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The Things They Carried

1) Tim O’Brien, a Vietnam War veteran, wrote *“The Things They Carried”,* to reflect on his experiences in Vietnam as a young drafted soldier in the war. The book was published in 1990 and is a collection of mini-stories that border on fiction and nonfiction. O’Brien uses real names of soldiers whom he fought beside in the war, thus giving an air of truth of the stories he narrates. This makes it difficult for the reader to identify which parts are fiction and which are non-fiction.

Vietnam War was the second longest war the United States was involved in. It was primarily a conflict between the forces of communism backed by Soviet Union and the capitalist bloc led by the United States fighting for establishing democracy in Vietnam. O’Brien also wonders whether the war was justified when he says *“It was my view then, and still is, that you don’t make war without knowing why”.*

2) The collection of stories in *“The Things They Carried”* reflect on the experiences and emotions of soldiers in the war. Tim O’Brien was drafted as a soldier to fight in Vietnam along with thousands of young Americans. He describes the emotional baggage of war veterans and how war changes men forever.

*“War is hell, but that’s not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love”.* I think this the central thesis of the book by O’Brien. He summarizes his thoughts, perceptions and feelings about war in this part of the book, which is the central theme of the book. O’Brien also brings the reader into the loop about the reality of war with this quote.

3) O’Brien was afraid of social marginalization and the shame associated with men who refused to fight or searched for ways to avoid going to war. Thus, his purpose was to avoid social stigmatization. The quote *“I couldn’t endure the mockery, or the disgrace… I would go to the war –I would kill and maybe die-because I was embarrassed not to”* summarizes this.

4) The title refers to the emotional luggage that soldiers carry with them during the war and even after the war ends. *“They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing. These were intangibles but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity.”* The title symbolizes soldier’s mental and emotional state during war and how it continues to affect them for the rest of their lives.

5) As opposed to World War II, the Vietnam War was a very divisive war, millions of Americans disagreed with the war and the 1960’s were especially controversial with assassinations and political turmoil. Among all the noise and clamor, the soldiers suffered the most. They were not treated or greeted with the same respect as the veterans of World War II. The economic conditions of the post-Vietnam War time were also not as rosy as those of 1950’s. Therefore, their compensations and post-war benefits were also less than those of World War II veterans. As a result, their socio-economic conditions also suffered.

Works Cited

O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried: A Work of Fiction*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. Internet resource.