosity: "two of our men stepped on a mine a little while ago. There was hardly enough of them left to send home. There is death all around us. I hate being in this place but there is a job to be done. It's our job, so they tell us, but I don't know the whole story -- and nobody seems to be explaining it to us, at least so it makes sense" (84). Once Parks experienced combat, the animosity he harbored against White officers and fellow soldiers seemed subside temporarily. He was injured when his truck hit a mine and he suffered a shrapnel in his forehead above his eye. Even after numerous combat situations, injury and receipt of the Purple Heart, while recovering in the hospital Parks was still perplexed by the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. After just three months in combat, Parks's company was subject to an investigation because of complaints of war atrocities against the Vietnamese. He wrote about how this just added to the mental pressure of witnessing death and the pervasive thoughts about his own survival. In the last days of his tour, he continued to struggle with the reasons for the war and the fact that he had killed other people in order to survive. Even in his last entry, he reflected on the racism he experienced at the airport as soon as he arrived back in the United States and which reminded him of all the racial problems that awaited him at home. As an African American soldier who not only survived, but also solidified his masculine identity in the face of

violence, Parks created a narrative discourse that underscores his own racial ideologies and offers a better understanding of his plight. Ironically, Parks's performance of African American masculine identity was different from his life before his service, in which his family's affluence sheltered him from much of the racial strife which Raynor experienced growing up on a farm in the segregated South.

In conclusion, while both the Raynor and Parks diaries similar to the Woodlin diary and Douglass's *Narrative* are records of participation in one of the world's historical struggles, they also employ other autobiographical strategies to convey collective and individual experiences, experiences which helped to reconstruct their masculine identity. Parks's tour of duty ended on 13 September 1967 just as Raynor was beginning his on 24 September 1967. Parks was eager to return to college and with his father's help he received a letter of admission to the Rochester Institute of Technology while still in Vietnam. After returning home, he started his studies and began his career as a photojournalist and writer following in his father's footsteps. For his time in Vietnam Raynor received the Vietnam Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Army Commendation Medal, and the Rifle Marksmanship Badge. He returned home and married his girlfriend, started a family, and attended vocational training school for long distance truck driving. Raynor did not continue to write about his service after he returned home, but stayed committed for some thirty years to silence about his experiences during Vietnam until I discovered his diary. Raynor and Parks not only depict their African American masculine identity in their writings, but affirm their manhood in the face of violence. They ultimately acquire a critical consciousness while fighting for their own liberation from the patriarchal norms that traditionally defined masculinity.

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