INFO 303 WAM Project #1: Proposal Sam Althaus

For my historical protest project, I will be analyzing the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. I’m focusing specifically on the protests of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War group and their protests that occurred during Operation Dewey Canyon III in 1971 in Washington, D.C.

The Vietnam War began to develop during the late 1950’s and the United States’ involvement escalated in the 1960’s as the military began to send more and more troops to stop the spread of Communism form North Vietnam to South Vietnam. As the war raged on, a large movement opposing the war in Vietnam began to develop back in the U.S. Shaken by losing their comrades, limbs, and their humanity, Vietnam Veterans used their horrifying experiences to open the eyes of the American public and especially the United State government.

On April 23, 1971, over 1,000 Vietnam Veterans gathered in front of the U.S. Capitol building in protest. One by one, approximately 800 veterans took the medals that they had earned from their service, told the crowd what they were and how they won them, and then tossed them over the fence in front of the Capitol building. It wasn’t just medals. Uniforms, ribbons, letters of gratitude, and military boots all were surrendered and forfeited for their cause. The demonstration was known as Dewey Canyon III, named after the first two secret operations conducted in Laos earlier in the war. The protestors put a sign in front of the statue that stood in front of the steps of the capitol that read “Trash.” It was at this statue that the veterans threw their awards and medals. This demonstration was the culmination of a whole week of protests by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War group where the demonstrators defied almost every obstacle placed in front of them by government officials and local authorities.

So why this particular protest? When I learned of this event, I was really overwhelmed by the power of the veterans’ actions. Some of these men had lost everything because of the war. These awards and medals were the only things they had to show for the hell they had faced in Vietnam and in war – a war that they shouldn’t have been fighting in the first place. They felt like the officials that were continuing to keep the U.S. in Vietnam were robbing soldiers of their bodies, their humanity, and the lives of their friends…all for nothing. With the action of throwing these tokens of ‘patriotism and honor’ over the fence, the veterans were ridding themselves of the false sense of morality that the government was trying to delude them with material awards. With these actions came disgust from pro-war supporters who branded them as traitors and communists.

For my project I have located several examples of video, audio, and photographical evidence of the strategies used in the protest. The multi-modal elements I plan to use for this project include a multimedia video that compiles video, photography, and audio both of my own creation and from sampling. In my video I plan to outline the movement and some brief background of the war. Then I plan to talk about the events of Dewey Canyon III and the actions of the veterans on the Capitol steps. Throughout this video I will highlight my main arguments and the weight of the particular protest strategy in the ultimate goals of the movement.