

COMMEMORATING THE
VIETNAM/AMERICAN
WAR:
COMPARATIVE
PERSPECTIVES

OVERVIEW

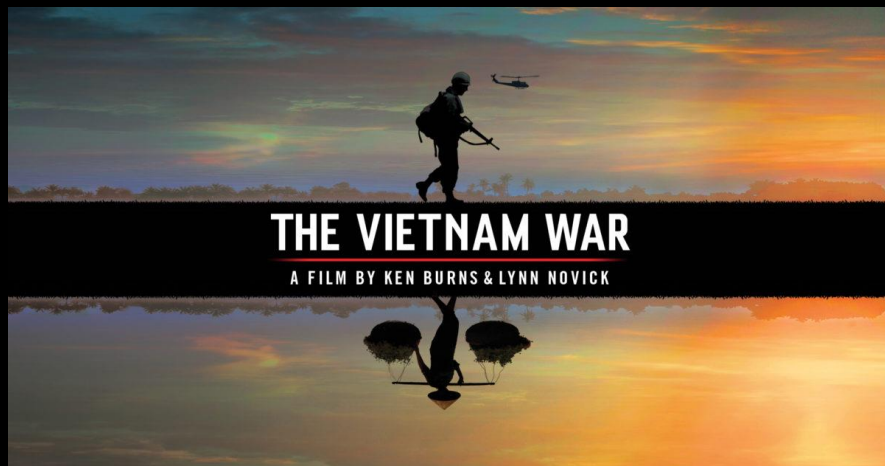
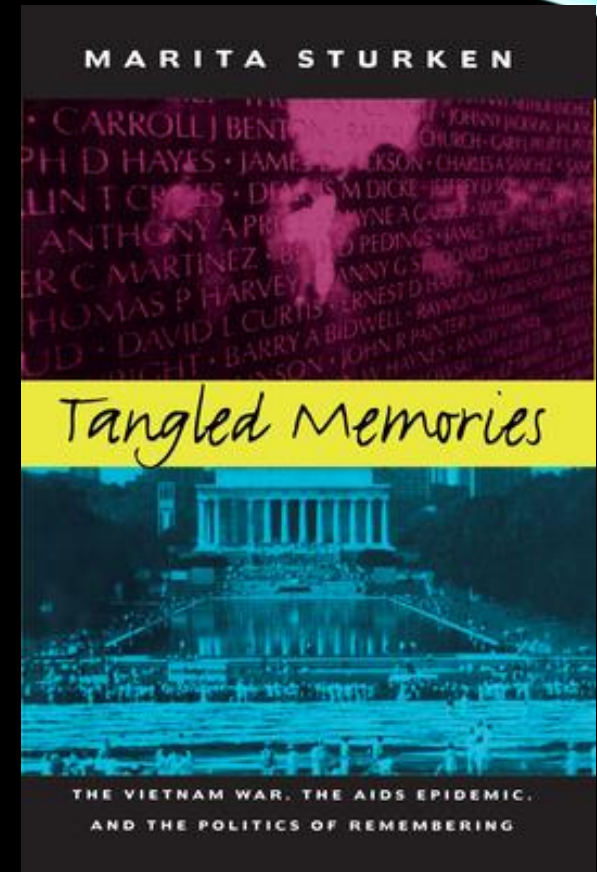
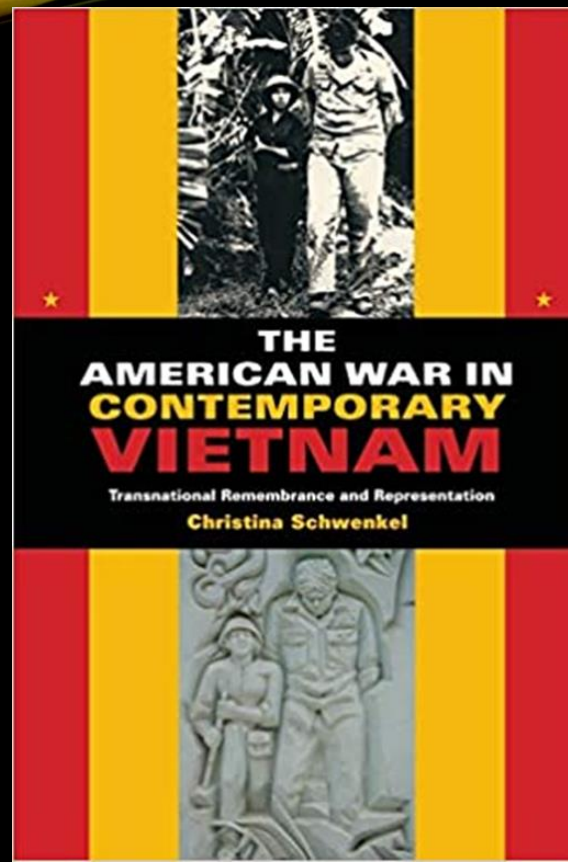
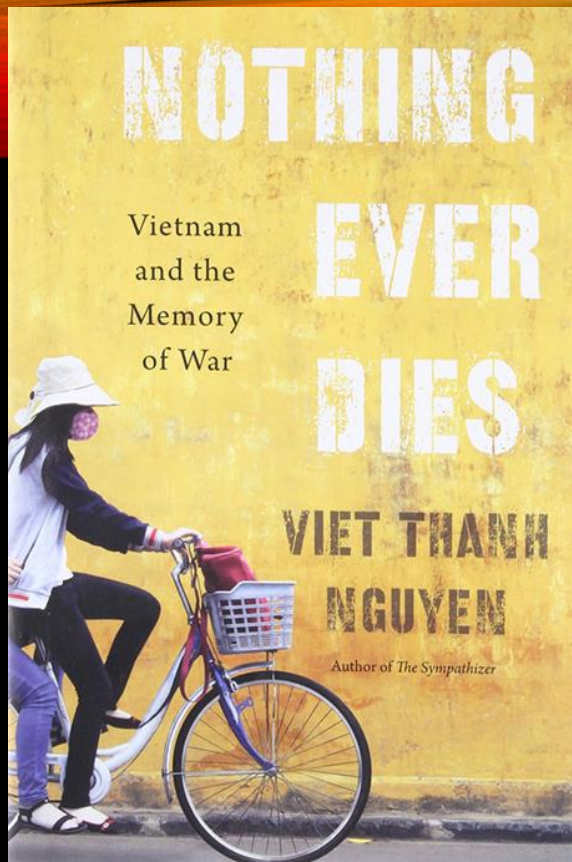
Part 1: Defining the Vietnam/American War: Nomenclature, Geography, Chronology

Part 2: Remembering the Vietnam War in the United States

- Vietnam as 'Different War'
- Vietnam as 'Trauma'
- Vietnam 'Syndrome'
- Reagan and the war
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial

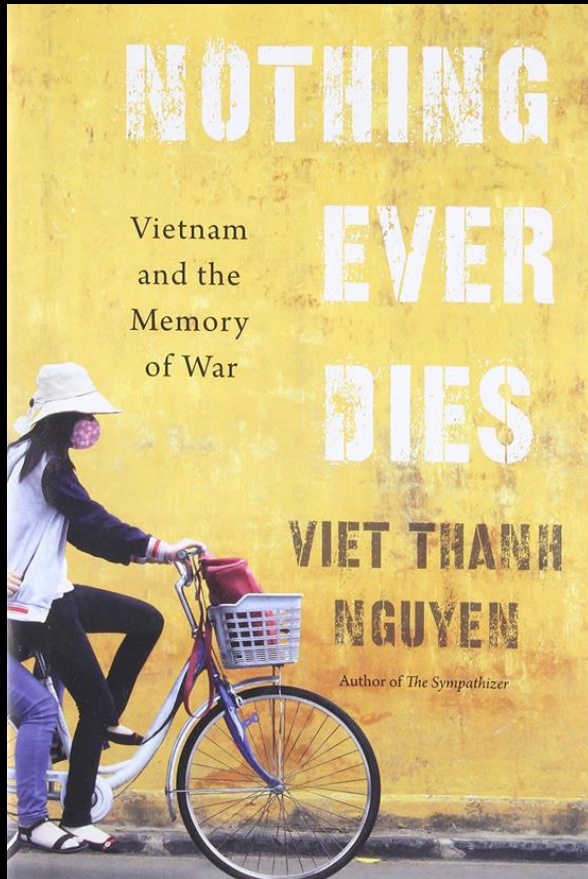
Part 3: Remembering the American War in Vietnam

- 'Post-War' Conflicts
- Doi Moi Vietnam
- Relations with US
- Narratives about American War
- Memorial Landscape
- Tourism
- War Remnants Museum
- Cu Chi Tunnels and Ben Duoc Temple



READING

PART 1: DEFINING THE VIETNAM/AMERICAN WAR: NOMENCLATURE, GEOGRAPHY, CHRONOLOGY



Each war has a distinct identity, a face with carefully drawn features, familiar at a glance to the nation's people. The tendency is to remember any given war, to the extent it is remembered at all, for a detail or two. ...

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 5.

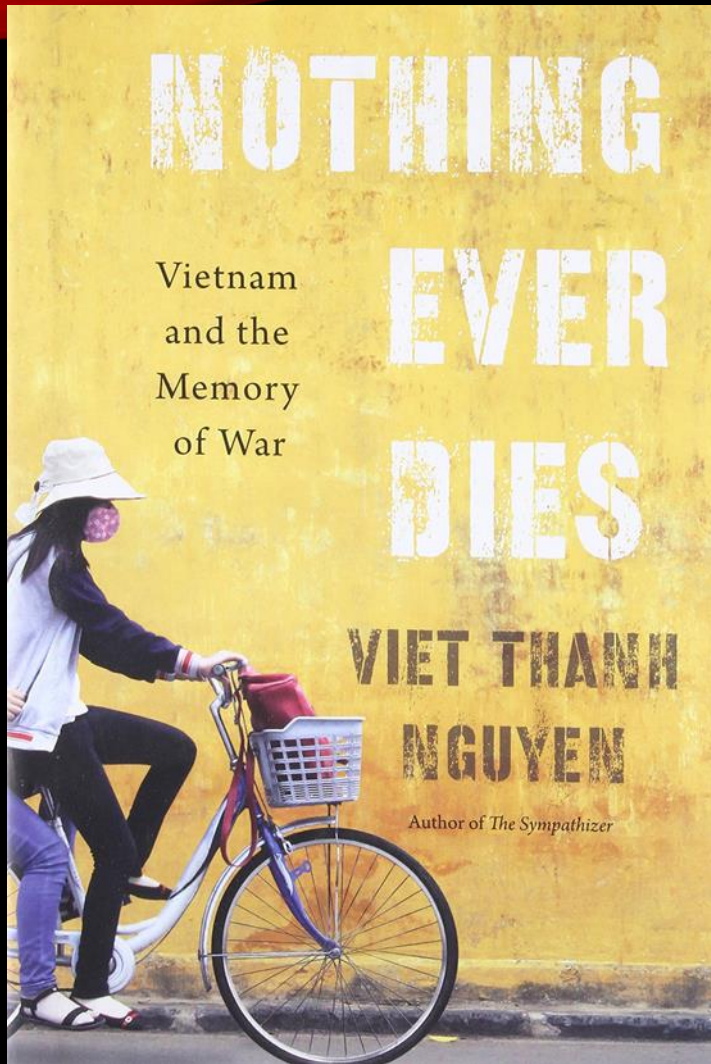


“VIETNAM WAR”

What do you know about the history of the Vietnam War?

What words, images and ideas do you most associate with the Vietnam War?

What representations of the Vietnam War are you familiar with, and what are there notable features?



The inclination is to remember wars like individuals, separate and distinct. Wars become discrete events, clearly demarcated in time and space by declarations of war and ceasefires, by the inscription of dates in history books, news articles, and memorial placards. And yet all wars have murky beginnings and inconclusive endings, oftentimes continuing a preceding war and foreshadowing a later one. Wars are as complex as individuals, but are remembered by names that tell us as little as the names of individuals do.

- Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, p. 5.

Chronologies:

Start date?

- 1950? (date of arrival of first US 'military advisors' into Vietnam)
- 1955? (date of first US serviceman to lose their life in Vietnam)
- 1964? (Congressional approval for escalation of US military involvement in Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident)
- 1946? (beginning of Viet Minh war of resistance against French rule)

End date?

- 1973? (cease-fire between US and north Vietnam regime)
- 1975? (fall of Saigon, reunification of north and south Vietnam)
- 1995? (normalisation of US–Vietnamese diplomatic relations)

Longer Chronologies

Bắc thuộc ("belonging to the north")

Four periods of Chinese 'domination' (111 BC–40 AD, 43–544, 602–938, 1407–1427)

- **1802–1945: Nguyen dynasty titular rulers of Vietnam**
- **1858: French Empire annexed parts of south Vietnam**
- **1887: Colony of French Indochina est. (inc. newly captured north Vietnam territories)**



Longer Chronologies:



Ho Chi Minh at the French Communist Party's first congress, 1920; with US security forces, 1945



French legionnaire in Vietnam, with US-made tank in background, 1954; Viet Minh troops fly flag during decisive victory in Battle of Dien Bien Phu, 1954

- 1930: Ho Chi Minh est. Indochinese Communist Party (ILP)
- 1941–1945: Japanese occupation of French Indochina; resisted by ILP
- 1945: Ho Chi Minh proclaims Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)'s independence from France and Japan
- 1946–1954: First Indochina War leads to end of French colonial rule; US military aides French



Longer Chronologies:



- 1954: Geneva conference separates north and south Vietnam with view to eventual reunification
- 1955: Pro-US Ngo Dinh Diem declared President of Republic of Vietnam, refuses to participate in reunification; US military continues to advise/train ARVN



Basic Chronology:

THE VIETNAM WAR, 1964–1975



- 1964: Gulf of Tonkin incident prompts US Congress to approve use of military forces in Vietnam
- 1968: Tet Offensive provides key public relations victory for DRV
- 1973: Cease-fire between US and north Vietnam
- 1974: Resumption of north-south hostilities
- 1975: Fall of Saigon; US forces leave Vietnam; unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam formed



Nomenclature

- **Different names:**
 - Popularly referred to as 'The Vietnam War' or even simply 'Vietnam' ('Nam')
 - Sometimes also referred to as 'The Second Indochina War'
 - Referred to as the 'Vietnam Conflict' in US Governmental documents

Nomenclature

- Known as 'The Resistance War Against America' (*Kháng chiến chống Mỹ*) and 'The Resistance War against the American Empire to Save the Nation' (*Kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước*) in official Vietnamese government discourse
- Commonly referred to as 'The American War' ('*Cuộc chiến tranh Mỹ*') in Vietnam
- Sometimes also referred to as 'The Second Indochina War,' 'North–South War,' or the 'war against Communism' in Vietnam

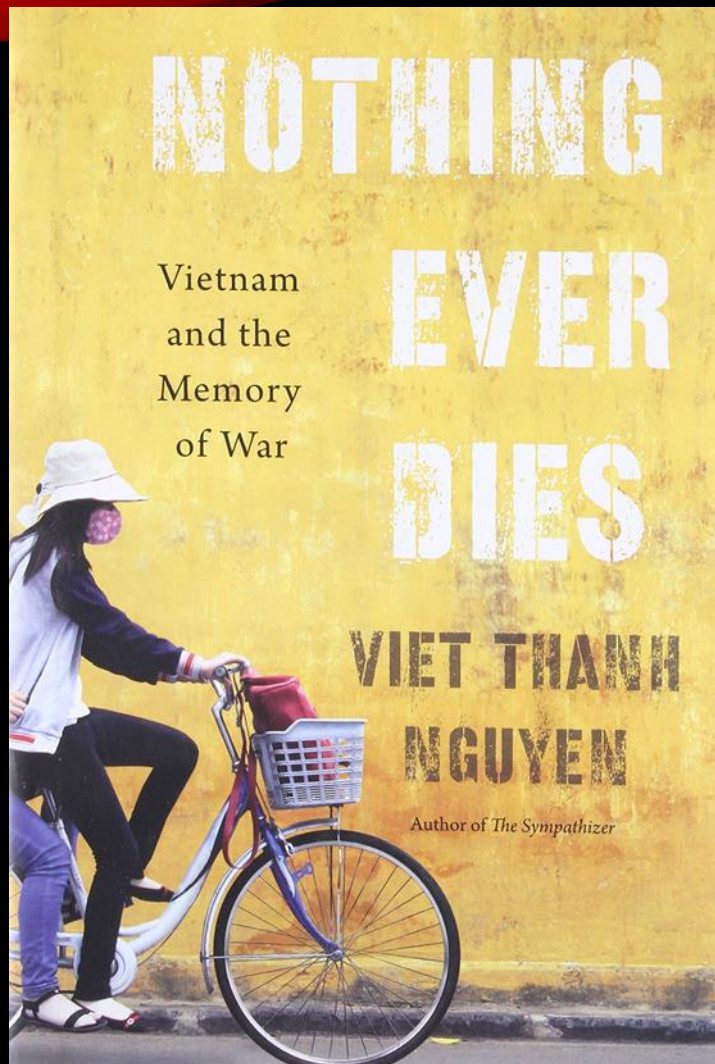
- 'North Vietnam' = Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)
- 'North Vietnamese Army' (NVA) = People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)
- 'South Vietnam' = Republic of Vietnam (RVN)
- 'South Vietnamese Army' = Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)
- Saigon = Ho Chi Minh City (post-war)

- ‘Viet Cong’ (VC, etc.), i.e. southern Vietnamese who fought on Communists’ side = National Liberation Front (NLF)
- Viet Cong refers to Việt Nam Cộng-sản (Vietnamese communist) or Việt gian cộng sản (‘Communist Traitor to Vietnam’)
- Preferred names Viet Minh (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng) or Minh Hội [‘League for the Independence of Vietnam’]

Casualties and Geography



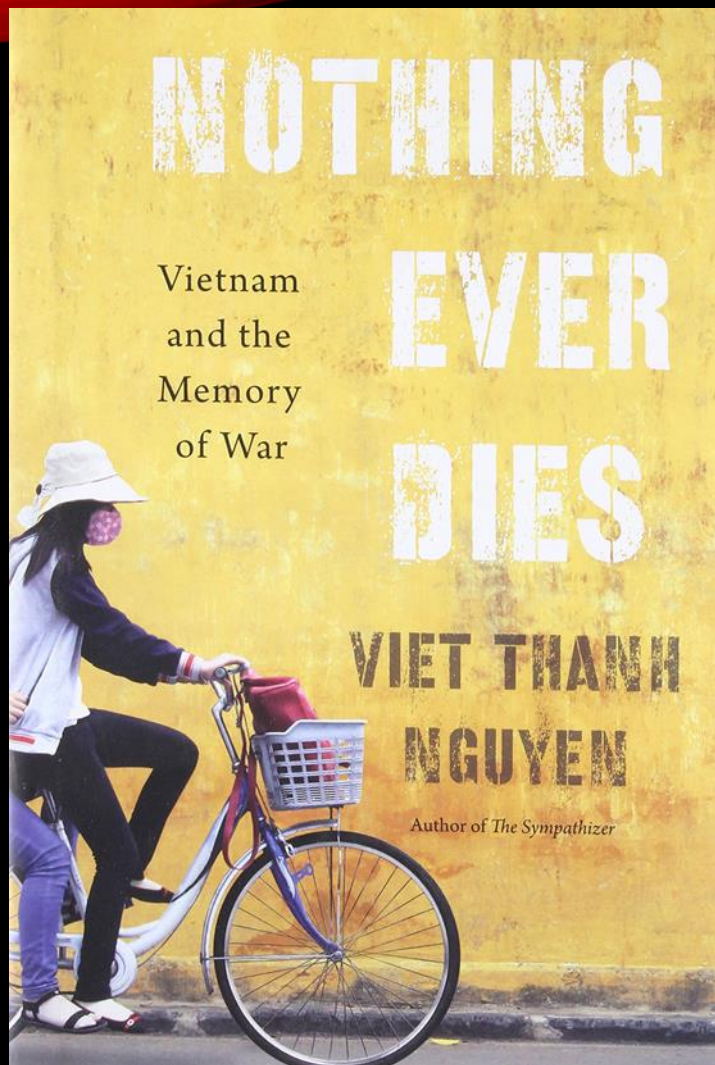
- US casualties totalled 58,220 dead, 303,644 wounded
- Vietnamese government recognises these estimates:
 - Four million civilians killed in northern and southern Vietnam (about same in each)
 - 1.1 million combined dead in People's Army of Vietnam and National Liberation Front
 - 250,000 dead in Army of the Republic of Vietnam
- Other organisations also est. number of Vietnamese unaccounted for as dead or MIA at upwards of 250,000
- Indochina Refugee Crisis: more than 2.5 million people left Vietnam and rest of SE Asia as refugees/emigrants between 1975 and 1995 (c. 1.2 million to US)



If the Vietnam War is an inadequate name in the sense that it misleads us about the war's identity, is the American War any better?

This name excuses the various ways in which Vietnamese of all sides also own the war, from its triumphs and its disasters to its glories and its crimes. Not least the name encourages Vietnamese people to think of themselves as victims of foreign aggression. As victims, they are conveniently stricken with amnesia about what they did to one another and how they extended their war westwards into Cambodia and Laos, countries that a unified Vietnam would strive to influence, dominate, and even invade in the post-war era

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, p. 6.

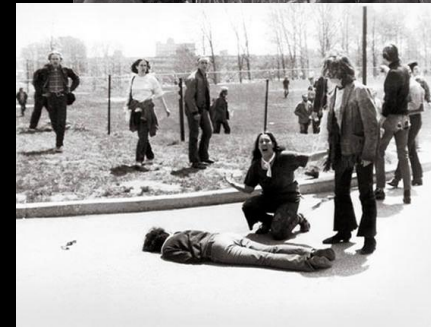


Each name obscures human losses as well as how the war also blazed through Cambodia and Laos, something both the Vietnamese and the Americans wish neither to acknowledge nor remember. The North Vietnamese sent troops and materiel through Cambodia and Laos, and the U.S. bombing of these efforts, as well as the civil wars that flared up in both countries, killed approximately four hundred thousand in Laos and also seven hundred thousand in Cambodia during what the journalist William Shawcross sarcastically called the “sideshow” to the war. If we count what happened in a bomb-wrecked, politically destabilized Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime of 1975–1979 as the postscript to the war, the number of dead would be an additional two million, or close to one-third of the population, although some estimates say the count was only 1.7 million, or about a quarter of the population. The body count in Vietnam for all sides was closer to one-tenth of the population, while the American dead amounted to about 0.035 percent of the population.

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, p. 6.

Part 2: Remembering the Vietnam War in the United States

Vietnam as a “Different War” Culture



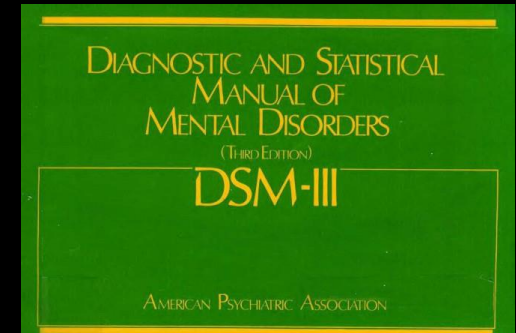
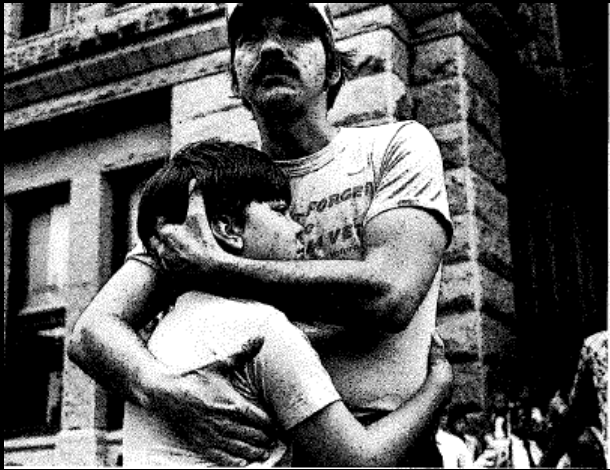
- Total number of US military personnel deployed in Vietnam over course of the war = 2.7 million peak at 536,000 in 1968.
- 648,500 (about 25%) of total forces were draftees.
- US casualties totalled 58,220 dead, 303,644 wounded
- Widespread opposition to involvement in Vietnam in US; intersections with Civil Rights movement, Black Power, student protests, Sixties counterculture (hippies, Weathermen)

Vietnam as a “Different War” in American Culture



- Contrasting experience to enshrined American cultural memory of WWII
- Social, political and cultural divisiveness
- Reality/ignominy of defeat, failure

Vietnam as National Trauma



- Actual physical and psychological trauma experienced by veterans (and exacerbated by homecoming experiences)
- After lengthy campaigning, the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III, 1980)* featured an entry for to as 'posttraumatic syndrome' (since renamed posttraumatic stress disorder, PTSD).
- Veterans a very visual, physical reminder of the war and its impact in American society

The Vietnam Syndrome

“[a] sickly inhibition against the use of military force”

- Norman Podhoretz (neo-conservative columnist), quoted in Noam Chomsky, ‘Visions of Righteousness,’ in John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York Columbia University, 1991), p. 28.

“... the paralysis stemming from America's failure in Vietnam that restrained U.S. presidents from sending troops into combat for fear of backlash at home.”

- Stewart M Powell, ‘Reagan Legacy on Defense is Good, Bad,’ *San Antonio Light*, December 26 1988, p. 1

“... the American public's disinclination to engage in further military interventions in internal Third World conflicts”

- Michael T. Klare, in *Beyond the "Vietnam Syndrome": U.S. Interventionism in the 1980s* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981), p. 1

"For too long, we have lived with the 'Vietnam Syndrome.' Much of that syndrome [was] created by the North Vietnamese aggressors ... They had a plan. It was to **win in the field of propaganda here in America what they could not win on the field of battle in Vietnam.** As the years dragged on, we were told that peace would come if we would simply stop interfering and go home.

"It is time we recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause. We dishonor the memory of 50,000 young Americans who died in that cause when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful, and we have been shabby in our treatment of those who returned. They fought as well and as bravely as any Americans have ever fought in any war. They deserve our gratitude, our respect, and our continuing concern.

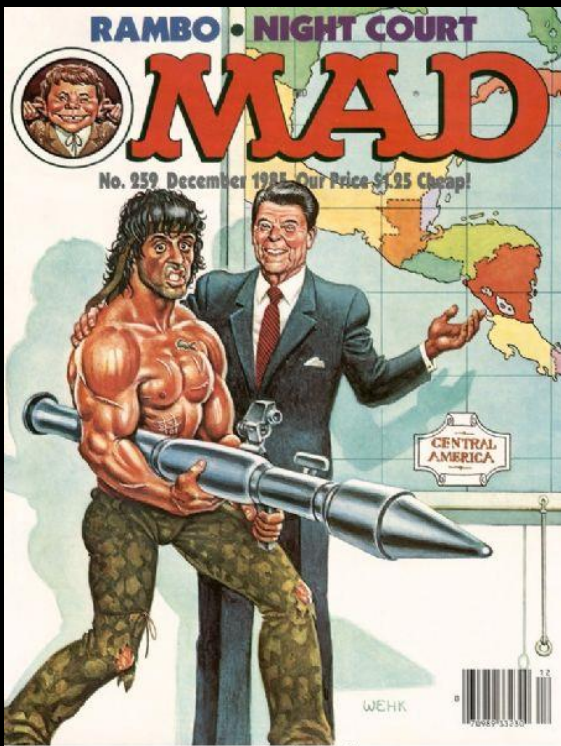
"There is a lesson for all of us in Vietnam. If we are forced to fight, we must have the means and the determination to prevail or we will not have what it takes to secure the peace. And while we are at it, let us tell those who fought in that war that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war our government is afraid to let them win."

- Ronald Reagan, 'Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety,' address to Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, Chicago, August 18 1980 <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>

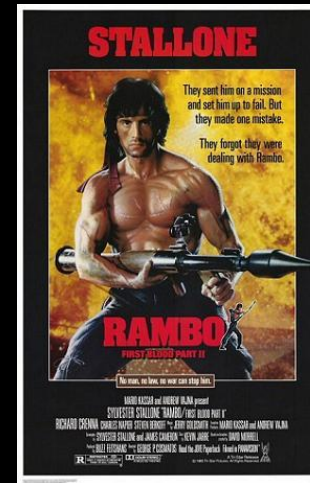


Reagan and Memory of the Vietnam War

Ronald Reagan and Memory of the Vietnam War

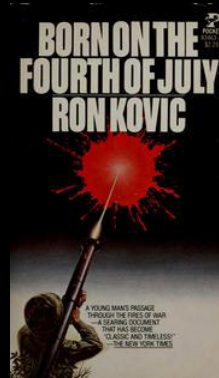
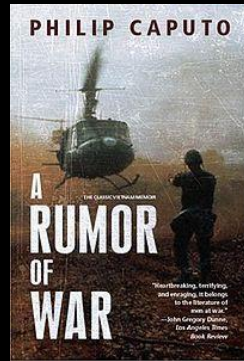
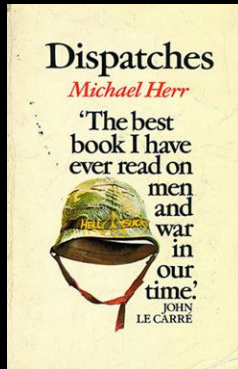


'Do we
get to
win this
time?'



Mad magazine
cover,
December 1985;
satirical advert,
1986; President
and Nancy
Reagan posing
with Sylvester
Stallone and
Brigitte Nielsen,
October 1985

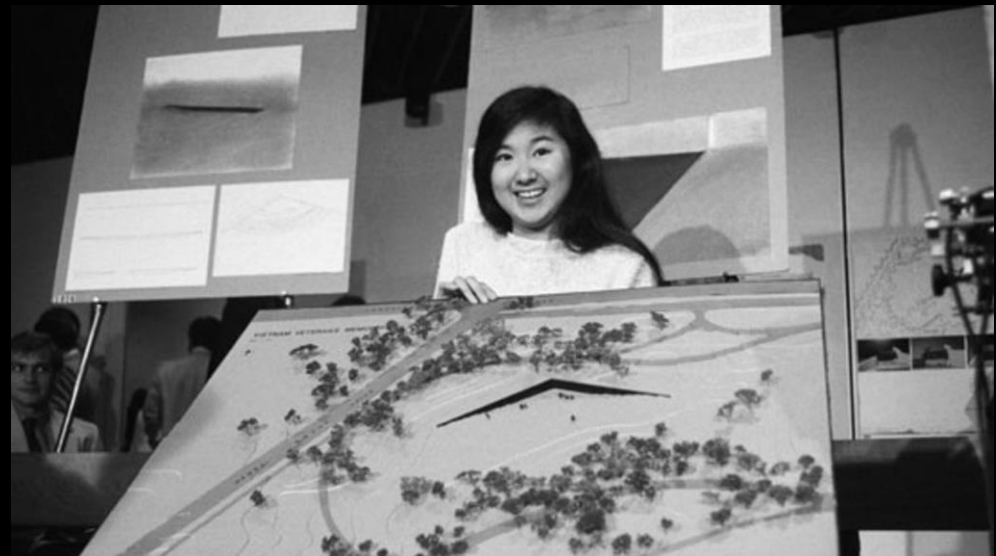
Challenging 'Amnesia' in American Culture

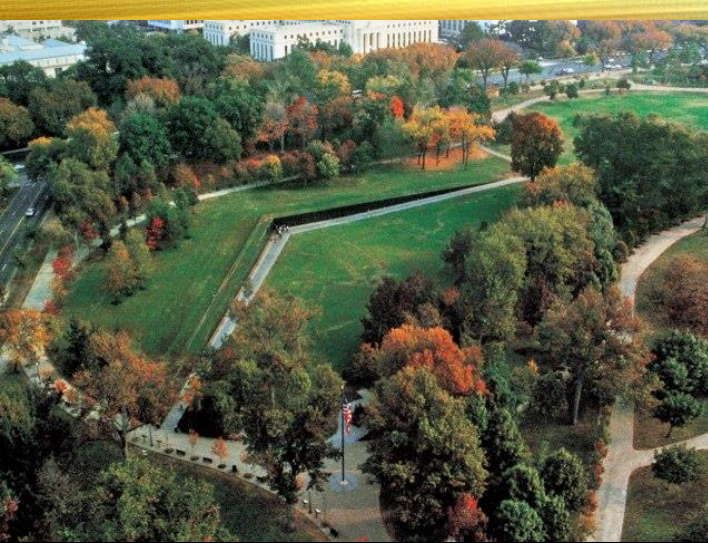


- Late 1970s newfound – or renewed – interest in the Vietnam war and Vietnam veterans within American culture
- Literary accounts – Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (1976), and Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (1977), the latter two by Vietnam veterans – performed well on best-sellers charts
- Hollywood storytellers also turned to Vietnam-themed stories: in 1978, both *The Deer Hunter* and *Coming Home* were released to box office success and critical acclaim

Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM)

- VVM Fund (VVMF) est. May 1979 by Jan Scruggs (pictured), a Vietnam veteran: foot-soldier (corporal) in 199th Infantry Division
- Memorial design competition won by Maya Lin, 1981
- Memorial dedicated 1982





Marita Sturken, 'The Wall and the Screen Memory,' *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (London: University of California:, 1997), pp. 44–84

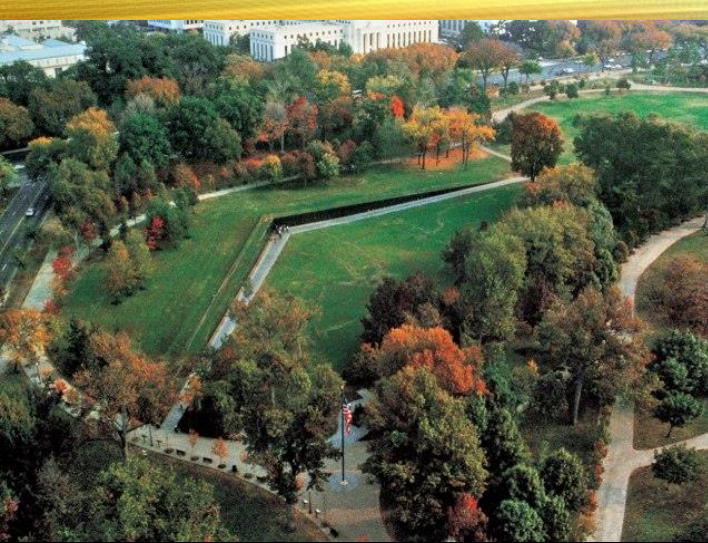
- **What were Scruggs motivations for creating a memorial? What sentiments did he think it should represent and embody?**

- **What were the features of Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM), and what are your opinions of the memorial?**

- What sort of memorial is the VVM?
- How does the VVM represent the war and those who died in it?
- Why did some veterans disapprove of Lin's design, and how were their objections phrased?
- In what ways would critics have preferred the war to be commemorated?

BARCLUND • BUCKOW • BASS JR • HAROLD C WHITTAKER • RICKY FAY ADAMS • LARRY J WALTER
 KILBRINT • RICHARD J BURNETT • ROBERT I CRANE • STEPHEN J BOBKOVICH • LINDEN
 W BENCE • LAWRENCE A DODD • JOE D DUNN • ADOLPHUS ELLIS • JERRY WAYNE FERREN
 PETUKA • MICHAEL H FRITZ • RICHARD L GARLICK • WILLIE GILES JR • CARLOS L GON
 AS C GOSCH • MICHAEL W HOLZMAN • PAUL W HEINZ • JOHN C HILL • NATHAN HOLME
 NEL K HASTINGS • RICHARD W KAPP JR • LAWRENCE J KLAHSEN • WILLIAM R KLAWITTER •
 ENT KUCAS • RICHARD C LANNOM • DANIEL LEFORD • STANLEY R LEWIS • FREDERICK
 RICHARD • GERALD W MARKWITH • CARY A MARTIN • JOSEPH MAYES • RICHARD D MI
 RED MARGULIS • BENNY RAY MONCUS • JOHN H MORENO • ALDEN F MOREY JR • ROBERT
 E MURRAY • JEFFERY MCCLATCHY JR • WILLIAM R MCGIMSEY • DAN LEE NEELY • GARY L OLIVE
 A WILLIAMS JR • FRANK D PINA • ROGER L REED • WILLIE LEE RICHARDSON • GERALD G ROSE
 MAS D ROSARIO • THOMAS E SCHEURICH • JOHN S SIMMONS • THOMAS SPADARO • MIC
 RICHARD • STEVEN F SWARTZ • JOHN S SWARTZ • WALTER L THOMPSON • MICHAEL
 RICHARD • STEVEN F SWARTZ • JOHN S SWARTZ • WALTER L THOMPSON • MICHAEL
 JERRY BRADY • ANTHONY J BRILEY • MARK D COOL • CHARLES E BONDS • JOHN M BOY
 JACOB CAMERON • WILLIAM B CANNON • MARK D COOL • CHARLES E BONDS • JOHN M BOY
 ISAAC COREY • NICHOLAS COUTINHA • ALVIN L CAYSON • ROBERT G BURKE
 MICHAEL • NICHOLAS COUTINHA • ALVIN L CAYSON • ROBERT G BURKE
 RICHARD • STEVEN F SWARTZ • JOHN S SWARTZ • WALTER L THOMPSON • MICHAEL
 RICHARD • STEVEN F SWARTZ • JOHN S SWARTZ • WALTER L THOMPSON • MICHAEL
 JERRY BRADY • ANTHONY J BRILEY • MARK D COOL • CHARLES E BONDS • JOHN M BOY
 JACOB CAMERON • WILLIAM B CANNON • MARK D COOL • CHARLES E BONDS • JOHN M BOY
 ISAAC COREY • NICHOLAS COUTINHA • ALVIN L CAYSON • ROBERT G BURKE
 MICHAEL • NICHOLAS COUTINHA • ALVIN L CAYSON • ROBERT G BURKE





Marita Sturken, 'The Wall and the Screen Memory,' *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (London: University of California:, 1997), pp. 44–84

- In what ways have the American public responded to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?
- How do visitors interact with it?
- What auxiliary commemorative phenomena did the memorial initiate?



THE VIETNAM TRAVELING MEMORIAL WALL ®



www.travelingwall.us



© 2011 All Rights Reserved



THE WALL THAT HEALS

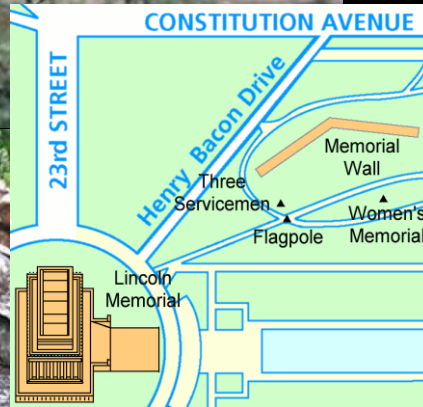
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL REPLICA & MOBILE EDUCATION CENTER

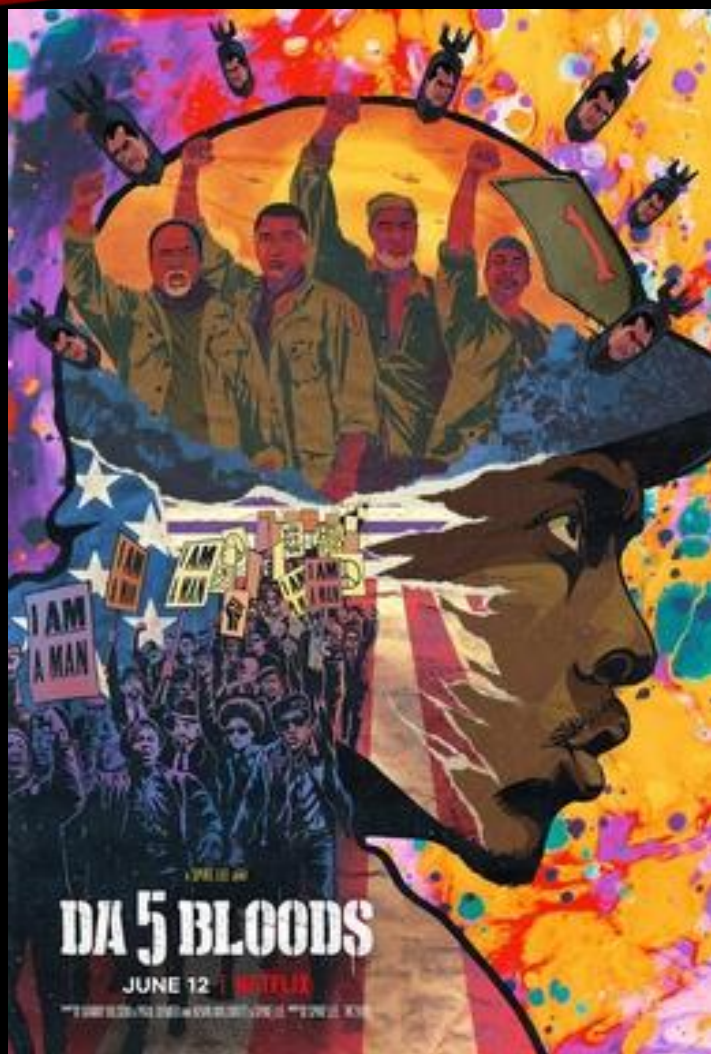


A PROGRAM OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND
FOUNDERS OF THE WALL



- What are your opinions of the additions to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial made since the dedication of Maya Lin's wall?
- What arguments does Sturken make about issues of race, class and gender in relation to the VVM?





Part 3: Remembering the American War in Vietnam



- Vietnamese government recognises these estimates:
 - Four million civilians killed in northern and southern Vietnam (about same in each)
 - 1.1 million combined dead in People's Army of Vietnam and National Liberation Front
 - 250,000 dead in Army of the Republic of Vietnam
- Other organisations also est. number of Vietnamese unaccounted for as dead or MIA at upwards of 250,000
- Indochina Refugee Crisis: more than 2.5 million people left Vietnam and rest of SE Asia as refugees/emigrants between 1975 and 1995 (c. 1.2 million to US)

'Post-War' Conflicts



- 1975: Khmer Rouge regime took power in Cambodia, est. Democratic Kampuchea
- 1975–1978: Vietnam–Cambodia border skirmishes
- 1978: Vietnam invades Cambodia; defeats Khmer Rouge
- 1979: Pro-Vietnam People's Republic of Kampuchea; Khmer Rouge ally China invades northern Vietnam (Feb– March)
- 1978–1991: Cambodian–Vietnamese War
- 1979: Sino–Vietnamese War



- 1979–1990: UN continues to recognise Democratic Kampuchea, not People's Republic of Kampuchea
- 1982: Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea est.

1986: Doi Moi ('renovation') economic reforms in Vietnam

- 1989: Vietnamese forces withdrawn from Cambodia
- 1991: Paris Peace Accords ends Vietnamese–Cambodian War
- 1993: Restoration of Cambodian Monarchy (Kingdom of Cambodia re-est.)
- 1999–2009: Vietnam and China border negotiations
- 2011–present: Vietnam and China dispute sovereignty over island groups in South China Sea

A Different Vietnam: *Doi Moi*

- *Đổi Mới* ('**Renovation**'), economic reforms initiated in 1986 with the goal of creating a “**socialist-oriented market economy**” in Vietnam; adopted by 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, December 1986
- Abolished command economy; replaced subsidy system with wage labour; legalised private ownership; invited foreign investment; targeted exports to international market
- Vietnam joined Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations **Free Trade Area** (AFTA) in 1995; other current members
- ASEAN plans to become a single market economy “characterised by free flow of goods, services, and investments, as well as freer flow of capital and skills”



A DIFFERENT VIETNAM: RELATIONS WITH UNITED STATES

1994: Clinton Administration ends US-Vietnam trade embargo

1995: Clinton Administration initiates process of normalising US-Vietnam diplomatic relations

2000: Clinton makes first US state visit to unified Vietnam

2006: President Bush state visit to Vietnam

2014: Obama Administration announces end embargo on arms trading with Vietnam

2015: President Obama & Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng announce new Pacific Rim trade deal; express “shared concerns” about territorial disputes in South China Sea Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreed

2016: President Obama state visit to Vietnam

2017: President Trump withdraws US from TPP



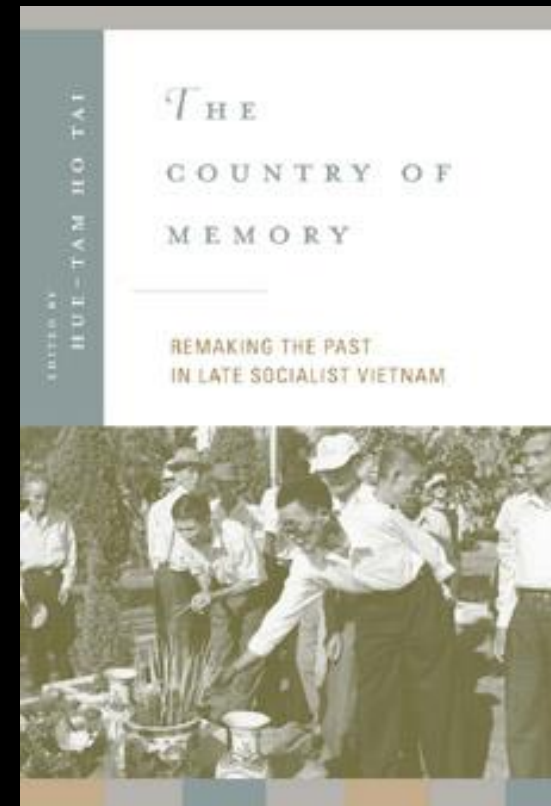


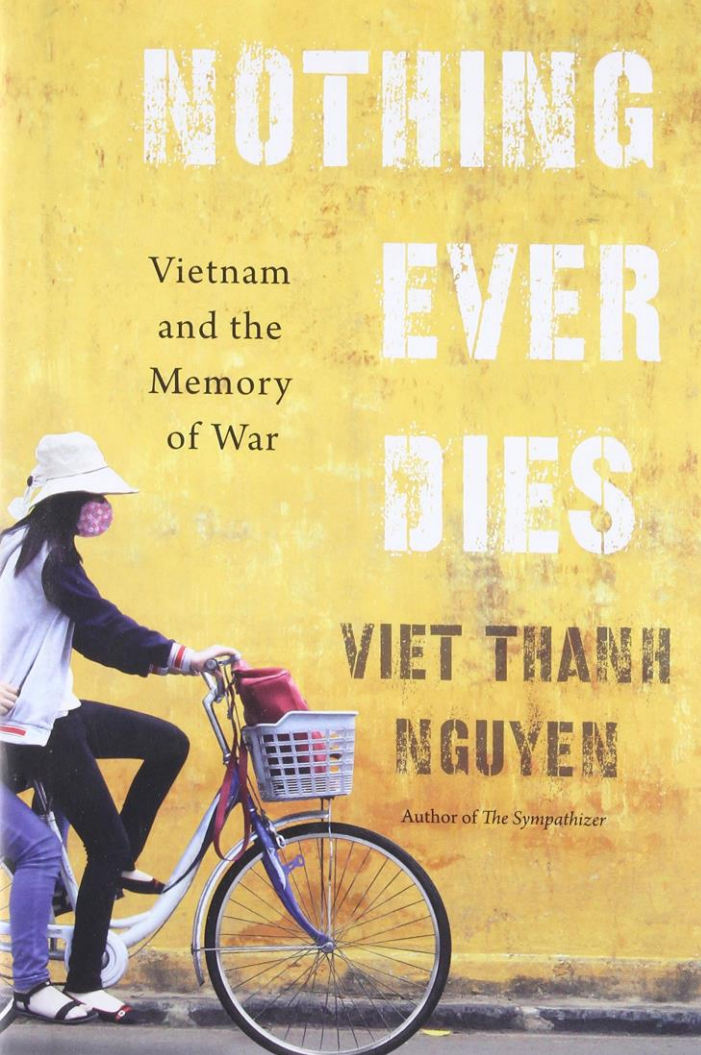
- Sustained foreign investment in Vietnam; massive increase in GDP since *doi moi* and end of US embargo; major exporter of raw materials
- Vietnam profits as multinational companies offshore from US (plus, latterly, China)
"You can come with 1000% foreign capital and full foreign management – simply transplanting an enterprise to our country. Here you have the benefit of low costs of labour, abundant raw materials and a low corporate income tax rate – the lowest in the world." – Nguyen Xuan Oanh, Vietnamese economist and politician, quoted by Laderman *Tours of Vietnam*, pp. 132–133
- Studies show levels of equality have decreased in *doi moi* Vietnam, as has access to health care; levels of rural poverty and child malnutrition have increased in *doi moi* Vietnam

NARRATIVES ABOUT AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM

- Contemporary Vietnam neither “full-blown totalitarianism nor total democracy”
- Declining appeal of Socialist Realism in Vietnamese art
- Loss of validity for Marxist-Leninist teleology: “with Doi Moi, history lost its capital ‘h’”
- Re-evaluation of (nostalgia for?) pre-*doi moi* era; e.g. ‘Hanoi under the Subsidy Economy, 1975–1986,’ Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi, 2006–2007

Quotes from Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ‘Situating Memory,’ in Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (University of California: Berkeley, California, 2001), pp. 4, 9.





Viet Thanh Nguyen, 'On Remembering One's Own,' *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 23–46

- According to Nguyen, what are some of the competing ways in which the American War is commemorated in Vietnam?
- How are northern and southern veterans remembered, for instance?
- What commemorative traditions exist in the Vietnamese diaspora?

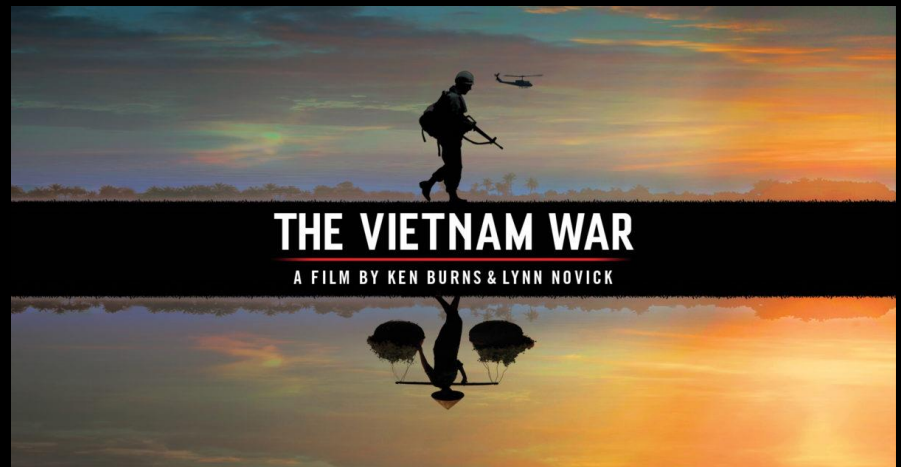
The Sorrow of War

A NOVEL OF NORTH VIETNAM



Bao Ninh

In war, no one wins or loses.



The Memorial Landscape in Vietnam: Cemeteries

Martyrs Cemeteries



The Memorial Landscape in Vietnam: Cemeteries

ARVN national military cemetery, Bien Hoa



Competing Narratives about the American War in Vietnam

Official narratives:

- Current regime as inheritors and regenerators of the revolutionary tradition of Hoi Chi Minh, and the defeat of US, French imperialism

Excluded narratives:

- Lack of commemorative voice for defeated southern Republic of Vietnam, and AVRN veterans
- Differing perspective of Vietnamese diaspora (more likely to reject Socialist Republic's legitimacy; e.g. 30 April reunification Day holiday referred to as "national day of shame" by expatriates; protests against General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng's White House meeting with Barack Obama, 2015 [pictured, note RVN flag])



Xuan Loc victory monument, dedicated to the Vietnam People's Army, Đồng Nai Province, Vietnam (commemorates key PAVN of ARVN Vietnamese forces in April 1975)





Doc Mieu Victory Monument
(former demilitarised zone [DMZ])



The Memorial Landscape in Vietnam: Victory monuments

Statue of Victory April 30 1975, Ho Chi Minh City

Cambodia-Vietnam Friendship Monument, Phnom Penh



Khe Sanh Victory Monument





**Viet Minh
victory
monument,
Dien Bien
Phu**



**PAYN
victory
monument**

**Memorials at
Sơn Mỹ (My Lai);
diorama at
Son My
Museum**

THE PLAIN DEALER

WEATHER
Snow flurries and
sleet
High in the upper 30s
Details on Page 3C

THE PLAIN DEALER

FINAL
Stocks & Bonds
Dow-Jones off 5.21

OHIO'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER
CLEVELAND, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1969

16 PAGES 10 CENTS

KINTH YEAR—NO. 324

Exclusive

This photograph will shock Americans as it shocked the editors and the staff of *The Plain Dealer*. It was taken by a young Cleveland area man while serving as a photographer with the U.S. Army in South Vietnam.

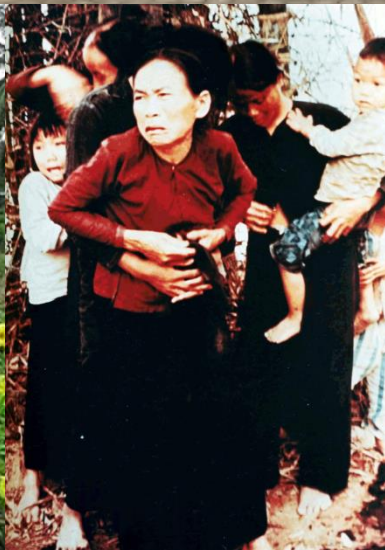
It was taken during the attack by American soldiers on the South Vietnamese village My Lai on an attack which has made world headlines in recent days with disclosures of mass killings allegedly at the hands of American soldiers.

This photograph and others on two special pages are the first to be published anywhere of the killings.

This particular picture shows a clump of brown, scrubby Vietnamese stillicies which include women and children. Why they were killed raises one of the most momentous questions of the war in Vietnam.

Cameraman Saw GIs Slay 100 Villagers

A clump of bodies on a road in South Vietnam



The Memorial Landscape in Vietnam: Physical Reminders of the War



Wreckage of B-52 fighter plane, Huu
Tiep Lake, Hanoi

Site of
Khe Sanh
siege
today



The Memorial Landscape in Vietnam: Monuments to US defeats



Tru Bac Lake, Hanoi, January 2012 – monument commemorates capture of American pilot on September 26 1967

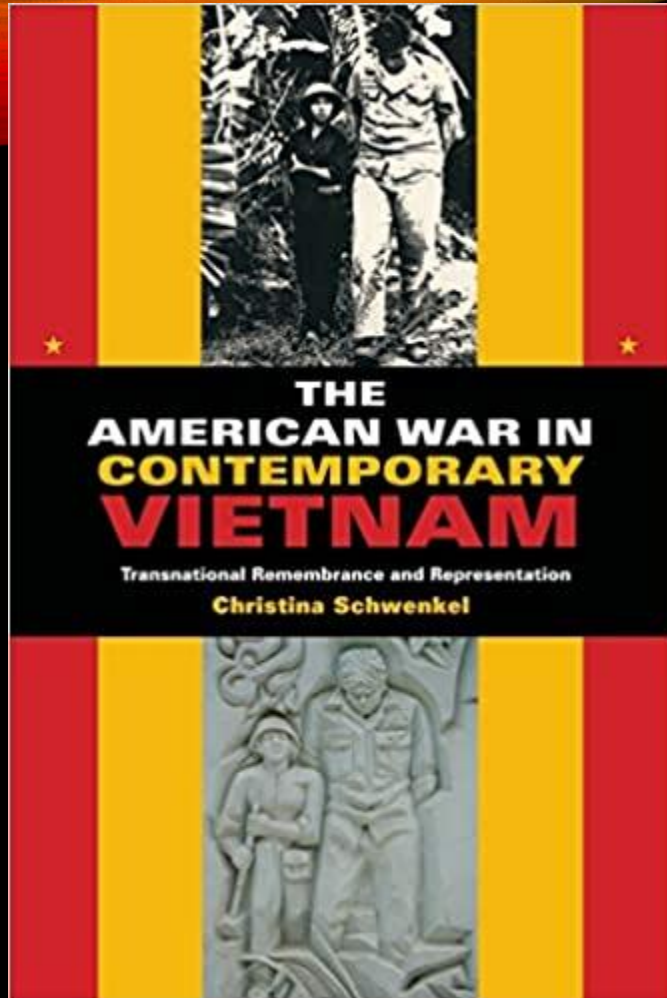
The Memorial Landscape in Vietnam: Monuments to US defeats

US Senators Kelly Ayotte, Joe Lieberman, John McCain and Sheldon Whitehouse at Tru Bac Lake, Hanoi, January 2012 – monument commemorates capture of American pilot “John Sney McGan” on September 26 1967



McCain and Lieberman at Hỏa Lò Prison museum, where his captured flight suit and parachute are on display

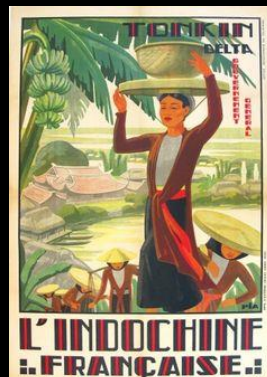
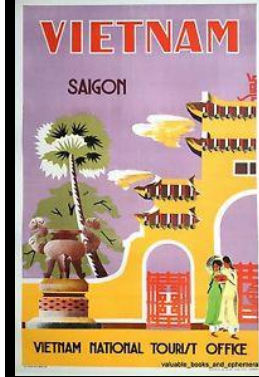
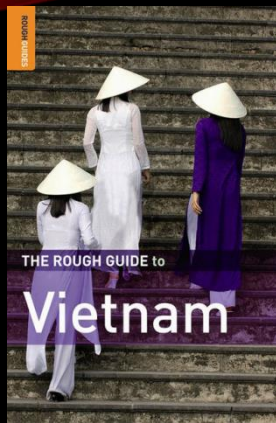
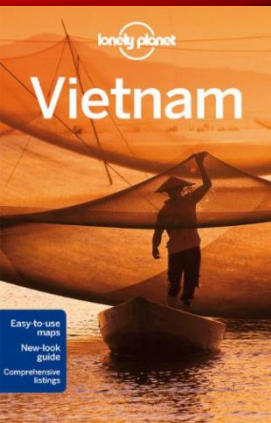




Christina Schwenkel, 'Commodified Memories and Embodied Experiences of War,' in *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 79–101.

- In what ways does the American War factor into tourist discourses and practices in contemporary Vietnam?
- Besides memorials, what heritage institutions and places commemorate the war and to what end?
- How do American tourists interact with Vietnam's heritage, tourism and memorial institutions?
- In what sense is the war commoditised in contemporary Vietnam?

A Different Vietnam: Tourism



- No. foreign visitors: 1993 – 515,000 2005 – 3.4million
1995 – 1.3 million 2010 – 5 million
2000 – 2.3 million 2014 – 7.8 million
2016 – 10 million 2019 – 18 million
- Pre-pandemic, tourists from US ranked 4th in nationality of foreign visitors to Vietnam (behind China, Korea and Japan); c. 400,000 Americans per-year visit Vietnam
- Longer history of tourism in Vietnam: romantic marketing of French Indochina; tourism as vehicle for state legitimacy in Republic of Vietnam

(see Scott Laderman, *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory* [Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 2009] on these issues)

War Remnants Museum, Ho Chi Minh City



War Remnants Museum

- “I am very sorry for what our country has done, and I regret the part I played in it,” Australian veteran, 2002
- “Normally, I am proud, grateful, and even blessed to be an American living the good life that I do. a However, today I feel a sense of shame at what my country did to this part of the world in pursuit of folly,” visitor from San Francisco, 2002
- “To the people of a united Vietnam: I was wrong. I am sorry,” US veteran William Brown, alongside donation of service medals, 2002
- “This museum may be a hard pill for many American visitors to swallow. But [the] truths underlying these exhibits [are] as important to our history as to that of the Vietnamese people,” US veteran, 1994
- “If you believe half what you read here your [sic] a fool. USA. all the way,” anonymous tourist, 2002
- “A little biased. The Americans were here to give freedom. They too lost a lot,” Australian tourist

- See Laderman, ‘The Other Side of the War: Memory and Meaning at the War Remnants Museum,’ *Tours of Vietnam*, pp. 151–182



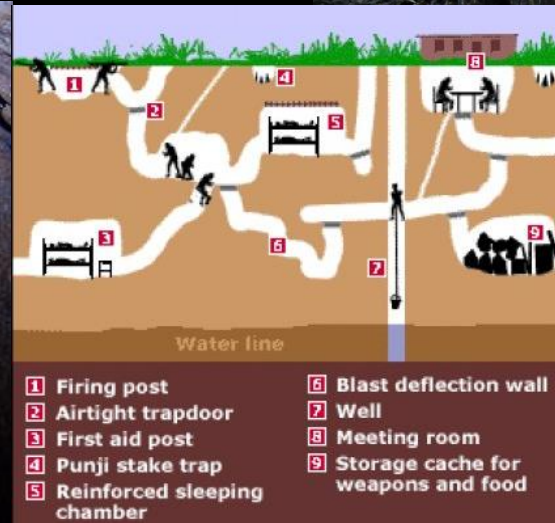
Apocalypse Now
nightclub – as seen
in *Da 5 Bloods* (2020)





FIGURE 3.1. “Original” Zippos on sale in Ho Chi Minh City. Photograph by the author.

Cu Chi Tunnels



- Two sections: Ben Dinh and Ben Duoc
- Represent "the will, intelligence and pride of the people of Chu Chi and symbolise the revolutionary heroism of Vietnam," English-language brochure; cited by Christina Schwenkel, 'Commodified Memories and Embodied Experiences of War,' in *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 89
- Government-sponsored trips to tunnels – esp. schoolchildren

**GŨ CHI, VIỆT NAM.
GRÄWL THRUÖH
THẾ TUNNÈLS THẮT
BRÖUGHT AMËRICA
TỎ ÍTS KNÈES.**



Cu Chi Tunnels



- 'Multi-sensory,' immersive tourist experience
- Tour guides in NLF uniforms
- In 1990s, tunnels widened to accommodate 'larger' frames of western tourists
- Firing range: "it was more real than the movies; a powerful but solemn experience," Canadian tourist; cited by Schwenkel, *American War*, p. 94

Ben Duoc Temple



- At one end of Cu Chi tunnels is Ben Duoc hamlet, site of the Ben Duoc memorial temple – includes gold-plated bust of Ho Chi Minh, beside stone table engraved with names of 44,520 'revolutionary martyrs' from Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces

Cu Chi Tunnels and Ben Duoc Temple



- English-speaking ARVN veterans (i.e. servicemen for the US-allied south Vietnam) found employment at Cu Chi, offering what Schwenkel termed “a critical renegotiation of historical memory in which unofficial knowledge and memories are redirected, reshaped and revalued to benefit the market and the state as well as veterans themselves” (*American War*, p. 99)

Cu Chi Tunnels and Ben Duoc Temple



"The attraction for urban Vietnamese youth lies with the recreational facilities in the immediate area ... Ben Duoc is a commercialized leisure park that offers ... pool tables, food stands, a mini hotel, and numerous cafes where youth gather to talk, relax, and drink strong coffee.

"Despite government efforts to retain its historical and commemorative significance, Vietnamese youth, in particular, have transformed the Củ Chi Tunnels into a site of entertainment that is largely detached from the war. In insisting on the irrelevance of the tunnel complex, they are neither engaged in debates over the past nor "reliving" the war and consuming it as spectacle like foreign visitors to the area. Rather, by turning a historical and pedagogical state site into a public space of pleasure, Vietnamese youth have imbued it with new antimemory functions and meanings that suggest their increasing detachment and distance from the nation's traumatic history."

- Schwenkel, *American War*, p. 97



Hỏa Lò Prison (aka 'Hanoi Hilton') museum



Hilton Hanoi Opera hotel

