

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

**REPRESENTING THE VIETNAMESE: RACE, CULTURE, AND THE
VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN FILM AND DRAMA**

by

DAVID S. CALLAGHAN

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

1998

UMI Number: 9830689

**Copyright 1998 by
Callaghan, David Scott**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9830689
Copyright 1998, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

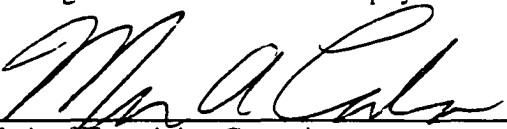
© 1998

DAVID CALLAGHAN

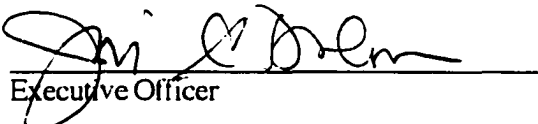
All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

3-26-98
Date


Chair of Examining Committee

3-26-98
Date


Executive Officer

Leonard Quart

Judith Milhous

Daniel Gerould

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would have been impossible to complete without the assistance and support of a number of individuals. I must, of course, thank my chair, Marvin Carlson, for his time and insightful guidance during the various stages of my project. My committee members, Leonard Quart, Judy Milhous, and Dan Gerould, also provided excellent feedback on each chapter. I thank all of them for their commitment to this study. In addition, I would like to especially thank Judy Milhous for her mentorship and encouragement of my work throughout my doctoral studies.

I am also grateful to several of my colleagues in the theatre department at CUNY for their ongoing friendship, support, and inspiration. Joel Bassin, Patrick Henneidy, Jay Plum, and Skip Dietrich were the best classmates anyone could ask for, and their good fellowship enriched my time in the program.

And finally, much love, thanks, and gratitude to my family for their support of my dream to obtain a Ph.D., and for their ongoing encouragement--and gentle nagging--which helped me to finish my dissertation. In particular, this dissertation really belongs to my wife Paola, as I would never have been able to devote the time needed to complete this study--and a doctorate--without her unwavering support.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>		1-8
<u>Chapter I</u>	<u>Patterns of Racial and Cultural Representation on Screen and Stage Before the Vietnam War</u>	9-56
<u>Chapter II</u>	<u>The War Years--The Vietnamese as the "White Man's Burden" and the "Noble Savage"</u>	57-115
<u>Chapter III</u>	<u>After the War--"In Country" and the Demonization of the Vietnamese</u>	116-163
<u>Chapter IV</u>	<u>Rewriting the War</u>	164-192
<u>Chapter V</u>	<u>The "Real" War</u>	193-255
<u>Chapter VI</u>	<u>Whose Vietnam?</u>	256-325
<u>Bibliography</u>		326-348

Introduction

In their book *From Hanoi to Hollywood*, Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud acknowledge not only "the power to make war and destroy lives," but also "the power to make images that may displace, distort, and destroy knowledge of the history in which those lives (and many others) participated."¹ During and after our involvement in the Vietnam War, film makers and theatre artists have constructed a shared sense of this historical event by creating cultural artifacts which have interpreted the Vietnam experience for the American people.

While seeking different audiences and focusing on numerous facets of the war, these products share a desire to posit "the truth" about the Vietnam War. Each successive film and play offers a new version of "reality" for its spectatorship, or "what really happened" in Vietnam. The result, especially for those with no firsthand knowledge of the war, is the creation of fictional representations which offer a surrogate experience of history. Thus, an entire post-1960s generation has come to "re-live" the Vietnam War via the by now overly familiar iconic images and sounds of the conflict depicted in various pop culture mediums (for instance, helicopters, body bags, booby traps, 1960s rock music, etc.), although perhaps most prominently displayed on film.²

As with fictional constructions of previous wars, the majority of American-made works about Vietnam have not surprisingly focused on our experiences in relation to the war. Recurrent themes frequently emphasize what "we" have lost: innocence; pride; trust in our institutionalized authority figures; a sense of shared values, national identity, and cohesiveness; etc. While such self-absorption is understandable on many levels and perhaps even necessary in terms of a cathartic sense of "coming to terms" with the war,

these works have consistently failed to acknowledge its impact on the Vietnamese--in terms of both allies and enemies--as well. In the reconstruction and deconstruction of our military presence in Vietnam on stage and film, the Vietnamese have been consistently absented, victimized, romanticized, demonized, and/or "Othered."³ In addition, the long-standing nationalistic struggles of the Vietnamese people have been equally ignored, reflecting a narcissistic American world view which often seems capable of comprehending Vietnam only in relation to its own relatively short-term involvement with that country.

There are long-standing historical prejudices in American culture concerning non-white Others which have naturally been reflected in such public acts as the film and theatre. In many ways, American depictions of the Vietnamese on stage and screen have followed previously established patterns of representation of race and culture in relation to both domestic and non-American Othered identities. In *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America*, for example, James Moy argues that America inherited a "two thousand-year-old Eurocentric prejudice that maintained the bestial representation of those not fitting into familiar governmental structures."⁴ So, long before Asians even appeared in America, the "framework that would provide for their representation had been established," which allowed for numerous future "constructed stereotypes" to flourish in various cultural sites and texts. Similarly, both the American theatre and Hollywood had frequently portrayed Blacks, Indians, and other non-white American minority groups in various stock and stereotypical ways long before the advent of the Vietnam War and its subsequent representations.

This is particularly true within the site of the Hollywood film experience. The Vietnam War film did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather developed out of a long-standing cinematic tradition which incorporated elements of the Western film genre, and more

importantly the combat genre as a whole.⁵ War film historian Jeanine Basinger contends that World War Two "gave birth" to a set of patterns and characteristics which essentially created the "combat genre" as we know it. Incorporating story elements from previous films about war (especially World War One), the Western, and several other Hollywood genres (e.g., the buddy film), the World War Two war film created a combat genre which became the prototype for all future combat films, regardless of whether their particular setting was Korea, Vietnam, or Grenada.⁶

Thus, the World War Two combat films continued--and developed further--the previously established modes of representation which had characterized both non-white Americans and non-Western foreigners as Others for American audiences. The Vietnam War films, working within the parameters of the larger combat genre, constructed the Vietnamese as a new kind of Asian Other. The historic repetition of these culturally shared images and themes thus resulted in the cinematic creation of a monolithic, nameless, Vietnamese Other, "offering audiences flash segments of a culture and people that have been narrowed down to categories of victims, prostitutes, snipers, and a race of people that do not have the same 'regard for human life' as westerners."⁷ The recreation of our involvement in Vietnam on film has created a discourse⁸ where the war is continually evaluated through the lens of American experience, which is often distorted or manipulated despite being privileged as fact or unquestionable reality in many instances. Similarly, plays about the Vietnam War can also be examined in the context of a larger tradition of war plays which reflected American/Western cultural attitudes towards various Others. Overall, while utilizing many conventions of the established combat genre, both mediums also

developed a new set of signifiers in order to meet the challenge of representing the particular dynamics of the politically controversial, guerrilla conflict in Vietnam.

My dissertation intends to examine the ways in which the Vietnamese were represented in these cinematic and theatrical recreations of the Vietnam War. This analysis will illuminate how the images and themes of such works either reinterpret, reinvent, or reinforce earlier depictions of race and culture as established within the film and stage combat genre. Thus, the fictional depictions of the Vietnamese will be situated in the larger context of previous cinematic and theatrical portrayals of non-white "enemies" or Others during and after America's wars (on both foreign and American soil). I will also argue that the Vietnamese presented a unique threat to our national identity and cultural mythology due to domestic and international perceptions of Vietnam as the first war ever "lost" by America. This ongoing tension and ambiguity impacted on the post-war discourse which attempted to "come to terms" with our military involvement in Vietnam and redefine our sense of "Americanness" in various representations of the war.

Indeed, the plays and films of the Vietnam War differ most clearly from those of earlier wars in their frequent portrayal of a divided America, with the fracturing of American cohesiveness in Vietnam mirroring the inflammatory milieu of our home front during the 1960s and early 1970s. Unlike many of the plays and films made about World War Two, the Vietnam War texts rarely depicted a unified American presence at war, nor hopes for victory or the preservation of democratic values. Rather, what is more often revealed is a polarized America, in which the "antagonisms of race, region, and class" are reconstructed in Vietnam.⁹ Thus, an examination of how the portrayal of Americans of various cultural and racial backgrounds evolved in the combat genre is also relevant to the larger concerns of this study.

Many of these authors and directors have used their works to engage, critique, rationalize, defend, and exorcize the complex issues of the Vietnam War--including charges

of American imperialism--which have not yet been resolved in our society.¹⁰ As Wimal Dissanayake observes in the introduction to *Colonialism & Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, "history, like cinema, is a discourse, a signifying system constructed by human beings living at a particular time and place, being subjected to the power and ideology inscribed in them." In addition, the fictional and cultural narratives which interpret that history are equally affected by a positioning within the discourse which privileges the most powerful identities and perspectives. Consequently, less dominant voices and viewpoints are excluded or forgotten in the "traditional tropes of 'memory' and 'gathering'" that inform the representation of history in cinema¹¹ (and theatre). I believe that an analysis of the discourse which has represented the war and the Vietnamese on stage and screen can suggest a great deal about our own cultural myths and prejudices in the context of a larger political and historic framework. As a result, I hope this study will provide a fresh perspective on what remains a national obsession of sorts--the Vietnam War. Finally, I think it is important to address how fictional recreations of historical memories are all too often accepted as "truth" in our society. An awareness of the power of these mediums to "write" and at times manipulate history may encourage people to question the inherent ambiguity and political implications of culturally mediated art.

As I am concentrating on images of the Vietnamese in these texts, I will focus on works which represent them in some way, even if indirectly. Thus, a film like Ted Kotcheff's *First Blood* or a play such as David Rabe's *Streamers* are relevant despite being set in America after and during the war, in that *First Blood* flashes back to Vietnam while *Streamers* includes graphic descriptions of the Korean and Vietnamese as Others. In contrast, other films or plays which focus more exclusively on issues of American veterans, anti-war protesters, etc., are more tangential to this study and will not be evaluated as part of my dissertation.

My chapters will proceed chronologically in terms of historical periods, beginning with a discussion of the treatment of various non-white and Asian enemies and Others in Hollywood and on stage before the Vietnam War. The representation of the Vietnamese during the years of America's involvement in the war will then be considered, emphasizing themes of "the white man's burden" and "the noble savage"¹² in these texts. This will lead to an examination of initial depictions of combat in Vietnam after the war ended in 1973, which generally created a "demonization" of the Vietnamese. The next chapter will analyze attempts to "rewrite" the war during the Reagan era, in which some films like *First Blood* reflected a desire in the larger society to reassert America's political and cultural hegemony. The efforts of other works in the 1980s such as *Platoon* on film and *Tracers* on stage to define the "reality" of the Vietnam combat experience will then be evaluated. The final chapter of my study will discuss more recent American efforts to expand the discourse in order to consider the impact of the war on the Vietnamese and African Americans as well. These texts will be compared to Vietnamese-made cinematic depictions of their experiences during and after the war. My dissertation will conclude with a discussion of the ongoing American cinematic and theatrical images of the Vietnam War in relation to the larger thematic concerns of this work.

Endnotes

1. Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 1.

2. Jeffrey Walsh and James Aulich, eds., *Vietnam Images* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), ix.

3. In *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 1, James Moy characterizes the concept of "Otherness" as follows: "since the beginning of the Western tradition in Drama, dominant cultures have represented marginal or foreign racial groups as othered--that is, not only different from people in the dominant culture but also as less than completely human or civilized." In addition, in his seminal work *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 45, Edward Said describes a historical, ongoing process in which the West has continually divided people into categories of "us" and "them," with "them" consisting of an Oriental "Other."

4. Moy, 4; and for subsequent quote.

5. In *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 15, Jeanine Basinger defines genre as "the simple observation that a great many films appear to have similar settings, plots, characters, and events." Kathryn Kane's *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 2, adds the element "of groups of films which visually resemble each other but which have no obvious controlling, external factor--e.g., an auteur--to link them" to this definition of genre.

6. Basinger, 14. The author also notes an evolution of the combat genre from its emergence in the 1940s during World War Two through the films about the Vietnam War, in which various "waves" of movies represent changes from the typical "World War II combat films over the decades." Basinger defines five of these "waves" as follows: from the start of the war through the end of 1943, in which the basic definitions of the genre are formed; from 1944 to just after the war, where films reflect an acceptance of this definition; the end of the 1940s through the end of the 1950s, in which a new level of "reality" was injected into the genre and the Korean War grafted a "variation" onto the basic patterns; the early 1960s, in which "epic recreations" (e.g., *The Longest Day*, directed by Darryl F. Zanuck, 178 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1962, videocassette) dominated the genre; and a period of "inversion" which renegotiates the genre in relation to the Vietnam War (which initially does not produce a large number of combat films, unlike the Korean War), 122.

7. Minne Jung-Min Hong, "Welcoming Statement," *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* series, 21-27 January 1994: New York City, program, 1.

8. I use the term discourse in Michel Foucault's sense of the word. John Storey's reading of Foucault (*An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 92, states that "discourse is the means by which institutions yield their power through a process of definition and exclusion." As a result, "discursive formations define what is possible to say on any given topic." Similarly, in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York and

London: Routledge, 1994), 17, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam characterize discourse as "images and statements providing a common language for representing knowledge about a given theme. As 'regimes of truth,' discourses are encased in institutional structures that exclude specific voices, esthetics, and representations." The implications of this concept in relation to representations of the Vietnam War, and the Vietnamese, in American films and plays will be considered throughout this study.

9. Richard Corliss, "Platoon: Vietnam, The War it Really Was," *Time*, 26 January 1987, 56.

10. Dittmar and Michaud, 1. In *Colonial Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., offer a Marxist based definition of imperialism as "the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production." Colonialism, on the other hand, involves a particular phase of imperialism resulting in "the conquest and direct control of other people's land." In contrast, Heinz Gollwitzer's earlier study *Europe in the Age of Imperialism* (trans. David Adam and Stanley Baron, Norwich, England: Jarrold and Sons, Ltd., 1969), 10-11, contends that by "1900 imperialism was understood to be an extension of national policies into world active politics" or the "expansionist power policies of the larger European countries, North America and Japan," involving "empire-building on the basis of colonial acquisitions." Either definition involves the notion of one people or nation controlling another at some level, which can manifest itself directly through conquest of territory or via more indirect means such as control of a culture, economy, or key institutions.

11. Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Colonialism & Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xxi.

12. I employ the term "white man's burden" from Rudyard Kipling's famous 1899 poem of the same name, in which he justifies imperialism as both the destiny and duty of the white race towards improving the lot of their cultural "inferiors." The idea of the "noble savage" comes from the writings of the eighteenth century French philosophe Jean Jacques Rousseau, who conceived of a "primitive" savage living free in an unsullied wilderness and decidedly more childlike, pure and innocent than modern, "civilized" man. Both terms can serve as paradigms for ways in which early representations of the Vietnam War appeared on screen and stage.

Chapter One: Patterns of Racial and Cultural Representation on Screen and Stage Before the Vietnam War

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stram note that the "birth of film" coincided with the height of European colonial expansion and conquest of much of the world at the turn of this century.¹ Like the fiction of such writers as Rudyard Kipling, the cinema became yet another potential means of promoting national identification among "disparate" peoples and classes as well as "with the racial solidarity implied by the imperial project as a whole."² Offering its spectators a mediated view of "Others" from distant lands and cultures, the cinema "told the story of colonization from the colonizer's perspective" and also allowed spectators to identify with their nations' empires.³ As the twentieth century progressed, various films defined characteristics and established patterns of representation of various non-white Others for both American and European audiences. In America, Hollywood's obsession with two genres--the Western and combat films--was instrumental in depicting the Other, both American born and foreign, in ways which would eventually impact on the Vietnam War film.

The Western holds an especially important place in the history of American cinema, with thousands of films made over the years which reconstructed and reexamined the American frontier experience. Despite a period where in the late 1970s and early 1980s the Western seemed to go out of fashion, the success of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) and other films in the 1990s illustrate the ongoing appeal of this genre to the American imagination. In his introduction to the American Film Series episode on "The Western," narrator John Lithgow offers the following commentary: "the history of the Western is often a history of legends.... not the real West, but a mythical place full of images that are uniquely American. The open frontiers, the outdoors, the solitary, often reluctant hero--the

Western is also landscapes, a unique stage on which a great range of dreams from the American experience gets played out."⁴

Thus, the Western film offers its audience an interpretation of our frontier experience which often works on a mythical rather than realistic level. A similar pattern occurred with cinematic depictions and recreations of America's wars, including the conflict in Vietnam. While films of both genres often present gruesomely "realistic" scenes of violence, carnage, and death, they still examine such historical events through a lens which often places them in the context of a larger American mythos or national self-perception.⁵ Both the Western and Vietnamese landscapes become a "stage," then, in which to examine the "American experience," with the result being a subordination of Othered voices and identities within that discourse. In a *Time* magazine cover story about Oliver Stone's film *Platoon* (1986), for example, Richard Corliss observed that: "the Vietnamese are either pathetic victims or the invisible, inhuman enemy. In the scheme of *Platoon* (and not just *Platoon*) they do not matter. The nearly 1 million Vietnamese casualties are deemed trivial compared with America's loss of innocence.... And the tragedy of Vietnam is seen as this: not that they died, but that we debased ourselves by killing them."⁶ Similarly, in discussing films about the Vietnam War, *Village Voice* critic and Vietnam veteran Leo Cawley noted the paucity of works which examined how the war affected the lives of the average Vietnamese, "our allies," whom American troops were sent overseas to defend. In analyzing the "lopsided" nature of American produced films which focus "exclusively on our story," Cawley raises the probing issue of "who were these people...? Will we keep thinking the tragedy is that of the invader, of his painful self-knowledge, his loss of innocence, his recognition of limits? This suits the national character so depressingly well."⁷ His comments are particularly insightful in recognizing

that a national cinema will understandably have a desire to examine its own cultural experience in representing historical watersheds such as the exploration of the West or the Vietnam War. There is, however, a need for looking beyond one's own narcissistic focus to obtain a fuller understanding and meaning of *all* the people and events involved in those depictions. The kind of viewpoint offered by Stone's *Platoon*, in which his protagonist Chris claims that "I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves--and the enemy was in us," is surely facile in reducing the Vietnam War to a symbolic interpretation of the American psyche.⁸

The Western genre, in its focus on interpreting the Western landscape as a means of defining a national identity and ideology of sorts, established a pattern which was later echoed in films which sought to "come to terms" with America's involvement in Vietnam. The Western's frequent absenting and stereotyping of the original inhabitants of the West, the various tribes of Native-American Indians, is especially significant in relation to the tendency in our cinema to depict American history in ways which reinforced national myths about pragmatism, self-reliance, and manifest destiny. Inherent in the notion of American expansion and quest for territory and individuality, of course, was the reality of eliminating the people who originally lived on the land.⁹ For years, regardless of plot or characters, most Westerns unceasingly failed to take into account any claims of settlement which the indigenous Native-American inhabitants might have possessed. Instead, the vast, open spaces of the West were presented as there for the taking for any American with enough drive and power to do so. The generic Indians in these films appeared as a nuisance--albeit often a dangerous one--which must be swept aside, and crushed if need be, so that the "real" Americans could expand Westward according to their God-given manifest destiny. Other films such as George Steven's *Shane* (1952) or Fred Zinneman's *High Noon* (also 1952) focused exclusively on the mythological Western outlaw or

gunslinger, which suggested that Native-American Indians were not even a viable presence in the Western hierarchy of representation.

Furthermore, to justify Westward expansion and the displacement, slaughter, and in some cases erasure of Native-American peoples and cultures, the Western films which do choose to represent Native-Americans typically demonize and/or stereotype them in their depictions. As Native-American Alphonso Ortiz notes:

Western films perpetuate the notion in the American mind that the Indian is the enemy--that the Indian is the general embodiment of the Other to the American self. I've sat with Navajo children watching recycled grade B Westerns, and when the cowboy or the cavalry comes over the hill they start clapping like mad, as they were defined unfortunately as being in the way of the orderly march of progress and civilization. This is how thorough the cultural conditioning has been.¹⁰

Consequently, a dominant impression emerges from the Western films of the Indian as a bloodthirsty, untrustworthy "savage," who must be suppressed and eliminated if necessary in order to protect the advance of "civilized" society. As historian Richard Slotkin has stated in examining various Puritan captive narratives, "it was within this genre of colonial Puritan writing that the first American mythology took shape--a mythology in which the hero was the captive or victim of devilish American savages and in which his (or her) heroic quest was for religious conversion and salvation." As the Puritans eventually adapted to the land, however, a new "myth-hero" emerged in the "figure of Daniel Boone, the solitary, Indian-like hunter of the deep woods."¹¹ This figure, using the ways of the Indians, was able to fight them on their own terms and thus preserve the destiny of the white settlers. Slotkin viewed the Boone character as establishing an archetypal "myth-narrative" which would be echoed in succeeding narratives, involving an American hero who loved the wilderness and could redeem his society spiritually through acts of violence against a savage people--hence the "regeneration through violence" of Slotkin's title.¹²

Thus, the demonization of the Indian Other so prevalent in the Western genre has its roots in our earliest cultural narratives about the American frontier and interactions with native peoples. These archetypes resonate loudly in films such as John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), in which John Wayne plays a character intent on killing his niece who has been captured by Indians, rather than let her be raised in a non-white culture. Also present is his fear of her "virtue" being sullied by the lusty brutes, with the assumption being that any pure white woman would surely be better off dead than as a concubine to her Indian captors. Another of Ford's films which starred Wayne, *Rio Grande* (1950), featured a bloodthirsty group of Apaches who attack a caravan of women and children from commander Wayne's fort. They kill one mother and bring the children back to their village where they spend the night drinking liquor. The tribe then performs a "vengeance dance" while preparing to slaughter the youngsters the next morning (of course, the children are saved by the American troops in the nick of time).¹³ The film's dominant image of the Indians, which involved exotic dancing and a willingness to murder innocent women and children, was not atypical of Hollywood films in this period.

A particularly interesting picture which explores the issue of racism on the frontier is John Huston's *The Unforgiven* (1960). In this film, Burt Lancaster plays Ben Zachary, the well respected head of a clan of cattle ranchers. Alas, Ben's adopted "sister" Rachel turns out to be an Indian herself. Once Rachel's Indian brother learns that his long-lost sister is nearby, his tribe ambushes and scalps Rachel's fiancée Charlie Rawlins. The townspeople, who have been fighting the Indians for generations but have savored peace for several years, demand that Rachel be returned to the Indians to avoid further reprisals. The Zachary family returns to their house as pariahs, and Rachel's brother Cash, a hot-headed bigot who hates Indians so much that he believes he can "smell" them, demands that Ben throw the "red-hide nigger" out of their home. Ben refuses, and the remainder of

the family rallies around Rachel to defend her from a series of Indian attacks on the house. Cash does return at the film's end to save the family just as they run out of ammunition.

The movie is complex in its exploration of racism in the community. On one level, it suggests that the townsfolk are narrow-minded bigots in their denunciation of Rachel. Yet the Zachary family itself hates Indians, as when Ben easily orders the killing of a defenseless Kiowa. They only seem to distinguish Rachel from the Indian Other because they have raised her from infancy. When Rachel questions Ben as to how he can kill "her kind," he responds that she is Indian by "blood" only, as she has been brought up in a superior white culture. The film also indulges in the kinds of Indian stereotypes seen in countless other Westerns. For instance, its opening scene suggests Rachel's Otherness when she disobeys her mother's commands to bake bread, in order to ride a wild horse with exotic abandon. Later, upon learning that she is an "Injun," she smears her head with paint, dons a buckskin outfit, and demands to return to "her people." The Kiowa Indians are presented as a non-individualized silent horde who mostly appear to scalp the bumbling Charlie or joyfully ride in suicide attacks against the ranch. This image, which also appears in many of the combat films which depict Japanese or Vietnamese soldiers, suggests the presence of an unthinking mob who are eager to die and therefore place less value on life than their white opponents. Thus, while the movie is unusual in its explicit confrontation of the issue of racism between whites and Indians in the West, it too stereotypes the Indians despite its generally sympathetic intentions.¹⁴

Indeed, whether characterized as friend or foe, violent or benevolent, the Indians of the Western film are consistently represented without psychological nuance or individuation. Common depictions include the ubiquitous, child-like "pidgin" English spouting Indian and the elimination of differences between tribes regarding language, geography, customs, rituals, and appearances. All of these choices resulted in the creation

of "Hollywoodized," stock conventions which could quickly convey a rather reductive perception of "Indianness" to film audiences. Also common was the standard practice of casting white actors in Indian roles, including combat film icons like Jeff Chandler as the Apache Chief Cochise in Delmer Daves's *Broken Arrow* (1950) and George Sherman's *Battle at Apache Pass* (1952), or John Wayne's turn as a "half-breed" Indian in John Farrow's *Hondo* (1953).¹⁵ As Shohat and Stram note, Hollywood cinema has historically allowed "Euro-Americans ... the unilateral prerogative of acting in 'blackface,' 'redface,' 'brownface,' and 'yellowface,'" while the reverse has rarely been true."¹⁶ This practice would be eliminated for the most part in the era of the Vietnam War film, as Hollywood strived to depict an increasingly "authentic" image of combat in Vietnam. Most of these films did continue, however, the American cinematic tradition of the stock Asian "type" by using actors of various Asian backgrounds to portray Vietnamese characters.

During the Vietnam War, a spate of Western films also emerged such as *Little Big Man*, *A Man Called Horse*, and *Soldier Blue* (1970), all of which treated the Indians sympathetically. In addition, they often drew allegorical comparisons to the killing of Vietnamese peasants by American soldiers, and attempted to present a less one-sided view of Indian violence by also depicting the brutality of whites on the frontier. Still, the films often echoed many of the non-individualized, generic portrayals of earlier Hollywood Westerns. *A Man Called Horse*, for example, represented a mythical Indian tribe "whose language is Lakota, whose hairstyles range from Assiniboi through Nez Perce to Comache, whose tipi design is Crow, and whose Sun Dance ceremony ... (is) typically Mandan," according to Ward Churchill.¹⁷ Even more recent Westerns such as Kevin Costner's much honored *Dances With Wolves* (1990), which presented a linguistically accurate portrayal of a Sioux Indian tribe, indulged itself in an overly idealized representation of an idyllic Indian

culture threatened by a totally corrupt and brutal white presence.¹⁸ Costner's dreamy, reverential exaltation of the child-like, "good" Sioux Indians further serves to displace the specific historical realities of the cultural interaction between whites and Indians on the frontier. In addition, his penchant for romanticizing the Sioux undercut his generally well-intentioned efforts to create a more fully realized depiction of a specific Indian tribe on screen.

Ultimately, the themes and characteristics involved in Hollywood's representation of "the Indian" as a collective Other would later resurface in the numerous films which explored America's involvement in the Vietnam War. For instance, the portrayal of the Indians as violent savages which helped justify myths of American manifest destiny would be echoed in various films produced after the Vietnam War which demonized the Vietnamese enemy as a means of "coming to terms" with our failure (military and otherwise) in Vietnam. While the nature of America's specific involvement in Vietnam would generate a set of representations which were unique to that war, the earlier patterns created by the Western and other Hollywood films which depicted "Orientals" placed the images of the Vietnamese squarely within a historical racist typology and lineage. As film critic and theorist Andrew Sarris once claimed:

The Vietnamese, both ours and theirs, thus oozed out on the screen from a long line of Fu Manchu-Yellow Peril prejudices. They were the Other, like all the indigenous Indian tribes who stubbornly resisted our Manifest Destiny. When John Wayne traded in his cowboy hat for a green beret in his much despised *Green Berets* in 1968, he was merely applying the Tonto principle to our foreign policy in Southeast Asia.¹⁹

While the Western film is significant in shaping this tradition, it by no means stands as the sole influence on the Vietnam War film. Rather, elements of the Western can be analyzed in tandem with another revered Hollywood film genre, the combat film, in order to understand more fully the historic patterns of racial and cultural representation which influenced the Vietnam War film.

World War One was the first American war to be depicted on film, initially involving wartime propaganda films such as the *The Kaiser: The Beast of Berlin* (1918).²⁰ In contrast to the later films about World War Two and Vietnam, however, this film and others like it were unique in their depictions of a white, Western European enemy as a demonized Other, complete with German soldiers ravishing virgins in Belgium. Indeed, many of America's historic enemies have been marked as the Other in order to stir up feelings of patriotism during wartime, as when the German "Huns" of World War One were depicted as eating babies, destroying churches, etc., to arouse support for the war effort. Thus, the depiction of Indians and Asians as Others in later films did not solely reflect racist tendencies in American culture, but also revealed specific chauvinistic national agendas such as rationalizing Manifest Destiny or arousing wartime fervor on the home front. Although lacking a specific racist component, Hollywood's earliest films about war *did* establish a precedent of representing America's enemies--white or otherwise--as the Other on the big screen. What was specifically added to this dynamic in the films made during and after World War Two, then, was the issue of race and racism. This new development was particularly reflected in the differences which emerged between the film community's representation of America's enemies, the Asian Japanese and the European Germans and Italians.

Before Hollywood turned its attention in that direction, a number of films emerged after World War One which would take a very different perspective on that conflict. As combat film historian Thomas Doherty has noted, "the retrospective Great War film was elegiac in tone, pacifist in purpose, and cynical in perspective."²¹ Films such as King Vidor's silent picture *The Big Parade* (1925) and Lewis Milestone's screen adaptation of German veteran Erich Maria Remarque's successful book *All Quiet on the Western Front*

(1930) emphasized the waste and loss involved in war, especially the devastation inflicted on the young men who were killed and maimed in the trenches. In a sense, the movies between the two world wars initially taught audiences how to "read" Hollywood's interpretation of combat on film.²² At the outbreak of World War Two, however, as Hollywood geared up its industry to support the wartime effort, it became necessary to redefine the nature of the war film. The result, which drew on aspects of the earlier war films in tandem with plots and characteristics from many other genres, was the creation of the aforementioned combat genre as defined by Jeanine Basinger. Furthermore, the treatment of race and culture on screen during the Second World War would eventually have a significant impact on the Vietnam War film.

The movies about World War II made during the war itself established a set of conventions and paradigms which became the basis for all future war films, including those which sought to subvert those very conventions. For instance, Keith Gordon's *A Midnight Clear* (1992), which depicts the decimation of a young intelligence unit before and during the Battle of the Bulge, contains the basic World War Two combat film plot motifs and character typology. Throughout the movie, however, Gordon conveys a dark, anti-war tone which seems more appropriate to a film about World War One or Vietnam. Thus, some of the later pictures about World War Two made during and after the Vietnam conflict reflected the anger, cynicism, and ambiguity about our involvement in Vietnam which impacted on the cinematic recreations of that war. In contrast, the works produced immediately after World War Two (Basinger's "third wave" of World War Two films) still celebrated that war, although they too modified the conventions of the combat genre as developed by Hollywood during the war years of 1941-1945. Initially, however, the government's Office of War Information (OWI) organized Hollywood and its studio

system to support the war effort and generate morale at home.²³ Inherent within these intentions was a deliberate effort to portray an image of America--and also its allies and enemies--which would effectively serve the noble aims of a war for freedom against various totalitarian regimes.

Doherty asserts that one of the first tasks facing Hollywood in this regard was to erase the image of war as meaningless and ignoble, which it had established in its earlier depictions of World War One. Thus, he notes that in films such as Howard Hawks's *Sergeant York* (1941), the story of the World War One hero is framed in ways which "re-mythologize World War One as a national crusade worthy of admiration." York's individual heroism was no longer an appropriate model in the era of fully mechanized "total" war, in which the American government needed to mobilize the resources of the entire society in order to defeat its enemies. As a result, the movies made in Hollywood during the early years of the Second World War sought to redefine both its purpose and the country's expectations of the American soldier and civilian for the film going audience.²⁴

Consequently, war films such as *Bataan*, *Guadalcanal Diary*, *Wake Island*, and numerous others usually displayed a "cross section of America," representing the squads in "unabashed stereotypes" such as the dumb Pole, tough Irishman, wise-cracking Jew, pious Mexican, blues-loving Black, etc.²⁵ A mix of various white ethnicities of all ages and social classes are typically depicted, accompanied by a few Hispanics and Blacks. Their differences are "minimized" in light of their greater unity as Americans, which posits that they share the "same values" as "decent young men." By fighting together, the men will achieve victory and "earn a postwar world of peace and prosperity." Ironically, this emphasis on unity and teamwork contradicted the traditional American archetypal vision of

a strong, solitary, self-sustaining hero capable of heroic deeds, as defined in a literary tradition extending back to Natty Bumppo (the hero of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*) and Daniel Boone; and reinforced in the twentieth century on film by the Western genre. This representation of what an ideal America united in its war effort should look like created a tension between the cinematic image and the reality of life in the armed forces. For example, Tay Garnett's *Bataan* (1943), which depicted a squad of soldiers' valiant efforts to resist the Japanese invaders on that island, portrayed a racially mixed unit comprised of Black, White, and Mexican American GIs supplemented by some local Filipino recruits. As Kathryn Kane commented in her analysis of the film, "the group is a metaphor for America."²⁶ What this admirable statement of unity ignored was the fact that the army segregated its troops by race during the war,²⁷ and thus the "all-American" unit depicted in *Bataan* could never have existed in actual combat.

Furthermore, as Kane notes in her highly detailed breakdown of the World War Two war films, Black Americans do appear in these pictures more frequently than say, Mexican Americans (who only appear in two movies), but are under-represented compared to the various white "ethnicities" such as Irish, "Jews," and WASPS. Like many of the non-WASP white ethnic groups, however, the Blacks are never portrayed as officers (these upper ranks were most frequently reserved for men of Anglo-Saxon descent), although they are usually depicted as loyal and efficient soldiers. In the world view of these films, the Black soldier is reduced to a stock "type," offering a benign, "gentle and dignified" presence which is "reassuring" to their peers and the cinematic spectators.²⁸

This typology reflected the broader context of representation of Blacks in Hollywood before the war, which had created a slew of distasteful images. Donald Bogle's book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* analyzes these stereotypes

in detail, and the title of his study indicates the overall categories of blacks found in Hollywood films: the ill-fated "Tragic Mulatto" of *Show Boat*, the cranky but caring "Mammy" and simpering "Tom" found in *Gone With the Wind*, the menacing "Buck" of *Birth of a Nation*, and so on, with many of these characters first appearing on stage (such as Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's nineteenth-century play *Uncle Tom's Cabin*).²⁹ And like the depictions of Indians in Westerns, Blacks were also frequently portrayed by white actors, but this time in "blackface." Blackface was a popular nineteenth-century stage tradition which continued into the war with films such as *Holiday Inn* (1942), in which Bing Crosby sings a blackface number now cut when the film is shown on television. The presence of Black characters, identities, and voices were also frequently erased in numerous Hollywood films of all genres before the war. Indeed, as Doherty observed, "in Hollywood's field of vision, blacks were invisible--out of the white world."³⁰ Unfortunately, the issues of stereotyping and absencing of African-Americans in Hollywood remain viable concerns to the present day. African American actor and director Robert Townsend's film *The Hollywood Shuffle* (1987), for example, offered a humorous but pointed indictment of the kinds of negative images Black actors encounter in portraying Black characters on film. And the noted director Spike Lee has soundly criticized director Woody Allen for his continual representations of multicultural New York City without a single Black (or any person of color, for that matter) present.³¹

Hollywood's efforts to present a united front of Americans during the Second World War, however, led to an abandonment of such ugly stereotypes in the combat genre. Still, Bogles's categories persisted in other films during and well after the war, and ultimately carried over into successive media such as television as with the Tom-like characters of Fred Sanford and his shiftless friend Grady on the popular 1970s

situation-comedy *Sanford and Son*. Still, as Kane observed, new stereotypes emerged in films like *Bataan* which defined an "appropriate" role for the Black soldier as simple, loyal, and working side-by-side with Americans of all colors and ethnicities to win the war. Again, historical realities such as segregation in the service or Black soldiers achieving commissioned rank were never depicted on film. Aside from the under-representation of a Black presence in feature films (i.e., the "token" Black soldier of the fictitious racially mixed squads), wartime newsreels continued the Hollywood tradition of absenting Blacks, with only three newsreel clips featuring Black troops shown in 1943 and eighteen in 1944. In response to criticism from the Black press and organizations such as the NAACP, however, the newsreels of 1945 made a strong effort to include greater numbers of clips featuring Black soldiers, and in capacities related more directly to combat (as opposed to earlier newsreel shots which featured Blacks jitterbugging, for example).³²

Nonetheless, the ultimate intention of the World War Two combat film in regards to the issue of race in America was to promote an image of loyal citizens working together towards a common goal of defeating the enemy. In his book *Making Movies Black*, Thomas Cripps notes that this motif reached its apotheosis in the 1944 army documentary *Teamwork*. From the outset, the film "set a black agenda in that it literally promised African Americans an enhanced status in the postwar world in return for their service during the war."³³ Only after the end of the war, in Hollywood's later treatment of the Korean conflict, would such issues as racial inequality even be hinted at on film. In Hal Bartlett's film *All the Young Men* (1960) for example, Sidney Poitier plays a sergeant who must take command of a reconnaissance squad after its white officer has been killed. Over the course of the film, Poitier's character struggles to maintain his position of authority over the divided unit, the majority of whom question his ability to lead based on the color

of his skin. Lewis Milestone's *Pork Chop Hill* (1959) features several Black soldiers as characters, with one playing a major supporting role--a major departure from combat films during World War Two (not to mention its depiction of a Japanese-American "executive officer," which would have been unthinkable during the war). However, the leading character, Franklin, is a coward who keeps trying to avoid combat and actually threatens to shoot his righteously indignant commanding officer. Thus, the gain in screen time is neutralized by the ugliness of the depiction. In addition, Sam Fuller's *The Steel Helmet* (1951) raised the issue of racial conflict "at home" which was ignored in the films made during the Second World War. In this movie, a Black medic is confronted by a wounded Korean prisoner who challenges his loyalty to a country that makes him sit in "the back of the bus." The still-loyal soldier replies: "that's right--a hundred years ago I couldn't even ride a bus, and now I can sit in the back--maybe in fifty years sit in the middle--someday even up front. There's some things you just can't push, Buster."

Indeed, while acknowledging racial divisions in American culture, all three films nonetheless reaffirm their faith in the democratic spirit of America. *All the Young Men* ends with Poitier saving the life of a bigoted "old hand" sergeant, thus earning his respect, with the two of them bonding over the final image of Poitier mowing down waves of the enemy as the soundtrack plays a jaunty version of "When the Saints Come Marching In." And at the end of *Pork Chop Hill*, Franklin finds his "manhood" and voluntarily fights after being implored by Lieutenant Clemens to join an "exclusive club" of men--many who "don't care about Korea" and had it "rough back home" too--but were still willing to die for America.³⁴ Still, the film's mere acknowledgment that some soldiers did not believe in the American military mission was a major departure from the earlier World War Two combat pictures. The post-war Vietnam films would later seize upon this motif and heighten its importance, especially concerning the involvement of African Americans in the conflict.

It was not until later films, such as *A Soldier's Story* (1984), Norman Jewison's movie version of Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play* (1981), that Hollywood took a more uncompromising look at the realities faced by a "Negro" unit stationed in the American South during World War Two. Although the Black characters in the film are anxious to fight for their country, they are relegated to support service duties amidst a hostile, racist population in the deep South. When a Black officer arrives to investigate a murder of a Black soldier, audiences are presented with a rare cinematic depiction of a non-white character in possession of a commissioned rank.³⁵ While reinscribing many of these historic images and gaps in representation regarding race and class, some of the later Vietnam War films would also be the first of the combat genre to explore how racial tensions "back home" in America affected the interaction of Black and white soldiers in combat. What such portrayals also revealed was a willingness after the 1960s to acknowledge a sense of disillusionment with the American value system. During the Second World War, the OWI monitored Hollywood's output of films in order to project an image of a "unified, harmonious society" in which "class, ethnic, and racial divisions evaporated in the foxholes and on the assembly line."³⁶ The films about the Vietnam War were not checked by any such governing body, and thus had the freedom to question issues of race, class, and culture in relation to America's military involvement in that conflict.

But what of the treatment of America's enemies during World War II? Hollywood's aim, after all, was not only to foster patriotism and unity at home in its representation of "good Americans," but also to arouse "properly directed hatred" (a term employed by the OWI) towards the German, Italian, and Japanese enemies. The OWI wanted the combat films to ensure that the average American's hatred was directed at the

government "systems" of these totalitarian countries, which were portrayed as standing in direct opposition to our democratic institutions, as opposed to individualized leaders or the entire "peoples" of each respective nation.³⁷ What resulted on film, however, did in fact often attack the particular "peoples," with the Japanese coming under far greater vilification than their German or Italian counterparts. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as well as reports of their atrocities in the Pacific accounted for a share of this difference, but the consistently racist nature of the depiction of the Japanese in these films also reflected America's long-standing cultural bias towards the non-white Other.

And while the OWI advised the studios not to depict the Japanese as "a little buck-toothed treacherous 'Jap'," ³⁸ this was in fact the common image that emerged in the body of combat films set in the Pacific Theatre. As Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black acknowledged in their study of World War Two films *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, the OWI was fighting a "national reflex" regarding America's long history of "virulent anti-Japanese prejudice." Such attitudes both influenced and rationalized the internment of Japanese-American citizens on the West Coast during the war, who were suspected of loyalty to the Japanese Emperor because of their skin color.³⁹ As is well known, no such precautions were taken against Italian-Americans or German-Americans.

The "Japs" or "Nips" as they were called in typically derogatory fashion, akin to the commonly used slurs against the Vietnamese such as "gooks" and "slopes" in later films, appeared on the silver screen as treacherous and sly, capable of heinous acts of betrayal and barbarism which would be unthinkable to an American. Thus, a common motif of these films was the notion of "dirty Japs" who did not play by the "rules"⁴⁰ of war, which offended the much vaunted American sense of fair play and honor. Representative

examples include the opening sequence of John Farrow's *Wake Island* (1942), which shows a Japanese diplomat oozing with insincerity as he falsely toasts America and pledges peace while his government prepares to attack Pearl Harbor. Other scenes depict Japanese pilots gloating over a defenseless American plane, or fiendishly bayoneting American prisoners. In Lewis Seiler's *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), a wily group of Japanese pretend to surrender and then massacre an American unit and their captain. Such "Jap" deceptions became a fixture in subsequent World War Two combat films such as Lewis Milestone's *Halls of Montezuma* (1950). This film and others like it were part of the "third wave" of World War Two combat films described by Basinger, in which a greater sense of gritty "reality" was injected into the standard story conventions and patterns.⁴¹

And as with the jungles of Vietnam in later war films, the "geography" of the war in the Pacific arena reinforced American perceptions that they were fighting a primitive enemy who was comfortable in the wilds beyond the restraints of decent, "civilized" society.⁴² When the battle-hardened Sergeant "Hook" finds one comrade shot in the back after a night ambush during *Guadalcanal Diary*, for instance, he decries them for "hidin' up in the trees like apes." The movie also contains numerous scenes of "Jap" soldiers who wear branches and leaves in order to blend into the jungle and thus ambush their American opponents more effectively. The inference, of course, is that the "ape-like" Japanese, with their more bestial natures, were willing to go to any lengths to win the war--including hiding in trees, holes, and caves like animals. One striking contrast between these depictions of the Japanese and the later representations of the Vietnamese opponent is that the "Japs" are eventually flushed out and vanquished by the determination and superior moral character of the Americans. This kind of upbeat, victorious ending does not occur in most Vietnam War films.

Thus, the "Japs" are presented as less than human and not worth worrying one's conscience over. When Private Anderson, new to war, asks the veteran Hook how he "feels about killing people," his sergeant replies "well, it's kill or be killed, ain't it--and besides, those ain't people." The God-like narrator of *Guadalcanal Diary*, who lends a newsreel-like voice of authority and "realism" to the film, alludes to the "Japs" as vermin fit for extermination: "his dead are numbered in hundreds, but the Jap is a persistent foe.... and the men behind those machine guns are fanatics--they'll die at their post, some of them chained to their weapons, rather than surrender. One by one, they must be blasted from the earth that hides them." And while the American troops are generally presented as being morally superior to the deceitful enemy, they do occasionally use the dastardly Japs' own tricks against them. For example, Private Anderson is wounded early on by a Japanese officer who pretends to be dead, and in a later sequence employs the same trick to fool a squad of enemy soldiers. As they walk away, he machine guns them in the back, proclaiming, "that's one you taught me, Tojo." Such occasional lapses from American standards of fair play were typically rationalized as righteous anger in response to "Jap" betrayals during the war. But later combat genre films like *The Steel Helmet* would go much further in presenting inexcusable acts of American brutality, as when a cynical career sergeant machine guns a disrespectful but unarmed prisoner. After Korea, this motif of American boys "going native" and engaging in savage behavior beyond the pale of civilization was taken up and expanded upon as a major issue in the Vietnam War film canon. Interestingly, then, the seeds of such representations can be found in the first and second wave World War Two combat films.

American racial bias against the Japanese enemy is also revealed in our soldiers' attitudes towards the Japanese language, physiognomy, size, and culture. *Halls of Montezuma* includes the ludicrous character of Sergeant Johnson, an eccentric fop complete with English accent, cigarette holder, and a pearl-handled revolver. An "expert" on

Japanese culture and psychology, he is considered an oddball by his peers, with the inference being that only a really weird character would be interested in such an un-American subject. Still, Johnson's so-called "knowledge" is of value in the war, and he can thus offer such profound advice as "tear down his ego, he's rolling in pride and vanity" to an American officer about to question a highly intelligent Japanese officer with "three university degrees." In *Guadalcanal Diary*, soldiers continually make fun of the Japanese soldiers' "slant-eyes," "buck teeth" and diminutive size, and their language is referred to as "hen scratch." After interrogating Japanese prisoners, a wholesome American lad rolls his eyes and moans "can't get much out of 'em--this lingo they talk," righteously indignant over their failure to know the only language that matters--English. As with the depictions of Indians before and after the war and the subsequent portrayal of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in Vietnam War films, the "Jap" enemy usually appeared as a generic stock type, frequently without names or specific character traits. Arrogant, cruel officers who often spoke impeccable English (sometimes learned at American universities before the war--the ingrates!) and fiendishly grinning, brutal soldiers were the norm, unless the American characters labeled them with condescending nicknames such as "Romeo" or "Pretty Boy" as in *Halls of Montezuma*.⁴³ Unlike the casting of non-white actors as Indian warriors in Westerns, however, the Japanese soldiers were usually portrayed by Asian performers, although various nationalities were utilized on the assumption that the American public would not care to discriminate between a Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, etc. The use of "yellowface" was continued in Hollywood after the war in non-combat films such as Marlon Brando's portrayal of Sakini in Daniel Mann's *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956), or with Micky Rooney playing Audrey Hepburn's buck-toothed, bug-eyed Japanese neighbor in Blake Edwards's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961).

Another aspect of this non-individualized representation can be seen with the consistent presentation of hordes of attacking Japanese in many of these films. Even World War Two combat films as late as Sam Fuller's *Merrill's Marauders* (1962) present wave after wave of Japanese falling under American bullets, thereby creating an image of them as an enemy fit only for wholesale slaughter by the Americans. The opposite extreme was a total absencing of the Japanese, as in John Ford's depiction of a squad of PT boat sailors in *They Were Expendable* (1945). Set on and around Bataan in the first year of the war, the film shows attacks on Japanese vessels, Japanese planes bombing and strafing American targets, etc., but never once does the image of a single Japanese character appear. It is certainly understandable that American directors would want to make films depicting the effect of the war on American lives, and absencing of this kind can reflect an aesthetic choice of subject matter without necessarily implying a denigration of the Japanese people. But as Dittmar and Michaud observe, "repeated silence on issues effectively erases them." Furthermore, "calling attention to what does and does not enter the 'canon'" of combat films can illuminate the nature of our cultural agendas and priorities regarding the relationship between history and the "selective" interpretation of those events on film.⁴⁴ Overall, such patterns revealed inherent American tensions and biases involving issues of culture, race, and national mythology, which would be echoed in Hollywood's approach to the Vietnam War film. An exception to this trend was the film *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), a unique Japanese/American co-production which employed both American and Japanese directors (Richard Fleisher, Toshio Masuda, and Kinji Fukasaku) in an attempt to present the bombing of Pearl Harbor from two points of view.⁴⁵ And while the brutality of many Japanese soldiers during the war is well documented, these films make no distinctions between individual Japanese citizens, soldiers, or military leaders. Instead, the entire

population is reduced to the insidious, venomous image of the cruelly-smiling evil "Jap." Koppes and Black note that only one film, Edward Dmytryk's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943), considered the issues of Japanese militarism and nationalism in relation to the causes of the war. This film was unusual for its contention that the Japanese people were not inherently barbaric, but were rather corrupted by a totalitarian military regime.⁴⁶

In his interesting study *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*, Sam Keen analyzes how nation states must convert the act of killing from "murder into patriotism" during wartime. The process of "dehumanizing the enemy," then, is a major propaganda tool in achieving that goal, and he notes the various ways in which governments have attempted to dehumanize their enemies over the years.⁴⁷ Generally, Keen claims that in modern warfare the state has removed any complexities from its consideration of an opponent. The enemy is reduced to a singular category, "to which we may assign any threat about which we do not wish to think clearly." The portrait of the enemy which is assembled usually contains the stereotypical "standard curses and routine insults that have been in use" for centuries.⁴⁸ Thus, the American portrayal of the Japanese as brutal, despised "apes" in various films provided the American soldier with an additional, and necessary, psychological justification for killing them. Keen also commented on the specific ways in which Asians were depicted in other American wars:

We have habitually portrayed Asians as so different from ourselves that they place a low value on life. The old image of Genghis Khan and the Mongol hordes still haunt us and is retooled and pressed into service when needed. American forces in Korea found themselves swamped by an 'ochre horde,' a yellow tide of faceless masses, cruel and nerveless subhumans, the incomprehensible and the inscrutable Chinese, the human sea. Less than a generation later we were face to face with the same archetypically degraded enemy, now labeled 'gooks,' 'dinks,' 'slopes,' in Vietnam.⁴⁹

Keen's study underscores how many of America's racist attitudes about the Japanese during World War Two could be extended to its perception of "Asian" enemies in successive wars. Consequently, the set of signifiers associated with the "Japs" which emerged from the mass of World War Two combat films provided a basis for the later treatment of the Koreans and Vietnamese in Hollywood.

In addition, the Japanese utilized a similar process of dehumanization towards their opponents during the war, as when they referred to the human victims of their medical experiments by the expression "logs of wood."⁵⁰ In his excellent study of the impact of race and culture on the Pacific Theatre of the war entitled *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*, John W. Dower documents how both sides often viewed the "enemy" as less than human. The Japanese, for instance, typically referred to themselves as "the leading race." However, Dower states that Japanese government propaganda documents denied that it "was a race war between colored and white peoples" in order to avoid alienating their German and Italian allies. Nonetheless, "Japanese patriots" often ignored such pronouncements, and many of the propaganda leaflets which were distributed throughout Asia urged "Asiatics" to overthrow the "white peril."⁵¹ As the war progressed and Japan's military position became more tenuous, its propaganda machine increasingly portrayed the Americans as the "demonic Other" in contrast to the "pure self" of the Japanese people (especially in relation to the American bombing of Japanese cities).

Dower also contends that Japan's early victories against the Western allies "exposed the racist underpinnings of the European and American colonial structures. Japan did not invade independent countries in southern Asia. It invaded colonial outposts which the Westerners had dominated for generations, taking absolutely for granted their racial and cultural superiority over their Asian subjects." Indeed, many other Asian countries such as

Burma pledged allegiance to Japan on grounds of racial solidarity, which "placed the war in an East-versus-West, Oriental-versus-Occidental, and ultimately blood-versus-blood context." Of course, these countries did not realize then that the Japanese also perceived themselves as racially superior to many other "colored" races, and would eventually attempt to dominate them through the formation of an Asian empire which they euphemistically labeled as the "Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."⁵² Thus, both sides indulged in racial and cultural stereotyping which undoubtedly contributed to the many acts of brutality which occurred during the savage fighting in the Pacific. In the conclusion to his chapter "War Hates and War Crimes," Dower insightfully observes the following:

atrocities and war crimes played a major role in the propagation of racial and cultural stereotypes. The stereotypes preceded the atrocities, however, and had an independent existence apart from any specific event. Seemingly casual expressions--General Blamey's reference to the infinite superiority of his men; and his call to exterminate the inhuman Japanese, the apes, the vermin; or Japanese references to their purity, and their call to chastise the fiendish foe or kill the Anglo-American devils--such expressions, in actuality, were not at all random. They belonged to webs of perception that had existed for centuries in Western and Japanese culture, and the atrocities were taken as simply confirming their validity.⁵³

Significantly, similar racial preconceptions about the "enemy" during the Vietnam War would also contribute to "war crimes" during that conflict.

But were these issues reflected in the Japanese cinema of the wartime era? In an essay on Japanese films and World War Two, Patricia Lee Masters contends that "nationalism was advanced and made sacred" during the war, although post-war films typically questioned those beliefs as part of a more probing critical discourse (interestingly, this would also happen in the US after we "lost" the war in Vietnam). As in America, the government ensured that wartime films promoted "national policy," although she notes that Japanese movies mostly ignored images of the enemy. Thus, "there was rarely a close encounter with the enemy Other as there was in American wartime films."⁵⁴ In contrast,

they emphasized the sacrifices of their heroes as well as the "spiritual" aspects of war in an effort to encourage young men to fulfill their military duties. While Dower and other historians have provided ample documentation regarding Japan's use of propaganda to create an image of the enemy as a subhuman Other, oddly enough their cinema was not typically used to support this campaign. In her article "The 'Peace Dividend' in Japanese Cinema," Marie Thorsten Morimoto calls this absention "the most conspicuous mystery concerning wartime Japanese cinema."⁵⁵ Overall, my discussion of Japanese propaganda and cinema during the war clearly illustrates that the desire to stereotype and absent the enemy has not been the sole province of the American government, people, and film industry. Rather, as Keen and Dower suggest, peoples and nations of various races and cultures have employed such strategies in wars throughout history.

Nonetheless, our depiction of the Japanese on screen reflected cultural and racial prejudices which transcended mere wartime feelings of hostility. Indeed, our other wartime enemies, the European Germans and Italians, were pointedly spared the kinds of scurrilous depictions which the Japanese experienced during and after the war. An OWI analysis of the representation of the various enemies on screen concluded that the Germans were typically portrayed as competent soldiers who did not support Nazism. Thus, responsibility for brutality during the war was directly placed on the Nazi party or police organizations like the SS or Gestapo, with many soldiers and the German people as a whole absolved as "good Germans" who were distinct from the Nazis. The report also stated that the officers of the German army were "gentleman with whom it would be possible to treat as an equal." The OWI concluded that in films the "cruel and barbarous" Japanese, on the other hand, "can only be killed."⁵⁶ In contrast to the Germans, the savagery of the Japanese was seen as an intrinsic part of their make-up, and few

distinctions were made between "good Japanese" and the militaristic political system of Japan.

The Fascist Italians were also spared any ethnic disparagement, and "the dual power of Italian-Americans in the New Deal Coalition and at the box-office window caused the OWI and Hollywood to tread lightly on the Mediterranean sensibilities."⁵⁷ In fact, anti-Italian remarks were deleted from the English import film *In Which We Serve* in 1943 so as not to offend Italian-Americans sensitive to slurs against "Eye-ties." The OWI was not as concerned about offending Japanese-Americans, I suppose, since many of them were locked up in internment camps and not attending movies of any kind. The Italians were typically portrayed as a less menacing, more bumbling enemy than their German counterparts, most likely due to their lack of success during the war. While the strutting Mussolini was easily ridiculed, the more menacing Hitler and the German army were afforded a grudging respect as a smart, determined, and tough enemy.⁵⁸ German leaders were even deemed suitable subjects for American combat films such as Stuart Heisler's *Hitler* (1962) or Billy Wilder's film about the famous tank commander Rommel *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943). Aside from *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, Hollywood has shown little interest in depicting Japanese leaders on screen, or illuminating the war in retrospect from "their" side.

That these distinctions have continued in post-war representations is interesting in light of our subsequent awareness about wartime German atrocities and the Holocaust (although the American government knew about the extermination camps before 1945). While new evidence is presented to this day which reveals the complicity of the larger German populace in the Nazis' racial agendas,⁵⁹ Hollywood has continued to make a distinction between the brutal Nazis and the typical German who was just "doing his job," not unlike our American boys. Scenes like the close-ups of American soldiers grinning

with glee after watching "Jap" bunkers incinerated by flame-throwers in *Halls of Montezuma* rarely occur in Hollywood's treatment of the European enemy on screen. As Dower commented, "there was no Japanese counterpart to the 'good German' in the popular consciousness of the Western Allies."⁶⁰ In part, the distinctions in treatment were the result of a world view which positioned the Japanese as another foreign, Asian Other, in contrast to the Germans and Italians with whom America shared a common European heritage and culture.

Indeed, the antebellum film industry established a negative treatment of Asians which went far beyond any clichéd depictions of white European ethnic groups on screen. Before the outbreak of World War Two, Hollywood released a number of films which stereotyped all immigrant newcomers to America in various ways. In his introduction to *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*, Randall M. Miller notes that such screen images as the "Jewish tailor, Irish cop, Italian grocer, German hausfrau, and Polish butcher" were firmly established by the 1930s.⁶¹ Although these characterizations were rather one-dimensional, they also portrayed such white ethnic groups as good, hard-working, citizens of the American "melting pot." In contrast, Richard Oehling contends in his essay "The Yellow Menace: Asian Images in American Film" that early cinematic representations of the Japanese and Chinese typically painted them as "*diabolical* Asians" who "connived the destruction of America in general and white women in particular."⁶² He also believed that such depictions partly reflected concerns among Americans beginning in the late-nineteenth century over the rise in Asian immigration. As with other newcomers to America, the Chinese and Japanese immigrants (usually lumped together as one race) were perceived as economic competitors for jobs, which contributed to anti-Asian prejudice and stereotyping. Unlike the white European immigrants, however, the Japanese and Chinese were also seen as a sexual threat via the concerns over miscegenation and "racial mongrelization" which abounded at that time.⁶³

While a smaller group of racist "eugenicists" were also interested in banning immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe on such grounds, these attitudes were more prevalent in racist reactions towards the Asian groups in America at that time.

Oehling does note that by the 1930s Hollywood was beginning to make distinctions between the Japanese and Chinese on film. For instance, Sidney Franklin's 1937 cinematic adaptation of Pearl Buck's novel *The Good Earth* presented Chinese peasants as simple, hardworking, and ultimately admirable people. The popular character of Charlie Chan, the intelligent detective who spouted popular fortune cookie-like maxims, also emerged on screen in this decade for the first time.⁶⁴ While still stereotypical, these images were at least more benign than the "white slaver" depictions of the 1920s. Nonetheless, the images of the European immigrants on film in this period were generally much more positive regardless of their stock natures (e.g., the Irish as policemen contributing to the safety of the larger society). Thus, the film industry has traditionally eschewed complex characterizations in favor of relying on stock character types and schematic genre conventions. While such practices have affected the representation of various ethnicities on screen, Hollywood's depiction of Asian peoples (initially Chinese and Japanese) was also influenced from the onset by wider American fears and misconceptions regarding racial, cultural, and economic issues.

The abundance of such negative images in Hollywood meant that distinguishing America's Chinese allies and other Asian friends (e.g., the Filipinos) from the "treacherous Japs" was an especially delicate issue for Hollywood and the OWI to contend with during the war. How to reconcile the savage depictions of and slurs against the Japanese, which were rooted in a racial taxonomy and fear of the Oriental Other to a significant degree, while portraying the so-called "good" Asians in a different light? Treating the Chinese as a distinctive Asian "race" in pre-war films like *The Good Earth* helped this cause, and the World War Two combat films made a strong effort to establish a binary representation of

Asians involving the "bad" Japs versus the "valiant" Chinese, Filipinos, etc. Not surprisingly, despite any and all good intentions, America's allies were equally misrepresented in these pictures as well. Most typically, the producers and directors of these films deal with America's Asian allies by relegating them to background roles. The movies set in the Pacific Theatre almost always contain shots of natives who, like their Japanese film counterparts, are usually nameless and voiceless. When they do speak, it is usually in the same pidgin-English used by the American Indians on film, and they are present only to support the courageous mission of the Americans. In *They Were Expendable*, for example, the audience is given images of Filipinos singing "My Country Tis' of Thee" in empathy with American sailors who have just learned of the bombing of Pearl Harbor; a Filipino waiter who proclaims "Hot! Biscuits! Very Good!" while serving American officers and their female guest; and an Asian in an American navy uniform who stands beaming with pride behind General MacArthur on a PT boat (is he American born? Filipino? Does the director know or care?). In other moments, the Filipinos are depicted as smiling in support of the awe-inspiring Americans, or waiting with heads bowed, complacent and dignified, as John Wayne's squad buries one of their own. None of these people are conceived as individualized characters with opinions, thoughts, relationships, desires, or personal histories. Rather, they are only portrayed in fleeting images which convey and support stock Hollywood character conceptions such as the "dignified Oriental."

And even though these films tried to portray the peoples of the various Pacific Islands as "friends" of the Americans, racial slurs still emerged in films like *Guadalcanal Diary*. A scene in the picture shows two dark-skinned, bushy-haired "natives" helping to carry equipment and providing information about the whereabouts of the Japanese troops. One of them is wounded, so an officer benevolently tells a Marine to take him to an aid station, as "he's a friend of ours." As the smiling, servile "friends" pass by, one of the

soldiers sputters "look at the hair on those guys--what a spot for a mattress factory!" So, even our allies or "friends" are still the source of an exotic, mysterious Other to the American mind--so strange, so foreign to our ways, and ultimately unknowable.

Still, a few films were made which did feature American allies in larger supporting roles. The idealized multi-racial unit of *Bataan*, for example, includes a Filipino scout named Salazar who risks his life to seek help behind enemy lines. Later, his body is found mutilated by the ruthless Japanese, a motif which would be repeated frequently in Vietnam War films vis-à-vis American troops and the Viet Cong. The OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures Film Analysis Section released a memo which praised *Bataan* as follows: "it makes an especially good contribution in its handling of U.N. characters--especially the Filipinos. The producer has agreed to delete a line in which the Japs are referred to as 'little yellow rats,' leaving out 'yellow'"⁶⁵ (the latter line reflected the OWI's lukewarm efforts to control racist depictions of the "Japs"). In typical fashion, the OWI lauded the relegation of the Filipino soldier to a subordinate role as appropriate in terms of the larger American war effort. Kathryn Kane noted that the Filipino "presence" in these films tended to "complicate things," in that "no reason is ever given for the American presence in the islands prior to the war." It is simply a given that the Americans have a right to be on these islands as part of the war effort, ignoring their earlier conquest of the Philippines.⁶⁶ Similarly, few combat films about the Vietnam War would ever address the sensitive political issue as to our involvement in what was arguably a civil war or internal conflict there.

The OWI's efforts to have Hollywood portray a "new," freedom loving China also resulted in a run of "B" pictures such as *Escape From Hong Kong* (1942), in which the Chinese were placed in a subordinate role to various leading American characters. Towards the end of the war, films like Jack Conway and Harold Bucquet's *Dragon Seed* (1944) were released which sought to emphasize the Chinese contribution to the war effort.

Its atypical emphasis on presenting leading Chinese characters was undercut by the casting of white American actors like Walter Huston in those roles.⁶⁷ Again, nationalist concerns would alter the nature of these depictions in the Cold War era, as the Chinese would soon be portrayed as "inscrutable Orientals" with no regard for human life in films about the Korean War like *Pork Chop Hill*. Ho Chi Minh, the post-war Communist leader of North Vietnam, was another former American ally during World War Two who would undergo a similar reversal of fortune by being "demonized" in later Vietnam War films. While politics and national interest have impacted on the shifting depictions of Asians of various nationalities in American combat films over a period of time, our historic attitudes towards these non-Western, non-Caucasian races and cultures created a larger frame of reference which affected the images which emerged on screen.

While the films of Hollywood have created the most popular and dominant representations of race and culture for American audiences, various plays depicting America's war experiences before Vietnam also contributed to the larger historic context in which the cinematic and theatrical texts of the Vietnam era would operate. And not unlike Hollywood, the American theatre also has a long tradition of portraying both American-born minorities and Asian foreigners as Others. James Moy, for example, contends that:

performances displaying Asianness before the end of the nineteenth century were part of an imperialist institution of representation which seemed to be preoccupied with containment and control of the Chinese in particular and Asians in general. The tendency to show the Asian as witless, sexless, and therefore harmless emerged as the Western colonialist powers were consolidating their economic subjugation of East Asia.⁶⁸

Moy also acknowledges that the nineteenth-century stage was riddled with stereotypical representations of various ethnic groups, but makes the interesting point that distorted images of the Europeans were eventually replaced by "dominant title-role characters in realistic dramas," while "Asians in America were denied access to the real." Thus, plays

like Eugene O' Neill's *Marco Millions* (1927) and David Belasco's 1900 version of John Luther Long's *Madame Butterfly* (in which a young Japanese Geisha kills herself over a dishonorable white sailor, Pinkerton) offered up visions of an exotic Asia filled with bizarre pageantry and characters full of "Oriental" wisdom and passivity.⁶⁹

These stage traditions and practices thus created a shared set of images which helped to define Asians as Others for American audiences well before the advent of the film industry. The numerous plays which were written about our twentieth-century wartime experiences served to reinforce and extend these views into the 1990s. Initially, though, the majority of plays written during and after World War One expressed strong anti-war sentiments. Collections of war dramas like *Peace Plays*, compiled and edited in 1932 by A.P. Sanford, or Percival Wilde's *The Unseen Host and Other War Plays* in 1917, frequently attempted to promote international goodwill and an effort to understand the enemy. Florence Brewer Boeckel's *The Whole World's Christmas Tree*, for instance, features characters such as "American Boy," "Eskimo Child," and "Japanese Girl," stressing each child's equally viable national contribution to Christmas. In his introduction, Wilde says his collection is "a book of viewpoints," and it does in fact contain plays from the perspectives of soldiers from various countries. While Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* also represented the war from the viewpoint of non-Americans, other films tended to stress the American experience at home and overseas in the larger context of denouncing the devastation created by the war. A good example was Raoul Walsh's *What Price Glory?* (1926), which was based on the popular play by Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings. Following the adversarial relationship between two American soldiers in France, the film presents a "war is hell" theme through its gritty depiction of fighting in the trenches and loss of life. The original play, more than most others of the period, paralleled the cinematic recreations of the war which established the German enemy as a distinct Other.⁷⁰

The plays written during World War Two, however, closely followed the OWI's goals of arousing patriotism and drumming up "properly directed hatred" against the enemy. Indeed, various collections of radio plays from the war such as *Free World Theatre* or *This is War!* were designed "to inspire, to frighten" and "to inform" the American listener about the war.⁷¹ Some plays such as Arch Oboler's "Rip Von Dinkel of Nuremburg," which represented the Nazis as buffoons,⁷² echoed comedic films like Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). However, the majority of them portrayed the Germans as a tough, fearsome enemy not to be taken lightly, and one who could only be defeated by a totally united American effort. Again, the theatre did not differ remarkably from Hollywood in this regard.

The stage also mirrored the film industry in its emphasis on representing the armed forces as a cross-section of Americana. Thus, plays like Stephen Vincent Binet's *Your Army* describes a "people's army, raised and equipped and run by a free people, made up of Bill Jones and Bennie Cohen and Stan Wocinski, Burt Anderson, and Charlie Pappas, the kid who dropped out of college when he heard about Pearl Harbor, and the blonde kid who used to pop sodas at the Combination Drugstore last year."⁷³ Such a description conjures up the standard popular images of wholesome, well-intentioned American "boys" of varying ethnicities and walks of life shown in numerous combat films of the war years. Moss Hart's *Winged Victory* (which was produced in 1943 and featured a cast made up of members from the various armed services) followed the adventures of two typically all-American lads from "Mapleton, Ohio" as they join the Air Force in the hopes of fighting the Japanese in the Pacific. Along the way, they encounter the usual stock genre types like "Pinky" from Texas and "Irving" from Brooklyn and Allan becomes a pilot in the Pacific. At the end of the play, Allan and Irving express hope for a better future after the war, which would lend "meaning" to the conflict. In Allan's words:

I'm a different guy from the kid who sat in that back yard and waited for a letter a year ago. It's more than just growing up. I'm different inside. Why, think of it--me from Mapleton, Ohio, and you from Brooklyn--we've been in Australia and the South Pacific, and we've flown with English kids and French kids and Chinese kids and Russian kids and some of us have died right with them. I've got a different idea of the world than I had a year ago. There's no boundaries in the sky. I wonder if they realize that back home.⁷⁴

What is missing from this admirable statement of international cooperation is the multiplicity of voices from America's non-white minorities. While willing to plug the efforts of America's allies like the Chinese and Russians, *Winged Victory* and the bulk of plays about the war ignore the presence of Black or Mexican American troops in their idealized presentation of America. Thus, the theatre of World War Two goes even further than Hollywood in erasing the images of domestic American Others from representations of the war.

One interesting exception to this larger pattern was the radio play *Something About Joe* by Milton Merlin and Clarence Muse, which revolves around a group of Black soldiers discussing the exploits of a Black messman ("Joe") who rescued a group of his "white comrades" at Guadalcanal. For its time, the play is amazingly frank in its willingness to confront the issue of racial inequality in America. *Something About Joe* openly acknowledges the fact that many Blacks were relegated to non-combat support roles in the service, but also lauds "Joe" for taking the initiative in a combat scenario despite his lowly position. Consequently, his peers feel "he's as big as any admiral on the sea." Another soldier casually wonders if "Satchel Paige is in the major leagues yet?" (referring to the segregation of Black baseball players like Page from the white professional leagues), but another replies that "we're on third base--just round the corner from home." A group of Black soldiers and sailors who have a "date with some no-good skunks named Adolf, Benito and Mr. Tojo" further reinforce this belief in a more racially equitable post-war society:

fightin' for what we've always been fightin'--the same thing! Not for three families in a li'l dark room. Not for Jim Crow! Not pellagra! Not for poll tax! Not for takin' leavin's an' bein' obliged, sir! Not for lynchin'! Against all the things that causes such things.... What we always been' fightin' for--what everybody's wantin'--*together*, now--'cause that's the only way we'll get it--so's we'll be able to hold our heads up and look anybody straight in the face and like him and he'll like us! No Mr. Bigshots anymore. No High-an'-mighty's--an'a world where people don't laugh to hide their crying, but laugh because they're happy.⁷⁵

As with the pre-war Hollywood films which had established cartoon images of Blacks, the history of American drama going back to early plays such as Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* in 1845 (as well as later minstrel shows and even popular musicals such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Showboat* in 1927) featured distorted, cartoon-like Black characters who were frequently servants.⁷⁶ *Something About Joe* is a rare wartime play in that it portrays thoughtful Black characters who question the system, even if they do ultimately support government propaganda aims.⁷⁷ The play's open acknowledgment of "lynchings," "Jim Crow," and the like is also atypical of the films made during the war, which preferred to depict a token "happy" Black or two as part of their fictitious "all-American" units. The acknowledgment of racial injustice and inequality in this play is more akin to "third wave" combat films made during the Korean War era like *Pork Chop Hill*, which raise similar issues but then bury them for the sake of the larger united effort. Of course, *Something About Joe* mirrors *Winged Victory* and numerous other works in its pitch for burying differences to achieve a vision of a greater post-war America, but is unique in that it includes Black Americans in the equation. In the Vietnam era, plays and films would emerge which did not resolve the issue of racism in America so blithely, but the groundwork for those more critical texts was established in some of these earlier examples.

A larger context of disillusionment with America is also hinted at in some of the plays which emerged at the end of the war or in the immediate post-war era. Harry Brown's *A Sound of Hunting* (1945), for example, focuses on a battle-weary group of

GIs in Italy. Like later wave World War Two films such as *The Halls of Montezuma*, the play offers a more "realistic" depiction of combat by stressing the hunger, fatigue, and physical discomfort of the soldiers. And while the squad consists of the usual white ethnic mix, most of them dislike the ineffective, "intellectual" Private Small, with the play's main conflict revolving around whether or not they should risk their lives to rescue him. Many of the soldiers hate the war but are still begrudgingly willing to "get the job done." Nonetheless, the lofty speeches of *Winged Victory* simply do not exist in the world of this play. Similarly, William Wister Hanes's *Command Decision* (1947) focuses on the bloody attrition rate of a group of American flyers stationed in England, noting how the pilots must rely on alcohol in order to muster the courage to continue their suicidal bombing missions over Germany. While ultimately acknowledging the worth of the war effort, the play also paints a critical picture of the American system in marked contrast to the images of unified, cheerful soldiers and their noble, patrician officers found in most wartime plays and films. Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons* (1947) expresses a more overt sense of betrayal from the war, as when the character of the mother bitterly tells a veteran: "they made an old man out of you ... it breaks my heart to see what happened to all the children. How we worked and planned for you, and you end up no better than us."⁷⁸ In his book *Wartime*, World War Two veteran Paul Fussell argues that the mass destruction which characterized the war impacted negatively on its combatants in ways which the "sanitized" fictional depictions of the conflict typically ignored. As he puts it, "what annoyed the troops and augmented their sardonic, contemptuous attitude toward those who viewed them from afar was in large part this public innocence about the bizzare damage suffered by the human body in modern war."⁷⁹ The air of disillusionment and cynicism in some of these post-war works anticipated the later, more savage indictments of American society seen in plays about the Vietnam War such as David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* (1969).

But wartime plays like *Winged Victory* and others such as Arch Oboler's radio work *The People March* (dedicated to and about the "fighting men and women of the United Nations") echoed Hollywood's efforts to "sanitize" the war and portray its allies--both European and Asian--in a favorable light.⁸⁰ As with the films discussed earlier, the results of these plays were mixed despite their best intentions. John Patrick's play *Hasty Heart* (1945), for example, is set in a hospital with a diverse group of white allied patients, as well as one "Basuto" native who the others make clean-up the ward. Patrick's initial description of him describes "the black head of a tremendous Basuto ... he has large puffed lips and a bullet-shaped cranium." The men and nurse Margaret treat him like an affectionate pet, and alternately refer to him as a "bloody cannibal," "brute" (who doesn't speak English, much to Margaret's annoyance), and "British subject." Still, in one exchange of dialogue, the not-so-bright Basutos are praised as "good fighters" with the quaint habit of saving up their pay so they can return to "Basutoland" and buy wives and oxen.⁸¹ Thus, the play suggests that the Basutos possess some "redeeming" qualities despite their obvious primitivism.

Patrick's later Broadway hit *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1953) features a similarly child-like group of natives. The play is set in a post-war Okinawan village which is supposed to receive schooling in "American" ways from a Captain Fisby, who soon falls prey to the exotic charms and simple pleasures of native life. While on one level the play humorously satirizes ethnocentric American attitudes towards the "natives," it also condescends in its depiction of the Okinawans as "noble savages" who understand the value of a purer lifestyle, which seduces the workaholic Americans with its intoxicating decadence. The Okinawans appreciate the material wealth of America and are inherently good capitalists, as evidenced by their success in the liquor business. Fisby's superior officer Purdy, for example, compliments the crafty native Sakini as "really an American ... he has get-up-and-go." Nonetheless, the Okinawan culture is marked as irrevocably

distinct from that of America's. Fisby waxes poetic about his halcyon days on the island, telling Sakini that "when an August moon rises in the East" he will "always remember what was beautiful in my youth--and what I was wise enough to leave beautiful." Thus, he benevolently "chooses" not to "impose" his way of life on his mistress "Lotus-Blossom" by bringing her back to America, as he is enough of a pragmatist to recognize that "she'd be different" back home--an Other--because of her skin color. In the world view of this play, such Otherness can obviously never be eradicated--Lotus-Blossom will always be one of "them" in good old America. In its last scene, Fisby and Purdy praise Okinawa as "a land of adventure ... a land of jade and spices ... of Chinese junks and river pirates ... makes a man's blood pound," thereby reinforcing traditional Western preconceptions of a bejeweled, exotic "Orient." The character of Sakini, although possessing a sly intelligence, also spouts clichéd pearls of "Eastern wisdom" in the standard pidgin-English used by all "foreigners" in Hollywood films of the studio era. And in keeping with the casting conventions for Asian characters during this period, Sakini was performed on stage by Caucasian actor David Wayne (he also played Oz the Irish leprechaun in the musical *Finian's Rainbow* and seemed to specialize in quaint caricatures), and in the film version by Marlon Brando complete with slanty-eyed make-up.⁸²

Another post-war play set against the background of the Pacific Theatre of operations was Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's popular musical *South Pacific* (1949), which also reinforced "Orientalist" themes despite an effort to portray America's "native" allies in a positive manner. Interweaving two love stories, one between French planter Emile de Becque and all-American girl Nellie Forbush and the other between the wholesome Lieutenant Cable and the "Tokonese" beauty Liat, the play explores the issues of racism and conflicting cultural values between the couples. Nellie wants to marry de Becque but fears she cannot love his "half-breed" children, while Cable dumps Liat after

falling in love with her when he realizes that he cannot bring such an Other back home "to the states."⁸³

In an article entitled "The 'Oriental' Musicals [*South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*] of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia," Bruce McConachie contends that these popular entertainments helped establish a world view in the 1950s which "Americanized" Asian cultures and reinforced America's belief "in their status as an exceptional people." While the authors criticize racism in songs like "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," McConachie believes that "the ideology of romantic love" is the real basis of their "attack on prejudice." For Rodgers and Hammerstein, "culture is only skin deep, especially in matters of the heart." Despite their well-intentioned liberalism, however, McConachie believes, and I agree, that one result of such thinking is the narcissistic notion that the "Orientals" of *South Pacific* and the other two musicals are "just like 'us,' a country of good people, yearning to free themselves from external oppression" underneath their yellow skins. Such ideas served to support a similarly ethnocentric foreign policy which rationalized the American presence in the East "on humanitarian as well as political grounds," and eventually "the use of force to save them from Communist 'others'." Ultimately, the musicals continued the long Western tradition (as discussed by Edward Said) of "'writing' the Orient to fit its own needs." McConachie also feels that while happily indulging in the trappings of the exotic, feminine, and seductive East as in the song "Bali Hai" in *South Pacific*, these musicals distanced themselves from the European image of the "Orient" derived from authors like Joseph Conrad as a place of menace and the "vengeful return of repressed desires." Rather, Rodgers and Hammerstein's emphasis on showing that the Tokonese et al. are really like good Americans underneath this outer image "allowed Americans to cloak their racism as benevolence and their lust for power as entitlement."⁸⁴ Clearly, the images of and attitudes towards Asian cultures and peoples created in the plays and films of the 1940s and 1950s

would have a significant impact on the interaction between Americans and Vietnamese during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the subsequent fictional representations of those intercultural encounters.

What then of the images of the Asian "enemy"--the Japanese--on stage during World War Two? While characters typically called them "Japs" as in the movies and occasionally resorted to epithets such as "dirty, stinking ... rats"⁸⁵ after learning about Pearl Harbor or the like, the plays of this era are dramatically different from the films through their lack of racist imagery and vocabulary in representing the Japanese. Plays like Norman Corwin's *This is War!* and *To the Young* stressed the evils and threat of Axis totalitarianism in general, whether of the German or Japanese variety, while his *The Enemy* painted gruesome images of both German and Japanese atrocities, blaming their leaders and governmental systems for these horrors (as opposed to the larger Japanese populace or character as in most films).⁸⁶ Thus, the kinds of distinctions made between the Germans and Japanese in Hollywood seemed less apparent in the theatre. One of the few plays which actually depicts combat in the Pacific, Arthur Laurents's 1946 *Home of the Brave*, is more akin to the movies of the period both in its approach to the war (i.e., conveying the visual spectacle of men in battle) and in its racist perceptions of the Japanese. The play is eager to condemn American anti-semitism, but typically refers to the "Japs" by epithets such as "squints" and only shows them diabolically torturing a wounded American soldier in order to flush out his comrades.⁸⁷ It is unarguable that Japanese (and American) soldiers participated in such actions during the war, but once again no distinctions are made between individual characters. Overall, however, the bulk of the World War Two plays offer a far more balanced view of the Japanese than do their cinematic counterparts. While undoubtedly generous in comparison to the views of other American playwrights, Arch Oboler's *The People's March* even goes so far as to offer its vision for a post-war "new democracy" to "you Matsummokos out there" and "new security ... not merely in the

United Nations, but also in Germany and Italy and Japan."⁸⁸ The OWI and Hollywood, however, rarely extended such lofty sentiments to the opposition in the context of an all-out, "total" war effort.

The theatrical response to the Vietnam War would also differ from that of Hollywood's in that many playwrights encountered the war on stage during the years of the conflict. With the exception of John Wayne's film *The Green Berets* (1968), the mainstream American cinema avoided the war until well after our withdrawal of troops in 1973, choosing instead to concentrate on "home front" issues during the fighting. Regardless of those differences, a cinematic and theatrical tradition of Otherness in relation to both Asians and non-Caucasian American minorities was established here long before playwrights and directors attempted to recreate the Vietnam War on stage and film. The long-standing images and perceptions in our culture of these "different" races and identities were reflected and reinforced in countless Westerns, combat films, and war plays. All of these earlier works thus created a paradigm for how Hollywood and the theatre would treat our next wartime Other--the Asian Vietnamese--in representing race and culture in plays and films about the Vietnam War.

Endnotes

1. Shohat and Stam, 100.
2. Ibid., 102.
3. Ibid., 104, 109, and 103.
4. *The Western*, 120 min., The New York Center for Visual History/American Cinema Series, 1995, videocassette. Another interesting "revisionist" depiction of the American West is the made-for-television movie *Buffalo Soldiers*, directed by Charles Haid, 7 December 1997, TNT, which explored the little-known activities of the all-Black Tenth Cavalry unit of the US army.
5. In considering the "myth of America" in his book *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 6, Richard Slotkin defines a mythology as "a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of complex metaphors."
6. Corliss, 59.
7. Leo Cawley, "Refighting the War: Why the Movies are in Vietnam," *Village Voice*, 8 September 1988, 21.
8. Oliver Stone, *Platoon* (Great Britain: Ebury Press, 1986; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 129. Citing *Platoon* in this regard is especially informative in that Stone's film has been widely praised as one of the most "realistic" films of the Vietnam War cycle, yet it too mediates the war from a perspective which is influenced by cultural and national perceptions.
9. *The Western*, American Cinema Series, videocassette.
10. Ibid.
11. Slotkin, 21.
12. Ibid., 22.
13. *The Western*, American Cinema Series, videocassette; *The Searchers*, directed by John Ford, 119 min., Warner Brothers, 1956, videocassette; and *Rio Grande*, directed by John Ford, 105 min., Republic Pictures, 1950, videocassette. Shohat and Stam note that many other films, including *Birth of a Nation*, 187 min., directed by D.W. Griffith, Epoch Producing Corp, 1915; *Last of the Mohicans*, directed by George B. Seitz, 91 min., United Artists, 1936; and *Drums Along the Mohawk*, directed by John Ford, 103 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1939, "have perpetuated the rape and rescue trope" in the American consciousness, "by which virginal white women and at times dark women are rescued from dark men" (156). Thus, the fear of a loss of sexual power as represented by

the encroachment of "dark men" on "white women" seems an especially potent and recurring theme in the American frontier mythology.

14. *The Unforgiven*, directed by John Huston, 120 min., United Artists, 1960, videocassette.

15. Various other American minority groups have suffered similar indignities in their representation in American culture. See the following references for a more detailed discussion of these issues: Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: the African-American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); M. Annette Jaimes, ed. *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992); Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981); Guy Garcia, "Burying the Frito Bandito Once and For All," *New York Times*, 30 January 1994, 32, 40; and Martha Southgate, "A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to Prime Time," *New York Times*, Magazine Section, 30 October 1994, 52-55 [regarding comedienne Margaret Cho's sitcom debut].

16. Shohat and Stam, 189.

17. Ward Churchill, in Jaimes, 237; quoted in Shohat and Stam, 194. *Little Big Man*, directed by Arthur Penn, 150 min., National General Pictures, 1970, videocassette; *Soldier Blue*, 114 min., directed by Ralph Nelson, Avco-Embassy, 1970; and *A Man Called Horse*, directed by Elliot Silversten, 114 min., National General, 1970, videocassette.

18. *Dances With Wolves*, directed by Kevin Costner, 181 min., Orion, 1990, videocassette. See Geraldine Baum, "Kevin Costner's Dance with the Sioux," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1995, 5, 41-42; Julie Lew's "Hollywood's War on Indians Draws to a Close," *New York Times*, 7 October 1990, 15, 18-19; and Angela Aleiss, "Le Bon Savage: Dances With Wolves and the Romantic Tradition," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15 (1991): 92, where she analyzes the film as follows: "the noble savage, according to 18th century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is an individual living in a 'pure state of nature'--gentle, wise, uncorrupted by the vices of civilization. Producer-director Kevin Costner brings this vision to his film *Dances With Wolves*, and thus he creates a nation of Sioux Indians living in a golden age, free from European social convention and removed from the failings of 'civilization.' His film is less about Indian tradition than European romanticism. Its white hero longs for an Arcadian wilderness, pursues his own 'dream woman,' and searches for a nature uncontaminated by contemporary society. Costner's vision of Sioux life before white contact is a chimerical dream of native American existence, a portrait of a people doomed to extinction."

19. Andrew Sarris, "The Screen at the End of the Tunnel," *Village Voice*, 8 September 1987, 27.

20. Basinger, 89.

21. Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 92.

22. Basinger, 88.
23. *A Midnight Clear*, directed by Keith Gordon, 107 min., A&M Films/Universal Pictures, 1992, videocassette. *The Combat Film*, 120 min., The New York Center for Visual History/American Cinema Series, 1995, videocassette.
24. Doherty, 100.
25. Kane, 62; and for subsequent quote, 90-91.
26. Ibid., 66.
27. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1972), 561.
28. Kane, 71.
29. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* (New York: The Viking press, 1973), 3-10.
30. Doherty, 207.
31. Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 28, 102. See also Leonard Quart, "Woody Allen's New York," *Cineaste* 19 (1992): 17. Perhaps in response to such charges, Allen's film *Everyone Says I Love You*, 106 min., Miramax, 1996, videocassette, contained an usually visible number of people of color in various roles. Of course, the plot focuses on Allen's usual WASPy, wealthy Upper East Side world, with the Blacks, Asians, and Arab characters relegated to "service" roles such as cops, nurses, cabdrivers, etc. Although his most recent film, *Deconstructing Harry*, Fine Lines Features, City Cinemas: Sutton, New York City, 22 December 1997, finally includes a major African-American character, she turns out to be a drug-taking hooker.
32. Doherty, 220-21.
33. Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120.
34. *All the Young Men*, directed by Hal Bartlett, 87 min., Columbia Pictures, 1960, videocassette; *Pork Chop Hill*, directed by Lewis Milestone, 97 min., United Artists, 1959, videocassette; and *The Steel Helmet*, directed by Samuel Fuller, 84 min., Lippert, 1951, videocassette. The images and motifs established in previous depictions of the Japanese on film are highly evident in such films about the Korean War, albeit with "adjustments" at times. Examples include a still hidden (although not in the jungle this time), deceitful enemy who spring "unfair" surprise attacks on the Americans, or scenes of attacking hordes at night--complete with blood-curdling bugles and savage war cries--when the enemy does choose to fight "in the open." The image of the perfidious "Oriental" is especially well-entrenched, and blatantly appears in films like *Pork Chop Hill* where an emotionless Chinese "negotiator" takes out his translation device in boredom while his passionate American counterpart implores him to save the lives of the soldiers on both sides. As a result, the morally indignant American denounces him as follows to an aide: "these aren't just Orientals, they're Communists ... they picked it [the hill] because it's

worth nothing--that makes it a test of strength, pure and simple ... they're willing to spend lives for nothing, or what seems nothing. That's what they want to know. Are we willing to do that as they are?" Thus, the "Oriental" character was even more suspect and dangerous by the time of the conflict in Korea because it was also "Communist," a view which would be reinforced in early films about the Vietnam War.

35. See *A Soldier's Story*, directed by Norman Jewison, 101 min., Columbia Pictures, 1984, videocassette; and Charles Fuller, *A Soldier's Play* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1981). Robert Aldrich's film *The Dirty Dozen*, 149 min., MGM, 1967, videocassette, also portrays a Black officer, but one who has disgraced himself by committing murder.

36. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes To War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York and London: The Free Press/Macmillan, Inc., 1987), 328, 325. The authors posit that the decline of the Hollywood studio system and the "Production Code Administration" (which regulated what was morally acceptable in the movies under the sharp eye of Catholic journalist Joseph Ignatius Breen) allowed for an increasing "diversity of viewpoints" (328) in film by the 1960s, which impacted on the content of the Vietnam era films (14-15 and 325-28). See also David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) for a more detailed analysis of the studio system and production code.

37. William R. Weaver, "Films Fostering Hate for Axis Approved," *Motion Picture Herald*, 3 October, 1942, 34; quoted in Doherty, 122.

38. "The Manual for the Motion Picture Industry," April 27, 1943, box 15, OWI files; quoted in Koppes and Black, 250.

39. Ibid.

40. In Gwynne Dwyer's book *War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1985), 76-97, the author questions the Western tradition of "rules" or "civilians" in warfare with the advent of highly technological "total" war in the twentieth century, where huge numbers of civilian noncombatants have been killed as military targets during bombing raids.

41. Basinger, 122.

42. Ibid., 253.

43. *Halls of Montezuma*, directed by Lewis Milestone, 113 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1951, videocassette; *Guadalcanal Diary*, directed by Lewis Seiler, 93 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1943, videocassette; *Wake Island*, directed by John Farrow, 78 min., Paramount Pictures, 1942, videocassette.

44. Dittmar and Michaud, 11, 13, 10.

45. *They Were Expendable*, directed by John Ford, 135 min., MGM, 1945, videocassette; and *Tora!Tora!Tora!*, directed by Richard Fleischer, Toshio Masuda, and Kinji Fukasaku, 143 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1970, videocassette. Kathryn Kane notes that the Japanese sequences in *Tora!* were filmed by Japanese directors and crews

(1993), a marked contrast to Oliver Stone's attempt to portray a Vietnamese perspective on the Vietnam War in *Heaven and Earth* (1993). Stone, a white male American veteran of the war in Vietnam himself, based the film on the memoirs of Vietnamese refugee Le Ly Hayslip.

46. Koppes and Black, 271.

47. Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 12-13.

48. Ibid., 25-26.

49. Ibid., 26.

50. Ibid., 25.

51. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books: 1986), 203, 205, 207.

52. Ibid., 203-261, 5, 9, 6, 7.

53. Ibid., 73.

54. Patricia Lee Masters, "Warring Bodies--Most Nationalistic Selves"; in Dissanayake, 1 and 2.

55. Marie Thorsten Morimoto, "The 'Peace Dividend' in Japanese Cinema--Metaphors of a Demilitarized Nation"; in Dissanayake, 15.

56. Koppes and Black, 282.

57. Doherty, 132.

58. Ibid.

59. For example, see Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's recent book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Knopf, 1996), in which he argues that the issue of a larger German culpability in relation to the Holocaust has been underestimated over the years and deserves to be reexamined.

60. Dower, 8.

61. Randall M. Miller, ed., *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups* (Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer, Publisher, 1980), 6.

62. Richard A. Oehling, "The Yellow Menace: Asian Images in American Film"; in Miller, 187.

63. Ibid., 183.

64. Ibid., 197. Interestingly, Miramax Films has purchased the rights to the Charlie Chan franchise and plans to release a series of films featuring a dashing young Chinese-American actor named Russell Wong as Chan, and directed by well-known Chinese director John Woo. Not surprisingly, their intention has provoked a mixed response among Asian-Americans. Bill Gee, executive director of Asian Cinevision, expressed a hope that they would avoid "stereotypes" since Asian artists were involved in the project. In contrast, playwright Frank Chin charged that "Charlie Chan will always be a symbol of white racism, no matter who plays him," and other critics argued that Chan recalled "a legacy of the stoic, mysterious Oriental" from a regrettable period of Hollywood film making. Somini Sengupta, "Charlie Chan, Retooled for the 90's," *New York Times*, 5 January 1997, 20.

65. Kane, 64; OWI quote from *The Combat Film*, American Cinema Series, videocassette.

66. Kane, 72-73.

67. Koppes and Black, 234-242.

68. Moy, 83.

69. Ibid., 95-101, 84. The well-known "Madame Butterfly" story would later become the basis for *Miss Saigon*, the popular musical about the Vietnam War, which I will discuss in Chapter Six.

70. Florence Brewer Boeckel, *The Whole World's Christmas Tree*; in A.P. Sanford, ed., *Peace Plays* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1932), 22-23. Percival Wilde, *The Unseen Host and Other War Plays* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), vii. Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings, *What Price Glory?*, 1926; in Kenneth Macgowan, ed., *Famous American Plays of the 1920s* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1959), 55-129.

71. Arch Oboler and Stephen Longstreet, eds., *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays* (New York: Random House, 1944). H.L. McClinton, introduction to *This is War!*, Norman Corwin, ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942), vii.

72. Arch Oboler, *Rip Von Dinkel of Nuremberg*; in *Free World Theatre*, 50-55.

73. Stephen Vincent Binet, *Your Army*; in *This is War!*, 72-73.

74. Moss Hart, *Winged Victory: the Air Force Play* (New York: Random House, 1943), 192.

75. Milton Merlin and Clarence Muse, *Something About Joe*; in *Free World Theatre*, 182-183.

76. Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie, *Fashion*; in Arthur Hobson Quinn, ed., *Representative American Plays* (New York: The Century Co., 1921), 293-328. See also Robin Breon, "Show Boat: The Revival, the Racism," *TDR* 39 (Summer 1995): 86-105; James V. Hatch, "Here Comes Everybody: Scholarship and Black Theatre History," in Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie, eds., *Interpreting the Theatrical Past* (Iowa

City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 148-165; and *Black Theatre, the Making of a Movement*, directed by Woody King, Jr., 114 min., California Newsreel, 1978, videocassette, for further discussion of the Black experience in the American theatre.

77. For a consideration of other plays which involve the participation of Blacks in World War Two, see the introduction to the unpublished dissertation by Paul Nadler, "American Theatre and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945--1965" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 1995), 10-15.

78. Harry Brown, *A Sound of Hunting* (New York: Knopf, 1946); William Wister Haines, *Command Decision* (New York: Random House, 1948); Arthur Miller, *All My Sons* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1947), 48, 49.

79. Paul Fussell, *Wartime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 129-164, 267-297, 268, 270.

80. As in Hollywood, the efforts of America's Russian, Filipino, and Chinese allies were lauded in plays like George Faulkner's *The United Nations* (in *This is War!*, 95-116); Allan Scott's *Your Day is Coming*, and Pearl Buck's *China to America* (in *Free World Theatre*, 35-49 and 140-150). While still presenting a somewhat patronizing view of these peoples and cultures, the plays go much further in depicting America's allies as independent people who actively fight for their freedom beyond merely serving to support American leaders.

81. John Patrick, *The Hasty Heart* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1945), 9, 10, 17, 30, 10.

82. Patrick, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1957), 77, 72, 73, 6.

83. The 1958 film version of *South Pacific*, directed by Johusa Logan, 157 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1958, videocassette, restored a song for Lieutenant Cable and Nellie which was cut from the stage version. Entitled "My Girl Back Home," it reinforced these cultural differences with such lyrics as Cable's "my girl back home, I'd almost forgot, that blue eyed kid, I liked her a lot.... How far away, Philadelphia, PA, Princeton, NJ, how far are they--from coconut palms, and banyan trees, and coral sands, and Tokonese."

84. Bruce A. McConachie, "The 'Oriental' Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia," *Theatre Journal* 46 (October 1994): 397-98, 392.

85. Allan Scott, *Your Day is Coming*; in *Free World Theatre*, 42.

86. Corwin, *This is War!*, 3-24; *To the Young*, 265-286; and *The Enemy*, 193-214 (in *This is War!*).

87. Arthur Laurents, *Home of the Brave* (New York: Random House, 1946); in Henry Hewes, ed., *Famous American Plays of the 1940s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1960), 156, 136-76.

88. Oboler, *The People's March*; in *Free World Theatre*, 17-18.

Chapter Two: The War Years--The Vietnamese as the "White Man's Burden" and the "Noble Savage"

As America's involvement in Vietnam escalated during the 1950s and 1960s, both Hollywood and the American theatre faced the question as to how they would present the war for the folks "back home." A few films emerged as early as the 1950s which depicted a "Western" struggle--first French, and then American--against Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. For the most part, however, the film industry did not portray combat situations in Vietnam throughout the duration of the fighting. In contrast, the theatre, which was undergoing a major revolution in style, staging, and content during the 1960s, chose to address the American military involvement in Vietnam in a far more direct manner. Broadway, the most mainstream sector of the theatre, echoed the film community's avoidance of the war by focusing mostly on the presentation of domestic dramas, comedies, and musicals. As a whole, however, the theatre community engaged the war far more fully than did Hollywood, which concentrated its efforts on less direct war-related topics such as youth anti-war protests or "disturbed" Vietnam veterans. Because of the highly controversial nature of the war, Hollywood was willing to produce films which showed direct scenes of combat only after the collapse of Saigon in 1975 to the North Vietnamese army and their National Liberation Front allies in the South (referred to as Viet Cong by the American media and government). Thus, it was not until the 1980s that a steady flow of mainstream films depicting an American presence in Vietnam emerged from the film community.

This chapter will examine these wartime representations in order to determine how the images of the Vietnamese were first presented to American audiences, and how they reflected conflicting perceptions about the war. Although the theatrical output was more fertile in this period, Hollywood did approach the subject of the war earlier in several films, which will consequently be examined first in my analysis. I will then compare these

cinematic depictions to the parallel efforts of the theatrical community, which was far more politicized and active in addressing the Vietnam War in comparison to World War Two. In both areas, I will discuss how images of the Vietnamese emerged which predominantly categorized them as either "noble savages" or as a new example of the "white man's burden." While the South Vietnamese and even the North Vietnamese were often depicted sympathetically in various works, the overall nature of these constructions resulted in an abstract, collective treatment of their role in the war. In some ways, this was consistent with the previously established modes of representation regarding non-white Others--especially Asians--on stage and screen. In contrast to earlier works from the combat genre, however, many of the plays written during the Vietnam War were much more empathetic and complex towards the notion of "enemy."

After World War Two and throughout the 1950s, Hollywood continued to fight the "good war" in a continual outpouring of later-wave combat films. Changes in the cinematic combat genre were inevitable, though, with the advent of the Cold War and America's growing desire to "contain" Communist expansion in Eastern Europe and other strategically and/or economically vital regions of the world. The US soon found itself increasingly engaged in a foreign policy which advocated an activist stance towards what might have once been construed as the strictly internal affairs of other countries. In the post-World War Two political climate, revolutions, civil wars, and the like were viewed in the context of potential world-wide domination by a monolithic Communist power spearheaded by America's former wartime ally, the USSR. A Communist "takeover" of an Asian country was perhaps an especially sensitive area in light of domestic conservative charges that pro-Communist Americans in the government had "sold out" China to the "reds" in 1949.¹ Consequently, America was vigilant in responding to Communist activity in Southeast Asia during the 1950s, which led in part to a major subsidy of France's efforts to retain its colony of French Indochina or Vietnam in an armed struggle against Vietnamese nationalist

forces led by Ho Chi Minh. While the motivations for American involvement in Vietnam were complex and still widely disputed,² America was committed to economic support of France's fight against the Viet Minh guerrilla forces by the early 1950s. American leaders defended this policy by arguing that Ho Chi Minh was a mere pawn for the more powerful Russian and Chinese Communist regimes. After the collapse of the French army at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the American government was active in the negotiations of the Geneva Accords peace treaty, which temporarily divided Vietnam until "free elections" would be held. Fearful that the popular Ho would win such elections by an overwhelming majority, America found a more "acceptable" leader for South Vietnam in the anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem, and threw its economic support behind his government. Diem claimed that the Communists would rig the polls and never held the promised elections in Southern Vietnam. This action precipitated a new wave of violence to "reunite" the country by Ho Chi Minh's former Viet Minh troops in the South, who were eventually labeled as Viet Cong (read Communist) by the Americans.

The degree of American involvement in Vietnam gradually escalated. President Eisenhower was the first leader to commit American troops to assist South Vietnam in the form of "military advisors." JFK greatly increased their numbers in the early 1960s, and by 1963 America had 15,000 of these advisors stationed there. This figure pales in comparison to the 200,000 ground combat troops LBJ sent overseas in alleged response to North Vietnamese "aggression" towards American vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1965.³ Despite the lack of a Congressional declaration of war, some 540,000 American troops were in Vietnam by the end of 1968. Beginning in 1969, President Nixon's "Vietnamization" phase of the war gradually withdrew American troops from Vietnam in an attempt to win "peace with honor," although his escalation of the war on other fronts (as in the bombing of Cambodia) muddled his intentions in this regard.⁴

Thus, Hollywood first turned its cameras on Vietnam before any American President formally committed infantry combat troops in support of the South Vietnamese government. As with celluloid portrayals of the Korean War, World War Two veteran-turned-director Samuel Fuller was one of the first to explore the fighting in Southeast Asia with his film *China Gate* (1957). Set in French Indochina, the movie focused on the efforts of a French Foreign Legion squad, which contained two Americans, to blow up a vital weapons and ammunition depot--the China Gate of the film's title--which was supplying the Viet Minh in their struggle against the French.

After an initial montage of documentary footage accompanied by a voiceover narration, the film opens with a shot of a cute Asian boy roaming through a decimated village. As an American food drop approaches, the collective villagers run frantically to gather the supplies. These initial sequences both recall earlier films of the combat genre while also anticipating stock motifs of future Vietnam War films. The omniscient, ideology spouting narrator (e.g., France is the "barrier between Communism and the rape of Asia") harkens back to films like *Guadalcanal Diary*, while the cliché of a cute, seemingly orphaned boy who was typically befriended by big-hearted American soldiers appeared in many combat genre films from Fuller's *The Steel Helmet* to John Wayne's *The Green Berets*. That these orphans were always male is striking in that the altruistic image of America which the combat films of this era hoped to convey would not allow for the potential of sexual misconduct. While a later play like *Miss Saigon* in the 1990s did acknowledge the prostitution of children of both sexes in places like Bangkok, the censored world of Hollywood in the 1950s could never have broached such a delicate topic. Thus, by constructing the "orphans" as boys who could serve as "pals" or "mascots" for the various GIs, the films effectively neutralized any potentially unsettling questions which the presence of an undefended girl might have raised. In addition, the use of documentary material in the narration sequence intercut with the scenes of the villagers collecting food

echoes the use of such footage to achieve "realism" in "second wave" films of the World War Two era. The shots of hungry, fearful, and nameless Vietnamese villagers, however, would become a staple of many other future American-made films about the Vietnam War. Thus, *China Gate* was the first film to establish the soon-to-be dominant image of a non-individualized, collective mob of Vietnamese. Typically, they were categorized as either passive victims if allies or bloodthirsty violent hordes if enemies, a pattern which would be endlessly reiterated in the canon of Vietnam War films.

China Gate does introduce a major character who is Eurasian in the role of the half-French, half-Chinese "Lucky Legs" (played by the Caucasian actress Angie Dickinson), who turns out to be the owner of the village bar and the mother of the previously seen young boy. The French need the beautiful Lucky as a guide on their mission as she alone knows the way to the China Gate. Lucky also seems personally acquainted with half of the Viet Minh army and is romantically linked to the Gate's commander, Major Cham. Their relationship apparently provides her with carte blanche to travel through enemy lines. Lucky's exotic Otherness is established in the film via her uncanny, mysterious knowledge of the local terrain, not unlike the abilities of American Indians at tracking or "smelling" danger in countless Westerns. This air of mystery is emphasized by the camera typically shooting her from the legs up, with the soundtrack playing an exotic Eastern sounding riff to signal the presence of an "Oriental" femme fatale. In his essay "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in an Age of Technology," Rick Berg observes that Lucky Leg's beautiful looks are deceiving, in that she is very dangerous despite the film's presentation of her as an object of desire. As Berg puts it, "she is the monstrous unknown 'other' whose looks tell us nothing more than that looks deceive." Significantly, then, the nature of her representation anticipates the "signs of our misunderstanding" regarding images of the Vietnamese in future films, as "through her we learn not to trust what we see while we

learn to look at the seen and our ways of seeing."⁵ Such ambiguity and "deception" also anticipates the difficulty American troops would have in determining friend from foe among the Vietnamese population, since the VC did not wear uniforms which would mark them as a definitive enemy. This tension led to a situation where American soldiers began to perceive all Vietnamese--including the villagers in the South who were ostensibly on "our side"--as the enemy. Naturally, these issues were extended to Hollywood's recreations of the war and created new challenges for American audiences to determine the "good guys" from the "bad guys" in the murky sites of combat in South Vietnam. Thus, in contrast to earlier works of the combat genre, many Vietnam War films would eventually redefine spectators' preconceived expectations and definitions about the concept of the "enemy." The difficulty in applying such previously established genre signifiers and conventions to celluloid depictions of the Vietnam War undoubtedly contributed to Hollywood's initial avoidance of the conflict, as well as its widely varied categorizations of the Vietnamese over the years.

Lucky's main conflict involves her reunion with Johnny Brock (Gene Barry), her former husband and the American leader of the legionnaire squad. Brock was repulsed by his son's Asian appearance and abandoned both of them in Saigon. As a result, Lucky eventually degenerates into an alcoholic prostitute and bar owner to support the boy, although in typically implausible Hollywood fashion she retains her dazzling looks along the way. Lucky agrees to the mission in order to have her son sent to America, as she feels his "eyes are a curse he has to carry--but in America that cross might be lighter."

Fuller's implication here is that the racially mixed boy will suffer more indignities in his own land than in America, which was still practicing the Jim Crow system of segregation in the South at the time of the film's release. As in *The Steel Helmet* and its depiction of the Korean War, Fuller raises the specter of American racism, then, but

ultimately resolves such ugliness in a facile affirmation of American goodwill and solidarity. In *China Gate*, this racial tension is underscored in the relationship between Brock and Goldie, a Black American on the squad who is also a rabid anti-Communist. Played by the popular singer Nat King Cole, Goldie likes the amoral Brock just fine until he learns of his disavowal of his son on racial grounds. He then avoids Brock until the man "comes to his senses" and tearfully professes his love for Lucky and their son before the final assault on the weapons dump. Certainly *China Gate's* use of a Black actor in a major supporting role was an advance over the brief or non-existent appearances of Blacks in films about our previous wars. The character is also given dimension in some interesting ways, like when he discusses his wife's heartbreak and eventual death over her failure to have a baby. Mostly, however, Goldie is defined as a subservient buddy to Brock, and even his temporary rejection of the white leader is resolved by his beaming, almost Sambo-like reaction to Brock's final acceptance of his son. Laughably, Goldie also enjoys crooning the film's bluesy title ballad while cleaning his machine gun. Undoubtedly Fuller included such scenes to capitalize on the commercial appeal of King Cole's vocal talents, but they also echoed previous racist Hollywood images of child-like, carefree, singing Blacks.

The Vietnamese don't fare much better in their scenes. As Lucky guides the expedition forward, numerous Viet Minh soldiers are encountered, as well as several villages along the way. The Vietnamese always speak with American accents and are quick to abandon their posts to ogle Lucky, swill her free booze, and laugh lustfully at her jokes as the legionnaires slip by. The implication of a Vietnamese weakness for hard liquor, like the cliché of American Indians and their love of "firewater" in the Western, seems especially prevalent and ridiculous in the film. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how the leering, alcohol-crazed bumbler of *China Gate* were able to drive the French army out of Vietnam and then successfully resist the mighty American military machine for years.

Furthermore, no social context is established in the shots of the villagers--we learn nothing of their daily lives, jobs, relationships, etc. Rather, the Vietnamese people are consistently presented as smiling, waving simpletons moving happily from one Communist organized celebration to the next.

Again, such images prefigure many films to come in their depiction of the "reality" of Vietnam for American audiences. And despite the lack of discipline among the Viet Minh, their ability to move stealthily in the jungle, spring surprise attacks on the legionnaires, and use booby traps (e.g., punji sticks) *is* clearly established in the movie. Consequently, *China Gate* presents clear moral distinctions between the Viet Minh and the Westerners in no uncertain terms. In this instance, however, Fuller contends that their ability to pursue a ruthless war without any "rules" is the extension of a Communist mentality rather than Asian *per se*. Major Cham, the only other distinctive Vietnamese character in the film, is another Eurasian played once again by a white actor (Lee Van Cleef). The ruthless Cham claims that the Communists will rule Asia because of their willingness to bomb unarmed villages and civilians--unlike the "stupid" French and Americans. In reality, within a decade or so the Americans would be bombing civilian targets in North Vietnam, and previously had attacked German cities during World War Two before dropping atomic weapons on Japan. But Fuller posits that Westerners c.1960 in Vietnam were still playing by the "rules" of war, while the inhumane Communists would go to any means to achieve their quest for world domination.

Ultimately, Fuller's attempt to depict the specific conflict in Vietnam was displaced by his reliance on a larger context of Cold War rhetoric. Above all, the film reveals a strong anti-Communist ideology, underscored by shots of pictures of Ho Chi Minh, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung on the walls of various Communist lodgings in the film, as well as references in the opening narration to the threat of the "Moscow trained revolutionary Ho Chi Minh."⁶ While Ho was allied with the leaders of the two major

Communist powers, he was also perceived within Vietnam as a beloved nationalist leader. *China Gate* only emphasizes the Communist connection, with the implication being that Western involvement would be necessary to keep Vietnam out of Russian and Chinese control. As Albert Auster and Leonard Quart noted in their book *How the War Was Remembered*, in many ways the film reinforced "the innocent assumption that we could do a better job than the French in dealing with Vietnam."⁷ Thus, early films about the fighting in Vietnam like *China Gate* suggested a "white man's burden" of sorts wherein idealistic, paternalistic Americans, chock full of condescending goodwill and benevolence, would lend a hand to their less developed Asian friends and establish democracy and "modernization" in Vietnam. Unfortunately, cinematic and cultural myths of this kind ignored geopolitical realities in Vietnam such as strong internal support for Ho Chi Minh, a largely illiterate peasant society which did not necessarily want or comprehend the abstract notion of Western-style "democracy," and a long-standing history of nationalist struggle against a foreign presence on Vietnamese soil.

But the cause of "maintaining US Cold War responsibilities in the struggle against Communism"⁸ as supported in *China Gate* would be further explored in the 1960s via screen adaptations of two well-known books of the period: William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick's *The Ugly American* and Robin Moore's *The Green Berets*. George Englund's screen adaptation of *The Ugly American* (1963) starred Marlon Brando as MacWhite, the newly appointed ambassador to the Southeast Asian country of Sarkhan, which was a clear stand-in for Vietnam. While abandoning the book's episodic structure in favor of a more linear plot line, the film echoes its position that America must stop its naive and condescending treatment of non-European allies in the "Third World."

In order to combat the growing threat of Communism in Sarkhan, Congress sends MacWhite there because of his alleged expertise in the country's language and customs. MacWhite, it seems, led a guerrilla unit in Sarkhan during World War Two, which

included their nationalist hero Deong. While MacWhite's background suggests the presence of an American who is atypically sensitive to cultural differences abroad, he soon reveals his true ethnocentric attitudes after arriving there. Upon meeting with his old pal Deong, their initially happy reunion quickly degenerates into an ugly shouting match. In response to Deong's charges of "American aggression" and "economic imperialism," MacWhite paradoxically argues that "if supporting dictators helps to keep the free world free, we'll support them." His woolly-headed thinking did in fact represent a major American policy at that time, as numerous dictators were supported in countries such as Iran, Nicaragua, and South Vietnam. All of these actions were legitimized in the name of anti-Communism and often created a hostile perception of the US amongst the larger populaces of these countries.⁹

The racial and cultural divisions between the two men also becomes clear when Deong tells MacWhite "don't preach at me--I'm not your pupil anymore," claiming that American exploitation is known "wherever black or brown or yellow men can read the newspapers and know that your democracy's a fraud--it's for white people only." The righteously angered MacWhite can only denounce Deong's "judascoat" ingratitude for our generous American aid. Ironically, despite MacWhite's vaunted "knowledge" of the Sarkhanese people and culture, his idea of skilled diplomacy is to engage in drunken insult swapping with his oldest friend, whom he immediately labels as a Communist when the man chooses to disagree with his views.¹⁰ MacWhite also takes on the mantle of the "white man's burden" in his heavy-handed decision to extend the so-called "freedom road" which the Americans are building in Sarkhan. Warned that such a move will only incite further feelings of anti-Americanism there, he paternally decides that he knows what's best for the people of Sarkhan.

Deong, however, is not in fact a Communist, but has rather been duped by Communist leaders from abroad into starting a popular nationalist uprising. They pledge to supply only guns from Communist dominated North Sarkhan, but their plot to assassinate Deong and take over the government is eventually revealed. The ultimate Communist betrayal prevails when Deong is struck down by his closest aide, a boy whom he raised as his own son. As in earlier combat films, then, Englund clearly establishes that the Communists are more brutal and treacherous than the Americans, giving them an initial edge of sorts which we would have to overcome with our own morally superior democratic ideology. The Vietnam War films, however, would eventually imply that this difference was essentially cultural and racial--something intrinsically Asian--not unlike the assumptions made about the Japanese during World War Two. But in the period of *The Ugly American*, Hollywood was still willing to acknowledge a hierarchy of "good" and "bad" Asians, with the bad being the Commie agitators, of course. Plenty of loyal Sarkhanese are shown in the film, such as the ones who use their own bodies to shield the lovable American couple who provide medical services for their village. Why the cold-hearted Communists would not shoot them too is totally glossed over, but it allows Englund to depict the larger peasantry as "noble savages"--simple, good folks who appreciate the generosity of Uncle Sam, and are therefore worthy of an American commitment overseas.

Interestingly, *The Ugly American* is less stereotypical in its depiction of the leader of Sarkhan. While weak and indecisive in some ways, he is also the one who uncovers the Communist deception. Thus, he understands the political situation on a deeper level than MacWhite, who ultimately emerges as "the ugly American" despite his frequently stated good intentions (not unlike the film's boorish Joe Bing, who brashly takes pictures of sacred Sarkhanese ceremonies). The Sarkhanese Prime Minister offers a coalition government with Deong and promises democratic reforms, illustrating his concern for the

needs of the people and a willingness to compromise. In contrast, Englund portrays the Communists as only wanting to seize power for themselves in Sarkhan, which reinforces the film's approval of American support for the South Vietnamese government. As Auster and Quart observe, *The Ugly American* "tries to have it both ways in its depiction of the Third World's desire for self-determination in a world dominated by the two power blocs. Although the film raises the possibility that a country like Sarkhan might authentically desire to stay aloof from the big powers, it nonetheless portrays Deong's neutralism as naively playing into Communist hands."¹¹ Thus, MacWhite realizes the error of his ways at the film's end and makes an impassioned speech about how Americans are only hated abroad when we forget our own ideals and good sense.¹² While such platitudes were unlikely to solve any political problems, they did reveal an atypical awareness of America's cultural blindness and impatience towards non-Western cultures and peoples. MacWhite's appeal on television for a greater display of sensitivity in the Third World, however, is cut off by a "typical" middle-class American viewer, whose lack of interest serves as a warning for America's future foreign relations.¹³

Despite such criticisms, the film still advocated a Cold War "white man's burden" of sorts in its position that Third World countries like Sarkhan/Vietnam both wanted and needed American protection to avoid falling into Communist hands. In retrospect, Southeast Asia did not "turn" Communist after the collapse of South Vietnam. Furthermore, American troops never succeeded in winning the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese peasants. Auster and Quart argue that this early cinematic ambiguity about Vietnam intensified as the war escalated, with the result being "the cinematic symbols, roles, and values that had served so well to justify and gain support for other wars lost their power to arouse a popular consensus in favor of the war." Thus, Hollywood not only

avoided Vietnam out of economic risk due to the controversial nature of the war, but also because of the unavailability of "any known film metaphors"¹⁴ to represent it adequately. Although a few other "B films" such as *A Yank in Viet Nam* (1964) and *Some May Live* (1967) were released during the war,¹⁵ only one major Hollywood film which directly depicted American combat in Vietnam would be made in this period--John Wayne's *The Green Berets* (1968).

By the mid-1960s, Wayne had achieved icon status in America as a result of his popular Western and combat films. Numerous studies have analyzed the influence of his cinematic heroics on the generation of young Americans who fought in Vietnam.¹⁶ In his book *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies*, Lawrence H. Suid observed that many combat films before the Vietnam War were dominated by what he called "the John Wayne Image," in which Wayne created a "mythical American hero" who symbolized the inherent goodness of the American character. Fighting for freedom at home and around the world, Wayne's brave celluloid warriors influenced a number of Vietnam veterans who grew up watching his movies and subsequently commented on the influence of his persona in their memoirs of the war.¹⁷ For example, veteran Philip Caputo, author of *A Rumor of War*, recalled that Wayne inspired him to join the Marines as "he saw himself charging up some distant beachhead, like John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, and then coming home a suntanned warrior with medals on my chest."¹⁸ American soldiers in Vietnam soon discovered that the reality of jungle warfare did not correspond to the romantic image of combat shown in Hollywood's movies. Their disillusionment in this regard was later reflected in representations of the war on film, stage, and in literature.

When Wayne first expressed interest in making a film about the Vietnam War, he was unable to find a Hollywood studio that would finance the movie. By 1968, opposition to the war at home was growing, and the studios were reluctant to bankroll a project which would surely offend either hawks or doves. Eventually, Warner Brothers studios gave Wayne's Batjac production company the seven million dollars needed for the film, due to their faith in the star's box office power.¹⁹ Wayne's patriotic intentions in making *The Green Berets*, however, were clear from the outset. In addition to expressing support for the American presence in Vietnam, he hoped to show the American soldier "carrying out his duty of death but, also, his extracurricular duties--diplomats in dungarees--helping small communities, giving them medical attention, toys for their children, and little things like soap."²⁰ Overall, the film applied the familiar parameters and conventions of the World War Two combat film to the new setting of Vietnam, with elements from Wayne's Westerns thrown in as well.

Despite its flag-waving politics which alienated many critics at the time of its release, *The Green Berets* is striking in its blatant recycling of old devices from the combat genre. The loose plot of the film follows a crack unit of Green Berets who are sent into the bush to reinforce an American fort nicknamed "Dodge City." Along the way, they convince a liberal, anti-military reporter of the righteousness of the American mission in Vietnam. The latter part of the film involves an unbelievable, James Bond-like foray into North Vietnam to capture a Communist general with the help of a beautiful, anti-Communist Vietnamese model. Regardless of the rather thin nature of such plot devices, Wayne consistently uses them to praise America's military involvement in Vietnam as an extension of our noble cause during World War Two, the "good war."

Thus, when Kirby's unit arrives at "Dodge City," the new and old troops greet each other with a high-spirited brio reminiscent of the "boys" in *Guadalcanal Diary* swapping

anecdotes about their favorite baseball teams back home. The defenses of the fort-like camp recalled tactics more applicable to World War Two than Vietnam, as the fixed battles depicted in *The Green Berets* rarely occurred during the Vietnam War. The name of the fort, in tandem with the attacking hordes of savage Vietnamese, also serves as a referent to Wayne's numerous Westerns. And, of course, he does in fact lead troops to save the camp from annihilation--just like the cliché of the US calvary arriving "in the nick of time" to rescue the white settlers from those savage Indians. The film also contains a tired "comic" subplot involving the company scrounger Peterson, who romps around Vietnam "liberating" various supplies that Wayne's elite troops need for their missions. Such antics and high-spirited independence from stuffy bureaucracy echoed the tone of many World War Two movies, where William Bendix frequently played a mischievous but harmless character who symbolized the brash humor and individualism of the "common American" for film goers. Peterson also "adopts" yet another cute little orphan boy named Hamchung in typical combat genre fashion. Perhaps the most laughable throwback to Wayne's earlier films is his constant use of the line "move out," as if he were a calvary officer telling the troops to mount up.

The film's treatment of the Vietnamese further developed the "good" and "bad" hierarchy of representation which Englund used in *The Ugly American*. The Communist Vietnamese are portrayed as totally ruthless and savage, dancing around the captured fort like a bunch of Indians drunk on "firewater." Their bloodlust is further demonstrated when they strip the American corpses of their uniforms and valuables to the sound of strident "Oriental" music, which cues the spectators that they are in the presence of the Other. Of course, the VC pay for this primitivism when they are easily mowed down by an American pilot, not unlike another scene in which a group of them are blown up while building a bridge in broad daylight. Such depictions presented the Vietnamese enemy as a bunch of fools who offered themselves as ready targets for the Americans. As has been well

documented, the Americans were in fact the highly visible targets for the almost impossible-to-find VC, many of whom lived in complex layers of underground bunkers for the duration of the fighting. And Wayne's film is similar to *China Gate* in its hard-to-believe representation of a Communist leader who is duped by his uncontrollable desire for a beautiful woman, thereby allowing the American forces to infiltrate his command.

The willingness of the Communists to perform actions beyond traditional Western notions of "acceptable" wartime behavior is also clearly established in the film. For example, Kirby tells the horrified reporter about a chieftain who was forced to watch his daughters disemboweled and his wife "abused" with a steel rod. The once skeptical American is thus immediately won over to the cause of anti-Communism after witnessing such unspeakable atrocities first hand. Like the Japanese "nips" before them, the Vietnamese "Charlie" are presented as not having the same regard for human life--including their own--as the Americans. Thus, the film tells us that they build coffins before an attack because if "Charlie knows he's got a nice box to be buried in, he's happy to die." Given the covert, hit-and-run nature of the war, such high profile acts of Oriental mysticism seemed rather unlikely. *The Green Berets*, however, was the first high-profile Hollywood film set in Vietnam to define this brutality as more than just a result of Communist ideology. Interestingly, this is accomplished through the film's complex portrayal of the South Vietnamese and the Americans' attitudes towards them.

Wayne's movie was also the first major film to depict the South Vietnamese or ARVN army in the field with their American counterparts. The American soldiers in *The Green Berets* are clearly respectful of the ARVN officers, and the film generally portrays them and their troops as efficient soldiers and "good" comrades. Mostly, however, it relegates the South Vietnamese, who are fighting in their own country, to a secondary position within the hierarchy of leadership. Despite any lip-service deference to ARVN authority, Kirby is unarguably the de facto commander of the Vietnamese. For instance,

when the American meets a high-ranking South Vietnamese officer, he condescendingly pats him on the back and proclaims "glad to have you aboard." Clearly, the Americans admire Vietnamese "initiative" only so long as Kirby et al. can control the show. The highly educated ARVN officers also speak in the traditional Hollywood "pidgin" English assigned to non-Westerners, and all of them use the American catch phrase "affirmative" in a cutesy imitation of their paternalistic American "superiors."

The film reveals a darker vision of the South Vietnamese in its depiction of specific ARVN attitudes and actions towards the VC enemy. A Captain Nim, for example, tells Kirby that "my home is in Hanoi--I will go home too someday--but first we kill all the stinking Cong." To reinforce this sentiment, he keeps count of his "kills" on his boots. Thus, while presented as a "good" soldier whom the Americans respect, Nim also seems to enjoy the killing in contrast to the highly professional Americans. His bloodlust, then, defines an essential difference between the Green Berets and their Vietnamese allies for the film's audience. Nim's "primitivism" is further reinforced in a scene which shows him torturing one of his men suspected of being a VC infiltrator. Kirby initially tries to stop Nim, but lends his tacit approval to his actions after he learns that the "traitor" had previously tortured to death an American Green Beret. On one level, Kirby's behavior reinforces the notion established by earlier combat films that Americans are above such vile behavior. He does, however, also condone the torture, although in the world view of the film only the more savage "Oriental" Nim is capable of *performing* the action.

Thus, even though Wayne clearly establishes Kirby's "justification" for allowing the torture, the scene represents a quantum leap forward from the range of foul play allowed in earlier war films. The Americans in Hollywood's recreations of World War Two had learned a few "dirty tricks" from "the Japs," and Wayne's film presented the Green Berets as certainly able to hold their own against the VC in the realm of jungle warfare. But in the earlier cinematic representations of war, there was always a line of

moral restraint which a good American boy would not cross. While *The Green Berets* maintains that line, Kirby's approval of the torture begins to blur the boundaries. Despite Wayne's well-publicized patriotic intentions, in this regard his film anticipated the later cinematic work about Vietnam which represented American soldiers as participating in wartime atrocities. Of course, the subsequent scene in the film shows a kindly Green Beret doctor providing medical service to Vietnamese children, followed by candy, thus reassuring the audience of the noble aspirations and praiseworthy behavior of Wayne's "diplomats in dungarees."

Otherwise, the Vietnamese are generally portrayed as "noble savages" whose quaint way of life must be preserved by the Americans. As Kirby's Sergeant Muldoon paternally states at the beginning of the film, "there's always some little fellow willing to stand up" for freedom. Thus, *The Green Berets* follows in the footsteps of previous films in its willingness to continue the "white man's burden" by helping the yellow "little fellows" of Vietnam defend their homeland against Communist aggression.²¹ Kirby's big speech full of patriotic bromides at the end of the film underscores this intention when he tells Hamchung not to worry about his fate: "let me worry about that, Green Beret--you're what this is all about," followed by the critically controversial shot of Wayne striding into the sun setting over the South China sea in the wrong direction. Leo Cawley's essay "The War About the War" aptly criticized the way in which Wayne reduced the political complexities of the conflict in Vietnam to a Western paradigm of sorts: "the Americans are the good guys, the Vietcong are the bad guys, and the peasants are the frightened townsfolk who need protection and the rule of the law."²² *The Green Berets* does veer from its larger Manichean view of the "good" and "bad" Vietnamese by acknowledging the presence of VC supporters amidst the generally loyal Vietnamese population. The picture

was the first Vietnam War film to explore directly the "unseen enemy" motif, in which American troops were constantly betrayed or attacked by seemingly innocent Vietnamese civilians. And while it portrays most ARVN soldiers as loyal and courageous, later pictures would characterize all South Vietnamese--including the ARVNS--as treacherous, cowardly, and certainly not worth the loss of American lives.

The film also follows in the footsteps of *China Gate* in substituting American locales for the topography of Vietnam. *The Green Berets* was shot at Fort Benning, Georgia, where the surrounding terrain looked nothing like Vietnamese jungle. Wayne and co-director Ray Kellog preferred filming on location in Vietnam, but were concerned about issues of safety and access to the Huey helicopters which the US Army was willing to supply stateside. The Army, which provided technical advice and official endorsement in the tradition of Wayne's earlier World War Two combat films, also flew in a platoon of Hawaiian soldiers for the directors to use as "Oriental" extras.²³ Such casting choices suggested a point-of-view in which all Asians were interchangeable, and echoed the use of Chinese actors to portray Japanese soldiers during the Second World War. And despite the directors' efforts to achieve visual authenticity, many reviewers still zeroed in on this area as a major weakness of the film. Renata Alder of the *New York Times*, for example, claimed that "anyone who has ever been in Vietnam, or heard of Vietnam, or read the news or watched a television set knows that the film is false," further noting that "Vietnam is not full of artificial foliage and white birch." In *Newsday*, Joseph Gelmis's reacted to the film's visual representation of the Vietnamese as follows: "the enemy soldiers and the healthy-looking camp dependents look like what they probably are, Orientals of a variety of nationalities.... From the appearance of some of the attacking Cong, it seems as if the producer couldn't fill all the uniforms with Orientals and had to use American Caucasians

with mud smeared on their faces as partial disguises."²⁴ *The Green Berets*, however, would be the last major Hollywood film to receive criticism over the issue of "yellowface," as later films would strive for increasing levels of visual "reality" in their portrayal of the war.

The self-ennobling sentiments of *The Green Berets* also fit nicely into the established patterns of America's cultural mythology. In his essay "American Myths and the Vietnam War," Robert J. McKeever discusses two key myths promulgated by Henry Steele Commager in a 1968 treatise which he defines as having greatly affected American foreign policy throughout our history: "the myth of American uniqueness and the myth of the political, social and moral superiority of America." By the end of World War Two, McKeever felt that two additional elements had been added to this cultural mix: "a belief in American military superiority," which further reinforced notions of American superiority in general; and a "bipolar view of international conflicts that defined virtually all political-military conflicts in the world as being primarily microcosms of the Cold War." Thus, when America chose to intervene in South Vietnam, it also set in motion a "rigorous testing of the viability of America's most important myths."²⁵ Many of these myths would be shattered as a result of the war, although the Reagan/Bush era in the 1980s attempted to restore their validity.

In its unquestioning defense of American altruism and rabid anti-Communist ideology, *The Green Berets* operated firmly within these traditional mythic paradigms. In a way, the film accurately reflected America's narrow-mindedness towards foreign cultures--especially non-Western--which continually hampered its mission in Vietnam. In Robert Chandler's study of the American propaganda effort in Vietnam, he observed that "Vietnamese and American societies were vastly different in almost every important

aspect--race, language, outlook on life, and ways of doing things." While the American government felt that its "psychological operations"²⁶ in relation to winning the confidence of the Vietnamese people were dependent on successfully bridging this cultural gap, that mission essentially failed.²⁷ Although a film like *The Green Berets* was willing to present representatives of a "superior" white American culture leading ARVN troops and successfully winning the loyalty of the local populace, many Americans challenged such representations as untruthful and even laughable. For example, former Vietnam correspondent David Halberstam noted the difficulty of the film's task in laying the grid of "John Wayneism" on a "peasant nation" experiencing "the heaviest carnage in the history of mankind."²⁸ In addition, the vitriolic reaction to the movie in many quarters²⁹ indicated that some Americans were beginning to question the validity of these historic national identity myths. Although *The Green Berets* succeeded commercially, it further stirred an already heated debate among divided Americans over the morality of the American military presence in Vietnam. As a result, perhaps, Hollywood would not directly approach the subject of combat in Vietnam again until the late 1970s. Instead, the American theatre was left to address the topic in the intervening years, to which I will now turn.

The period of the 1960s in America, and elsewhere, resulted in a great deal of social turbulence and challenging of traditional mores and values. Much of this protest eventually centered on the Vietnam War as a symbol of "establishment" corruption and wrong-headedness, although some other areas of countercultural protest such as the so-called "hippie" movement advocated the formation of alternative lifestyles and cultures (e.g., communal living) in lieu of overhauling, or overthrowing, the existing system. As with other modes of cultural expression such as music, fashion, and art, the American theatre

soon responded to the current of change as a number of artists assaulted the established conventions, structures, and styles of theatrical expression which had previously dominated the mainstream commercial stage.

In a 1978 *Yale Theater* article on "Theater and the Vietnam War," Robert Asahina accused the avant-garde or experimental theatre of the 1960s of having essentially ignored the Vietnam War. For Asahina, well-known experimental companies of the period such as The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, and The Performance Group emphasized formalistic innovations over political content. Typically, these artists reduced the importance of the theatrical text in favor of non-verbal and imagistic communication. Most of these ensembles also attempted to blur the distinctions between life and art by emphasizing the "presence" of the actor, as opposed to an actor playing a character as was customary in the traditional theatre.³⁰

Asahina further claimed that more conventional playwrights, as well as other creative artists working in the realm of literary fiction, avoided direct treatments of the war. This was partly a result of the American public's daily exposure to the war through media coverage, especially on the nightly news, which "presented uncensored scenes of combat and destruction." Thus, while numerous non-fiction memoirs were written after the war, only one significant novel--Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers*--had emerged by 1978.³¹ Similarly, while Hollywood released few fictional films about Vietnam during the conflict, a number of documentary films which engaged the war on various levels were produced at that time.³² Nonetheless, Asahina felt that the conventional theatre eventually addressed the war much sooner than did Hollywood via the plays of Vietnam veteran David Rabe. In contrast, the avant-garde theatre either ignored the topic or echoed the "form and content" of the news media in their treatments of the war, as with the Open Theatre's production of

Megan Terry's *Viet Rock*.³³ For Asahina, *Viet Rock's* generally praised innovations such as transformational "montages" (in which individual and collective groups of actors rapidly changed characters or identities before the spectators) merely echoed the "instantaneous transmission" of media images. The play, and others like it, thus failed to find a uniquely theatrical means of depicting the war on stage.³⁴

While Asahina's indictment of the avant-garde theatre's failure to engage the war is not without some merit, his categorization of this movement is too simplistic. Certainly a segment of the experimental theatre was engaged primarily in the non-political, formalistic experiments which Asahina described in his article. What he fails to acknowledge, however, is another current of the avant-garde work of the period. For example, groups like El Teatro Campesino and The Bread and Puppet Theatre were very focused on political issues, including the Vietnam War, in their productions during the 1960s and early 1970s. In his much more detailed study of the theatre of this period, *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era*, J.W. Fenn characterizes this current as "radical" in contrast to less politically motivated "experimental" groups like The Open Theatre. For Fenn, the purpose of the radical groups was "the dissemination of message rather than experimentation with nuance of medium," with that message typically including distinct "antiwar goals."³⁵ Thus, Fenn's distinctions within the avant-garde movement account for a much greater volume of direct responses to the war.³⁶

Furthermore, the experimental vein of the avant-garde, to use Fenn's categories, also engaged the war more fully than Asahina would like us to believe. For example, he fails to mention The Performance Group's 1970 production of *Commune*, which intertwined the killing of actress Sharon Tate by members of Charles Manson's "family"

with a recreation of the massacre of Vietnamese civilians by American troops at My Lai. En route, the performers also enacted events from American history such as the killing of American Indians during nineteenth-century westward expansion. The company presented these various scenes to suggest that they were all linked together as an outgrowth of a chauvinistic "national policy."³⁷ Richard Schechner's account of the production in his book *Environmental Theater* notes that the depiction of My Lai was a "re-presentation of an interview relating the killing of Vietnamese civilians ... taken from newspaper and television reports." Near the end of the play, the actors asked for fifteen members of the audience to play the members of the village, and informed the spectators that the performance would not continue until the volunteers were obtained.³⁸ Lieutenant James Calley was the leader of the American unit at My Lai, and the only American soldier convicted of war crimes there. His documented testimony about the slaughter was presented as the climax of the play, during which the shoes of some audience members were gathered in a circle and put on by the Manson group as they left to murder Sharon Tate. The production ended with the spectators collecting their shoes and engaging the actors in a discussion of the play.³⁹

While Asahina's thesis would discount *Commune's* reliance on media sources as "non-theatrical," in fact the production found a way of utilizing this documentary material in a highly theatrical manner which directly engaged the audience about a controversial incident of the Vietnam War. Schechner's connection of the war to American domestic events did perhaps dilute the work's focus on Vietnam, and Schechner himself seemed far more interested in the formalistic nature of the evening, as when he stated, "what is at stake is not the themes of the play--not the people of My Lai--but the immediate question of whether or not the show will go on.... *The performance itself was what was important.*"⁴⁰

While this rather self-absorbed statement might seem to reflect the lack of concern with political issues which Asahina condemned, the reality was that productions like *Commune* confronted the Vietnam War on stage at a time when the American film community refused to produce films set in Vietnam itself. The play's linkage of the Vietnamese and American Indians as parallel victims of an aggressive nationalistic American foreign policy was also a common theme of many plays of the 1960s era, in contrast to the unquestioning, pro-war agenda of Wayne's *The Green Berets*.

Asahina's condemnation of the conventional theatre's use of "allegory" to engage the war was also short-sighted. For instance, he argued that Arthur Kopit's 1968 play *Indians*, which sought to "put the Vietnamese situation into a context of American history" by focusing on Buffalo Bill Cody and the extermination of the Indian way of life, was so tenuous "that audience and even critics missed the point."⁴¹ J.W. Fenn notes that a number of playwrights in the 1960s began to question the principles and national character of our country, and saw America's policies in Vietnam as an extension of a failed cultural mythology. Dramatists like Kopit and others "turned to historical paradigms to illustrate the curious paradoxes they saw inherent in the American character and national image."⁴² In *Indians*, for example, Kopit actually incorporated a speech made by American General William Westmoreland in 1966 regarding the deaths of Vietnamese civilians from American bombing missions. Some productions of *Indians* in the 1970s enhanced the parallels to Vietnam by dressing reporters in contemporary clothing and using terminology from the war such as "body counts" to refer to the Indians. Thus, as Fenn noted, the play's "philosophical" connections to the war were "less pronounced but quite as valid."⁴³ Cody's eventual acceptance of responsibility for his role in the government's savage treatment of the Indians, as well as the military's willingness to implement such policies,

was also recognizable as referring to Vietnam. While Kopit's focus on the American Indians might have distracted the audience from our involvement in Vietnam in some ways, it is hard to dismiss the potential power of the play to critique the war by linking it to one of the nation's most powerful cultural myths--that of the conquest of the West.

In addition, Asahina underestimated the abilities of the audiences and critics of the period to grasp the allusions inherent in works like *Indians*. Critic John Lahr, for example, observed the following connections in the work: "Kopit's play is ostensibly about America's first 'enemy,' but the Indians are prototypes for our hysterical reaction to other 'alien forces'.... Indians, like the Viet Cong, become 'savages'."⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Asahina attacked Judith Malina and Julian Beck's The Living Theatre for failing to address the controversy in Vietnam beyond merely shouting "stop the war" during some performances.⁴⁵ He does not, however, mention their 1967 production of *Antigone*, which was perceived by many critics as a commentary on the war, with Julian Beck (Creon) actually imitating President Johnson at times. Also, The Living Theatre's production of *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, which premiered in Paris in 1965, ended with their enactment of Antonin Artaud's essay *The Theatre and the Plague*. This section involved a ritualistic gathering of "corpses" into a macabre body pile, and Saul Gottlieb's description of the piece in *TDR* (Summer 1966) noted that many people in the audience frequently joined the stacked bodies as a protest against American involvement in Vietnam.⁴⁶ Even commercial productions like *Hair* on Broadway included a prolonged scene in which the protagonist Claude takes LSD, resulting in a montage exploring America's cultural and racial memory and mythological past. Short scenes of Indian massacres, racial conflict, and ideological struggles for power are blended together with images from Vietnam such as Buddhist monks immolating themselves. After his "trip"

ends, Claude is drafted and shipped to Vietnam where his death is mourned by the company in the stirring finale "The Flesh Fails." ⁴⁷ Although *Hair* focused primarily on the loss of American life in Vietnam, the play also offered criticism of America's racist attitudes and actions even in the mainstream venue of Broadway.

While varying in their degree of emphasis on Vietnam, these examples displayed a range of responses to the war which far outstripped those of the film community in Hollywood during the 1960s. And while I contend that forms such as allegory engaged the war more clearly than Asahina acknowledged, there were other productions within both the avant-garde and mainstream theatrical communities which addressed the war in blunt terms. Such concerns partly reflected a larger empathy with and support of the Vietnamese in radical political circles, including the NVA and VC. Indeed, some anti-war protesters actually carried pro-Viet Cong banners or pictures of Ho Chi Minh during rallies throughout the period. ⁴⁸ But what was the specific nature of this representation? I will now consider some individual plays from the war era in this regard.

Megan Terry's *Viet Rock*, produced by the Open Theatre in 1966, was the first major play of this period to portray aspects of the war on stage. Employing an ensemble of actors who "transformed" themselves into various characters or inanimate objects, the play followed a "loose chronological structure dealing with young men who are inducted into the army, trained, sent to Vietnam to fight, and are killed." ⁴⁹ Along the way, the play suggests that our "system" indoctrinates the youth of America with a pro-war ideology of violence through games like army, cops and robbers, and cowboys and Indians, all of which the ensemble plays in the opening scene. This premise would later be echoed in such films as Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. The children who play these games eventually grow into young men who are taken from their mothers, drafted into the army, and shipped to Vietnam. Her indictment of a

militaristic American culture is also extended to its historic treatment of the American Indian. When taken to boot camp, for example, the "boys" encounter a psychotic drill sergeant who bombards them with chauvinistic slogans. Raging against a group of anti-war protesters, he incites them to "go back to U.S. History 101. Have you forgotten the Indian wars already? What country are you really from?"

Furthermore, the play ridicules the anti-Communist rhetoric of the era in the sergeant's buffoonish diatribes against "pinkos," as well as his faith in the value of past wars: "let me ask you where we'd be if we hadn't fought in World War I, World War II, and Korea ... since when is it not honorable to die for your country?" *Viet Rock* alludes to the carnage of war most graphically in these speeches, as when the sergeant describes "baby bodies dotting the dirt like bean sprouts in chow mein. I ain't afraid to look. Slant-eyed mommas crying over the limp remains of black haired sons. I seen it all--yes, boys, war is hell.... and go get that guy, before he gets you first. For God. For country. For the land of the brave and the home of the free. Fall in!"⁵⁰ Terry's representation of the sergeant's racist attitudes stands in marked contrast to plays from World War Two like *Winged Victory*, in which wholesome American boys are shown fighting for freedom and a better post-war world for people of all races and nationalities. Such plays also avoided graphic descriptions of combat or death, whereas *Viet Rock* and other works of the Vietnam era depicted and referred to intense and often horrific acts of violence. Thus, these plays responded to the war as an immoral action which needed to be publicly exposed, resulting in a willingness to show scenes of combat and violence which would have been unthinkable to stage during the Second World War. The loosening standards of what was morally acceptable in all of the arts during this period, as well as the nightly depiction of similar violence on television, also undoubtedly contributed to this trend.

Viet Rock also displays a notable concern with the suffering of the Vietnamese people. While it does give voice to a diverse number of viewpoints about the war in a congressional hearing scene at the end of Act One, empathetic references to the Vietnamese abound throughout the play. For example, one witness expounds on the "beauty" of Hanoi which is being bombed to extinction, while other Vietnamese peasants are brought forth to testify on behalf of the "common people," although they can only wail when promised "great highways" by the senators in compensation for the death and destruction of the war. "Witness Eight" is an American Indian who reinforces the connection between the suffering of native born Others and the Vietnamese when he threatens: "this is the end of the line for you--and all you white men. The red man and the yellow man and the black man are banding together. We will run you off the scorched face of this earth." A scene in Act Two in which an American soldier dies and is mourned by his mother is also striking in its unusual sensitivity for the Vietnamese, as the moment is suddenly "transformed" as followed in the stage directions: *"abrupt transformation into a Buddhist funeral. The sounds become Vietnamese. The scene transforms immediately from that of the army field hospital to a Vietnamese hamlet. The American Mother becomes the Vietnamese Mother, and Jerry becomes her dead son. All the other actors participate as villagers and mourners."* The play's willingness to look beyond the emotional pain of the American mother to reflect on a parallel scenario in a Vietnamese village indicates a concern for foreign cultures--in this case Vietnamese--not typical of the war genre.

The long monologue of "Hanoi Hanna" in Act Two, in which she harangues the "Yankee imperialist" soldiers in Vietnam, also raises the issue of American imperialism abroad. Noting that America cannot be "every place at once," Hanna predicts that the "immoral giant of U.S imperialism" will be defeated by "the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" who "can destroy the United States piece by piece, some striking at its head

and others at its feet."⁵¹ While Terry does not necessarily endorse this position and offers contradictory views through the speeches of other characters, the play certainly places the American presence in Vietnam in the context of a wider foreign policy which was considered chauvinistic and imperialistic in some political circles during the 1960s. The suggestion of solidarity between various peoples of color in response to American oppression, both historical and contemporary, is clearly established in *Viet Rock*.

Some critics, however, attacked the play for not taking an explicit position against the war. Asahina, for example, claimed that it "disparaged militarism, pacifism, nationalism, patriotism, and the Left and the Right, as well as the Center (and even the North Vietnamese, in a surprising deviance from orthodox opinion)."⁵² While the play does give voice to a plethora of viewpoints, it distinctly sympathizes with the death of the Vietnamese peasantry. Furthermore, the right wing, pro-war American perspective typically emerges as consistently idiotic, as when "Witness One" demands that the "native population" of Vietnam be moved to California so that an "atomic bulldozer" could clear the jungle, thereby providing "a hell of a parking lot for when the next domino threatens to fall."⁵³ Such moments ridicule jingoistic rhetoric and American justification of the war based on the popular domino theory of the Cold War era.

In her thorough study of the Vietnam War plays of this era both in America and Europe, Nora Alter's book *Vietnam Protest Theatre: The Television War on Stage* posits that *Viet Rock*--and other American plays of this period--avoid examining the deeper causes of the war in favor of a more superficial "protest" against America's military involvement in Vietnam.⁵⁴ While Terry's sympathy with the anti-war protesters is clear, Alter argues that the play does not "delve deeply enough into the problems of historical causation," and that

her "voice of protest against imperialism is muted by a vociferous support of the U.S. policy and patriotism."⁵⁵

She makes this leap by contending that the scenes in Act Two which reenact combat depict Americans as the primary victims of Vietnamese brutality and betrayal, in contrast to those of Act One which generally protest against the deaths of people on all sides. Alter feels that the depiction of such acts also served to reinforce American prejudices against "savage" Others, which had been molded before the Vietnam War by the scurrilous images of Indians in our culture. Overall, the play "presents the American GIs as its primary victims: victims of warlike Americans and warlike Vietnamese, both of whom are presumed to be equally guilty."⁵⁶ Indeed, Alter extends this failure to the general anti-war theatre of this period, claiming that "in the American paradigm" GIs are rarely seen as "aggressors," but rather as "victims." Thus, such plays ignored the complex, underlying causes of American imperialism. In doing so, they also mirrored the larger countercultural movements of the day which challenged the American establishment but typically underestimated its deep-seated "undergirding system of ideologies, politics, and economics."⁵⁷

Alter's point that the majority of American anti-war plays in this period "protested" the war in lieu of examining its deeper roots is insightful. This issue has also been hotly debated in the area of cinema, with Auster and Quart arguing that "only when the political and social issues that were at the heart of the war are illuminated will the Vietnam war film become a true act of remembrance."⁵⁸ Furthermore, wartime plays such as *Viet Rock* and later post-war ones like *Tracers* certainly presented American soldiers as victims on various levels. I do, however, disagree with Alter's analysis that such depictions resulted in a de facto "vociferous" support of imperialistic American policies.

Viet Rock, for example, depicts the Vietnamese more frequently than most other plays and films of the period, and often in stereotypical ways. The stereotypes, however, are always presented as the *perspectives* of various American characters in the play. For example, when a GI asks his Sergeant what a VC looks like, his superior officer points to the ARVN South Vietnamese soldiers and says "like them." Two key points are thus established through this scene: one, the racist viewpoint that all Orientals look alike to some Americans; and two, the American perception of the VC as an "unseen enemy" who was constantly infiltrating the seemingly friendly Vietnamese populace. These themes are reinforced in the bombing of American troops at "Saigon Sally's" bar and the "alternate scene" at the play's end in which "demented" VC, babbling in "gibberish" and almost "foaming at the mouth," torture and execute a stalwart American lad. In addition, numerous characters in the play spout racist and ethnocentric maxims about the Vietnamese, as when GIs refer to the ARVNs as "you cute little guys" or sing "gonna get me a slant-eye in old Saigon, she'll feed me booze and I'll make her a son" about Vietnamese women.⁵⁹

The actions of these characters in no way reveal Terry's support of American imperialism and our military involvement in Vietnam, especially given the play's broad, satirical style. Rather, Terry both depicts and critiques the attitudes some Americans undoubtedly held towards the Vietnamese and the war. For example, the war-mongering sergeant who wants to "get on with the war" while orgasmically screaming "I love our President"⁶⁰ hardly seems to serve as a political mouthpiece for Terry. Nor do they indicate her "complicity" with any larger imperialist American ideology. And considering that *Viet Rock* was written in the early years of the war, the play was quite prescient in its depiction of the guerrilla warfare which created such a distinct challenge to American troops in Vietnam. In addition, American troops *were* bombed, mutilated, and tortured by the

VC. To deny this is to romanticize the Vietnamese soldiers as some sort of saintly martyrs of the left, thereby creating yet another category of generic representation. Conversely, Americans committed atrocities towards the Vietnamese which have been equally well documented, and the play is actually quite balanced in considering American culpability. While no such specific American acts are portrayed, the sergeant's racist slurs regarding the deaths of Vietnamese non-combatants and soldiers throughout the play seem quite relevant in this regard.

Furthermore, American GIs--many of whom were drafted into combat against their will--were victims of the war and also of their Vietnamese opponents. Who else in fact killed them? This does not in any way defend the political, military, and cultural beliefs which led to American participation in the war. But the VC and NVA were soldiers and did kill American GIs, who were very real victims in that sense. Again, what many of the representations of the war on film and stage failed to consider was that large numbers of Vietnamese also lost their lives and suffered immeasurably as a result of the war. They too, in a very practical sense, were victims of violence. This absence, in tandem with a general portrayal of the Vietnamese as savage "Orientals" or passive victims, is a major aspect of many American representations of the war--especially after the 1960s.

Interestingly, a later section of Alter's book suggested that the following patterns emerged in most plays of this era:

Shown as instigators much more often than as victims of the war, Americans are commonly assigned in the plays an active role that includes generating most forms of this violence. No doubt Americans, especially GIs, are occasionally shown as "tragic" victims, but the "evil" that victimizes them, most notably in the later plays, tends to originate among themselves, or among their leaders, rather than in the Vietcong. On the other hand, as obvious targets of the U.S. aggression, the Vietcong are systematically characterized as victims of violence inflicted upon them by the American war machine. Their own acts of violence, occasionally reaching extreme levels, are usually explained by some previous American violence and hence minimized; besides, they are rare.⁶¹

I feel that her analysis above, in which the American military, culture, and government are assigned the primary responsibility for the war, is more consistent with Terry's intentions in *Viet Rock*. It is also more reflective, I believe, of the larger anti-"establishment" tone of the era which influenced many plays of the 1960s dealing with the war. Furthermore, while perhaps *Viet Rock* did not dig deep enough into the myriad causes of the war, it certainly displayed an intelligent awareness of the context of American imperialism in relation to Vietnam, as well as a courageous willingness to debate such issues on stage during the volatile period of the conflict itself.

Daniel Berrigan's play *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (1971) was a good example of a later work which directly addressed the complexities of the war's causation. It also echoed *Viet Rock's* concern for the Vietnamese people, innocent or otherwise, who were being bombed and killed as a result of the war. Set during the trial of the "Catonsville Nine," who were convicted of burning draft records with napalm in 1967, the play does not depict any images of Vietnam. But through the documentary testimony of the various defendants, it does debate America's military presence in Vietnam as well as the larger foreign policy context of our involvement there.

The play is especially interesting in its condemnation of the role American economic concerns played in leading us into Vietnam, which echoed the critiques of emerging "New Left" historians such as Gabriel Kolko at that time.⁶² The defendants Thomas and Marjorie Melville specifically charged the United States government, for example, with backing the interests of multinational corporations like the United Fruit Company in Guatemala via an American-supported coup which led to the forcible removal or murder of peasants who had been given land belonging to the corporation. Thomas Melville claimed that if Third World countries like Guatemala did not cooperate with the economic interests of America, then the government labeled them Communists and "began executing them." Defendant Thomas

Lewis linked such activities to Vietnam when he stated that "we have representatives in Vietnam who do terrible things in our name"⁶³ and identified napalm as a particularly heinous aspect of American foreign aid. In Lewis's words:

we supply weaponry to more than eighty countries. We have troops in more than forty countries. These troops are backed up with our weaponry. The fact is, the American system can only flourish if we expand our economy. The fact is we produce more goods than we are capable of consuming. We must have new markets. We must bring our industries, our way of life, into Vietnam and Latin America. We must protect our interests there.⁶⁴

In effect, Lewis's argument put an economic slant on the Cold War domino theory which greatly influenced American intervention abroad during the 1950s and 1960s. Daniel Berrigan echoed Lewis when he cried out against the war as follows: "how long must the world's resources be raped in the service of legalized murder?"

The testimony recorded in the play also attacks the government's treatment of the poor and various people of color in the Third World through its expansionist economic foreign policy in general and the Vietnam War in particular. Philip Berrigan expressed their outrage over "blood being shed in Vietnam--American and Vietnamese blood," and defendant Mary Moylan stated her horror as a nurse over the "inhuman" effects of pouring napalm on the Vietnamese. Similarly, Daniel Berrigan recalled his time spent in Hanoi during 1968 where he saw the results of America's bombing of Vietnam first-hand: "the bodies of children, the hearts and organs and limbs of women--teachers, workers, peasants--bombed in fields and churches and schools and hospitals. It was quite clear to me during three years of air war America had been experimenting upon the bodies of the innocent." The defendants also extended their concern to the poor of America, which included large numbers of people of color in various "ghettos" throughout our nation. Lewis acknowledged the implications of the war vis-à-vis race and class when he noted that

they burned the draft records in the inner city "to dramatize that the war is taking more cannon fodder from the poor areas than from the more affluent areas."

While the tribunal structure of the play does not show any specific scenes involving the Vietnamese people, the defendants and the play as a whole reflect an unusual concern for the victims of American aggression and injustice both abroad and at home. The play's candor in challenging economic imperialism as the cornerstone of America's foreign policy also revealed a willingness to engage the larger intersection of economics and politics in relation to our long-term involvement in Vietnam dating back to the World War Two era. The play's cultural critiques are often quite insightful in this regard, as when Philip Berrigan notes the American penchant for self-absorption and intercultural insensitivity: "most Americans have difficulty seeing the I, the self, as being, the we, humanity. We cannot feel the effects of our actions as others see us. We think we can rape a people and have them love us. We cannot ravage the ecology of Indochina.... We cannot fight the abstraction of Communism by killing the people who believe in it."⁶⁵ Certainly such remarks stand in marked contrast to the mainstream films previously discussed, which wholeheartedly endorsed the "anti-Communist" American mission in Vietnam as beneficial to both the Vietnamese and American peoples.

In considering other plays which responded politically to the war, the work of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppet Theatre, and El Teatro Campesino must be discussed. These three "radical" street theatres (as well as many other smaller, less well-known companies) were very concerned with exposing the interconnection between American militarism abroad and the domestic treatment of various minority groups. The companies were also notable in their willingness to take their wide-sweeping political agendas to the streets and parks of America through a quick, easy-to-disperse performance

style which was typically called "guerrilla" theatre.⁶⁶ All three of these troupes engaged the war in several works which addressed the issues of race and culture vis-à-vis America and Vietnam.

The San Francisco Mime Troupe, founded by R.G. Davis in 1959, utilized a number of popular performance techniques, including *commedia dell'arte*, in its broad, highly physicalized productions. The troupe satirized the government's altruistic justifications for intervention in Vietnam with two major plays in the 1960s. One was an adaptation of Carlo Goldoni's *L'Amant militaire* in 1967, which exposed the Spanish army fighting in Italy (read America in Vietnam) for profit. A more direct and less analogous approach to the war was presented in their 1971 production of *The Dragon Lady's Revenge*. This play was set in Southeast Asia and broadly caricatured the machinations of the CIA, the American Ambassador, and various exoticized "Oriental" characters such as "the Dragon Lady" and "General Rong Q" in their competition to control the drug traffic in that area. As with the satire of *Viet Rock*, the play offered a collage of historic Western stereotypes of Asian cultures for ridicule, and suggested that the American "establishment" was capable of such illicit acts as drug trafficking. Furthermore, while never specifically mentioning Vietnam, their 1976 play *False Promises* attacked the roots of American economic imperialism. This work examines the origins of an expansionist American foreign policy through our accumulation of "spheres of interest" in Cuba, the Philippines, etc. during the Spanish American War. Such actions were justified and maintained on grounds of helping the native inhabitants of these countries "better" themselves in keeping with Kipling's "white man's burden" scenario. Although the play was written after the end of the war, its exposé of a US foreign policy dominated by a need to expand its capitalist markets in areas inhabited by racial and cultural Others was consistent with the radical troupe's perspective on American involvement in Vietnam.⁶⁷

The Bread and Puppet Theatre was founded by pacifist Peter Schumann in 1961 and sought to raise the consciousness of its audiences regarding various inhumane events around the world. In the mid-1960s, however, Schumann focused his energies on protesting the war in Vietnam. In his lengthy two-volume study of the theatre, Stefan Brecht noted that "what Schumann and the Peace Movement carried out into the streets of New York was the theme of war, and, to some--lesser--extent--its image." Thus, Schumann and his colleagues saw great importance in informing people about and protesting against the war on a personal level, which they hoped would affect viewers who had become desensitized to images of the war in the media. While groups like Davis's Mime Troupe performed "anti-war skits at rallies or by themselves in parks," Brecht credits Schumann with perfecting the practice of "parade art." Indeed, his giant puppets, which depicted various acts of suffering in Vietnam, were a common sight at many peace marches of this period. Beyond these street protests, however, Schumann presented three specific plays in this period which denounced the war in Vietnam: *Fire* in 1966 and *Wounds of Vietnam* and *Bach Cantata #140* in 1967.

Fire was first performed at the company's loft on Delancey Street in New York and opened with two seated rows of masked, dead Vietnamese characters. The figures proceeded through various actions in which each day of the week was announced on a placard, culminating in a scene of destruction on "Saturday" which simulated a bombing raid. In the penultimate scene, called "Fire," the bloodied figures were swathed in dark cloth. At the end of the play, a Vietnamese woman was entombed by two callous young men in Western clothing. *Wounds of Vietnam* was presented as part of a week-long program against the war called "Viet Life" at Washington Square Methodist Church in New York. The program included scenes depicting "various aspects of Vietnamese history, culture, and daily life." A flyer which was distributed before the event soliciting participants noted that it intended to make the Vietnamese people "present to the audience

and ourselves" by letting them "speak for themselves." Although the "presence" and voice of the Vietnamese people was in fact mediated and filtered by the various performers of the project, its intention to depict the humanity and daily lives of the peasants of Vietnam reflected an effort to expose the audience to a side of the war not typically addressed in film, the media, or mainstream theatre. Schumann's contribution to the protest, *Wounds of Vietnam*, featured a doctor lecturing masked students on the dangers of treating burn victims juxtaposed against an electronic wail, a female victim writhing in agony, and a female voice reading from a newspaper article on the horrific conditions of civilian hospitals in Vietnam. Finally, his short piece, *Bach Cantata #140*, presented a stage full of women with babies whom are mowed down by machine gun fire to the sounds of one of the most famous composers of Western "civilized" music, Bach. Brecht comments that the plays reflect a non-violent response to the "airborne American carnage in peasant Asia" by paying tribute to its victims and also noting the "incursion of evil" onto innocent life.

A year later, however, Schumann would explore the ideology of violent resistance in his 1968 work *A Man Says Goodbye to His Mother*. The play is set in a small village in Asia, where its narrator gives a young man a gun and toy airplane as he leaves to fight the "enemy." The soldier then burns villages, destroys crops, and kills babies until his mother--now representing the "enemy"--kills him with a pair of scissors. The narrator presents the mother with a "we regret to inform" you telegram from the government which informs her of her son's death in battle. Its focus on the perspective, and loss, of a Vietnamese mother and son as a result of the carnage of war is again atypical of the commercial theatre, and did not take place on film until Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* in 1993.⁶⁸

Another of the street theatre ensembles which actively engaged the politics and responsibility of the war was Luis Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino*, which was originally founded in 1965 to help Chicano farm workers better their working and living conditions.

Utilizing "actos" or brief "skits" in both English and Spanish, the troupe drew a parallel between the oppression of Chicano workers and Vietnamese peasants by the "American military-agricultural-industrial complex" in its 1970 work *Vietnam Campesino*. In this play, a figure representing "General Defense" instructs another called "The Draft" to "stick to the minorities" in gathering fodder for the war. When the Chicanos protest the use of poisonous pesticides by the military-industrial complex, the military, represented by a Chicano draftee named Hijo (or son), arrives to burn down their homes. At one point in the play, the General tells the representative of the pesticide company, "Butt," that "you get the Whites to pay for it, and the Chicanos, the Blacks, Indians and Orientals to fight it. So what if we've killed people? We've saved the country from Communism." When Hijo refuses to perform such actions against his own people, "Defense" orders him to burn down Vietnamese villages. He does so, and is shot by a Vietnamese for his efforts. When the military tries to recruit more soldiers from the Chicano ranks, the community, led by a resurrected Hijo, rejects them. The play thus ends on a note of solidarity between the Vietnamese and Chicanos.⁶⁹

In the later 1970s and beyond, the company's work took on a more mystical bent, but another play entitled *El Soldado Razo* (*The Chicano G.I.*) from 1971 echoed the themes of *Vietnam Campesino*. The play involves a Chicano named Johnny who goes to Vietnam and tells his mother of American massacres of Vietnamese civilians who seem no different from his Chicano loved ones.⁷⁰ While the Vietnamese were in many ways actually quite different from the Chicanos, these plays reflected the radical politics of the day which often linked together the suffering of American minorities and Vietnamese civilians.

The work of all three companies tended to depict the Vietnamese in a collective rather than individualized manner, but did explore how the war affected them in

considerable depth. Still, the abstraction of these presentations, as well as the willingness of some extremely radical groups (both theatrical and political) to romanticize the violence of the Viet Cong, served on one level to categorize the Vietnamese as "noble savages" who were generic victims of American violence. On another level, the work of these guerrilla theatre groups, in tandem with some of the other more mainstream plays, centered the Vietnamese on stage in ways which helped balance the traditional focus on the American presence or self in the war genre. The absencing of the Vietnamese, not to mention the war in general, which largely took place in the film community during these years was countered in the theatrical representations which either staged, or at the very least described, the role of the Vietnamese in the war. While much of the avant-garde or radical theatre of the 1960s focused on the Vietnamese to a degree never seen before or again on stage or film, its emphasis on an admittedly narrow range of depictions (i.e., suffering or victimization) lacked complexity at times.

Nora Alter notes that some works of this era such as Tuli Kupferberg's little-known play *Fuck Nam* (1967) established a "racial solidarity" between Black American soldiers and the Vietnamese. In this particular play, the white GIs are depicted as bestial sadists who enjoy sexually abusing the local Vietnamese women at every possible opportunity. In contrast, the Black soldiers never harm the Vietnamese and in one scene actually rape a group of white GIs in order to establish their dominance over them.⁷¹ Images of Black Americans at war were certainly much more visible in many plays of this era, especially when compared to those written during World War Two. Given the large number of Blacks troops drafted into the war, however, Black characters were still under-represented on stage during this period. Since most of the plays were written by white playwrights, however, they not surprisingly focused on white protagonists with the Black characters confined to supporting roles. Still, the nature of their representation differed greatly from

that of plays like *Somebody Named Joe* during World War Two, which suggested that Black participation in the war would help abolish racism and inequality. The plays of the Vietnam era often reflected the militancy of the "Black Power" movement and the increasingly violent nature of the struggle for civil rights during the 1960s. Thus, Blacks and whites were no longer automatically presented as fighting together to preserve America's democratic ideals as was done during the "good war." Rather, racial conflict and white oppression of Blacks as another group of domestic Others beyond the American Indians became a hotly contested subject on stage.⁷²

Vietnam veteran David Rabe, whose first two plays of his "Vietnam trilogy" were written during the war itself, was one highly praised white playwright of this era who included several important Black characters in his works about the conflict. The first of his Vietnam War plays to receive a production was *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*. Its Caucasian protagonist, Pavlo Hummel, is a dim-witted, socially inept outsider who reinvents himself as a "regular army" soldier. Once in Vietnam, he continually reenlists because he has grown to enjoy the killing there. The non-linear plot begins with the death of Hummel in Vietnam by an unidentified assailant who blows him up with a hand grenade. Soon after, he is "resurrected" and accompanied throughout the play by the character of Ardell, a Black soldier who serves as a guide/confidant to Hummel as he flashes back on his life. Indeed, when Hummel is ostracized from his squad in boot camp for stealing from them, Ardell identifies with his Otherness as follows: "sometimes I look at you, I don't know what I think I'm seein', but it sooo simple. You black on the inside. In there where you live, you that awful hurtin' black so you can't see yourself no way. Not up or down or in or out." After narrating Hummel's slow, painful death to the audience, Ardell engages his ghost in a nihilistic exhortation about the meaning of his life, death, and service in Vietnam: "it all shit."

While Ardell's comments do raise the issue of Black anger against the larger white society, the Black and white soldiers in the play generally get along fine. If anything, Hummel has more trouble with his white counterparts in training camp than with his Black colleagues, and later risks his own life to rescue a Black GI named Parham who has been captured and mutilated by the Viet Cong.⁷³ Furthermore, the principal character of Sergeant Tower, a major authority figure in the play, is also Black. Other more radical works such as the aforementioned *Fuck Nam* went much further in denouncing America's treatment of Blacks. In addition, the burgeoning Black theatre movement of the period addressed the often involuntary participation of Blacks in Vietnam. For example, the outline for a Black "Communications Project" drafted by prominent playwright Le Roi Jones (later known as Imamu Amiri Baraka) printed in a 1968 *TDR* devoted to "Black Theatre" included an agenda for "political" activity involving the "Draft--Anti-Vietnam, Anti-Genocide."⁷⁴ And groups like El Teatro Campesino, of course, depicted the negative impact of the war on other minority groups such as Chicanos. Conflict between American troops in Vietnam based on issues of race and class would be explored much more fully after the war, especially on film. John Irwin, the director of the movie *Hamburger Hill* (1987), once stated that "I would like to see Spike Lee or a Black film maker make a film about Vietnam and until that is done there's going to be a great void in the Vietnam genre." More recent films like *The Walking Dead*, *Panther*, and *Dead Presidents* in 1995 have subsequently addressed this absence with mixed results, which I will discuss in Chapter Six.⁷⁵

The Vietnamese are given a decidedly secondary role in *Pavlo Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones*, which contrasts to their representation in some of the earlier, less mainstream plays of the era. This was a significant development in that Rabe's plays were the most

commercially successful productions of that time dealing with Vietnam, and were strongly concerned with the impact of the war on American culture and the psyche of the individual soldier. The plays suggest two essential premises: that the war transformed American boys into hardened killers and that the seemingly placid and innocuous middle-class American society did in fact contribute to the horrors of Vietnam. The Vietnamese are presented in collective terms as victims of American savagery, sexual objects, or the ever-popular omnipresent, sinister enemy. *Pavlo Hummel* is also one of the first theatrical efforts to abandon the distinction in American attitudes between Vietnamese "enemies" and "allies." The play reveals this shift in perception when a seasoned veteran tells the neophyte Hummel about the war as follows:

but you go over there, that's what you're goin' for. To mess with them people, because they don't know nothin'. Them slopes; man they're the stupidest bunch of people anybody ever saw. It don't matter what you do to 'em or what you say, man they just look at you. They're some kinda goddamn phenomenon, man. Can of bug spray buy you all the ass you can handle in some places. Insect repellent, man. You ready for that? You give 'em can a bug spray, you can lay their fourteen-year old daughter. Not that any of 'em screw worth a shit.⁷⁶

After hearing this story, Hummel becomes obsessed with another tale of a battle savvy Sergeant Tilden, who cuts down a seemingly benign old Vietnamese man and his daughter because he senses that they are actually carrying satchel charges to blow up an American squad.

These Vietnam "war stories" paint a picture of an America far removed from the altruism of *The Green Berets*. Indeed, once in Vietnam Hummel is transformed into a hardened killer whose main enjoyment in life seems to involve shooting Vietnamese. Like his "hero" Tilden, Hummel himself eventually executes a Vietnamese farmer on the rationale that he was carrying dynamite, but the act seems mostly motivated by revenge for a fallen comrade. While the play presents the "civilian" Vietnamese as passive victims of American brutality, it depicts the armed VC as mysterious savages who consistently

ambush the GIs in the jungle or booby trap their places of recreation behind the lines. When the enemy does materialize, it is only to perform actions like stabbing Hummel in the back or torturing the helpless Parham. They then quickly disappear into the dark void of the jungle, just like the Japanese of the World War Two works who are equally at home in such menacing terrain. In the scene with Parham, the VC speak in "singsong" pidgin English which accentuates their Otherness, as do the only Vietnamese civilians we encounter beyond the tales and images of atrocity killings--the whores of "Mamsan's" place. Thus, Rabe depicts Vietnam as a dark killing field void of any human decency or compassion. The Vietnamese are totally constructed as an enemy, often unseen, who must serve the needs of the corrupted American soldiers for killing and sex. Thus, all participants of Hummel's world in Vietnam are reduced to a bestial level where only primal urges are evident.

Furthermore, Rabe effectively twists the established paradigms of the combat genre in his representation of the American soldiers. While white-Black antagonism is not a particularly central issue in the play, the old-fashioned notions of team play and camaraderie among American troops have disappeared in Vietnam. For instance, Hummel dies because of an argument with a Sergeant Wall over the availability of his favorite whore. After he kicks Wall in the groin during their scuffle, the sergeant retaliates by throwing the grenade which we saw in the first scene, which results in Hummel's mutilation and agonizing death. Ironically, despite his paranoia about VC booby traps, Hummel dies at the hands of a "regular army" Caucasian American GI--one of his "own kind." Such conflicts never occurred between American troops in films or plays of the World War Two era, or in movies like *China Gate* and *The Green Berets* which essentially reinforced previous combat genre conventions.⁷⁷ And even the old-time myths of wartime valor are debunked in *Pavlo Hummel*, as with the horror story told about the veteran Sergeant Brisby who lost his lower body to a "Bouncing Betty" land mine. Sadly, the

cynical Brisby is a victim of a new, different war where the "rules" have changed, and which he cannot comprehend. In an earlier scene, however, Sergeant Tower implies that perhaps such "rules" never really existed, as when he tells the recruits about a group of American POWs in Korea who abandoned a comrade to die in the snow because he was merely disturbing their sleep.⁷⁸ Indeed, Rabe suggests that these once-held "truths" were in fact hollow myths created by various romanticized recreations of war in our culture. As J.W. Fenn observes in his analysis of the play, "the overwhelming dominant themes of the war plays become those of ... internecine conflict, psychological fragmentation, alienation, and isolation; and a loss of cultural identity."⁷⁹ Thus, Rabe presents the war as the reflection of a dark underside of the American character.

Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* explores the problems of a veteran returning to his life and family "back home" and reflects a similar perspective towards American culture and its relation to the war. The play depicts a seemingly perfect middle-class American family, with all of the characters named after the family on the popular 1950s television program *Ozzie and Harriet*. The eldest son David's return from Vietnam as a blinded and emotionally disturbed veteran, however, triggers a release of the ugliness and hatred lurking beneath the plastic veneer of their world.

Although Ozzie, Harriet, and their youngest son Ricky attempt to maintain a facade of having achieved the "American dream," David's antagonistic behavior increasingly forces them to confront the harsh impact of Vietnam on their lives. As Harriet says to David near the end of the play, "that's all we ever wanted, your father and me--good sweet things for you and Rick--ease and lovely child, a car, a wife, a good job.... it would be so wonderful--everyone so happy--turkey. Turkey. Lights." Both parents also initially view the war and David's role in it from an idealized perspective which is heavily influenced by earlier cinematic depictions of combat. For example, Ozzie refers to the respect he has for "men serving together in war, it's a powerful thing," and Harriet assumes that David's

overseas girlfriend must be a "WAC or Red Cross girl." But when David admits that she was in fact a Vietnamese prostitute, they reveal an ugly racism which contradicts their previously cheery behavior. Ozzie actually slaps David after a tirade about his betrayal of the white "race" by having sexual relations with a woman of "yellow" skin. As Ozzie puts it, "I just can't stop thinking about it. Little, Bitty chinky kids he wanted to have. Little Bitty chinky yellow kids." At first, Harriet tries to rationalize the situation, noting that there were "no white girls around" for David to date, but then literally vomits in disgust at the thought of his involvement with one of "them."

As with *Pavlo Hummel*, Rabe posits that the violence inherent within the larger American culture was extended to our treatment of the Vietnamese during the war. Such violent tendencies become evident when Ozzie, for example, threatens to rape Harriet and "cut her tongue from her mouth." Rabe's suggestion of a warped cultural conditioning of American youth is underscored when Harriet accuses Ozzie of contributing to David's pathology by teaching him "sports and fighting" as a boy. In a weak moment, Ozzie also recalls David mutilating cats as a child, although the family prefers to allude to his former "innocence" whenever possible.

In Rabe's scathing representation of American society, the racist characters of the play view the Vietnamese as a bestial Other completely opposed to the values and lifestyle of white, middle-class America. Ozzie rants about the "disease, filthy diseases those girls" possess, and Harriet urges David to "think of their faces, their poor funny little faces.... the human face was not meant to be that way. A nose is a thinness--you know that and the lips that are not thin are ugly, and it is we who disappear, David." The family's fear of any outside "pollution" of its white, Christian purity is further revealed when their priest tells David that sexual "acceptance of an alien race is in fact the rejection of one's own race--it is in fact the rejection of one's own self--it is sickness." Thus, by sleeping with the Vietnamese Zung, it is implied that David has let down his "side" of the white race.

This hostility towards "yellowness" is even used to justify the war atrocities David describes to his family, such as the horror of seeing a pregnant woman with a rifle shoved up her vagina. Harriet's only response is to condemn the "awful things those yellow people do to one another ... animals--Christ, burn them. David, don't let it hurt you. All the things you saw." While David is literally blind, it is his family who cannot see the "truth." Thus, they can only respond to the savagery inflicted on the Vietnamese people in relation to how the war has disrupted their own previously cozy lives. Even David, who professes his love for Zung, tends to exoticize their relationship, as when he proclaims "there was total understanding in you of me and me of you." In addition, Zung has no individual identity of her own in the play, but is only characterized through David's vision of her. Although he feels guilty for having been afraid to bring his girlfriend home, he too views the Vietnamese as "primitives" who behave in ways that are alien to the American value system: "they hit their children. The yellow people. They punish the disobedience of their children with sticks. And then they sleep together one family in a bed, limbs all intertwining like puppies."

Ultimately, Rabe questions the notion of American goodwill in his condemnation of the corruptness which permeates the very fabric of our society. This hypocrisy is expressed most definitively, perhaps, in the family's decision to cajole David into committing suicide at the play's end in order to restore calm and tranquility to their lives. In a parallel move, Ozzie "chokes" the spirit of Zung as he accuses her of living in filth like a "dirty animal" who talks the "gibberish" of a foreign tongue. With Harriet's help, he then places her in a "green garbage bag" (symbolic of an American body bag in the war), which in his mind is the appropriate place for such an animal. Rabe marks the impact of the conflict on a larger societal level, however, via the play's reference to the endless line of trucks delivering the broken bodies of young soldiers to their families. A Sergeant Major of "Black or Spanish descent" tells Ozzie of the huge deliveries he must make to urban

slum areas and rural outposts like Reading, Pennsylvania, thus alluding to the class and racial disparities of the war.⁸⁰

In both plays, Rabe replaces the view of Americans as altruistic, good-hearted folks as depicted in the World War Two combat genre with a dark vision of them as racist, xenophobic, self-absorbed monsters. While the major Hollywood films about the war discussed in this chapter supported America's intervention in Vietnam as an anti-Communist "white man's burden" of sorts, Rabe's works depicted such policies, as well as the paternalistic attitudes behind them, as hypocritical and perverse. Understandably, *Sticks and Bones* elicited strong although generally positive responses from the press when it played in New York at the Public Theater during 1971-72 (it was later transferred to a Broadway house). Dick Brukenfeld of the *Village Voice*, for example, commented, "at a moment when our theatre reflects the national tendency to flee from reality, I welcome his blessings, even in their imperfection. This one makes an intriguing, disquieting, evening."⁸¹ Interestingly, Rabe's plays marked a distinct transition to the work which would follow the end of the war on both stage and film. His emphasis on examining American culture in relation to Vietnam, as well as the impact of the war on returning veterans, would be reiterated in the films and plays which emerged after the war's conclusion.

In considering the overall arc of the work discussed in this chapter, it seems that the dominant image of the Vietnamese was that of various types of victims of American policy and violence, albeit sympathetic ones in many cases. Some demonization of the VC and the larger populace occurred on stage, and the Communist forces were definitely perceived as evil ideologues on film, which was consistent with the treatment of the Japanese and Koreans in earlier combat pictures. Some of the stage plays worked against the previous

patterns of the combat genre, however, by expressing sympathy with the enemy forces as well as civilian victims of the war, thereby reflecting the radical politics of the period. While the plays of World War Two mostly avoided the racist attacks on the Japanese which permeated the Hollywood films of the period, none of them ever took the side of the enemy or depicted them as victims of American oppression. So, on this level the American theatre during the period of the war was quite unusual. Even the plays which were not pro-VC typically distinguished between the military foe in Vietnam versus the "innocent" civilian targets of American bombings, etc. Again, such distinctions were not granted to the Japanese during World War Two. The controversy and ambiguity over our military involvement in the internal affairs of Vietnam, in contrast to the largely unified support against a clear-cut totalitarian aggressor during World War Two, partly contributed to such a dramatic shift in representation.

But the trend in film to support American claims of altruism in Vietnam reinforced the historic notion of a "white man's burden" in protecting the "little guys" there from Communist aggression. On stage, an overall tendency emerged which categorized the Vietnamese as non-individualized, sympathetic victims of American violence. Such characterizations worked within cultural paradigms of the "noble savage" who was somehow simpler and purer than the corrupt, technologically advanced Westerners. Still, the theatre of this period was distinct in its efforts to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between our cultural mythology, racial attitudes, and participation in the war. Although this pattern lessened after the end of the war, similar themes surfaced less overtly in the many post-war films which depicted American troops in Vietnam as savage, psychopathic killers. As I will argue in successive chapters, however, such movies tended to infer that the soldiers were largely responding to the decadent environment of Asia, whereas the plays of the war era typically suggested that wartime atrocities reflected a deep-seated corruption in the American culture and society.

Overall, the impact of the war on the Vietnamese received a primacy of attention in the theatrical work of the 1960s which disappeared after the war ended, with David Rabe's plays marking a transition towards this more inward-looking focus. Rabe's third Vietnam play *Streamers*, which was written in 1976 after the war's completion, was set fully in America and featured no Vietnamese characters. Ironically, then, the balance between the theatre and Hollywood during the war would reverse itself in the following years, as by the mid-1970s Hollywood was filming movies set in Vietnam, whereas the stage was focused on the problem of Americans "coming to terms" with the war. In addition, Rabe's plays and the bulk of the work thereafter on stage and film increasingly demonized the entire Vietnamese population in various ways, reflecting the paranoia of American troops by the war's end regarding the difficulty of fighting either an "unseen" enemy or one who frequently appeared in civilian guise. Thus, the position of sympathy and solidarity with the Vietnamese people which characterized many of the plays and films of this period would increasingly evaporate as America grappled for the first time with the impact of losing a war.

Endnotes

1. See David F. Trask, "The Korean War and the Cold War"; in Thomas G. Patterson, ed., *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Documents and Essays, Volume II: Since 1914* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1978), 339. The notion that China was "ours" to be "lost" or "sold out" in the first place reflected a typically American ethnocentric view of foreign affairs.

2. The rhetoric of American foreign policy leaders advocated for a "containment" of Communism in Vietnam and elsewhere as part of a larger belief in a "domino theory." This notion predicted that the collapse of one "domino" (e.g., Vietnam) to Communism would topple successive "dominoes" in a surrounding region such as Southeast Asia. Thus, the "need" to help South Vietnam maintain a democratic system against Communist aggression from the North was presented as a justification for sending aid and then troops to Vietnam. In contrast, some of the so-called "revisionist" or "New Left" historians such as Gabriel Kolko have contended that more selfish motives led to our involvement in Vietnam, mostly revolving around the need for controlling vital economic markets as part of a new "economic" form of imperialism. See "Dwight D. Eisenhower Explains the 'Domino Theory,' 1954," and "Lyndon B. Johnson Explains Why Americans Fight in Vietnam, 1965"; in Patterson, 370 and 446-49.

3. See "The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, 1964"; in Patterson, 445-46. The secret government documents obtained by the *New York Times* were eventually published as *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971). They revealed that LBJ's administration had privately planned on escalating American military involvement in Vietnam before its public use of the incident in the Tonkin Gulf as a justification for sending troops overseas.

4. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 676-686; and Michael Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 13-18.

5. Rick Berg, "Losing Vietnam"; in Ditmar and Michaud, 53.

6. *China Gate*, directed by Samuel Fuller, 97 min., 20th Century Fox, 1957, videocassette.

7. Albert Auster and Leonard Quart, *How the War was Remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 16.

8. Ibid.

9. In Edward W. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 282-87, he contends that imperialism did not end with the collapse of various Western empires in the post-World War Two era, but rather continued in new, more covert forms. Regarding the US, he feels that American diplomats who championed "containment" during the Cold War period employed a "rationale" of "world responsibility" to advance their interests and intervene in the economic and political affairs of numerous countries (often via CIA backed coups). Such policies have continued beyond the demise of the Cold War to the present day.

10. American blindness towards Vietnamese culture and the deep-rooted historical nature of the nationalist struggle there is analyzed in *How We Lost the Vietnam War*, the memoir of Nguyen Cao Ky, the former Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), 11-12. As Ky notes: "how many of the strapping twenty-year olds who fought in our country in the late sixties realized that the Americans of a generation before had been helping the French maintain colonial control of our country? How many Americans in Vietnam could really understand that to all of us Ho Chi Minh was, until 1946, a great patriot.... to many Americans in Vietnam, we were just vaguely 'Chinese.' We are not. We are Vietnamese. The Americans did not realize that though the first Chinese warlord marched into our Red River Delta in 200 B.C. and the Chinese stayed for ten centuries, we, almost alone in Asia, defeated them.... It is easy to say that none of this matters, but it does; it helps one understand the reason why. Why a villager in the South might hide a killer from the North; why 'Uncle Ho' could inspire his men while so many of our leaders failed."

11. Auster and Quart, 21.

12. *The Ugly American*, directed by George Englund, 120 min., Universal-International Films, 1963, videocassette.

13. Auster and Quart, 21.

14. Ibid., 22.

15. Michael Lanning, *Vietnam at the Movies* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 45-48. Lanning observes that Marshall Thompson's *A Yank in Viet-Nam*, 80 min., Allied Artists, 1964, while unremarkable in most respects, is "notable" for being "the only Hollywood production about the war to be filmed completely in Vietnam," 46.

16. See Michael Anderegg's essay "Hollywood and Vietnam: John Wayne and Jane Fonda as Discourse" for a particularly insightful reading of this issue. In Michael Anderegg, ed., *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 15-32. The author notes the irony that Wayne, unlike many of his fellow stars such as Jimmy Stewart, did not serve in the armed forces during World War Two. He mentions this not to criticize Wayne, but to emphasize that "his *image* as the soldier-hero of World War II was precisely that, an image, pure fantasy." Thus, "to be like John Wayne, to mimic his words, his mannerisms, his actions, is to imitate an imitation," 28.

17. Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 102-106.

18. Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), 6.

19. Robert Windeler, "Defiant Wayne Filming 'Green Berets'," *New York Times*, 27 September, 1967 (clipping file "*The Green Berets*," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City).

20. Letter from John Wayne to Bill Moyers, 18 February 1966, Johnson Library; quoted in Suid, 223.

21. See the review of the film in the *New Yorker*, 6 July 1968 (clipping file "*Green Berets*," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City), in which the author likens the film to "the voice of the traditional English Nanny." This figure is "authoritative, proselytizing ... and conservative through to her bootheels. She is also often kindly, fruitful, and impossible to budge, with the carpond of benignity and insensibility that has distinguished much imperialist policy." Furthermore, the "Nanny's sentiments underlie every scene of 'The Green Berets.' Vietnam is treated as if it were a little savage, in dire need of moral upbringing and probably infested with lice. As the picture sees things, all the appalling brutality carried out by the Americans in it is for Vietnam's own good. The Vietnamese haven't had our advantage; they don't know what's best for them yet." This image of an imperialist "Nanny" in relation to the film places Wayne's *Green Berets* and the Vietnamese squarely within the tradition of the "white man's burden" and "the noble savage."

22. Leo Cawley, "The War About The War"; in Dittmar and Michaud, 74. *The Green Berets*, directed by John Wayne and Ray Kellog, 141 min., Warner Brothers, 1968, videocassette.

23. Suid, 229, 230.

24. Renata Adler, "The Absolute End of the 'Romance' of War," *New York Times*, 30 June 1968, 1; and Joseph Gelmis, "Review of *The Green Berets*," *Newsday*, 20 June 1968 (clipping file "*The Green Berets*," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York City).

25. Robert J. McKeever, "American Myths and the Impact of the Vietnam War: Revisionism in Foreign Policy and Popular Cinema in the 1980s"; in Walsh and Aulich, *Vietnam Images*, 44-46.

26. Robert W. Chandler, *War of Ideas: U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 16.

27. See Francis FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake; The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 368-69. FitzGerald claims that some American officers in Vietnam liked to refer to the Vietnamese as Indians, thereby putting the war "into a definite historical and mythological perspective: the Americans were once again embarked upon a heroic and (for themselves) almost painless conquest of an inferior race." An additional problem was that many GIs lumped our "allies" in the same category "of the enemy--communist, small, yellow, and poor," with only the issue of Communism removed from the equation. She also argues that many American advisors expected the Vietnamese to treat them as "members of a more 'advanced' society," and reacted angrily when they did not do so. While some Americans achieved a rapport with the Vietnamese, many others treated them as pupils, "looking upon the Vietnamese as savages or children with empty heads into which they wanted to pour instruction."

28. David Halberstam, interview with Lawrence Suid, 29 March 1975; quoted in Suid, 231.

29. Renata Adler's frequently cited review of the film, "Screen: '*Green Berets*' as Viewed by John Wayne," *New York Times*, 20 June 1968, 49, in which she calls the film

"vile," "insane," and "so unspeakable, so stupid, so rotten and false in every detail," probably serves as the most glaring example of the kind of harsh reaction which the film engendered at the time. Conversely, over the years, more conservative critics have defended the film. For instance, Michael Lanning, a former Vietnam veteran and author of the Vietnam War film book *Vietnam at the Movies*, claims that it "is dear to most veterans' hearts simply because it is all they have." Although its similarities to World War Two and cowboy-and-Indian films are derided by "greybeard college cinema professors and deskbound newspaper reporters," Lanning feels that such "positive" images of the American troops are "too often missing from films about the Vietnam War," 49-50.

30. Robert Asahina, "The Basic Training of American Playwrights: Theater and the Vietnam War," *Yale Theater* 9 (Spring 1978): 30.

31. Robert Stone, *Dog Soldiers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). While other noteworthy novels such as veteran Tim O'Brien's acclaimed *In the Lake of the Woods* (New York: Viking, 1994) have been published since the 1970s, certainly the non-fiction Vietnam war memoir has been the dominant mode of remembrance in prose.

32. Most notably *In The Year of the Pig*, directed by Emile de Antonio, 103 min., New Yorker Films, 1969; and *Hearts and Minds*, directed by Peter Davis, 112 min., Warner Brothers/Columbia, 1974, videocassette. In the latter film, US Commander General William Westmoreland proclaimed that "the Oriental does not put the same high value on human life as does the Westerner." These, and many other non-studio or "independent" documentary films addressed the war from a decidedly pro-Vietnamese and at times pro-Viet Cong perspective. Interestingly, the most direct fictional treatment of combat and the Vietnamese during the war was not a feature film, but rather Ronald Ribman's CBS television special *The Final War of Olly Winter*, directed by Paul Bogart, 90 minutes, 1967, 5-88, which involved an atypically direct consideration of both racism in America and the role of the Vietnamese in the war. The script depicts a Black American advisor, Olly Winter, in the field with ARVN troops in 1963. After surviving a massacre of the unit, Olly is hunted through the jungle by a band of Viet Cong. Along the way, he is accompanied by a Vietnamese girl whom he initially scorns as an ignorant and backwards Other. As the action progresses, however, Olly repeatedly flashes back to the traumas of his poverty stricken childhood and humiliations at the hands of white Americans. By the movie's end, he and the girl have reached a rapport that suggests an impending sexual relationship. It is never consummated because the couple is shot down by the VC as the girl comforts the bereaved Olly as he remembers the suicide of his mother. The dialogue includes complex debates between Olly and his ARVN "advisees" about the role of the American military; Olly and a VC prisoner regarding the notion of American/Western imperialism; and various VC and Vietnamese peasants over the role of the VC as "liberators" or murderers. A VC leader, for example, executes a village leader for helping the "Fascist imperialist" Olly, but tells him that he does so as a "military decision done without rancor." The film's willingness to engage various sides of the war, discuss issues of racism and politics in a non-dogmatic manner, and give a voice and identity to Vietnamese characters and a Black American protagonist on television was not only surprising but unparalleled in fictional treatments of the war in Hollywood to this day.

33. Asahina, 34, 35, 37.

34. *Ibid.*, 32.

35. J.W. Fenn, *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 50.

36. For a third point of view, see Nora M. Alter, *Vietnam Protest Theatre: the Television War on Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), xiv and xv, in which she claims that while the "Vietnam Protest Theatre" was aware of and dependent on television's mediated reportage of the war, it "also attempted to place a dialectical distance between itself and the televised images." Furthermore, she argues convincingly that despite the power of television to manipulate images of the war, the live theatre had the ability to respond *immediately* to "current events," as well as participate in "direct interaction" with its audience. Thus, the theatre differed from the journalistic media's response to the war on these levels.

37. Theodore Shank, *American Alternative Theatre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 99. Letter to Theodore Shank from Richard Schechner, 17 April 1971; quoted in Shank, 99.

38. Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973), 47, 49. Schechner noted that at one performance it took the audience three hours to reach an agreement as to who would volunteer before the production would proceed, 49.

39. Shank, 100. In terms of the shocked response in America at the time of the My Lai massacre, see "My Lai: An American Tragedy," *Time*, 5 December 1968, 23-34.

40. Schechner, 49.

41. Asahina, 37.

42. Fenn, 90. For a fuller discussion of the allegorical drama of this period, see Chapter Five of Fenn, 87-1376. In addition, in his essay "Historical Memory and Film," Michael Klein observes that several of the Western films which were made during the war indirectly criticized US involvement in Vietnam. As Klein put it, films like "Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* (1970) and Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970) suggest in their condemnation of cavalry massacres and genocidal policy towards American Indians allegories of the war in Vietnam, perhaps with particular reference to the massacre of Vietnamese civilians in the village of My Lai and the U.S. Air Force's indiscriminate use of napalm in free-fire zones"; in Dittmar and Michaud, 21. Thus, even though the Hollywood fiction film mostly ignored the controversial Vietnam War, film makers and audiences still "read" their concerns about the war into other films of the period. And even though Hollywood could not--or would not--produce films about the Vietnam War, they continued to romanticize World War Two through war films like *Bridge at Remagen*, directed by John Guillermin, 116 min., MGM, 1969, videocassette, which presented combat as a noble enterprise and American efforts in the "good war" as ultimately triumphant. Along the same lines, one of the most popular television shows of the era was *Combat*, a program on ABC, 1962-1967, which followed the exploits of an American squad in Europe during World War Two.

43. Fenn, 112, 104.

44. John Lahr, "Arthur Kopit's Indians: Dramatizing National Amnesia"; in Lahr, *Up Against the Fourth Wall: Essays on Modern Theater* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 148, 151. Arthur Kopit, *Indians* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969).

45. Asahina, 32.

46. Margaret Croyden, *Lunatics, Lovers & Poets: The Contemporary Experimental Theatre* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 110; and Saul Gottlieb, "The Living Theatre in Exile," *TDR* 10 (Summer 1996): 145. The always controversial The Living Theatre was criticized by Renfreu Neff in her chronicle of their 1968-69 tour across America, *The Living Theatre: USA* (New York and Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970). Neff notes that despite their widely publicized pacifist and anti-war beliefs, the company showed no interest in helping to keep the anti-war demonstrations in Berkeley non-violent. Instead, they chose to stay in their hotel and take drugs, 162-165.

47. Fenn, 46-48; and Gerome Ragni and James Rado, *Hair* (New York Pocket Books, 1969), 146-157.

48. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 186-88, 237.

49. Shank, 38.

50. Megan Terry, *Viet Rock and Other Plays*, with an introduction by Richard Schechner (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 29-30, 44, 47, 48-49.

51. *Ibid.*, 61, 64-65, 63, 87, 90-91.

52. Asahina, 32.

53. Terry, 56-57.

54. Alter, 26.

55. *Ibid.*, 29, 33.

56. *Ibid.*, 33-34.

57. *Ibid.*, 34, 35, 46.

58. Auster and Quart, 147.

59. Terry, 73, 102, 106-110, 75, 96.

60. *Ibid.*, 100.

61. Alter, 113.

62. See Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) for a representative study which

emphasizes economic imperialism as the primary motivation for American involvement in Vietnam.

63. Daniel Berrigan, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1971), 22-23, 27.

64. *Ibid.*, 28.

65. *Ibid.*, 39, 27, 31, 36, 28, 33.

66. Alter, 6-7. For additional reading on some lesser-known companies of the period involved in "street" or "guerrilla" anti-war theatre activities, see Arthur Sanier, *The Radical Theatre Notebook* (New York: Avon books, 1975); and Karen Malpede Taylor, *People's Theatre in Amerika* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972).

67. Shank, 60-71. For further reading on the work of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, see R.G. Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1975).

68. Stefan Brecht, *The Original Theatre of the City of New York from the Mid-sixties to the Mid-seventies, Book 4, The Bread and Puppet Theatre, Volume One* (New York, London: Methuen/Routledge, 1988), 476, 650-53, 664-671, 647; Fenn, 56; and Shank, 104-105. Brecht's book is the most thorough and detailed study of the group's work to date.

69. Fenn, 59-6; and El Teatro Campesino, *Vietnam Campesino*; in *Theatre Three: The American Theatre 1969-70*, International Theatre Institute of the United States (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 150.

70. Francoise Kourilsky, "Approaching Quetzalcoatl: The Evolution of El Teatro Campesino," *Performance* 7 (Fall 1973): 38.

71. Alter, 128, 129. Her book also contains a very useful section on representations of the Vietnamese in works produced in Europe during the war years. Generally, Alter concludes that many of these plays examined the war in a broader historical frame than did their American counterparts, which tended to critique the war in a narrower context of "humanist" concerns regarding the suffering of the Vietnamese and/or American troops. She also contends that the European works saw American involvement in Vietnam as continuing "a long sequence of European colonial wars, that the United States was more of a colonial power than was usually admitted, and that the entire Vietnam story should be viewed as an episode in the vast history of colonialism." Undoubtedly, some of these playwrights were specifically criticizing French imperialism vis-à-vis Vietnam as well. Furthermore, some European plays tended to depict a much wider range of lifestyles and behaviors regarding the Vietnamese, as in Armand Gatti's *V comme Vietnam* (V as in Vietnam) and Andre Benedetto's *Napalm*, both of which were presented in France in 1967. These works not only portrayed the Vietnamese as involved in the war, but also showed "scenes from the everyday life of Vietnamese civilians." The American plays, even the ones sympathetic to the Vietnamese, tended to depict the Vietnamese only when "involved in direct relations with Americans; they seem to have no life of their own." Alter notes that in the French plays, "the Vietnam scene is ostensibly viewed from the perspective of the Vietnamese, who are provided with distinct personalities, positive or

negative, and often grounded in past history" (109-110, 85-86, 89-90). Her use of the word "ostensibly" is significant, in that the authors actually filtered the viewpoint of the Vietnamese through their own Western oriented lens, which is not quite the same as a "Vietnamese perspective." Nonetheless, they at least attempted to provide a broader world view of the Vietnamese people in relation to the war than did the American theatre of the day. Of course, America's more direct involvement in Vietnam might have precluded such a "distanced" perspective at that time, but the continuation of such patterns after the war speaks to additional causes rooted in the American national character and our cultural mythology.

72. Consistent with its reliance on World War Two paradigms, *The Green Berets* includes a number of Black soldiers in cheery supporting roles, as well a mix of characters from the traditional white ethnic groups (Kowalski, Muldoon, etc.) to comprise a model "integrated" unit. All of the soldiers get along famously and are equally devoted to God, country, and anti-Communism. Thus, the film effectively silenced the historical reality of the racial turmoil which was occurring in America at that time.

73. David Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*; in Ted Hoffman, ed., *Famous Plays of the 1970s* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1981), 36, 65, 115, 102-103.

74. Le Roi Jones, "Communications Project," *TDR* 12 (Summer 1968): 54.

75. *The Combat Film*, American Cinema Series, videocassette.

76. Rabe, *Pavlo Hummel*, 61.

77. Similar events occurred in Wesley Balk's *The Dramatization of 365 Days* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 98, 65-66. Balk adapted the play from Ronald Glasser's memoir (*365 Days*) about his experiences as a doctor in Vietnam, and it utilized staging techniques similar to those of *Viet Rock*. In one scene, the play depicts an officer whose reckless leadership results in his being "fragged" or blown up by his own men. Another one echoes the atrocity depictions of *Pavlo Hummel* when a group of tired GIs emerge from a long period in "the bush" and shoot a Vietnamese man for spitting at them after they refuse to buy his coca colas. Like Rabe's plays, this work focused on the impact of the war on Americans, largely ignored the Vietnamese, and thus anticipated the concerns of the post-war theatre to follow.

78. Rabe, *Pavlo Hummel*, 103, 107, 101, 91-93, 112-113, 110-11.

79. Fenn, 139.

80. David Rabe, *Sticks and Bones* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1972), 76, 24, 25, 49, 30, 46, 40, 16, 71-78, 58, 38, 49, 77, 85-90, 14, 84.

81. Dick Brukenfeld, "Review of *Sticks and Bones*," *Village Voice*, 11 November 1971 ("Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City). The play was originally performed at Villanova University in 1969 under the title *Bones* and was written before *Pavlo Hummel*, although the latter play was produced first in New York during 1971 at the Public Theater.

Chapter Three: After the War--"In Country" and the Demonization of the Vietnamese

As America emerged from the cultural turbulence of the 1960s and the conflict in Vietnam, the film industry slowly reexamined its position on the war. By the late 1970s, several films were released which actually depicted scenes of combat and were set in Vietnam itself. In addition, a number of pictures were produced earlier in the decade which focused on the plight of veterans in America. Overall, both trends marked an increase in Hollywood's willingness to embrace the war as a viable subject. As I discussed in Chapter Two, this was not the case during the period of the war, with *The Green Berets* standing as the only major studio release about combat in Vietnam during that period. In contrast, the American theatre was very active in addressing the war during the 1960s, although its focus also began to change with the approach of the war's conclusion. As with the homecoming films of the early 1970s, it too increasingly emphasized the subject of "coming to terms" with the war for both the Vietnam veteran and the larger American public. In both mediums (but especially film), the representation of the Vietnamese in these works showed a growing tendency towards demonization. In the theatre of the 1960s, distinctions tended to be made between Vietnamese antagonists, allies, and innocent victims of American aggression. Some plays even went so far as to sympathize or express solidarity with our VC and NVA opponents. By the late 1970s, however, the new works about the war in both arenas suggested a less differentiated depiction of the Vietnamese which condemned allies, enemies, and civilians as equally corrupt, barbaric, and potentially threatening. Because of the greater range and volume of films in this immediate post-war period, I will first address this area before comparing the cinematic works to the Vietnam War plays of the 1970s.

The initial part of the decade saw an interest in the war on film in a handful of works such as Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* (1971), Tom Laughlin's *Billy Jack* (1971), Ossie

Davis's *Gordon's War* (1973), Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), and Henry Jaglom's *Tracks* (1976).¹ But these films ignored images of combat in Vietnam, and instead focused on portraying various types of disturbed American veterans of the war. All of their veteran protagonists emerged as alienated from the wider society and potentially violent, although some of them used their military combat skills in the service of "good" causes (e.g., Tom Laughlin's character of Billy Jack protecting hippie school kids from reactionary townspeople). By the late 1970s, some additional films had been made which reinforced these themes but also included fleeting shots of combat in Vietnam, frequently in the form of uncontrollable "flashbacks" to the war. Films like Jeremy Paul Kagan's *Heroes* (1977), John Flynn's *Rolling Thunder* (1977), Karl Reisz's *Who'll Stop the Rain?* (1978), and William Peter Blatty's *The Ninth Configuration* (1978) thus combined the "disturbed veteran" motif with brief imagistic moments of combat and the Vietnamese people. All of these works contributed to the public perception in America at that time of the Vietnam veteran as at best troubled and at worst potentially psychotic and dangerous.

In Reisz's film, for example, Nick Nolte plays Ray Hicks, a Nietzsche spouting sailor who is clearly on the brink of a violent break from an American society riddled with corruption. In this immoral world, no one--but especially the law--can be trusted, with the lost innocence of the earlier 1960s counter-culture represented through the depiction of an abandoned commune where Hicks once lived before shipping out to Vietnam. While the film's primary focus is on the alienation of Hicks and the other characters (especially his photo-journalist friend John Converse, who attempts to smuggle heroin out of Vietnam), its opening sequence presents a harrowing, inferno-like representation of the war.² As with many of the plays of the 1960s, however, *Who'll Stop the Rain* suggested that the

moral anarchy of Vietnam reflected the larger problems plaguing American society on the "home front."

In *The Ninth Configuration* and *Rolling Thunder*, the film makers planted the seeds of a different interpretation of the war which would flower more fully in successive films. Mainly, the idea that American troops were good, wholesome "boys" who loved life and country before going off to Vietnam, yet returned as broken, emotional cripples--and sometimes even psychotic killers--from the war. The implication here, which emerged much more explicitly in films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Platoon*, was that the cream of American youth were corrupted by their exposure to an evil, decadent "Oriental" people and culture. *The Ninth Configuration's* protagonist "Killer" Kane (Stacey Keach), for instance, is described by his psychiatrist brother as a once happy American boy who loved baseball, but during the war slaughtered some forty Vietnamese with his bare hands as head of a "special operations" unit. The film's only flashback image of the war portrays a seemingly mad Kane holding the head of a young Vietnamese soldier whom he has just garroted. Placed as the "head" of a psychiatric hospital for disturbed vets in the Pacific Northwest as a means of experimental therapy, Kane eventually atones for his bloody actions by rescuing a fellow patient from a group of local bikers. Kane's deadly assault on the thugs also reinforced the dominant image in the films of that period of the Vietnam vet as someone capable of violently "taking care of business" if pushed to extremes.³

Similarly, the protagonist of *Rolling Thunder*, Major Charles Rane (William Devane), is a veteran who enjoyed a fulfilling, "normal" American life with his wife and child in Texas before serving as a pilot in Vietnam. Held captive and tortured in a POW camp for many years, he returned home delivering patriotic maxims about how his war experience made him a "better man" and a "better officer." Unfortunately, Rane is soon disillusioned with his domestic life after he discovers his wife's affair with an old friend

and unsuccessfully tries to establish a fatherly relationship with his emotionally distant son. Shortly after his return, he is also attacked by a band of merciless robbers led by a disgruntled veteran (Luke Askew) who resents Rane for flying over combat in Vietnam while he lay "face down in the mud." Thus, the solidarity between veterans depicted in earlier World War Two combat films is inverted here, as the "grunt" vet enjoys seeking revenge on an officer from Vietnam. Rane withstands the torture of the outlaws at the cost of his hand (they shred it in a garbage disposal) and the massacre of his family.

The crooks symbolize the larger ungrateful American society in the film, and this final humiliation unleashes Rane's previously suppressed veteran rage as he methodically tracks down the band and slaughters them. He is happily aided in this task by a fellow POW, Johnny Vohden (Tommy Lee Jones in an early film role), who has also adjusted to life back home with great difficulty. Like Rane, Vohden is an emotional cipher who only seems happy when given the chance to jump back into action. While both men are obviously alienated from the larger society, the film presents them as only resorting to "motivated" violence. In contrast, the behavior of the brutal veteran who assaulted Rane and his family reflects a more amoral version of the "disturbed veteran" character which dominated the films of this era. Rane himself continually flashes back to images of his torture in Vietnam at the hands of sweating, sinister looking Vietnamese captors and tells his wife's lover that he "learned to love the rope" as a prisoner. His comment referred to a particularly painful torture practice where his elevated arms were lashed behind his back, and he goes so far as to voluntarily demonstrate this practice for Cliff in his shed. This scene is the first to reveal the extent of the emotional and psychological damage inflicted on Rane by the "merciless Gooks," as Cliff calls them.⁴

Thus, the film powerfully reinforced the message emerging in films of the 1970s that something was drastically wrong with "GI Joe" as a result of the war. A few films

after World War Two, most notably William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947), showed the difficulties of veterans adapting to post-war civilian life. In contrast to the Vietnam veteran films, however, they usually focused more on issues such as lack of jobs, lost girlfriends, and/or wartime injuries. And in the final analysis, most of the conflicts in those films were resolved optimistically.⁵ Furthermore, regardless of Hollywood's devious representation of the "Japs" on film, the American boys did not seem pathologically affected in any long-term manner by their interaction with them during the war. In contrast, the Vietnam vets were usually depicted as irrevocably damaged as a result of their exposure to the savagery of the Vietnamese people, with many films featuring veteran characters who would never again function as productive citizens. This motif, in fact, would become a staple of the Vietnam War film genre, with pictures like Jon Avnet's *The War* (1994) and Emelio Estevez's *The War at Home* (1996) still reworking the topic well into the 1990s.

This premise has been debated thoroughly in American society over the years, in that previous wars also produced victims of what was once called "shell shock." In the past, however, such incidents received little public attention, and were almost never addressed on film. But the Vietnam War was considered by many psychologists as "different" from previous American wars in three major areas: the younger age of the average American soldier serving in Vietnam because of the draft; the uncaring if not hostile reception veterans received after returning home; and the psychological pressures resulting from the covert nature of the war where even the most seemingly friendly Vietnamese peasant could be a potential member or supporter of the Viet Cong. Many studies, in fact, suggested that a greater number of Vietnam veterans experienced what was eventually labeled as "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" than did participants in previous wars.⁶ And

unlike the pictures made during and after World War Two, many of the Vietnam War films displayed a willingness--if not enthusiasm--to explore this topic. The dominant image of the disturbed Vietnam veteran on film was prefigured to some extent by John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), where a squad of American soldiers were captured and "brainwashed" by ruthless Russian and Chinese Communists during the Korean War.⁷ While all of the Americans in that film experienced nightmares back home as a result of their wartime trauma, it was more the specific result of their brainwashing as opposed to exposure to the Koreans or Chinese in general. Thus, the Vietnamese were still singled out as more "dangerous" in a sense, in contrast to the depictions of other Asian enemies on film in previous wars.

The screen portrayal of the disturbed veteran would soon be followed by films depicting American soldiers interacting with Vietnamese in combat and "behind the lines" situations. Many of these films would reinforce and expand upon the earlier suggestions in films such as *Rolling Thunder* and *The Ninth Configuration* that the Vietnamese represented a kind of special decadence which was not experienced by American soldiers in previous conflicts on foreign soil. The brief flashback images of the war in works like *Rolling Thunder* and *Heroes* in a sense tested the American public's tolerance and increased willingness to pay to see cinematic depictions of American combat troops in Vietnam. Thus, such films anticipated the flood of cinematic releases which emerged towards the end of the decade,⁸ all of which placed the American soldier squarely in Vietnam for the first time: Sidney Furie's *The Boys in Company C* (1978), Ted Post's *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

In his book *Vietnam at the Movies*, Vietnam veteran Michael Lanning aptly discusses the huge challenge for film makers in duplicating the nature of combat on film. For Lanning, "Hollywood's combat, Vietnam or otherwise, remains simply Hollywood--with little resemblance to what actually occurs on the battlefield." World War Two films shot late in or after the end of the war often integrated newsreel footage of combat into the fictional scenes for the purpose of achieving greater "realism."⁹ While an occasional image of this kind appeared in some of the Vietnam War films (*The Deer Hunter*, for example, utilized several authentic shots of American troops in Vietnam), most of them abandoned this earlier practice. Perhaps this was due in part to the fact that the American public had been extensively exposed to such footage on the television news during the war. Consequently, the inclusion of the kinds of "real" combat scenes which had captivated World War Two era audiences would not have held as much novelty for the viewers of Vietnam War films. In addition, by the 1970s, the motion picture industry's capacity to create "special effects" which could portray the visual and aural sense of combat more realistically had greatly increased.¹⁰ As a number of films depicting graphic scenes of combat and carnage in Vietnam were released throughout the 1980s (e.g., John Irwin's *Hamburger Hill*), Hollywood's ability to depict mutilated limbs, bombings, air assaults, etc., seemed more and more technologically advanced and sophisticated. Nonetheless, despite increasing claims of surface "authenticity" in the marketing campaigns for these various movies, the Vietnam War genre was still only "Hollywood's own image of battle." Its penchant for screen "realism" was also balanced by a necessity (namely, the fact that Vietnam was unavailable for location shooting) and/or desire to utilize locales in the Philippines, Thailand, California, and even studio lots as substitutes for Vietnam. Lanning's insightful observation that Hollywood has most typically attempted to recreate

Vietnam "to fit its own preconceptions" of the war also undercut the studios' claims of presenting the "reality" of war in the various films.¹¹

Sidney Furie's *The Boys in Company C*, a rather low-budget effort shot in the Philippines, was the first Vietnam combat film to receive a major theatrical release. The film is interesting in that it both imitates and subverts the motifs and standard conventions of the combat genre, almost to the point of unintentional parody. As with World War Two classics such as *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and *Battle Cry* (1955), the film follows the adventures of a "melting pot" squad of young Marine recruits from boot camp to the jungles of Asia. All of the cliché character types are present including the wise-cracking Italian from Brooklyn; the patriotic Southerner who wants to be a war hero; the callow youth from the Midwest who dreams of writing about the war and provides the voiceover narration typical of the genre; and the tough-as-leather-on-the-outside but caring-on-the-inside Drill Instructor. This standard mix of ethnic and cultural identities is slightly updated, however, to reflect the period of the 1960s. Thus, a "hippie" who has been sentenced to service in the Corps (Craig Wasson) and a Black from the ghetto of Chicago (Stan Shaw) are added to the usual group in this film. Unlike the docile, loyal Blacks of the World War Two films, however, Shaw's Tyrone Washington is hostile, street-smart, and only wants to go to Vietnam so that he can smuggle heroin back home in body bags. His individualism does echo that of stock combat genre characters such as PFC Peter Conway in the above mentioned *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. Just like characters in other World War Two films who refused to be "team players," Conway eventually realizes the error of his ways under the tutelage of a seasoned mentor--in this case Sergeant Striker, as played by John Wayne. Conway's change of attitude reinforced the motif of suppressing individual goals for the good of the greater cause which was so important to the Office of War Information and Hollywood during the war. Similarly, the truculent but intelligent

Washington in *The Boys in Company C* is challenged by his DIs to become a leader and he eventually places his skills at the service of the squad after they experience combat in Vietnam. Thus, the final image of Washington marching his men into the jungle while singing Marine Corp ditties echoes Conway adopting Sergeant Striker's signature line of "saddle up!" as he leads his squad up the hills of Iowa Jima after Striker is ambushed by a "Jap" sniper.

The Boys in Company C's initial boot camp section mostly follows the conventional combat genre formulas. Once the "boys" are shipped overseas, however, they encounter a veritable slaughterhouse in Vietnam. At this point, the film veers dramatically from the earlier combat models in many ways. For instance, they are quickly disillusioned by numerous encounters with corrupt or incompetent American officers. Their own commanding officer is an initially gung-ho and arrogant captain who laughably makes the men learn soccer so as to echo the "fluid" moves of the Vietnamese enemy. In the field, his irresponsible leadership continually endangers and costs the lives of the squad as they traverse the countryside of Vietnam. The captain himself is soon discouraged after volunteering for a "crucial" supply convoy which results in high casualties, only to learn that the items are delicacies for a General Dearborn's birthday party. By the end of the film, he is totally estranged from his men and flees in cowardice during the climactic firefight. Washington, who almost frags the captain at one point, assumes de facto leadership of the squad in tandem with a respected lieutenant who openly condemns the cowardice and short-sightedness of the CO and higher "brass" to the men. These representations are the antithesis of the elegant, highly respected WASP officers typical of most World War Two films.

Indeed, almost all of the officers depicted in the film are so odious as to be almost cartoon villains. A Green Beret officer, for example, is only shown participating in the torture of an obviously innocent VC suspect, as well as using Vietnamese children as

human shields during the final battle. While on one level the film accurately conveyed the tensions which existed between officers and their troops by the end of the war, the overall outlandishness of Furie's plot devices and characterizations echoed caricatures of the "establishment" in some anti-war works of the 1960s. In an article on this first wave of Vietnam combat films, Peter McNerny noted that the movie echoed Wayne's *The Green Berets* in its use of propaganda--but this time of an antiwar nature. As McNerny put it, "*The Green Beret's* jingoism did little to provide American audiences with a sound understanding of the war while it was being fought. *Boys in Company C's* antiwar activism after the fact does nothing to put the war that has ended in coherent perspective."¹² In many ways, then, the extremity of Furie's anti-military fervor undercuts the believability of the various wartime situations which his film depicts. For example, he shows Vietnam riddled with long-haired, drug taking soldiers who are far removed from the wholesome GIs of the World War Two movies. The film's setting of 1967 is rather early for the presence of these types in Vietnam, though, as such behavior was much more rampant by the war's end in the 1970s (including the fragging of officers). In fact, the pre-Tet Offensive war of 1967 was one which many Americans still believed they were winning, and the counterculture in the US was just beginning to receive widespread attention via the "summer of love" in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district.

Despite such cultural anachronisms, *The Boys in Company C* captured the anarchic, guerrilla nature of the war with sharp insight, as well as the psychological terror which the constant booby traps and ambushes inflicted on the American psyche. It accurately conveyed the reality of a war in which American troops were never sure where the enemy lurked, or who was friend or foe. In one chilling scene, for example, two small Vietnamese boys are seen placing soda cans on a trail. After a truck harmlessly flattens the cans, we realize that it was just a child's game, but the act could have easily been the

placement of a booby trap by seemingly innocent children in this helter skelter world. The film is also one of the first to address the issue of internecine warfare and racial tension among American troops which existed in Vietnam. The "boys" are often presented in conflict with each other, their officers, or the other less noble hippie-type soldiers. While the intra-squad squabbles were happily resolved by the film's end and the "bad guys" received their comeuppances during the final VC attack, such unsettling issues would be resolved less easily in future cinematic explorations of the war. *The Boys in Company C* is also distinctive in that Washington represents a major and admirable Black character in the film, unlike the earlier combat pictures in which Blacks are usually relegated to minor, stock roles. He does, of course, sing the blues in stereotypical Hollywood fashion, and the number of Blacks in Vietnam is under-represented in the film's mostly white world. But as was the case in many of the plays presented during the years of the war, Washington expressed racial solidarity with the Vietnamese when he confronted the captain over his complicity in the torture of the Vietnamese villager: "you wouldn't have done that if that was a white boy back there--to you he's nothing but a Gook--he's just a yellow nigger." Still, as the film's representative of the "Black soldier in Vietnam," Washington never really expresses any racial hostility towards his peers. This certainly failed to reflect the tensions which existed in some units by the early 1970s, but might have been a reasonably accurate portrait of the war in 1967.

The film also had an impact on how the Vietnamese were initially portrayed in the post-war years. On the whole, the Vietnamese received a cartoon-like treatment by Furie which paralleled the images of the despicable, uncaring American officers in the picture. But while at least the American ground troops and a few junior officers were presented as courageous and honorable, the Vietnamese received a consistent bashing at the hands of the director. As would be the case in many future Vietnam War films, the VC are only glimpsed occasionally, and usually surfaced in order to ambush the hapless marines. The

civilian peasants are depicted for the most part as smiling, waving ciphers tending to their rice-paddies. When the squad stumbles on a village which contains only "innocent" women and children, however, the question of where the men are is never raised. Presumably, they were all off fighting as VC, an issue which would be confronted more explicitly in later films like *Platoon*. Indeed, many of these seemingly benign villagers were in fact VC sympathizers or supporters, if not VC themselves. *The Boys in Company C* never really developed the complexities of this issue, but did introduce the notion for further consideration.

The movie does present an overwhelmingly negative portrait of the South Vietnamese ARVN troops, who are portrayed as cowardly and decadent. For instance, Washington establishes his drug connections with high ranking ARVN officers and Vietnamese policemen, one of whom notes that a "man of conscience has no place in our business." A Colonel Trang, an ARVN district leader, is the film's major Vietnamese villain and main drug supplier. Played by a Chinese actor, Trang is represented as an exoticized, insidious "Oriental" caricature complete with Fu-Manchu mustache and a long fingernail for sniffing heroin. Of course, all of the characters in the film are generally stock ones, but Trang is so cartoonish as to make the "all-American" squad almost seem like complex characters. The message here, of course, is that the corrupt South Vietnamese government and its ARVN army was not worth the lives of the altruistic American soldiers.¹³ Overall, the film's willingness to indict our ARVN allies across the board and present all the Vietnamese as potential enemies marks an important step in Hollywood's post-war tendency towards demonizing the Vietnamese on film.

While the film employed many conventions of previous war films without much finesse, some of the later Vietnam War films would absorb these combat genre influences more subtly within their narratives and formal systems. Overall, regardless of its many

flaws, *The Boys in Company C* is an influential film in that it introduced various themes and images, many of which would eventually become common signifiers of the Vietnam War genre, to a sizable post-war audience for the first time.

Ted Post's *Go Tell the Spartans* opens with a visual title which states "in 1964, the war in Vietnam was still a little one--confused and far away." Thus, the movie is an atypical post-war release in that it focuses on the early years of American involvement in the war, before massive numbers of ground troops were shipped overseas to Vietnam. As a result, the visual iconography of the film, as represented in its images of uniforms, equipment, sandy terrain, etc., still seems more rooted in World War Two than in Vietnam. In this film, a base camp of ARVN soldiers, led by a small contingent of American advisors, struggles unsuccessfully to maintain control over a region saturated with Viet Cong.

Their American commander, a cynical career officer by the name of Asa Barker (Burt Lancaster), soon sends a group of South Vietnamese and American soldiers to defend an abandoned French outpost called Muc Wa from VC attack. In contrast to *The Green Berets*, which portrays the early American presence in Vietnam in a highly positive manner, *Go Tell the Spartans* suggests that the American mission there was ill-fated from the beginning. As Auster and Quart note, "the political focus of the film is the evocation of the differing attitudes towards the war, represented by the three main characters."¹⁴ Commanding Officer Barker is a skilled professional but perceives the war as a hopeless cause. As he tells a junior officer at one point, the "VC know everything we're gonna do, we don't know anything they're gonna do." A new volunteer, Corporal Courcey (Craig Wasson, who played the hippie role in *The Boys in Company C*), is an efficient, well-intentioned soldier who attempts to befriend the South Vietnamese civilians and troops he encounters. Lastly, the dim-witted and naive Lieutenant Hamilton (Joe Unger) spouts

patriotic clichés such as "we won't lose because we're Americans" and truly believes in stopping the Communist menace in Vietnam.

By the end of the film, all three characters have met ignoble fates. Hamilton, for example, is gunned down as he vainly attempts to rescue an already dead ARVN soldier in an open field outside the camp at Muc Wa. While this kind of behavior might have been presented as both heroic and successful in earlier war films, in *Go Tell the Spartans* it is depicted as pathetically futile. The honorable Coursey is betrayed by a young Vietnamese girl who engineered an ambush of the troops as they left Muc Wa. These engagements occur mostly at night and thus reflect the guerrilla nature of the war, and Post uses dim lighting and shots of fast-moving, hard-to-see VC in order to present the combat scenes as "realistically" as possible. In contrast, other films like Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* would present stylized scenes of battle in order to reveal the hallucinatory, surrealistic aspects of the war (e.g., a scene depicting a group of crazed, leaderless GIs defending a bridge amidst a cacophony of hellish sights and sounds which, as one drugged-out soldier notes, seem like a warped representation of the "Fourth of July"). In a surprising gesture, Barker himself is the only American besides Coursey to stay behind with the Vietnamese after the American troops are evacuated from Muc Wa by helicopter, although the abandonment of the ARVN troops by their "advisors" foreshadows the American evacuation of Saigon in 1973.¹⁵ A survivor of two previous wars, Barker dies in the VC ambush, with his last words being a fatalistic "ah, shit." The nature of his death seems only to reinforce his earlier views of Vietnam, where he responds to Coursey's interest in experiencing a war as follows: "you're a tourist. Too bad we couldn't have showed you a better one. This is a sucker's tour, going nowhere." Thus, the picture depicts American involvement in Vietnam as doomed, wrong-headed, and squandering American lives.

The portrayal of the South Vietnamese in the film soundly reinforces this message. The ARVN troops emerge as a sullen lot with no seeming loyalty to any government or ideology. Barker actually describes them as "mercenaries" to Hamilton, and they are led by an intelligent but sadistic Vietnamese nicknamed "Cowboy." One of the film's first images, in fact, shows Cowboy torturing a VC suspect, and he later beheads a captured VC with a machete. When Hamilton reacts in shock to this action, Cowboy seems genuinely puzzled, implying that this is an every day sort of occurrence for a Vietnamese. This stereotypical notion of Oriental savagery is reinforced by Cowboy's ability to whip his troops into a frenzy by screaming "kill Communists," as well as shots of the VC stripping enemy corpses naked after their ambush at the film's end. Thus, the ARVNs might be on "our side," but the Americans in *Go Tell the Spartans* clearly view them as some kind of unfathomable species who are tolerated only out of military necessity. In the world view of the film, they are just as demonic as the VC, but the American command must reluctantly channel their capacity for savagery into the service of "Uncle Sam."

The ultimate marker of Vietnamese barbarism is portrayed in the film via the breakdown of the professional soldier Sergeant Oleonowski. A seasoned veteran of World War Two and Korea, Oleonowski has become a burnt out alcoholic after having witnessed "three teams" wiped out in Vietnam. He clearly fears and hates the VC and the Vietnamese in general, perceiving them as an evil, almost supernatural people. After enduring several nighttime attacks at Muc Wa, he finally commits suicide after ranting to Coursey that he's "sick and tired of the Goddamned, fish stinking Dinks." His death suggests that the brutality of the Vietnamese, even as early as 1964, could drive a career soldier insane--even one who had fought against another Asian enemy in Korea. His disgusted comment of "that's what it's like in this fucking war" after Cowboy beheaded the prisoner clearly expressed the film's notion of Vietnam as a "different" kind of war. American arrogance and their lack of respect for the Vietnamese is underscored when Barker's CO remarks that

"the only way we'll win the war is with American combat troops in here." An exception to this trend in the film is its depiction of a group of Vietnamese "paddy farmers" who fight loyally for the Americans, and one of them actually drags the wounded Coursey to safety. Portraying such an act of humanity on the part of a Vietnamese was unusual and would not be frequently repeated in future films. Overall, however, Coursey's final disillusionment suggests that American goodwill had been betrayed by the Vietnamese, and that America would be best served by his parting comment of "I'm going home, Charlie."

The film's hard-edged, cynical tone also stood in marked contrast to the World War Two era combat films, which typically promoted the notion of a "better world" as the payoff for a cooperative American involvement overseas. Certainly some of the Korean War films, as well as later movies about World War Two such as Robert Aldrich's *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), began to question the earlier combat genre image of American fair play and high ideals. But the open mockery of Hamilton's patriotic maxims in *Go Tell the Spartans* would have been considered almost treasonous during World War Two. In addition, the film hints at the breakdown in discipline between ranks which was rampant by the end of the war. For example, Barker's clerk is a young Black corporal with the beginnings of an Afro haircut who addresses Barker with the unmilitary salutation of "hey." He also affectionately refers to the old-fashioned Barker as "World War Two," thus emphasizing the contrast between Vietnam and "the good war." Even the old-pro Barker calmly threatens to "shoot the balls off" a general in order to receive artillery support for Muc Wa. Such brazen disrespect for a superior officer would never have been presented on screen in earlier examples of the combat genre. *Go Tell the Spartans* effectively conveyed the multitude of problems and concerns which plagued the American involvement in Vietnam from the get-go.¹⁶

Such perceptions were reinforced and extended in director Michael Cimino's popular epic film *The Deer Hunter* (1979). Nominated for several Academy Awards and winner of the Oscar for Best Picture that year, it was the first post-war film with images of combat in Vietnam to capture the American public's interest on a wide scale. Michael Klein observes the following about the movie:

The Deer Hunter marks the beginning of a series of post-Vietnam films that ... use the era as a period and a setting in order to construct parables that reinterpret the Vietnam experience in the context of the concerns and developing climate of opinion of the late 1970s and the 1980s. What is occurring in Hollywood narrative fiction film in the years after the war is that Vietnam, like the West in the days of Indians and cowboys or the South in the time of plantations, has become a setting within which ideological constructs are explored and contested. Given the illusionist power of the cinema and the technical skill of special effects teams, these fiction films may indeed *seem* [italics mine] to be detailed reenactments of history. They are, however, highly encoded generic melodramas and thus should be evaluated with an eye to their ideology and the ways they interpret a recent period of American history that is part of our national experience.¹⁷

Thus, while films like *The Deer Hunter* and Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (released soon afterwards in 1979) were undoubtedly perceived by some audience members as "the way it was in Vietnam," they actually framed the war within a larger mythological context. Klein's comments accurately mark how the site of the Vietnam film would become an increasing area of ideological contestation through the 1980s and the Reagan years (e.g., President Reagan linking the cartoon-like exploits of "Rambo" to his administration's foreign policy goals).¹⁸ Regarding *The Deer Hunter*, Cimino himself noted in interviews that he never intended to make a "Vietnam film," or a "political film," but rather one about the kind of small-town, blue-collar American community which the film reproduced in loving detail. For the director, the issues he wanted to explore via his trio of protagonists Michael (Robert DeNiro), Nick (Christopher Walken), and Stevie (John Savage)--three patriotic steel-working buddies who volunteered to fight in Vietnam--could have taken

place "just as easily" in "the Civil War or any other war."¹⁹ In light of the particularly controversial nature of America's involvement in Vietnam, Cimino's lack of historic specificity in making the film was simplistic and impacted tremendously on the kinds of images which it presented about the war.

It is striking that the more than three hours long *The Deer Hunter* contains relatively little screen time set in Vietnam. In contrast, the first third of the movie establishes the daily rituals and life of the "boys" in their hometown of Clairton, Pennsylvania, as they prepare for service in Vietnam to "proudly serve God and country." This section climaxes with a long sequence involving Stevie's wedding, in which the director impressively captures the details of a Ukrainian-Orthodox ceremony and celebration. Cimino's careful attention to the casting of extras in this scene--as well as his use of long shots to convey the grand sweep of the festivities in tandem with a series of well-edited close-ups to reveal a number of nuanced, ritualistic flourishes--combine to create an authentic sense of ethnic texture to the event. The reception is followed by a section where Michael and Nick, accompanied by their loutish pals Axel, Stan, and John, observe the tradition of their cherished deer hunt one last time. The film then abruptly cuts to Vietnam where the three friends are reunited as POWs in North Vietnam, and then forced to compete in a horrific round of "Russian Roulette" by their sadistic Vietnamese captors. After the trio escapes, the film reverts back to Pennsylvania for the third structural sequence as the members of the community attempt to deal with the impact of the war on their shattered lives. In the film's nightmarish penultimate scene, Michael returns to Saigon during the American evacuation in one last effort to bring Nick home to Clairton. Unfortunately, Nick dies in a final match of Russian Roulette with Michael, and the film's closing image involves the grieving band of friends singing "God Bless America" in a display of communal solidarity after Nick's funeral.

The Deer Hunter's structure is important in that the initial Pennsylvania sequence establishes Michael as an archetypal "hunter" character. As noted in Chapter One, this symbolic heroic figure has been a part of the American literary and cultural tradition from the work of James Fenimore Cooper through the Western film genre. Although respected by his peers for his strength of character and first-rate hunting abilities, Michael is clearly distanced from the community in many ways. For example, his friends cannot fathom his interest in symbolic omens of Indian Warrior Gods or his macho obsession with the need to kill a deer with "one shot," and he is socially awkward with women. For Michael, only the more sensitive Nick is worthy of accompanying him on his sacred hunting rituals, which are filmed by Cimino with an almost religious reverence. As John Hellman observes in an essay on mythology and the Vietnam War films, "Michael, like the western hero, is a man of extraordinary values and resources, which are dangerous unless properly channeled into a role of protector of the community."²⁰ This is significant in that Michael's superior will and physical skills are eventually unleashed in Vietnam in all of their extraordinary fury.

Initially, however, the first part of the film echoes World War Two genre paradigms in its depiction of a loyal, patriotic community whom are proud to send their best sons off to war for a good American cause. The "boys" (although all three actors, but especially DeNiro as Michael, seem rather mature for their roles) also spout John Wayne-like clichés with bravado, as when Nick tells a visiting Green Beret that he "hopes they send us where the bullets are flying" during Stevie's reception at a VFW hall. The silent, stone-faced Green Beret will only offer a nihilistic "fuck it" when pressed by the trio to tell them what the war is like, offering a hint of the amoral world which awaits them in Asia. Cimino's lengthy, romanticized depiction of the warm, caring community of Clairton makes the film's quick transition to the charnel-house atmosphere of Vietnam especially

powerful. In our initial image of the war we see a wounded Michael, now an elite Green Beret himself, recovering consciousness in a village deep within Vietnam. After watching a VC throw a grenade into a hole full of frightened Vietnamese women and children, he grabs a flame-thrower and efficiently torches his opponent. Unlike the shadowy scenes of nighttime combat in *Go Tell the Spartans*, these shots clearly and graphically reveal such images as the village strewn with corpses and pigs eating the entrails of fallen soldiers and civilians. The visual contrast to the well-ordered world and lush mountains of Clairton is shocking, and within the first frame of the movie's middle section Vietnam thus emerges as an alien place of unimaginable horror.

This motif is extended shortly thereafter in the film's controversial and by now very well-known "Russian Roulette" sequence. In this intense and impressively acted scene, the friends are forced to play against each other while their jeering captors ironically drink American beer and place bets on who will die first. A cruel-looking young NVA officer who slaps the prisoners' faces to force them to shoot represents a particularly despicable presence in the scene. In addition, Cimino's camerawork effectively captures the horrible physical conditions of their imprisonment, as when he cuts to a close-up of a terrified Stevie submerged in water up to his neck as a rat crawls over his face. While Stevie and Nick understandably break down emotionally during the sequence, Michael withstands the pressure and shoots their torturers after convincing the Vietnamese to put more bullets in the gun. Soon afterwards, he drops off a rescue helicopter to help the weakened Stevie, who has smashed his legs after falling into a river. The indefatigable Michael then carries Stevie on his back to safety through hundreds of miles of dangerous terrain. As Hellman observes, "Michael is in his element here," using his Green Beret prowess within "the tradition of Indian fighters who used Indian skills, became like Indians, to protect the community from Indians."²¹

Michael has become a "superman"²² of sorts in Vietnam and the film clearly suggests that the savagery of the Vietnam War has unleashed a hardness in him that would never have emerged in the more "civilized" world of America. To illustrate, after the wounded Stevie is thrown into the water pit, Michael tells Nick to "forget about Stevie--he's dead" as he plans their escape. Understandably, Nick is shocked by Michael's "survival of the fittest" attitude and refuses to "forget" his buddy. In the subsequent scenes, Michael goes to great lengths to save Stevie's life, of course, but this moment reveals a fundamental change in his nature as a result of his wartime experience. In the world view of the film, the rationale for such behavior lies in his exposure to the brutality of the Vietnamese Other.

Furthermore, Michael, having to fight the "savages" with their own methods like the hunter-heroes of America's cultural past, cannot totally repress this brutality upon his release from captivity and the turbulent world of Vietnam. This partly explains the "distance" he feels upon returning to America, although Cimino's depiction of the change in Michael as a result of his combat experience is ambiguous. On one level, the film implies that Michael can no longer pursue casual violence, as when he avoids shooting a deer on his first hunt after returning home. "Okay," he shouts to his mountain Gods, as if asking their forgiveness for his earlier hubris in terms of the "one shot" credo. In other ways, he carries a barely suppressed fury which he eventually unleashes on the braggart Stan by recreating the Russian Roulette "game" with him as their horrified comrades watch helplessly. What the film clearly implied was that even a man with Michael's unusual strength had been horribly damaged by his exposure to the evil Vietnamese.

Not surprisingly, the less iron-willed Stevie and Nick fare far worse than Michael after surviving the abuse of their captors. The double amputee Stevie exiles himself to a veterans hospital, where he marks time by playing bingo until Michael forces him to return

to the community of friends in Clairton. In a rather implausible plot turn, the emotionally traumatized Nick is lured into the world of Russian Roulette in the back-streets of Saigon by a decadent Frenchman. This perhaps is the most unbelievable aspect of the film's portrayal of the Vietnamese, in that it implies that they all love to bet on Russian Roulette the way Americans enjoy Monday Night Football. So, it wasn't just the evil VC who indulged in this sadism, but also mobs of frenzied South Vietnamese who reveled in the bloodlust of the game. A few Americans are present in the crowd during these scenes, but they watch calmly in contrast to the rabid excitement of the Vietnamese onlookers. Cimino even goes so far as to suggest that while Saigon was collapsing in flames, about to fall to the approaching VC and NVA armies, the South Vietnamese were so depraved that they would still meet to bet on "the game."

Significantly, the French "talent scout" of sorts senses something in the damaged Nick which indicates that he will prove to be a superior player. Despite his initial protestations, Nick cannot help but embrace the sickening violence of the game again, and soon renounces almost all connections to his past life. Before encountering the game in South Vietnam, however, Nick is also repulsed by his exposure to the lurid night life of Saigon, including a tawdry encounter with a prostitute who wants to have sex with her baby present in the room. Cimino pointedly establishes a strong visual contrast between the dirty, noisy, over-crowded streets of Saigon and the pristine splendor of life in the Pennsylvania mountains in order to underscore his representation of the differences among the two cultures. Ultimately, Cimino's portrayal of the war implies that a more sensitive soul like Nick could never transcend the damage inflicted on his being by the cruel Vietnamese. As a result, he becomes just like "them," playing Russian Roulette and shooting heroin until his eventual suicide. This is the film's most obvious instance of depicting the unspeakable corruption of a once wholesome American "boy" by the demonic Asians. Although the use of Russian Roulette during the war has never been documented,

some American viewers of the film probably assumed that such actions were the norm in Vietnam. As Jeffrey Walsh and James Aulich observe in their *Vietnam Images: War and Representation*, Cimino's prejudiced representation of the Vietnamese "freezes the reality of the Vietnam conflict, distances its actual history, estranges the viewer from important moral issues, and refocuses the war so as to make scapegoats of the Vietnamese."²³ The captivity scene is particularly manipulative and powerful in this regard, as Cimino repeatedly shows the outraged viewers close-ups of the crying, traumatized "boys" while their sadistic "Oriental" captors laugh at their weakness.

Indeed, *The Deer Hunter's* blatantly racist ideology in relation to its representation of the Vietnamese goes much further than the previous films discussed. Unlike earlier movies like *China Gate* or *The Boys in Company C* where all the characters, including Westerners, are rather cartoon-like in nature, *The Deer Hunter* goes to great lengths to individualize the American protagonists and their home town world. In contrast, the Vietnamese emerge as a collective group of alien savages, not unlike the Indians of many American Western films. A few scenes of helpless and potentially sympathetic refugees are presented, but as Auster and Quart comment, "they are usually seen in a long shot, and in almost every instance that the camera gets sufficiently close to personalize, it sees evil and contemptibility." The authors also note that in Cimino's depictions of life in South Vietnam he never attempts to "suggest or point out that the hellish Saigon he has visualized is primarily an American import brought on by U.S. intervention and occupation."²⁴

The film's moving but politically facile final scene of the friends reaffirming their faith in America also seems to recall the mood of a Second World War era combat film. But the emotional and psychological trauma inflicted on the "boys" and their community suggests a more irrevocable sense of loss in comparison to the problems of returning

veterans in pre-Vietnam War movies. Furthermore, like most Hollywood combat films, *The Deer Hunter* chose to explore the war by showing how it affected the personal lives of individual American soldiers. Cimino adds a twist to that genre convention by exploring their experiences in the context of a larger mythological framework, and his directorial style effectively reinforces the symbolic aspects of the film. Thus, *The Deer Hunter's* linear plot structure and seemingly "realistic" events are placed within a larger-than-life, almost quasi-operatic frame, as with the director's wide majestic shots of a misty mountain--supported by the stirring choral work on the soundtrack--during Michael's deer hunts. Auster and Quart observed in their discussion of the film that, "Cimino also has a gift for utilizing a variety of camera angles and dazzling camera movements to create scenes that are both visually striking and emotionally affecting. What he lacks is the kind of governing intelligence that would give the audience more of a critical hold and coherent sense of what they are seeing and reacting to." Nonetheless, his commercial success with *The Deer Hunter* undoubtedly contributed to the successive wave of films which would also view the war through the lens of personal history. And the film's Manichean depiction of the American-Vietnamese encounter in Vietnam significantly built upon the initial post-war cinematic images of the Vietnamese as barbaric hordes operating beyond the pale of civilized culture. In this topsy-turvy moral world, the film suggests that the "dark side" of American soldiers could potentially be released by exposure to primordial Oriental savagery. But while the righteous fury of Michael or the self-destructive anguish of Nick are not used against "innocent" Vietnamese in *The Deer Hunter*, other films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* would soon take this notion in a different direction.²⁵

Working with co-author John Milius, Coppola had in fact begun to develop a screenplay for *Apocalypse Now* in the late 1960s while the war was still in progress. At that time, George Lucas was the intended director, and he planned on shooting the film in

Vietnam with a low-budget "documentary style" approach. When Coppola was able to start his own production company (American Zoetrope) after the success of his first two *Godfather* films, he returned to the script as the first project for his budding organization with himself at the helm.²⁶ Coppola intended the film, which was loosely based on the structure of Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*, to be "about the precarious balance between the choices of good and evil, light and darkness."²⁷ Coppola, Lucas, and Milius have all discussed how they also wanted it to reflect the "insanity" of the war, as well as aspects of the 1960s psychedelic counterculture which had influenced the American forces in Vietnam by the later stages of the conflict.²⁸ However, Coppola's interest in exploring the universal human struggle between good and evil via American involvement in Vietnam revealed a larger metaphorical and mythological agenda removed from the specific historical context of the war. In this regard, the film echoes the intent of *The Deer Hunter*. Unlike Cimino, however, Coppola continually manipulates the viewer's sense of time and space in order to convey his vision of the war as an experience of surreal horror.

Apocalypse Now's opening sequence establishes the nightmarish tone which dominates the film, as the viewer watches a jungle treeline erupt in flames while the haunting sounds of The Doors's song *The End* plays on the soundtrack. Additional visual images of fiery destruction soon dissolve into a hotel room in Saigon, where a Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) tells us via voiceover narration that he is anxiously waiting for a mission. It turns out to be a covert "special operations" assignment to proceed up river to Cambodia and assassinate a renegade Green Beret Colonel named Walter Kurtz (Marlon Brando). A once promising officer, he has deserted from the American ranks to lead a private army of Montagnard "natives" in highly effective raids against the VC. The American general who gives Willard his orders notes that the natives worship Kurtz "like a

God," claiming that he has "gone insane" and is "out there operating without any decent restraint, totally beyond the pale of any acceptable human conduct." Willard then proceeds on a macabre journey to Kurtz's compound on a Navy PT boat, echoing the structure of Conrad's story where the character of Marlow recalls his journey to find an ivory trader named Kurtz who has also "gone native."

From its onset, the film establishes American involvement in Vietnam as a moral quagmire where an officer like Kurtz--a "good, humanitarian man" before his service in Vietnam--deliberately ignores the "rules" of war. In the scene where Willard is introduced, the viewer learns that he is a hit man for the CIA with six kills to his credit (mostly of Vietnamese civilians suspected of VC sympathies). Burnt out from the killing, he attempts to drown his anguish in alcohol as a montage reveals him guzzling liquor, punching a mirror, rubbing the blood over his face, and releasing a silent scream as Jim Morrison of The Doors screams "kill, kill" on the throbbing, expressionistic soundtrack. Despite his war-related angst, Willard paradoxically informs us in another voiceover that he now only exists for combat and can't wait to get back to the jungle. Thus, the first fifteen minutes of the film reveals its two central characters as having been totally warped by their service in Vietnam. Both men are also estranged from any semblance of a "normal" life back home in the states. Even the ostensibly "civilized" American officers are well aware of Willard's background and are willing to have one of their own troops murder Kurtz (or, as they say in their army double-speak, "terminate the Colonel's command"). Consequently, Coppola establishes the amorality of the war to an extent unseen in any previously made Vietnam War film. The picture also clearly contradicts earlier combat genre paradigms, most obviously in its repeated presentation of Americans who love the viciousness of the war. In earlier films, what American troops typically wanted more than anything else was to finish "the job" with honor and then go home. *Apocalypse Now* is full of characters who either have no desire to leave the war or are emotionally unable to return to their former

lives in America. This motif reaches its apotheosis later in the film when the jingoistic Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall) remarks with disappointment that "someday this war's gonna end."

As Peter Cowie notes in his analysis of the film in a biography of Coppola, "the chaos aboard the patrol craft seems like a microcosm of the entire war situation. Drugs have fermented a spiritual claustrophobia, ready to explode at the slightest excuse."²⁹ Indeed, the group on the boat is a hallucinogenic version of the clean-cut "melting pot" outfits of the older combat films. In addition, of the four sailors on board, two are Black, including their veteran commander Chief. This represents an updating of the ethnic mix of the traditional war genre platoon to reflect the large numbers of minority troops who served in Vietnam. *Apocalypse Now* is the first Vietnam War film to include a noticeable increase in the number of Black soldiers involved in the war, especially in scenes depicting front-line action. With the exception of the Chief, however, all of the sailors on Willard's mission behave in an extremely unmilitary-like manner. They have no commitment to the war and indulge in activities like pot smoking and water skiing to the sounds of the Rolling Stones's song *Satisfaction*. Lance, the clean-cut looking sailor from California, even goes so far as to "drop acid" and becomes so scrambled by drugs that he can only worry about finding a dog after his buddy Clean is killed during a VC attack. Such behavior is a far cry from the scenes of American soldiers grieving over their fallen comrades in earlier combat films and reflects the insanity which Coppola wants to present as the norm in Vietnam. Perhaps the scene where gyrating Playboy Bunnies are flown in to dance for a group of crazed GIs and are then attacked by the out-of-control soldiers best represents the change in attitude of American troops in Coppola's Vietnam. Furthermore, as Susan Jeffords observes in an article about the images of women in Vietnam War films, "the Bunnies here embody the fantasies of American manhood, dressing as a Cowboy, an Indian and a cavalry soldier, reviving yet another era of American expansionism and imperialism, of a

less troublesome war where the battles were more clearly won and the slaughters more simply patriotic."³⁰ Willard's voiceover narrative marks the "softness" of the American troops in the war when he comments on the event: "Charlie didn't get much USO. He was dug in too deep or moving too fast. His idea of R&R was cold rice and a little rat meat. He had only two ways home--death and victory."

Willard's comment also speaks to the film's depiction of "Charlie" as an almost mythical, superhuman force or collective being that controlled the sites of combat in Vietnam. Notably, *Apocalypse Now* does show one scene of the VC and NVA regulars fighting in the open in what is possibly the most directorially impressive sequence of combat ever filmed. In this lengthy battle scene, Kilgore's air cavalry unit attacks a VC-held village to the sounds of Wagner blaring out of stereo speakers, which the American colonel proudly proclaims "scars the hell out of the slopes." The enormous scale and almost mythic grandeur of these sequences, in which Coppola films what seems like dozens of helicopters swooping down on the village to the martial sounds of the music, moves the depiction of combat to a level of heightened "realism" which borders on the surreal.

Generally, however, Coppola's picture mostly reinforces the idea that "Charlie" was always vigilant, "out there," and waiting for the right moment to strike. This blurring of the lines of battle reaches its climax in the film when the Chief decides to inspect a Vietnamese fishing boat on the river. Already jittery and unbalanced by drugs, the young crew becomes increasingly agitated by their inability to understand the Vietnamese language. When a young girl moves quickly to rescue her unseen puppy, the hyper-sensitive young Americans gun down the entire boatload of passengers. This significant scene is the first in a Vietnam War film to depict Americans killing a group of Vietnamese civilians, albeit accidentally (it almost happens in *The Boys in Company C* but is luckily

averted). Although the Americans are remorseful, the scene still represents a new plateau in the combat genre in terms of the kinds of acts a war movie would be willing to depict American soldiers committing. Such unfortunate events have been well documented as occurring in Vietnam, and no doubt happened in earlier American wars as well. They were not, however, shown directly on screen prior to *Apocalypse Now*.³¹

Coppola's notion that the VC possessed a superior willpower is more fully explored when Willard approaches Kurtz's compound deep in the jungles of Cambodia. As Willard and the crew travel further upriver into Conrad's "heart of darkness," the visual landscape becomes increasingly filled with macabre images such as corpses in trees or burning helicopters. Before reaching the camp, the boat is attacked by a group of natives with "primitive" bows and arrows, and the Chief is killed by a hurled spear. This scene definitively marks for the viewer that the Americans have crossed the "line" beyond civilization, which is reinforced when Willard finally arrives at his destination. The film's first shot of the camp is from the point-of-view of the boat, panning across rows of painted, almost naked Montagnard "savages" in canoes awaiting Willard's arrival. The compound is a veritable chamber of horrors, with decomposing bodies littered everywhere and decapitated heads prominently displayed. While the Americans are naturally repulsed by the display of corpses, the Cambodian natives walk among them non-plussed. Thus, when Willard finally encounters Kurtz's world, the film presents it as morally corrupt and reprehensible. The appalled Chef, one of two surviving soldiers on the boat, reflects this sentiment when he exclaims that Kurtz is an "evil" man practicing "pagan idolatry."

When Kurtz appears, he explains his new "methods" to Willard in detail. Claiming that he has witnessed "horror" in Vietnam, Kurtz observes that to win the war, "horror and moral terror" must become "friendly" to the Americans. Otherwise, they are "enemies to be feared." Kurtz came to such a realization after witnessing the Viet Cong's highly

successful application of this formula in the field. For example, he recalled his initial outrage over finding a village full of children whose arms were hacked off by the VC after they received inoculations from American troops. Soon afterwards, he realized the "genius" of this act, acknowledging that they were "stronger than we." Even though the VC were men who loved their families and were not "monsters," they possessed a "will" which would allow them to commit such ruthless acts in order to achieve victory. Kurtz tells Willard that if he had ten divisions of such men--"men who are moral but at the same time are able to utilize their primordial instinct to kill without feeling, without passion, without judgment, without judgment, because it's judgment that defeats us"--the war in Vietnam would soon be over.

This exchange represents the crux of Coppola's vision of Vietnam and his ultimate representation of the Vietnamese in the film. The Vietnamese and Cambodian "natives" are presented as demonic savages capable of unleashing their "primordial instincts" in order to achieve victory. Kurtz's position is distinct, however, from the viewpoint expressed by the American officers at the beginning of the film. In that scene, the General claimed that there is a conflict "in every heart between good and evil," and that "sometimes the dark side prevails," with Kurtz having reached his "breaking point" and "gone insane." The larger American perception in the film thus suggests that while everyone--American or Asian--possesses such "primordial instincts," the more "civilized" Americans normally suppress them. Only when exposed to a less civilized influence as in Vietnam would some formerly "good" Americans "break" from said civilization and join the dark forces on the "other side." Kurtz's argument, with which Willard ultimately sympathizes, is more nuanced in that he perceives the Vietnamese as totally in control of these instincts, harnessing them at will in order to realize their goals. When not terrorizing their enemies, they are just as capable of "loving their families" and behaving peaceably as the Americans. Nonetheless,

both arguments present the Vietnamese as willing to engage in actions, regardless of their motives, which Western culture traditionally defines as barbaric war crimes.

Coppola's interest in myth, and in painting the Asians as primitives, is especially revealed in the controversy over the film's ending, which underwent several versions during the filming and editing process. As Coppola described it:

I had no ending, but Brando couldn't play the scenes that were originally meant to form the ending. He was too fat. So, with the help of Dennis Jakob I decided that the ending could be the classic myth of the murderer who goes up the river, kills the king, and then himself becomes the king--it's the Fisher king, from *The Golden Bough*. Somehow it's the granddaddy of all myths. I was dealing with moral issues, and I didn't want to have just the typical John Milius ending, when the NVA attack and there's a gigantic battle scene.... I wanted to explore the moral side, and in reading some of *The Golden Bough* and then *From Ritual to Romance* I found a lot concerning that theme. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* also seemed so apt for the conclusion of the story.³²

Although Coppola claimed to be most interested in the "moral" implications of the war,³³ he did not seem particularly bothered about depicting American involvement with Asian "natives" as resulting in "the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts" which would lead men like Kurtz "beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations."³⁴ Indeed, Coppola's choice to juxtapose shots of a native ritual where a water buffalo is cleaved with machetes against Willard's execution of Kurtz is at best ambiguous and at worst somewhat insidious in terms of primitive Asian stereotypes. As critic David Denby put it in his review of the film, "by the time the dying Brando whispers Conrad's famous 'The Horror! The Horror!,' the apocalypse has turned into third-rate exoticism--not all that different from the nonsense-adventure hokum of the skull island episodes in *King Kong*."³⁵ Coppola himself is seen gleefully dancing with "native" extras in the documentary about the making of the film (*Hearts of Darkness*) and attributes his own megalomania during the shoot (i.e.,

possessing a "state of mind like Kurtz") as partially due to being in a "distant Oriental country."³⁶

Kurtz's admiration of the ruthlessness of the VC is also somewhat disingenuous on Coppola's part. While atrocities in the war by some--not all--of the VC have been well documented, so have similar actions by a percentage of American troops in Vietnam (most infamously at the My Lai massacre). Nonetheless, in the film only the Asians are depicted as generally capable of such acts. Individual Americans like Willard might engage in assassinations of politicians who are covert VC supporters, but most of the troops are still fighting in a conventional, "accepted" manner despite their unruly social behavior. While the boat massacre is horrible, it is presented as an accident, the "boys" are distraught afterwards, and a few other scenes show American soldiers aiding wounded and/or frightened Vietnamese noncombatants in traditional combat genre fashion. Colonel Kilgore, the war-worshiper who "loves the smell of napalm in the morning," still only kills armed opponents, and Kurtz's savagery is also directed against the VC (unless challenged, as when he beheads Chef in order to intimidate Willard). In contrast, the VC are described as routinely committing acts like amputating the arms of little children, while Kurtz's native army revels in bloodlust and mutilation. Any Americans who joined in the actions of these "savages," such as Kurtz or another Green Beret sent to assassinate him prior to Willard (he is spotted by Willard in full native regalia), are described as totally removed from the "pale of civilization." Like Cimino, then, Coppola posits that Americans would only commit such acts after exposure to the intrinsic cruelty of the Vietnamese. Coppola's stance is especially ironic when considering that his military advisor on the film, a former CIA operative in Vietnam named Fred Rexer, is described as telling the crew stories about enthusiastically executing "Viet Cong chieftains by squeezing his fingers

through their eye-sockets and literally tearing their skulls apart."³⁷ Coppola also shares an interest with Cimino in exploring the war within a larger mythological context, but his directorial style in *Apocalypse Now* is distinctive. Consequently, Coppola utilizes a non-linear structure and various stylized, haunting visual and aural signifiers to capture the surrealistic undercurrents of the war.

Still, the film does go farther than any previous work in presenting Americans as capable of horrific acts of violence in the war. A significant moment in this regard occurs when Willard kills the sole survivor of the boat massacre at close range with a pistol so that he can continue unhindered on his journey. This cold-blooded execution of a *non-combatant* by an American is the first presented in any Vietnam War film, and sets the stage for even more bloody, unsettling scenes in successive films such as *Platoon* and *Casualties of War*. The type of violent American rage which was used only in service of a "good" cause in *The Deer Hunter* would soon be turned against helpless Vietnamese women and children in films about the war. The public image of the heroic American soldier as molded through years of Hollywood combat pictures had thus begun a marked transformation in the Vietnam War films of the 1970s, peaking with *Apocalypse Now*. In addition, by the early 1980s, the trend towards demonizing the Vietnamese initiated in the first post-war films had been fully realized in blockbuster hits such as *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*.³⁸

Conversely, the American theatre in this period avoided Hollywood's penchant for presenting the war within a larger mythological frame. Playwrights focused on exploring the problems of the returning Vietnam veteran in a series of "homecoming" plays written throughout the 1970s. With the exception of Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story* (1975), the theatre mostly ignored any representations of combat until a new series of plays

emerged in the early 1980s. Obviously, the more "realistic" medium of film allowed for a greater ease in representing images of combat for American audiences in the 1970s. This absence on stage cannot be explained so simply, however, as many plays in the 1960s such as *Viet Rock* developed staging techniques which presented the experience of combat. Similarly, plays like *Tracers* (collectively created by its cast of veterans) and David Berry's *G.R. Point* in the 1980s would develop a new approach to theatricalizing the war that emphasized stylized movement and sound and light technology. And as previously noted, Hollywood refused to employ its technology to make combat films during the war except for *The Green Berets*. Clearly, then, there was a larger socio-political agenda at work beyond the intrinsic nature of their respective mediums.

I believe that in the immediate post-war period, both the theatre and film communities were essentially reversing the trends of their previous encounters with the war. Reflecting the social activism of the 1960s era, many "protest" plays were written during the war which frequently presented horrific images of destruction for audiences in the hopes of provoking anti-war feelings among them. As the activism of the 1960s waned by the 1970s, however, cultural institutions like the theatre also reflected this change in mood. As Richard Schechner argued in his essay "The Decline and Fall of the American Avant-Garde," political content generally disappeared from the avant-garde theatre of the 1970s.³⁹ And it was in the area of the avant-garde where many of the anti-war plays of the 1960s were generated. After experiencing such an intense period of political activism and cultural change, many Americans were more interested in pursuing a quieter period of introspection in the initial post-war years. Former student activist Todd Gitlin commented on this transitional period in his book *The Sixties--Years of Hope, Days of Rage*: "by the early Seventies the upheaval was over--as mysteriously as it had appeared, and as worldwide. Neoconservatives wobbled between relief and vindication; old radicals felt

mixtures of despair, regret, chagrin, pride, resolve, and got on with their lives."⁴⁰ The film community followed suit with a similarly inward focus in its initial emphasis on exploring the war's impact on America. By the end of the decade, however, these themes had been exhausted without gaining full closure on the war experience for a still-grieving nation. Simultaneously, enough psychological "distance" had occurred for Hollywood to consider Vietnam combat films as a viable economic subject by 1978. And since Hollywood had not made any such films since 1967, the time seemed ripe to return to the popular tradition of the war picture. After the success of Vietnam combat films like *Apocalypse Now*, the American theatre would follow suit and also return to the site of the battlefield in the early 1980s.

In the mid-1970s, however, popular playwright David Rabe set the tone for the American theatre and the Vietnam War with the third play of his "Vietnam Trilogy," *Streamers* (1976). Although not a "homecoming play" per se, *Streamers* is set entirely in America during the period of the war as with Rabe's previous highly successful work, *Sticks and Bones*. The play explores the tensions between a culturally and racially mixed group of recruits in an army barracks at the time of LBJ's initial escalation of the war. The main characters reflect a racial and cultural cross-section of America, including two urban Blacks (Roger and Carlyle) and two middle-class whites (Billy and Richie). As with *Sticks and Bones*, Rabe is clearly interested in revealing the social fragmentation of American society in relation to the war. But unlike the characters of previous war plays who eagerly want to serve their country with honor, these young men are angry about and fearful of the possibility of being sent into combat in Vietnam. As Rabe notes at one point in his stage directions, "the war--the threat of it--is the one thing THEY share." This tension eventually erupts into deadly violence between the men in the barracks, mirroring the divisiveness of the larger society over the war.

And once again, Rabe reflects changes in the nature of the American armed forces, but in this case through the nihilistic characters of Sergeants Cokes and Rooney. Alcoholic, buffoonish survivors of three wars, these two callous Airborne warriors have been totally hardened by their combat experiences. When not drunk or crashing vehicles off base, they regale the recruits with "war stories" about the old days. One of their favorites tells of an American buddy who lost his parachute and plummeted to his death as a "streamer" of the play's title (they sing a dark parody of Stephen Foster's song "Beautiful Dreamer" to characterize the terror involved in such a death). The other involved Cokes being shot in the buttocks by a Korean soldier during the Korean War, after which Cokes threw a grenade into the man's hole and listened to his terrified screams before it exploded. Both of the sergeants find these tales greatly amusing. While their John Wayne bravado obviously covers up their combat trauma and fear of death to a degree, it also reflects the themes of societal corruption and wartime brutality which Rabe explores in his previous plays. Rabe develops this notion even further in *Streamers*, as he not only indicts America's involvement in the Vietnam War, but also past wars and a military culture in general which could produce career soldiers like Cokes and Rooney. In contrast to earlier war plays like Moss Hart's 1943 *Winged Victory*, in which officers and seasoned NCOs are always positive role models for the younger soldiers, the recruits in *Streamers* look upon the aging sergeants with pity and even disdain. Rabe's condemnation of the dehumanized world of the military emerges most clearly at the play's end after Carlyle's rampage where he stabs both Billy and Rooney to death. An investigating officer is seemingly outraged by the deaths not because of the loss of life, but rather due to the fact that "two perfectly trained and primed strong pieces of U.S. Army *property* [italics mine] got cut to shit up here."

Streamers also goes much further than Rabe's previous plays in its depiction of Black alienation from mainstream America. While Roger notes the indignities he has

suffered as a Black man in America, he still has feelings of loyalty for his country and is able to integrate himself into the dominant white world of army life. In contrast, Carlyle is obsessed with racial issues and full of rage at perceived past and current injustices. At one point, he even bluntly proclaims to Roger that "it ain't our war, brother. I'm tellin' you. That's what gets me, nigger. It ain't our war nohow because it ain't our country, and that's what burns my ass."⁴¹ Of all the recruits, Carlyle is the most openly fearful over the possibility of being sent to Vietnam. And while Carlyle and Roger both note the paucity of Black soldiers in the camp (this might be partly explained by the play's setting at the beginning of the war before the draft went into full effect), *Streamers* contains far more major Black characters than most films of the period. Other plays of the 1970s also focused on the experiences of Black veterans overseas or "back home" from the war, which further developed the themes of solidarity between American minorities and the Vietnamese seen in some plays of the 1960s. Overall, the theatre addressed the issue of racism and the war much earlier than did the mainstream film community (the exception was the 1982 non-studio film *Ashes and Embers*, which also covered similar terrain).⁴² While the Broadway theatre usually presented plays as politically "safe" as most mainstream Hollywood films, other smaller theatrical venues were willing to engage such controversial themes more readily. Still, Rabe does not seem to be justifying Carlyle's violent behavior, as the more politically moderate Roger emerges as a much more rational and likable character. The playwright's presentation of a Black soldier who is highly alienated from his country on racial grounds, however, does challenge the previous images of satisfied Black soldiers from World War Two era plays. As J.W. Fenn observes in his analysis of the play, the microcosm of the barracks in *Streamers* reflects "the situation in contemporary America where racial strife, doubts about the society, and Vietnam occupied

the individual and collective consciousness."⁴³ Thus, the volatile Carlyle serves as a catalyst for Rabe to explore the larger racial conflicts existing within America in relation to the specific issue of the war.

The play is similar to *Sticks and Bones* in that it contains a great many indirect references to the Vietnamese as threatening Others. Billy, for example, continually expresses fear over encountering snakes in the jungle, and debates the other men over the desirability of fighting in a warm or cold climate. Although Richie has never been to Vietnam, he rants about the VC dipping punji sticks in "elephant shit" and hiding in dark caves. As in many of the films considered thus far, such concerns reflect a historic Western fascination with and fear of the exotic, primal locales of the East, as well as a belief in the mysterious ability of the enemy to function efficiently in the dark void of these unknown spaces. The war stories of Cokes and Rooney also reinforce Rabe's depiction of the kind of ethnocentric American world view which perceives all Asians, and not just the Vietnamese, as "gooks." When telling their tales of their exploits in Korea, the sergeants speak of killing "Chinese Gooks" in the same manner as they happily discuss going to Vietnam to kill more "gooks."⁴⁴ While *Streamers* is not concerned with a direct engagement of the war, the specter of combat and the demonic threat of VC lurking in the "primordial" jungles of Vietnam looms over the barracks throughout the play.

Interestingly, the only play of this period which depicted combat in Vietnam, Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story* (1979), was really an allegory about the war in the manner of Kopit's *Indians*. Set in the fictitious Asian nation of "Am-bo Land," the play follows the experiences of a savant-like Reporter who wants to cover the war in order to learn about Asian cultures. Stylistically, it echoes the transformational approach of *Viet Rock*, with one actor playing The Reporter and another all the other characters (or "The Historical

Event," as the playwright calls them). Gray also borrows from Terry's play in his use of humorous caricature to satirize both left and right-wing attitudes about the war as The Reporter engages various American and Vietnamese characters. His reliance on an approach to staging the war developed in the 1960s, however, suggests an unfortunate failure to develop a new theatrical language which could capture the atmosphere of combat on stage.

Regarding the representation of the Vietnamese people and culture in the play, Gray follows Rabe's interest in deconstructing "typical" ethnocentric American perspectives about "Orientals." The play immediately establishes the Other-like nature of the naive Reporter's quest in its opening image of the Event character "articulating a strange and Asian-sounding musical piece." The Reporter echoes this puzzlement with the foreignness of Asia when he is immediately intrigued by "Oriental weather" upon arriving in Am-bo Land. The Vietnamese characters The Reporter encounters are deliberately presented as various types of "Oriental" caricatures such as Madame Ing, the dragon lady ruler of Am-bo Land who stages an exotic "Peking Opera" dance for him. Along the way, The Reporter also confronts "inhumanly still" VC, quaint peasants, and an exploitative prostitute who wants to use him as a ticket to America. Despite The Reporter's overly sincere efforts to understand the "true" nature of the Am-bonese people, they remain only incomprehensible and, as Madame Ing says, "inscrutable" to him. Eventually, the once optimistic Reporter is disgusted with the horrible smells and tastes of Am-bo Land, decrying the fact that no one ever answers his questions.⁴⁵ His reactions reflect Gray's condemnation of American arrogance in Vietnam via our various ethnocentric and ill-conceived efforts to win the "hearts and minds" of the people there. One unique scene in the play is a direct, face-to-face encounter between The Reporter and an enemy Guerrilla Information Officer, which illustrates the American's inability to fathom the nature of the

struggle in Am-bo Land/Vietnam. Noting the historic context of their resistance to Westerners, the Guerrilla condemns The Reporter's presence in his country as "morbid and decadent." The iron will of the VC stand-in is expressed when he tells The Reporter that "you will be fed on what the soldiers eat. You will think that we are starving you, but these are the rations on which we march toward our inevitable victory."⁴⁶

Despite the Guerrilla's didactic rhetoric, Gray generally paints a somewhat sympathetic portrait of the VC as a strong opponent with a history of patriotic resistance to foreign encroachment on their soil. In addition, another scene shows The Reporter living in a Vietnamese village in order to experience the "simple" life of the peasants. Although Gray lampoons an Ambonese Psychological Warfare Officer who drinks "refreshing" defoliant to reassure the peasants of its harmless nature, he reveals a tendency to romanticize the peasantry and the VC which also echoes the politics of many anti-war plays from the 1960s. As with some of those plays such as *Viet Rock*, he also satirizes the American military in a scene where The Reporter goes on a "search and destroy mission" with a squad of soldiers. Their commander, the war-loving, foul-mouthed Lieutenant Thibodeaux, is a caricature of the John Wayne persona similar to the sergeant character in *Viet Rock*. His men, a surly group who have no enthusiasm for the war, immediately frag him after he finishes his hyper-patriotic pep talk, after which they are ambushed by the unseen guerrillas. Thus, while Gray (a conscientious objector who was drafted into the war as a medic) pokes fun at the corruption and military bureaucracy of both sides of the conflict, the play most strongly depicts the folly of American involvement in Am-bo Land/Vietnam.⁴⁷

The other significant plays of the period were essentially ones which also explored the problems of veterans returning home from the war. The most prominent examples

include Lanford Wilson's *Fifth of July* (1978) and James McLure's one-acts *Lone Star* and *Private Wars* (1979). While these works sometimes alluded to the horrific events American soldiers experienced in combat, they were more interested in working through their veteran protagonists' war-related angst. While they depicted veterans as psychologically disturbed, these plays also offered more complex portraits of them than any found in the numerous "psycho vet" films of the 1970s. Furthermore, they often ended with the possibilities of eventual reintegration into American society for the emotionally wounded veterans. This trend was continued into the 1980s with such plays as Stephen Metcalfe's *Strange Snow* (1982), which contained a believably hopeful ending for its two veteran characters. One of them, the colorful Megs, committed atrocities during the war and periodically smashed his hand through windows in uncontrollable anguish after returning home. The other, his wartime buddy Dave, has become an alcoholic recluse due to his guilt over the death of another friend who saved his life during the war. By the play's conclusion, Megs has begun a relationship with Dave's lonely sister, Martha, and Dave confronts the downward spiral of his life after beating up some teenagers in a drunken bar room rage. Thus, while both men are still troubled at the end of the play, they have taken the first step towards healing their war-inflicted traumas.⁴⁸

Just as the films of this period explored the war in ways which would hopefully allow the American people to reconcile their ambivalent feelings about Vietnam, the majority of the plays produced dissected American attitudes after the war as another means of "coming to terms" with the conflict. Indeed, many of the plays of the 1970s and early 1980s have been collected in a volume entitled *Coming to Terms*, reflecting a desire for catharsis on some level through these theatrical remembrances. The images of the Vietnamese in the plays and films of the period reflect this process of America working through the impact of the war. In addition to the internal social divisiveness which resulted

from our involvement in Vietnam, we also had to deal with the insecurity of losing a war for the first time in American history. The issue was further complicated by the reality that we had lost to a people whom some Americans undoubtedly perceived as technologically backwards and racially and culturally inferior. Thus, the representation of the Vietnamese discussed in this chapter reflected American anger and uneasiness over these various conflicts, leading to the increasing demonization of the Vietnamese as "savages" in the popular cinema as one means of salvaging American "honor." Such representations worked within the larger historic American cultural, literary, cinematic, and theatrical tradition of constructing the non-white Other as an appropriate scapegoat for a myriad of domestic fears and problems. With the exception of the plays which expressed Black solidarity with the Vietnamese, the theatre of this period also abandoned the sympathetic view of the Vietnamese found in many productions of the 1960s. While the theatrical works of the 1970s do not depict the Vietnamese as utter brutes as in films like *The Deer Hunter*, a general perception does emerge from them which mirrors the larger cinematic construction of the Vietnamese as a collective group of mysterious, fearsome "gook" Others.

In conclusion, by the late 1970s, the American people were really just beginning to grapple with the impact of the war on the nation's collective psyche. Viewing Vietnam within the frames of familiar genre conventions and/or mythological traditions provided the film and theatre going public with an entrée towards reconciling their ambiguous feelings about the war. As Auster and Quart have observed, Hollywood's main strategy in engaging the war was to indulge its traditional penchant for dealing with complex political, historical, and ideological issues in personal terms.⁴⁹ The same can be said of the theatre in this period, in contrast to the more politically oriented anti-war plays of the 1960s period. As America moved into the 1980s, the films and plays which reinterpreted the

history of the war would continue to define the nature of our country's involvement in Vietnam for a new generation of spectators. Michael Klein insightfully summarized this development by noting that "in the 1980s, as U.S. economic and political hegemony declined throughout most of the world, the decline was manifested, in excess, in a series of films that not only refight the Vietnam War and justify it on the basis of an anti-Asian racism and anti-Communist demonology, but create the illusion that the U.S. won the battle and in a sense the war."⁵⁰ Thus, the films of the first half of the 1980s in particular rewrote the war in ways which reinforced the inflammatory anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Cold War during Ronald Reagan's presidency. And both the plays and films of this decade would continue to explore these developments in ways which would further alter America's cultural perceptions of the war and the Vietnamese people.

Endnotes

1. See *Dirty Harry*, directed by Donald Siegel, 102 min., Warner Brothers, 1971; *Billy Jack*, directed by T.C. Frank (Tom Laughlin), 114 min., Warner Brothers, 1971; *Gordon's War*, directed by Ossie Davis, 90 min., 20th Century Fox, 1973; *Taxi Driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese, 113 min., Columbia, 1976; *Tracks*, directed by Henry Jaglom, 90 min., Rainbow Pictures, 1976.

2. *Who'll Stop the Rain?*, directed by Karel Reisz, 126 min., United Artists, 1978, videocassette.

3. *The Ninth Configuration*, directed by William Peter Blatty, 115 min., New World Video, 1978, videocassette. See also *Heroes*, directed by Jeremy Paul Kagan, 137 min., Universal, 1977, videocassette. This film's veteran protagonist appears to be cuddly and harmless until robbed by a group of rednecks during a cross-country trip. Suddenly, he reveals his martial arts expertise (a standard Hollywood Vietnam veteran cliché) and beats up an entire bar full of large opponents. In the final scene of the movie, he also uncontrollably flashes back to a traumatic firefight in Vietnam while running through the streets of a small town in California.

4. *Rolling Thunder*, directed by John Flynn, 99 min., International Pictures, 1977, videocassette.

5. *The Best Years of Our Lives*, directed by William Wyler, 170 min., RKO, 1946, videocassette.

6. There are dozens of such studies, but see Robert Jay Lifton, *Home From the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); Ghislaine Boulanger and Charles Kasdushin, eds., *The Vietnam Veteran Redefined: Fact & Fiction* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986); and Wilbur J. Scott, *The Politics of Readjustment: Vietnam Veterans Since the War* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1993) for three good ones which reflect changing perceptions of the most significant veteran ailments. For example, Lifton's 1973 study focuses on the issue of veterans being collectively associated with atrocities such as the My Lai massacre in that period, while Scott's later analysis considers the impact of exposure to Agent Orange.

7. *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by John Frankenheimer, 127 min., MGM, 1962, videocassette. More recent films about World War Two (e.g., Keith Gordon's 1992 *A Midnight Clear*) have also considered such issues but filter them through a "Vietnam consciousness" of sorts, which reflects the influence of the Vietnam War films on the ongoing combat genre as a whole.

8. An exception to this trend was the popular *Coming Home*, directed by Hal Ashby, 127 min., United Artists, 1978, videocassette. This picture also focused on the plight of the returning Vietnam veteran, but was the first Vietnam War film to achieve wide success at the box office, critical acclaim, and Oscar nominations. Its visibility is important in that the film blatantly advanced the notion of the Vietnam War as a tainted one which corrupted American soldiers. For example, the character of Bob (Bruce Dern), a once gung-ho Marine officer, is so devastated by American atrocities in Vietnam that he presumably commits suicide by running naked into the ocean at the film's end (expressing

his need for purification, I suppose). While it contains no direct images of combat, *Coming Home* is the first major Hollywood film to construct the American-Vietnamese encounter as involving a level of savagery which the purer Americans could never have imagined in their pre-war existence. This notion would be reinforced in the more combat oriented box office blockbusters which followed the film, beginning with Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*.

9. Lanning, 88.

10. In my opinion, such efforts peaked somewhat early on in the terrifyingly visceral scene from Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* where the American air calvary assaults a Viet Cong stronghold to the sounds of Wagner.

11. Lanning, 89.

12. Peter McInerney, "Apocalypse Then: Hollywood Looks Back at Vietnam," *Film Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1979-80): 29.

13. *The Boys in Company C*, directed by Sidney J. Furie, 125 min., Good Time Films, 1977, videocassette. See also *More American Graffiti*, directed by W.L. Norton, 111 min., Universal, 1979, videocassette. In this sequel to the popular film directed by George Lucas, one of the film's ensemble of characters, Toad, volunteers for Vietnam so he can "kick ass and eat Cong for breakfast." He soon becomes disenchanted with the violence of the war and various unfeeling American officers, which leads to his desertion on New Year's Eve. Filmed in a grainy faux-documentary style, the Vietnam sequences contained lots of high-volume firefights and surprise attacks by the VC who were never visible. Generally, the film added little to the development of the Vietnam War canon and mostly echoed the themes and tone of *The Boys in Company C*.

14. Auster and Quart, 54.

15. See David Hare, *Year of the Cat*, in his *The Asian Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983). This English play, set in the period just before Saigon's collapse, explores the moral ramifications of the rapid abandonment of the South Vietnamese by their American and European allies.

16. *Go Tell the Spartans*, directed by Ted Post, 114 min., Avco-Embassy, 1978, videocassette.

17. Klein, 22.

18. Ibid., 23.

19. Michael Cimino; quoted in Al Auster and Leonard Quart, "Hollywood and Vietnam, the Triumph of the Will," *Cineaste* 9 (1979): 9. In a different interview given just after the film was finished, however, Cimino modified his views. In his words, "perhaps war--the Vietnam war--is a stronger element in the film than I thought or was willing to admit. The people that the film is about are the people who fight wars, produce the material for them, and who suffer the consequences of them." Donald Chase and Joseph Coencas, "Two Interviews: Stalking the Deer Hunter," *Take One* 7 (May 1979): 38.

20. John Hellman, "Vietnam and the Hollywood Genre Film: Inversions of American Mythology in *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*"; in Anderegg, 61 and 60-61.

21. Ibid., 63.

22. See Part II of Auster and Quart, *How the War was Remembered*, which analyzes the initial Vietnam War films within the Hollywood created paradigms of the "Superman" and "Wounded Hero," 23-73.

23. Walsh and Aulich, 2.

24. Auster and Quart, *How the War was Remembered*, 64; and for subsequent quote, 64-65.

25. *The Deer Hunter*, directed by Michael Cimino, 183 min., Universal, 1978, videocassette.

26. Peter Cowie, *Coppola* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 120-21 and *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, directed by Fax Bahr, documentary footage directed by Eleanor Coppola, 96 min., ZM Productions, 1991, videocassette. See also Eleanor Coppola's written account of the making of the film upon which the documentary is based: Eleanor Coppola, *Notes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

27. Francis Ford Coppola; quoted in Cowie, 130.

28. *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, videocassette; and Cowie, 124.

29. Cowie, 139.

30. Susan Jeffords, "Friendly Civilians: Images of Women and the Feminization of the Audience in Vietnam Films," *Wide Angle* 7 (1985): 15-16.

31. *Battle Hymn*, directed by Douglas Sirk, 108 min., Universal, 1956, videocassette, did show an American flyer accidentally bombing an orphanage in Germany during World War Two. Based on the true story of Colonel Dean Hess, "the flying Parson" (played by Rock Hudson), the film is much different from *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, etc. in that Hess rejoins the Airforce during the Korean War to make amends. He then proceeds to save 1,000 Korean orphans by airlifting them to safety and organizing a home for the children on an island. Thus, in the world view of this earlier combat film, the American ultimately redeems himself for his "accident" and emerges in the final analysis as still a "good guy." In contrast, many of the soldiers in Vietnam War films showed no remorse for their intentional wartime atrocities and/or the films ended without a sense of feel-good resolution. After *Apocalypse Now*, even television would be willing to show Americans committing atrocities against unarmed Vietnamese, as in the two-part adaptation of veteran Philip Caputo's best selling memoir *A Rumor of War*, directed by Richard T. Heffman, 200 min., CBS TV, 24-25 September, 1980.

32. Francis Ford Coppola, interview with Peter Cowie; quoted in Cowie, 125-126.

33. Coppola's interest in depicting the "insanity" and "immorality" of the war is also clouded by the technical virtuosity of the film's battle scenes, which although disturbingly violent are also undeniably exhilarating to watch. To Coppola's credit, perhaps, *Apocalypse Now* believably captures the simultaneous horror and "adrenaline high" of combat which many veterans have discussed in their remembrances of the war. On another level, however, the sheer Hollywood spectacle of such scenes provide a kind of aesthetic voyeurism which quite possibly negates any other anti-war elements in the film. Similar issues have become a source of controversy in films depicting the Holocaust, with some critics contending that any aesthetic representation of such an event can only trivialize the millions of lives lost. See Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), for a good cross-section of views on this topic.

34. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness & The Secret Sharer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910); reprint (New York: Signet Classics, 1950), 129.

35. David Denby, "Hollow Movie," *New York*, 27 August 1979, 88.

36. *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, videocassette.

37. Cowie, 128.

38. *Apocalypse Now*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 150 min., United Artists/American Zoetrope, 1979, videocassette.

39. Richard Schechner, "The Decline and Fall of the American Avant-Garde," essay in *The End of Humanism* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 11-76.

40. Gitlin, 3.

41. David Rabe, *Streamers*; in James Reston, ed., *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 16, 20.

42. *Ashes and Embers*, directed by Haile Gerima, 120 min., Mypheduh Films, 1982. Regarding plays, see most notably Tom Cole, *Medal of Honor Rag*, 1978, in *Coming to Terms*; and Adrienne Kennedy, *An Evening With Dead Essex*; in *Yale/Theater 9* (Spring 1978). Both plays are based on "real" incidents involving Black veterans of the war. In Cole's play, a Black Medal of Honor winner undergoes therapy in a veterans hospital for the effects of "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." While the play offers a thoughtful exploration of the moral impact of war in general, it also specifically considers the racially motivated anger of some Black veterans after returning from Vietnam. As its protagonist Dale Jackson tells his psychiatrist, "but a lot of folks don't want the black veteran to throw down his weapons so soon. Know what I mean? Like, we are supposed to be preparing ourselves for another war, right back here. Vietnam was just our basic training, see?," 148. Similarly, Kennedy's *An Evening With Dead Essex* examines veteran Mark Essex's problems in reentering American society after the war. This play, however, which involves an imaginary theatre group ostensibly rehearsing for a production

of a play about Essex, utilizes documentary materials (i.e., pictures, newspaper articles, letters, etc.) to help convey its much more hostile stance towards "white" America. While Dale Jackson's main problem is his guilt over surviving an ambush which wiped out his entire squad (including friends and comrades of both races), Mark Essex emerges as having been totally alienated from his white peers during his army service. Indeed, at one point in the play, one of the "actors" states that "after going over this material I do believe Essex was so deeply religious that he was torn to bits in spirit by having to serve alongside his white enemy," 68. No specific motivation beyond general white "injustice" towards Blacks is ever given for Essex's attitude, and the play's heavy-handed political rhetoric recalls many plays of the 1960s era. As with some works of that period discussed in Chapter Two, the play also expresses solidarity with the Vietnamese in a scene which juxtaposes reports of American bombings of North Vietnam with descriptions of the police shooting Essex in New Orleans, 71-73. Essex's more extreme perception of America, race, and the Vietnam War is expressed through his death, in that he was shot dead after killing and wounding numerous people during a deadly rampage atop a Howard Johnson's Inn. In contrast, Jackson was killed by the manager of a store during an armed robbery where he made no effort to shoot back. Thus, while *Medal of Honor Rag* presents Jackson's death as an intentional suicide in order to ease his mental anguish over winning a medal for "surviving" the war, *An Evening With Dead Essex* depicts Essex's demise as resulting from an understandable act of Black rage against "white" society. The play's empathy with his actions is troubling considering his shooting of innocent bystanders, but does reflect some of the more extreme responses which the war engendered on stage.

43. Fenn, 166-167.

44. *Streamers*, 9, 21, 24-25. See also the well-done film adaptation of *Streamers*, directed by Robert Altman, 118 min., United Artists, 1983, videocassette.

45. Amlin Gray, *How I Got That Story*; in *Coming to Terms*, 81, 84, 87-88.

46. *Ibid.*, 93, 95-99, 108-109, 110.

47. *Ibid.*, 104-105, 91-93.

48. Lanford Wilson, *Fifth of July* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1978); James McLure, *Lone Star* and *Private Wars* (New York: Dramatists Play Service), 1979; and Stephen Metcalfe, *Strange Snow*, 1982, in *Coming to Terms*. See also the well-acted film adaptation of *Strange Snow* featuring Robert DeNiro, Ed Harris, and Kathy Bates entitled *Jackknife*, directed by David Jones, 102 min., Cineplex Odeon Films, 1988, videocassette.

49. Auster and Quart, *How the War was Remembered*, 72.

50. Klein, 23.

Chapter Four: Rewriting the War

Ronald Reagan's election as President in 1980 initiated a resurgence in the Cold War, accompanied by a marked shift in America's cultural climate. After experiencing a decline in political, military, and economic status since the end of the Vietnam War, the American people seemed ready for a new leader who would reestablish the dominance of the US on the international scene. Societal perceptions of Jimmy Carter as a "wimp," exacerbated by America's humiliation during the Iranian hostage crisis in the late 1970s, set the stage for the ascendancy of the reactionary, anti-Communist Reagan to the Oval Office. A former screen actor who often couched his policies in the context of old Hollywood movies, Reagan developed a persona which contributed to a level of popularity unseen since FDR's administration. Glib, blithely confident, and eternally cheerful, Reagan demonstrated unshakable faith in the manifest destiny and innate cultural superiority of the American people, which provided a much-needed balm for the wounded collective national consciousness. Reagan tirelessly promoted a romanticized view of America's past glories and reasserted its international hegemony by "heating up" the Cold War in a series of major ideological and minor military skirmishes with the Soviet Union. Upon leaving office in 1989, he noted as one of his proudest accomplishments the "recovery of our morale. America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership."¹ Indeed, this issue of a renewed "respect" for America would become a major cause célèbre in international affairs during the 1980s. Not surprisingly, many American films of the period similarly reflected this cultural desire to shake off domestic and foreign perceptions of a post-Vietnam national malaise. In a series of pictures beginning with Ted Kotcheff's *First Blood* (1982), Hollywood churned out a group of action-oriented films with aggressive, macho protagonists who invariably defeated a variety of international enemies.

The subject of the Vietnam War was a particularly apt target for a national effort aimed towards depicting Americans as "winners." Since America had been licking its wounds over Vietnam in various cultural remembrances of the war for almost a decade, the time was ripe for Hollywood to validate the military efforts of our Vietnam veterans. By the mid-1980s, a number of films had emerged which attempted to "rewrite" the war on screen for American audiences. In contrast to the Vietnam War movies of the 1970s, these new films claimed that the war had been worth fighting after all. In addition, they suggested that we had won the war militarily only to have been "betrayed" at home by various subversive forces (e.g., corrupt politicians, unsympathetic reporters and protesters, cowardly allies, etc.). These films also typically involved their protagonists' returning to Vietnam to "refight" the war on a metaphorical level. These chauvinistic, self-aggrandizing cinematic constructions echoed the larger persona or national myth surrounding Reagan's presidency, which Susan Jeffords has analyzed in detail in her interesting book *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. For Jeffords, the "public and popular images of 'Ronald Reagan'" paralleled the myriad "action-adventure Hollywood films that portrayed many of the same narratives of heroism, success, achievement, toughness, strength, and 'good old Americanness' that made the Reagan Revolution possible."²

Not surprisingly, America's cultural memory of the Vietnam War was also revised to fit this new agenda. In order for these efforts to succeed, the image of the Vietnamese created in earlier films--particularly that of the VC and NVA as fearsome, almost supernatural opponents--would have to be reworked. In contrast, the Vietnam War plays of this period were more concerned with an ongoing consideration of American veterans' issues, in tandem with a renewed interest in depicting the nature of combat in Vietnam on the stage. In that regard, they anticipated the cinematic trends of the latter part of the 1980s, starting with Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), to confront the "reality" of combat in the Vietnam War for American audiences. Thus, I will mostly consider the plays of the

1980s within the framework of my next chapter. Only the play *Tracers*, which contained several sections which reconsidered the war's outcome, will be considered here in part. Overall, the more populist, mainstream medium of the Hollywood film was the most effective tool for creating the image of a reconstructed, "hard body" American warrior in Vietnam. Consequently, this chapter will focus almost exclusively on the film community, and Chapter Five will return to a discussion of several important plays.

This obsession with a loss of American will and confidence, as well as the numerous studies examining the war in the context of American national myths,³ also speaks to our ongoing post-war tendency towards defining the impact of the war in strictly American terms. Recognizing this current is essential for gaining a clear understanding of the evolution of the war's recreation on film and stage, particularly during the jingoistic period of the Reagan administration. In many ways, our defeat in Vietnam shattered the myth of invincibility and superiority once held by many Americans, leaving the nation in a state of cultural shock. As James William Gibson rightly observed in his essay "American Paramilitary Culture and the Reconstitution of the Vietnam War":

American culture did not have any mythical narratives and visual symbols to explain why US forces had not achieved victory. There was no popular cultural archetype to account for successful Vietnamese resistance to foreign invaders--the Indians had always lost. But 'self imposed restraint' offered the American people a way to make sense of failure in Vietnam; that position plunges into the core of American mythology.... It is only a short distance from these classic American heroes [e.g., Western gunslingers, cartoon super heroes, and modern detectives] who act outside the power structure in order to save society to American soldiers who are *restrained by corrupt or cowardly politicians and thus not allowed to win the war....* This new 'hero' is the 'paramilitary warrior' ... he is the centre of an emerging paramilitary culture that is actively redefining notions of peace and war to the American public. This culture posits a *mythical interpretation of the Vietnam War* and a *new war* as the path to health for the warrior and regeneration for a society weakened and troubled by mysterious military failure and a world it can no longer control.⁴

Thus, the initial group of Vietnam War films in this period would seize upon this figure of the "paramilitary warrior" as the main means of redressing America's military and psychological losses on the big screen.

As mentioned, the 1982 film *First Blood* kicked off this new cycle and marked a transition from the films of the 1970s which had generally criticized American involvement in the war. *First Blood's* unexpected box-office success indicated that the film had indeed struck a responsive chord with the American public. Written by John Milius (who also co-scripted *Apocalypse Now*) and starring Sylvester Stallone of "Rocky" fame in the leading role of John Rambo, the film possessed first-rate action picture credentials from the get-go. Although it was loosely based on David Morrell's psychologically complex 1972 novel of the same name, Milius and director Ted Hotcheff made a number of changes in the screenplay which allowed them to develop the motifs of the "paramilitary warrior" and the "betrayed veteran" in significant ways.

For instance, *First Blood* opens with Rambo seeking out the last surviving member of his Green Beret unit, Delmar Berry, in the Pacific Northwest. He soon learns that Berry has died of cancer resulting from exposure to Agent Orange; a wartime victim who, in Rambo's words, "got himself killed in Nam and didn't even know it." In the book, which was set in Kentucky during the early 1970s, Rambo looked like just another long-haired "hippie" wearing blue jeans and an army jacket. Furthermore, he has been home from the war only six months after escaping from a brutal POW experience, which more reasonably explains his restlessness and inability to adjust to "normal" life back in the States. The film is set in the 1980s, and Stallone's Rambo appears to be a mature man well into his thirties. Thus, in the screen adaptation, Rambo is still a drifter and unassimilated into American society a full decade after returning home from the war. His long hair and military-like garb also sets him apart from the larger culture much more distinctly in 1982 than it would have in 1972. In tandem with his quest to connect with his veteran buddies years after the

war's conclusion, all these factors speak to his obvious long-term, war-related angst. In contrast, the photo of the robust, smiling, ethnically mixed squad shown in Berry's home underscores the film's promotion of the ideal of a camaraderie among men at war.⁵ By the end of this opening sequence, *First Blood* has clearly established two of its major themes: that the war is not over for the Vietnam veteran, and Rambo--as the representative of the veteran on screen--still views American society in "us versus them" terms.

Aside from the character's hairstyle and dress, the casting of the heavily muscled Stallone also affects the mood of the film. Pumped up and in prime physical condition, his Rambo is obviously a man not to be trifled with. In contrast, the novel describes the character as a "kid" who no one would have ever imagined to be a trained commando and martial arts expert. Although the film's numerous dim-witted cops repeatedly profess surprise over Rambo's glowing war record because of his slovenly appearance, in actuality Stallone looks as if he's been in training for an Olympic decathlon. Jeffords argues that screen icons like Rambo fulfilled a national desire at the time for symbolic "hard bodies" who would reestablish America's military and political might around the world. For her, the celluloid heroics of Rambo and other 1980s action characters portrayed by the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Mel Gibson both reflected and reinforced the international muscle-flexing and tough-talking rhetoric of the Reagan administration.⁶ Certainly, the striking "hard body" appearance of Rambo looming over the horizon in the film's opening shot sets the tone for the remainder of the movie.

The main conflict of the picture revolves around Rambo's harassment by a local Sheriff (Brian Dennehy) who kicks him out of town because of his unkempt looks. Tired of being "pushed," Rambo returns there and is promptly arrested. Once in jail, he is taunted by the local redneck deputies and beaten by one particularly nasty guard. Shots of Rambo being hosed down in his cell are juxtaposed against images of his Vietnamese captors throwing slop on him in a pit during the war, reinforcing for the viewer the

ongoing nature of Rambo's unjust persecution. When the policemen attempt to shave him forcibly with a straight-edged razor, Rambo "flashes back" to his torture at the hands of a knife-wielding NVA officer during his captivity. He then snaps and goes berserk, wreaking havoc on a half-dozen large guards with his martial arts skills. After breaking out of jail, Rambo escapes into the woods where he is pursued for the remainder of the film by various police officers, national guardsmen, and local thrill-seekers.

The film's contrast to the book in relation to the entire imprisonment sequence is striking. In the novel, Rambo does balk at having to enter the cell, as he cannot bear to be in confined spaces as a result of his wartime imprisonment. Unlike the film, however, he never psychotically flashes back to Vietnam, although he does grab the razor in a moment of desperation. Furthermore, Morrell's Rambo deliberately cuts a guard only as a last resort after being threatened by a gun, and then quickly and efficiently knocks out a couple of others as he runs from the jail. Thus, the cinematic version of Rambo's escape is expanded significantly so that the viewer can "enjoy" watching the enraged Stallone beat up twice as many guards (all of them huge), with several bodies shown crashing through windows in slow motion for optimum action sequence effect.

The movie also veers from the book dramatically in its extended "chase" scenes where Sheriff Teasle and his deputies pursue Rambo into the woods. The novel depicts Rambo as receiving assistance from a local moonshiner, including warm clothes and a rifle. Although he initially attempts to leave the area without committing any further violence, he decides to turn his Green Beret abilities against the sheriff's posse once they close in on him and cut off any chance of a peaceful escape. He then calmly and lethally picks them off one by one until only Teasle, a decorated combat veteran of the Korean War in the book, luckily escapes his attack. The film, however, depicts Rambo as a superman who requires no help from anyone. Like the traditional American hunter-heroes of past eras, he can easily live off of the land, cutting up tarpaulins for clothing, hunting animals for food,

and laying a series of Viet Cong-like booby traps for his pursuers. Although he eventually arms himself with a captured rifle, the screen Rambo needs only his over-sized hunting knife and highly developed body to defeat his enemies.

Such changes from the novel throughout the film serve its ideological intentions in several ways. Most significantly, the cinematic Rambo emerges more distinctly as a victim of unjust police persecution, as he is provoked by the sadistic bullies until his veteran's angst erupts into a psychotic rage against his oppressors. The book's characters are much more three-dimensional, with both sides bearing some of the responsibility for the escalating violence. On screen, Rambo is the cardboard cut-out good guy and the cops, who symbolize an ungrateful society who never really appreciate the sacrifices of the Vietnam veteran, are the stock bad guys. The film's sympathy for Rambo's mistreatment is underscored by his obvious long-term war related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (again, the character in the novel initially controls himself more successfully after being home from the war only six months). American culpability for the veterans' plight is clearly established in the film's conclusion, when Rambo delivers an anguished, impassioned speech to a Colonel Trautman (Richard Crenna) who led his Special Forces team in Vietnam: "nothing is over--nothing. You just don't turn it off. It wasn't my war. You asked me, I didn't ask you. And I did what I had to do to win. But somebody wouldn't let us win. And I come back to the world, and I see all those maggots at the airport, protesting me, spittin', calling me baby killer and all kinds of vile crap. Who are they to protest me? For me, civilian life is nothing."

Rambo's heroic stature in the film is further reinforced by his repeated efforts to avoid bloodshed. While the character in the novel never overtly "snaps," he has been clearly affected by his wartime experiences, as evidenced in his capacity for violence. Once threatened, he quite consciously reverts to a "survival of the fittest" wartime mentality and kills anyone who gets in his way, albeit regretfully. In contrast, although he has

uncontrollable flashbacks to Vietnam and beats up a lot more people, the celluloid Rambo generally chooses to wound rather than kill. For instance, he traps and injures all of the posse, including Teasle, to demonstrate that he could easily kill them but would rather just be left alone. As he warns Teasle, "don't push it, or I'll give you a war you won't believe." Later, he tells Trautman, who has been called in to lure him out of the woods, that "they drew first blood," thus reinforcing the "innocent" nature of his position.

Such nobility further enhances his image as a traditional action hero, in that while Rambo is clearly the baddest dude on screen, he also operates under a strict moral code. The only man he ever kills, for example, is the deputy who beat him and who later attempts to shoot him from a helicopter (Rambo, laughably, knocks him out of it with a well-thrown rock). His combination of heroic individualism and elevated physical and moral character traits is linked to an established tradition of screen heroes, such as the solitary gunslingers of the Western who would rescue a town from the bad guys and then ride off, alone, into the horizon. Rambo's similarly mythic stature resonated effectively within a larger web of popular cultural signifiers for his audience, although his combat skills were exaggerated far beyond any degree of verisimilitude (e.g., as when he handled a heavy caliber machine gun like a six-shooter). On one level, the character's heightened combat abilities in such sequences reflect the demands of Hollywood economics, in that the producers would have expected fans of Stallone's "Rocky" image to enjoy seeing the muscle-bound actor beat up the bad guys. But the specific way in which the film distorts Morrell's book goes beyond simple melodramatic conventions, suggesting a calculated desire to pit a larger-than-life, powerful veteran avenger against the weak representatives of an unappreciative nation. The film's ending underscores this intent, with Rambo destroying the town and cutting down Teasle at will before making his heavy-handed speech. In contrast, the book describes Rambo attacking the town until Teasle, although wounded by Rambo, kills him.

Indeed, all of Rambo's opponents on screen are soft, whiny, and out-of-his-league when it comes to combat. The hapless Teasle even cries out to Trautman at one point, "where do you people come from?," whereas in the book Teasle was himself a winner of the Distinguished Service Cross in Korea and does eventually stop Rambo with deadly marksmanship. And Trautman, presented in the novel as a complex character torn between an admiration of Rambo's abilities and a desire to stop his rampage, emerges in the film as a smarmy civilian hater who seems present only to mythologize Rambo's legendary military skills (e.g., "you're lucky he didn't kill all of you"). Despite his emotional trauma, the film ultimately defines Rambo as a superman warrior par excellence to be admired by the viewer. Jeffords contends that its exaggerated praise of Rambo's physical prowess speaks to the absence of any such image in American culture during the initial post-war years. In the film, the 1960s-trained Rambo can easily defeat hundreds of younger National Guardsman armed with the latest high-technology weapons. Thus, the picture exposes our "national deterioration" during the Carter administration, reflecting the growing sentiment in some quarters of American society to become a respected military power once again.⁷ As she puts it, "the true success of *First Blood*, both symbolically and as a marketing tool, is to have created the desire in citizens/audiences to see more bodies like Rambo's, an achievement to which the blockbuster films of the 1980s can attest."⁸

With men like Rambo on our side, the film clearly suggests that some other insidious force must have been at work during the war to explain America's defeat (its sequel, *Rambo: First Blood Part Two*, would hammer this theme home with relentless fury). After all, if the likes of Rambo were roaming around the jungles of Vietnam, how could we possibly have been defeated militarily? And while the Vietnamese are only seen during Rambo's brief flashbacks to his wartime torture, the film's huge success created the impetus for Hollywood to produce a sequel. Given the nature of Rambo's image of a lone, paramilitary warrior operating by himself "behind the lines," it was inevitable that he would

next return to the jungles of Vietnam and reengage the enemy. In their analysis of the "Rambo" films, Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser emphasize how these narratives resurrect past American cultural images of the hunter-hero as a kind of "noble savage": "emerging from the mud of the jungle, from the trees, rivers, and waterfalls, Rambo displays a privileged, magical relationship with the Third World wilderness not evidenced even by the Vietnamese."⁹ The sequel to *First Blood*, in tandem with a number of other Vietnam films which "refought the war," helped to redefine the representation of the Vietnamese on screen for a new generation of American film goers.

The next such film was *Uncommon Valor* (1983), also directed by Ted Kotcheff. Unlike *First Blood*, the film's opening sequence was set during the war, and echoed Coppola's treatment of Vietnam in *Apocalypse Now* as a surrealistic nightmare. Filmed in slow motion with dark, haunting lighting, the scene depicts a squad of American soldiers under fire as they desperately attempt to reach a rescue helicopter. While they slog through a rice paddy, the unseen VC assault them with a deadly cross-fire. Frank, a soldier who stops to pick up a wounded buddy, is left behind with a half dozen other comrades when the pilot flees in terror. As the helicopter departs, the camera lingers from its point-of-view on the shocked faces of the abandoned soldiers, with Frank's outstretched arm reaching towards the sky in an almost biblical-like supplication. Within just a few moments, Kotcheff visually establishes the war as a chamber of horrors which would surely linger in the collective veteran psyche. This idea also connects to the key theme of the movie: namely, the "unfinished business" remaining for our nation vis-à-vis "the boys who were left behind" in Vietnam.

Indeed, the film then abruptly flashes forward to the 1980s. Frank's father, the retired Colonel Rhodes (Gene Hackman), is unsuccessfully lobbying to draw political

attention to the 2,500 GIs missing in action. Rhodes and his supporters contend that many of these men are still being held in captivity by the victorious Communist regime in Vietnam. Aside from the veteran characters and their families, no one else in the film seems to care about the war or the MIA cause. When Rhodes and MacGregor (Robert Stack), the father of Frank's fallen buddy, seek out the remaining members of the squad, it is clear that they have not enjoyed the luxury of forgetting about the war. With one exception, all of them are living aimless if not criminally disturbed lives some ten years later, echoing the familiar cinematic portraits of emotionally crippled veterans. The exception is a notable one because the character is a successful Black hospital administrator who served as a pilot during the war. Not only is the film's portrayal of a well-adjusted veteran who was an officer and a hero during the war unusual, but the fact that the character is Black is downright extraordinary.¹⁰ Having obtained evidence which suggests that Frank is being held captive in Laos, Rhodes proposes to each of them that they return to Vietnam and rescue the American captives. After they all agree and fly to Texas to train for the assault on a model of the POW camp built by the wealthy MacGregor (who also supplies their weapons), *Uncommon Valor* veers in a markedly new direction from earlier films about the war.

The film's training sequence does echo earlier World War Two films like *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) and *The Devil's Brigade* (1968) in its depiction of the transformation of a group of misfits into a polished fighting machine. In this case, however, the unit must rediscover its former warrior spirit and military prowess. Furthermore, Rhodes delivers a didactic monologue which pointedly establishes the film's ideological position. Noting that the veterans share a bond of having risked their lives together in combat, Rhodes argues that they are equally linked by their image as "criminals" in the larger American society. This, of course, is due to their having "lost" the war, which Rhodes claims is the only unforgivable sin in our culture. He also contends that the politicians, who never lost "one

son" in Vietnam, won't rescue the POWs because they have no political capital as a result of this "loser" stigma. Thus, it is up to the band of paramilitary warriors to seize the day, rescue their missing buddies, and restore honor to their own wartime record in Vietnam. As Rhodes emotionally announces, "this time nobody can dispute the rightness of what we're doing."

Thus, *Uncommon Valor* proudly championed American involvement in the Vietnam War to a degree which even surpassed the empathy expressed for the veteran in *First Blood*. Its stance also contrasted greatly with the previous outpouring of films which generally condemned America's military commitment to Vietnam as at best misguided and at worst imperialist and racist. The picture also expanded upon Rambo's claim in *First Blood* that the valiant American soldiers in Vietnam were betrayed by "politicians" back home who did not allow them to win the war.

Uncommon Valor reinforces this theme by highlighting the combat expertise of the squad in the extended training sequence. Each member possesses a deadly specialty and they are still lethal killers after almost a decade of civilian life. The abilities of the unit become even more apparent after they land in Thailand and have their equipment confiscated by a CIA operative there. Pooling their own personal money together, they buy World War Two era "bargain basement" weaponry from a French arms dealer and steal helicopters from a Laotian base (as with *The Deer Hunter*, any Western profiteer in Vietnam must always be a decadent Frenchman in the world view of Hollywood). As Americans, the film suggests, they are not only tough but smart, able to improvise and accomplish the mission successfully even with antiquated equipment.

The "enemy" they face also supports such thinking. While quite willing to die in combat and numerically superior to the Americans, the Laotians¹¹ do not seem particularly bright and possess none of the talent for jungle warfare which the VC displayed during the conflict. Repeatedly, they are caught sleeping at camp or are ambushed in the open by the

stealthy Americans. Indeed, the film, and the similar ones which followed it, in a sense inverted the historical reality of combat in Vietnam. During the war, the Americans were the ones who crashed about Vietnam vainly looking for the unseen enemy during countless "search and destroy" missions, while the VC moved with ease through the jungles and their huge network of tunnels. In *Uncommon Valor*, it is the Americans who prey upon the unsuspecting Asian enemy.

The Americans do, however, require assistance from an anti-Communist Thai drug dealer and his two daughters to guide them into Laos. Although the man is a criminal, he is anti-Communist and therefore admirable in the hierarchy of the film. These three roles mark the introduction of "good" anti-Communist Asian characters into this group of Vietnam War films, harkening back to the noble Indian scouts of the Westerns or the loyal Asian allies of the World War Two combat pictures. Like those secondary characters, as well as the cooperative South Vietnamese in *The Green Berets*, these Asians are presented as unquestioningly willing to serve and die for the Americans. Once again, the Americans are happily in charge of the "natives" in the historic Western tradition of the "white man's burden." And like the "bad" Indian and Asian opponents of numerous earlier Western and combat films, the Laotians are depicted as a collective force present only to be mowed down by the intrepid Americans. Consequently, the memory of the frightened Americans running from the Vietnamese in the film's opening scene is dispelled by the later images of the Americans returning to the former site of their humiliation and killing hundreds of the enemy. Granted, they lose a couple of the squad in the process and Rhodes learns that Frank died in the camp some years earlier from an illness. But *Uncommon Valor's* political agenda is accomplished by the group's successful military rescue of the American POWs present at the camp. Overall, the film's message conveys that this group of "honorable," paramilitary veterans were able to accomplish through will and force of arms what years of hollow political negotiations were unable to do.

The film also reverses the apologetic and/or accusatory tone of previous Vietnam films in its suggestion that the Vietnam veterans' combat experience and camaraderie is something to be admired rather than despised. This is especially accomplished via the character of "Mr. Scott" (Patrick Swayze), a young ex-army type whom Rhodes brings in to whip the men back into shape at the training camp. Lacking combat experience, Scott is scoffed at by the tight-knit clique of veterans until they learn that his father is a Vietnam vet MIA. Then, they immediately welcome him into the fold. Scott himself wants nothing more than to prove himself in combat and join the "brotherhood," exhorting the squad to "kill, kill, kill the enemy" during rifle practice. In tandem with the group's selfless and *successful* efforts to rescue the POWs, the film sends out a clear message that these veterans are men not only to be respected but even emulated. Like *First Blood*, then, *Uncommon Valor* argued that the public image of the Vietnam veteran needed to be rehabilitated in American society. Furthermore, the film's willingness to posit the obvious superiority of American combat troops was well-timed for a public looking for a way to reconcile our losses in Vietnam.

Although *Uncommon Valor* falls into cliché genre conventions in depicting the covert operations of the squad, the character of Colonel Rhodes emerges as surprisingly nuanced and believable due to the fine, subtle acting of Gene Hackman. And while the film obviously relishes the machismo military culture of these men-at-arms (one scene shows them laughing uproariously over the demolition expert demonstrating how he "blew the balls" off Vietnamese during the war with "Bouncing Betty" mines), it also successfully conveys the emotional anguish and loss of life resulting from combat. *Uncommon Valor's* action sequences, while glamorized to depict the Americans in the best possible light, still emerged as much more credible than those of *First Blood*. In contrast, the next group of films to engage the themes introduced in *First Blood* and *Uncommon Valor* would distort

the violence of combat, as well as the abilities of the paramilitary warrior, to previously unseen levels.¹²

Ironically, Chuck Norris, a former world karate champion and neophyte actor, was the first to capitalize on the "return to Vietnam" trend begun by *Uncommon Valor*. As Tony Williams observed in his article "*Missing in Action: The Vietnam Construction of the Movie Star*," it is easy to dismiss the Vietnam War films starring Stallone and Norris as mere "moneymaking artifacts."¹³ As popular stars, however, they became the successors to the mainstream American audience's need for traditional screen action heroes left vacant by the death of a long ailing John Wayne in 1979 from lung cancer. In addition, Norris's *Missing in Action*, released in 1984, tied together several significant cultural and political currents:

This election year was one of popular enthusiasm for Ronald Reagan. He had made America "feel good," reinterpreted Vietnam as a "noble crusade," and restored leadership to the Oval Office. The year 1984 was also when the MIA issue received widespread publicity. Norris's fervent patriotism, his heroic leadership qualities in *Missing in Action*, his championship of the MIA issue, and his non-antihero image all benefited from the charismatic shadow of Ronald Reagan. In a year when all these factors dominated the public mind it was hardly accidental that *Missing in Action* proved a contemporary box office (if not critical) success.¹⁴

Norris had ventured briefly into Vietnam with his earlier film *Good Guys Wear Black* (1979), a thriller which portrayed a Vietnam veteran embroiled in CIA espionage. The flashback sequences of that film prepared Norris for a full-fledged foray into the war with his first *Missing in Action* film.

In this picture, Norris's character of Colonel John Braddock is initially seen leading a retreat through the jungles of Vietnam. While the image of Americans fleeing from superior Vietnamese forces was by now a familiar one to American audiences, *Missing in Action* presents this sequence as more of an equal battle. After all, by 1984 it was culturally acceptable if not desirable to show Americans "winning" on screen again, so in

this picture a lot of Vietnamese get killed along the way as the Americans move towards the rescue choppers. The film also supports this change in mood formally in its use of bright lighting and crisp cinematography to convey the exhilarating nature of the action, in contrast to the elegiac, brooding quality of the opening retreat scene in *Uncommon Valor*. Naturally, Braddock dispatches the most Vietnamese and is captured only because he stays behind to aid his fallen comrades. In doing so, he actually leaps from a building with a grenade in each hand to kill an NVA regular who is diabolically bayoneting a wounded American.

How he survives this feat is never explained, of course, as the film then cuts to Braddock in a hotel room "eight years later." Recently escaped from a POW camp after years of imprisonment, he is about to participate in American negotiations with the Communist government in Vietnam regarding the MIA issue. Thus, despite the GIs' better show of arms in the initial combat scene, they still have been abandoned by the American government (as in *Uncommon Valor*). The taciturn, iron-willed Braddock has nothing but contempt for a US Senator who wants to appease the lying Commies, and returns to Vietnam only to locate--and liberate--the captive Americans. To accomplish his Herculean task, he proceeds to Thailand where he enlists his old army buddy Tuck (M. Emmett Walsh) to assist him and slaughters hundreds of Vietnamese in the process.

The Vietnamese are all one-dimensional villains modeled upon World War Two screen caricatures of the Japanese. The smooth-talking but deceitful Vietnamese politicians recall the unctuous Japanese diplomats who lied to the trusting Americans before Pearl Harbor in films like *Wake Island*. And the brutish Vietnamese officer depicted in Braddock's captivity flashbacks could easily have run one of the Japanese POW camps portrayed in World War Two films of various eras (e.g., Lewis Milestone's 1944 *The Purple Heart*). Interestingly, like Rambo's flashbacks in *First Blood*, these scenes show him being tortured with a sharp knife by a gleeful, sadistic Vietnamese officer. Along the

lines of the Russian Roulette images from *The Deer Hunter*, such visual depictions of torture offered yet another emotionally charged sign of "Oriental primitivism" for American audiences. In *Missing in Action*, Braddock's former tormentor is now the leader of a Vietnamese "hit squad" pursuing him, which gives the American a welcome opportunity to settle their old score. Braddock does so in a *mano a mano* encounter, in which he bests his Vietnamese enemy with his superior strength by forcing the man to impale himself upon his own knife. Such a moment assures the spectator that when placed in a fair fight, the American hero will always win.¹⁵

Similarly, at the end of *Missing in Action 2: The Beginning* (1985), Braddock engages in a brawl with the cruel commander of his POW camp after all the other guards have been overcome. Shrieking that he wants to find out who is the "better man," Colonel Yen (Soon-Teck Oh) is easily beaten to a pulp by the obviously stronger Braddock (the audience must "suspend its disbelief" regarding the fact that he is so fit despite enduring a near decade of hard labor and starvation). Barely landing one punch, Yen is weakened by Norris's undeniably impressive karate skills until he is helplessly pinned against a wall. At that point, Norris abandons his fancy martial arts tricks and pummels Yen with a series of good old-fashioned right crosses to the jaw, like John Wayne clearing out a barroom in a Western. Such moves, in addition to his successful solo forays through the streets and jungles of Vietnam, serve to place Braddock--like Rambo--within the archetypal tradition of American individualism and the hunter-hero.

This sequel, released in the same year as Stallone's follow-up to *First Blood*, was in fact more of a "prequel" given its depiction of Braddock's POW experience and eventual escape. Of course, when the film shows him being shot down in a helicopter, it totally contradicts the portrayal of his capture in the first film. But such is the nature of Hollywood, where characters in sequels are played by different actors, revived from the

dead, etc., in order to continue successful, money-making franchises. Overall, the sequel differs little from the first film, although Braddock gets more opportunities to inflict mayhem on the Vietnamese (who are, if possible, even more stereotypically evil this time around).

The main thrust of the picture involves the previously mentioned Colonel Yen's ongoing efforts to get Braddock to sign a "confession" for his alleged "war crimes." Although the film subtly chides the American government for forgetting about those soldiers MIA, almost all of the prisoners are unquestioningly patriotic and remain loyal to their country. The exception is a Captain Nestor, who naively believes that Yen will release them if Braddock gives in to his demands. The fact that Nestor is Black might have been perceived as political commentary, but his character is balanced by another loyal Black soldier who urges Braddock not to confess even if it means saving his own life. Alas, the sadistic Yen burns the "patriotic" American alive even after Braddock signs the phony confession, but the traitorous Nestor redeems himself by the film's end by dying in order to save one of his former comrades. Thus, the audience can rest easy, for in the final analysis all the Americans are still good guys.

After this betrayal, Braddock escapes and eventually blows up the camp before killing Yen with his bare hands. Again, it is hard to imagine the inept Vietnamese soldiers depicted in the movie as having ever defeated America's mighty military machine. But the film, like its predecessor, is not interested in such details. Rather, as critic Rob Edelman noted in an analysis of the Rambo-Braddock pictures, "all of these films offer a shallow, superficial formula by which Americans can rid themselves of the guilt over the fiasco that was Vietnam. That war really isn't over, these films allege. Just send Gene Hackman, Chuck Norris or Sylvester Stallone back there.... The reds will fall like redskins in a John Wayne Western and America will be proud, will regain its honor, will actually, incredibly,

'win' the war."¹⁶ All of the films discussed in this chapter also showed the Vietnamese wearing Japanese style uniforms from the World War Two era, which perhaps served as yet another familiar, comforting costume signifier for their action-adventure fans.

Although the guards are reprehensible sadists, the film also includes a number of South Vietnamese prisoners. One of these characters, a Captain Ho, actually emerges as a fairly distinct supporting player. He is obviously intelligent and courageous and aids Braddock at several key junctures in the film. Of course, it does not allow him as an Asian to participate directly in the final liberation of the camp. Rather, his secondary role is to provide "cover" for the American heroes as they "go in" to do the job. Similarly, Braddock frees a group of South Vietnamese prisoners in part one of the series. The film's ethnocentrism is highly evident through Braddock's interest in only taking the worthy American prisoners back to Ho Chi Minh City (forget about our allies), but the South Vietnamese yell that they will "fight for their freedom" anyway after humbly bowing to Braddock in gratitude.

The politics of both films are similar to those of *Uncommon Valor* in this regard, in that they clearly want the audience to distinguish between the "good" and "bad" Asians. The good ones, naturally, are anti-Communist and always willing to play second banana to their American leaders. The political rhetoric of the Reagan years is reflected in such representations, which indicate that the Communists were just as brutal to their own people as to the Americans. Overall, audiences embraced the films, turning Norris into a major box-office attraction.¹⁷ Despite his unpolished acting and the unbelievable situations of the *Missing in Action* films, Norris's low-key intensity and obvious physical adroitness did lend a greater degree of credibility to them compared to Stallone's *First Blood* series.¹⁸

In fact, the sequel to *First Blood*, *Rambo: First Blood Part Two*, would take the "Vietnam action film" to new heights of ludicrousness. The movie begins with Rambo in prison, sentenced to hard labor for his rampage in *First Blood*. As before, the camera fetishizes Stallone's over-developed physique from the first frame on, with the bare-chested actor so overly-muscular in this film that he can barely lower his arms to his side. Accordingly, his beloved hunting knife, which he later claims brings him "good luck," is also noticeably bigger as well--about the size of a small sword. The thin excuse for a plot involves Trautman dangling a pardon for Rambo in exchange for his participation in a mission to locate American soldiers MIA in Vietnam. The theme of veteran "betrayal" developed in the first film is reintroduced almost immediately when Rambo asks Trautman "do we get to win this time?" Trautman's reply, "this time it's up to you," suggests that "last time" around the efforts of the GIs in Vietnam were hindered by "outside" forces. Rambo promptly hops on a plane to Thailand while the film's credit sequence pans over shots of Buddhist and Hindu statues. In addition, ominous "Oriental" music plays on the soundtrack, thereby cueing the viewers that we are entering a strange, impenetrable land that only a super-hero like Rambo can fully comprehend.

Once there Rambo encounters Murdoch, the shifty bureaucrat in charge of the mission. After Murdoch abandons him in the jungle, Rambo gets really mad, rescues the remaining prisoners, and comes back to even the score with the traitor. Thus, like the earlier films discussed, *Rambo: First Blood Part Two* dismisses political action and "cheap talk" in favor of effective paramilitary strikes which "get the job done." And once again, Trautman is present in order to develop the Rambo legend even further, spouting over-the-top dialogue like "what you call hell he chooses to call home" and "Rambo's a pure fighting machine--his only desire was to win a war someone else lost." In fact, Trautman bluntly accuses Murdoch and the "government" of failing to pay four billion dollars in war reparations to the North Vietnamese in 1972, which resulted in the ongoing POW situation.

Thus, the film clearly implies that while a soldier like Trautman cares about the veterans, the politician Murdoch is willing to sacrifice them for the sake of US foreign policy interests.

Rambo: First Blood Part Two's message is also ambiguous in that, as Studlar and Desser observe, "while it appears to embrace the militaristic ideology of the radical right, *Rambo* sustains an atmosphere of post-Watergate distrust of government."¹⁹ The film's Cold War, anti-Communist credentials are clearly established by its inclusion of Soviet troops into the plot. The Soviets' dominance of their Vietnamese minions²⁰ in the film also supports Cold War era fears about monolithic Russian Communism and the domino theory, while Rambo's destruction of both the Soviets and the Vietnamese turns it into a "proxy" battle of sorts against Reagan's evil Soviet empire. Thus, while Reagan was quick to embrace Rambo as a symbolic ally in his crusade against Communism,²¹ he ironically chose to ignore the distinct anti-government tenor of the films. Ultimately, however, *Rambo: First Blood Part Two* assures us that Rambo is a loyal patriot despite the "system's" machinations against him. Just before Rambo strides across the airport tarmac at the film's end like a Western hero riding off into the sunset, Trautman pleads for him to not "hate his country." The stunned Rambo replies that he only desires what all the men who "spilled their guts" in Vietnam want: "for our country to love us as much as we love it." As Studlar and Desser contend in their essay, the *Rambo* films help displace the topic of our defeat in Vietnam, as well as any questioning of our motivation for being there in the first place, to the issue of addressing our "obligations" to the Vietnam veterans.²² In Rambo's teary-eyed concluding speech, the film clumsily attempts to reconcile its muddy political message by marking Rambo's "love of country" above all else.

Such complex questions are also erased by giving Americans a chance to cheer Rambo's larger-than-life abilities to withstand pain, escape sure death, and vanquish large numbers of opponents. Rambo's outlandish exploits, which include jumping out of a river to commandeer a helicopter and blowing up opponents with exploding arrows, clearly place him in the mythic realm of the Hollywood action hero. In *Uncommon Valor*, the fact that several of the squad were killed in battle made the action sequences seem somewhat believable. Rambo, however, survives numerous deadly confrontations with no more than a scratch. Critic David Denby remarked on the absurdity of his theatrics as follows: "the shamelessness of *Rambo* surpasses all bounds ... in imitation of the Japanese, who obligingly ran straight into Robert Taylor's line of fire in *Bataan*, the Russians and Vietnamese forget to take cover and hopelessly fall down by the dozen before Stallone's hail of bullets."²³ In contrast, as in most action-adventure movies, none of the fusillades fired at the "hero" Rambo by his opponents ever find their mark.

Denby's review also speaks to the film's facile representation of the fighting ability of the Vietnamese. Indeed, Rambo sets traps for them in the jungle which make Braddock's maneuvers in *Missing in Action* look like those of a Boy Scout. As Denby queried, "but what about those skinny guys in Black pajamas? How does Stallone think they ever licked the Americans?" The Vietnamese are also so weak that they need to call in their Russian "protectors," who treat them with obvious contempt, to rescue them from Rambo's wrath. As in the first film, Rambo's Indian-like appearance and tactics place him within a system of comfortable cultural archetypes for the audience, while once again reversing history in depicting the Americans as more adept at jungle warfare than the Vietnamese. However, as Studlar and Desser observe with insight, despite his Native American iconography, Rambo, and the men he rescues, are white. Thus, the imbalance of Hispanics and Blacks among the ranks of combat troops in Vietnam is conveniently

ignored in the film. Ultimately, Rambo's gory annihilation of all his enemies, down to the last man, served as the kind of "regeneration through violence" which Richard Slotkin observed in the traditional American captivity myths²⁴ (as discussed in Chapter One of my study). The fictitious, victorious post-war slaughter of the Vietnamese in the films of this period thus provided some Americans with an opportunity to resolve their distress over our military defeat at the hands of the VC and NVA.

In contrast, the American theatre was still burrowing inward vis-à-vis the war, although portions of the high-profile play *Tracers* echoed some of the cinematic and cultural developments of the early 1980s. The play was originally created from a series of improvisational workshops by a group of veterans about their wartime experiences. It premiered in Los Angeles at the Odyssey Theatre in 1980, and various all-veteran casts then successfully toured the play around the country for several years.²⁵

While *Tracers* was especially singled out by critics for its harrowing, unflinching depiction of the American experience in Vietnam, it does reflect some of the revisionist concerns of the 1980s regarding the war. For example, the second scene of the play involves each of its characters describing their initial homecoming experiences in several long monologues. All of them displayed the various psychological disorders and ailments catalogued in the numerous plays and films about veterans produced throughout the 1970s. After an extended "flashback" sequence to wartime Vietnam which comprises the bulk of the play, however, the veteran characters deliver another series of monologues set in 1984. While several of them have been able to reconcile some of their post-war demons, the speeches reveal a distinct sense of betrayal at the hands of the government along the lines of Rambo's rhetoric. The hard-working, loyal Little John, for example, has developed Agent Orange related cancer and vents his bitterness towards the system he feels has let him

down: "the war drags on. Fuck the VA! Fuck the Agent Orange lawsuit! Fuck Dow Chemical! Fuck the government!" Similarly, Habu, who reenlists after failing to adjust to post-war civilian life, derides US policy in Lebanon as echoing the military mistakes of Vietnam. He characterizes the situation as "still, the unwilling led by the uneducated to do the impossible for the ungrateful." Finally, Scooter, a veteran who landed in jail after the war, fantasizes returning home and being welcomed by a "brass band and ticker tape parade." Thus, like Rambo and the veterans of *Uncommon Valor*, the former soldiers in *Tracers* still harbor resentment against an ungrateful society which never acknowledged their efforts in the war. And like the protagonists of these films, they still yearn for that respect as well as an opportunity to redress such perceived societal injustices.

Tracers, however, eschews the "regeneration through violence" approach of its cinematic counterparts, choosing to pay tribute to the 59,000 Americans killed in the war via a highly theatrical section entitled "The Resurrection (The Ghost Dance)." In this ritualistic scene, the fallen soldiers--slaughtered in a helicopter landing during the previous scene--rise from the dead and enact a stylized movement sequence which leads them to a representation of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC (also known as "the wall"). While they do this, the character of Sergeant Williams fires a twenty-one gun salute in their honor. Once at the wall, the soldiers silently lament their fallen comrades before reciting their concluding dialogue. Thus, while the play reconciles few of the veterans' problems in full by its conclusion, the "Resurrection" sequence does reflect the desire of many Americans by the 1980s to praise and value the efforts of the average GI in Vietnam. Furthermore, the veterans' own need for emotional reparations regarding their wartime sacrifices is expressed in the fantasies about "ghost dances," parades, salutes, and so forth. Like many of the films of the 1980s, *Tracers* also presents a more positive image of the Vietnam veteran while criticizing the American government for failing to honor its obligation to these men.

The play does not convey the extreme anti-Vietnamese sentiments of the early 1980s war films. For instance, the character of Dinky Dau, who lost both legs in the war, finds solace by establishing a relationship with a Vietnamese refugee. Such post-war rapprochements with individual Vietnamese contrast strongly with the soldiers' harsh attitudes towards the larger Vietnamese populace during the wartime sequences of the play. Thus, *Tracers* ultimately expresses a willingness to move beyond the hatred and emotional turmoil of the war years for both countries and peoples involved in the conflict, as opposed to the jingoistic and frequently racist ideology of the films discussed in this chapter.²⁶

The trend towards refighting and rewriting the war on film would more or less reach its apotheosis with part two of the Rambo films. Stallone did, however, make a third and final installment of the series in 1988 which depicted Rambo fighting side-by-side with anti-Communist rebels in Afghanistan in order to rescue Trautman from his Soviet captors. Similarly, Chuck Norris would make a third *Missing in Action* film in 1988, which this time featured Braddock returning to Vietnam "twelve years later" to rescue his Vietnamese wife and Amerasian son from the clutches of Communism.²⁷ The success of such films in the early 1980s also led to a slew of low-budget imitators, all of which featured the paramilitary adventures of super-warrior Vietnam veterans returning to Vietnam to settle various scores.²⁸ In addition, the paramilitary warrior image was embraced in the larger American culture through the success of magazines such as *Soldier of Fortune* (which actually ran classified ads for mercenaries in its early days), or the *Executioner* series of novels by Don Pendleton. The latter work features a Rambo-like Vietnam veteran named Mack Bolan who declares war on the American Mafia, and in each new installment enlists various buddies from the war to assist him in wiping out the local branch of organized crime wherever he travels.²⁹ Aside from the obvious saber-rattling propaganda of the pictures discussed in this chapter, they also served to increase the interest of the average American film goer in watching Hollywood recreate the war on the big screen. Given the

large profits reaped from the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* films, the Hollywood studios were now eager to make more pictures about Vietnam. And after 1985, the paramilitary current in the Vietnam War film was no longer fresh, and the Rambo/Braddock characters could not be developed much further. Thus, the time was right for a new "take" on the war, which Vietnam veteran-turned-screenwriter-and-director Oliver Stone would provide with his 1986 film *Platoon*.

Endnotes

1. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 11 January 1989, 53-54; quoted in Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 3.
2. Jeffords, 15.
3. See John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
4. James William Gibson, "American Paramilitary Culture and the Reconstitution of the Vietnam War"; in Walsh and Aulich, 20-21.
5. The World War Two-like "melting pot" representation of Rambo's comrades once again ignored the large number of Blacks and Hispanics who served in the war, not to mention the racial discord which was common among the ranks of American troops in Vietnam.
6. Jeffords, 23-63.
7. Ibid., 33.
8. Ibid., 34. In her *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), Jeffords contends that the cinematic representations of the Vietnam War in this period primarily served to "remasculinize" American culture, which had experienced a crisis of faith after the "humiliations" of Vietnam and the ineffective Carter presidency. She views the films discussed in this chapter as suggesting that, "women or what are perceived as the feminine characteristics of weakness, passivity, nonaggression, and negotiation are shown to be responsible for America's loss of the war in Vietnam," 60. This created the need for and interest in celluloid, masculine "hard bodies" like Rambo and Braddock who would recuperate America's lost military power and honor. See Amanda Howell, "Lost Boys and Angry Ghouls: Vietnam's Undead"; in Thomas Foster, Carol Seigel, and Ellen E. Berry, eds., *Bodies of Writing, Bodies in Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 297-334, for another interesting discussion of gender issues and Vietnam War films.
9. Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser, "Never Having to Say You're Sorry: Rambo's Rewriting of the Vietnam War"; in Dittmar and Michaud, 108. *First Blood*, directed by Ted Kotcheff, 97 min., Orion Pictures, 1982, videocassette; and David Morrell, *First Blood* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 11-12, 20-21, 38-54, 69-147, 251-56.
10. This representation contrasts significantly to the lead character in *Some Kind of Hero*, directed by Michael Pressman, 95 min., Paramount Pictures, 1982, videocassette. In the latter film, the multi-talented Richard Pryor plays a former Black POW who faces the usual traumas experienced by returning veterans in various Hollywood films. While Pryor invests the character with a crafty intelligence and humor, ultimately the film offers yet another clichéd representation of a maladjusted, mistreated veteran. The film's portrayal of

Black veterans is not necessarily more stereotypical than those of white veterans in previous films. But considering that *Some Kind of Hero* was the first Hollywood feature film to focus on a Black Vietnam veteran in the leading role, it missed a rare opportunity to address some of the specific issues facing the Black soldier and community in relation to the war. Another such opportunity would not surface again until the 1995 film *Dead Presidents*.

11. After invading and defeating South Vietnam in 1975, the new state of Vietnam eventually absorbed Laos and then Cambodia into its borders. Still, American fears of a Communist takeover of larger Southeast Asia never materialized. In addition, Cambodia eventually regained its independence, although it continues to suffer from internal factionalism and civil war. See Angus Deming, John Walcott, Kim Willenson, and Melinda Liu, "The Legacy of Vietnam: Why the Dominoes Didn't Fall," *Newsweek*, 15 April 1985, 62.

12. *Uncommon Valor*, directed by Ted Kotcheff, 100 min., Paramount Pictures, 1983, videocassette.

13. Tony Williams, "Missing in Action: the Vietnam Construction of the Movie Star"; in Dittmar and Michaud, 129-130, 141.

14. Ibid., 132.

15. *Good Guys Wear Black*, directed by Ted Post, 96 min., American Cinema Releasing, 1979, videocassette; and *Missing in Action*, directed by Joseph Zito, 101 min., Cannon Films, 1984, videocassette.

16. Rob Edelman, "Review--*Rambo: First Blood Part Two*," *Cineaste* 14 (1986): 44.

17. In her review of *Missing in Action*, Janet Maslin noted her fellow film goers' enthusiasm for its depiction of scurrilous "Vietnamese soldiers and officials." See Maslin, "Screen: Norris in *Missing in Action*," *New York Times*, 17 November 1984, 11. No doubt Norris's popularity at the time partly reflected the rise in militarism in American society during the 1980s. Such attitudes also surfaced in non-Vietnam action films of the period like the mega-hit *Top Gun* (1986), which portrayed cocky American pilots dueling successfully with Soviet planes encroaching on our airspace.

18. *Missing in Action 2--The Beginning*, directed by Lance Hool, 96 min., Cannon Films, 1985, videocassette.

19. Studlar and Desser, 105.

20. Significantly, the Soviets offer the only true challenge to Rambo in the film, especially in the form of a massive Sergeant who tortures him. Naturally, Rambo eventually defeats him in a hand-to-hand confrontation, with Hollywood once again reducing complex political and moral issues to a personal level which allows for a cheap and easy reconciliation of such conflicts.

21. After seeing the film, Reagan declared, "I saw *Rambo* last night and next time I'll know what to do" while being interviewed about American hostages hijacked in Lebanon. Quoted in Gregory A. Waller, "*Rambo: Getting to Win This Time*"; in Dittmar and Michaud, 125. One of Reagan's real "proxy" wars was depicted in the film *Heartbreak Ridge*, directed by Clint Eastwood, 130 min., Warner Brothers, 1986, videocassette. This film depicts the stock war genre character of the grizzled, battle-hardened Sergeant (Eastwood) whipping into shape a bunch of soft recruits, all of whom perform with distinction during America's invasion of Grenada. *Heartbreak Ridge* reflects the revisionist attitudes of the 1980s towards Vietnam in that Eastwood's character is a veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam wars. After the "victory" on Grenada, he notes that his war record has been redeemed with a final tally of one tie (Korea), one loss (Vietnam), and one success (Grenada). Thus, the film actually suggests that America's "pride" over its defeat of a tiny island could help eradicate the painful issues pertaining to the Vietnam War.

22. Studlar and Dessar, 102-104.

23. David Denby, "Review of *Rambo: First Blood, Part Two*," *New York*, 3 June 1985, 72; and for subsequent quote. *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, directed by George Pan Cosmatos, 95 min., Tri-Star Pictures, 1985, videocassette.

24. Studlar and Dessar, 107-109.

25. John DiFusco et al., *Tracers* (New York: Dramatists Play Service), 1983, 7-8.

26. Ibid., 10-12, 57-59, 63-66.

27. *Rambo III*, directed by Peter MacDonald, 104 min., Tri-Star Pictures, 1988, videocassette; and *Braddock: Missing in Action III*, directed by Aaron Norris, 103 min., Cannon Films, 1988, videocassette.

28. See, for example, *Saigon Commandoes*, directed by Clark Henderson, 84 min., New Classics, 1987, videocassette; or *American Commandoes*, directed by Bobby A. Suarez, 89 min., Lightning Video, 1984, videocassette. The jacket cover of the latter work describes it as "all the fiery action of *Rambo* ... all the vengeance of *Death Wish* come together in *American Commandoes*."

29. Gibson; in Walsh and Aulich, 27-38. See also his full length study on the development of the paramilitary sub-culture in America during the 1980s, William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).

Chapter Five: The "Real" War

While *Platoon* ushered in a cinematic obsession with depicting the war in Vietnam as "realistically" as possible, Roland Joffe's *The Killing Fields* (1984) prefigured this current in many ways. Inspired by a 1980 article in the *New York Times*, the film depicted the genocide which took place in Cambodia after Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge party seized power from the US backed government in 1975. After an initial examination of this work, I shall discuss *Platoon*'s considerable impact on the development of the Vietnam War film and the larger American society. My chapter will conclude with an analysis of the play *Tracers*, which was in a sense the theatrical counterpart of *Platoon*, as well as two other plays from the early 1980s which were intended as more "authentic" aesthetic representations of the Vietnam experience. While these plays initially addressed many of the issues and themes which seemed so fresh and revelatory to the large audiences which flocked to *Platoon*, they received much less national attention and thus had a lesser impact on our cultural consciousness about the war. Consequently, the more visible cinematic works of the period will be considered first in this chapter.

The historic events at the core of *The Killing Fields*'s plot were filtered through the prism of the "real life" experiences of Cambodian journalist Dirth Pran (Haing S. Ngor) and *Times* correspondent Sidney Schanberg (Sam Waterston).¹ Although Schanberg and several other Americans were almost executed by Khmer Rouge loyalists, they eventually left the country with the help of Pran's negotiations. Despite their efforts to forge a phony passport picture for him, however, Pran was left behind. He was then forced to enter one of the Khmer Rouge's "reeducation" camps whereby they attempted to convert Cambodia into an illiterate, agricultural society. In the process of completing this task, the populations of entire cities were transported to the countryside, although many people were

tortured and executed outright. Anyone considered an "intellectual" was especially at risk, and Pran survived only by hiding his education and background during his years of forced labor and political indoctrination. When Pran finally escaped from the camp, the full impact of the horror of Pot's regime was revealed as he waded through fields filled with the skeletons of their victims (ultimately, over a million Cambodians died in the slaughter). He eventually fled the country only with the assistance of a once loyal Khmer Rouge officer who had turned against the fanatical violence of his cause. Once over the border, Pran was reunited in a refugee camp with his old buddy Schanberg, who had spent years in the US guiltily bemoaning his escape and Pran's captivity.²

The crimes committed against the Cambodian people as depicted on screen are so enormous that the film possesses an almost surreal, larger-than-life quality at times. In this regard, it seems to work within the tradition of Vietnam War films such as *Apocalypse Now*. That aside, the movie's graphic portrayal of the Khmer Rouge's horrific assault on the entire population of a country represents a level of screen realism heretofore unseen in representations of the war. In that sense, *The Killing Fields* anticipates Oliver Stone's raw depiction of combat in *Platoon* a year later.

But *The Killing Fields* also examines these day-to-day events within a larger frame of political, moral, and ideological issues which is unusual for a war film from any era, including Vietnam. For instance, President Nixon's escalation of the war to include the bombing of Cambodia is viewed in the context of how such policies might have strengthened support for the Khmer Rouge within that country. America's moral failure in abandoning the Cambodians to the approaching terror is also bluntly debated throughout the picture. Previously, this issue was only considered cinematically in the brief shots of hysterical peasants vainly trying to enter the American embassy at the end of *The Deer*

Hunter. Thus, the film is atypical in its willingness to consider the long-term impact of America's withdrawal from Asia on the people we had promised to support.³

Of course, none of this excuses the heinous actions of the Khmer Rouge, and the film depicts the murderous results of their agenda with an unflinching candor. Still, as Auster and Quart observe in their analysis of the film, its individualized, complex portrait of the Khmer Rouge officer who assists Pran is again unique for a Hollywood picture about the Vietnam War. As they note, when he describes his personal sacrifices for a revolution which he "can no longer trust," he emerges as a three-dimensional human being instead of an abstract "ideologue." His views "suggest that even the Khmer Rouge, despite their barbarism, cannot be viewed only as some demonic monolith; that their revolution, like all revolutions (including the Vietnamese), encompasses a variety of personalities and ideological commitments--a historical reality that only *The Killing Fields*, of all the Vietnam films, even bothers touching on."⁴

On another level, the film's honest representation of the Khmer Rouge's cruel, ideological annihilation of their fellow Cambodians confirmed some of the most extreme anti-Communist fears expressed by American foreign policy makers during the Cold War. However, unlike many of the other films discussed thus far, the brutality of the Khmer Rouge is not presented as a result of their Asianness per se, but rather as a horribly misguided political fanaticism. Furthermore, the Cambodians are rescued from their oppressors not by Western intervention but rather by the invasion of their Asian neighbor Vietnam in 1979. At the same time, while the film is atypical in its willingness to present an intelligent, humane Asian character in a leading role, Pran's relationship with Schanberg still reflects Hollywood's traditional approach to representing interracial friendships. Thus, Schanberg is clearly the dominant partner in the relationship or the "boss" to Pran's loyal, "Third World" sidekick. Pran expends far more energy in assuring that Schanberg

will be released from Cambodia than in worrying about his own survival, which results in a great deal of angst for Schanberg after he returns to America. Indeed, these scenes of Schanberg futilely attempting to help Pran and trying to cope with his "survivor guilt" are given more weight in the film's narrative than those of Pran's efforts to survive the daily terror of "the killing fields." While Pran is clearly a central character in the telling of his country's destruction, the white American Schanberg emerges as the weightier lead role in the film.⁵ His struggle to assist Pran over the years, which results in an emotional catharsis for the audience when the two men tearfully meet in the refugee camp, is also presented in a manner which paints Schanberg in the most heroic light possible. Thus, despite its unusual content and levels of political ambiguity, the film does fall back on stock Hollywood formulas in several ways. Overall, however, it was instrumental in drawing attention in America to the plight of Cambodia, and its stark portrait of the genocide there remains a powerful and disturbing cinematic experience.⁶

In terms of the larger cinematic currents of the period concerning Vietnam, the success of *The Killing Fields* partly paved the way for the release of Stone's *Platoon* in December of 1986, although few people in Hollywood anticipated the impact that his film would have on the American people. Indeed, Stone had originally written its screenplay ten years earlier, but during the post-war climate of the mid-1970s was unable to find any interest in such a disturbing portrayal of the day-to-day combat experiences of GIs in Vietnam. After eventually establishing himself in Hollywood as a successful screenwriter of action oriented films, Stone achieved critical recognition for *Salvador*, his directorial debut, in 1985. Impressed by his work on that film, the English production company Hemdale agreed to finance *Platoon* for a small budget of six million dollars. Stone completed the shooting on location in the Philippines in an impressive fifty-four days.

While *Platoon* was eventually distributed by Orion Pictures, it is somewhat ironic that the film--hailed by many as one of the classic American war pictures of all time--was financed by a foreign company. But Hollywood was still entranced with the super-hero theatrics of the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* films in 1986, although Stone's experiences as a Vietnam veteran signaled that *Platoon* might potentially offer something new about the war to American film goers.⁷

Indeed, the pre-publicity campaign centered on Stone's "authentic" veteran credentials and how they distinguished the film from all previous cinematic portrayals of the war. Early ads for *Platoon* featured pictures of Stone in uniform, with the accompanying copy foregrounding his wartime wounds and medals (Bronze Star, Purple Heart, etc.) As Orion marketing executive Charles Green noted in an interview, the campaign "legitimized the picture" while also generating pre-release interest throughout the media.⁸ Stone's unusual "on location" rehearsal process was also given a great deal of attention. Upon arriving in the Philippines, his cast of young, mostly unknown actors were put through a two-week training session by the film's military advisor, a retired Marine officer and Vietnam veteran by the name of Dale Dye. After sleeping in the field, eating army rations, and receiving military instruction for thirteen days, the exhausted and dirty actors immediately began to shoot the film without a break. For Stone, "the idea of a cram course was to immerse the actors into the infantryman's life. His way of thinking, talking and moving. I hoped that subconsciously what would slip out would be the dog-tired, don't give-a-damn attitude, the anger, frustration, casual brutality and way death were approached. These are the assets and liabilities of infantrymen. I remember being so tired that I wished the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) would come up and shoot me and get this thing over with."⁹

All of this ballyhoo contributed to the authority of what critic David Denby called Stone's "IWT factor" ("I was there"). For Denby, who praised the film itself highly, the ad campaign suggested that the film was only a good one because Stone's veteran pedigree made it an "authentic" representation of Vietnam. Denby's criticism, with which I agree, is that while Stone clearly drew upon his combat experiences in writing and directing the film, he still "had to shape and transform his memories, and he also needed the technical skills--the command of men and machinery--to create a fiction that would have the authority of truth." Indeed, as Denby noted, some two million other Vietnam veterans have not created movies about their combat experiences, so merely serving in the war is not the only criteria involved in the film making process. And surely someone who was not in the war could possibly create an important work of art about it: Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* serves as a good example.¹⁰ Nonetheless, *Platoon's* marketing campaign successfully generated a distinct aura around the film which greatly influenced film goers' prior perceptions about the picture, and consequently their reception of it as well. (I myself remember seeing the film when it first opened in my hometown area in early 1987, and standing in line outside on a cold winter night for an hour in order to obtain one of the precious tickets.) By the time it received a wide release, the picture was as much a media event for its audience as an aesthetic experience. Between the marketing blitz about the film's "realism" in portraying Stone's wartime experiences and its emotionally powerful, visceral recreation of the war, *Platoon* captured the American public's imagination in a way unlike any previous film about Vietnam. *Time* critic Richard Corliss surely represented the view of many Americans when he wrote an article examining the phenomenon of the film entitled "Vietnam, the War It Really Was."¹¹

What exactly did *Platoon* offer cinematically that seemed so fresh, so new, and so "authentic" to audiences who had been seeing movies about the war for years? The film focuses on a raw recruit, Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen), who arrives in Vietnam to join Company B in "the bush." As his platoon moves through a variety of wartime situations--including several terrifying encounters with NVA regulars and the VC--Taylor comments on his experiences via letters to a beloved grandmother which are conveyed to the audience through voiceovers. The squad is led by two seasoned Sergeants, the legendary super-warrior Barnes (Tom Berenger) and the caring, humane Elias (Willem Dafoe), and eventually splinters into opposing groups after Elias stops Barnes from leading a My Lai-like massacre of a Vietnamese village suspected of supporting the VC. When Taylor accuses Barnes of deliberately shooting Elias behind the lines during the confusion of a VC ambush, Elias's supporters plot revenge against the intimidating Top Sergeant, who has been wounded seven times and tells his men that he is "reality" in Vietnam. After surviving a climactic battle where hundreds of NVA soldiers are killed in a napalm air strike, the wounded Taylor kills a helpless but unrepentant Barnes in retribution. As the helicopters carry him away, weeping, the camera pans over the vista of the numerous Vietnamese corpses lying across the American encampment. While elegiac music plays on the soundtrack, Taylor's voiceover proclaims:

I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves--and the enemy was in us. The war is over for me now, but it will always be there the rest of my days. As I am sure Elias will be--fighting Barnes for what Rhah called possession of my soul. There are times since I have felt like the child born of those two fathers. But be that as it may, those of us who did make it have an obligation to build again, to teach to others what we know and to try with what's left of our lives to find a goodness and meaning to this life.

Thus, despite the brutalities experienced by Taylor in the war, his final words offered the possibility of a better future which had not always been extended to the veteran characters of earlier films.

What *Platoon* excels at is depicting the daily life of the "grunt" GI infantryman in Vietnam. As the platoon tramps through the jungles in search of the elusive enemy, Stone's camera gets close enough to give the viewer a visceral sense of the overwhelming heat, exhaustion, bugs, and fear which the soldiers experienced on an ongoing basis. In this regard, the film differs from the mythological context of films like *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter* (although it does veer from "realism" on other levels, as with the symbolic aspect of Taylor's relationship to his two spiritual "fathers"). Generally, however, *Platoon's* greatest impact lies in its ability to convey the war from the "bottom up," or from the viewpoint of the men who fought it. For Taylor and his comrades, the war is about one thing only: survival. Set shortly before the Tet offensive in 1968, the picture effectively conveyed the change in attitude among American troops as the war progressed. For instance, Elias tells a shocked Taylor that he believed in the cause of the war "in '65," but now feels that the US will lose in Vietnam. Thus, Stone believably suggests that the grunts were the first to realize that Johnson's much promised "light at the end of the tunnel," which fueled the need for inflated enemy body counts during the war, was indeed a myth. The larger American public began to acknowledge this truth after the massive Vietnamese offensive during the Tet holiday, which indicated that the NVA was still a viable fighting force and also obviously committed to long-term resistance against the US presence in South Vietnam. Stone impressively immerses his audience into this insular world, which involves an endless obsession with the counting of the days that remain before one can leave Vietnam and return to America. As critic J. Hoberman observes in his review of *Platoon*, "the film's power resides in its details--the grunts talking about their 'bad feelings,' the bandannas and fetishes of the men who've gone native, the ongoing intra-platoon sniping...." Vietnam news correspondent David Halberstam praised the film for capturing the "special reality of Vietnam, the loneliness of these men, how isolated they are and how on this terrain they are always foreigners." While acknowledging that every

soldier who served in the war has his "own Vietnam," Halberstam felt that Stone was able to communicate successfully his own personal experience of combat. Furthermore, more than any other director, Stone was able to make the average film goer understand why we had failed militarily in Vietnam: "we dropped, according to the Pentagon, two and a half times the amount of bombs we used in World War II, and it made no difference. Watching the movie, seeing the thickness of the jungle, seeing the other side move at night, one can readily understand why that was true."¹² Viewing *Platoon* is indeed a gripping, albeit unsettling cinematic experience, and I agree that Stone brilliantly thrust the audience into the middle of "his" Vietnam on screen. But the general aura around the movie, which suggested that it was the new, never-before-seen "real" Vietnam, created a controversial debate about the film among critics and viewers alike.

During *Platoon's* release, many local papers ran articles featuring interviews with veterans who had seen the film. While many veterans of combat like Halberstam praised the movie for its atmospheric recreation of jungle warfare, some audience members were uncomfortable with its unsavory portrayal of American soldiers.¹³ Such representations, of course, had a great impact on the depiction of the Vietnamese in the film, and are thus of major importance in this chapter. Indeed, *Platoon* presented aspects of the war which had been extensively described in various literary memoirs but mostly ignored in celluloid representations of Vietnam. The grunts in the film are divided by two distinct ideologies: the "lifer/juicers," or career soldiers who favored alcohol and a more traditional military subculture; and the "heads," or soldiers who incorporated trappings of the 1960s counterculture into their military lifestyles, including drug usage.¹⁴ *Platoon* also bluntly addressed the issue of race and class inequality which was a major component of the war. Most of the men in Taylor's outfit are poor, uneducated draftees from small towns in

America. Although they have little stake in the larger American system, they are the ones sacrificing their lives for the nation. Taylor himself is an exception as a college dropout who volunteers for Vietnam to find himself and show support for the "poor kids." Upon learning this, his friends are incredulous, noting that one would have to be rich in the first place even to think that way. After Taylor's Black buddy King (Keith David) laughingly calls him a "crusader," he claims that "the poor always being fucked over by the rich-- always have, always will." The evolution of the combat genre is particularly evident in *Platoon* with the character of Lieutenant Wolfe (Mark Moses), an educated, boyish looking officer who is obviously ill at ease with his men and incapable of command. It is clear that Barnes and Elias are the real leaders of the platoon, and Wolfe even mistakenly calls in a "friendly fire" attack on the men during a VC ambush (at which point Barnes calls him an "ignorant asshole" and hits him over the head with a field phone before correcting the coordinates). In a 1983 television interview, veteran Charlie Sabatier recalled dealing with "twenty year old" lieutenants who were absolutely terrified in the field. Frequently, they would give orders which the more experienced grunts felt would result in their death and were thus consequently disobeyed. Such incidents as represented in *Platoon* revealed a marked change from the respectful relations between genteel WASP officers and their "melting pot" squads of enlisted men which had dominated the cinematic representations of World War Two. While such tensions were portrayed in earlier Vietnam movies like *Boys in Company C* and *More American Graffiti*, *Platoon* was the first Vietnam film seen by a wide scale American audience which depicted this aspect of the war in detail.

Platoon also presented the involvement of Black soldiers in the war to a degree unseen in any previous film, which reflected the high numbers of Black troops (many of them poor draftees) who fought in Vietnam. However, it also acknowledged the racial tensions which existed between Black and white troops during the war, eliminating the camaraderie of the "melting pot" squadrons of the older combat genre films. While

friendships do exist between the races in *Platoon*, especially among those in the "head" group, racial epithets and "jokes" are also exchanged on an ongoing basis on all sides. Junior (Reggie Johnson), a militant Black loner who avoids both the "heads" and the "juicers," despises whites and constantly talks about their conspiracies against the "Black man." Conversely, the racist Sergeant Barnes jokes about "niggers" and "jews," and tells Junior at one point that he's "gonna court-martial his nigger ass." Even Blacks like Big Harold (Forest Whitaker), who seems to get along with everyone and develops a close friendship with Taylor, jokes about having to "paint his face white" to get a coveted job behind the lines doing laundry. While such hostilities are repressed in the field in the interest of staying alive, the ideological unity presented in earlier war films, regardless of race, no longer exists in *Platoon*. Despite Stone's greater acknowledgment of the Black presence in the war, however, Black veterans like Jimmy Williams of Boston criticized the film because it "made the black guys look like a bunch of bozos.... The truth is, everybody ran into trees during a firefight or fell asleep on night watch. But only the blacks did it in the movie."¹⁵ In addition, the Blacks were relegated to subordinate roles while the white characters like Taylor, Barnes, and Elias dominated the film in traditional Hollywood fashion. Clyde Taylor analyzes this practice in his essay "The Colonialist Subtext in *Platoon*," observing that while the Black characters are no longer in the "background" as in earlier war films, they still "occupy a second tier, where they are deployed as shadows deepening the moral conflict between Elias and Barnes for Chris Taylor's soul."¹⁶ Again, it would take another ten years before a Hollywood studio would be ready to produce a film about Vietnam with Black characters as the leads, although *Platoon* prepared the way for more extensive examinations of Black-white antagonisms during the war in successive films like *Hamburger Hill*.

But an even greater conflict develops in the squad after they wreak havoc on a Vietnamese village. After stumbling upon a network of tunnels, two of the soldiers are killed by a VC booby trap. Notified that the enemy has been spotted in a village "upriver," the platoon proceeds in that direction only to discover the savagely mutilated body of a missing comrade, Manning, hung from a tree. By the time they reach the village, they are angry and seeking revenge, with the helpless villagers serving as easy targets for their pent-up fears and frustrations. As Taylor remarks in his voiceover, "Barnes was at the eye of our rage--and through him, our Captain Ahab, we would set things right again. That day we loved him." The GIs quickly find caches of rice and weapons, as well as villagers hiding in well-concealed bunkers. The absence of any young males also arouses their suspicions that the village is a VC base, and the enraged Americans begin shooting animals and destroying property. Taylor erupts in anger when he terrorizes a seemingly retarded young Vietnamese man who cannot control a dazed smile after being discovered in a hiding place. His fellow soldier Bunny, an angelic looking young American, beats the man to death after claiming that "he was laughing at you--that's the way the Gook laughs." The escalating violence and tension climaxes when Barnes interrogates the village Chieftain. Their intercultural barrier contributes to Barnes's fury as he grows increasingly exasperated with the Chief's inability to speak English. Egged on by some of the squad who want to "do the entire village," Barnes abruptly executes the leader's hysterical wife and then threatens to kill his daughter if he doesn't give up the VC in the area. The camera pans the faces of Taylor and some of the other GIs who obviously want to speak out against the brutality, but none of them takes any action in this regard. Barnes is only stopped by the arrival of Elias, who literally punches him out and then promises legal retribution. From this point on, and especially after Barnes "frags" Elias to avoid prosecution, Taylor notes that a "civil war" rages within the platoon.

This scene became one of the most controversial in the film and was understandably shocking for its audiences. Although massacres of Vietnamese civilians had been publicized both during and after the war, with the incident at My Lai receiving particular attention, American participation in such a heinous event had never before been represented on film. Yes, the Vietnamese family on the boat were killed in *Apocalypse Now*, but the sailors expressed remorse afterwards and it was mostly presented as a horrible accident. In contrast, Stone's *Platoon* shows Americans--traditionally presented as the "good guys" in combat films--clamoring to shoot unarmed Vietnamese women, children, and old men for the pleasure of it. Stone tries to establish the context of the GIs' rage and fear by depicting the preceding events (especially the torture execution of Manning), but their treatment of the villagers is also an inevitable extension of their attitudes as seen throughout the film. Many of the soldiers seemed to view the Vietnamese as less than human, and even Taylor casually referred to them as "gooks"¹⁷ in his correspondence home after only a week in the field. When Taylor reacts in revulsion to the sight of a Vietnamese corpse on his first mission in the jungle, Barnes dismisses his response with a surly "that's a good Gook--dead Gook." While not all of the soldiers despise the general Vietnamese population, men like Barnes and Bunny have obviously been highly desensitized by their combat experiences. Bunny, for example, later tells Junior that he likes being in Vietnam ("you can do what you want, nobody fucks with you"), and Barnes is referred to as a man "high on war" who has voluntarily spent four years in the field. Even Elias, who courageously stops the massacre, is described in Stone's script as reveling in combat and "roaming through the jungle, born to it" like a hunter-hero fighting against the Indians. As the men evacuate the village, which they burn to the ground, Taylor does finally speak up and interrupts several of the men who are raping a young Vietnamese woman. As Taylor

comforts the sobbing teenager, he asks his comrades how they could do this to a fellow "human being." The men scoff at him, snarling that he doesn't "belong in the Nam."

In his interesting study *Home From the War*, Robert Jay Lifton analyzes his counseling work with emotionally traumatized American Vietnam War veterans in the early 1970s. These veterans described a recurring pattern of American behavior in Vietnam which Lifton eventually labeled as "the Gook syndrome." In this syndrome, various aspects of the war served to create a psychological state in which soldiers could kill without feeling, and where many Americans characterized all of the Vietnamese people as whores, thieves, traitors, and/or enemies. Factors which contributed to the syndrome were the guerrilla nature of the war, where any Vietnamese could be a potential enemy; a perception that the South Vietnamese ARVN troops were cowards; and a general lack of cultural understanding and respect towards the Vietnamese populace. Indeed, Lifton notes that because of their diminutive size and seemingly passive demeanors, many South Vietnamese men were perceived as "feminine" or weak by many Americans, while many of the women performed mundane chores for the soldiers (e.g., laundry, cleaning, and cooking) or sexual activities for pay.¹⁸ Consequently, in the eyes of some GIs, the Vietnamese were often viewed at best as servants who were not worthy of their respect, or at worst as dehumanized Others. In addition, stereotypical American perceptions of Vietnamese men as "feminine" also reflected in part years of cultural exposure to cinematic portrayals of such stock Asian types in Hollywood films (as discussed in Chapter One). Similarly, James Moy has analyzed the even earlier, pre-Hollywood cultural construction of Asian stereotypes: "the sexually available Asian woman and the sexually neutralized male."¹⁹ In terms of Stone's film, many of the pre-*Platoon* plays and memoirs about the war also acknowledged incidents of rape. As Nora Alter observed in her analysis of wartime plays

which depicted Americans raping Vietnamese women, such brutality certainly inspired sympathy for the victims. Because these women are only depicted within the context of such abuse, however, representations of rape also helped "commodify" the Vietnamese women as generic victims fit only to be "treated as debased erotic objects." Overall, representations of wartime atrocities helped define the Vietnamese as a collective Other by categorizing them as passive, albeit sympathetic, victims. The act of rape, then, becomes a powerful signifier in relation to the specific "victimization" of Vietnamese women in these works. As Alter puts it, "all of them, and hence the archetypal 'Other,' are victimized in their flesh and in their soul: killed, raped, sodomized, tortured, and always humiliated."²⁰ No matter how repugnant some of the American characters in *Platoon* or other plays and films might appear, they are still typically individualized, and we, the audience, get to know them as people in a larger context beyond their specific actions as rapists, murderers, etc. Their Vietnamese victims, however, are not presented as having any kind of a life prior to their encounters with the American oppressors. Thus, despite our anguish for their suffering, they remain distanced and anonymous as depicted in *Platoon* and other earlier narratives, including some of the wartime plays, as well.

Of course, the specific act of rape--as opposed to other atrocities or abuses committed by Americans in the field--also speaks to how gender and cultural myths about "masculinity" are constructed in these works about the Vietnam war. In her detailed study of gender issues and representations of the Vietnam War entitled *The Remasculinization of America*, Susan Jeffords claims that war can be interpreted as one of the few "pure" contemporary sites for the "enactment and development of the masculine bond." As she puts it, "war ... is the optimal display of masculine collectivity in America, since battle, as defined by American culture, is an exclusively male activity. War is the stage where men can perform, for themselves, and their 'enemies,' it is the ostentation of bonding." Noting

the frequent descriptions of gang-rape in non-fiction memoirs of the war, Jeffords perceives such violent actions as reaffirming the "masculine-bonded" collective within the context of war.²¹ The types of cultural gender conditioning which fostered such twisted interconnections between masculinity and violence, especially within the military sub-culture, would be explored more fully in Stanley Kubrick's post-*Platoon* film *Full Metal Jacket*. In terms of Lifton's study, American efforts to dehumanize Vietnamese women in relation to "the Gook syndrome" also contributed to the willingness of some GIs to participate in actions such as rape which would have been anathema to them "back home." Furthermore, as Sam Keen observed in *Faces of the Enemy*, "war is largely a man's game," and traditionally women have been excluded from identification with "the enemy" in wartime situations. But in instances of guerrilla warfare, where women and children are involved in combat or support situations, they too can be included in "the image of the enemy."²² Thus, if all the Vietnamese were perceived eventually as "the enemy," and a sub-human one at that, then rape could be rationalized as an acceptable action for those troops operating under the psychological conditioning of "the Gook Syndrome." And within the parameters of a military/wartime culture of hyper-masculinity, rape could also serve to empower GIs who felt emasculated and powerless against the unseen, seemingly omnipotent military enemy. The veteran protagonist of Emily Mann's documentary drama *Still Life*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, acknowledged this notion when claiming that he and his peers enjoyed the "power" they had in Vietnam to abuse the civilian populace.²³

Again, while representations of rape were common in plays and non-fictional memoirs about the war, *Platoon* displayed the shocking image of a group of young American men sexually attacking a defenseless Vietnamese teenager on screen for the first

time. Successive films like Brian DePalma's *Casualties of War* (1989) would examine this topic in further detail,²⁴ and the more ubiquitous pre-*Platoon* image of the Vietnamese prostitute who voluntarily engaged in sexual acts with American soldiers would continue into the 1990s. Both motifs vis-à-vis the Vietnam War film were also grounded within a larger Hollywood context or tradition which Shohat and Stam referred to as "rape and rescue" and "harem" fantasies. As mentioned in Chapter One, the authors identify a common pattern in many studio films involving the fear of dark "Others" raping virginal white women, as well as a subsequent need for white men to "rescue" these women from their impending fates. Conversely, they describe the Hollywood view of "Black" and "Oriental" women as sexually promiscuous or libidinous in contrast to the more sexually conservative white women. Thus, while the sexual interaction between Black and "Oriental" men and white women "can only involve rape" (because no self-respecting white women would desire them), the sexual interaction between white men and Black or "Oriental" women "cannot involve rape (since Black or Arab women are in perpetual heat and desire the white master)." Furthermore, various Hollywood films which showcased alluring, tantalizing "Oriental" harems allowed for further "exoticizing and eroticizing" of the Third World on screen.²⁵ In some ways, then, the forcible sexual domination of Vietnamese women in *Platoon* and later films like *Casualties of War* also worked within the discourse of a larger Western cinematic tradition which cultivated a lack of respect towards "Oriental" women. On another level, however, these films broke away from that discourse in that they also presented such actions as reprehensible and criminal.

In such a callous wartime environment, atrocities were committed on both sides, and numerous veterans' accounts of the war describe incidents similar to, or far worse than, the scene depicted in *Platoon*.²⁶ Veteran Bill Erhart, an initially gung-ho volunteer

who contemplated deserting before his tour of duty ended, recalled that most American contact with the enemy consisted of "mines and snipers," with his outfit recording about seventy-five mining incidents per month. Day after day, as Marines were wounded or killed by mines, they would see "Joe the rice farmer" avoiding them with ease. Thus, they eventually began to assume that he was a VC or a VC sympathizer. As Erhart put it, "so, over a relatively short period of time, you began to treat all the Vietnamese as though they are the enemy--if you can't tell, you shoot first and ask questions later." Indeed, an emotionally distraught Erhart described an incident where he shot a scared, unarmed old woman who was running away from American soldiers. Observing that she later became the source of his ongoing nightmares about Vietnam, he admitted that "at the time I didn't even think about it."²⁷

In *Platoon*, while Taylor's brutalization of the Vietnamese man is horrible to watch, he does stop himself before seriously hurting him, and the viewer can see the distraught GI momentarily snap from exhaustion, anger, and fear. In contrast, some of the other soldiers seem to be totally affected by "the Gook syndrome" and are able to destroy the lives and property of the Vietnamese without remorse (Bunny, for example, happily takes snapshots of the burning village as they leave). Thus, not only do the soldiers in Stone's Vietnam fail to champion the altruism of the stated US mission there, but many of them view the people whose freedom they are supposed to be defending as sub-human. The Americans in *Platoon* emerge as disillusioned at best, and at worst cold-hearted killers. Barnes will even kill his fellow Americans, as when he shoots Elias or later attempts to bludgeon Taylor with a shovel while overcome with bloodlust during the final firefight. In the blurry moral universe of *Platoon*, even the once high-minded Taylor kills Barnes--his superior officer--at the film's end. Thus, in terms of the combat genre, the film was especially revolutionary in its depictions of American troops engaging in such actions. Their behavior, however,

also revealed a great deal about the perceptions some GIs held of the Vietnamese populace. And while Stone was mainly concerned with how such events affected the platoon (i.e., "we were fighting ourselves when we should have been fighting them" or "the enemy was within us"), that too was revealing regarding the kinds of ethnocentric attitudes which permeated America's involvement in Vietnam. The loss of Vietnamese life in the village is terrible, implies Stone, but it is still of secondary concern in relation to its impact on the Americans for the remainder of the film. Of course, this is to be expected in so far as Stone is an American director telling an American story for American audiences.

The armed Vietnamese--the VC and NVA regulars--emerge on screen as the customary shadowy, fearsome enemy who seem to be able to control the jungle with an uncanny ease. The GIs' fear of the rarely seen but omnipresent enemy contributed to the kinds of "Gook syndrome" perceptions which were frequently extended to all of the Vietnamese. Certainly such representations of the VC had been seen many times on screen before. But one of *Platoon's* distinct achievements is the way in which Stone visually conveys the adrenalized rush of combat on the ground level. While Coppola masterfully created grandiose, memorable *mise en scènes* of combat on a macro level of sorts, Stone burrows deep into the confusion and fury of a VC ambush or NVA assault to recreate the visual landscape of combat on an individual or micro level. His frequent use of a hand-held camera, smoke, nighttime shooting, and quick cuts to simulate the accelerated pace of battle all work to his advantage in filming the various combat scenes. Stone also accurately conveyed the combat "high" which some veterans experienced in the midst of a firefight. In *Vietnam: A Television History* veteran Mark Smith, for example, described combat as "the most intense, continual excitement I've ever felt in my life. I'm not sure how to describe the energy you would feel and the excitement you would feel--however you felt about it in terms of being scared and liking it or disliking it or whatever--the excitement was there for everybody." *Platoon* echoes such sentiments in the final terrifying assault on the

American encampment, for instance, as Taylor loses all fear and runs through the enemy lines yelling "I love it" as he mows down dozens of NVA troops. This pitched battle, however, was a misstep of sorts for Stone regarding the film's "authenticity," in that such large scale confrontations were more typical of World War Two than the Vietnam War. In terms of genre expectations, however, perhaps Stone felt a need for an appropriately climactic engagement with the enemy, and the NVA's fierce onslaught--complete with Japanese and/or Indian-like war cries--delivered the goods in this regard. Overall, despite its visceral, intense depictions of combat, the film adds little to the representation of the enemy as established in previous films. Instead, it prefers to depict them as the traditional mysterious Other moving through the jungle or as generic corpses. However, their undeniable military prowess did serve the purpose of negating the image of the Vietnamese troops as bumbling buffoons which had dominated the screen throughout the first half of the 1980s. David Halberstam criticized the "fantasy" aspects of the "Rambo" films which diminished our Vietnamese opponents as inept, noting that the determination and skills of the NVA allowed them to "stalemate [many would argue defeat] one of the mightiest armies in the history of mankind."²⁸ On that level, *Platoon* was a welcome addition to the Vietnam War film canon and a much more honest accounting of the war.

The film's vaunted "realism," however, was eventually questioned in some critical circles. While many viewers and critics were captivated by *Platoon's* authentic texture, a number of reviewers also acknowledged it as a fictional work despite its undeniably impressive verisimilitude. In a piece entitled "'Platoon' Finds New Life in the Old War Movie," Vincent Canby accurately noted how Stone took a number of conventions from old war movies and effectively reinvented them to create a seemingly fresh perspective on the war.²⁹ Motifs or techniques such as the use of voiceover narrative, the journey of

Taylor from a naive youth to a seasoned veteran under the tutelage of two master warriors, and even the portrayal of the day-to-day exploits of the average infantryman can be found in numerous classic combat films such as *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Story of GI Joe* (1945). But again, the views of *Platoon's* characters and the actions they commit are far removed from those pictures. So, Stone cannily employs a solid genre foundation which he then proceeds to subvert throughout *Platoon*. Furthermore, as World War Two veteran and war film director Sam Fuller once observed, the only way to give an audience a real sense of war was to fire shots over their head and have "actual casualties in the theatre."³⁰

Thus, despite its greater degree of verisimilitude, *Platoon* is still and foremost only an aesthetic recreation of a historical event, not the event itself. Stone himself freely admits to taking dramatic license in the film by presenting composites of experiences and characters that he encountered while serving on different tours in Vietnam.³¹ Some critics, like Pauline Kael of the *New Yorker*, also disliked the spiritual or "mythic" aspects of *Platoon*, such as the satanic Barnes and saint-like Elias battling for Taylor's humanity, or the crucifixion imagery of Elias's death scene. Kael denounced such choices as "melodramatic shortcuts" which reduced all of the issues of the war to a heavy-handed tag of "good" or "evil." In her concluding paragraph, she astutely observed that "I know 'Platoon' is being acclaimed for its realism, and I expect to be chastened for being a woman finding fault with a war film. But I've probably seen as much combat as most of the men saying 'This is how war is'."³² Finally, another important criticism of the film centered on the very element which made it special at the time of its initial release: namely, the "grunt's eye" view of the war. In his review of the film, *Cineaste* critic Sydelle Kramer took Stone to task for failing to acknowledge the political turmoil of the 1960s. Thus, while the soldiers share in the trappings of the counterculture of that era, they lack its "moral confusion" or political activism against the war. Although the GIs don't want to be in Vietnam, they never question whether or not they should be fighting, which places the film

in a "historical vacuum" of sorts.³³ In that regard, *Platoon* echoed its cinematic predecessors, which also ignored the larger socio-political context of the war in favor of a personalized or philosophical treatment of the Vietnam experience. Bill Erhart's comments speak to Kramer's critique when he notes that after being in Vietnam for a few months, he began to realize that "the war was crazy," but couldn't question America's role there because the answers were too "terrifying." In regards to the issue of protesting against or quitting the war, he was also cognizant of potentially having to serve "twenty years" in a Federal prison for such activities. Thus, he concentrated instead on trying to survive his one year military commitment.³⁴ So, perhaps Stone's avoidance of a larger political voice among the platoon members was honest to the concerns of some veterans at that time. In any event, he did seek to address that issue in more detail in his next film, *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). In addition, he attempted to examine the war from the "Vietnamese perspective" in the third film of his so-called "Vietnam trilogy," *Heaven and Earth* (1993). Regardless of the results of these films, to his credit Stone has tried to explore the war from a greater variety of angles than any other American director.

And despite any eventual critical backlash, *Platoon* undeniably had an enormous impact after its release, pulling in some 136 million dollars in domestic ticket sales and receiving eight Academy Award nominations (and winning four Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Director).³⁵ More importantly, it seemed to touch the collective soul and psyche of the American people who, some thirteen years after the end of the war, were still seeking a catharsis from the trauma of that era. As Michael Klein observed, "in the late 1960s, we silenced Vietnam; in the 1970s, we defended ourselves from it; and in the mid-1980s we return to it, or it returns to us. Like the characters in *Cease Fire* (1985), the country is suffering from a collective flashback."³⁶ The "Rambo/Braddock" sub-genre of

Vietnam films attempted to whitewash our painful memories of the war with macho screen tricks and a facile championing of myths about American cultural superiority. In contrast, *Platoon*, while avoiding or minimizing some important issues, was certainly willing to examine America's involvement in the war on a "warts and all" level. The American public seemed to welcome this opportunity to finally confront its Vietnam skeletons through *Platoon*, and a new wave of Hollywood films about the war were produced in its wake.³⁷ Many of these pictures displayed a tendency to depict the war in an increasingly graphic manner, no doubt influenced by the higher standard of war film "realism" which so many critics and film goers had admired in *Platoon*.³⁸

John Irvin's *Hamburger Hill* (1987) stands as the most obvious imitator of *Platoon* in this regard. Also shot in the Philippines, the film was based on a wartime encounter where an American unit assaulted an NVA held hill eleven times in ten days before "winning" the position. Irvin depicts the daily charge up the hill in excruciatingly gory detail, including many close-ups of bodies being blown apart, bleeding stumps, and dead faces. Aside from reaching new levels of cinematic carnage, *Hamburger Hill* adds little to the Vietnam War film canon. The intra-racial tensions within the squad are even more distinct than in *Platoon*, with the Black soldiers forming a noticeably separatist clique from their uneasy white counterparts. Their leader, Doc (Courtney B. Vance), angrily tells his white peers that "the brothers is here because we're Black and uneducated," and notes that they are fighting for the "United States of white America." But by the film's end, they are united in their valiant effort to take the hill, with a dying Doc telling his white pals that "we're all dumb niggers on this hill." As they hold him in their arms, his final demand is that they "take the hill--those bastards back in the world can never take that away from me." Ultimately, the GIs are willing to put aside their differences, charge up the hill, and die for

Uncle Sam without question. On that level, the ideology of the film seems more in keeping with the traditional combat genre picture than in exploring any new post-*Platoon* territory.

The men are also led by a salty, stock character sergeant from Texas (Stephen Weber), who has volunteered for another tour of Vietnam after observing the cruel behavior of anti-war protesters back home who "love Luke the Gook" but not the veterans (e.g., they throw bags filled with dog feces at soldiers returning from Vietnam). The geographical landscape of the barren hill, as well as the soldiers' assault on a fixed enemy in trenches and bunkers firing machine guns, also reflects World War Two era iconography more so than that of Vietnam. Indeed, the film's depiction of shrieking, bayonet wielding NVA soldiers charging at the Americans echoes the portrayal of Japanese troops in any number of earlier combat films. Many "friendly" Vietnamese are shown in scenes behind the lines, but they are always depicted in general terms as stereotypical prostitutes or simple peasants. A prostitute who does atypically exchange views about the war with Sergeant Worcester defends ARVN cowardice by claiming that it is an "American war," thereby revealing the "ingratitude" of the Vietnamese to the righteously indignant GI. However, one interesting moment of the film does individualize the enemy. After following the blood trail of a wounded NVA soldier, the squad finds his wallet containing a picture of an attractive Vietnamese woman. One of the new recruits, who has a girlfriend waiting for him back home, is obviously moved by the image and is forced to think about the notion of "enemy" in a different way for the first time. But even that scene is derivative of the combat genre, echoing the longer scene in *All Quiet on the Western Front* where a German soldier spends an evening in a foxhole with a dying Frenchman, thus allowing him to personalize the abstract enemy at long last.

Hamburger Hill also reveals a distinct right-wing ideology in its continual bashing of the 1960s era anti-war movement. "Hippie protesters" are criticized as evil ingrates who, for example, called the families of dead veterans to say that their sons deserved to die

for participating in an immoral war against the noble Vietnamese patriots. While some peace activists did romanticize the Vietnamese peasantry and the actions of the enemy, and were unkind to individual veterans during this period of intense passions on all sides, the film's treatment of the anti-war cause was simplistic and mean-spirited. Interestingly, similar viewpoints emerged in other films of this period such as *Hanoi Hilton* and *Gardens of Stone*. Perhaps the long-delayed cinematic validation of the American GIs' sacrifice in Vietnam resulting from the buzz around *Platoon* encouraged successive film makers to indulge in an equally reductive round of "peacenik" bashing.

Overall, while *Hamburger Hill* does extend the muck and mire of combat to new heights of gruesomeness, it ultimately lacks the visceral wallop and visual finesse of *Platoon*. As with *Platoon*, the war is reduced to an existential struggle, but in this case it lies in a championing of the soldiers' indefatigable will to conquer the hill as opposed to survival. But the reality of Vietnam was that their "victory" on the hill was meaningless, in that it neither altered the military course of the war or regenerated the GIs' service on any spiritual or philosophical level. The final image of the three survivors of the platoon, standing atop the bleak devastation of "their" hill in empty exhaustion, underscores the hollowness of this achievement (especially when contrasted to the lofty sight of hale and hearty Marines, proud and unvanquished, lifting the Stars and Stripes at the end of John Wayne's most famous combat film, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*). And while *Hamburger Hill* alluded to the divisive milieu of home front America during the war, its heavy-handed treatment of the anti-war movement failed to ground the immediate reality of combat in Vietnam within any informative socio-political context.³⁹

Lionel Chetwynd's *The Hanoi Hilton*, also released in 1987, seemed similarly influenced by the widescale praise of *Platoon's* "realism." While several of the films discussed in Chapter Four of my study were set in Vietnamese POW camps, *The Hanoi*

Hilton purported to depict the experiences of American POWs in Hanoi's notorious Hao Lo prison ("The Hanoi Hilton" of the film's title) in a more truthful manner. Despite its attempts to present graphic, "realistic" scenes of the prisoners' abuse at the hands of their brutal Vietnamese captors, the film comes off as melodramatic and derivative of earlier combat genre conventions. The Vietnamese vary little from the racist, sadistic portrayals of Asian guards in past combat films from both the Vietnam and Second World Wars, and the Americans are all flawlessly heroic and resistant in the face of their oppression. And, as with *Hamburger Hill*, the opposition of the anti-war movement is condemned when the Vietnamese commander describes the protesters as valued allies (indeed, a foolish Jane Fonda-like character inspects the prison at one point in the film and is easily duped by the propaganda of the Vietnamese). Interestingly, Michael Lanning's pro-military, rather right-wing analysis of the Vietnam War films lauds this aspect of *The Hanoi Hilton* as "accurate,"⁴⁰ although the representation of the peace movement here is again cartoonish and reductive.

In his book *Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POW*, Elliot Gruner notes that the film is also disingenuous in that all of the violence of the war is directed only at the Americans. Thus, the film opens with a scene in which a downed, wounded, and pleading American pilot is executed with a shot to the head by a merciless North Vietnamese soldier. But, as Gruner observes, "it is important to note what we never see in the movie (and what we continued to avoid during the recent Gulf War): explicit scenes of the devastation caused by the machines the now helpless captives piloted. We never see a dead or maimed Vietnamese. We do get plenty of dead Americans and graphic scenes of torture."⁴¹ Furthermore, the film rarely shows any American submitting to the demands of the Vietnamese, and one American captain refuses to bow despite being severely beaten. The various memoirs of American POWs which recalled their experiences frequently contradicted such cinematic heroics, with some Americans even confessing to "war crimes"

under torture. Gruner argued that the "mythologizing" of the POW experience in *The Hanoi Hilton* and other representations in effect "coopted" their story by increasingly dominating the "cultural history" of the period.⁴² Despite its surface realism, the film's cardboard depiction of both sides cheapened the real-life suffering and courageous behavior of many American POWs during their years of difficult captivity.

Not surprisingly, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) revealed a far more original and provocative take on the war. Shot in England, the film is split into two sections. The first follows a group of recruits during the eight-week Marine Corp recruit training process on Parris Island, South Carolina, where a rabid, profanity spewing Drill Instructor (played with an awesome ferocity by former Marine DI R. Lee Ermy) transforms them into "killers" who will serve his "beloved Corps" without question. Part Two follows one of these recruits, a Private Joker (Matthew Modine) assigned to *Stars and Stripes* magazine in Vietnam, as he becomes involved in the defense of the city of Hue during the Tet Offensive. Gone are the jungle sites of the previous Vietnam films as Kubrick locates his war within the urban rubble of Hue where the Marines weed out the enemy block by block. Kubrick gained access to an abandoned gas works in England where he built his sets and brought in some five thousand Vietnamese immigrants from London to play extras in the film. For six weeks, his art directors turned the site into ruins and rubble to recreate the destruction of Hue during the battle. In Kubrick's words, the location "achieved something that looked exactly like the photographs of what was left of the city of Hue. It is not easy to get research on Vietnamese signs but we went to the Library of Congress, which had microfilm editions of most Vietnam newspapers and magazines of the period and replicated what we found in their pages."⁴³ Such research would suggest a film that worked within the "realistic" style which Stone employed in *Platoon*. But the way in which Kubrick incorporates such historically accurate details into his larger formal systems results in a picture which transcends realism both stylistically and

thematically. Stone's film worked on several levels thematically, but his visual recreation of combat aimed towards verisimilitude. Kubrick's depiction of the training sequences and combat are much more stylized, and the violence is so hyper-realistic at times as to almost become surreal (e.g., seeing huge streams of brightly colored blood spurt from a Marine's leg in slow motion after he is hit by a sniper's bullet). These choices create a distinct tone for the film which inevitably has an impact on the representation of the Vietnamese as well.

The extended training sequence is the key to Kubrick's intentions in many ways. The viewer is thrust into the dehumanization process of boot camp immediately as the film opens with shots of recruits having their heads shaved bare, thus losing their individual civilian identities. As they suffer the loss of their hair with woebegone faces, a nasal country singer croons "goodbye my sweetheart, hello Vietnam" on the soundtrack. Kubrick uses music to comment on the action throughout the film, as when later firefights are juxtaposed against innocuous pop songs of the period such as "Woolly Bully." Such techniques create an ironic distance of sorts for the viewer which contributes to the generally nihilistic mood of *Full Metal Jacket*. Joker, the narrator and protagonist of the film, aptly conveys Kubrick's view of the violent conditioning that occurs on Parris Island when he observes: "the Marine Corps does not want robots. The Marine Corps wants killers. The Marine Corps wants to build indestructible men, men without fear." On this level, the film's theme recalls the cutting edge and dark humor of wartime plays such as David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones*, which linked American institutions such as family, church, and state to the savagery of our involvement in Vietnam.

Indeed, the extremities of the forty-five minute boot camp section greatly reinforces Kubrick's bleak, amoral interpretation of the war. Everything about the recruits' environment suggests an exaggerated sterility, devoid of any human warmth or feeling. Their barracks is immaculately spotless, they dress alike in drab clothing, and even Kubrick's cinematography is whitewashed and monochromatic. At the core of this alien

place is Ermy's merciless, bellowing Sergeant Hartman, who dominates every aspect of the recruits' existence. Kubrick incorporated a good deal of Ermy's own favorite DI harangues into the script for a greater sense of authenticity, but the character is so outrageously sadistic that he too seems stylized rather than naturalistic (Ermy's fascinating but ultimately one-note performance contributes to this result). As David Denby noted in his review of the film, "Hartman isn't secretly benevolent. He brutalizes the men because he wants to turn out killers for the Marine Corps--and because he enjoys it. Happily malevolent, he's an inspired and profane ideologue of war, controlling the men, then releasing them to kill and die. In the end, he is not their protector and friend but their executioner."⁴⁴ *Full Metal Jacket* subverts the traditional combat genre in this regard, as many earlier war films presented DIs who acted tough but cared for their men underneath that facade (Ermy himself played such a character in *Boys in Company C*). Hartman only cares about ensuring that the recruits have the "hard hearts" necessary to "harness their killer instincts" and shoot the enemy without hesitation in combat. For Kubrick, cold-hearted killers are thus created by institutions like the Marines as well as the larger culture which the Corp represents. The soldiers constantly mimic John Wayne throughout the film, and refer to "Vietnam the movie" during a television interview while in Hue, with themselves as "cowboys" and the Vietnamese as "Indians." Thus, as in many plays of the 1960s, Kubrick roots the bellicose attitudes of these young men in their years of cultural exposure to cinematic heroics and the enemy Other in various Westerns and combat films. While this was a common societal critique in plays like *Viet Rock*, *Indians*, etc., Kubrick's film represents the first major Hollywood feature to explore such links. By the end of their training, Hartman has succeeded in his desire to transform the young boys into savage warriors. But in the case of Joker's platoon, his methods backfire on the initially inept Private Pyle, who becomes "born again hard" after being physically and emotionally abused by his peers under the Sergeant's orders. The formerly slow-but-gentle boy snaps

and becomes a wild-eyed brute out of Kubrick's horror film *The Shining*, ranting about rifles loaded with "full metal jackets" in the company bathroom during the new Marines' last night on the island. When challenged by the ever abusive Sergeant Hartman, Pyle abruptly kills him before committing suicide. The sight of Pyle's brains scattered on the bathroom wall is the last image the audience sees before Kubrick dissolves the frame to Da Nang, Vietnam, creating an ominous foreshadowing for what is to come in the remainder of the film.

In Susan White's essay "Male Bonding, Hollywood Orientalism, and the Repression of the Feminine in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*," she remarks that Hartman's boot camp also serves to construct a "masculine identity" for the recruits where anything associated with the female and the racial Other are violently rejected.⁴⁵ Indeed, Kubrick explores the connections among gender identity, sex, and violence throughout the training sequence, as when Hartman leads the recruits in a drill which requires them to hold their rifles (named after women) in one hand and their crotches in another, all the while chanting "this is my rifle, this is my gun, this is for fighting, this is for fun." As David Denby noted in his review of the film, "there's an element of open eroticism in the DI's dominating assaults. He's the only one allowed to be a hard-on. They are 'ladies,' 'queers,' 'maggots'; they are feminized, robotized, screwed. He says to them (in effect), 'By submitting to me, you will become men.' And they believe him."⁴⁶ The indoctrination the Marines receive during their training will have a significant impact on the way they behave in Vietnam and interact with the people of that country. Thus, for Kubrick, the two parts of the film clearly represent a cause and effect relationship.

Once in Kubrick's Vietnam, it is clear to the viewer that Hartman's brutal lessons have been well learned by the American troops there. The viewer's first image of Vietnam is that of a mini-skirted Vietnamese hooker grotesquely strutting towards Joker while

Nancy Sinatra's song "These Boots Were Made for Walking" plays on the soundtrack. During their negotiations, Joker obviously views her as a dehumanized sexual object, and the woman reveals no sense of any personal history or character dimension (i.e., she can only spout clichés in pidgin English like "me so horny--love you long time"). Indeed, these initial scenes "in country" strongly establish the post-boot camp racist and sexist attitudes of the American troops. For instance, at the *Stars and Stripes* office where Joker is assigned, his commanding officer cynically speaks to the hypocritical nature of America's propaganda effort in Vietnam: "we run two basic stories here--grunts who give half their pay to buy Gooks toothbrushes and deodorant--winning of hearts and minds, OK? And combat action that results in a kill--winning the war." It is clear that he believes in neither type, and virtually every American Joker encounters has nothing but disdain for the Vietnamese. In this regard, his buddy Rafterman's comment, "you know what pisses me off about these people? We're supposed to be helping them, and they shit all over us every chance they get" is representative of the general American attitude toward their Vietnamese "allies." And while the enemy "Victor Charles" are still referred to as the customary "Gooks" or "Zipperheads," they are also acknowledged as tough and worthy opponents (one Marine praises them as "slant-eyed drill instructors"). In contrast, the ARVN troops are despised as cowards who, for example, make money during the battle of Hue by pimping prostitutes while the Americans risk their lives clearing the streets of VC. As White comments, "if this was a world of men, of drill-instructors, slant-eyed or otherwise, the warrior ideal could prevail. It is the South Vietnamese, not the NVA, who are associated with a degraded femininity."⁴⁷ Thus, in the world view of the Marines, the Vietnamese women are innately inferior because they are both female and Other (i.e., "Oriental"). The South Vietnamese men, however, are even more lowly in that they have denied their masculinity by rejecting combat in favor of more cowardly "feminine"

behaviors. The North Vietnamese and VC, while still racially inferior, at least act like "killers" according to Hartman's expectations of male warriors.

Perhaps the film's ultimate illustration of American arrogance and ethnocentrism occurs when a Colonel accosts Joker, who has "Born to Kill" printed on his helmet, about the peace sign on his lapel. When Joker tries to explain that he is making a commentary on the "duality of man," the officer lectures him as follows: "don't you love your country? Then how about getting with the program and come on in for the big win. Son, all I've ever asked of my Marines is for them to obey my orders as they would the word of God. We are here to help the Viet-Nam-ese because inside of every Gook there is an American trying to get out. It's a hardball world, son--we've got to try and keep our heads until this peace craze blows over." While such speeches in the film might initially seem outlandish to the point of caricature, they actually echo comments that were made during the war such as "it became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it."⁴⁸ All of the characters speak in a made-up language riddled with nicknames, jargon, and fractured syntax. This serves to define Vietnam as a site both removed from and connected to "the world" back home in America. Although the Marines' jargon is not the traditional English which they spoke in their civilian existence, it is linked to the scatological flow of "DI speak" employed by Hartman to help wean them away from their former lives and identities.

For Kubrick, this becomes yet another tool for establishing wartime Vietnam as an alien world beyond the pale of civilization. As the Marines travel through the burned out rubble of Hue, the billowing flames and thick smoke suggests a visual landscape more appropriate to some post-apocalyptic, futuristic setting than traditional Hollywood representations of the Vietnam War. Only the sight of an occasional palm tree amidst the decay reminds the spectator that this is the physical terrain of Vietnam. Indeed, the entire moral universe of *Full Metal Jacket* seems inverted here. Whereas characters like Taylor in *Platoon* struggled with the battle between good and evil, Joker encounters only unabashed

brutality and cynicism in Vietnam. After hooking up with his old pal Snowball's unit in Hue, Joker meets a group of Marines who revel in death and destruction--a whole unit of men like Barnes from *Platoon*. Rafterman is the only soldier who seems to have any sense of idealistic mission in Vietnam, and even he reveals a warped view of the glory of combat as when he compliments himself with egotistical gusto for blowing away a VC sniper. The savage Marine Animal-Mother sets him straight, however, when he snarls "flush out your headgear, new guy. You think we waste Gooks for freedom? This is a slaughter." The only notion the men hold dear is the lure of celebrity, as Joker's reporter credentials win him instant interest and recognition among the soldiers he questions. Even in the midst of battle, these callous warriors are always ready to preen for a photo opportunity or grant a television interview. While the soldiers in *Apocalypse Now* seemed bemused by the cameramen filming them in combat, the "boys" of *Full Metal Jacket* are highly aware of their self-referential roles within the larger meta-war. Indeed, the characters often analyze American attitudes about the war and the Vietnamese, as when Joker ironically tells the TV interviewer that he "wanted to see exotic Vietnam--the jewel of Southeast Asia--I wanted to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture and kill them." Thus, Kubrick both represents and deconstructs traditional Western/American perceptions of "Oriental" people and cultures at various points in the film.

The ultimate slaughter and moral test occurs in the film when the sniper who has brutally cut down three members of the outfit is wounded and revealed to be a woman. As White suggests, Joker is so thrown by his discovery of her identity that he cannot initially fire his weapon.⁴⁹ The revelation of the sniper as a female works on several levels. In the eyes of the Americans, it reinforces the depraved nature of the Vietnamese people and their war, in that they were willing to employ women and even children within the traditionally exclusive male site of combat. In addition, I think that underlying many of

the post-war arguments about our ineffective military tactics during the war is a cultural assumption that American troops could never have been defeated in a manly, "fair" fight out in the open. As former President Nixon claimed in his book *No More Vietnams*, the "weak" Vietnamese were only able to fight us by engaging in guerrilla tactics, thereby avoiding an "even test of strength."⁵⁰ In another way, however, the sniper's gender also subverts the Marines' carefully constructed views about the inferior nature--and threat--of the feminine Other. After all, one lone female opponent was able to terrorize the squad and skillfully lure three of its members to their deaths. On that level, White notes that the "sadistic riflegirl" ironically fulfills the chauvinistic soldiers' worst fears and insecurities of a "castrating" female. And, in this, instance, such gender perceptions are heightened by additional layers of cultural and racial barriers revolving around stereotypes of the seductive, sexually insatiable "Oriental" temptress. Overall, as White puts it, Kubrick's representation of the enemy sniper is "a complex one."⁵¹ Nonetheless, she is ultimately cut down and begs to be killed as the Marines coldly watch her labored breathing (one mutters "no more boom-boom for this baby-san," which again reflects their general perception of Vietnamese women in sexual terms). After a close-up which suggests a great deal of moral deliberation, Joker shoots her at close range with a handgun. The next scene depicts the American survivors of the battle striding with bravado towards the Perfume River, silhouetted against the burning city as they sing the theme song from "The Mickey Mouse Club" television program with sardonic enthusiasm. Via voiceover, Joker tells us that he is "in a world of shit"--one of Sergeant Hartman's favorite expressions--but he is "alive and not afraid." Thus, the meaning of Joker's shooting of the sniper is unclear. Was it an act of mercy? Retribution? Furthermore, if their so-called worthy opponent is in fact a female, then the boot camp construction of a male "warrior ideal" cannot be sustained despite Joker's ultimate destruction of the sniper's body.⁵² In any event, the film offers no redemption in its conclusion, as Joker fulfills the expectations of his teacher Hartman by

finally emerging as a fearless killer. The parting image of the shadowy, larger-than-life mythic American warriors of destruction singing a song of innocence from their childhood also speaks to the cultural corruption which Kubrick posits as contributing to the moral quagmire of Vietnam. Despite the atrocities committed by Americans in *Platoon*, Taylor's final voiceover promised potential salvation in his pledge "to build again" after the war. In *Full Metal Jacket*, no such optimistic possibilities exist regarding America's involvement in Vietnam--at the day's end, the best one can hope for is to be alive in "a world of shit." This is the last word in Kubrick's Vietnam.⁵³

While the film offered a distinctive perspective on the war, it did not result in any cathartic release for the American film going public as with *Platoon*. And the pre-release interviews with Kubrick, which focused on his extensively "realistic" recreations of wartime Da Nang and Hue, were perhaps misleading given the film's rather stylized excesses and unapologetically malevolent mood. Consequently, it left many critics puzzled with regard to Kubrick's intentions in making the film.⁵⁴ As the most highly anticipated Vietnam War film in the aftermath of *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* was important in its willingness to break away from the acclaimed realistic mode of Stone's picture. Still, *Platoon's* stylistic influence on the Vietnam combat film in this regard would continue well into the 1990s with such high profile movies as Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1994).⁵⁵ Before the end of the 1980s, Hollywood would once again turn to the familiar subject of the American Vietnam veteran with Norman Jewison's *In Country* and Stone's *Born on the Fourth Of July* (both released in 1989). The two pictures, however, incorporated many of the various currents which had emerged in the Vietnam war films of the decade in order to reexamine the image of the veteran within a decidedly new frame.

In Country focused on the journey of a teenage girl, Samantha (Emily Lloyd), to learn more about her father who died in Vietnam while she was a baby. To satisfy her growing curiosity, she seeks out the company of local veterans like her Uncle Emmet

(Bruce Willis) and his tight-knit circle of war buddies in their small town in Kentucky. Emmet refuses to work and seems to be suffering from several Agent Orange-related illnesses. The cliqueishness of the vets, as well as their resentment against the town for waiting over ten years to throw them a celebration (which is mostly attended by area veterans), reflects the societal alienation typically depicted in previous Hollywood films about returning GIs. But the film also transcends these earlier representations in significant ways. While the veterans are irreparably affected by their wartime experiences, they are all functioning, law-abiding citizens with deep roots in the community of their birthplace. Even the unemployed Emmet is a caring uncle who spends his days puttering around his backyard or helping neighbors with chores. During the veteran celebration/reunion in town, the viewer sees veteran characters proudly displaying their medals or discussing their service during the war. Thus, as it progresses, the film conveyed a message of pride about the American GIs who served in Vietnam that is not present in the earlier cycle of veteran films. While eschewing the jingoism and self-pitying of the "Rambo" type pictures, *In Country* seems to have been influenced by the change in attitude about the veteran which initially emerged in the films of the early 1980s. However, it incorporates such themes within the framework of a more naturalistic, less action oriented narrative, thereby avoiding the fantasy based heroics and didactic guilt-trips of those earlier movies.

While the Vietnamese are never shown directly, Emmet does repeatedly flash back to the site of his unit's nighttime ambush in Vietnam. As the squad proceeds through a swamp, the Vietnamese launch a flare which illuminates the Americans, who freeze like deer caught in a car's headlights. The Americans are then mowed down by the unseen VC. This brief scene quickly establishes the almost supernatural authority of the Vietnamese over the dark, mysterious jungle. On this level, the film echoes many similar depictions of the VC found in previous films.

But the film's ending, in which Samantha, Emmet, and her grandmother visit the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC to pay tribute to her fallen father, does take the Vietnam War film in a new direction. The shot where Emmet asks for a private moment to ritualistically don his field jacket before approaching the wall poignantly establishes the importance of his service in Vietnam despite any other post-war alienation. Like most other Vietnam War films, *In Country* does not engage the complex politics of the war on a significant level. But in its balanced, compassionate treatment of veterans, it does pay tribute to them in a manner which far exceeds the breast-beating hysterics of, for example, Stallone's Rambo in *First Blood*. The non-melodramatic, moving scene at the wall offered yet another level of catharsis for the American film going public beyond the battlefields of *Platoon*.⁵⁶ Thus, by the end of the decade, the American Vietnam veteran, while still recovering from the effects of the war, had finally been rehabilitated and accepted on screen. Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*, which served as a bookend of sorts to *Platoon*, would cement that closure.

Based on the 1976 memoir of the same title by Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic, the film offered Stone a rich opportunity to examine the political ramifications of the war which *Platoon* had avoided. Kovic came of age during the Eisenhower-Kennedy years, and his book analyzed how the ideological and cultural socialization of his "all-American" upbringing in the suburbs of Long Island led him to volunteer naively for service in Vietnam. During his second tour there, he suffered wounds which paralyzed him from the mid-chest down, and after returning home the increasingly disillusioned veteran eventually became active in the anti-war movement. Thus, his story seemed an ideal one for Stone to examine the impact of the war's aftermath on the likes of a once idealistic character like *Platoon's* Chris Taylor within a broader ideological and political framework. As with *Platoon*, Stone had to wait many years before making *Born on the Fourth of July*, having

initially written the screenplay in 1977. Only after the phenomenal success of *Platoon* was a Hollywood studio willing to greenlight his making of the film.⁵⁷

Born on the Fourth of July proceeds chronologically, portraying Kovic's childhood as an idyllic one filled with sports, patriotism, family, religion, and hard work. Stone especially foregrounds Kovic's childhood awe over the sight of veterans marching in the local Fourth of July Parade. The holiday is also Kovic's birthday, which takes on an almost mythic significance for his family while adding a poignant resonance to his later loss of faith in America. But lurking underneath this blissful facade are cultural pressures which convince the young teenager that as an American, he must always "win" and "do his best." For instance, his high school wrestling coach calls the boys "ladies" and exhorts them to "kill, kill, kill" their opposition in a warped practice session which recalls Sergeant Hartman's boot camp in *Full Metal Jacket*. Weaned on childhood games of army and Hollywood war films, the impressionable Kovic (played by Bryan Larkin as a child and Tom Cruise as a teenager/adult) eagerly joins the Marines after graduating from high school in order to "become a man" and stop the looming threat of Communism. Kovic's father (Raymond Barry), a veteran of World War Two, is uneasy about his enlisting to fight a faraway war in Asia, but his devoutly religious mother (Caroline Kava) tells him that "Communism has to be stopped--it's God's will you go."⁵⁸

The Vietnam sequences of the film are relatively short, but vividly contrast with the visual landscape depicted in Stone's *Platoon*. Set on the coastline of that country, Kovic's war is one of sun-drenched beaches and scrubby, open fields rather than dense, claustrophobic jungle. As ever, though, Stone effectively conveys a palpable sense of the searing heat and fatigue experienced by the foot soldiers in Vietnam. The film also echoes the gritty realism of *Platoon* when Sergeant Kovic's nervous Lieutenant orders the unit to fire into a village where he has "spotted gooks." Unfortunately, the NVA have pulled back to use the villagers as cover, and the American bullets hit dozens of unarmed Vietnamese

women and children. As the panicked, guilt-stricken soldiers view the bleeding bodies in horror, the stunned Kovic is forced to leave a wounded baby behind after the enemy returns to the village. Stone utilizes a spinning, hand-held camera and a series of rapid cuts to convey effectively the chaos and terror of this scene. In the hysteria of their retreat, Kovic, blinded by the sunlight, accidentally kills a fellow American. Despite Kovic's efforts to initiate an inquiry into his actions, the incident is covered up by his superior officer. Thus, while no intentional atrocities are committed by Americans in *Born on the Fourth of July*, once again Stone unflinchingly portrays the confusion, terror, and brutality of the war. The guerrilla-like nature of the conflict is reinforced later in the film when Kovic is wounded in an NVA ambush which, as in *Platoon*, catches the defenseless Americans totally off-guard.

After Kovic is shipped back to America, Stone extends the realistic style of *Platoon* to his treatment of the "returning veteran" via a lengthy sequence which depicts Kovic's rehabilitation in an understaffed, squalid, rat-infested VA hospital in the Bronx. These scenes are excruciating to watch, as the frustrated veteran lies for hours in his own excrement or almost loses his leg because of outdated equipment. At one point, when Kovic demands respect from a Black orderly because of his military service, the hostile man tells him that "Vietnam don't mean nothing to me, man--you can take your Vietnam and shove it up your fucking ass." Another more outwardly friendly Black aide warns him that "there's a revolution going on, Kovic--the brothers are getting it together, and if you ain't part of the solution you part of the problem." While these scenes acknowledge the racial tensions which did exist in relation to the war at that time, Stone also shows a Black soldier risking his own life to save the wounded Kovic during the ambush in Vietnam.

After returning home to Long Island in a wheelchair, Kovic becomes increasingly alienated from his family, eventually feeling that he has been betrayed by the values of his youth. After showing Kovic's drunken sojourn in Mexico, the film abruptly portrays him

as a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War protesting at the 1972 Republican Convention in Miami. While reviled by the participants at the convention, Kovic is interviewed on camera where he articulates his political conversion:

I'm here tonight to say that this war is wrong, that this society lied to me, it lied to my brothers--that it deceived the people of this country, it tricked them into going 13,000 miles to fight a war against a poor peasant people who have a proud history of resistance, who have been struggling for their own independence for 1,000 years, the Vietnamese people. I can't find the words to express how the leadership of this government sickens me.

While the film is atypical in acknowledging that America's war in Vietnam existed within a larger historical context, Stone's dialogue about a "poor peasant people" romanticized and stereotyped the Vietnamese people in ways which would be extended further in his *Heaven and Earth*.

The film then jumps ahead chronologically again to the 1976 Democratic Convention, where Kovic, now a noted author, is a featured speaker. As he wheels himself to the microphone and receives the greetings of various well-wishers, he seems to have achieved a significant degree of closure regarding his war-related demons. And ironically he has fulfilled his mother's prophecy from his childhood, where she dreamed of him one day speaking to a crowd of people, "saying great things."

Stone's film effectively captures the broad strokes of Kovic's journey from a callow, trusting American boy to a disillusioned, crippled veteran to a respected political activist and author. He tends to avoid the psychological and moral complexities of Kovic's memoir, however, choosing instead to emphasize the emotional devastation resulting from his wartime experiences. As with *Platoon*, Stone displays both a penchant and talent for creating a visceral, empathetic film. In the process, however, he undercuts his opportunity to explore the political ambiguities of the war in detail for the first time in a major Hollywood release. Thus, Kovic's politicization as he segues from a bitter dunk to an outspoken anti-war activist condemning the basic fabric of American society is given short

shrift in the film, although the book devotes several chapters to this topic.⁵⁹ Still, in tandem with *Full Metal Jacket*, the film is one of only two major post-war Hollywood pictures to debunk the cultural myths of American society surrounding the Vietnam era. It differed from Kubrick's film, however, in that it examined this topic within a naturalistic, conventional framework, which made the film much more accessible to audiences despite its graphic violence and emotional intensity.⁶⁰

And once again, the veteran Stone is seemingly most interested in capturing various facets of the American experience in the war on film. While Kovic reacts with horror to the inadvertent slaughter of the Vietnamese civilians, what haunts him most after returning home is the fact that he killed a fellow American soldier. This act, more than anything else, contradicts his previously held self-image as a "winner" and a "good American." Indeed, he finally achieves a catharsis of sorts regarding the incident when he seeks out the boy's parents and painfully confesses his actions to them. Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* acts as both a prequel and sequel of sorts to *Platoon*, with the two films together serving to examine a broad range of issues concerning American society and the war. As with *In Country*, *Born on the Fourth of July* in effect validated the sacrifices of the veterans on a "realistic" level which dismissed the revisionist mock-heroics of the earlier veteran dominated films of the decade.⁶¹ Stone himself seemed to achieve some degree of closure regarding America's involvement in the war with the film, as his next picture about Vietnam would attempt to examine the war from a drastically different perspective--that of the Vietnamese themselves.

As Toby Silverman Zinman noted in a 1990 article about Vietnam War plays, the war had become a "media event" by the end of the 1980s, creating a veritable "minor industry" around the popular films of the period. Regarding the plays which have been written about the war, however, she observes that "in all the resurgent interest there has

been remarkably little performance of or discussion of Vietnam drama."⁶² This trend was particularly striking in that several plays involving "authentic" veteran voices, all written before the release of *Platoon*, anticipated the film's intention to portray the "realities" of the war as they affected the American grunts in Vietnam.

David Berry's *G.R. Point* was the first of these plays. Although it was copyrighted in 1976, it remained unpublished until 1980. A veteran of the war, Berry states in production notes state that the play "is a spare and simple piece which *requires* utter naturalistic simplicity in scene design concept and execution."⁶³ The characters are involved in several fearsome "firefights" but they all occur off-stage, although sound effects attempt to convey the sense of "incoming" rounds for the audience at times. Overall, the play represents the day-to-day reality of Vietnam as experienced by one group of men assigned to the gruesome task of registering and shipping the bodies of dead American GIs (the "Graves Registration" of the play's title).

Tracers was "conceived" by veteran John DiFusco and premiered in Los Angeles in 1980. The play was collectively created by its all-veteran cast via workshop improvisations which were eventually transcribed by Sheldon Lettich, and then later edited and structured by him and DiFusco. As noted in Chapter Four, it received a great deal of critical acclaim and toured domestically and abroad for years with various all-veteran companies (this novelty gave the work an air of authority in its publicity campaign similar to that of *Platoon*). In his production notes, DiFusco writes that *Tracers* was "created by a group of men who had something to get off their chests, so the true energy of the play should be unyielding."⁶⁴ *Tracers* attempts to portray the authors' personal wartime experiences, including scenes of combat, via a collage-like structure which includes a great deal of ritualistic choreography, songs, and chanting recalling the improvisational style of the experimental theatre of the 1960s. Still, the play is atypical in that it does seek to depict the

frenetic terror of combat directly on stage, and at one point shows the squad getting wiped out after landing in the middle of a firefight. Regarding the challenge of theatrically staging such scenes, DiFusco advises potential directors of *Tracers* as follows:

stylistic choices in the choreography and action sequences are very important. You cannot hope to realistically recreate a battle on a stage with six actors but you should choose a style of movement (incorporating sound and lights) which gets at the surreal feeling of what it was like in America's first rock and roll war.... Music and sound effects should be given a great deal of attention. The sound track is listed in the script because it is an integral part of the play. One could say that the sound track becomes a character in itself--an expression of the teenage warrior's psyche.⁶⁵

Despite its rather surrealistic style and non-linear structure, the play was still perceived by many critics as effectively recreating the war on a number of levels. As David Kaufman observed in his review of the New York production of *Tracers*, "of all the accounts of Vietnam, I know none of which approaches the subject with as much dignity, authority [a word which was later frequently used in conjunction with *Platoon*], and relevance as *Tracers*.... The fact that *Tracers* was conceived and written by Vietnam vets, under the auspices of VETCO [Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theatre Company], and is here performed at the Public Theater by eight Vietnam vets ... makes it all that more powerful a statement."⁶⁶ Zinman's article perhaps best captured the general reaction to *Tracers* when she noted that it "surely is the most heavily credentialed play about the war...."⁶⁷ Like Oliver Stone six years later, DiFusco himself encouraged such responses when he made claims like "most of all bear in mind that this play is based in truth."⁶⁸

The last of these three plays is Emily Mann's *Still Life*, which also premiered in 1980. Again, the published text includes "notes" which speak to the "authenticity" of its portrayal of the wartime experiences of a specific veteran or group of veterans. Mann herself comments that:

Still Life is about three people I met in Minnesota during the summer of 1978.... The play is a "documentary" because it is a distillation of interviews I conducted during that summer. I chose the documentary style to insure that the

reality of the people and events described could not be denied. Perhaps one could argue about the accuracy of the people's interpretation of the events, but one cannot deny that these are actual people describing actual events as they saw and understood them.⁶⁹

While sharing the concern of the other two works in somehow capturing the "truth" of Vietnam, Mann's use of the documentary style recalled many plays from the period of the war which engaged the war through the use of documentary materials (e.g., Daniel Berrigan's *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*). *Still Life*, however, also reflected the themes and ideologies of many 1960s era plays about the war in that Mann viewed it as "about violence in America. The Vietnam War is the backdrop to the violence at home." Ultimately, through an examination of our participation in the brutality of the Vietnam War, Mann hoped to shed some light on our country's inherently violent nature, and thus "come to terms" with the ramifications of the war and the tumultuous period of the 1960s. Of course, while Mann acknowledges that she is presenting her characters' "interpretations" of the war, her claim that the documentary style somehow insures a greater "reality" in recreating a historical event is debatable. As playwright Peter Weiss argued during the 1960s, writers who utilized documentary material in the theatre inevitably selected and rearranged such information in ways which reflected their own political viewpoints about the subject at hand. In a discussion of documentary theatre in 1972, critic Julius Novick echoed this position when he stated that "the problem with Theater of Fact is that 'the facts'--the raw data of history ... seldom reveal the deep significance of historical events in a swift, vivid, and economical fashion. The historical record itself is usually very bad drama; if it is to appear in the theater at all, it urgently needs an adaptor who can ... arrange what is left into a coherent dramatic whole." Mann has acknowledged her own role and voice in shaping such raw documentary material more directly in relation to her recent "theatre of testimony" works such as *Greensboro*. In an interview regarding the premiere of this work at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton in 1996, Mann commented on how much

she had been able to "orchestrate" the language of the play. As she put it, "having the actors think the thought 'on' the word has been wonderful for me, as a writer, allowing me to fine-tune. Redundancies that I might not have noticed, as we get deeper into the text. I can distill even further."⁷⁰ Despite their differing styles, all three plays attempted to stake out a position of greater "authenticity" than previous plays about the war based on their representation of one or more veteran voices. In this regard, they anticipated the novelty which surrounded *Platoon* and its successor films by several years. And like those films, all three works are most interested in focusing on the experiences of American combat soldiers in Vietnam, and the impact they had on our larger culture and society. But because they do depict or refer to numerous American-Vietnamese encounters in combat and behind the lines, the plays also reveal a good deal about American attitudes regarding the Vietnamese and the war.

Tracers was the only play to depict a scene of boot camp training, which in fact anticipated *Full Metal Jacket* more than *Platoon*. But all three works address the impact of the veterans' "homecoming" in varying degrees in addition to representing various wartime experiences. Many of the events of the plays prefigure those seen in *Platoon*: rampant drug usage; lack of military protocol and respect for officers; ritualistic dress and jargon; internecine conflict and threats of "fragging" fellow Americans; American deaths resulting from "friendly fire"; and abusive attitudes towards and treatment of the Vietnamese people as a whole. While the units of *G.R. Point* and *Tracers* are mixed ones racially, the men generally get along well on that level despite a constant racial bantering. As with many of the post-war films, racial tensions are acknowledged but usually suppressed on the front lines in the interest of keeping each other alive, with deep friendships formed between Black and white soldiers at times.⁷¹

Still, the men of *G.R. Point* immediately threaten the newly arrived Micah Bradstreet with fragging if he gets too close with their officers. Early in the play, Micah

tries to stop his Sergeant Deacon from raping their elderly Vietnamese "servant," Mama-San. Like many of the American characters in the later films, Deacon views Mama-San as less than human and present only to serve his various needs. At one point, he even claims that "only a fucken animal would burn shit" while she cleans their latrine. Deacon cuts Micah as a warning to mind his own business and also to establish his authority (as does Barnes to Taylor after he is challenged about killing Elias in *Platoon*). In *Tracers*, the men talk of fragging the "lifer Sergeants," and one "short" GI (the term used to describe soldiers nearing the end of their tour in Vietnam) attacks his platoon leader after being ordered on a dangerous mission. So, there is violence and the potential for murder among the Americans as represented in these plays, with the shocked Micah reacting to the confrontation with Deacon as follows: "what the hell is going on? He's on my side and I wanted to kill him. Jesus ... what am I thinking?" And, as with *Platoon*, the men do their duty but eschew "John Asshole Wayne" heroics in favor of surviving their tour and returning home to "the world" of America.⁷²

In *G.R. Point*, the central character, Micah, announces that he intends to "remain civilized" during his stay in Vietnam. Not surprisingly, Micah must change significantly in order to survive Vietnam both emotionally and physically. Although no direct scenes of combat are portrayed, the play does refer to several encounters with the enemy quite explicitly. After surviving an enemy assault, Micah describes "deep-frying" Vietnamese soldiers with napalm grenades, as well as hundreds of dismembered "raggedy gook bodies." And, of course, the daily "normal" work the men do at the G.R. Point often involves piecing mutilated bodies back together, all of which is referred to in nauseating detail. In this regard, the play goes even further than earlier Vietnam War dramas in its willingness to capture the horrors of war without theatrical stylization. Similarly, Mark, the veteran character in *Still Life*, describes a number of brutal experiences from his service in Vietnam, including atrocities he witnessed on both sides of the conflict. While these

events are not recreated for the audience, Mark does show slides which graphically depict the horrific impact of the war on the Vietnamese people (e.g., mass graves or a man with "his arm exposed, the flesh torn, eaten away"). *Tracers* differs from the other two works in that it places such moments directly on stage, although in a more stylized, theatrical manner of presentation. For instance, one particularly nasty scene is entitled "blanket party," which shows the men picking up pieces of dismembered GIs and placing them on a blanket. The entire scene is performed in pantomime as the increasingly distraught men pick up fingers and other body parts in the searing heat of Vietnam.⁷³

Furthermore, some of the Americans in these works seem to enjoy the killing on certain levels, and often view the Vietnamese enemy as a dehumanized, alien Other within the parameters of Lifton's "gook syndrome." Deacon, for example, takes pictures of the charred and mutilated VC corpses which he then sells as "souvenir packages" to the men to bring back home (even the squad's commanding officer buys them).⁷⁴ Micah revels in the excitement of combat, and tells Zan that he "LIKED THE BLOOD." When Zan tries to assure him that everyone reacts intensely to their first experience of combat, Micah reveals that:

man, I fucken *begged* Charlie to come for me! Come for me, you motherfuckers, I'm gonna tear your throats! Get near me, you bastards, and I'm gonna eat you, gonna cut open your fucken stomachs 'n wrap your steaming guts around my neck 'n rip your veins open and drink your warm blood 'n pound your fucken heads on the bunker beams 'til there's nothing fucken left of you for G.R. to shovel into the truck and take to the dump and push into a hole and pour diesel on and burn, you motherfuckers, BURN!⁷⁵

While numerous veterans of various wars have described the adrenaline rush of combat, Micah's bloodlust here suggested that more insidious forces were at work with our "boys" in Vietnam. Indeed, by the end of this scene, Micah shamefully confesses to Zan that he actually orgasmed during the firefight. Through the rest of the play, he wrestles with his simultaneous attraction and revulsion to combat and killing the Vietnamese enemy. In

Tracers, the youthful Dinky-Dau experiences this duality when he riddles a dead VC's body with bullets during his first firefight, which he later refers to as a "a frenzy that I got caught up in. A crazy, primal, stupid, fuckin' frenzy." *Still Life* also explores the relation between sex and combat when Mark's wife Cheryl states that "everything he's done, everything is sexually oriented in some way," and that Mark describes war "like orgasm" and "the best sex he ever had." Mark himself confesses a "really bad number" he committed in Vietnam, where he executed a Vietnamese family--including three children--in "cold blood" because a friend of his had been killed by a VC booby trap. Although Mark is racked with guilt over this action after returning home, during the war he reveled in the "power" he was given to "work outside the law" and kill people at will. In addition, he recalls that "everybody knew about My Lai. But it wasn't different from what was going on. I mean, the grunts did it all the time."⁷⁶

The plays vary in terms of explaining such behavior. The GIs of *G.R. Point* have all "gone native" in a sense, with the war unleashing a primitivism in them which would have never surfaced in America. Thus, Micah struggles through the rest of the play to regain the sense of "civilized" humanity he brought to Vietnam as part of his inherent American nature (in his notes, Berry describes it as a "journey to the light"). As he prepares to return to America at the play's end, his buddy K.P. reinforces this theme when he tells Micah "count the livin', not the dead." Thus, the play implies that only in Vietnam, after being exposed to the savagery of the "gook" enemy, would American boys like Micah "turn on" to war and revel in bloodlust. Once the soldiers returned to the familiar comforts of America, they could once again enjoy a normal life away from "Oriental" corruption. Similarly, the GIs of *Tracers* all indulge in actions which would surely have been unthinkable to them back home (e.g., Scooter cutting the ears from VC corpses). Their Sergeant Habu is so hardened by his exposure to the war that he describes "hunting parties" against the VC as a kind of football game, using a quintessential American image

of play to reveal his callousness: "how do I feel? It's my team against his. And a kill is just a touchdown man. *Fuck it.*" In this regard, such attitudes mirrored the views expressed in films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* released around the same time as these plays, and where the decadence of Vietnam was presented as "corrupting" previously wholesome American boys. The general behavior of the men in Stone's *Platoon* several years later is represented in a similar fashion, as Taylor, Barnes, et al. act more like "them" instead of the traditional image of the "noble American" seen in earlier examples of the combat genre. Even Elias, the "good" Sergeant, is such an effective soldier because he can maneuver in the jungle just like the VC. So, in that sense, he has "gone native" as well, which is further evidenced by his headbands, pot-smoking, etc. But unlike *G.R. Point*, *Tracers* also establishes an earlier basis for such behavior in its boot camp sequence, where the young Americans are taught to fear the mysterious fighting prowess of "Luke the Gook, Link the Chink, and Charlie Cong" even before arriving in Vietnam (thus anticipating the dehumanization process which Kubrick later examines in detail with his *Full Metal Jacket*). Not until they are actually exposed to the savagery of the Vietnamese, however, are their latent primal instincts fully unleashed.

In contrast, *Still Life* posits a view which is more similar to many plays of the wartime era which root the brutality of American soldiers in Vietnam within a larger framework of home front corruption. Given the anti-establishment mood of that period which crystallized around the war as the ultimate symbol of American wrongdoing, many of the anti-war plays sought to expose domestic evils which were then extended to other peoples and cultures via our foreign policies. For instance, Cheryl places Mark's attraction to violence in the context of a culturally conditioned machismo, and he speculates on what the experience of war "would be for women" (recalling that he saw a lot of women brutalized during the war). At the end of the play Mark's mistress Nadine notes that "through him--I've come to understand the violence in myself ... and in him, and in all of

us." Again, Mark himself claims that as a Marine, he was trained to do one thing only--kill--and that once in Vietnam he and his buddies all "dug it." Mark speaks to a more historic socialization process in this regard when he comments that "there's no difference between this war and World War II. I'm convinced of that. Maybe it was different in that it was the race thing. (*Admitting*) We referred to them as zips, or dinks, or gooks. But I don't think I would have had any trouble shooting anything. We weren't freaks out there. Guys in World War II cracked up, too. We're their children."⁷⁷

As I considered in Chapter One, however, perhaps "the race thing" in our military struggle with the Japanese during World War Two was not as different as Mark's speech might suggest. As John Dower observed in his excellent study of the impact of race on the Pacific Theatre of that war, "many stereotyped patterns of perception which characterized American attitudes towards the hated Japanese enemy in World War Two also proved to be free-floating, and easily transferred to the new enemies of the cold war: to Soviet and Chinese Communists, the Korean foe of the early 1950s, the Vietnamese enemy of the 1960s and 1970s, and hostile 'third-world' movements in general."⁷⁸ Thus, as I have been exploring throughout this study, attitudes about the "alien Other" from earlier wars, which were handed down to the generation of men who fought in Vietnam via various cultural artifacts, greatly influenced American perceptions of the Vietnamese as sub-human "gooks." What was perhaps "different" then about Vietnam was not so much the "race thing" but rather the guerrilla nature of the war which contributed to the formulation of Lifton's "gook syndrome" attitudes and behaviors. While GIs fought against the "Japs" in the jungle, caves, etc., they did not interact with a large civilian populace--many of whom were allied with the enemy--as was the case in Vietnam (had the projected mainland invasion of Japan occurred, the situation there in this regard might well have been quite similar). Our experience in Vietnam was also differentiated by the fact that we eventually "lost" that war, and many GIs saw no evidence of any military advancement or victory

during their tours even before our eventual withdrawal. This sense of helplessness and defeat--so antithetical to our innate cultural sense of "Americanness"--had a significant impact on the manner in which the American-Vietnamese encounter occurred and was aesthetically represented and recreated after the war.

But Mark's comments in *Still Life* address the brutal nature of our interaction with the Vietnamese--armed or unarmed--regardless of any such underlying causes. Again, while such atrocities had been well documented in literary memoirs of the war, *Platoon* was the first film to depict openly such treatment of the Vietnamese. Plays such as *G.R. Point*, *Tracers*, and *Still Life*, however, all addressed this topic well in advance of Stone's seminal film. Thus, as in the 1960s during the war, the theatre was far more willing than Hollywood to engage the abuses and general brutality which often resulted from America's political, ideological, and military agenda in Vietnam. Of course, the differences between the mediums in terms of structure and audience size and composition contributed to this trend. The American theatre is often best known to the larger public through the work presented in its most commercial venue: namely, the Broadway houses of New York. However, many smaller, less commercially driven New York and regional theatre companies had both the desire and the resources to confront the more problematic and/or controversial aspects of the war in a more immediate fashion. In contrast, the dynamics of the Hollywood film industry encouraged a slower response to the war. Because its product is more expensive and takes longer to produce, the medium of the commercial studio film is also more dependent on a need for large audiences and high ticket sales in order to turn a profit. Consequently, the inherent nature of the movie "business" hampered its willingness to make films about the war until the studio heads were confident that the larger public was ready to support such works at the box office. Again, some directors like Stone attempted to make their Vietnam War films without success long before the Hollywood system was willing to address the war. In addition, the smaller, more specialized theatre going

audience was presumably perceived by some producers as more tolerant of or potentially receptive to such issues. Since the non-Broadway theatres which produced plays like *Tracers* were not as motivated by or dependent on such concerns, they were able to engage such provocative material well in advance of the mainstream film community.

And in their representation of the war, all three plays, albeit in different ways, posited a viewpoint that America's exposure to the Vietnamese and their style of warfare unleashed a savagery antithetical to the once firmly held notion of behaving as a "good American." The result of viewing all Vietnamese as "the enemy" or "gooks" was that innocent non-combatants--or perhaps unarmed civilians who were VC supporters--became victims of American violence at times. I believe that what was so unsettling about the scene in *Platoon* for American viewers was not the issue of GIs torturing a suspected enemy (even John Wayne's Colonel Kirby condoned the torture of a captured VC, after all), but rather that Sergeant Barnes, Bunny, etc. were willing to kill unarmed women and children because they had the power to do so. While such atrocities also occurred in previous American conflicts, including the struggle against the Japanese in World War Two,⁷⁹ they were not depicted in cinematic or theatrical representations of such wars. In that regard, the plays and films about the Vietnam War were quite distinct from the works which portrayed those earlier wars.

At the conclusion of her essay about American drama and the Vietnam War, Zinman claims that:

Most of these plays can be loosely categorized as antiwar, and almost all of them have transcended the facile condemnation of Vietnam veterans, which was so basic to international public opinion and the American antiwar movement. But although these playwrights are able to acknowledge some of the important issues of racism, sexism, and lurid savagery inherent in the Vietnam War, they remain morally as well as aesthetically unresolved.... Although these plays represent many colors, including gentleness and pity for the Vietnam veterans who were--and are--harmed beyond repair, not one play sheds a tear for the Vietnamese. If 59,000 Americans died in the war, millions of Southeast Asians were killed, or injured, or made homeless as their country disappeared before their eyes under the spell of Agent Orange and napalm. None of these plays tries to represent what that must

have been like. Thus, the failure, of Vietnam drama may be greater than anything this essay demonstrates. The unspeakable remains unspoken.⁸⁰

Zinman's words capture the tendency in American drama (and to an even greater extent American cinema) to focus on the war's impact on our own troops and society. However, as I discussed in Chapter Two, many of the plays written during the war did attempt to address its effect on the lives, culture, and property of the Vietnamese people as well. Furthermore, the plays examined in this chapter all consider the consequences of American brutality towards the Vietnamese in varying degrees, although this typically occurs as a side result of analyzing what the war did to "us." But all three works ultimately convey some degree of apology for our behavior in Vietnam, or at least a hope for redemption or spiritual closure in the aftermath of the war. Thus, *Still Life* ends by acknowledging the ill effects of the war and the turbulence of the 1960s on that generation in tandem with a hope to move past that era. As Micah prepares to leave the war at the end of *G.R. Point*, Mama-San, who has become his lover, urges him to "go home be good," while his buddies advise him to embrace life once again. And while the final dialogue in the epilogue of *Tracers* echoes the angry query of "how does it feel to kill somebody" which also ends the play's prologue, the penultimate group of monologues set in the 1980s reveals a softening of their wartime disdain for the "gooks." This is perhaps most clear when the character called the Professor emotionally describes returning to Asia and having his tears brushed away by a Thai woman who tells him "the war is over. It's time to go home."⁸¹

Thus, like the later films of the 1980s, the theatrical works of this less immediate post-war period sought to find some degree of closure or catharsis from the traumas of the Vietnam experience. While still most interested in focusing on the war's impact on American identity, values, and lives, the theatre of this period abandoned the domestic emphasis of the plays of the 1970s era in favor of engaging the military aspects of the war. Consequently, while still of secondary interest to these plays, the Vietnamese once again

begin to emerge as sympathetic victims of American aggression. And by 1991, a new play would emerge--*Miss Saigon*--which did indeed "shed a tear" for the Vietnamese, beginning a larger current in this period which tried to paint a more benevolent picture of the Vietnamese in terms of both civilians and armed foes. Perhaps this was possible by the 1990s because the high profile works of the 1980s finally helped American audiences to confront some of the more painful issues of the war in a highly public forum. Although *Still Life* and especially *Tracers* were widely praised by critics and received many productions all across America, the inherently more populist medium of cinema allowed films like *Platoon* to have an enormous effect on the cultural *zeitgeist*. As veteran activist John Wheeler observed after the release of the film, "before, we were either objects of pity or objects that had to be defused to keep us at a distance. *Platoon* makes us real. The Viet Nam Memorial was one gate our country had to pass through; *Platoon* is another. It is part of the healing process."⁸² Both media, however, revealed a willingness in this period to engage issues which the American public was not ready to consider in the immediate aftermath of the war. Consequently, while controversy and debate about the war continues to this day, by the end of the 1980s the nation seemed to have begun the long-sought-after "healing process" over Vietnam.

Endnotes

1. Ngor himself was a Cambodian refugee and a non-professional actor, which added to the "realistic" texture of the film. He later appeared in several other films about the Vietnam War, including Stone's *Heaven and Earth*.

2. See Jerry Adler and Ron Moreau, "The Devil's Due," *Newsweek*, 30 June 1997, 40-44, which discusses the history of Pol Pot's terror regime as well as the implications for the future of Cambodia of his trial in Fall, 1997.

3. As mentioned in Chapter Three, David Hare's play *Saigon: Year of the Cat* (as well as its film version, directed by Stephen Frears, 106 min., Thames TV/HBO Home Video, 1983) examined this issue in a broader Western context regarding the abandonment of Saigon by various allies. *Miss Saigon*, which opened on Broadway in 1991 and is still playing to packed houses in New York City, would also address the notion of an American "betrayal" of South Vietnam and our allies.

4. Auster and Quart, 118.

5. A critical backlash developed around Steven Spielberg's 1993 film *Schindler's List* in relation to a similar issue. In that film, the director examined the Holocaust but foregrounded the story of a non-Jew, Schindler, who was also a member of the Nazi party. Consequently, some critics complained that the Jewish characters like Ben Kingsley's Stein were relegated to secondary status and suffered from a lack individuation as a result. See Caryn James, "Film View: Seeing 'Schindler' Plain," *New York Times*, 23 January 1994, 13, for a good analysis of the various responses to the film.

6. *The Killing Fields*, directed by Roland Joffe, 141 min., Swank Motion Pictures, 1984, videocassette. See also the play and film versions of actor Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia*, which describe his experiences in Asia during the filming of *The Killing Fields*.

7. Frank Beaver, *Oliver Stone: Wakeup Cinema*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 84-85, 8-9.

8. Aljean Harmetz, "Unwanted 'Platoon' Finds Success as U.S. Examines The Vietnam War," *New York Times*, 9 February 1987, C13.

9. Orion Pictures "Production Notes" for *Platoon*, November 1986 (clipping file "Platoon," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center).

10. David Denby, "New Year's Bonus," *New York*, 19 January 1987, 78.

11. Corliss, 54-61.

12. J. Hoberman, "Review of Platoon," *Village Voice*, 23 December 1986, 79; and David Halberstam, "Two Who Were There View 'Platoon': The Correspondent," *New York Times*, 8 March 1987, 38.

13. See, for example, Bob Drury, "No one Leaves the Vietnam of 'Platoon' Unmoved," *Newsday*, 26 February 1988, 5. In this article, a number of patrons--veterans and non-veterans alike--were interviewed after seeing the film at a theatre in Queens, New York. One Vietnam veteran, a "Ricky from Elmhurst," called the film "utter and complete bull," while Korean War veteran Morton Kaplan stated that "I can identify with warfare, I can identify with fighting the Orientals, and I just don't think this film is a suitable vehicle to influence public opinion on a national level." In Richard Corliss's prominent cover story on the "phenomenon" of the film in *Time*, "veteran Bob Duncan argued that Stone 'managed to take every cliché--the 'baby killer' and 'dope addict'--that we've lived with for the past twenty years and stick them in *the* movie about Viet Nam," 57. Veteran James E. Howley's review in *Army Times*, 23 March 1987, 27, reacted to the character of Barnes by observing that "he likes killing.... We who were there remember him. He was to be feared by both the enemy and us. If he was lucky, he died there long ago." In his concluding remarks, Howley commented that "folks asked me if I was glad I saw the movie. No, I'm not glad, but I'm not sorry either. The movie isn't something to be proud of, but it's not something to be ashamed of either. I guess that's what makes it so real. It's a lot like the war." Other more politically radical critics like Tod Ensign, "'Platoon': A Movie Review," *Citizen Soldier*, Summer 1987, and Michael Klein (in Dittmar and Michaud), argued that the village scene ignored the deliberate involvement of the American chain of command in such atrocities during the war. As Ensign put it: "Stone somehow makes the viewer understand how these frightened and angry boys can commit such unspeakable acts, while at the same time refusing to condone them. In Stone's script however, this episode takes place without any participation by field grade officers. We know, for example, that high ranking officers planned the attack on My Lai and were in radio contact with their men even as the massacre was taking place. My point isn't that isolated atrocities were not committed by individual GIs. But rather that most massacres were the result of policies directed from the top and it's harmful to obscure this fact for today's audience.... My fear is that young people will walk away from seeing 'Platoon' understanding that 'war is hell,' but understanding nothing more.... It's as if the My Lai massacre was resolved with the conviction of Lt. Calley," 11-12 (despite much evidence indicating that Calley's superior officers had ordered the attack on My Lai, Calley was the only American soldier convicted at the military trial). Similarly, Klein contends that "*Platoon* erases the context of the war from historical memory. Foregrounding an American soldier's myopic perspective on the morality of several decontextualized moments of combat, it blots out the history of Mongol, French, and U.S. occupation of Vietnam and centuries of Vietnamese resistance, as well as the general thrust of U.S. military counterinsurgance policy and the genocidal actions that it sanctioned," 28-29.

14. Robert Jay Lifton noted that many veterans who were draftees complained of being harassed by the "lifers" about issues of military discipline. One draftee actually told Lifton that "the war between us and them was just as great or greater than the war between us and the Vietnamese." As Lifton put it, in this regard the war in Vietnam became "a malignant crucible of the conflicts of American society," reflecting the "war between the generations" which took place on the American home front during the 1960s era, *Home From the War*, 230-231. Again, the depiction of such conflicts in the aesthetic representations of the Vietnam War significantly erased the impression of wartime unity created by earlier works from the combat genre. Stone himself recalled that "on one side were the lifers, the juicers (heavy drinkers) and the moron white element. Guys like Sergeant Barnes--and there really was a sergeant as scarred and obsessed as Barnes--were in this group. On the other side was a progressive, hippie, dope-smoking group: some blacks, some urban whites, Indians, random characters from odd places. Guys like Elias--

and there really was an Elias, handsome, electric, the Cary Grant of the trenches. They were out to survive this bumper with some integrity and a sense of humor. I fell in with the progressives--a Yale boy who heard soul music and smoked dope for the first time in his life"; in Corliss, 60.

15. Drury, 5.

16. Clyde Taylor, "The Colonialist Subtext in *Platoon*," in Dittmar and Michaud, 171. However, *Bat 21*, directed by Peter Markle, 105 min., Tri-Star Pictures, 1988, videocassette, revolved around two characters: a downed white officer played by Gene Hackman, and the Black pilot--intelligently portrayed by the talented Danny Glover--who courageously risked his life to guide him to safety. This film is an atypical Hollywood product in that Glover's character is well educated, complex, heroic, and almost shares equal screen time with the white lead. Interestingly, only one token Hispanic soldier is present in *Platoon* and other films such as *Full Metal Jacket*, although a large number of Hispanic American GIs also served in Vietnam.

17. John Dower locates the origin of the term "gook" in America's war in the Philippines (beginning in 1898), where American troops referred to Filipino "insurgents" as "gorillas," "niggers," "treacherous savages," and "treacherous gugus" or "goo-goos." The latter term eventually became "gook" and resurfaced in World War Two as an epithet for the Japanese, although Americans more typically referred to them as "nips," "Japs," and various riffs on "monkeys," and "apes" (e.g., "monkeynips"), 151-152, 86. Thus, while the term "gook" is most commonly considered as an American racial epithet for the Vietnamese during the war, it actually has a long history of usage in terms of denigrating a variety of Asian opponents from earlier American wars.

18. Lifton, 191-201. Veteran Mark Smith commented on the cultural gap between the Americans and Vietnamese which contributed to the development of such attitudes and behaviors as follows: "we knew that the people who lived there probably lived normal lives that we might even understand if we were part of it. But we weren't part of it--all we saw were the people staring at us like we were from Mars"; interviewed in *Vietnam: A Television History*, Episode Five: "America Takes Charge: 1965-1967," produced by Andrew Pearson, 60 min., Sony, 1983, videocassette.

19. Moy, 36. In her essay "Male Bonding, Hollywood Orientalism, and the Repression of the Feminine in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*," Susan White observes that *Full Metal Jacket* and a number of other Vietnam War films echo earlier Hollywood works which "conflate various Eastern cultures with corrupt sexuality, a degraded or treacherous femininity, and male homoeroticism"; in Anderegg, 217, 216.

20. Alter, 129, 130.

21. Jeffords, 73, 68-71. The increasing involvement of women in combat as during the Gulf War, however, will test the future parameters of such traditional views of "men at war" (as well as the subsequent fictional representations of those conflicts). Eric Weston's Vietnam War film *The Iron Triangle* (1988) speaks to the typical absencing of women in war when its protagonist and narrator, Captain Keene, comments on the rare appearance of a female ARVN propaganda officer as follows: "some sights in a war you will always remember--a beautiful woman is one of them."

22. Keen, 58.

23. Emily Mann, *Still Life: A Documentary* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1982); in *Coming to Terms*, 230-31.

24. Brian DePalma, *Casualties of War*, 120 min., 1989, Columbia-Tristar, videocassette. The film is based on a brutal incident during the war where a group of soldiers kidnapped, raped, and murdered a young Vietnamese girl for their "amusement." Eventually, a member of the squad (played by Michael J. Fox) who refused to participate in the gang-rape initiated an investigation which resulted in jail sentences for the other soldiers. As the main thrust of the plot deals with the abduction of the girl as well as the soldiers' subsequent attempts to cover up their actions, perhaps no other film goes so far in depicting the kind of "gook syndrome" attitudes and abuses which many veterans discussed in their counseling sessions with Lifton. Of course, while these particular soldiers were eventually charged and convicted for their crimes, many other cases of murder and rape occurred during the war without any legal consequences.

25. Shohat and Stam, 156-157, 161-165.

26. See, for example, Caputo, *A Rumor of War*, in which the author tells of his court-martial trial for shooting Vietnamese villagers (he was acquitted); or Mark Baker, *Nam* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1981), an "oral history" of the war in which a number of veterans describe shooting, abusing, and raping defenseless Vietnamese civilians. *Vietnam, A Television History*, Episode Five, contains an unusual interview in 1983 with both American soldiers and Vietnamese villagers who were involved in an American assault on a village during the war. The Americans describe being pinned down outside the village by VC fire in one-hundred degree heat without food, water, and sleep for thirty-six hours. As Private Jack Hill recalled, after enduring such conditions and hearing their wounded buddies cry for their mothers all night, the Americans were a "bundle of nerves" by the time they entered the village. Hill claimed that the Vietnamese were unwilling to come out of their hiding places and "hootches," and described a general environment of fear, frustration, and chaos not unlike the scene depicted in *Platoon*. For Hill, the Americans had orders to round up the Vietnamese and question them, and they followed their "normal procedure--especially after three days"--to accomplish that task. Nguyen Bay, a villager who was in the fourth grade at the time of the incident, claimed that the "soldiers used their guns in a very brutal manner," shooting people at will and beating them with gun butts ("it was so horrible I can't describe it all"). Similarly, villager Le Thi Ton recalled that ten of her family members were present when the Americans approached them, and that the soldiers threw a grenade into their home which killed everyone except for herself. Although they tried to greet the soldiers, she observed that the Marines "laughed" at them and "seemed to hate us." Private Hill acknowledged that perhaps some Vietnamese "got in the way" of machine gun fire, but felt that an angry eighteen year old would not show remorse under such circumstances. He responded further as follows: "I didn't shoot any old ladies and kids, *half* [italics mine] the guys in my squad didn't shoot any old ladies and kids--that wasn't the fight there.... Hey, you can't take it, we couldn't take it--like I said, I can't account for every Marine that was there, what they done, at that particular time they done it because they felt that's what they had to do. I can't account for how they acted, you know, everybody's got their own way but, if he [Nguyen Bay] seen it that way, that's the way he seen it. The way I seen it, it was war." In Hill's final comments from the

interview, he described his ongoing sorrow regarding his fallen buddies, but noted that "I couldn't give a damn what happened inside that village--that's my personal feeling."

27. Bill Erhart, and Mark Smith in subsequent quote; interviewed in *Vietnam: A Television History*, Episode Five.

28. Halberstam, 38.

29. Vincent Canby, "'Platoon' Finds New Life in the Old War Movie," *New York Times*, 1 January 1987, 21.

30. Sam Fuller; quoted in *The Combat Film*, American Cinema series, videocassette.

31. See Beaver, 83-84, where the real-life models for Barnes and Elias were described as follows: "Stone was assigned to four different units--suffering two wounds while in combat and encountering the soldiers who would serve as the prototypes for *Platoon's* assortment of characters. As a naive ex-New York City boy, he was especially taken with two men of different but superb soldiering instincts--one a 23-year-old in the First Calvary's Long range Reconnaissance Patrol, who was turned on by the dangers of the war but could still draw a moral line when it came to killing. The other was a sergeant--an angry loner and the "best soldier" Stone ever met--who had a near-obsessive penchant for killing and getting even. These two men would become, respectively, Elias and Barnes in Stone's imaginative retelling of his Vietnam experiences." See also "Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies (A Conversation between Mark C. Carnes and Oliver Stone), *Cineaste* 22 (1997): 33-37; and Gary Crowds, "History, Dramatic License, and Larger Historical Truths: An Interview with Oliver Stone," *Cineaste* 22 (1997): 38-42, where Stone readily admits to taking liberties with historical details in search of larger "truths" in all of his films.

32. Pauline Kael, "Review of *Platoon*," *New Yorker*, 12 January 1986, 95.

33. Sydelle Kramer, "Review of *Platoon*," *Cineaste* 15 (1987): 50.

34. Erhart, *Vietnam: A Television History*, Episode Five, videocassette.

35. Beaver, 97.

36. Klein; in Dittmar and Michaud, 97.

37. The success of *Platoon* also quickly inspired television imitators such as *Tour of Duty*, which premiered on CBS in September, 1987. See Daniel Miller, "Primetime Television's Tour of Duty"; in Anderegg, 166-189. *China Beach*, which ran on television from 1988-1991, also capitalized on the increased public interest about the war in the wake of *Platoon*, but focused on the activities of a group of nurses in a hospital unit as opposed to a field unit of grunts. See Carolyn Reed Vartanian, "Women Next Door to War"; in Anderegg, 190-203. Shirley Lauro's play *A Piece of My Heart* (New York: Samuel French, 1988) also explored the impact of the war on a group of American nurses who served in Vietnam.

38. *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone, 120 min., Hemdale and Orion Pictures, 1986, videocassette ; and Stone, *Platoon*, 129, 79, 94.

39. *Hamburger Hill*, directed by John Irvin, 110 min., Paramount Pictures, 1987, videocassette. In contrast, *Gardens of Stone*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 112 min., Tri-Star Pictures, 1987, videocassette, was set entirely on the American home front during the war. Its main conflict involves two "lifer" Sergeants and Vietnam veterans, Goody Nelson and Clell Hazard (James Earl Jones and James Caan), who yearn to train recruits to survive in the jungles of Vietnam but have been assigned against their will to the burial detail at Arlington Cemetery (which they sneeringly refer to as "toy soldier" duty). The grizzled vets soon take a liking to an idealistic young soldier (D.B. Sweeney) who later ships off to Vietnam where he becomes disillusioned and is eventually killed. Although the sergeants are openly critical of American involvement in the Vietnam War, they relish army life, and Coppola's direction fetishizes their military rituals and macho hijinks (e.g., bar-room brawls and birthday shoulder punching) with loving detail. And while Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* was saturated with countercultural references and influences, in *Gardens of Stone* he too portrays the anti-war movement in a stereotypical manner through the character of a drunken, obnoxious protester (played by 1960s rock impresario Bill Graham) who confronts Clell at a party. In response to such an abrasive left-wing attack, the sergeant quickly and efficiently breaks his jaw in righteous indignation, egged on by a supportive "patriotic" bartender.

40. Lanning, 241.

41. Elliot Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POW* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 54.

42. Ibid., 55, 62-63. *The Hanoi Hilton*, directed by Lionel Chetwynd, 130 min., Cannon Films, 1987, videocassette.

43. Alexander Walker, "Stanley Kubrick's War Realities," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1987, 28.

44. David Denby, "Review of *Full Metal Jacket*," *New York*, 13 June 1997, 54.

45. White, 206.

46. Denby, 54.

47. White, 210.

48. Auster and Quart, 35.

49. White, 212.

50. Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 83, 223. In addition, see Jefford's interesting analysis of this work, *The Remasculinization of America*, 22-36, 43-45.

51. White, 214.

52. Ibid., 210-214.

53. Not surprisingly, former Vietnam journalist Michael Herr, whose memoir *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1968; reprint, New York: Avon Books, 1978) was critically acclaimed for uniquely capturing the dark, surrealistic nature of the war, co-authored the screenplay to *Full Metal Jacket* along with Kubrick and Gustav Hasford (based upon Hasford's novel *The Short-Timers*, New York: Harper and Hill, 1979). *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, 118 min., Warner Brothers, 1987, videocassette.

54. See, for example, Dave Kehr, "Kubrick's void: What does 'Jacket' mean? Absolutely nothing," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 July 1987, 8, where he critiques the film as follows: "intended neither to entertain nor educate, 'Full Metal Jacket' is a deliberately useless film--and uselessness is one concept our utilitarian culture has never been able to assimilate. The film's power to disturb and provoke comes not from what it says about 'war,' but from its refusal to speak at all."

55. *Forrest Gump*, directed by Robert Zemeckis, 142 min., Paramount Pictures, 1994, videocassette. The film's episodic journey through the 1960s and 1970s includes a section where its title character is drafted and sent to Vietnam. The war is mostly depicted through a montage sequence which conveys the discomfort (e.g., sleeping in the rain) and endless marches through the jungle which Stone so aptly captured in *Platoon*. The film, like many others after *Platoon*, also scores these scenes and transitions with "classic" 1960s rock music. The ambush which almost wipes out Forrest's squad echoes *Platoon* in its suddenness and ferocity, and imitates Stone's film stylistically by viscerally immersing the viewer into the chaos and terror of combat. Overall, the film relies on a number of visual and aural signifiers most popularized by Stone in *Platoon* to quickly convey the sensory "experience" of Vietnam. While perhaps fresh in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s references such as helicopters, "search and destroy" missions, and period rock music served as cliché signposts which immediately signaled "Vietnam" to film goers.

56. *In Country*, directed by Norman Jewison, 116 min., Warner Home Video, 1989, videocassette.

57. Beaver, 127-29.

58. See Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: Pocket Books), 54-56, 171, 112. The film opens with a visual scene of the childhood Kovic playing "army" with his neighborhood buddies (several of whom were also wounded or killed in Vietnam), which is recalled in a voiceover by the adult Kovic with an almost mystical awe. Generally, however, the book places a far greater emphasis on how such childhood games helped shape Kovic's desires to become a war "hero." And while Kovic mentions doing a "John Wayne thing" in the film while describing getting shot to a veteran friend (i.e., after initially being wounded in his foot, he challenged the enemy to keep shooting until he received his more serious spinal injury), the picture mostly ignores the influence of Hollywood on his expectations of war. In contrast, his memoir recalls how he and his childhood friends watched John Wayne and Audie Murphy films "every Saturday afternoon" and yearned for the day when they too could become "men" and go off to war. The book is also riddled with bitter, sardonic references to Hollywood and American pop culture, as when he describes Vietnam as "the glory John Wayne war" or agonizes that he

gave his "dead dick for John Wayne and Howdy Doody ... nobody ever told me I was going to come back from this war without a penis."

59. See Kovic, 144-84. At one point in this section, Kovic describes the initial appeal of joining the veteran anti-war organization as follows: "all of a sudden everything seemed to change--the loneliness seemed to vanish. I was surrounded by friends.... I began to feel closer to them than I ever had to the people at the university and at the hospital and all the people who welcomed me back to Massapequa." Despite the emotional intensity of Stone's film version, it fails to capture the psychological and political complexity of Kovic's memoir (although Kovic himself co-authored the final screenplay with Stone).

60. Despite receiving mixed reviews, *Born on the Fourth of July* scored at the box office and received eight Award nominations (winning four Oscars, including another Best Director honor for Stone), Beaver, 142.

61. *Born on the Fourth of July*, directed by Oliver Stone, 145 min., Universal, 1989, videocassette.

62. Toby Silverman Zinman, "Search and Destroy: the Drama of the Vietnam War," *Theatre Journal* 42 (March 1990): 5.

63. David Berry, *G.R. Point* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1980), 59.

64. DiFusco et al., 7, 70.

65. Ibid., 71.

66. David Kaufman, "Tracers at the Public Theater; *Life and Limb* at Playwrights Horizons," *Aquarian Weekly*, 20 February 1985, 11. Similarly, a Fall, 1997 revival of the play was touted in *New York*, 15 September 1997, as follows: "Apocalypse Then--and Now--long before *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Born on the Fourth of July*, there was *Tracers*, the cannily restrained memory play by John DiFusco and eight Vietnam veterans," 87.

67. Zinman, 8.

68. DiFusco and et al., 71.

69. Mann, and for subsequent quote; in *Coming To Terms*, 214-215.

70. Peter Weiss, "Notes on the Contemporary Theater," trans. Joel Agee; in Margaret Herzfeld-Sander, ed., *Essays on German Theatre* (New York: Continuum, 1985), 294-303. Julius Novick, "Review of *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?*," by Eric Bentley, *New York Times*, 3 December 1972 (clipping file, "Drama--Types of--Documentary," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center). Larry S. Ledford, "Emily Mann: Remembering 'Greensboro' at McCarter," *Back Stage*, 9 February 1996, 15.

71. See Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), which generally suggests that while relations between Black and white soldiers were often hostile behind the lines, the racially mixed units functioned without conflict while in the field.

72. Berry, 14, 21-22; DiFusco et al., 61-62.
73. Berry, 11, 33, 19, 38-39; Mann, 228, 240-43; DiFusco et al., 45-47.
74. Berry, 38-39.
75. Ibid., 33.
76. DiFusco et al., 28-30, 31; Mann, 242, 232, 268-69, 237, 239.
77. Berry, 7, 53; DiFusco, et al., 30, 37-38, 14-16; *Platoon*; Mann, 240-44, 222, 271, 231, 237, 253.
78. Dower, 14.
79. See Dower, "Chapter Three: War Hates and War Crimes," 33-73, where he catalogues a wide range of brutal atrocities committed by both American and Japanese soldiers in the Pacific War. For example, he cites Charles Lindbergh's journal during his time as a "civilian observer" in New Guinea during 1944, as with the following observation from July 13: "it was freely admitted that some of our soldiers tortured Jap prisoners and were as cruel and barbaric at times as the Japs themselves. Our men think nothing of shooting a Japanese prisoner or soldier attempting to surrender. They treat the Japs with less respect than they would give to an animal, and these acts are condoned by almost everyone," 69-70. While the "Jap" atrocities were well-represented in many films of the period, the OWI and Hollywood never allowed the movies to depict Americans as committing similar acts. Again, a major distinction here is that any torture and execution of Japanese at the hands of Americans during the war typically involved uniformed soldiers. Thus, wartime and post-war accounts of such incidents rarely expressed any remorse. In contrast, many Vietnam veterans were haunted by wartime conditions which led them to shoot people who were less definitively marked as "the enemy" (i.e., women, old people, and children who were possibly involved in supporting the VC, or who perhaps became innocent victims of American troops abusing their power in the field).
80. Zinman, 25-26.
81. Mann, 271-74, 271; Berry, 51, 52-53; DiFusco et al., 66, 57-59, 57.
82. Corliss, 57.

Chapter Six: Whose Vietnam?

With the advent of the 1990s, several new patterns emerged in American filmic and theatrical representations of the war. In some ways, the passage of time after the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam in 1973 had created an aesthetic distance of sorts from the war. Thus, both audiences and artists were able to view the conflict--and the Vietnamese--from a broader perspective as its twentieth anniversary approached. While the war remained an ongoing source of emotional turmoil for some Americans, the various milestones of the intervening years (e.g., The Vietnam War Memorial, *Platoon*, etc.) had helped our nation "come to terms" with many of the legacies of Vietnam. The change in American attitudes about our involvement in the war was most clearly reflected in the improvement of relations between the US and the Communist dominated government of Vietnam by the 1990s. The issue of American troops who were still "Missing in Action" had been the major impediment to restoring diplomatic and economic relations between the two nations since the end of the war. With Vietnam struggling economically and eager for American investment, however, its leaders seemed to be making an increasingly acceptable effort to resolve this issue for the American government as the decade progressed. While it was technically illegal for Americans to travel to Vietnam for many years, a number of veterans had in fact returned there in order to revisit former sites of combat, hoping to reach some closure concerning their wartime experiences. By 1994, the US had finally lifted its trade embargo with Vietnam and diplomatic sanctions were eventually removed as well. As a result, Saigon has recently become a "hot spot" for young American entrepreneurs, and travel packages to Vietnam have become standard in the American tourist industry--many of which contain visits to various war related areas.¹ Thus, while the flurry of Vietnam War representations produced after the success of *Platoon* had lessened in volume by the

1990s, Vietnam remained "in the news" throughout the decade. Similarly, cinematic and theatrical depictions of the war have continued to emerge at a slower, but still steady, pace up to the present time.

The works of this period demonstrated an increasing emphasis on an area which had once been of lesser interest to Americans struggling to fit the war into their fractured sense of national identity and myth: namely, the role of the Vietnamese in the war, both those we fought against and those we fought for. This development took place over several phases, however, beginning with two films in the 1980s which placed a far greater focus on the Vietnamese people and/or issues affecting them in relation to the war, Louis Malle's *Alamo Bay* (1985) and Barry Levinson's *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987). Thus, my final chapter will initially address these two movies and their impact on the ongoing Vietnam War film canon. Other American works on stage and film which went beyond such generally sympathetic portrayals of the Vietnamese to depict the war from their point-of-view will also be analyzed. Oliver Stone's 1993 film *Heaven and Earth* and the 1991 musical *Miss Saigon* are the most high-profile works in this regard. I will then consider how this interest in exploring less dominant voices in the Vietnam discourse was extended to representing the impact of the war on Black Americans for the first time in Hollywood. Finally, my chapter will conclude with a discussion of various Vietnamese-produced films about the war, with special attention given to how these works compare and contrast to American-made recreations and interpretations of the war.

Alamo Bay, the first of these post-war works to involve Vietnamese characters to a significant degree, was made by the French director Louis Malle. It was, however, produced and released by an American studio and featured well-known American actors like Ed Harris in the leading American roles. Set in a small town on the Gulf Coast of Texas, the film's opening credits state that it was "inspired by a series of incidents" which occurred there between 1979 and 1981. *Alamo Bay* examines the conflict that developed

in this period between Vietnamese refugees or "boat people" (some 10,000 of them settled in Texas by the 1980s) and the indigenous white population over competition for the declining shrimping industry there. The film opens with the arrival of an optimistic Vietnamese refugee named Dinh (Ho Nguyen) who dreams of making his fortune in America. Upon entering town, he joins the expatriate Vietnamese community who live in what the American locals have labeled "slop city."

The essence of the film examines the escalating tensions and intercultural misunderstandings between the two groups. The Vietnamese, like other earlier immigrant groups who came to America, want to work hard and become good Americans. Their attempts at cultural assimilation are evident in their efforts to play baseball, join the Catholic church, and dress in the local regalia of cowboy hats and boots. Alas, their enthusiasm leads them to break American laws as when they illegally shrimp the bay at night, or discard their waste in the waters which interferes with the nets of the "native" fisherman. In addition, the budding capitalists don't understand American and/or local traditions of private property, as when the unsuspecting Dinh marches through his outraged neighbor's yard or the Vietnamese fisherman invade without hesitation the "family fishing grounds" of local hero Shang Pierce (Ed Harris).

The crux of their conflict over the increasingly limited fishing resources is revealed at a town meeting where an American board member tells a Vietnamese priest that his congregation "works too hard." It seems that none of the locals anticipated that the Vietnamese would eventually want to own their own boats, or offer stiff competition to the local shrimpers. Thus, the white "natives" are clearly uneasy over the entrepreneurial spirit of the Vietnamese as well as their unwillingness to "stay in their place." Ironically, the same impulse for financial mobility had attracted various white ethnic immigrant groups to America in earlier times (e.g., Irish, Italians, Jews, etc.), many of whom also experienced discrimination from more established groups on grounds of economic competition and

cultural/religious Otherness. The tension between the Vietnamese immigrants and the established populace is distinct from the earlier immigration cycles in that the Vietnamese, of course, had fled from a country where Americans were involved in a recent war. Indeed, many of the local fisherman, including Shang, are Vietnam veterans. Thus, their prejudice against the Vietnamese, albeit exacerbated by the rising conflict over economic issues, was also an extension of their wartime racism and preconceived negative perceptions of the Vietnamese as a whole as "gooks" (as embodied in Lifton's "gook syndrome" attitudes). This becomes especially clear in that the immigrants were all on "our side" during the war--the very people whom in theory we were fighting to protect against the Communists. Dinh himself tells his boss Glory (Amy Madigan) that at one point he "ate grass for a week" in order to survive in the jungle after the Communists took control of his village. Consequently, the conflict very quickly takes on severe racial overtones.

The Vietnamese are mostly employed at Wallace Seafood by Wally (Donald Moffat) and his daughter Glory, which causes the white shrimpers to boycott his business. Similarly, Glory, who has rekindled an old romance with the unhappily married Shang, is increasingly criticized for her support of the Vietnamese workers. A local barmaid tells her that she "no longer belongs in this town," and after losing his boat for failure to make loan payments, Shang rejects Glory and tells her to "go back to your gooks and your gook business." The racial tensions peak with the involvement of the Texas Ku Klux Klan, whose leader tells the local good old boys that "history is with the white race." While the white townsmen's hatred and fear of the Vietnamese as "gooks" are grounded in contemporary events, the appearance of armed white locals in Klan robes places the conflict in a larger historic context of American racial prejudice against non-white Others. This frame is accentuated when Luis, Wally's Hispanic foreman, responds to the outraged white shrimpers inquiries about his attitude towards the Vietnamese by stating "I think I'm a Mexican." Thus, he displays his solidarity with the Vietnamese on the grounds of their

cultural and racial difference from the American "gringos." The specter of racism also enters the conflict through Shang's outrage over Dinh's attention to Glory. As Renny Christopher observes in her discussion of the film, its rather abstract characterization of Dinh is exacerbated by Malle's failure to allow him to be considered as a potential sexual partner for Glory.² Although Shang accuses her of having sexual relations with Dinh, she dismisses him as a "kid." Shang's paranoid fear of "his woman" becoming involved with a "yellow man" reflects the long tradition of American "rape and rescue" motifs extending back to early pioneer tales of Indian savages kidnapping white women (as discussed in earlier chapters).

Still, the more immediate legacy of the war looms over the situation when Shang's buddies call for a "little search and destroy" against the Vietnamese, again failing to recognize that the refugees were not our official enemy during the war (and were in fact our allies). The deep-seated nature of their cultural biases is revealed when a local woman yells during a town meeting, "my boy fought the VC over there, and now they're right here taking the bread out of our mouths." Indeed, when the Klan burns a cross on the grounds of the Vietnamese church, they shout "America for Americans," "death to the gooks," and "death to the Cong." Thus, just as during the war, for some Americans any "gook" was still a VC or the enemy. The wartime cultural barriers and tensions are extended even more dramatically to the post-war home front in the film's climactic scene, when Dinh and his buddy Ben engage in a "firefight" with Shang and two of his veteran cohorts (ironically, the Vietnamese men wield American-made M-16 rifles). Each side takes a casualty until Shang pins down the helpless Dinh. As he starts to beat the man to death, Glory arrives and kills him. The film ends with the dazed Glory being led past her peers, all of whom seem horrified that she would have killed Shang to protect one of "them." Thus, in terms of the town's racial taxonomy, she has committed the ultimate sin by letting down "her side," the white race.

The film is unusual in its extensive depiction of the cultural interactions between the Americans and Vietnamese. In addition, it puts another new twist on the familiar topic of the "Vietnam veteran" by revealing how the prejudiced interactions of some veterans with the Vietnamese were extended to a post-war environment at home in America. The veterans' ethnocentric attitudes towards the Vietnamese echoes those of the disgruntled vets from the early 1980s "Rambo" type films, and Shang's comment that "we defend everybody all over the world but there's no protection for any American--that ain't right" could easily have been muttered by Rambo himself. Still, at least in the Rambo/Braddock sub-genre, the veterans only despise the Communist Vietnamese and recognize the contributions of other "good" Vietnamese to the American cause (regardless of the stereotypical or paternalistic nature of such representations). In *Alamo Bay*, most of the Americans only perceive the Vietnamese as "gooks," and therefore "Cong" as well. Although Malle never mentions it overtly, the locals' perception of the Vietnamese refugees' encroachment on "native American soil" also speaks to our abrupt abandonment of the South Vietnamese in 1975 under the Communist invasion from the North. While most veterans thought that they would be through with the Vietnamese forever after returning home to America, the geo-political realities of our foreign policy created a long-term legacy of responsibility to our former allies. Upon arriving on American land, the Vietnamese refugees or "boat people" thus rekindled the wartime animosity of some veterans like Shang. Consequently, the conflict in the town recreates the war metaphorically, but this time the site of battle is the American home front.

In this case, however, the townspeople are clearly portrayed as racist, petty rednecks despite their legitimate economic hardships. The Vietnamese, while perhaps overzealous, are admirable in their drive to obtain the American dream of economic prosperity and upward mobility. As is typical of Hollywood films, though, Shang and Glory are the principal characters, while Dinh is clearly relegated to supporting role status.

Most of the Vietnamese characters also don't speak any English, which particularly renders them abstract in this film. *Alamo Bay* was one of the first studio films beyond the *The Killing Fields* to engage a topic which involved Asian characters in relation to the war on a significant level. In terms of developing this atypical material, however, the film still approached the Vietnamese characters and community in ways which were similar to many earlier war pictures.³ In contrast, Barry Levinson's *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987) would emerge as the first studio film to explore in detail the intercultural encounter between the American and Vietnamese during the war itself.

The film is set in 1965 during the period when President Johnson first began to escalate the involvement of American ground troops in the war. The thin plot follows the anti-authoritarian antics of an armed forces disc jockey in Vietnam named Adrian Cronauer (played by the noted stand-up comic/actor Robin Williams). The film's tone is an odd one in that ostensibly it was the first "Vietnam comedy," with many scenes of Cronauer's show seemingly present only to provide a forum for Williams's well-known impersonations and zany, improvisational shtick. However, the lighter aspects of the film are balanced with a more serious consideration of the war's impact as it "heats up" in both Saigon and the jungles of Vietnam. In that regard, it echoes Robert Altman's dark satire *M*A*S*H* (1970), which took a humorous slant on the Korean War while also graphically representing the horrific carnage of combat in its numerous scenes of field hospital operations on wounded American GIs.⁴

Levinson's film is also interesting in that the popular Cronauer in some ways represents the tradition of the American celebrity performer who would travel the sites of combat to entertain American "boys" during various American conflicts. Even during the less popular Vietnam War, old Hollywood stalwarts like Bob Hope, Jimmy Stewart, and John Wayne toured the army bases to boost morale.⁵ Cronauer's subversive style, however, reflected the growing influence of the home front "counterculture" which

eventually permeated the American ranks in Vietnam. He flaunts army regulations, makes fun of authority figures like "former VP Nixon," and plays rock-and-roll music much to the dismay of his "lifer" officers, who prefer to enjoy a "good polka." His humorless superiors are appalled by his lack of respect for authority, and his sergeant (J.T. Walsh), a former Green Beret who seems to be suffering from combat fatigue, actually deliberately sends him into VC-held territory in the hopes of eliminating his subversive program. The quick-witted Cronauer's mockery of these bureaucratic drones increasingly revealed a strong anti-war sentiment. Again, this perspective recalled *M*A*S*H* as well as other non-studio films produced during the war which criticized US involvement in Vietnam. Nonetheless, the film's bashing of military bureaucracy seems most influenced by Levinson's contemporary attempt to seem "hip," as when a general who admires Cronauer's irreverent humor tells a stiff-necked lieutenant that the expression "military intelligence" is an oxymoron. Such a moment, as well as the general's overall support of Cronauer's anarchic behavior, seems decidedly out of place in the world of the US army c. 1965.

The film, set mostly in Saigon, presents the most extensive portrayal of Vietnamese lifestyles and characters in a Hollywood film up to that point in time. Cronauer's rather immature humor constantly makes fun of Blacks, gays, and the Vietnamese, as when he mocks his Vietnamese students' accents while taking over an English class in order to meet an attractive young Vietnamese woman named Trinh (Chintara Sukapatana). Upon his arrival in Vietnam, he refers to the women as "dragon ladies" and jokes about how all of the attractive "girls" look alike to him. But Cronauer, the movie suggests, really *cares* about all of these people, so we should not in fact take any offense at his often condescending jokes. Interested in developing a relationship with Trinh, he befriends her brother Tuan (Tung Thanh Tran) in order to cultivate goodwill with her family. This leads to a number of interesting intercultural encounters which the other films of the Vietnam War

canon rarely explore. Tuan exposes Cronauer to aspects of Vietnamese life which most American GIs presumably ignore, as when he takes him into the side streets of Saigon for an authentic Vietnamese lunch. Being the "good American" that he is, Cronauer eyes the "odd" food with suspicion, but eventually tastes it in order to prove his respect for Tuan's culture. As Tuan grows to like and trust Cronauer, he eventually arranges a date between the "crazy American" and his sister. To Cronauer's dismay, however, their entire extended family comes along as chaperones, highlighting the cultural differences between the couple. The "Americanization" of Vietnamese culture as a result of our military presence there is effectively underscored when the family goes to the movies and watch Frankie Avalon in *Beach Blanket Bingo*.

Overall, the film's representation of the Vietnamese is amazingly uneven. On one level, it indulges in blatant stereotypes, as with the character of Jimmy Wah (Cu Ba Nguyen), who runs a bar which the American soldiers frequent. Jimmy, an extremely effeminate man who calls all of the Americans "Earl," is well-known for a sexual obsession involving Walter Brennan which the GIs find hilarious. Cronauer and his buddies treat him like a quaint little pet, and the smarmy DJ actually tells the green-suited Jimmy at one point that he "looks like an Oriental leprechaun." Thus, Jimmy's persona fulfills the most extreme Western expectations of a perverted and feminized "Oriental" culture and sexuality. In the scenes where Cronauer instructs his Vietnamese students, most of whom are old enough to be his parents, he decides to teach them "street English" which results in several patronizing scenes where the Vietnamese mimic Black American "jive" or yell "full of shit" while the class giggles uproariously. One of his elderly students (Uikey Kuay) also clings to his "reticence" in one interaction with Cronauer, thereby confirming the incredulous teacher's preconceived notions of the "passive Oriental." Indeed, all of the Vietnamese students find Cronauer's juvenile babbling hilarious, and they generally come across as congenial, child-like simpletons. Cronauer treats them with a jovial paternalism not unlike

Colonel Kirby's condescending behavior towards his Vietnamese "underlings" in *The Green Berets*. While Levinson's portrayal of the Vietnamese civilians was certainly more benevolent than the demonic representations of them seen in many post-war films, it also reinscribed earlier Hollywood misconceptions about "noble savages." In another scene, Tuan takes Cronauer to visit his sister in their village outside of the city. As with the film's initial depictions of Saigon before the American presence there escalates, the Vietnam countryside is visualized as a lush paradise with gentle winds blowing through the leaves of trees. The peasants in the village are seen as a simple, hard-working people to be admired along traditional "noble savage" lines, and they are not personalized in any way. Such constructions of an idealized Vietnam which was somehow more pure and unsullied before the American arrival seemed to reinforce Edward Said's notion that Westerners often approach the East in terms of an historically conditioned "idea" of a fictitious, generalized "Orient."⁶

In other ways, however, *Good Morning, Vietnam* surprisingly reverses the stock nature of its representations. For instance, when Cronauer takes Tuan into Jimmy's establishment, a couple of burly GIs come over and tell him that "gooks" are not welcome in an American bar. Cronauer and his friends defend Tuan's right to be there by engaging in a brawl with their fellow Americans. While this action serves to reassure the viewer that Cronauer is not a bigot despite his fondness for racial stereotyping, it is also rare for an American in any of these works to risk physical injury in order to defend a Vietnamese "friend." Certainly, Cronauer's personal relationship with Tuan and his family stands in marked contrast to the images of Americans abusing Vietnamese villagers in works like *Platoon* or *G.R. Point*. And the film is unusual in its willingness to depict any aspect of daily Vietnamese life, including Buddhist rituals at a local temple. Furthermore, the cinematic montages which show the escalating violence and American involvement in the war do serve to hint at the existence of a pre-war Vietnamese society. When Cronauer first

arrives in Saigon, one gets little sense of a war in progress except for the sight of an occasional American uniform. In contrast, the majority of American works before the mid-1980s were only interested in exploring the "American side" of the war, and thus tended to thrust the viewer into the conflict *in medias res*. Consequently, *Good Morning Vietnam* anticipated Stone's desire in *Heaven and Earth* to acknowledge that "Vietnam" was not just a war that involved America, but also a country with its own distinct history and culture. Tuan underscores this notion when he initially tells Cronauer that his affection for Trinh is "phony" as Americans, like the French before them, always "want something" from the Vietnamese.

The montage scenes also address, albeit briefly, the politics of the war by depicting South Vietnamese citizens protesting against the US backed government and being clubbed down by their own police. This governmental suppression of internal dissent against the war is linked to the American army's cover-up of any news which would acknowledge South Vietnamese opposition--especially VC activity. Thus, when the VC plant a bomb in Jimmy Wah's bar which kills several Vietnamese and American patrons, Cronauer's sergeant physically stops him from reporting the event which "never happened." Such censorship recalls American concerns in the early stages of the war about winning the "hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese people. Consequently, public recognition of intensive VC activity would seem counter-productive to American military maneuvers in the field as well as our propaganda efforts behind the lines. The army did, of course, eventually admit the presence of the VC in the media as the war progressed, but only as a minority of the South Vietnamese populace. Such "credibility gaps" contributed to the false reports of inflated "body counts" or enemy dead which gave the American public an overly-optimistic sense of an impending American victory prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive. Accordingly, as the film progresses, Cronauer becomes less interested in "being funny" on the air and more concerned with reporting an accurate picture of the war's escalation.

While all of these issues are undercut by Levinson's reliance on a number of standard Hollywood clichés and stereotypes, the film makes more of an effort to acknowledge some of the wider political and cultural implications of the war than many other previous studio releases.

This interest is most evident in Cronauer's relationship with Trinh and Tuan, which eventually emerges as more layered and complex than the film would initially suggest. Trinh is attracted to Cronauer, but recognizes that their cultural and political differences are too vast for them to become seriously involved. Despite her seemingly sheltered background, she is also savvy enough to understand that the American Cronauer wants a sexual relationship with her. Trinh, however, is not interested in "prostituting herself" through a short-term relationship with an American soldier. Thus, when Cronauer disingenuously claims that he seeks her "friendship," she bluntly tells him that only he and the male Tuan can be friends. In her words, "Vietnam ladies" are "not friends" with American GIs. One of the later montages depicts Trinh involved in the anti-government protests, and Tuan is eventually unmasked as a high-ranking VC, which of course also serve as impediments to their relationship. Trinh's lack of sexual involvement with Cronauer--not to mention the portrayal of her political activity--are a rarity in any American work about the war, and reflect the existence of a larger life outside of American interests (sexual or otherwise). Of course, given the film's constant shifting between the traditionally stereotypical and more unexpected three-dimensional representations of the Vietnamese, we also see the ubiquitous Vietnamese "boom-boom" girls soliciting Americans in Jimmy Wah's bar. But at least such depictions are balanced more fully in *Good Morning, Vietnam* by a major Vietnamese female character who is not presented as a prostitute.

Tuan's emergence as a VC "terrorist" is surely the most complex characterization in the film. Despite his involvement with that cause, his friendship with Cronauer leads him to pull the American out of Jimmy Wah's bar moments before it is bombed. In addition, he rescues Cronauer after he is ambushed by a group of VC en route to an interview with GIs in the field. This latter action raises the suspicion of Cronauer's "lifer" sergeant, who uses the information about Tuan's true identity to blackmail the subversive DJ into leaving Vietnam. Certainly, Tuan's loyalty to Cronauer seems rather far-fetched and a somewhat "Hollywoodized" attempt to show that "friendship" can transcend political differences, as Tuan would probably have been executed by his fellow VC for aiding an American. What this plot device accomplishes, however, is to humanize a "VC"--one of the mysterious, collective enemy in dozens of previous American films about the war--for the first time on screen in a major Hollywood picture. Indeed, the viewer gets to know and like the warm, intelligent Tuan throughout the movie before his true colors are revealed. In addition, through most of the picture, Tuan seems to act within the parameters of the Hollywood cliché of the "loyal Third World sidekick" to Cronauer, although he is initially more suspicious and opinionated than most. The fact that he has been concealing his identity as a VC--and not because he wanted to gain something from Cronauer, but rather out of a desire to form a personal relationship with him--cunningly subverts that traditional model of representation. Thus, while he is still the "enemy," our preconceived notions of that concept as conditioned through previous cinematic representations have been seriously challenged. This idea is underscored when Levinson shows the squad of VC searching for Cronauer in the jungle. Unlike most of the other films, they are depicted in daylight and are highly visible. And while obviously formidable opponents, they are also disconcertingly young (like Tuan, one of them is clearly in his mid-teens). Thus, the film puts a human face on the more common celluloid depiction of the VC as a shadowy, almost supernatural Other. In addition, the distinct youth of Tuan and some of his compatriots

speaks to the deep-rooted nature of the Vietnamese commitment to ousting the foreign presence from their soil, whether French or American.

Of course, Levinson allows Cronauer to confront Tuan in a Saigon back alley in order to lend the film an appropriately dramatic climax by Hollywood standards. Cronauer acts like a typically naive American when he bellows at Tuan, "I fought to get you into that bar--I gave you my friendship and trust, and now I find that my best friend is the Goddamned enemy!" Like Ambassador MacWhite in *The Ugly American*, Cronauer assumes that "friendship" should never be overshadowed by issues of politics, nationalism, imperialism, etc. His attitude also seems to reflect traditional American cultural expectations of "fairness," which of course exacerbated our confusion in confronting the guerrilla nature of the war in Vietnam. Tuan emotionally replies that Cronauer is "the enemy," telling him that his brother, neighbors, and parents were all killed by Americans. He clearly places the conflict in a racial context when he claims that Americans do not view the Vietnamese as "human." Cronauer, echoing MacWhite's earlier response to Deong's attack on American imperialism, can only sputter that "we're here to help this country," failing to acknowledge the complex interconnection of historical, cultural, and political issues involved in the deployment of American troops in Vietnam. Ultimately, Cronauer feels "betrayed" by having allowed himself to trust and befriend "one of them." After all, even after learning that Tuan was a VC, he sought the young man out to warn him about an impending army/CIA assassination attempt. Still, Hollywood being Hollywood, the film ensures that Cronauer will redeem his faith in the Vietnamese people and thus end on an artificial note of "feel-good" catharsis. On the way to the airport, Cronauer stops to play a game of makeshift baseball with his students (they pitch with melons--how quaint!). His Vietnamese pupils shower him with compliments and affection, stating that they will "miss him." Even Trinh shows up to "thank him for being so kind" and to wish him well. Thus, Cronauer and the viewer can rest assured that the

Americans really did some "good" in Vietnam after all, and that at least some of the Vietnamese people were appropriately grateful for his bountiful kindness. Despite its intelligent, multi-dimensional depiction of Tuan, then, the film ultimately falls back on the Hollywood penchant for reducing the political complexities of the war to glib personal relationships.

In this regard, *Good Morning, Vietnam* echoes the paternalism of pre-war Hollywood films towards "colonial" peoples,⁷ but to some extent subverts that tradition in Tuan's ultimate rejection of Cronauer. Although his loyalty to Cronauer is linked to a long line of loyal Hollywood "Third World" sidekicks like Gunga Din, at the end of the day Tuan is still a VC. And the picture gives a rare voice to his angry views of American imperialism and racism, although again it is softened by the film's huggy ending between Williams and the "loyal" Vietnamese. Overall, despite its flaws, the movie was significant in that it began an exploration of a number of issues related to the war's impact on the Vietnamese.⁸ Before Oliver Stone's film *Heaven and Earth* (1993) would attempt to portray a full-fledged "Vietnamese story" for the first time in a major studio release, Eric Weston's very interesting picture *The Iron Triangle* (1988) sought to examine the war from a perspective which incorporated the "other side" as well.

The film's initial credits tell us that it is "based on the diary of an unknown Vietcong soldier" over a montage of faux-documentary still photos which depict American and VC operations. These pictures, including a group shot of a VC unit in the jungle, immediately signal the viewer as to the atypical nature of the film's focus (Preston A. Whitmore II's 1995 film *The Walking Dead* establishes a similar intent by showing pictures of Black Marines in Vietnam during its opening sequence). *The Iron Triangle* is narrated by and told from the viewpoint of an American Captain Keene (Beau Bridges), who is captured by the Viet Cong after an ambush nearly annihilates his squad. During his

captivity, he gets to know and respect a seventeen year old VC named Ho (Liem Whatley) before he eventually escapes.

The Iron Triangle is interesting in its extensive "depiction of Vietcong organization, motivation, and life in the jungle and underground."⁹ Scenes of Keene's unit are intercut with those of Ho's VC cadre. The nationalist motivations of the VC become clear when Ho and his friend Pham (Wing Pu) discuss their lives as soldiers. Pham reveals that he once only wanted to be a farmer, but is now dedicated to driving the foreigners from his country. Ho is the educated son of a teacher from Saigon executed by "government troops" for venturing into the countryside without his passport, and a dedicated soldier whom the film presents as dutifully executing various South Vietnamese officials on charges of "treason." However, he has become disenchanted with the hardships of war and dreams of the comforts of hearth and home like his American opponents who yearn to go back to "the world." Alas, Pham tells Ho that for now he has "no choice but to continue to fight." Their political position towards the Americans becomes most clear when Ho later tells the prisoner Keene that he must answer for his "war crimes."

Other scenes explore the nature of the cadre's command structure as a party official named Koi (Jim Ishida) frequently challenges the authority of the unit's leader (*The Killing Fields* Hang S. Ngor). We also see the troops being "entertained" at a political meeting by a masked, agit-prop performance that enacts the VC's eventual defeat of the American "tyrants." The film strikes a false note in that the large group of clapping VC in the jungle would probably have alerted enemy troops as far away as Saigon. Otherwise, its exploration of the political views of the VC soldiers is quite striking. What is most interesting in this regard is the fact that Weston does not portray the VC guerrillas in monolithic terms. Rather, Koi is fiercely jealous of Ho's favored position in the unit and constantly looks for an opportunity to accuse him of disloyalty to their "cause." After Keene is captured, Koi tortures him so severely that Ho is moved to take the American to

their commander in order to save his life. This drives Koi to execute Pham for disloyalty and track Ho down as a traitor. Thus, the film atypically individualizes these characters enough so that we get a real sense of their contrasting personalities.

The depiction of the Americans is much more in keeping with previously established combat genre conventions. At the beginning of the film, a clean cut GI is seen risking his life to save a Vietnamese child in the midst of a firefight, and they are all full of bravado and élan about the American military mission in Vietnam. While being tortured, the hard-boiled Captain refuses to reveal vital information to the VC and will only tell them with gusto to "blow it out their ass." The combat scenes mostly revolve around fixed battles which occur in broad daylight with large numbers of troops involved on each side (even the VC ambush depicts the Americans and Vietnamese shooting at each other in the open at close range). These images most typically reflect the era of World War Two as captured on film, and even the American uniforms seem like those worn in the "good war." Although the film was shot in Sri Lanka, the terrain looked more like woods than jungle, which also contributed to the artificiality of these scenes. Most significantly, the film reverts back to the older combat film representations of Americans as honorable, altruistic soldiers à la John Wayne who are only fighting to "do a job" and then go home. And like Wayne's Colonel Kirby, Keene reacts in righteous indignation when he witnesses his ARVN counterpart torturing a VC suspect. After the South Vietnamese officer executes the prisoner to "save face," Keene tells him "to grow a pair of balls, get in the bush, and find his own prisoners." As with most other Vietnam War films, then, the South Vietnamese troops are depicted as cowardly and not worthy of American respect. This was a common pattern, in that some Americans identified the South Vietnamese as "losers" who ultimately surrendered their country to the Communists with little opposition in 1975. Thus, a reading of the war emerged in most of the Vietnam War films which in effect implied that they squandered the lives we risked to defend them. Consequently, the war was only

"lost" after we withdrew and they capitulated to the North. In contrast, the military efforts of the VC and NVA needed to be lauded in the films in order to help justify why we never "won" in the first place. This recurrent pattern is striking in that the military prowess of the enemy was rarely complimented in earlier works from the combat genre. If they won, it was only a temporary basis and often because they didn't "fight fair," but the superior American firepower and courage would eventually carry the day. The frequent portrayal of the ARVNS as cowards and the VC as "good soldiers" speaks to a post-war need in our culture and art to use the representation of Vietnamese soldiers in order to help reconcile our "losses" in Vietnam. Only in the period when the "Rambo/Braddock" type films dominated the Vietnam War canon did any of the pictures dismiss the Communist Vietnamese as inept opponents; a fantasy which created yet another justification for our losing the war.

Keene's views change dramatically, however, after being captured by Ho. As the VC leads him through the jungle, the two "enemies" get to know each other as individuals while they discuss politics, hometowns, etc. When Ho reveals to Keene a VC bridge that was built under water, or shows him how to live off plants growing in the jungle, the GI develops a clear respect for his tactical cunning and soldierly commitment. After Keene kills Koi, who shows up to reclaim his prisoner, he escapes and returns to the American camp to lead the troops in a successful, World War Two-like full frontal assault on a VC-held village. At the film's end, though, he captures the seriously wounded Ho and compassionately demands immediate medical attention for his "enemy." It is clear that he now perceives Ho as a person instead of just a VC, and his concluding voiceover confirms this change when he states: "I never saw him again, but I had come to understand that on the other side of the barrel of a gun, there was a man, like me." While Keene's final meeting with Ho after the battle is a rather pat plot contrivance, the development of their relationship is the most provocative aspect of the film. Weston's interest in stripping away

the construct of "enemy" for both sides in order to discover the humanity of these characters is highly effective. It also goes much further than Oliver Stone's later film *Heaven and Earth* in individualizing a number of Vietnamese characters without romanticizing their "peasant nobility."¹⁰

Still, *The Iron Triangle* is told from the traditional cinematic viewpoint of an American. In contrast, the intent of Stone's *Heaven and Earth* was different in that it sought to go beyond merely including the Vietnamese as part of a larger American story about the war. Rather, Stone's film purported to approach the war from the radically new viewpoint of the Vietnamese themselves. Based on the two volume memoirs of Vietnamese refugee Le Ly Hayslip,¹¹ the film also marked a departure for Stone in terms of its emphasis on a female protagonist. The pre-release publicity for *Heaven and Earth* emphasized the novelty of the film, with *Entertainment Weekly* officially touting it as "the first major American movie to examine the Vietnam War from a Vietnamese perspective."¹² Hayslip herself initially expressed concern about Stone's interest in filming her story, noting the plethora of earlier works depicting American involvement in the war. In addition, she feared that Stone "would rewrite my story the way he wanted to see it."¹³ Stone himself told an interviewer that "my enemies are going to say, 'It's Oliver Stone doing his political bulls--- again', but it's not. It's not me at all. I'm really letting her speak of what she went through."¹⁴ While the film does explore new cinematic territory for Stone in several ways, it never really depicts a "Vietnamese perspective" about the war. It is true that *Heaven and Earth* foregrounds the experience of a Vietnamese woman, which is a first for a Hollywood film. But the story of Hayslip's life is still filtered through the viewpoint of an American director, who also happens to be a male veteran of the war. As

with any director, what Stone offers for the viewer is his own very personal interpretation of Hayslip's memoirs. Regardless of his faithfulness to Hayslip's story, or the depth of her involvement with the film, it must invariably reflect his directorial--and undeniably American--vision to a significant degree. In short, Stone's claims about the film's non-Western frame and breakthrough representation of Vietnamese voices were rather disingenuous.

What *Heaven and Earth* does do is put Stone, previously known for his visceral, macho-oriented films, on somewhat unfamiliar cinematic ground. As Lan Cao noted in a *New York Times* article which discussed the film, "in 'Heaven and Earth,' Oliver Stone's third movie about my homeland, Vietnam has been given a new face. This time, it is not that of an American soldier but of a Vietnamese woman, as Mr. Stone interprets her...."¹⁵ In interviews, the director himself claimed that he "would have made the same story, however, if it had been about a man."¹⁶ Stone further denied any need for personal atonement as an American veteran as his primary motivation for making the film: "beyond any guilt, there is any enormous peasant knowledge--a love of the land, a love of ancestors ... we need to know what happened to the peasants of Vietnam." In relation to this question of perspective and representation of cultural identity, does *Heaven and Earth* in fact convey the story of the "peasants" of Vietnam in lieu of the more traditional focus on the American presence there? An examination of the film reveals a mixed answer, although it does depict village life in Vietnam to a significant degree.

The episodic plot begins with the seemingly idyllic childhood of Hayslip (played by Vietnamese émigré Thi Le, although the real-life Hayslip makes several cameo appearances in the film) in her village of Ky La, which is soon ravaged by the brutality of the French in the 1950s and the Viet Cong and the Americans in the 1960s. As with *Good Morning*,

Vietnam, the film atypically refers to a larger historical context of foreign aggression in Vietnam before the arrival of American troops. For instance, after French soldiers burn their house down, Hayslip's voiceover narration tells us "I will never forget my father's eyes as he watched our house burn to the ground. But as it had happened to our village for so many centuries, we rebuilt our lives." Later, shortly before the arrival of American troops, her father (Hang S. Ngor again) speaks of their family fighting against a slew of foreign invaders--Chinese, Japanese, French, and now potentially American. He warns her that "freedom is never a gift" and must be "won again and again." *Heaven and Earth* is especially unusual, however, in its depiction of the village being terrorized by both Westerners and VC at various intervals. In the past, most Vietnam War films presented such hamlets as either pro-American or pro-Communist, whereas Hayslip's memoirs and Stone's adaptation offer a more complex treatment of the demands placed on the villagers' loyalties by both sides during the war.

Despite this, Hayslip's family and their neighbors are initially shown as sympathizing with and supporting the NLF when they first arrive in 1963, and Hayslip herself is later arrested and tortured by the South Vietnamese police for "anti-government" activity (her two brothers join the army in the North). While the seemingly-harmless-peasant-masquerading-as-VC-soldier has been discussed as a common motif in the Vietnam War film, *Heaven and Earth* is the first one to probe extensively the appeal of the Communist guerrillas to the larger population on nationalist grounds. NLF leaders tell the admiring villagers that the war is about the North freeing her "sister" in the South from the "rape" of the French and American imperialists. The film effectively conveys how the VC were perceived by many peasants as national liberators fighting a war of independence against foreign invaders, which the American propaganda effort never fully understood in its efforts to win the "hearts and minds" of the larger populace. As Hayslip indicates in a voiceover, "if the VC won the peasants over, it is because they lived their lives with us."

Still, Hayslip and Stone do not whitewash the brutality of either side, and the film graphically depicts the VC-ordered rape of Hayslip for "betraying" their cause after she is released from jail (they incorrectly assume that she talked under torture to secure her freedom). In addition, as the war progresses, the picture also presents the increasingly fanatical VC leaders' cold-blooded executions of their erstwhile supporters in the village for various "offenses." Hayslip's mother, initially a fervent believer in the NLF, becomes especially disillusioned after a VC almost shoots her for being a suspected traitor.

The film also moves beyond the cliché representations of earlier works in its attention to Hayslip's family life and acknowledgment of the importance of Buddhism to the Vietnamese peasantry.¹⁷ Hayslip's mother (Joan Chen) emerges as a caring parent, but also a fierce patriot who urges her sons and daughters to fight for the independence of their homeland. In contrast, her protective father vainly attempts to keep their family intact, which prompts his wife to call him "selfish." Interestingly, the contrast in their positions regarding the participation of their children in the war recalls a similar conflict between Ron Kovic's parents in Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*. Moments like these allowed American audiences to identify with a Vietnamese family having to address some of the same concerns which their American counterparts faced during the war. Hayslip's sisters are often jealous of what they perceive to be her favored position as the youngest child, and one of them actually throws her into the streets after a violent quarrel. Her father refuses to speak to her in shame after she is impregnated by her wealthy South Vietnamese employer in Saigon, although he eventually forgives her. The film's portrayal of a three-dimensional family unit, complete with squabbles and problems, is a welcome sight in comparison to the generic depictions of Vietnamese life in other Hollywood films. Lan Cao observed that Hayslip's role as Stone's technical advisor on the picture "produced a film whose attention to detail gave it authenticity," with various "intimate elements" such as "linguistically

correct Vietnamese, including regional accents" partially balancing "the film's didactic, sometimes bullying tone."¹⁸ In all of these areas, Stone's efforts were indeed admirable and effective.

Despite this, Cao felt, and I agree, that *Heaven and Earth* was ultimately "very much an American-driven and American-centered film." Doan Van Toi, a former student from Saigon, aptly notes in Cao's article that "the events are very familiar to American audiences. The G.I.s roaming the streets, American army camps, Vietnamese peddling American products--this Vietnam has already been transformed by the U.S. into a predominately American area." Consequently, Stone indulges in many of the familiar cinematic motifs and/or images of the American Vietnam War film: ubiquitous Vietnamese hookers, callous Americans who mistreat the Vietnamese and perceive them as sub-human "gooks," and a penchant for perennially representing Vietnamese characters (in this case Hayslip) as "victims." When Hayslip finally meets a seemingly kindly American named Steve (Tommy Lee Jones) whom she eventually marries, he turns out to be psychotically racked with guilt over the savage acts he committed while serving with a covert unit in the field. After Steve brings his new bride home to the US, his family are all depicted as fat-cat American consumers with his grotesquely made up sister-in-law lecturing Hayslip about being appropriately "grateful" for her processed food. Another relative (played by Dale Dye, who was Stone's military advisor in *Platoon* and also appeared in *Casualties of War*) debates the merits of "Oriental women" with Steve in front of Hayslip at the table, and Steve himself even tells Le Ly at one point that he "needs a good Oriental woman" after experiencing a bitter divorce from his "American" wife. While Stone obviously enjoys satirizing middle-class American life in the 1960s, his caricature of suburban excess weakens his opportunity to explore the tensions between Steve and Le Ly as she tries to assimilate herself into American society.

Indeed, for all the potential heroism and determination of her story, Hayslip emerges as an oddly passive character, perhaps as a result of Stone's continual representation of her as a victim. Stone felt that "the character Tommy Lee Jones plays is very much like the role we played in Vietnam. We wanted them, we wanted to prop them up, they were our little children, our Oriental wives. At the same time, there was an undercurrent of arrogance, ethnocentricity, racism."¹⁹ However, Hayslip's individuality often disappears in the film as she suffers at the hands of various men, with Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* observing that "when Mr. Stone treats his Vietnamese heroine as both sexual martyr and national metaphor, he so overburdens her story that Le Ly disappears as a real person."²⁰ The film especially seems to reduce Hayslip's character to secondary status once the action moves to America. At this point, Stone reverts to the more traditional Hollywood interest in depicting the angst of the returning American veteran, as Steve eventually kills himself over his inability to come to terms with his "war crimes" in Vietnam. While the America sequences of the film do convey the lingering impact of the war for Hayslip (as when the increasingly out-of-control Steve puts a gun to her head and calls her a "gook"), Stone's emphasis on Steve's breakdown interferes with his own stated goal of telling Hayslip's story. This shift in focus was perhaps accentuated by the contrast in performances between seasoned actor Tommy Lee Jones and newcomer Thi Le. The latter performer was a college student who had never acted professionally before being cast in the role,²¹ and Jones's more vibrant screen presence seemed to overshadow her in the final section of the movie.

Stone's penchant for creating a striking *mise-en-scène* also works against his desire to represent the Vietnamese peasants' lifestyle faithfully. Hayslip's village, which Stone recreated in Thailand, was shown as a pastoral paradise before the encroachment of the Western invaders. The director went to great lengths to create an idealized representation of

rural Vietnam, and "boasted" to one interviewer that "we made it greener ... we fertilized the shit out of it" by transplanting "super-rice" onto his set in southern Thailand.²² When Hayslip returns home from Saigon to see her dying father, the picture does dramatically convey how the war devastated the countryside and lives of the Vietnamese villagers. While Hayslip picks her way through bomb craters en route to her house, American helicopters and vehicles hover about as a constant reminder of the war's intrusion on the villagers' lives, and Stone's camera pans the surrounding area to reveal how the formerly lush foliage of the Vietnamese countryside has been destroyed by the war. Despite such "realistic" depictions of the village at a later point in the film, however, Stone's earlier interest in creating a mythological, romanticized version of a pre-Western Vietnamese countryside serves mostly to indulge his undeniable directorial virtuosity at the expense of his larger intentions in *Heaven and Earth*.

One of the most interesting aspects of the film is that it shows Hayslip eventually returning to her village after Steve commits suicide. Although Le Ly has achieved material success in America, she feels spiritually disconnected from the ghosts of her ancestors and wants her sons to meet their surviving relatives "back home." Her return to her homeland some thirteen years after the end of the war allows Stone to provide the American film going audience with a rare cinematic view of post-war life in Vietnam. Hayslip first stops off in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) so that her eldest son can meet his father. Her former "master," once a wealthy businessman, is now a common tradesman in the new Vietnam. Thus, this brief scene speaks to the profound social changes which resulted after the Communist government took control of South Vietnam. Hayslip's return to Ky La, however, is much more dramatic, in that on a surface level the village and its surrounding environs seems to be restored to their pre-war loveliness. But, as Hayslip walks through the village, she sees numerous old people with missing limbs, which reminds the viewer of the horrific impact of the war on these people. This time, then, Stone's visual depiction of

the "noble peasant lifestyle" is balanced by a more honest accounting of the less favorable aspects of their world. This point is emphasized after Hayslip is greeted coldly by her surviving brother who fought against the Americans. Although he loves Le Ly "as a sister," he tells her that she has no understanding of "how much suffering Americans caused here." He describes the starvation and sacrifice which the Vietnamese endured throughout the war as well as in the immediate post-war years, and tearfully claims that the VC died and struggled not because they were brave, but because they "had no choice" (i.e., they had to win the war or perish). Having finally established a better life for the family after years of hardship, he fears that Le Ly's visit as a rich "foreigner" will once again turn the village against them. Thus, while many films have explored the traumas experienced by American Vietnam veterans and their families in the war's aftermath, this scene is the first one in any American picture to consider how the war might have impacted on an average family still in Vietnam. The villagers potential suspicion of the "American" Hayslip also reflects the long-term consequences of the violence inflicted on the Vietnamese countryside and populace by the American military presence during the war.

But Hayslip's mother refutes her son's objections to his sister's presence in their home, claiming that both sides suffered as a result of the war and that "in cemeteries there are no enemies." She tells Ly Le that she is proud of her for building a better life in America, and that she has "completed her circle of growth" by returning to her village. In her final voiceover, Hayslip herself comments that her fate was to always be between all worlds--Vietnam and America, North and South, Heaven and Earth. One needs to accept this fate to gain enlightenment, and to learn that the "gift of suffering" teaches us that "nothing happens without a cause." Her final line in the film claims that "lasting victories are won in the heart; not on this land or that." Thus, the film's ending reinforces the Buddhist philosophy that runs throughout it, as well as providing a sense of optimism for the future which had also ended Stone's previous Vietnam War films. Still, Janet Maslin

aply observed that "it seems unimaginable that Mr. Stone would conclude a film about any wartime experience quite this beatifically, no matter how true the film is to Ms. Hayslip's attitudes or her ordeal."²³ Maslin's remarks also acknowledge the difficulty for viewers who do not share in Hayslip's Buddhist-inspired serenity of glossing over the ramifications of the war so easily.

Overall, *Heaven and Earth* does go beyond previous films about the war, including Stone's earlier works, in portraying the Vietnamese as multi-dimensional human beings. His *Platoon*, for instance, while praised by some Vietnamese refugees living in America for being more accurate than its predecessors (especially those of the "Rambo" ilk), was also perceived as having little to do with the Vietnamese people. As Yen Do, the editor of a Vietnamese-language paper in California stated, "it is his personal odyssey in Vietnam ... but his film is no more about Vietnam and its people than was *Deer Hunter* or any of the others. This is to be expected. They were made by Americans, for Americans."²⁴ This point, perhaps more than any other, underscores the mixed results of Stone's *Heaven and Earth*. While a well-intentioned effort to present the Vietnam War from the "other side," the film is still made "by Americans, for Americans." Furthermore, the positive aspects of Stone's representation of the Vietnamese are weakened by his indulgence of many stock motifs and images found in previous films. As Doan Van Toai concluded in Cao's article, "can the US make a movie about Vietnam that does not in some way mirror their image?"²⁵ The answer thus far would seem to be no to a large extent. Understandably many American film makers, including the pre-*Heaven and Earth* Stone, were not particularly interested in portraying the other side in their fictional remembrances of the war. But, as film critic and Vietnam veteran Leo Cawley once noted, perhaps we could focus on the Vietnamese "one day when, after growing curious about what we were like and learning

about ourselves, we acquired an interest in other lives, including those of the Vietnamese. There could be a film about their experience."²⁶ Indeed, Stone himself commented in an interview before *Heaven and Earth's* release that "it certainly occurred to me that no American would want to see this film."²⁷ But in the post-*Platoon* era, enough dialogue about the "American experience" in Vietnam had taken place so that attention did begin to shift towards an exploration of the participation of "other lives" in the war, including both the Vietnamese and American minority groups. Not surprisingly, though, these American explorations of "the Vietnamese perspective" inevitably reiterated many of the standard Vietnam War signifiers which had emerged by the 1990s, and still reflected the "other side" from a distinctly American point-of-view.

The film received mixed reviews and was less commercially successful than Stone's more American-focused films about the war. Of course, general public interest in the war as a viable screen subject had peaked by the early 1990s, which was underscored in critic Owen Gleiberman's reaction to the picture:

few would quarrel with Stone's essential vision of the Vietnam experience: that it was a cataclysmic tragedy causing wounds that still fester in the American--and Vietnamese--consciousness. By now ... Stone's continued obsession with Vietnam bespeaks a demagogic single-mindedness as exhausting as it is illuminating. In *Heaven and Earth*, he uses Le Ly's story didactically: the movie is so saturated with reverence for its saintly, long suffering heroine that it never quite breathes. If the film offers any message worth heeding, it's that Stone, like America, needs to put the war behind him.²⁸

Perhaps Stone's seeming preoccupation with presenting the "Vietnamese perspective" contributed to some of these problems, as it implied a monolithic, Vietnamese experience in relation to the war waiting for Stone to capture on film. Hayslip's tale, of course, is only one of many "Vietnamese stories" worth telling about the war, just as Chris Taylor or Ron Kovic's "Vietnam" did not represent the experience of the war for all American soldiers. As with the publicity campaign for *Platoon*, some of Stone's interviews about *Heaven and*

Earth suggest a similar arrogance on his part in believing that his films capture a certain collective experience of the war on either side.²⁹

The American theatre also turned its attention to representing the Vietnamese more extensively in the 1990s, beginning with the musical hit *Miss Saigon*. The play was created by a mixed French-American team under the aegis of English producer Cameron Mackintosh, which brought a variety of Western perspectives to the production. The plot of the play is essentially an updating of Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* (1904), in which a Japanese geisha kills herself over her romantic betrayal by a dishonorable Western naval officer named Pinkerton.³⁰ Thus, *Miss Saigon* explores the romance between a young girl Kim, who has been reduced to working in a Saigon brothel out of poverty, and an American GI named Chris. The quasi-operatic style of the through-sung musical echoes Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg's previously successful work *Les Misérables*, and follows Kim's epic journey through the torturous final days of Saigon's collapse, "reeducation" under the Communist regime as a despised "American whore," and her eventual escape to Thailand where she hopes to be reunited with Chris.

The play's American co-lyricist Richard Maltby stated that the Vietnam War represented "the dark mirror image of the American Dream. We went over to sell our American values and ended up with every horrible corruption of them imaginable...."³¹ While not strictly an American work, *Miss Saigon* was one of the few plays presented in a major American forum--i.e., Broadway--that hoped to portray sympathetically the negative impact of the war on the Vietnamese people. In the process of doing so, it also blames America for its failure, as Chris says later in the play, "to do good."

To what extent does the musical successfully accomplish its mission? Although the authors attempt to humanize Kim and create sympathy for her circumstances, they are

hampered by their creative choices from the get-go: namely, the decision to employ the Orientalist context of the "Butterfly" story in *Miss Saigon*, which led them to update the plot by placing Kim in the world of Saigon prostitution. Unfortunately, this characterization immediately saddled them with the baggage of having to overcome the clichéd image of the wartime Vietnamese whore. As Eileen Blumenthal observed in her article "'Mikado' to 'Miss Saigon': East is East, or Is It?," the American theatre has historically "fabricated phantasmagoric Asias that have little to do with any real places but rather, as Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang puts it, 'serve as almost a Rorschach test,' revealing the mentality of the West." Furthermore, the *Madame Butterfly* opera, especially after the success of Hwang's play *M. Butterfly*, "has been an emblem of Western disrespect for Asians."³² Interestingly, Edward Behr and Mark Stevyn's book *The Story of Miss Saigon* opens with a chapter by the former American war correspondent Behr recalling his personal recollections about the world of "bar girls" in Saigon. He concludes by stating that because of his "I Was There" credentials, he is "perhaps well-placed" to argue that the play is indeed "believable."³³ Thus, the book's authors, who not surprisingly received extensive cooperation from the creators of *Miss Saigon* in charting its developmental process, seemed to have learned well from Oliver Stone's ability to create an aura of historical "truth" around his work based on "authentic" veteran credentials.

Regardless of its authors' intentions, *Miss Saigon* represents the most extreme depiction of Vietnamese women as prostitutes as seen on stage or film to date.³⁴ Again, while no one can deny that prostitution flourished during the war, clearly not all Vietnamese women were hookers. *Miss Saigon*, however, offers the opposite impression, as the female characters only exist to "service" the sexual needs of their customers who are mostly American GIs. Furthermore, the American troops seem to be fully conditioned by

Lifton's "gook syndrome" and view the Vietnamese women as chattel, to whom they typically refer by such derogatory terms as "pieces of ass," "slits," "meat," "whores," etc. The play attempts to go beyond such cardboard representations through its depiction of Kim and Chris's romance. Kim, you see, is not really a prostitute because she truly loves Chris. And although Chris is initially presented as yet another callous, burnt-out American who loves to sleep with "cheap meat" in the bars, the play suggests that their romance transcends the mercenary nature of the other sexual transactions. However, the potentially interesting nature of their intercultural relationship quickly degenerates into "Orientalist" mumbo-jumbo when Kim responds to Chris's invitation to live with him as follows: "you are sunlight and I moon, joined by the gods of fortune, midnight and high moon, sharing the sky, we have been blessed, you and I." At this point, the play's stage directions indicate that Chris has been "charmed"--presumably by her Asian quaintness--and Kim's fellow hookers sing an exotic Vietnamese wedding song as she prepares a small shrine with family photos and a statue of Buddha in their new home. Interestingly, the play's director Richard Hytner originally questioned the authors' use of "Oriental mysticism" in defining Kim's character. As he put it: "I felt all of that 'great sacred bird' stuff was a rather shallow Western idea of the way the Eastern mind works." Eventually, however, co-lyricist Alain Boublil persuaded him of the "realism" of such depictions.³⁵ Aside from Kim, the other women in the play are portrayed as vultures only interested in using the American GIs as possible "passports" to America.

Ultimately, as *Newsweek* critic Jack Kroll observed, "*Miss Saigon's* pop myth of Vietnam, whose people are shown as whores, pimps, murderous communists or hapless victims, is hard to swallow."³⁶ Indeed, the non-female Vietnamese emerge as equally one-dimensional or distasteful in the play. Kim's cousin, in fact, turns out to be a VC officer, and he is portrayed as an evil ideologue who tries to kill Kim's child because her father was an American.³⁷ As with most of the previous plays and films about the war, the South

Vietnamese men--our allies--don't fare much better than the women of *Miss Saigon*. Once again they are presented as corrupt and cowardly, especially in the amoral character of the Engineer--a half-French, half-Vietnamese pimp who works initially for the Americans and then later the Communists (he sings, "for men will always be men, you change the regime, the lust doesn't stop"). Willing to do anything to protect himself and make a buck, he dreams of going to America and living among his fellow kindred-spirit capitalists. In his big number "American Dream," the Engineer bemoans his birthright, asking "why was I born of a race that thinks only of rice and hates entrepreneurs.... I belong in a place where a man sets his price.... I should be American!" Still, he exploits both the Americans and his fellow Vietnamese at every opportunity, and even pimps Kim in Thailand after she brings her son Tran there in the hopes of a reunion with Chris (this segment really allows the authors to indulge themselves in stereotypical images of "Oriental decadence").

Miss Saigon attempts to "shed a tear," in Toby Zinman Silverman's words, for the plight of these characters, but does so mostly by chiding Americans throughout the play for their mistreatment and abandonment of the Vietnamese. Indeed, in the showiest scene of the play, a helicopter lands on stage to evacuate American personnel as the Communist army approaches. Amidst the chaos, the generalized hysterical mob of Vietnamese peasants sing "take my children ... I helped the CIA ... they'll kill who they find here, don't leave us behind here ... they have left us behind here." The guilt-stricken Chris later acknowledges that we "messed it all up," and returns to find Kim in Thailand with his befuddled American wife in tow. Alas, Kim shoots herself after learning that Chris is married, believing that he will take their son to America if she is no longer in the picture. The play ends weepily with Kim dying in his arms à la Tony and Maria in *West Side Story*.

Ironically, then, despite the play's finger wagging about American "guilt," it presents the Vietnamese characters in terms of the most stock stereotypes created around the war. Kim is the only non-self-serving character in the entire work, although her saintly

sacrifice and dedication to Chris serve to identify her as yet another victim of male--both Vietnamese and American--oppression. This problem was exacerbated by the larger context of her relationship with Chris being based on a model which posited "Orientals" as playthings of Western men. Indeed, a group called "Asian Revisions: Beyond 'Miss Saigon'" picketed the production in Toronto because they felt that it represented "Asian Women as 'servile, self-sacrificing sex slaves'."³⁸

The controversy in America which ultimately resulted from the production team's casting of the talented English actor Jonathan Pryce in the key role of the Engineer also raised criticism about the play on racist grounds. In addition to taking away a job from an Asian-American actor amidst a highly competitive market, their choice to have a white actor play the character in vaguely "Asian" make-up recalls many past instances, now distasteful, of actors in "yellowface" on both stage and film. Yoko Yoshikawa, a member of a coalition which was organized to protest against the American production on Broadway, emphasized this issue of historic stereotypes when she told interviewers, "we're saying, look at the way Asians have always been portrayed--Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan and Suzie Wong."³⁹ Indeed, the producers' own defense of their "good intentions" in casting the show revealed their insensitivity to these objections. For instance, they expressed a determination to cast as "many real-life Asians as possible," in part because "the physical demands made on performers in *Miss Saigon* required an authentic Asian liveness and grace" (presumably Mr. Pryce's character was an exception). Ultimately, many of the roles went to a number of Asian actors of various nationalities--especially from the Philippines--supported by a "handful of Vietnamese" performers.⁴⁰ While surely the vocal demands of the show created a casting challenge for the producers, their seeming willingness to use any generic "Asians" to play the Vietnamese characters also conjured up past practices of interchangeable Asian casting.

Many reviews of the New York production critiqued the play for its condescending treatment of the Vietnamese, as well as its shallow portrayal of the moral complexities of the war in general. As Frank Rich of the *New York Times* observed, the play "says merely that the North Vietnamese were villains and that the Americans were misguided, bungling do-gooders," with both sides "generalized into meaninglessness."⁴¹ Michael Feingold's reaction to the work in the *Village Voice* was much more vitriolic. He complained that "every civilization gets the theater it deserves, and we get *Miss Saigon*, which means that we can now say definitively that our civilization is over." More pointedly, Feingold objected to the play as follows: "to impose the kitsch tragedy of the betrayed geisha and her feckless American lover on the very real tragedy of the betrayed Asian country is a trick of exploitation that someone involved with *Miss Saigon* must have thought very clever."⁴² Nevertheless, the play was embraced by American theatre goers, and at the time of this writing box-office sales for the Broadway production are still going strong. Considering that *Miss Saigon* was the first highly visible stage production in America which attempted to portray the impact of the war on the Vietnamese people, its overwrought, simplistic, and at times outright insulting results were disappointing. Its commercial success, however, speaks to why the entertainment industry has continually represented the war through the lens of personal history (in this case, the "love story" between Chris and Kim) in lieu of a more potentially unsettling political analysis.⁴³

Unfortunately, the other major theatrical effort of that period which tried to paint a more benevolent portrait of the Vietnamese culture in relation to the war was even more disastrous. Lanford Wilson's *Redwood Curtain* was originally produced regionally in 1992 and ran briefly on Broadway in 1993. Its lead character, Geri, is an Amerasian teenage musical prodigy born in Vietnam during the war. Adopted and raised by an

American couple, she knows little about her Vietnamese mother and American GI father. Like the character of Samantha in the film *In Country*, Geri feels an increasing need to get in touch with her "roots" as they relate to the war. In her case, however, this also involves discovering her connection to her mother's Vietnamese culture. Her search for her real father leads her to the "redwood curtain" of Northern California, where hundreds of emotionally damaged "bush vets" are living in the woods. Had this interesting premise been as intelligently handled as Samantha's journey throughout *In Country*, the play might well have broken interesting new ground. Wilson instead chose to emphasize the theatrical conceit of granting Geri "mystical" powers, thereby once again pandering to historic Western expectations about exotic and mysterious "Orientals." Her "magic" is revealed when she ludicrously tells Lyman, the bush vet character, that "you don't even feel the enchantment, do you?... You've limited yourself to such a physical, blundering oafdom that you can actually sit talking to a sylph and not even know it.... A nymph, a sylph. Actually more of a genie." Later, she yells a spell in Vietnamese for the "wind" to bring Lyman back to her for further questioning. Thankfully, a made-for-television version of the play eliminated this "magic realism" current in recognition of that medium's more "realistic" nature, I suppose. Despite a likable performance by Lea Salanga (the original Kim in *Miss Saigon*) as Geri, the television adaptation still has her utter absurd dialogue in order to reveal her ideological connection to the VC struggle. For instance, she tells Lyman (Jeff Daniels), whom she suspects of being her father, that "my mother's people fought a war that took half a century--first the French, then the Americans. We never give up--you can't get away from me."

The play does contain one clever scene where Wilson acknowledges the impact of film on America's cultural perceptions about the Vietnam veterans as Geri tells Lyman about "Rambo." Thus, she ironically notes that "the movie houses go wild. Suddenly everyone realizes that the only way our boys could have lost is if someone didn't let them

win. We were double-crossed. Have you been away so long you don't know you're a hero now? Come home, all is forgiven." Overall, while *Redwood Curtain* reflected the increasing cultural interest in Vietnamese stories during the 1990s, it unfortunately added little insight into the wider impact of the war.⁴⁴

Fortunately, Ping Chong's 1997 play *After Sorrow*, the final part of his "East/West" Trilogy, provided a more thoughtful theatrical representation of the intersection between American and Vietnamese culture in relation to the war. All three works of the trilogy--*Deshima*, *Chinoiserie*, and *After Sorrow*--explore the collisions between various cultures and the impact of colonialism on different Asian peoples. Along the way, Chong observes that "one of the recurring lines in *Chinoiserie* is that history is written by the victors.... From the British perspective, the Chinese were wrong; they had burned private property, even if it was opium. These events seem quite different when viewed from the East." In his notes on these three works, Chong reveals that "undermining expectations" has always been one of his favorite theatrical strategies. While "*Deshima* begins as a critique of Western colonialism in the East, it ultimately implicates the Japanese as well, as colonizers and oppressors." Thus, Chong rightly "discovered that ethnocentricity is a universal problem, not just a Western one. Every race and nation has a mythology of describing themselves as the chosen people, the center of the universe, amen." Consequently, he deliberately used Asian actors to perform "colonizer and colonized, Easterner and Westerner" in that production to underscore this theme.⁴⁵ Chong's willingness and ability to explore issues like colonialism, imperialism, and racism in such a complex manner distinguishes his work from most of the plays and films discussed in this study.

In specific regard to Vietnam, Chong wanted "to subvert another expectation" in *After Sorrow*: namely, "that the piece would be about America's experience in Vietnam." Noting that the American War in Vietnam "lasted a mere 35 years in the context of a culture

that fought for a 1000 years for independence," Chong's intention in the play "was to cast a light on a history, a nation, a people we still barely know."⁴⁶ His final comments aptly summarize the goals of these three ambitious works:

taken as a whole, the *East/West* trilogy is a modest attempt at presenting history from a point of view other than the official one, the one written by the victors.... Finally, these works represent my continuing fascination with the artifice of human culture, the prejudices and mythologies that are used to justify the slaughter of others, and the peculiar inclination of each discreet cultural or religious group to claim that their truth is the absolute truth. Sadly, we Americans are no exceptions. In that sense, all my work attempts to add up to, a select view of earthlings who claim to be ruled by reason, but are in fact ruled by greed, ignorance and intolerance.

Indeed, the Chinese-American performance artist is himself part of the "victors" culture vis-à-vis Vietnam. Consequently, Chong can still only represent Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese characters, culture, and history from an American viewpoint. But his insightful and multi-layered works reveal an atypical empathy without condescension for various victims of racial intolerance and oppression; as well as a striking awareness of the manner in which such attitudes have intertwined historically with colonialism and imperialism (be it Western/Eastern or Eastern/Eastern).

The textual section of *After Sorrow* itself is based on episode from the memoirs of a Lady Borton's book of the same title.⁴⁷ Borton was a Quaker who had provided assistance to Vietnamese civilians during the war, and who was allowed by the Communist government to visit a village near Hanoi some twelve years after it ended. Chong's work revolves around Lady Borton's interactions with a village leader whom she eventually gets to know as Mrs. Beautiful. Although the villagers initially greet Lady Borton's presence with hostility, they warm up to her after the war-hero "Mrs. B" welcomes the American visitor into her own home. The caring Mrs. B constantly engages Lady Borton in discussions about the political context of the Vietnamese struggle for independence, as when she describes the oppression they suffered under French and Japanese rule:

We were starving because of French taxes. We couldn't stand it any more.... So yes, I grew up to fight the French.... What choice did we have? When I was 18 years old, we had both the French *and* the Japanese for masters. The Japanese forced us to grow jute instead of rice to make rope for their own industry. By early 1945 there was no rice. *Two million* people died during the first six months.

She also discusses with Borton the negative impact of the American military presence on the daily lives of the Vietnamese, as when she remarks "how can house of thatch withstand American bombing?" Despite their growing friendship, Lady Borton senses a deep sorrow in Mrs. Beautiful and describes an unspoken cultural distance between the two as follows: "we sipped green tea. We didn't speak. Between us there were thick walls: regulations forbidding conversations with foreigners, the US embargo, bombs, death. Between us there was green tea and silence." The cause of Mrs. Beautiful's pain is finally revealed when, in the middle of a sleepless night, she tells Lady Borton how her son was killed during the war. While visiting at home during a leave from the NVA, his friends found an unexploded American "baby bomb" which, despite its innocuous name, flung hundreds of murderous darts into the air upon detonation. Not realizing what it was, they brought the bomb into her house where it exploded and killed or wounded *nine* people, including her son. While hugging herself in sadness, Mrs. Beautiful admits that she misses her son and asks Lady Borton, "do you think Americans understand?" The American can only respond, "Not yet."

This sad exchange speaks to the enduring legacy of pain and loss which has also informed "the other side" of the conflict, and which most American-made recreations of the war have either deliberately ignored and/or failed to understand. Albeit a rather short work compared to most of the plays and films discussed in this chapter, *After Sorrow* incisively reveals both Mrs. Beautiful's ongoing resentment against the West and her willingness to move past the wounds of the war and develop a friendship with Lady Borton. What is most affecting about Chong's work is that it believably presents two individuals struggling

with their attitudes and feelings about the complex legacies of the war. Chong's notes reflect this intention when he comments that "I try to give some perspective on who and what it was we went to war with, and at what price. The figure of Mrs. B. is both emblematic of individual suffering and the incredible tenacity of the Vietnamese people." In doing so, however, he avoids the trap of painting Mrs. B. as a mere victim or abstract national symbol of Western oppression. Furthermore, while Chong is most interested in exploring the very personal relationship of the two characters, he never loses sight of the importance of the wider historical context which affected the relationship between East/West and America/Vietnam .

Interestingly, Chong inserts himself into this site of exploration at the play's end when he describes in voiceover how he traveled to Vietnam to see America's former "enemies" for himself. Once there, he comments that he "found a warm, forgiving people who looked ahead to the future." Of course, other accounts of contemporary Vietnamese attitudes about the Americans have not been equally forgiving, just as some Americans still harbor hatred towards the Vietnamese. Nonetheless, *After Sorrow*, like the earlier two parts of Chong's trilogy, effectively explores the "human face" of history within a larger political and cultural framework.⁴⁸

Before discussing several Vietnamese-made works of this period which also engaged various war-related issues, I would like to consider two other American films which finally explored the war from a so-called "Black perspective": Albert and Allen Hughes's *Dead Presidents* and Preston A. Whitmore II's *The Walking Dead* (both released in 1995). However, it should also be noted that Levinson's *Good Morning, Vietnam* contained an unusually well-drawn Black character: Sergeant Eddie Garlick, who functioned in the film as Cronauer's aide, confidant, and loyal friend. As portrayed by the talented Forest Whitaker (who also played Big Harold in *Platoon*), Garlick emerged as a sensitive, intelligent, and multi-dimensional individual. However, the role was still

relegated to what Clyde Taylor's discussion of *Platoon* called the "second tier" of importance in the character hierarchy of the film. As critic Cynthia Fuchs observed, movies such as *The Walking Dead* served "to recover a lost chunk of Vietnam war history," as "previous films about the Vietnam experience have portrayed Black servicemen as either cowards, buffoons or background characters."⁴⁹ In contrast, the two pictures released in 1995 situated Black characters in leading roles for the first time in Vietnam War films.

Dead Presidents covers a time span from 1968 to 1974 and focuses on the experiences of a young Black man named Anthony Curtis (Larenz Tate). At the beginning of the film, Anthony and his friends Skip (Chris Tucker) and Jose (Freddy Rodriguez) contemplate their future as they are about to graduate from high school in the Bronx. Anthony dreams of adventure and doing "something different," but his more cynical pal Skip advises him to go to college and avoid the draft. The directors thus confront the racial implications of the war in this first scene when Skip proclaims that he has nothing against the Viet Cong and "ain't fightin' no white man's war." Still, they depict Anthony's community as a vibrant, middle-class enclave where whites, Blacks, and Hispanics mix together easily. Anthony emerges as an amiable, good-hearted young man from a hard-working, caring family (his mother urges him to go to college like his brother and is dismayed when Anthony volunteers for the Marines). Although Anthony runs numbers for a violent local gangster named Kirby (Keith David, who played King in *Platoon*), the pool hall owner treats him with an obvious paternal affection. After losing his virginity to his girlfriend on graduation night, Anthony runs home through the tidy backyards of his neighborhood with youthful abandon. As he does so, the film abruptly cuts to the image of a uniformed Anthony scrambling through the jungles and swamps of Vietnam as his unit is pursued by the VC.

While the visual shift in location is momentarily jarring and attention-getting, the film's twenty-minute Vietnam sequence seems disjointed and also derivative of earlier Vietnam War films. Visually, the war is presented in a rather surreal style which recalls *Apocalypse Now*, as when a helicopter looms against a blood-red sky while ominous music plays on the soundtrack. A darkly lit, creepy montage which depicts several violent encounters with the VC in "the bush" also seems to echo the mood of Coppola's film. Anthony's elite reconnaissance outfit is racially mixed, although predominantly Black, which again foregrounds the film makers' interest in emphasizing the Black presence in Vietnam. Interestingly, though, the squad's leaders are depicted along more traditional lines through the presence of the white Lieutenant Dugan (Jaimz Woolvett) and his Black Sergeant Cleon (Bokeem Woodbine). However, both of them are characterized as over-the-edge killers, with one shot in the montage depicting Dugan gleefully head-butting a Vietnamese villager during an interrogation. Cleon in particular seems to relish the savagery of the war, and actually carries the head of a dead VC in his backpack as a "good luck charm." Such actions, of course, recall the nihilism and brutality of various figures from both *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*. In addition, even the film's initial transition to Vietnam echoes the quick dissolve in *The Deer Hunter* from the bar in Pennsylvania to a combat scenario deep in Vietnam as discussed in Chapter Three. Overall, the Vietnam footage in *Dead Presidents* comes off as a pastiche of earlier films about the war.

Skip, who flunked out of college and is now a member of Anthony's unit (this plot turn seems especially implausible), does tell Anthony that "this ain't our war, man--our Black asses should be back in our bunks where we belong." To emphasize this point, the Marines read VC leaflets at one point which state, "Black men go home--it's not your war." Nonetheless, while Anthony describes himself as emotionally "numb" from the war, he fights skillfully, and Skip in fact criticizes him for being too "into" combat. In addition, all of the Black soldiers in their outfit fight courageously, which balances previous negative

depictions of Black characters in Vietnam War films such as the cowardly, manipulative Junior in *Platoon*. On another level, soldiers like Cleon, Dugan, and even Anthony are also presented as having obviously "gone native" as a result of their exposure to the savage "Oriental."

The Vietnamese are only glimpsed occasionally behind the lines or in combat as they kill or are killed by the Marines. But their menacing absence, in tandem with the obvious control of the jungle they possess as they spring ambush after ambush upon the Americans, seems very similar to the dominant cinematic representation of the enemy from the period of *Platoon*. This is also true of *The Walking Dead*, in which four highly-efficient Black Marines unbelievably overcome numerous units of rarely visible VC. Indeed, their exploits become almost Rambo-like as the film progresses. Thus, in their enthusiasm to depict the efforts of Black troops during the war as courageous, the directors of these films unfortunately utilized several rather overly-familiar conventions and images from earlier movies. These included the formulaic portrayal of the Vietnamese enemy as evil "Orientals" who turned good American lads against their inherently wholesome natures, as previously seen in *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, etc. *Dead Presidents* demonstrates the brutality of the VC when they ambush a soldier from Anthony's squad; disemboweling the poor man and stuffing his penis in his mouth (thus presenting a more extreme version of the GIs finding the tortured body of Manning in *Platoon*). Overall, both *Dead Presidents* and *The Walking Dead* revert back to the more demonic portrayals of the Vietnamese seen in the pictures made during the late 1970s and 1980s. In doing so, they worked against the larger current of the 1990s in both film and stage which attempted to convey a more sympathetic, multi-dimensional image of the Vietnamese.

This reliance on familiar combat genre conventions continues in *Dead Presidents* after Anthony returns home to a changed world. His once cozy neighborhood is now a

poverty-stricken Black "ghetto" riddled with drugs; he can't find a decent job to support his girlfriend and their baby; and no one seems to respect or value his military service. This is all familiar, of course, from the many films about alienated or "psycho" veterans made during and after the war in the late 1960s and 1970s, but with white protagonists. And like many of those characters, the increasingly disillusioned Anthony is eventually driven to commit a crime with his Vietnam veteran buddies, in this case involving a heist of an armored car containing old US currency (the "Dead Presidents" of the film's title). The directors underscore Anthony's rage and politicization in a scene where he attends a Black Panther meeting and his girlfriend's college educated sister Delilah (N' Bushe Wright) denounces white exploitation of Black men through the Vietnam War.⁵⁰

Ultimately, the heist goes awry, much blood is shed, and Anthony is arrested and sentenced to a sentence of fifteen years-to-life in jail by a hard-nosed, middle-aged white judge (Martin Sheen, who played Captain Willard in *Apocalypse Now*), who also happens to be a Marine veteran of World War Two.⁵¹ This is significant because he dismisses Anthony's war record by claiming that he served in a "real war" and refuses to let Anthony use the "Vietnam War as a cop-out" for his crimes. After the stunned Anthony hears the judge's sentence, he angrily starts throwing chairs and screaming in incredulity about "all the fucking things I did for this country" as he is dragged out of the courtroom. Thus, this final scene reinforces the film's perspective about how the Black veteran was mistreated by the larger white society after the war. While this point had been made about veterans in general in numerous films, *Dead Presidents* was provocative in that it atypically addressed the impact of the war on Black veterans through the vehicle of a Hollywood studio picture. As mentioned earlier, less mainstream films like *Ashes and Embers* had engaged this topic in the 1980s.

Critic Jami Bernard of the *Daily News* observed that "*Dead Presidents*" adds texture to an emotional territory that is usually mined from the white man's perspective."⁵² While a somewhat true statement, her comment also implies the existence of either a monolithic Black or white "perspective" or experience in relation to the war, reflecting the kind of reductive viewpoint which has hampered many of the fictional works discussed in this study. Similarly, while making a number of interesting points about the experiences of some Black veterans vis-à-vis the war, the film ultimately relies far too much on depicting Blacks as collective "victims" of white injustice and oppression. Anthony's particular situation, for instance, is more complicated than the film's outcome suggests in that he was not drafted into the army as were many poor, uneducated Blacks during the war. Rather, like the white character Chris Taylor in *Platoon*, the middle-class Anthony chose not to attend college and volunteered for military service in Vietnam. Thus, the Hughes brothers' ultimate depiction of Anthony as a victim of a "white man's war" is somewhat simplistic and fails to explore the full complexity of his particular story within the wider social framework of the period. The film's romanticization of Anthony's pre-war neighborhood also undercuts its overall credibility--are we really to believe that drugs and poverty exist in Black communities only as a result of the war?⁵³ Furthermore, its crude characterization of the judge speaks to the directors' didactic choices in this regard, as his lack of sympathy towards Anthony could just have easily reflected the much-discussed "generation gap" of that period in relation to Vietnam and World War Two, the so-called "good war." Instead, the directors frame the scene in a way which clearly marks Anthony as being unjustly persecuted by "the man," who in this case is symbolically represented by a white authority figure. Although Anthony's post-war circumstances were trying, he did participate in a violent, brutal crime which resulted in the deaths of several people including

a Black policeman--also briefly identified as a veteran of the war--whom Skip shoots at close range in the back of the head. Should he be excused from serving hard time for such a crime because of his Vietnam service? The Hughes brothers would suggest he should, as the emphasis in the scene is placed on Anthony and his family's shock and anger over his "unjustly" stiff sentence. Overall, although always visceral and compelling, *Dead Presidents* is ultimately reduced to another tale of veteran angst, although with a specific racial agenda in this case.

In contrast, the surviving Black Marines in *The Walking Dead* are all acknowledged in a fictitious post-script as having led highly productive lives after returning to America. Thus, while *The Walking Dead* also refers to white prejudice "back home" throughout the film, it differs from *Dead Presidents* in that it chooses to present a positive image of Black veterans after the war. But *The Walking Dead* also relied on what Fuchs described as an "unimaginative rehearsal of well-known war movie conventions" in depicting combat in Vietnam.⁵⁴ Still, despite their flaws, the films are significant in that they represent Hollywood's only attempt to explore how the war might have affected Black GIs and their larger communities. In addition, it took twenty-two years after our withdrawal from Vietnam before mainstream financing could be generated to explore such topics. Unfortunately, the directors approached this potentially new and rich subject matter in ways which failed to maximize its potential. Like the plays and films which attempted to capture the Vietnamese side of the conflict, however, this interest in exploring the involvement of American minorities in the war reflected the tendency in the 1990s to insert previously silenced voices into the Vietnam discourse.⁵⁵

The increasing cultural interest in examining the "Vietnamese side" of the war also resulted in the screening of a number of Vietnamese made-films for the first time in America during the 1990s. A number of pictures made during and after the war in Vietnam were shown in New York City as part of two different series in the same period that

Stone's *Heaven and Earth* was released.⁵⁶ The timing in this regard made the contrast between the American director's interpretation of a "Vietnamese perspective" and a diverse array of actual Vietnamese viewpoints about the war even more striking.

At the series entitled *Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* which I attended in February 1994, Asian Cinevision screened six films which were made in Vietnam from 1974 to 1991. Like their American counterparts, these films explored a number of themes relating to the war and post-war periods. In her program notes, Exhibition Director Minne Jung-Min Hong commented on the proliferation of American films since 1975 offering a "complicated range of emotions" regarding "cinematic interpretations of the Vietnam war." Furthermore, she reiterated the position of some critics of these works that they typically constructed "Vietnam" as part of a mythic American landscape:

in American films like *The Deer Hunter*, *Casualties of War*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Missing in Action*, *Rambo*, *Apocalypse Now*, and the Oliver Stone Trilogy (*Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Heaven and Earth*), Vietnam is a psychological landscape of unresolved anguish, a place where we face the deepest horrors of inhumanity, and test out the American will for survival. And yet, the history of Vietnam, the culture traditions, and strengths of the Vietnamese people, have spanned far more than its brief twentieth century encounter with the United States. Through the upheavals of invasion, French colonization, and revolution, Vietnam has also survived the war, and emerged with a truly breathtaking, and very human, cinematic record of its achievement.⁵⁷

Thus, these and other works from the Vietnamese motion picture industry offer a range of interpretations which, unlike the Hollywood films, do in fact represent a variety of "Vietnamese perspectives" on the war (as opposed to the frequent American depictions of a monolithic or collective Asian Other). The burgeoning Vietnamese film industry faces many obstacles, and these pictures lack the sophisticated formal systems of the Hollywood features.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, they were fascinating viewing for a spectator like myself previously exposed only to American depictions of the war and Vietnam.

Not surprisingly, films made during the war itself like Hai Ninh's *The Little Girl of Hanoi* (1974) often portray the Americans as the brutal, corrupt enemy Other. This film

involves the search of a young North Vietnamese girl (Ma) for her soldier father during a severe bombing attack on Hanoi by American planes. In flashbacks, we discover that her mother died while trying to save other children in a bombing attack on a kindergarten which also seriously wounded Ma's baby sister. In one striking scene, as Ma sifts through the rubble of her demolished home, several captured American pilots are marched through her neighborhood en route to prison. The film portrays the Americans as savage baby-killers, and the nameless, unindividualized airmen are viewed as murderers by Ma's neighbors. Indeed, they attack the shame-faced Americans and have to be forcibly restrained by the NVA soldiers from seriously hurting them. Another revelatory moment occurs when an elderly Vietnamese woman attempts to comfort a crying baby by assuring her of her safety, despite the fact that "Nixon wants to kill you." NVA soldiers are shown as brave patriots valiantly struggling to free their homeland from foreign oppression, and Ma's father emerges as an affectionate parent who sadly leaves his home in order to serve his country. The film often reflects a heavy-handed desire to promote wartime support for the nationalist cause in Vietnam, and in an interview during the late 1980s, the director himself criticized its "high propaganda content." Still, the difference in perspective towards defining the concept of "enemy" is illuminating for an American viewer.⁵⁹

Other films from these series explore various topics affecting post-war Vietnamese society. For instance, Chau Hue's *The Strolling Singers* (1991) and Tran Vu's *Brothers and Relations* (1986) examine the plight of returning Vietnamese veterans who, in many cases, also experienced difficulties in adjusting to civilian life after the war ended. *The Strolling Singers* depicts the struggle of a homeless veteran who must sing on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City in order to make a living in the shaky post-war economy and later blinds himself in frustration after his wife leaves him for a wealthier man. Like many films from the American combat genre, *The Strolling Singers* also utilized documentary footage--in this case, of actual veterans who worked as street singers--to heighten its dramatization

of this social problem in Vietnam. Another facet of the war's impact on various Vietnamese individuals was revealed in Dang Nhat Minh's *When the Tenth Month Comes* (1984), which explored the struggle of a grieving widow to come to terms with the death of her soldier husband. In his analysis of the film in "Vietnamese Cinema: First Views," John Charlot notes that several controversial scenes in which the village god and ghosts of the dead appeared to the woman, Duyen, demonstrated the ongoing importance of "folk religion" in Vietnam despite the Communist ideology of the country. Interestingly, the government's censorship board approved the religious aspects of the picture by declaring that "an artistic style that shows the metaphysical side of life is legal in Vietnam." Other films, like Nguyen Khac Loi's *The Retired General* (1988), criticize the loss of revolutionary ideals in the aftermath of the war. The picture focuses on a retired, highly decorated war-hero general who cannot adjust to what he perceives as an increasingly corrupt and materialistic post-war society. While the film industry in Vietnam is controlled by the Ministry of Culture there, Charlot notes that a number of films have been allowed to critique the government bureaucracy to an unexpected degree, although the films must stop short of attacking "the very principle" of the Communist society.⁶⁰

Overall, these films explore a wide variety of experiences, issues, and perspectives in relation to the war. What is perhaps most revealing about them for an American viewer is their consistent depiction of believable, three-dimensional people with all of their flaws and foibles intact. In these films, Vietnamese characters are represented as complex individuals who live in a world with families, obligations, friendships, and relationships--just like Americans! Such representations help balance the simplistic constructions of the Vietnamese as whores, evil torturers, and/or happy simpletons created by the American film industry. It is striking that many of the themes explored in these films are already familiar to American audiences (e.g., the "wounded veteran"), but only in the context of Hollywood's emphasis on our involvement in Vietnam. Charlot contends, however, that

Vietnamese films as a whole emphasize an art tradition which seeks to express aspects of Vietnamese philosophy, society, and human concerns. Generally, combat footage in Vietnamese films about the war is rare, and film makers tend to emphasize the "impact of the war on people rather than the war as a subject in itself." For instance, attitudes towards various groups considered disloyal to the cause of Vietnamese independence, such as prostitutes, have been explored in several films. Charlot observes that during the war prostitutes "symbolized the corruption of the South Vietnamese regime and American influence" and were often discriminated against or, after the war, sent to "reeducation camps."⁶¹ Indeed, Dang Nhat Minh's *The Girl on the River* (1987) depicts a prostitute who shields a Viet Cong soldier from South Vietnamese troops in the war. Years later, he becomes an important party official and refuses to acknowledge their wartime relationship. Director Hai Ninh, whose film *Shipwreck Beach* (1983) also explored this subject, discussed how these pictures provided a wider humanitarian focus in relation to the war:

there were lots of prostitutes during the war. People didn't want to compromise themselves. But the prostitutes were victims of the war like any other. They had to be helped to normalize their lives. Revolutionaries should have charity for such people, should give them confidence and hope. So stories of prostitutes have a broader reference. On the one hand, they committed mistakes because of the historical and social situation they were in, so they were like others who committed crimes during the war. On the other hand, society can be judged by the way they are helped and reintegrated.⁶²

While his comments certainly illustrate a particular ideological interpretation of the war, they also show how the Vietnamese cinema has explored certain wartime situations--like the Vietnamese prostitute--in a more sensitive manner than the numerous misogynist representations of Vietnamese "boom-boom girls" in American films.

However, interviews with leading Vietnamese film makers suggest that Vietnamese cinema today is less interested in the war as a viable topic. For instance, in Jean-Jacques Malo's 1995 interview with Minh (who was also General Secretary of the Vietnamese

Filmmaker's Association at that time), the director commented that "after 1975, war as a theme is less and less frequent in the Vietnamese production. Instead, the emphasis is put on daily life, relationships within society, and mostly social problems." Increasingly, he felt that the "young generation" of Vietnamese directors today only reflected "echoes" of the war's impact in their works. The recent softening of relations between the two nations, as well as the passage of time, have also contributed to such changes. As Lu Thang, a twenty five year old Vietnamese student, commented in a 1995 *New York Times* article, "the war is over--we do not want to talk about it anymore. I think everybody, including all the people in Hanoi and all over Vietnam, agree that what is best for our country is that we try to make some money and feed ourselves and have clothes. And we are doing that."⁶³ Historically, however, Minh claimed that "the main differences between Hollywood and Vietnamese cinema regarding the war" were that "in Hollywood reality becomes spectacular. War is spectacular and you can admire it. But in Vietnamese films you don't see such spectacular images of the war. War penetrates the feelings of the people. In American pictures war is exterior whereas in Vietnamese films it is interior."⁶⁴ Charlot points out another difference in their approaches in that a theme of many Vietnamese films about the war involves maintaining a "kind of normalcy" about life. Since the Western phase of their war lasted from 1945 to 1975, the Vietnamese had to try and carry on the routine of life around the fighting as much as possible. This reality is reflected in films like Nguyen Hong Sen's *The Abandoned Field* (1979), when a woman casually brings a camouflage cloth with her as she travels in a boat to harvest flowers. When the area is later attacked by an American helicopter, she uses the cloth to hide herself and thus saves her life.⁶⁵

While the Vietnamese films view the war differently in many ways from their Hollywood counterparts, they are similar to those American movies in their lack of interest in and prejudice against the foreign "enemy." Thus, this discussion of Vietnamese cinema

reinforces the notion that issues of absencing, stereotyping, etc. have not only occurred in American films and other cultural works about the war. Nonetheless, it does reflect how the war films of that country--even the ones made in the 1960s and early 1970s for obvious anti-American propaganda purposes--not surprisingly explored numerous aspects of Vietnamese culture, society, values, family life, etc. that have basically either been ignored, demonized, or romanticized in American explorations of the conflict. In addition, while the American media typically represent Vietnam as a "war," the Vietnamese cinema has been increasingly interested in exploring all facets of daily life in that country (especially as the memory of the war recedes).⁶⁶

Certainly, then, the various Vietnamese-made films about the war provide a cinematic representation of Vietnam and its people which goes beyond the American tradition of viewing the war and its aftermath from its own perspective and interests. Hollywood, however, has yet to produce a film which, in Vietnamese refugee Yen Do's words, depicts a "full, realistic" representation of the Vietnamese experience and people during and after the war. In 1987, the California based editor predicted that "it is still too soon for such a film. Maybe it will take another ten years, probably much more."⁶⁷ In contrast, despite the formal and at times ideological crudeness of the Vietnamese pictures, "at their best, these films engage even as they tear at the way Hollywood represents earth, and asses, as things to grab."⁶⁸ While the American works discussed in this chapter do reflect a change in interest towards representing the Vietnamese and the notion of "Vietnam" with more depth and sensitivity than their predecessors, the majority of them have still offered an inevitably limited and often reductive view of the Vietnamese made "for Americans, by Americans."

After considering the more than forty years of American fictional representations of Western involvement in Vietnam on either film or stage, we can recognize that our vision of both the war and the Vietnamese people have changed over the years. In her analysis of the

most high-profile Vietnam War films, Lan Cao acknowledges the shift in emphasis from *Apocalypse Now* to *Full Metal Jacket* to *Born on the Fourth of July*, for instance, but aptly observes that all of these works tend to use Vietnam as a metaphor for "American disillusionment with its self-congratulatory patriotism." Overall, she argues that most representations of the war and the Vietnamese people have served as a "catalyst for provoking America into a lacerating self-analysis."⁶⁹ In addition, these films and plays have functioned within a larger web of genre influences established by earlier works which engaged other American wars as well as our various opponents. The combat genre, in tandem with other Hollywood and theatrical conventions regarding the portrayal of race and culture, heavily influenced the character development, structure, themes, and visual iconography of both mediums' depictions of the Vietnam War. The works about Vietnam, however, differed from those of earlier conflicts in their willingness to question and often attack US participation in the war; portray conflicts based on race, class, and rank among American troops; and at times express sympathy with and/or support of the enemy. Indeed, as Dittmar and Michaud observed, "the particularity of the Vietnam War must be stressed," in that it "deeply divided the country's population and brought about a profound crisis in imagination."⁷⁰ Consequently, the films and plays discussed in my study reflect an ambiguity and moral anguish about the war which was not typically seen in earlier works of the combat genre.

This cultural sense of divisiveness and confusion, as well as its impact on America's historic self-image, also created a striking tension in our shifting attitudes towards the Vietnamese. During the period of the actual conflict, the 1960s and early 1970s, the growing body of opposition to the war led to the creation of a number of works which criticized the basic values of American society as corrupt, racist, and imperialist. As a result, many plays and non-studio films expressed sympathy with the South Vietnamese people, who were perceived as innocent victims of an unjust and oppressive American

occupation. Furthermore, a smaller number of works even supported or demonstrated solidarity with the NVA and Viet Cong, who were often romanticized by the anti-war activists as noble peasant revolutionaries. Representations of this kind would have been unthinkable during World War Two (although later films about the war did express sympathy towards individual Germans or Italians), and reflect the controversy surrounding our involvement in Southeast Asia at that time. After American troops were withdrawn from Vietnam, this divisiveness continued and impacted on the eventual wave of fictional recreations of the war which emerged on screen and stage. This traumatic legacy was exacerbated by our having to come to terms with a sense of defeat for the first time in American history, as well as a difficult assessment of the traditional notions of American honor, fair play, and altruism both at home and abroad. As the cinematic and theatrical discourse struggled with these issues, the impact of the war on the Vietnamese was generally dismissed amidst the cultural lament over what the war did to us.

Later, as America became determined to banish the "Vietnam syndrome" by the 1980s, the Vietnamese were reconstituted as inept opponents in a series of films (e.g., *First Blood*) which championed images of American military and cultural invincibility. In all of these varied mythological treatments of the war during the 1970s and early 1980s, the Vietnamese (when considered at all) were typically portrayed as barbaric, alien "Orientals" who were responsible for the corruption and emotional devastation of previously "normal" American boys. The most popular pattern of plays and films in the 1980s, however, took the opposite tack of attempting to present the "reality" of the war for the viewing public. As a result, the callous attitudes and savage behavior of some American troops towards the larger Vietnamese populace was revealed for the first time to a widespread American audience. While creating a new level of sympathy for the Vietnamese "victims" of American brutality, these works continued the tendency towards individualizing the Americans (even the "bad" ones) and collectively categorizing the Vietnamese which had

characterized the Vietnam War canon from the outset. The cultural catharsis which seemed to result from this graphic confrontation of the specific savagery associated with Vietnam did create a softening of attitudes about the war and the Vietnamese people by the 1990s. This development, and the inevitable healing of wounds which the passage of time provided, led to a number of attempts in the decade after *Platoon* to look beyond American concerns and finally represent the "Vietnamese perspective" on the war. In addition, a few mainstream Hollywood films also began to explore the impact of the war on Black Americans (although this subject, like most others about the war, had been previously addressed in the theatre).

The results of these works have been considered in previous chapters, but the various patterns of representation speak to the larger issue of a cultural discourse which naturally has favored some voices and concerns over others. In 1990, Dittmar and Michaud wrote that "to date, the complexity and diversity of the roles played by people of color and women ..., the relation between social class and the conduct of this war, and the full ugliness and brutality of a war experienced differently by the Vietnamese and American G.I.s, are all largely exiled from the realm of representation. Clearly, then, attention to what is said and what has been left out uncovers these films' relation to contemporary arenas of ideological contradiction and conflict."⁷¹ While the developments on stage and screen in the 1990s did begin to address some of these areas of absence (again, with decidedly mixed results in most cases), their statement is certainly true of the overall thrust of both media in representing the American and Vietnamese presence in the war. As I have emphasized in this study, the response of our entertainment industry to the war was also conditioned by previous traditions of absencing or stereotyping of domestic minorities and foreign Others in numerous plays and films. And, as Wimal Dissanayake insightfully observed, "nationhood, as with all other forms of identity, turns on the question of difference ... the notion of difference and the incessant interplay between presence and

absence are central to the construction of nationhood."⁷² Thus, our construction of a sense of national identity or self has also involved those Others (e.g., Blacks, Indians, Asians, etc.) who exist in opposition to the privileged members of the nation. Consequently, cultural representations of historic watersheds such as wars have frequently manipulated the discourse about those events in order to create, reinforce, and legitimize cultural mythology and identity. In relation to this, Dissanayake notes that Eric Hobsbawm's interpretation of the concept of "nationhood" states that it "serves to present a threatened way of life of the privileged by drawing on the past for historical validation." This notion has been reflected in Hollywood's treatment of our nation's "conquest" of the West; numerous representations of World War Two on stage and screen; and many of the mainstream cinematic and theatrical explorations of the Vietnam War.⁷³

The Vietnam War offered a greater challenge to our national self-identity and innate sense of "Americanness" than any other war in our history. As a result, the subsequent representations of the war often "drew on the past" in order to validate and restore our weakened faith in American honor, altruism, and willpower. This tendency is most apparent in the films like *The Deer Hunter* which examine the war in a larger context of American mythological references, or in the "Rambo/Braddock" pictures which attempt to revise the military and political results of the war to suggest that we were "winners" after all. However, even works like *Platoon* and *Tracers*, which criticized our national character in some ways in relation to Vietnam, still operated within a discourse which favored the usual dominant voices or institutions (i.e., white American) and which ultimately hoped to salvage the "lost" American national character. Again, the cultural artifacts of other nations reflect similar agendas and recovery projects in relation to the complex issues of war, imperialism, economics, foreign policy, race, culture, etc. (indeed, my brief discussion of Japanese and Vietnamese cinematic depictions of World War Two and the Vietnam War

indicates a narcissistic focus not dissimilar to the American works about these wars). The focus of this study, however, has been on an examination of the manner in which American cultural products--specifically plays and films--have engaged these issues. Ultimately, I believe that the changing ways in which our Vietnamese allies and enemy have been defined--through both presence and absence--has revealed a great deal about how our own historic and contemporary socio-political, cultural, and racial agendas intersected around the Vietnam War.

As the century which spawned most of the American wars discussed in this study draws to a close, plays and films about those events continue to emerge.⁷⁴ While the "Vietnam War film" does not command the box office clout it did in the late 1980s, the combat genre as a whole retains its hold on the American popular consciousness. Indeed, Terrence Malick's upcoming film--based on veteran James Jones's novel *The Thin Red Line* about a squad of American infantrymen fighting the Japanese in the Pacific during World War Two--seems to be one of the most anticipated pictures of 1998. While this is due in part to the long-absent-from-Hollywood Malick's return to directing, it also speaks to the deep-seated appeal of the combat film to America's cultural psyche. Indeed, Hollywood's top male stars were clamoring to be in the film at salaries far below their normal fees, and its cast contains such "A list" actors as Sean Penn, Nick Nolte, John Travolta, Woody Harrelson, and John Cusack.⁷⁵ While many of the recent works about the Vietnam War have worked within familiar, previously established paradigms such as "the disturbed veteran," there is still much room for further exploration of the war on stage and screen. Again, few plays or films have examined the political and economic causation of our involvement in Vietnam in any depth, and the attempts to expand the field of representation to include previously silenced or distorted voices in the last decade or so have barely scratched the surface of possibilities in that regard. As most of the American works discussed in my last chapter tend to posit the notion of a monolithic Black or

Vietnamese "perspective" on the Vietnam War, it is to be hoped that future ones will explore the conflict from a plethora of perspectives in order to achieve the fullest possible understanding of its complex issues. And as Dissanayake contends in her essay, cinematic treatments of history can maintain cultural interest in these topics and, at their best, serve to offer a counter-memory of sorts to the "homogenizing and monological narratives" which are frequently claimed as historical "truth" or "reality."⁷⁶ As she puts it:

counter-memory underlines the fact that history is a multivoiced and multileveled narration and that normally the single voice and single level are privileged depending on the author.... Cinema can be extremely effective in persuading us to deconstruct the putatively unified narrative of nationhood by focusing on the diverse elements that go to form it as well as by urging us to take a second look at certain well-accepted positionalities.

While the stage can also serve the same purpose, it is my position (as well as that of many of the critics and authors cited in this study) that neither medium has been typically used as a form of "counter-memory" about our involvement with the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese people, although individual works in certain periods have pursued such a mission. This failure is less true of the lower-profile medium of theatre and more relevant to a consideration of the commercially driven, populist Hollywood feature film. Consequently, cinematic attempts to reassess or subvert--as opposed to reinscribe--our narratives and myths of nationhood in relation to Vietnam typically occurred outside the purview of the major studios (especially during the years of the war itself, where a number of politically charged films were produced independent of Hollywood financing). Thus, my discussion of the various intentions and implications of these works has attempted to clarify how such American theatrical and cinematic representations of race, culture, and the Vietnam War have operated within the ongoing discourse of one of the most significant events of our recent history. As this discourse continues, I hope that future fictional depictions of any wars--including Vietnam--will indeed encourage the American viewer of

plays and films to take a "second look" at the complex interconnection of politics, nationalism, imperialism, gender, race, and culture involved with those events.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, James Walsh, "Peace Finally at Hand," *Time*, 14 February 1994, 34, which noted how the lifting of the trade embargo signaled a "fresh start for old foes"; Steven Erlanger, "America Opens the Door To a Vietnam It Never Knew," *New York Times*, 6 February 1994, E4, where he observed the change in relations between the nations as follows: "in increasing numbers, Americans who have visited Vietnam, to rediscover old battlefields, or just to tour, have found the necessary solace. On my last visit, two years ago, I found that Vietnamese in general liked and admired Americans.... having been divorced from the world for so long, the Vietnamese are rushing now to meet it halfway"; and Michael Paterniti, "Saigon: The Sequel," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1997, 24-31, 40, 44, which discussed the wave of young Western entrepreneurs who have recently flocked to Ho Chi Minh City to seek their fortunes.
2. Renny Christopher, "Images of Vietnamese in American Film: the Mafia and the Super-Capitalists," *Viet Nam Generation 7*: 106.
3. *Alamo Bay*, directed by Louis Malle, 99 mins., Tri-Star, 1985, videocassette.
4. *M*A*S*H*, directed by Robert Altman, 116 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1970, videocassette, while set in the Korean War, was perceived by many critics and viewers as another allegorical commentary on US involvement in the Vietnam War. Its satirical stance towards the military, as well as the anarchic behavior of most of the doctors, seemed to influence the style of Levinson's film some twenty years later. The fact that *Good Morning, Vietnam* was not produced until 1987, however, suggests that Hollywood and the larger American public needed a significant passage of time before feeling comfortable with a "comedy" about the war. No doubt this reflects the particular ongoing controversies which surrounded our involvement in Vietnam since a number of comedies were made during World War Two (e.g., Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, 126 min., United Artists, 1940, videocassette). Indeed, even "lowbrow" comedians such as The Three Stooges often triumphed over buffoonish Nazis in various short films made during that war. After the success of *Good Morning, Vietnam*, two other "comedies" set during the Vietnam War were made: *Air America*, directed by Roger Spottiswoode, 112 mins., Tri-Star, 1990, videocassette; and *Operation Dumbo Drop*, directed by Simon Wincer, 108 min., Walt Disney Pictures, 1995, videocassette. *Air America* featured the clandestine operations of two pilots (played by Mel Gibson and Robert Downey, Jr.) in Laos during the war, while critic Lisa Schwarzbaum described *Operation Dumbo Drop* as follows: "Danny Glover [previously seen fighting the war in *Bat 21*], Ray Liotta, and Denis Leary play American military men who show goodwill to friendly locals by replacing a revered elephant lost in battle. The mission entails their ... surviving wacky mishaps, learning lessons in cooperation, and experiencing how to do good deeds in a bad (but strangely distant, bloodless) war. The whole concept, supposedly based on a true story, is weird--this is what Vietnam movies have come to?," *Entertainment Weekly*, 11 August 1995, 38. These films, which combined Vietnam War combat stories with other genres (in this case comedy, although the 1984 film *Purple Hearts*, directed by Sidney J. Furie, 116 mins., Warner Brothers, videocassette, was billed as a "Vietnam romance" between an American doctor and nurse during the war), perhaps reflected the eventual need of the studios to find a fresh cinematic "take" on the war as well.

5. See Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *John Wayne: American* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), which describes "The Duke's" USO Tours during both World War Two and Vietnam; and Donald Dewey, *James Stewart: A Biography* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996), which notes the actor's USO Tour during 1969. The film *For the Boys*, directed by Mark Rydell, 145 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1991, videocassette, depicts two entertainers (James Caan and Bette Midler) performing for American soldiers during World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam. The film is effective in showing the change in American troops over a twenty year span encompassing three wars, although it is rather heavy-handed in contrasting the gentlemanly, WASPy lads of the "good war" against the grungy-looking, rowdy GIs in Vietnam--many of them Black--who, for example, maul a perky go-go-dancer on the tour. Still, it is the only film which includes images of combat spanning all three wars, and its use of Bob Hope-like stars as a framework to convey the changing cultural landscape of America vis-à-vis our military commitments abroad is also unique.

6. Said, *Orientalism*, 23.

7. See Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

8. *Good Morning, Vietnam*, directed by Barry Levinson, 120 mins., Buena Vista, 1987, videocassette.

9. Lanning, 253.

10. *The Iron Triangle*, directed by Eric Weston, 92 mins., Scotti Brothers Pictures, 1988, videocassette. The film does revert to the more traditional, stock depictions of "Orientals" in its character of the beautiful, "femme fatale" South Vietnamese propaganda officer. When not executing elderly peasants who question her anti-Communist spiel, she is shown in bed with her decadent (of course) French bodyguard. Both of them receive their comeuppance when Ho catches them off-guard after making love and kills them at close range.

11. See Le Ly Hayslip, with Jay Hurts, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Place: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey From War to Peace* (New York: Penguin, 1989); and with James Hayslip, *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1993). For a good discussion of Vietnamese literary narratives about the war, see Renny Christopher, *The Vietnam War/The American War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

12. Nisid Hajari, "Stone Angel," *Entertainment Weekly*, 19 November 1993, 42.

13. Thea Klapwald, "Two Survivors Turn Hell Into 'Heaven and Earth'," *New York Times*, 19 December 1993, 22H. Director Steven Spielberg faced similar concerns and criticisms in his recent film *Amistad* (released in December 1997), which dealt with the revolt of a group of Africans aboard their slave ship of the same name in 1839. See Jeff Gordinier, "Mutiny and the Bounty," *Entertainment Weekly*, 12 December 1997, 25, where he notes Spielberg's apprehension about directing such a racially charged topic after being treated like a "Caucasian carpetbagger" by critics concerning his 1985 adaptation of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*. As Spielberg himself put it, "I expressed to Debbie [Debbie Allen, who originally optioned the rights to the film] that I didn't feel comfortable in telling the story ... and she was very compelling in her arguments to

convince me to look beyond color and race. If I was interested in telling this story, nothing should stop me from telling it." The issue of who has the appropriate "credentials" or right to represent a particular race has become a controversial topic in the American entertainment industry in recent years, with Benjamin Svetkey's article on "The Race Question," *Entertainment Weekly*, 7 March 1997, 20-21, observing that "a very personal debate has been raging about who should be allowed to direct what sorts of pictures. Black filmmakers, furious at what they see as a long history of industry insensitivity, have accused white directors of patronizing attitudes and even outright racism. White directors, meanwhile, feeling damned if they do and damned if they don't, have lobbed back charges of reverse racism." White director Rob Reiner ventured into this racial minefield with his 1996 film *Ghosts of Mississippi*, where a white lawyer in the 1990s reopens the investigation of civil rights activist Medgar Evers murder during the 1960s. In Reiner's words, "for years I had wanted to make a film that dealt with race relations... I didn't feel I had the right to tell the stories of people like Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, or even Medgar Evers. But I felt I had the right to tell the story of a white person facing these issues and what he learns about himself." Despite this, leading Black directors like Spike Lee criticized the film as follows: "*Ghosts of Mississippi* is a bulls--- movie ... if you're going to tell a story about civil rights, then black people cannot be muthaf---in' peripheral," 21. In terms of Black directors like Lee and John Singleton having enough "clout" in Hollywood to move Blacks from the "periphery" of the cinematic discourse, see also E.R. Shipp, "Taking Control of Old Demons By Forcing Them Into the Light," *New York Times*, 16 March 1997, 13, 26. Lee did note to Svetkey that he thought it was "possible for a white director to make a sensitive film about the African-American experience, but not likely. 'Because he's never been a Black man in the United States ... you grow up with a whole mind-set'." In response, white director Norman Jewison called Lee's comments "apartheid thinking," Svetkey, 21, a viewpoint which was echoed in relation to the contemporary American theatre by Robert Brustein (Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theatre and a well-known scholar and critic). In response to playwright August Wilson's keynote address at the June 1996 Theatre Communications Group Conference where, among other points about the importance of "race" in theatre, he denounced Black actors for performing in "white" plays, Brustein called his views "separatist." The controversy peaked with a debate between the two men at Town Hall in New York City on 29 January, 1997 (which I attended). See August Wilson, "The Ground on Which I Stand," Keynote Address, Theatre Communications Group Conference, Princeton University, 26 June 1996; printed in *American Theatre*, September 1996, 14-16 and 77; Robert Brustein, "Subsidized Separatism," *American Theatre*, October 1996, 26-27, 100; and William Grimes, "Face-to-Face Encounter On Race in the Theater," *New York Times*, 29 January 1997, C9-C10.

14. Gregg Kilday, "Oliver Stoned," *Entertainment Weekly*, 14 January 1994, 32.

15. Lan Cao, "The Details Are Vietnamese, The Vision, Guilty American," *New York Times*, 23 January 1994, 13.

16. Hajari, 42; and for subsequent quote.

17. *Heaven and Earth* differs stylistically from Stone's previous films about the war in that it goes beyond cinematic "realism" to attempt to convey the metaphysical aspects of Haylsip's world view. Thus, Stone incorporates dream sequences, surrealistic imagery, contrasting film stock, etc. within his overall naturalistic framework to establish the spiritual dimension of her story. As with *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, then, the

film has a very distinct visual style in relation to Stone's recreations of the war and Vietnam.

18. Cao, 22; and for subsequent quotes.

19. Kilday, 32.

20. Janet Maslin, "A Woman's View of Vietnam Horrors," *New York Times*, 24 December 1993, C22. Stone himself felt that Hayslip's memoirs reflected a tone of victimization which he tried to avoid in the film. In his words: "if anyone had bad luck with men, she was victim number one. It's easy to cast yourself as a victim of men, especially when you're 4 foot 11. She's guilty of some of that in the movie. Victimization is a popular concept now, but it's not an accurate one. It doesn't solve the problem. It doesn't take responsibility.... Maybe we're into victimization as a society. But I try not to be," Kilday, 32.

21. Hajari, 45.

22. Ibid., 42.

23. Maslin, C22.

24. Herman Wong, "Viet Refugees Give 'Platoon' Good Reviews," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 January 1987, 5.

25. Cao, 22.

26. Cawley, 20.

27. Hajari, 42.

28. Owen Gleiberman, "'Earth' to Stone," *Entertainment Weekly*, 24 December 1993, 36.

29. *Heaven and Earth*, directed by Oliver Stone, 142 min., Warner Brothers, 1993, videocassette. My discussion of this film and many of the Vietnamese-made movies in this chapter evolved from my previous article "Whose Vietnam: the Representation of the Vietnamese in Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*," *Viet Nam Generation 7*: 102-105. Another American picture with similar intentions to *Heaven and Earth* was Tiana Thi Nga's documentary *From Hollywood to Hanoi*, 78 mins., Friendship Bridge Productions, 1993. Nga's family left Vietnam in 1966, and the actress-turned-film maker stated that "as children in American schools, we were labeled the gooks, the Chinks, the Viet Cong. Vietnamese were the guys killing American GIs. I wanted to be good and that meant being American. What kind of role models are we giving Asian-American kids now except for Rambo? We must have other role models," Linda Ilene Solomon, "A Vietnam Movie Through a Different Lens," *International Herald Tribune*, 8 June 1993, 93. Thus, she returned to Vietnam to discover her own "roots," and eventually filmed a number of interviews which were juxtaposed in the film against older newsreel and documentary footage, Vincent Canby, "Going Back Home, Again and Again, To Find Vietnam and to Find Herself," *New York Times*, 21 July 1993, C13. Betsy Sherman's review of the film in the *Boston Globe*, 25 October 1992, observed that "like any good piece of filmmaking,

it broadens the personal into the universal. Through her quest, we find out about Vietnamese culture and American culture and the delicate bridge, too often built from misinformation, that spans the two.... 'From Hollywood to Hanoi' presents a postwar Vietnam we have not seen before on film. Thi Thanh Nga seeks out the stories of Vietnamese from all strata of society ... she films poignant reunions with her own family members ... she also grills public figures whose names echo in the memory from the war years, such as former prime minister Pham Van Dong and diplomat Le Duc Tho. American attitudes and misconceptions about Vietnam are explored as well. In a striking sequence, Thi Thanh Nga shows an old clip of General Westmoreland saying 'The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does the Westerner' and then confronts the general with his own words at a recent benefit performance of 'Miss Saigon.' (On camera, Westmoreland denies having uttered the sentiment we've just seen him deliver)," B7 and B9. *From Hollywood to Hanoi* received a limited release around the same time as *Heaven and Earth*, and despite its generally ecstatic reviews has never been seen by a widespread American audience (it is also not easily available on videotape). Ironically, then, despite its small budget and Nga's inexperience as a director, her film seemed to go much farther than Stone's more high profile, big-budget *Heaven and Earth* in representing Vietnam as "a country with real people" and not just a war or syndrome, Sherman, B7.

30. See Edward Behr and Mark Steyn, *The Story of Miss Saigon* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1991) 18-39, for an interesting discussion of the various versions of the "Butterfly story" and how they influenced the creation of *Miss Saigon*.

31. Ibid., 148.

32. Eileen Blumenthal, "'Mikado' to 'Miss Saigon': East is East, or Is It?," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1991, G1. David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* (in *American Theatre*, July/August 1988) examines the racial, sexual, and cultural ramifications of the "Butterfly" myth on various levels. At one point, the Chinese character Song Liling mocks the "favorite fantasies" of Western men regarding "submissive Oriental women" as follows: "consider it this way: What would you say if a blond homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be an deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner--ah!--you find it beautiful," 4. See also James Moy's discussion of *M. Butterfly* in his *Marginal Sights*, 115-129, where he notes that the French diplomat Gallimard extends his attitudes about "Oriental submissiveness" towards the Vietnam War: "if the Americans demonstrate the will to win, the Vietnamese will welcome them into a mutually beneficial union Orientals will always submit to a greater force' (9-10).... This of course was the mistake of the Vietnam War: 'And somehow the American war went wrong.... Four hundred thousand dollars were being spent for every Viet Cong killed; so General Westmoreland's remark that the Oriental does not value life the way Americans do was oddly accurate. Why weren't the Vietnamese people giving in? Why were they content to die and die and die again?' (13)." Ultimately, Moy argues that "Gallimard's fantasy collapses the Orient into one indistinguishable mass, annihilating the differences between Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese," 117.

33. Behr and Steyn, 9-15, 16.

34. Except perhaps for *Saint Jack*, directed by Peter Bogdanovich, 112 min., New World Pictures, 1979, videocassette. In this picture, the American protagonist Jack Flowers (Ben Gazzara) works as a pimp in Singapore during the early 1970s, but becomes disillusioned with his work after running a brothel for GIs in Vietnam (all of whom are burnt-out cases in the "psycho vet" mode of representation discussed previously).

35. Behr and Steyn, 139.

36. Jack Kroll, "Good Evening; 'Miss Saigon'," *Newsweek*, 22 April 1991 (Criticism file "Miss Saigon--1990/91," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center).

37. The play's unusual acknowledgment of the Amerasian children (called Bui Doi or "dust of life" in Vietnam) is interesting in that they were discriminated against in post-war Communist Vietnam. See Melinda Beck et al., "The Legacy of Vietnam--Where Is My Father?," *Newsweek*, 15 April 1985, 54-57. However, Chris's GI friend John sings a preachy number about their plight in Act Two of the show. While he flashes "documentary" photos (no doubt another attempt to reinforce the "believability" of the play for its audience) of the Bui Doi on a screen while attempting to raise funds for them in America, he tells us that they "are the living reminder of all the good we failed to do."

38. *Variety*, 7 June 1993 (Criticism file "Miss Saigon--1990/91"). See Behr and Steyn, Chapter Seventeen, 180-191, where they discuss the casting flap over Pryce in the American theatre community. The authors do acknowledge the legitimate concerns of Asian-American actors like B.D. Wong (who played Liling in *M. Butterfly*) who wrote a note to the American Actors Union stating "... at this time in history, blackface is wrong, yellowface is wrong. Only Equity and her Alien Committee has the power to stop this ridiculous notion, or else it will magnify and multiply itself so fast that it will become an hourly issue which Equity simply is not equipped to fight.... Force Cameron Mackintosh and future producers to cast their productions with racial authenticity," 182-83. Generally, however, they blatantly sympathized with Mackintosh, defending his "producer's prerogative" to cast the role as he wished; and also criticized the "overtly aggressive, resentful overtones" of the "unexpected campaign against him" which "introduced the notion of racial privilege under the guise of multi-racial equality," 183. Mackintosh himself responded to the various criticisms of the play's casting in a letter to Actors' Equity Association as follows: "the colour of one's skin cannot be the only criterion for casting. Talent has to be the primary consideration.... As a character, the Engineer is the archetypal outsider who excludes himself from every community and we therefore feel that the part can be played by actors of any race," 185. Again, his comments showed a surprising lack of awareness concerning the potential sensitivity of choices like having Pryce wear prosthetic pieces on his eyes to make them appear "Oriental" in the London production. While Behr and Steyn claim that "this had never been an issue with Equity in London, or with its Asian community," the actor abandoned his make-up in response to the furor in America, 183.

39. Kari Granville, "'Miss Saigon' Finally Hits Broadway," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1991, 2.

40. Behr and Steyn, 141-42.

41. Frank Rich, *New York Times*, 12 April 1991, C226 (Criticism file "Miss Saigon--1990/91").

42. Michael Feingold, "Heat Seeking Bomb," *Village Voice*, 23 April 1991, 91.

43. Alain Boubil, Richard Maltby, Jr., and Claude-Michel Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, unpublished libretto, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City, 13, 32, 38, 61; and Alain Boubil, et al., *Miss Saigon*, Broadway Theatre, New York City, 28 October 1993. The opera *Tonkin*, by Conrad Cummings and Thomas Bird, which premiered at the Grand Opera House, Wilmington, Delaware, 27 November 1993, attempted (in the words of librettist Bird, who also founded New York's Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theater Company), "in some way [to] illuminate our differences in a way we can understand and reconcile them in peaceful and constructive ways," James Oestreich, "Theatrical Vietnam: a Land of Ghosts," *New York Times*, 29 November 1993, C16. The opera explores Vietnamese history from the end of World War Two through the present day, where the Vietnamese characters are then portrayed as "ghosts." Although one leading character is a downed American pilot, most of the roles are Vietnamese, including a representation of Ho Chi Minh (as with most other contemporary operatic conventions, all of the Asian characters were portrayed by Caucasian singers--but without "Oriental" make-up in this case). Peter Goodman's review of the work in *Newsday*, 29 December 1993, 55, observed that "Act II is the crucial failure, for here, one gets no real sense of battle, anger, fear or bitterness. As a result, the ghosts of Act II are not haunting, and even the final prayer for reconciliation is unearned. Even 'Miss Saigon,' cynically specious and manipulative as it is, is more disturbing." Oestreich's review critiqued the opera's characters as "mere symbols, seemingly bereft of intimate human feeling, as distinct from, say revolutionary rage," C11. *Tonkin* is an unusual stage piece about the war in its interest in depicting the "other side," as well as a fairly broad sweep of recent Vietnamese history beyond the specific period of America's military involvement. Based on the critical response to the work, however, it would seem that it too failed to individualize or illuminate its characters as human beings beyond the abstract notion of "the enemy."

44. Lanford Wilson, *Redwood Curtain* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995), 14, 50, 15; and *Redwood Curtain*, directed by John Kory, adapted by Ed Namzug, ABC Television, 23 April 1995. Frank Rich of the *New York Times*, 31 March 1993, C.15, felt that Geri's Aunt Geneva (played by Debra Monk in both the stage and television versions) "sees her niece's obsession as part of a larger story reaching into both buried American history and buried family secret...." Indeed, at one point in the play, Geneva tells Geri that "you're just deliberately moving away from us. I expect any day now you'll start spouting Vietnamese and wearing a kimono," 27. Interestingly, David Richard's review in the Sunday *New York Times*, 11 April 1993, 5, was one of the few to comment on the "mystical" aspect of the work: "yet 'Redwood Curtain' is such a curious mixture of fantasy and realism, of earthy humor and unearthly hocus-pocus, of mysticism and social criticism that you're never entirely certain how to respond."

45. Ping Chong, *East/West Trilogy--Deshima, Chinoiserie, and After Sorrow*, unpublished script, personal collection of the author, "notes," 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 2; and for subsequent quote.

47. Program, Ping Chong, *After Sorrow (Viet Nam)--Part 3 of the East/West Trilogy*, La Mama e.t.c., New York, 15 February 1997. Personal collection of the author.

48. Chong, *After Sorrow*, 1-7. See also Martha Hess, *Then the Americans Came: Voices From Vietnam* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), which presents an "oral history" of the war and its impact from various Vietnamese perspectives. In this regard, the book offers an interesting balance to the numerous oral histories of the war by American veterans.

49. Cynthia Fuchs, "Bearing Arms Legitimately": *The Walking Dead* and *Panther*, *Viet Nam Generation* 7 (Fall 1995): 108.

50. Another film released in 1995, *Panther*, directed by Mario Van Peebles, 123 min., Gramercy Pictures, videocassette, focused on the creation, goals, rise and fall of the Black Panther party during the 1960s. It also linked the Vietnam War to issues of government discrimination against Blacks and non-whites in general, as when co-founder Huey Newton asked "why should the Black man go fight the yellow man for the white man? ... the Black Panther party is opposed to the war in Vietnam." A scene which recreates a speech at an anti-war rally where Black activist Stokely Carmichael expressed Black solidarity with American Indians, Koreans, and the Vietnamese is particularly striking in this regard, and the movie is framed through the lens of a Black Vietnam veteran (Kadeem Hardison) who becomes disillusioned with police brutality against Blacks in Oakland and joins the Panthers.

51. The fact that so many of the same actors had appeared in successive Vietnam War films by the 1990s created another interesting level of signification around these works. Just as John Wayne, Audie Murphy et al. invested the war pictures they appeared in with an immediate air of familiarity and credibility for the pre-Vietnam generations, actors such as Martin Sheen and Tom Berenger (*Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and *The Substitute*, directed by Robert Mandel, 114 min., Live Entertainment, 1996, videocassette, where he plays a Vietnam veteran-turned-mercenary who becomes a substitute teacher in an inner city school district in order to eliminate a drug cartel operating at a local high school) have become linked to the Vietnam War film canon for the post-Vietnam film going audience. A interesting example of this practice can be seen in director/actor Emilio Estevez's *The War at Home*, 124 mins., Touchstone Pictures, 1996, in which he plays a disturbed Vietnam veteran who cannot readjust to life back home with his family in Texas. The picture is based on James Duff's play *Home Front*, New York: Dramatists Play Services, 1985. Martin Sheen--Estevez's father in real life--also played the role of the father in the film. Critic Justine Elias noted the implications of this casting in her review of the film, *Village Voice*, 26 November 1996, 74, when she commented that "to moviegoers under a certain age, Martin 'Apocalypse Now' Sheen and his progeny *are* the Vietnam War." The other Sheen son, Charlie, had of course played the leading role of Chris Taylor in *Platoon*.

52. Jami Bernard, "Another Kind of Bronx Tale," *Daily News*, 29 September 1995, 58.

53. Unlike *Dead Presidents*, *Panther* does not romanticize its depiction of Black neighborhood life in this regard. Indeed, much drug dealing is shown, and the Panthers in fact try and stop local Black pushers from "corrupting" their own people. Van Peebles did share the Hughes brothers' view, however, that the white-controlled power structure conspired against the Blacks in "ghettoes" during this period and beyond. *Panther* blatantly states that the FBI cooperated with white Mafia members to flood the Black neighborhoods with cheap drugs as a means of destroying the Panthers' work towards self-empowerment

and politicization in Black communities. Not surprisingly, these "revisionist history" aspects of the film in particular provoked a great deal of controversy, although surviving party co-founder Bobby Seale denounced the film generally as "a bootleg fiction." A former white activist from the 1960s named David Horowitz attacked the film's conspiracy angle, claiming that the Panthers themselves were involved with drugs. In response, Gramercy Pictures (the distributor of the film) released documents, including formerly classified FBI material, which allegedly supported *Panther's* claims about the FBI-Mafia link, Gregg Kilday, "Power to the Peebles," *Entertainment Weekly*, 12 May 1995, 33.

54. Fuchs, 108.

55. *Dead Presidents*, directed by Allen and Albert Hughes, 119 min., Hollywood Pictures, 1995, videocassette; and *The Walking Dead*, directed by Preston A. Whitmore II, 90 min., Savoy Pictures, 1995, videocassette.

56. *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994: *The Little Girl of Hanoi*, directed by Hai Ninh, 77 min., 1974; *The Strolling Singers*, directed by Chau Hue, 89 min., 1991; *Brothers and Relations*, directed by Tran Vu, 90 min., 1986; *When the Ten Month Comes*, directed by Dang Nhat Minh, 90 min., 1984; *The Girl on the River*, directed by Dang Nhat Minh, 98 min., 1987; *The Quiet Town*, directed by Le Duc Tien, 77 min., 1986. A *Program of Films from Vietnam*, Museum of Modern Art, 17 February--22 February 1994: *The Retired General*, directed by Nguyen Khac Loi, 1988, 17 February 1994.

57. Hong, Series program, 1, personal collection of the author. Director Tran Anh Hung, who left Vietnam with his family in 1975 to live in France, was motivated to show Vietnam outside of the context of "the American War" (as the Vietnamese sometimes call it) when he made his Oscar nominated film *The Scent of Green Papaya*, 104 min., Firstlook Pictures, 1993, videocassette. Set in 1951 and 1961--shortly before the arrival of American ground troops--it portrays the story of a ten year old Vietnamese girl who journeys from the countryside to work as a servant in Saigon. The director observed that "Vietnam in the movies has meant images of war ... for years now, violence has masked the humanity of my people. It is this humanity I sought to show in the film," Cao, 22. Interestingly, although the film was shot on a sound stage in Paris, as critic Richard Corliss noted it was submitted as "the official Oscar entry from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Perhaps, for a nation emerging from centuries of war, the movie is the best kind of foreign aid--the kind that comes, express mail, from an émigré's wise and tender heart," *Time*, 7 March 1994, 75.

58. See also Seth Mydans, "In Hanoi, an Austere Film Diet," *New York Times*, 1 September 1996, 20, which discusses various hardships and issues facing the struggling film industry in Vietnam today.

59. John Charlot, "Vietnamese Cinema: First Views"; in Dissanayake, 122. The Ho Chi Minh City "Exhibition House of Aggression War Crimes," which documents American "war crimes" in Vietnam, offers yet another decidedly Vietnamese perspective on the war. However, Orville Schell's interesting article "Tunnels That Run Deep, In Earth and Memory," *New York Times*, 20 April 1997, 31, underscores the softening in former hard-line attitudes about the war on both sides as war monuments become "theme parks" in service of the new global economy. The American Vietnam veteran discusses his visit to the 120 mile tunnel complex at Cu Chi (twenty one miles from Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City)

which sheltered the VC during the war. The tunnels are a war monument which extol the "killer heroes" of the NLF, but have also become a popular tourist site where "knock-off Vietcong black pajama uniforms" and American military issue zippo lighters are hawked. Schell notes with discomfort that visitors can also dress up as VC and have their picture taken, or fire AK-47 or M16 rifles at a nearby shooting range.

60. Charlot, 108, 109. Oliver Stone discussed film censorship in Vietnam from another angle in relation to the making of his *Heaven and Earth*. The American director claimed that the Vietnamese government was not willing to let him shoot the picture there because it showed the VC raping Hayslip and executing villagers, Kilday, 31.

61. Ibid., 111, 124, 116, 130-31.

62. Hai Ninh; quoted in Charlot, 130.

63. Philip Shenon, "On Saigon's Day of Defeat, Glitter of Rebirth," *New York Times*, 30 April 1995, 1.

64. Jean Jacques Malo, "Interview with Dang Nhat Minh," *Viet Nam Generation* 7: 97. In addition, director Hai Ninh stated in an interview that "during the war, we concentrated on war films. Now we have turned to other subjects, comedy, sport, and so on. Recently our government and party recognized that the role of culture and cinema is very important, that they contribute to the building of the country as other fields do.... Our newest films concentrate on humanity and moral character"; quoted in Charlot, 116. One picture which depicted present-day Vietnam in a rather amoral light, however, was Tran Anh Hung's follow-up to *The Scent of Green Papaya: Cyclo*, Cineplex Film Properties, Film Forum, New York City, 26 February 1997. The film explores the harsh economic realities of life in Ho Chi Minh City, where a young cyclo (or bicycle-taxi) driver and his sister get increasingly pulled into a tawdry world of violent crime and prostitution. Using a hidden camera, Hung filmed the picture entirely on location in Vietnam, and based it on his observations of that country after returning there for the first time in 1991. He hoped to capture "a country caught in the middle of a transformation ... heading towards modernity after almost twenty years of American embargo." Noting the dearth of films in contemporary Vietnam and dismissing the exotic images of Asia in Western cinema, he claimed that "my film is the first to speak of today's Vietnam. But it will take many films to create a mosaic where one can see Vietnam at close range"; quoted in Laura Winters, "Now Vietnam," *Village Voice*, 18 February 1997, 75. Interestingly, the Vietnamese film critic Ngo Phuong Lan commented that *Cyclo* was a "great film" but did not accurately portray contemporary life in Vietnam, which was why it was never screened there publicly (a video of it was viewed by government officials and critics), Mydans, 20. Although the film generally received positive reviews in the American press, J. Hoberman of the *Village Voice*, 18 February 1997, 75, criticized it for "fetishizing" the character of the sister who is lured into prostitution by her boyfriend; and for being "elliptical, distanced, and barely interested in social reality." Another Vietnamese émigré, twenty five year old Tony Bui, is currently making the first American-produced movie to be shot completely on location in Vietnam. Entitled *Three Seasons*, the film "aims to be a sentimental and sensitive exploration of the profound social and cultural changes that have swept the country of his [Bui's] birth since the Communists reunified it by force in 1975." American actor Harvey Keitel plays an American veteran searching for his child in Vietnam, but the film is not American-centered and the rest of the roles are cast by either Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American actors. Although government censors have approved the script, they have been

actively involved with the film's shooting and raised some concerns about its depiction of prostitutes (which they view as "a relic of Vietnam's decadent past" during the American occupation) and some other politically sensitive issues. Director Bui, however, felt that he would maintain official cooperation because of his patience and the film's "positive" but "honest portrayal of Vietnamese society." Currently set to be released in America by October Films in 1998, the film offers the potential for a major new development in both American and Vietnamese cinema regarding representations of Vietnam, its people, and its culture, Craig R. Whitney, "Going Home, American Shoots Film In Vietnam," *New York Times*, 2 December 1997, 1-2.

65. Charlot, 119.

66. For a brief discussion of Vietnamese theatre about the war, see Nora Alter, "Vietnamese Theatre of Resistance"; in J. Ellen Gainor, ed., *Imperialism and Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-18. Some of the material in this essay was incorporated into the "epilogue" section of her book *Vietnam Protest Theatre*, 175-87, which also considered this topic. Alter notes that the NLF used theatre as a tool to promote propaganda and maintain morale during the war (the brief scene in Weston's film *The Iron Triangle* showed this), and that very little has been written in the West about such performances. She attributes this to the overall lack of interest in non-American depictions of the war in all areas of representation, but also because many of these wartime plays emphasized an oral tradition and thus were not typically written down, 2-3, *Imperialism and Theatre*. In contrast, as I have noted in this chapter, a number of Vietnamese-made films about the war have been seen and reviewed in America in low-profile venues. For an interesting discussion of contemporary Vietnamese theatre, see Theodora Skipitares's account of her participation in a collaboration between Ellen Stewart's LaMama e.t.c. and two Vietnamese theatre companies during a 1997 tour of Vietnam, "Vietnam Journal," *Performing Arts Journal* 56 (May 1997): 64-80. While the performances were not related to the war directly, Skipitares encountered its lingering effects in several instances as when a Vietnamese theatre participant (a Mr. Giao) responded to the American actors' complaints about unprepared dressing rooms, malfunctioning microphones, etc. as follows: "you must excuse us Mrs. [sic] Skipitares, but it has only been twenty years since the war, and we still need time to catch up. After all, it has been more than two hundred years since your country has had a war at home. So I hope you'll understand," 76.

67. Wong, 5.

68. Lawrence Chua, "Cinema Now--of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam," *Village Voice*, 25 January 1994, 57.

69. Cao, 13.

70. Dittmar and Michaud, 4-5, 6.

71. Ibid., 11.

72. Dissanayake, xi; and for subsequent quote, xii.

73. See Paul Fussell's *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. In a chapter entitled "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books," 267-297, for example, he discusses the awareness of soldiers during the war that "optimistic publicity

and euphemism had rendered their experience so falsely that it would never be readily communicable. They knew that in its representation to the laity what was happening to them was systematically sanitized and Norman Rockwellized, not to mention Disneyfied.... America has not yet understood what the Second World War was like and has thus been unable to use such understanding to re-interpret and re-define the national reality and to arrive at something like public maturity," 268.

74. For instance, a new play about the impact of the Vietnam War on a group of former military nurses recently performed in New York was Jane Hogan's *Casualties*, Pulse Ensemble Theatre, New York City, 3-6 September 1997. Emilio Estevez's *The War at Home* was the last studio release about the Vietnam War, and like Jon Avent's similarly titled picture about a traumatized American Vietnam veteran (played by Kevin Costner), *The War*, 126 min., Universal Pictures, 1994, videocassette, offered a new exploration of familiar combat genre themes. Two other more recent combat genre films, however, revealed a fresher take on the old formulas: Bruce Beresford's *Paradise Road*, 120 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1997, videocassette, which portrayed the travails of a group of women prisoners in a Japanese POW camp on Sumatra during World War Two; and Ridley Scott, *G.I. Jane*, Hollywood Pictures, Gotham Cinema, New York City, 12 September 1997, which depicts Demi Moore as the first Navy SEAL candidate who is eventually sent into a covert combat mission in the Middle East, where she performs courageously and saves the life of her Drill Instructor. In Laura Winters's article about Cate Blanchett, one of the stars of *Paradise Road*, *New York Times*, 28 December 1997, 22, the Australian actress observed that the story of these women "was such a forgotten moment in history. Women in wartime are always forgotten."

75. Josh Young, "In the Line of Fire," *Entertainment Weekly*, 5 September 1997, 42-45. The film's casting is also interesting in that John Savage, who played Stevie in *The Deer Hunter*, will be making a rare screen appearance in the film. His presence again speaks to the iconic value of certain actors whom audiences associate with the combat genre in general and/or Vietnam War films in particular. Along these lines, Francis Ford Coppola's company American Zoetrope has optioned the film rights to Christopher Hunt's book *Sparring With Charlie: Motorbiking Down the Ho Chi Minh Trail* (about the author's efforts to bike down the former site of the Ho Chi Minh trail after the end of the war); which will be directed by Coppola's nephew and potentially star Charlie Sheen. In Ross Johnson and Joseph Steuer's article on the project in *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 May 1996, 7, they noted that the participants of the project have nicknamed it "'Apocalypse Now': the Next Generation."

76. Dissanayke, xxi; and for subsequent quote, xxiii-xxiv.

Bibliography

Books

- Alter, Nora M. *Vietnam Protest Theatre: the Television War on Stage*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Anderegg, Michael, ed. *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- Auster, Albert and Leonard Quart. *How the War was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam*. New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Baker, Mark. *Nam*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1981.
- Basinger, Jeanine. *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Beaver, Frank. *Oliver Stone: Wakeup Cinema*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994.
- Behr, Edward, and Mark Steyn. *The Story of Miss Saigon*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1991.
- Bernstein, Matthew, and Gaylyn Studlar, eds. *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*. New York: The Viking Press, 1973.
- Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Boulanger, Ghislaine, and Charles Kasdushin, eds. *The Vietnam Veteran Redefined: Fact & Fiction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986.
- Brecht, Stefan. *The Original Theatre of the City of New York from the Mid-sixties to the Mid-seventies, Book 4, The Bread and Puppet Theatre, Volume One*. New York, London: Methuen/Routledge, 1988.
- Calvocoressi, Peter, and Guy Wint. *Total War*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1972.
- Caputo, Philip. *A Rumor of War*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1977.
- Chandler, Robert W. *War of Ideas: U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1981.
- Christopher, Renny. *The Vietnam War/The American War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness & The Secret Sharer*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910; reprint, New York: Signet Classics, 1950.
- Coppola, Eleanor. *Notes*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.
- Cowie, Peter. *Coppola: A Biography*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1994.
- Cripps, Thomas. *Making Movies Black*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Croyden, Margaret. *Lunatics, Lovers & Poets: The Contemporary Experimental Theatre*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974.
- Davis, R.G. *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years*. Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1975.
- Dewey, Donald. *James Stewart: A Biography*. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996.
- Dissanayake, Wimal, ed. *Colonialism & Nationalism in Asian Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Doherty, Thomas. *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books: 1986.
- Dwyer, Gwynne. *War*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1985.
- Fenn, J.W. Fenn. *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992.
- FitzGerald, Francis. *Fire in the Lake; The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1972.
- Fussell, Paul. *Wartime*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Gibson, William. *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1987.
- Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. New York: Knopf, 1996.
- Gollwitzer, Heinz. *Europe in the Age of Imperialism*. Translated by David Adam and Stanley Baron. Norwich, England: Jarrold and Sons, Ltd., 1969.

- Gruner, Elliot. *Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POW*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993.
- Guerrero, Ed. *Framing Blackness: the African-American Image in Film*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.
- Hasford, Gustav. *The Short-Timers*. New York: Harper and Hill, 1979.
- Hayslip, Le Ly, with Jay Hurts. *When Heaven and Earth Changed Place: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey From War to Peace*. New York: Penguin, 1989.
- Hayslip, Le Ly, with James Hayslip. *Child of War, Woman of Peace*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Hellman, John. *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1968; reprint, New York: Avon Books, 1978.
- Hess, Martha. *Then the Americans Came: Voices From Vietnam*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- Hunt, Michael. *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.
- Jaimes, M. Annette, ed. *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992.
- Jeffords, Susan. *The Remasculinization of America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- . *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- Kane, Kathryn. *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.
- Keen, Sam. *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Kolko, Gabriel. *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Koppes, Clayton R., and Gregory D. Black. *Hollywood Goes To War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. New York and London: The Free Press/Macmillan, Inc., 1987.
- Kovic, Ron. *Born on the Fourth of July*. New York: Pocket Books.

- Ky, Nguyen Cao. *How We Lost the Vietnam War*. New York: Stein and Day, 1976.
- Lanning, Michael. *Vietnam at the Movies*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994.
- Lee, Josephine. *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *Home From the War*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- Loshitzky, Yosefa, ed. *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Miller, Randall M. Miller, ed. *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*. Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer, Publisher, 1980.
- Moy, James. *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- Morrell, David. *First Blood*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1972.
- Neff, Renfreu. *The Living Theatre: USA*. New York and Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970.
- Nixon, Richard. *No More Vietnams*. New York: Arbor House, 1985.
- O' Brien, Tim. *In the Lake of the Woods*. New York: Viking, 1994.
- Roberts, Randy, and James S. Olson. *John Wayne: American*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.
- Russo, J. Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- _____. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Sanier, Arthur. *The Radical Theatre Notebook*. New York: Avon Books, 1975.
- Schechner, Richard. *Environmental Theater*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973.
- Scott, Wilbur J. *The Politics of Readjustment: Vietnam Veterans Since the War*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1993.
- Shank, Theodore. *American Alternative Theatre*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.
- Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.

Stone, Robert. *The Dog Soldiers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

Storey, John. *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Suid, Lawrence H. *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978.

Taylor, Karen Malpede. *People's Theatre in Amerika*. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972.

Terry, Wallace. *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.

Walsh, Jeffrey, and James Aulich, eds. *Vietnam Images*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Articles and Reviews

Adler, Jerry, and Ron Moreau. "The Devil's Due." *Newsweek*, 30 June 1997, 40-44.

Adler, Renata. "Screen: 'Green Berets' as Viewed by John Wayne." *New York Times*, 20 June 1968, 49.

———. "The Absolute End of the 'Romance' of War." *New York Times*, 30 June 1968, 1 and 10.

Alter, Nora. "Vietnamese Theatre of Resistance." In Gainor, Ellen J., ed. *Imperialism and Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, 1-18.

Aleiss, Angela. "Le Bon Savage: Dances With Wolves and the Romantic Tradition." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15 (1991): 91-96.

Anderegg, Michael. "Hollywood and Vietnam: John Wayne and Jane Fonda as Discourse." In Anderegg, Michael, ed. *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 15-32.

Asahina, Robert. "The Basic Training of American Playwrights: Theater and the Vietnam War." *Yale Theater* 9 (Spring 1978): 30-37.

Auster, Al, and Leonard Quart. "Hollywood and Vietnam, the Triumph of the Will." *Cineaste* 9 (1979): 4-9.

- Baum, Geraldine. "Kevin Costner's Dance with the Sioux." *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1995, 5 and 41-42.
- Beck, Melinda, et al. "The Legacy of Vietnam--Where Is My Father?" *Newsweek*, 15 April 1985, 54-57.
- Berg, Rick. "Losing Vietnam." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 41-68.
- Bernard, Jami. "Another Kind of Bronx Tale: Effective 'Dead Presidents'." *Daily News*, 29 September 1995, 58.
- Blumenthal, Eileen. "'Mikado' to 'Miss Saigon': East is East, or Is It?" *Washington Post*, 7 April 1991, G1 and G8-G9.
- Breon, Robin. "Show Boat: The Revival, the Racism." *TDR* 39 (Summer 1995): 86-105.
- Brukenfeld, Dick. "Review of *Sticks and Bones*." *Village Voice*, 11 November 1971.
"Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.
- Brustein, Robert. "Subsidized Separatism." *American Theatre*, October 1996, 26-27 and 100.
- Callaghan, David. "Whose Vietnam: the Representation of the Vietnamese in Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*." *Viet Nam Generation 7*: 102-105.
- Canby, Vincent. "'Platoon' Finds New Life in the Old War Movie." *New York Times*, 1 January 1987, 21 and 31.
- _____. "Going Back Home, Again and Again, To Find Vietnam and to Find Herself." *New York Times*, 21 July 1993, C13 and C14.
- Cao, Lan. "The Details Are Vietnamese, The Vision, Guilty American." *New York Times*, 23 January 1994, 2, 13, and 22.
- Cawley, Leo. "Refighting the War: Why the Movies are in Vietnam." *Village Voice*, 8 September 1988, 18-23.
- _____. "The War About The War: Vietnam Films and American Myth." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 69-80.
- Chau, Lawrence. "Cinema Now--of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam." *Village Voice*, 25 January 1994, 56-57.
- Charlot, John. "Vietnamese Cinema: First Views." In Dissanayake, Wimal, ed. *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, 105-140.

- Christopher, Renny. "Images of Vietnamese in American Film: the Mafia and the Super-Capitalists." *Viet Nam Generation* 7: 106-108.
- Cimino, Michael. "Two Interviews: Stalking the Deer Hunter." Interview by Donald Chase and Joseph Coencas. *Take One* 7 (May 1979): 37-42.
- Corliss, Richard. "Platoon: Vietnam, The War it Really Was." *Time*, 26 January 1987, 54-61.
- _____. "Sweet Dreams from Vietnam." *Time*, 7 March 1994, 75.
- Deming, Angus, et al. "The Legacy of Vietnam--Why the Dominoes Didn't Fall." *Newsweek*, 15 April 1985, 32-86.
- Denby, David. "Hollow Movie--Review of *Apocalypse Now*." *New York*, 27 August 1979, 89-90.
- _____. "Review of *Rambo: First Blood, Part Two*." *New York*, 3 June 1985, 72.
- _____. "New Year's Bonus--*Platoon*." *New York*, 19 January 1987, 78.
- _____. "Review of *Full Metal Jacket*." *New York*, 13 June 1997, 54-55.
- Drury, Bob. "No one Leaves the Vietnam of 'Platoon' Unmoved." *Newsday*, 26 February 1988, Part II, 4 and 5.
- Edelman, Rob. "Review--*Rambo: First Blood Part Two*." *Cineaste* 14 (1986): 44-45.
- Elias, Justine. "Review--*The War at Home*." *Village Voice*, 26 November 1996, 74.
- Ensign, Tod. "'Platoon': A Movie Review." *Citizen Soldier*, Summer 1987, 11-12.
- Erlanger, Steven. "America Opens the Door To a Vietnam It Never Knew." *New York Times*, 6 February 1994, E4.
- Feingold, Michael. "Heat-Seeking Bomb." *Village Voice*, 23 April 1991, 91.
- Fuchs, Cynthia. "'Bearing Arms Legitimately': *The Walking Dead* and *Panther*." *Viet Nam Generation* 7 (Fall 1995): 108-100.
- Garcia, Guy. "Burying the Frito Bandito Once and For All." *New York Times*, 30 January 1994, 32 and 40.
- Gelmis, Joseph. "Review of *The Green Berets*." *Newsday*, 20 June 1968. Clipping File "The Green Berets." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.
- Gibson, James William. "American Paramilitary Culture and the Reconstitution of the Vietnam War." In Walsh, Jeffrey, and James Aulich, eds. *Vietnam Images*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, 10-41.

- Gleiberman, Owen. "'Earth' to Stone." *Entertainment Weekly*, 24 December 1993, 36.
- Goodman, Peter. "And Now, Vietnam as Opera: *Tonkin*." *Newsday*, 29 December 1993, 49 and 55.
- Gordinier, Jeff. "Mutiny and the Bounty." *Entertainment Weekly*, 12 December 1997, 19-27.
- Gottlieb, Saul. "The Living Theatre in Exile." *TDR* 10 (Summer 1996): 140-145.
- Granville, Kari. "'Miss Saigon' Finally Hits Broadway." *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1991, Calendar, 1-2.
- Review of *The Green Berets*. *New Yorker*, 6 July 1968. Clipping File "*The Green Berets*." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.
- Grimes, Williams. "Face-to-Face Encounter On Race in the Theater." *New York Times*, 29 January 1997, C9-C10.
- Hajari, Nisid. "Stone Angel." *Entertainment Weekly*, 19 November 1993, 40-45.
- Halberstam, David. "Two Who Were There View 'Platoon': The Correspondent." *New York Times*, 8 March 1987, 21 and 38.
- Harmetz, Aljean. "Unwanted 'Platoon' Finds Success as U.S. Examines The Vietnam War." *New York Times*, 9 February 1987, C13 and C16.
- Hatch, James V. "Here Comes Everybody: Scholarship and Black Theatre History." In Postlewait, Thomas, and Bruce A. McConachie, eds. *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989, 148-165.
- Hellman, John. "Vietnam and the Hollywood Genre Film: Inversions of American Mythology in *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*." In Anderegg, Michael, ed. *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 56-80.
- Hoberman, J. "Review of *Platoon*." *Village Voice*, 23 December 1986, 79 and 82.
- _____. "Big Wheels: Review of *Cyclo*." *Village Voice*, 18 February 1997, 75.
- Howell, Amanda. "Lost Boys and Angry Ghouls: Vietnam's Undead." In Foster, Thomas, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry, eds. *Bodies of Writing, Bodies in Performance*. New York: New York University Press, 1996, 297-334.
- Howley, James E. "'Platoon': Remembering a War Impossible to Forget." *Army Times*, 23 March 1987, 27.
- James, Caryn. "Film View: Seeing 'Schindler' Plain." *New York Times*, 23 January 1994, H13.

- Jeffords, Susan. "Friendly Civilians: Images of Women and the Feminization of the Audience in Vietnam Films." *Wide Angle* 7 (1985): 13-22.
- Johnson, Ross, and Joseph Steuer. "Zoetrope on the road to Vietnam with 'Charlie'." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 May 1996, 7 and 19.
- Jones, Le Roi. "Communications Project." *TDR* 12 (Summer 1968): 53-57.
- Kael, Pauline. "Review of *Platoon*." *New Yorker*, 12 January 1986, 94-96.
- Kaufman, David. "Review of *Tracers* at the Public Theater; *Life and Limb* at Playwrights Horizons." *Aquarian Weekly*, 20 February 1985, 11.
- Kehr, Dave. "Kubrick's void: What does 'Jacket' mean? Absolutely nothing." *Chicago Tribune*, 26 July 1987, 8 and 10.
- Kilday, Gregg. "Oliver Stoned." *Entertainment Weekly*, 14 January 1994, 28-33.
- _____. "Power to the Peebles." *Entertainment Weekly*, 12 May 1995, 32-33.
- Klapwald, Thea. "Two Survivors Turn Hell Into 'Heaven and Earth'." *New York Times*, 19 December 1993, 22H.
- Klein, Michael. "Historical Memory, Film, and the Vietnam Era." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 19-40.
- Kourilsky, Francoise. "Approaching Quetzalcoatl: The Evolution of El Teatro Campesino." *Performance* 7 (Fall 1973): 37-46.
- Kramer, Sydelle Kramer. "Review of *Platoon*." *Cineaste* 15 (1987): 49-50.
- Kroll, Jack. "Good Evening; 'Miss Saigon'." *Newsweek*, 22 April 1999. "Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism--1990/91." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.
- Lahr, John. "Arthur Kopit's Indians: Dramatizing National Amnesia." In Lahr, John. *Up Against the Fourth Wall: Essays on Modern Theater*. New York: Grove Press, 1968, 136-157.
- Ledford, Larry S. "Emily Mann: Remembering 'Greensboro' at McCarter." *BACK STAGE*, 9 February 1996, 15.
- Lew, Julie. "Hollywood's War on Indians Draws to a Close." *New York Times*, 7 October 1990, 15 and 18-19.
- Maslin, Janet. "Screen: Norris in *Missing in Action*." *New York Times*, 17 November 1984, 11.
- _____. "A Woman's View of Vietnam Horrors." *New York Times*, 24 December 1993, C1 and C22.

- Masters, Patricia Lee. "Warring Bodies--Most Nationalistic Selves." In Dissanayake, Wimal, ed. *Colonialism & Nationalism in Asian Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 1-10.
- McConachie, Bruce A. "The 'Oriental' Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia." *Theatre Journal* 46 (October 1994): 385-398.
- McInerney, Peter. "Apocalypse Then: Hollywood Looks Back at Vietnam." *Film Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1979-80): 21-32.
- McKeever, Robert J. "American Myths and the Impact of the Vietnam War: Revisionism in Foreign Policy and Popular Cinema in the 1980s." In Walsh, Jeffrey, and James Aulich, eds. *Vietnam Images*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, 43-56.
- Miller, Daniel. "Primetime Television's Tour of Duty." In Anderegg, Michael, ed. *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 166-189.
- Minh, Dang Nhat. "Interview with Dang Nhat Minh." Interview by Jean Jacques Malo. *Viet Nam Generation* 7: 96-101.
- "Review of *Miss Saigon*." *Variety*, 7 June 1993. "Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism--1990/91." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.
- Morimoto, Marie Thorsten. "The 'Peace Dividend' in Japanese Cinema--Metaphors of a Demilitarized Nation." In Dissanayake, Wimal, ed. *Colonialism & Nationalism in Asian Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 11-29.
- Mydans, Seth. "In Hanoi, an Austere Film Diet." *New York Times*, 1 September 1996, 20.
- "My Lai: An American Tragedy." *Time*, 5 December 1969, 23-34.
- Novick, Julius. "Review of *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?*" *New York Times*, 3 December 1972. Clipping File "Drama--Types of--Documentary." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.
- Oehling, Richard A. "The Yellow Menace: Asian Images in American Film." In *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*, 182-206.
- Oestreich, James. "Review/Opera--Theatrical Vietnam: a Land of Ghosts." *New York Times*, 29 November 1993, C11 and C16.
- Paterniti, Michael. "Saigon: The Sequel." *New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1997, 24-31, 40, and 44.
- Quart, Leonard. "Woody Allen's New York." *Cineaste* 19 (1992): 16-19.

Rich, Frank. "Review of *Miss Saigon*." *New York Times*, 12 April 1991, C1 and C226.
 "Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism--1990/91." Billy Rose
 Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.

_____. "Lanford Wilson's Comment on the U.S. in the 90's." *New York Times*, 31
 March 1993, C15.

Richards, David. "You Can't See the Forest for the Trees in 'Redwood Curtain'." *New
 York Times*, 11 April 1993, 5 and 36.

Sarris, Andrew. "The Screen at the End of the Tunnel." *Village Voice*, 8 September 1987,
 19, 27-29, and 54.

Schechner, Richard. "The Decline and Fall of the American Avant-Garde." In *The End of
 Humanism*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, 13-76.

Schell, Orville. "Tunnels That Run Deep, In Earth and Memory." *New York Times*, 20
 April 1997, 31.

Schwarzbaum, Lisa. "Where the Wild Things Went." *Entertainment Weekly*, 11 August,
 1995, 38.

Sengupta, Somini. "Charlie Chan, Retooled for the 90's." *New York Times*, 5 January
 1997, 20.

Shenon, Philip. "On Saigon's Day of Defeat, Glitter of Rebirth." *New York Times*, 30
 April 1995, 1 and 14.

Sherman, Betsy. "Back in Country: A filmmaker's journey." *Boston Globe*, 25 October
 1992, B7 and B9.

Shipp, E.R. "Taking Control of Old Demons By Forcing Them Into the Light." *New
 York Times*, 16 March 1997, 13 and 26.

Skipitares, Theodora. "Vietnam Journal." *Performing Arts Journal* 56 (May 1997): 64-
 80.

Solomon, Linda Ilene. "A Vietnam Movie Through a Different Lens." *International
 Herald Tribune*, 8 June 1993, 93.

Southgate, Martha. "A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to Prime Time." *New York
 Times*, Magazine Section, 30 October 1994, 52-55.

Stone, Oliver. "Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies." Interview by Mark C.
 Carnes. *Cineaste* 22 (1997): 33-37.

_____. "History, Dramatic License, and Larger Historical Truths: An Interview with
 Oliver Stone." Interview by Gary Crowdus. *Cineaste* 22 (1997): 38-42.

- Studlar, Gaylyn, and David Desser. "Never Having to Say You're Sorry: Rambo's Rewriting of the Vietnam War." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 101-112.
- Svetkey, Benjamin. "The Race Question." *Entertainment Weekly*, 7 March 1997, 20-21.
- Taylor, Clyde. "The Colonialist Subtext in *Platoon*." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 171-174.
- "Theater Previews: Apocalypse Then, and Now--*Tracers*." *New York*, 15 September, 1997, 82. 29th Street Repertory Theatre, New York City, September 1997.
- Trask, David F. "The Korean War and the Cold War." In Patterson, Thomas G., ed. *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Documents and Essays, Volume II: Since 1914*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1978, 337-343.
- Vartanian, Carolyn Reed. "Women Next Door to War." In Anderegg, Michael, ed. *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 190-203.
- Walker, Alexander. "Stanley Kubrick's War Realities." *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 1987, 28-30.
- Waller, Gregory A. "Rambo: Getting to Win This Time." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 113-128.
- Walsh, James. "Peace Finally at Hand." *Time*, 14 February 1994, 34.
- Weiss, Peter. "Notes on the Contemporary Theater." In Herzfeld-Sander, ed. Translated by Joel Agee. *Essays on German Theatre*. New York: Continuum, 1985.
- White, Susan. "Male Bonding, Hollywood Orientalism, and the Repression of the Feminine in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*." In Anderegg, Michael, ed. *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, 204-230.
- Whitney, Craig R. "Going Home, American Shoots Film In Vietnam." *New York Times*, 2 December 1997, E1 and E2.
- Williams, Tony. "*Missing in Action*: the Vietnam Construction of the Movie Star." In Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud, eds. *From Hanoi to Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 129-144.
- Wilson, August. "The Ground on Which I Stand." Keynote Address. Theatre Communications Group Conference, Princeton University, 26 June 1996. In *American Theatre*, September 1996, 14-16 and 77.

Windeler, Robert. "Defiant Wayne Filming 'Green Berets'." *New York Times*, 27 September 1967. Clipping File "The Green Berets." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.

Winters, Laura. "Now Vietnam." *Village Voice*, 18 February 1997, 75.

———. "Getting the Call for the Unconventional." *New York Times*, 28 December 1997, 22.

Wong, Herman. "Viet Refugees Give 'Platoon' Good Reviews." *Los Angeles Times*, 25 January 1987, Calendar Section, 1-7 and 38-39.

Young, Josh Young. "In the Line of Fire." *Entertainment Weekly*, 5 September 1997, 42-45.

Zinman, Toby Silverman. "Search and Destroy: the Drama of the Vietnam War." *Theatre Journal* 42 (March 1990): 5-26.

Plays and Screenplays

Anderson, Maxwell and Laurence Stallings. *What Price Glory?* In Macgowan, Kenneth ed. *Famous American Plays of the 1920s*. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1959.

Balk, Wesley. *The Dramatization of 365 Days*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972.

Berrigan, Daniel. *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*. New York: Samuel French, 1971.

Berry, David. *G.R. Point*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1980.

Binet, Stephen Vincent. *Your Army*. In *This is War!* Corwin, Norman, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942.

Brewer Boeckel, Florence. *The Whole World's Christmas Tree*. In Sanford, A.P., ed. *Peace Plays*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1932.

Brown, Harry. *A Sound of Hunting*. New York: Knopf, 1946.

Buck, Pearl. *China to America*. In Oboler, Arch, and Stephen Longstreet, eds. *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays*. New York: Random House, 1944.

Cole, Tom. *Medal of Honor Rag*. In Reston, James, ed. *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War*. New York: TCG, 1985.

Corwin, Norman. *The Enemy*. In *This is War!* Corwin, Norman, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942.

———. *This is War!* In *This is War!* Corwin, Norman, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942.

_____. *To the Young*. In *This is War!* Corwin, Norman, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942.

DiFusco, John, et al. *Tracers*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1983.

El Teatro Campesino. *Vietnam Campesino*. In *Theatre Three: The American Theatre 1969-70*. International Theatre Institute of the United States. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

Faulkner, George. *The United Nations*. In *This is War!* Corwin, Norman, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942.

Fuller, Charles. *A Soldier's Play*. New York: Samuel French, 1981.

Gray, Amlin. *How I Got That Story*. In Reston, James, ed. *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War*. New York: TCG, 1985.

Gray, Spalding. *Swimming to Cambodia*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

Haines, William Wister. *Command Decision*. New York: Random House, 1948.

Hare, David. *Year of the Cat*. In Hare, David. *The Asian Plays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1983.

Hart, Moss. *Winged Victory: the Air Force Play*. New York: Random House, 1943.

Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly*. In *American Theatre*. July/August 1988, 1-16.

Kennedy, Adrienne. *An Evening With Dead Essex*. In *Yale/Theater* 9 (Spring 1978): 66-78.

Kopit, Arthur. *Indians*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969.

Laurents, Arthur. *Home of the Brave*. New York: Random House, 1946. In Hewes, Henry, ed. *Famous American Plays of the 1940s*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1960.

Lauro, Shirley. *A Piece of My Heart*. New York: Samuel French, 1988.

Lee, Spike. *Do the Right Thing*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Mann, Emily. *Still Life: A Documentary*. In Reston, James, ed. *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War*. New York: TCG, 1985.

McClinton, H.L. Introduction to *This is War!* Corwin, Norman, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1942.

McLure, James. *Lone Star*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1979.

_____. *Private Wars*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1979.

Merlin, Milton, and Clarence Muse. *Something About Joe*. In Oboler, Arch, and Stephen Longstreet, eds. *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays*. New York: Random House, 1944.

Metcalf, Stephen. *Strange Snow*. In Reston, James, ed. *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War*. New York: TCG, 1985.

Miller, Arthur. *All My Sons*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1947.

Oboler, Arch. *The People's March*. In Oboler, Arch, and Stephen Longstreet, eds. *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays*. New York: Random House, 1944.

_____. *Rip Von Dinkel of Nuremberg*. In Oboler, Arch, and Stephen Longstreet, eds. *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays*. New York: Random House, 1944.

Patrick, John. *The Hasty Heart*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1945.

_____. *The Teahouse of the August Moon*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1957.

Rabe, David. *Sticks and Bones*. New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1972.

_____. *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*. In Hoffman, Ted, ed. *Famous Plays of the 1970s*. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1981.

_____. *Streamers*. In Reston, James, ed. *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War*. New York: TCG, 1985.

Ragni, Jerome, and James Rado. *Hair*. New York: Pocket Books, 1969.

Ribman, Ronald. *The Final War of Olly Winter*. CBS Playhouse/Television Network, 1967.

Ritchie, Anna Cora Mowatt. *Fashion*. In Quinn, Arthur Hobson, ed. *Representative American Plays*. New York: The Century Company, 1921.

Scott, Allan. *Your Day is Coming*. In Oboler, Arch, and Stephen Longstreet, eds. *Free World Theatre: Nineteen New Radio Plays*. New York: Random House, 1944.

Stone, Oliver. *Platoon*. Great Britain: Ebury Press, 1986; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1987.

Terry, Megan. *Viet Rock and Other Plays*. With an introduction by Richard Schechner. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966.

Wilde, Percival. *The Unseen Host and Other War Plays*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917.

Wilson, Lanford. *Fifth of July*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1978.

_____. *Redwood Curtain*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995.

Published Documents

Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Dwight D. Eisenhower Explains the 'Domino Theory,' 1954." In Patterson, Thomas G., ed. *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Documents and Essays, Volume II: Since 1914*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1978, 370-372.

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Lyndon B. Johnson Explains Why Americans Fight in Vietnam, 1965." In Patterson, Thomas G., ed. *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Documents and Essays, Volume II: Since 1914*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1978, 46-449.

The Pentagon Papers. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

"The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, 1964." In Patterson, Thomas G., ed. *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Documents and Essays, Volume II: Since 1914*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1978, 445-46.

Unpublished Documents and Manuscripts

Boubil, Alain, Richard Maltby Jr., and Claude-Michel Schönberg. *Miss Saigon*. Libretto. Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.

Chong, Ping. *After Sorrow (Viet Nam)--Part 3 of the East/West Trilogy*. Program. La Mama e.t.c., New York, 15 February 1997. Personal collection of the author.

_____. *East/West Trilogy--Deshima, Chinoiserie, and After Sorrow*. Script. Personal collection of the author.

Hi Chi Minh City Exhibition House of Aggression War Crimes. Brochure--"Crimes of War of Aggression in Vietnam." Personal collection of the author.

Minne Jung-Min Hong, Minne. "Welcoming Statement." Program. *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* series, 21-27 January 1994, New York City. Personal collection of the author.

Orion Pictures. "Production Notes" for *Platoon*, 1-4. November 1986. Clipping File "Platoon." Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center, New York City.

Doctoral Dissertations

Nadler, Paul. "American Theatre and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945--1965." Ph.D. diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 1995.

Performances

Boubil, Alain, et al. *Miss Saigon*. Broadway Theatre, New York City, 28 October 1993.

Chong, Ping. *After Sorrow (Viet Nam)--Part 3 of the East/West Trilogy*. La Mama e.t.c., New York, 15 February 1997.

Cummings, Conrad, and Thomas Bird. *Tonkin*. The Grand Opera House, Wilmington, Delaware, 27 November, 2 and 4 December 1993.

Hogan, Jane. *Casualties*. Pulse Ensemble Theatre, New York City, 3-6 September 1997.

Filmography

Air America. Directed by Roger Spottiswoode. 112 min. Tri-Star Pictures, 1990. Videocassette.

Alamo Bay. Directed by Louis Malle. 99 min. Tri-Star Pictures, 1985. Videocassette.

All the Young Men. Directed by Hal Bartlett. 87 min. Columbia Pictures, 1960. Videocassette.

American Commandoes. Directed by Bobby A. Suarez. 89 min. Lightning Video, 1984. Videocassette.

Apocalypse Now. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. 150 min. United Artists/American Zoetrope, 1979. Videocassette.

Ashes and Embers. Directed by Haile Gerima. 120 min. Mypheduh Films, 1982.

Bataan. Directed by Tay Garnett. 113 min. MGM, 1943. Videocassette.

Bat 21. Directed by Peter Markle. 105 min. Tri-Star Pictures, 1988. Videocassette.

Battle Hymn. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 108 min. Universal Pictures, 1956. Videocassette.

The Best Years of Our Lives. Directed by William Wyler. 170 min. RKO, 1946. Videocassette.

- Billy Jack*. Directed by T.C. Frank. Tom Laughlin. 114 min. Warner Brothers, 1971. Videocassette.
- Birth of a Nation*. Directed by D.W. Griffith. 187 min. Epoch Production Corp, 1915.
- Black Theatre, the Making of a Movement*. Directed by Woody King, Jr. 114 min. California Newsreel, 1978. Videocassette.
- Born on the Fourth of July*. Directed by Oliver Stone. 145 min. Universal Pictures, 1989. Videocassette.
- The Boys in Company C*. Directed by Sidney J. Furie. 125 min. Good Time Films, 1977. Videocassette.
- Braddock: Missing in Action III*. Directed by Aaron Norris. 103 min. Cannon Films, 1988. Videocassette.
- Bridge at Remagen*. Directed by John Guillermin. 116 min. MGM, 1969. Videocassette.
- Brothers and Relations*. Directed by Tran Vu. 90 min. 1986, *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994.
- Buffalo Soldiers*. Directed by Charles Haid. TNT television, 7 December 1997.
- Casualties of War*. Directed by Brian DePalma. 120 min. Columbia/Tri-Star Pictures, 1989. Videocassette.
- China Gate*. Directed by Samuel Fuller. 97 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1957. Videocassette.
- The Combat Film*. 120 min. The New York Center for Visual History/ American Cinema Series, 1995. Videocassette.
- Coming Home*. Directed by Hal Ashby. 127 min. United Artists, 1978. Videocassette.
- Cyclo*. Directed by Tran Anh Hung. Cineplex Film Properties, Film Forum, New York City, 26 February 1997.
- Dances With Wolves*. Directed by Kevin Costner. 181 min. Orion Pictures, 1990. Videocassette.
- Dead Presidents*. Directed by Allen and Albert Hughes. 119 min. Hollywood Pictures, 1995. Videocassette.
- Deconstructing Harry*. Directed by Woody Allen. Fine Lines Features, City Cinemas: Sutton, New York City, 22 December 1997.
- The Deer Hunter*. Directed by Michael Cimino. 183 min. Universal Pictures, 1978. Videocassette.

- The Dirty Dozen*. Directed by Robert Aldrich. 149 min. MGM, 1967. Videocassette.
- Dirty Harry*. Directed by Don Siegel. 102 min. Warner Brothers, 1971. Videocassette.
- Drums Along the Mohawk*. Directed by John Ford. 103 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1939.
- Everyone Says I Love You*. Directed by Woody Allen. 106 min. Miramax, 1996. Videocassette.
- First Blood*. Directed by Ted Kotcheff. 97 min. Orion Pictures, 1982. Videocassette.
- Forrest Gump*. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. 142 min. Paramount Pictures, 1994. Videocassette.
- For the Boys*. Directed by Mark Rydell. 145 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1991. Videocassette.
- From Hollywood to Hanoi*. Directed by Tiana Thi Nga. 78 min. Friendship Bridge Productions, 1993.
- Full Metal Jacket*. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. 118 min. Warner Brothers, 1987. Videocassette.
- Gardens of Stone*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. 112 min. Tri-Star Pictures, 1987. Videocassette.
- G.I. Jane*. Directed by Ridley Scott. Hollywood Pictures, Gotham Cinema, New York City, 12 September 1997.
- The Girl on the River*. Directed by Dang Nhat Minh. 98 min. 1987, *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994.
- Good Guys Wear Black*. Directed by Ted Post. 96 min. American Cinema Releasing, 1979. Videocassette.
- Good Morning, Vietnam*. Directed by Barry Levinson. 120 min. Buena Vista, 1987. Videocassette.
- Gordon's War*. Directed by Ossie Davis. 90 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1973.
- Go Tell the Spartans*. Directed by Ted Post. 114 min. Avco-Embassy, 1978. Videocassette.
- The Great Dictator*. Directed by Charlie Chaplin. 126 min. United Artists, 1940. Videocassette.
- The Green Berets*. Directed by John Wayne and Ray Kellog. 141 min. Warner Brothers, 1968. Videocassette.

- Guadalcanal Diary*. Directed by Lewis Seiler. 93 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1943. Videocassette.
- Halls of Montezuma*. Directed by Lewis Milestone. 113 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1951. Videocassette.
- Hamburger Hill*. Directed by John Irvin. 110 min. Paramount Pictures, 1987. Videocassette.
- The Hanoi Hilton*. Directed by Lionel Chetwynd. 130 min. Cannon Films, 1987. Videocassette.
- Heartbreak Ridge*. Directed by Clint Eastwood. 130 min. Warner Brothers, 1986. Videocassette.
- Hearts and Minds*. Directed by Peter Davis. 112 min. Warner Brothers/Columbia Pictures, 1974. Videocassette.
- Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*. Directed by Fax Bahr, documentary footage directed by Eleanor Coppola. 96 min. ZM Productions, 1991. Videocassette.
- Heaven and Earth*. Directed by Oliver Stone. 142 min. Warner Brothers, 1993. Videocassette.
- Heroes*. Directed by Jeremy Paul Kagan. 137 min. Universal Pictures, 1977. Videocassette.
- In Country*. Directed by Norman Jewison. 116 min. Warner Brothers, 1989. Videocassette.
- In The Year of the Pig*. Directed by Emile de Antonio. 103 min. New Yorker Films, 1969. Videocassette.
- The Iron Triangle*. Directed by Eric Weston. 92 min. Scotti Brothers Pictures, 1988. Videocassette.
- Jacknife*. Directed by David Jones. 102 min. Cineplex Odeon Films, 1988. Videocassette.
- The Killing Fields*. Directed by Roland Joffe. 141 min. Swank Motion Pictures, 1984. Videocassette.
- Last of the Mohicans*. Directed by George B. Seitz. 91 min. United Artists, 1936.
- Little Big Man*. Directed by Arthur Penn. 150 min. National General Pictures, 1970. Videocassette.
- The Little Girl of Hanoi*. Directed by Hai Ninh. 77 min. 1974, *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994.

The Longest Day. Directed by Darryl F. Zanuck. 178 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1962. Videocassette.

A Man Called Horse. Directed by Elliott Silversten. 114 min. National General Pictures, 1970. Videocassette.

The Manchurian Candidate. Directed by John Frankenheimer. 127 min. MGM, 1962. Videocassette.

*M*A*S*H.* Directed by Robert Altman. 116 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1970. Videocassette.

A Midnight Clear. Directed by Keith Gordon. 107 min. A&M Films/Universal Pictures, 1992. Videocassette.

Missing in Action. Directed by Joseph Zito. 101 min. Cannon Films, 1984. Videocassette.

Missing in Action 2--The Beginning. Directed by Lance Hool. 96 min. Cannon Films, 1985. Videocassette.

More American Graffiti. Directed by W.L. Norton. 111 min. Universal Pictures, 1979. Videocassette.

The Ninth Configuration. Directed by William Peter Blatty. 115 min. New World Video, 1978. Videocassette.

Operation Dumbo Drop. Directed by Simon Wincer. 108 min. Walt Disney Pictures, 1995. Videocassette.

Panther. Directed by Mario Van Peebles. 123 min. Gramercy Pictures, 1995. Videocassette.

Paradise Road. Directed by Bruce Beresford. 120 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1997. Videocassette.

Platoon. Directed by Oliver Stone. 120 min. Hemdale/Orion Pictures, 1986. Videocassette.

Pork Chop Hill. Directed by Lewis Milestone. 97 min. United Artists, 1959. Videocassette.

Purple Hearts. Directed by Sidney J. Furie. 116 mins. Warner Brothers, 1984. Videocassette.

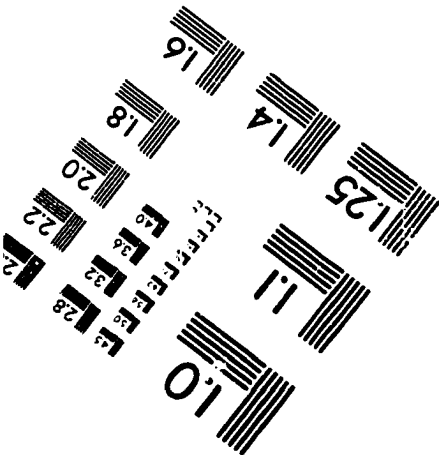
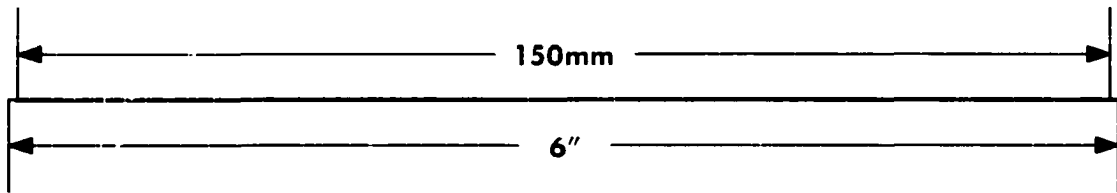
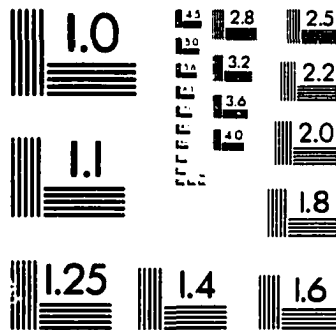
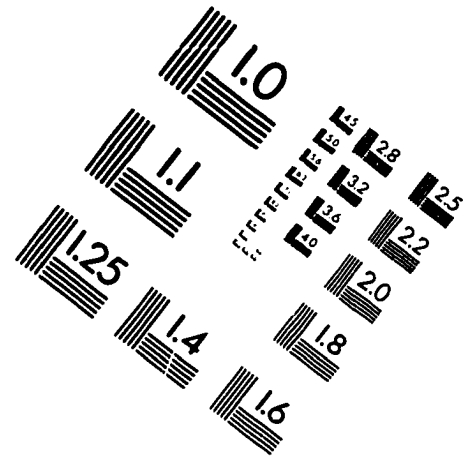
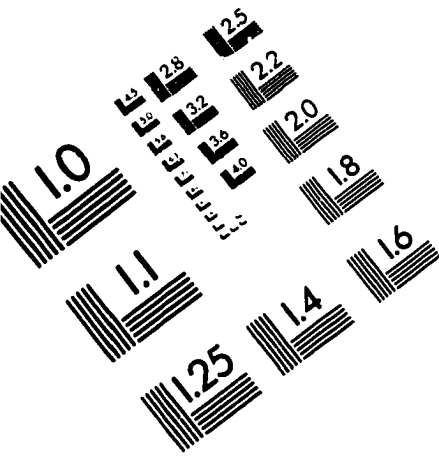
The Quiet Town. Directed by Le Duc Tien. 77 min. 1986, *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994.

Rambo: First Blood Part II. Directed by George Pan Cosmatos. 95 min. Tri-Star Pictures, 1985. Videocassette.

- Rambo III*. Directed by Peter MacDonald. 104 min. Tri-Star Pictures, 1988. Videocassette.
- Redwood Curtain*. Directed by John Korty. 120 min. ABC Television, 23 April 1995.
- The Retired General*. Directed by Nguyen Khac Loi. 1988, *A Program of Films from Vietnam*, Museum of Modern Art, 17 February--22 February 1994.
- Rio Grande*. Directed by John Ford. 105 min. Republic Pictures, 1950. Videocassette.
- Rolling Thunder*. Directed by John Flynn. 99 min. International Pictures, 1977. Videocassette.
- A Rumor of War*. Directed by Richard T. Heffman. 200 min. CBS Television, 24-25 September, 1980.
- Saigon Commandoes*. Directed by Clark Henderson. 84 min. New Classics, 1987. Videocassette.
- Saigon: Year of the Cat*. Directed by Stephen Frears. 106 min. Thames TV/HBO Home Video, 1983. Videocassette.
- Saint Jack*. Directed by Peter Bogdanovich. 112 min. New World Pictures, 1979. Videocassette.
- The Scent of Green Papaya*. Directed by Tran Anh Hung. 104 min. Firstlook Pictures, 1993. Videocassette.
- The Searchers*. Directed by John Ford. 119 min. Warner Brothers, 1956. Videocassette.
- Soldier Blue*. 114 min. Directed by Ralph Nelson. Avco-Embassy, 1970.
- A Soldier's Story*. Directed by Norman Jewison. 101 min. Columbia Pictures, 1984.
- Some Kind of Hero*. Directed by Michael Pressman. 95 min. Paramount Pictures, 1982. Videocassette.
- South Pacific*. Directed by Joshua Logan. 157 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1958. Videocassette.
- The Steel Helmet*. Directed by Samuel Fuller. 84 min. Lippert, 1951. Videocassette.
- Streamers*. Directed by Robert Altman. 118 min. United Artists, 1983. Videocassette.
- The Strolling Singers*. Directed by Chau Hue. 89 min. 1991, *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994.
- The Substitute*. Directed by Robert Mandel. 114 min. Live Entertainment, 1996. Videocassette.

- Swimming to Cambodia.* Directed by Jonathan Demme. 87 min. Cinecom, 1987. Videocassette.
- Taxi Driver.* Directed by Martin Scorsese. 113 min. Columbia Pictures, 1976. Videocassette.
- They Were Expendable.* Directed by John Ford. 135 min. MGM, 1945. Videocassette.
- Tora!Tora!Tora!* Directed by Richard Fleischer, Toshio Masuda, and Kinji Fukasaku. 143 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1970. Videocassette.
- Tracks.* Directed by Henry Jaglom. 90 min. Rainbow Pictures, 1976. Videocassette.
- The Ugly American.* Directed by George Englund. 120 min. Universal-International Films, 1963. Videocassette.
- Uncommon Valor.* Directed by Ted Kotcheff. 100 min. Paramount Pictures, 1983. Videocassette.
- The Unforgiven.* Directed by John Huston. 120 min. United Artists, 1960. Videocassette.
- Vietnam: A Television History.* "Episode Five, America Takes Charge: 1965-1967." Produced by Andrew Pearson. 60 min. Sony, 1983. Videocassette.
- Wake Island.* Directed by John Farrow. 78 min. Paramount Pictures, 1942. Videocassette.
- The Walking Dead.* Directed by Preston A. Whitmore II. 90 min. Savoy Pictures, 1995. Videocassette.
- The War.* Directed by Jon Avnetz. 126 min. Universal Pictures, 1994. Videocassette.
- The War at Home.* Directed by Emilio Estevez. 124 mins. Touchstone Pictures, 1996. Videocassette.
- The Western.* 120 min. The New York Center for Visual History/ American Cinema Series, 1995. Videocassette.
- When the Ten Month Comes.* Directed by Dang Nhat Minh. 90 min. 1984, *Of Love and War: Cinema of Vietnam* Series, Cinema Village, New York City, 21 January--27 January 1994.
- Who'll Stop the Rain?* Directed by Karel Reisz. 126 min. United Artists, 1978. Videocassette.
- A Yank in Viet-Nam.* Directed by Marshall Thompson. 80 min. Allied Artists, 1964.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved

