

Class of 1968 Reflection
"Blowing in the Wind"

By Bill Fergusson

So, 509 young men arrived on this beautiful campus September 13, 1964. A large part of our three-day freshman orientation comprised the class's discussions with faculty of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The theme? Three reactions to American culture. These readings and discussions jump-started our intellectual journeys. With uncertainty and trepidation, we marched into the future. And we--and this nation--grappled with issues of war and peace, race, and intellectual independence.

"Like a rolling stone, with no direction home," we fought to develop ourselves and move into an unknown future. And two great events that shook America and the world--Vietnam and the Civil Rights Revolution--got our attention real quick. Ralph Ellison wrote eloquently about the problems blacks faced in our America: identity, lack of voting rights, Jim Crow, racism in real estate transactions, separate but equal facilities in some parts of the country, absence of economic opportunity, and so on. Most glaring was the circumstance that the fighting in Southeast Asia was being done largely by African-Americans and others from the other side of the tracks. We did lead a rather privileged life with student deferments here in the land of the plain people so that we could pursue our college education at Franklin & Marshall.

So, how did these events – the Vietnam War and the civil rights revolution – impact us as students? They made us realize just how lucky we were to be in a place like F&M. They helped us to understand the need to study and understand people and groups who came from different backgrounds than we did, privileged as we were. That the Declaration of Independence applied to all American citizens.

The Vietnam War? Well, it sure didn't sober all of us up, but it must have created sobering expectations as we looked into the future. I know it made us a lot more serious about our futures and studies. It also caused us to think about many of the fallacies inherent in our bedrock foreign-policy of containment. We had to want to excel. We had to contemplate our life's work. We had to think about the consequences of public policy and just what being a good citizen means. And we had to think about our choices with respect to military service: enlist, wait out the draft, get some kind of deferment, or conscientiously object to military service.

To sum up, facing the issues of civil rights and Vietnam, in the context of what one's own life is worth, made us better citizens, professionals, husbands, fathers, etc., and taught us to appreciate that life is a one act play with respect to which we all had to be good stewards.