

# The War in Vietnam: Studies in Remembrance and Legacy, 2000–2014

By Jerry Lembcke

In 2012, Congress appropriated \$65 million for a thirteen-year ongoing series of events commemorating fifty-year anniversaries of Vietnam War dates. One year later, the celebrated filmmaker Ken Burns announced plans for what he called "a mammoth history of the Vietnam War." With millions of federal dollars priming the planning and programming pumps, and the imprimatur given the subject by the US's virtuoso visual documentarian, the prominence of the war in Vietnam in college and university curricula for the coming decade is assured.

## Scope and Organization

THIS ESSAY SURVEYS THE LITERATURE THAT has helped extend US interest in the war in Vietnam into the twenty-first century. The essay's scope is shaped by Brenda Boyle's observation, made in her edited volume *The Vietnam War: Topics in Contemporary North American Literature*, that interest in Vietnam began to wane in the 1990s only to surge when policy makers drew parallels between that war and the new engagements in the Middle East that followed the attacks of September 11, 2001. She cites books such as Lloyd Gardner and Marilyn Young's *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or, How Not to Learn from the Past* for the eerie comparisons the authors make between those conflicts, and points to historian David W. P. Elliott's notation in *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* that the Vietnam tropes of

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quagmire, light at the end of the tunnel, and exit strategies became commonly used references to the war in Iraq.

Taking Boyle's cue, then, this essay reviews the books published between roughly 2000 and 2014 that constitute the resurgent interest in the Vietnam War. Allowances will be made for books published earlier that are recognized for their influence on later works.

A second parameter of the essay is drawn by James Fentress and Chris Wickham's axiom, from their book *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past*, that "we are what we remember." Implicit in their words is the distinction between events themselves and the memory people have of them, a distinction calling forth two different bodies of scholarship: histories of the war in Vietnam, per se, and books about the way social memory of the war has been mediated by journalism, the practices of commemoration, the traditions of folklore (involving myths and legends), and the production and consumption of literary and popular

culture. Necessarily, the latter group of books often delves into the historical record of the war, but their primary interest is in the social construction of the images and narratives through which the United States remembers, and thereby knows, its war in Vietnam.

The essay organizes books into groups softly bounded by their importance for form or content. The boundaries sometimes overlap, with cross-references provided to suggest the multiple topics covered by some titles. The essay begins by noting a small number of important new historical studies. Books grouped into the functional category of biographical/autobiographical work follow. Next is a content-oriented group that includes studies of how social movements for and against the war are remembered. The following two groups are about Vietnam veterans: the remembrance of them as activists opposed to the war, including ethnic perspectives, and how that memory was largely displaced by images of them as "victim veterans"—disparaged, neglected, or rejected by the people who sent them off to war. Then comes a group of books composed of commemoration studies, in which "transnational" practices are highlighted and attention is given to Vietnamese commemoration of the war. A collection of legacy studies follows, in which the ongoing influence of the war on US ideology, cultural studies, and military policy is seen. The essay concludes with citations to new film, photography, and literature studies, and a few new collections of documents and reference works.

## Histories of the War: Background and New Directions

STANLEY KARNOW'S *VIETNAM: A HISTORY*, editor Marvin Gettleman et al.'s *Vietnam and America: A Documented History*, and Jean-Jacques Malo and editor Tony Williams's filmography *Vietnam War Films*, which appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, remain the standard reference works for undergraduate libraries. For new titles, there is nothing comparable to Christian Appy's *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*. Appy compiled short segments of 150 interviews with, and biographical sketches of, US and Vietnamese veterans of the war, military leaders on both sides (US General William Westmoreland and North Vietnam's strategist Võ Nguyên Giáp among them), and leaders of the antiwar movement, such as Todd Gitlin and novelist and Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien. John Prados, a senior fellow of the National Security Archive at George Washington University, accessed documents and newly available presidential tapes for *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War*, a chronology covering 1945 to 1975.

Books on the Vietnam War going to press after 2000 were conceived as the United States was just entering conflicts in the Middle East, making it unsurprising that comparisons with "how we got into Vietnam" spawned new books on the subject. Fredrik Logevall's *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* is a historically deep account of France's years in Indochina between World War I and its 1954 defeat at Dien Bien Phu, years that laid the groundwork for US involvement. Gareth Porter's *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* picks up the story from there with fresh documentation on the escalation of US involvement. Porter's material is organized into thematic chapters delineated with subheads to make it accessible for undergraduate reading. He challenges conventional accounts that overplay the importance of global Cold War factors for US entry to the war, showing instead that the US stepped into a stew of village-level conflicts between pro-French groups and independence-minded rebels largely oblivious to the ideological camps of East and West.

Jeffrey Race's *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, originally published in 1972 and reissued in 2010 in an updated and expanded edition, with a new foreword by Robert Brigham, remains the starting point for studies of the grassroots struggles in Vietnam's south prior to the formation of the communist National Liberation Front (NLF) and escalation of the US war in 1960. Philip E. Catton keeps the focus on this early period with *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam*. Catton uses new materials he translated from Vietnamese archives that take readers into the countryside where the plans of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to resettle peasants into "agrovilles" to expedite socioeconomic development, and "strategic hamlets" for political and military control, met indigenous resistance that provided momentum and cut the trail for the NLF. Catton's book indicates a metanarrative of Vietnam's wars serving as developmental pangs within which the anticolonialist/imperialist liberation movements unfolded. In *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South*, Australian anthropologist Philip Taylor provides support for that search-for-modernity narrative as an alternative to the Cold War paradigm that dominates US memory of what its war in Vietnam was all about. Readers at all levels will find fascinating Taylor's account of the Vietnamese Communist Party justification for its 1980s turn away from central planning (*doi moi*) as a *return to* free-market practices that were indigenous to the southern Mekong Delta region (*Nam Bo*)—i.e., the party was not abandoning its mission to walk a socialist path to modernity, but enlisting deeply rooted traditions in service to the mission.

David Hunt uses a set of interviews done by the RAND Corporation in the late 1960s to ply the biographies of Viet Cong prisoners and deserters for insights into the realities of peasant life that moved them from resistance to revolution. His *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War* fits reading lists in ethnography, sociology, and history, as well as policy-oriented studies seeking know-your-enemy lessons from Vietnam that are applicable to twenty-first-century conflicts. Robert Brigham's *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* complements Hunt's work with a look inside the families and military lives of soldiers fighting for the Saigon government. Brigham finds

the ARVN to have fought more bravely than common accounts have it, but that the central government's disrespect for it led to demoralization that undercut its performance in the field. In *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966*, Robert J. Topmiller shines light on the Buddhist push for a "neutralist" government in Saigon that would have provided the United States an exit from Vietnam in 1966. When pro-war hawks in Washington squelched that initiative, anticommunist hard-liners within the South Vietnamese Army cracked down on their "accommodationist" rivals, briefly bringing ARVN units into conflict with one another and bringing US troops to the brink of battle with ARVN units. Topmiller also usefully introduces Buddhist thought that will benefit undergraduates. Jonathan Neale's *A People's History of the Vietnam War* puts light on the ordinary people, Vietnamese and American, who fought in and against the war.

David Maraniss and Nick Turse have used research methods so innovative (Maraniss) and resourceful (Turse) that the *how* of their studies is as important as the *what* of their findings. For *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*, Maraniss used letters written home by soldiers in Vietnam and students at the University of Wisconsin in 1967 to tell the parallel stories enveloping them in October 1967: west of Saigon near Loc Ninh, the American First Infantry Division was getting chewed up by the enemy North Vietnamese at the same time that confrontations between protesters and the police had shut down the Madison campus. Besides the obvious relevance of these events to today's students, historians of military strategy and tactics will have additional appreciation for the insight Maraniss offers into why the United States would eventually lose the war. For *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*, Turse traveled to the former South Vietnam to visit villages like My Lai, where a US infantry unit massacred hundreds of civilians in 1968. In those settings, Turse met the people whose ancestors were killed by US ground forces and combined what he learned from them with newly available documents to push out the boundaries of what is known about US military leaders' culpability for those atrocities.

More advanced students will benefit from the fourth edition of Robert J. McMahon's edited *Major Problems in the History of*

*the Vietnam War*. McMahon gathers primary documents on the policy decisions and challenges of military strategy and tactics that faced each US presidential administration, the North Vietnamese leadership in Hanoi, and the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam, and he groups the materials accordingly. Each set of documents is paired with a set of essays, many written by academic scholars.

## Biographies and Autobiographies of Wartime Experiences

MEMOIRS, BIOGRAPHIES, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES are natural centerpieces of remembrance studies. Those that follow life courses from the war years and into the present also double as contributions to the legacy studies discussed below.

Gordon M. Goldstein's *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* is an intense but well-organized and readable inquiry into the role played by Bundy as national security adviser for Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Goldstein uses interviews with Bundy, selections from Bundy's memoirs, and secondary sources to reveal the thinking of those presidents that formed turning points in the war, such as the Tonkin Gulf Affair and the 1965 decision to "Americanize" the war. Bundy's policy nemeses counted among themselves a group of senators including Ernest Gruening, who cast one of two votes in the Senate against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, and George McGovern, who opposed the war throughout. Randall B. Woods, in his *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent*, provides chapter-length biographical sketches of those and five other senators who dared to challenge establishmentarians like Bundy.

John Kerry's prominence as a decorated veteran of the war and a leading figure in the veterans' antiwar movement, and in his later political roles as senator from Massachusetts and secretary of state in the Obama administration, calls for libraries to hold Douglas Brinkley's *Tour of Duty: John Kerry and the Vietnam War*. In *The Vietnam War from the Rear Echelon: An Intelligence Officer's Memoir, 1972-1973*, Timothy J. Lomperis provides a rare view from the inside of US intelligence of the very last days of the war

as the US military departed and the Saigon regime collapsed. Even more remarkable for its uniqueness is Larry Berman's *The Perfect Spy: The Incredible Double Life of Pham Xuan An*. An spent 1954-75 as a double agent: a communist spy within the government of South Vietnam, using his work as a reporter for *Time* magazine as his cover. Berman uses documents and an array of interviews with An and his associates (from all sides) to recount An's life while telling plenty about the unknown off-screen war, and bringing into focus the ethical dilemmas arising at the intersection of political and professional commitments. The authors of *War Torn: Stories of War from the Women Reporters Who Covered Vietnam* contribute ten chapter-length memoirs that broaden reading lists in this category with easy reading.

The most teaching-friendly entry on the memoir list is *The Fog of War: Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* by James Blight and Janet Lang. McNamara was the secretary of defense for seven years during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Blight and Lang's book, based on Errol Morris's acclaimed 2003 film *The Fog of War*, is part viewer's guide to the film and part instructor's manual for teaching the film. Loaded with how-to lessons for doing oral history and interpreting historical material, it is most of all a comprehensive biography of McNamara, one of the most important figures of the Vietnam War.

With three million Americans having served in Vietnam and the war remaining a national preoccupation, the catalog of biographical material grows thicker each day, though many entries with a "true story" subtitle suggest anything but. With myth and legend coursing through the genre, it is all the more incumbent upon undergraduate holdings to include titles able to hone student skills in discerning authenticity in biographical material. Gary Kulik's *War Stories: False Atrocity Tales, Swift Boaters, and Winter Soldiers* is a suitable learner's manual for that task. To move students beyond the quotidian true/not-true binary to the challenge of discerning (in Foucault's words) "what was being said in what was said," a more scholarly orientation is desirable. Best suited for that is editors Paul Budra and Michael Zeitlin's *Soldier Talk: The Vietnam War in Oral Narrative*, wherein the authors suggest approaching war stories in a new manner they call "oral narrative."

## Support for and against the War: Activism and Legacy

THE BOOKS FROM WHICH READERS CAN DRAW some meaning for current military conflicts are the most significant contributions to scholarship in this subject area. At the top of the list are Michael Foley's *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* and John Hagan's *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada*. Foley uses the resistance in the greater Boston region as a case study of the values that motivated young men to resist the draft, and the mobilization of religious, academic, and community resources that sustained them. He details the tension between two factions of the movement: the working-class oriented Boston Draft Resistance Group, which honored all attempts to stay out of the draft, including accepting deferments for college, versus the Resistance (with the upper-case R), which viewed deferments as a copout. Most valuable are the findings of his research project to survey and interview former activists in the late 1990s, some thirty years after the war, for their memories and feelings about their resistance. Hagan is also interested in the dilemmas presented by the war and the draft, and portrays the move of 50,000 US war resisters to Canada as a "brain drain" that hurt the United States and benefited Canada. Equally instructive is his documentation of the lives led by the Americans who settled in Canada, often with successful careers, as well as the legacy of the social and cultural disruption in their lives wrought by their emigration from the United States.

For some contemporaries, the antiwar movement changed the trajectory of their life courses as much as did the war itself. That is most vividly obvious in autobiographies and biographies of those who opposed the war. In *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen*, Mark Rudd tells how he got involved in the 1968 Columbia University protests against university complicity with military research and was then thrust into a leadership position that led to building occupations, conflict with the police, and a brush with the revolutionary violence of the Students for a Democratic Society Weatherman faction. Rudd's recounting of his days as a fugitive living underground is absorbing,

and the story of his later reconciliation with his parents and the mainstream United States is moving. Bruce Dancis's *Resister: A Story of Protest and Prison during the Vietnam War* is every bit as poignant as a personal story and riveting as a political memoir. Dancis was an SDS leader at Cornell University, and the trajectory that took him to prison for draft resistance rather than a life on the lam (à la Rudd) makes his and Rudd's books a spectacular combination for a comparative study of life courses.

Penny Lewis's *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* can be read as a history of the movement, but Lewis relies on studies done since the war to tease out the complexity of interclass relations during the 1960s and 1970s. Working-class opposition to the war, she points out, was more likely to extend civilian forms of workplace resistance into the military (as a work site) and manifest there as GI rebellions against the brass. Her focus on the creation of myths like that of the pro-war "hard-hat" worker makes the book more an epistemological inquiry into why people believe what they do than an empirical study of who did what in the 1960s and 1970s. As such, it gives equal consideration to "now" as "then" and "us" as "them."

Lewis's attention to hard hats and hawks—nicknames for pro-war people during the war—is an acknowledgment that opposition to the war was not a universal sentiment; indeed, support for the war was sometimes substantial within certain demographics. However, Sandra Scanlon makes clear in *The Pro-war Movement: Domestic Support for the War in Vietnam and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* that conservative opposition to the antiwar movement and support for the troops fighting it did not always mean support for the war itself. Portions of the book constitute political biographies of figures such as William F. Buckley and Patrick Buchanan, who would shape the conservative movement in the postwar years.

Pro and con views on the war continue into the present, playing out now on terrain occupied by historians. The outcome of those scholarly conflicts is central to what Americans remember and know about the war, making Mark Moyar's *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* an appropriate entry here. Moyar divides the contending historians into "orthodox" and "revisionist" camps: the former are committed to showing

US commitment to the war to be wrong and futile; the latter (among whom Moyar counts himself) believe the Saigon government could have defeated its communist opposition if Kennedy had not accepted a neutral Laos in 1961 (thus paving the way for North Vietnam to move military resources to the south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos) and the US press had not turned against Saigon President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, thereby abetting his assassination later that year.

There are some new general surveys of the antiwar movement that academic libraries should have in their collections. The most important are Tom Wells's *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* and Fred Halstead's *Out Now: A Participant's Account of the Movement in the United States against the Vietnam War*. Melvin Small's *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* is a synopsis of other sources, but his effort to draw meaning from them for present conflicts recommends it for acquisition. The anniversary of the 1970 shootings at Kent State brought out new work on that affair, of which Thomas Hensley and J. M. Lewis's edited *Kent State and May 4th: A Social Science Perspective* is important to have.

## Vietnam Veterans as Warriors against the War

WRITING IN *VIETNAM AND OTHER AMERICAN Fantasies*, H. Bruce Franklin recalls the crucial role played by combat veterans of Vietnam in the movement to end the war. The consciousness-raising effect of the war on those who fought it is documented in David Zeiger's film *Sir! No Sir!*. The story of in-service resistance validates Milton Bates's observation made in *The Wars We Took to Vietnam: Cultural Conflict and Storytelling* that public memory in the United States of the country's own race, class, gender, and generational conflicts as it stood in the early 1960s factored into the institutional cultures that accompanied the military to Southeast Asia. Penny Lewis (*Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks*) enhances that validation, as does John Darrell Sherwood's *Black Sailor, White Navy: Racial Unrest in the Fleet during the Vietnam War Era*. Lorena Oropeza's *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* recaptures the otherwise lost history of the Mexican American

relationship with US military institutions while focusing on the antiwar movement that emerged out of the radical expressions of Chicano nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Herman Graham III's account of racial conflict in the ranks in *The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience* has resonance with the current situation as domestic racial tensions intersect, once again, with the racial themes of US wars in the Middle East and Africa. The author's chapter on the resistance to the draft waged by boxing champion Muhammad Ali is reason enough for it to be on library shelves, while other chapters complement studies of masculinity.

Andrew Hunt's *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans against the War* is a thorough study of the veterans' organization (VVAW) that came out of that period. Richard Stacewicz provides a set of antiwar veterans' memoirs in his *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans against the War*. Dick Perrin's story of his in-service opposition, known for years by many movement veterans, was finally written in 2006 as *G.I. Resister: The Story of How One American and His Family Fought the War in Vietnam*. Perrin went AWOL from the army in Germany and then lived as a deserter in Paris, where he educated himself and others, including actress Jane Fonda, on the war that Americans were waging in Vietnam.

Not all GI and veteran opposition to the war stemmed from principled pacifism, courageous whistle-blowing, or anti-imperialist convictions. By the late 1960s, the countercultural currents coursing through the youth rebellion flowed with young recruits into the military, where they eroded discipline and exacerbated the breakdown of combat readiness. As it was for their stateside peers, music was the lingua franca of a refusnik attitude among GIs that is captured by Doug Bradley and Craig Werner in *We Gotta Get out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*. Meredith Lair in *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism & Soldiering in the Vietnam War* details the many other ways in which the reality of the Vietnam experience for many GIs belied the Hollywood imagery of in-country hardships. Lair's book can also be read as a comment on the mystique of men and war in which popular notions of masculinity take shape. James Lewes's catalog of GI newspapers, *Protest and Survive: Underground GI Newspapers during the Vietnam War*, is essential for this category as well.

## Yellow Ribbons and the “Victim-Veteran” Mythology

THE FEDERALLY FUNDED THIRTEEN-YEAR series of anniversary Vietnam War events (noted in the introduction) was announced by President Barack Obama in his 2012 Memorial Day address at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall in Washington, DC. The president called the war begun fifty years earlier “one of the nation’s most painful chapters.” Addressing himself to Vietnam veterans, the president said, “You came home and sometimes were denigrated. It was a national shame, a disgrace that should have never happened. And that’s why we’re here. Today we resolve that it will not happen again.” The next day, *Los Angeles Times* editor Michael McGough upbraided the president for ratifying the meme of war protesters’ hostility for Vietnam veterans. The image of spat-on Vietnam veterans is a myth, he said, adding that “even an edifying myth is still a myth.”

The image of veterans defiled upon their homecoming, enhanced by that of veterans suffering traumatic injury, form the core subject matter of Vietnam War memory studies. It is, in other words, through the cultural and news media representations of Vietnam veterans as “damaged goods” that the image of veterans empowered and politicized by their wartime experience has been elided in US memory. Indeed, much of the war itself has been displaced from memory by powerful tropes about the men who fought the war. It is the war remembered through that imagery that came into play during the Persian Gulf War to animate the yellow ribbon campaign, and that remains potent for motivating public support for the current wars.

## POWs and MIAs: The “Left Behind” Narrative

THE NARRATIVE OF SOLDIERS AND PRISONERS “left behind” as MIAs and POWs has the longest standing in the victim-veteran literature. H. Bruce Franklin’s *M.I.A., or Mythmaking in America: How and Why Belief in Live POWs Has Possessed a Nation* and Craig Howes’s *Voices of the Vietnam POWs: Witnesses to Their Fight* still constitute the foundational scholarship in this area. Carol

McEldowny’s *Hanoi Journal* is unique as a reflective first-person account of a US civilian’s visit in 1967 to the so-called Hanoi Hilton, where US POWs were being held. Michael J. Allen’s *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* and Jerry Lembcke’s *CNN’s Tailwind Tale: Inside Vietnam’s Last Great Myth* do double duty as contributions to policy studies (Allen) and studies of war myths and legends (Lembcke). Natasha Zaretsky’s *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* is an invaluable addition to legacies studies (below), but her attention to the gendered dynamics generated by the home front movement to support POWs mounted by the POWs’ wives is also without peer.

## The Myth of Spat-On Veterans

CLAIMS OF VETERANS TREATED BADLY BY WAR protesters did not appear until about 1990, and B. G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley’s *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of Its Heroes and History* was one of the first attempts to work the stories into a narrative for the coming-home experience. H. Bruce Franklin touched on the mythical character of those claims in *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*. In his book *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, Jerry Lembcke made the stories of spat-on veterans a case study in myth creation and noted their similarity to stories told in Germany after World War I, when they became part of the *Dolchstoßlegende*, or stab-in-the-back legend, which fed a home front betrayal narrative for Germany’s defeat. Claims that the spitters were often women or girls lends a sexual tenor to the interpretation of the war as a solipsistic affair “that Americans did to each other,” themes that are explored by Katherine Kinney in *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War*.

## The Wounded Warrior as Mnemonic Figure

THE EMOTIONAL AMPERAGE OF PRISONERS abandoned and veterans rebuked is raised higher by images of veterans at home with unshakable trauma. In their 2013 book *Beyond Post-traumatic Stress: Homefront Struggles with The War on Terror*,

anthropologists Sarah Hautzinger and Jean Scandlyn write, “In most conversations where the topic of returning soldiers [comes up], PTSD is mentioned in the first few minutes.” It is the imagery of psychological damage and emotional trauma that dominates the coming-home story of war veterans today, and makes the ongoing study and reappraisal of PTSD, not only as a diagnostic category but as a powerful cultural category, a high priority for academic scholars and teachers. The centrality of Vietnam veterans to PTSD’s seminal moment when healthcare professionals debated its diagnostic value, and the controversies over its rise to prominence, are covered in Allan Young’s classic *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* and reprised in Wilbur Scott’s *Vietnam Veterans since the War: The Politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and the National Memorial*.

Traumatized and wounded veterans are powerful figures in American memories of the war. Keith Beattie’s *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War*, Patrick Hagopian’s *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*, and Jerry Lembcke’s *PTSD: Diagnosis and Identity in Post-Empire America* top the list for acquisitions on this topic. The study of PTSD, the concept, for its mnemonic value is enhanced by its comparison with the cultural properties of World War I era shell shock, making Anton Kae’s *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* and Fiona Reid’s *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914-1930* helpful additions. Editors Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner’s *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, Ben Shephard’s *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century*, and Michael Roth’s *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* broaden the studies of war trauma literature to other time periods and topics. Some of the more recent works, like Daryl S. Paulson’s *Haunted by Combat: Understanding PTSD in War Veterans*, fold Vietnam veterans into studies that include veterans of more recent wars, thereby updating Vietnam-related subjects as well as showing their legacy for the present.

Victim-veterans also take form in the literature on Agent Orange, the defoliant containing the chemical compound dioxin that the US military sprayed liberally in South Vietnam. The biological damage that

Agent Orange caused to humans continues to be documented in Vietnam, but evidence that US soldiers were comparably injured is more elusive, a fact that invites probes into the political and cultural values that keep that story in the media spotlight. Edwin Martini's *Agent Orange: History, Science, and the Politics of Uncertainty* is a state-of-the-art study on the full range of postwar controversies, including birth defects and legal accountability, that surround the effect of Agent Orange on humans. With the rigorous argument and detailed documentation befitting graduate studies, Martini's writing nevertheless keeps the material accessible to undergraduates. Portions of Wilbur Scott's *Vietnam Veterans since the War: The Politics of PTSD* are also useful, and Chris Arsenault's *Blowback: A Canadian History of Agent Orange* sheds light on the US military's use of Canadian territory in the early 1960s to experiment with Agent Orange for combat use.

## Commemoration and Memory Studies

THE MOST IMPORTANT NEW BOOKS ON commemorative studies indicate the trend toward “transnational commemoration”—practices that fuse the sentiments and architectural styles emanating from the varied national and cultural contexts reflective of the parties to the war. Christina Schwenkel begins *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* by contrasting US commemorations such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall in Washington, DC, which focus on loss and grief, with those in Vietnam, like peace parks, which are more hopeful and forward looking. Within Vietnam, Schwenkel documents the way the spiritual tones found in “traditional” forms of remembrance have been incorporated into more secular and political forms in order to lessen the postwar tension between popular and statist sentiments. Most profound is her documentation of the ways US commemorative practices have penetrated Vietnam's memorial landscape, partly through the marketing of US veteran tourism.

For Americans for whom the 1968 massacre at My Lai remains indelible in memory, Heonik Kwon's *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* is an engaging anthropological study of the way those hamlets continue to process their experience with mass death

nearly fifty years ago. Kwon distinguishes between the traditional Vietnamese rituals for natural or expected “home” deaths and rituals for “street” deaths through violent or other unexpected events. The massacres involving the burning of homes, the murder of children in them, and the disposal of bodies in mass graves blurred those distinctions, making commemoration impossible. Commemoration was further complicated by the postwar effort of the Vietnamese government to supplant ancestor veneration with a modern statist celebration of the war dead as heroes, identification with whom would galvanize a new sense of nationalism.

Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen's *New Perceptions of the Vietnam War: Essays on the War, the South Vietnamese Experience, the Diaspora and the Continuing Impact* is an edited volume that counterbalances the US domination of commemoration studies. In chapters that foreground the South Vietnamese and US allies like Australia, Nguyen (Monash University, Australia) recalls the war from the perspective of the South. She attends to the postwar experience of the South Vietnamese now resettled in Australia with a focus on the “side-by-side” memorials positioning Australian and South Vietnamese soldiers together on a single pedestal. The creative design of Scott Laderman's *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory* credentials it for a broad range of comparative US and Vietnamese studies of memory and commemoration. It should be required for US study-abroad students headed for Vietnam.

Yen Le Espiritu's *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* calls out the narcissism threading Americans' memory of the war, critically reassessing the “refugee” narrative of Vietnamese resettlement in the United States. Viewing the Vietnamese as refugees, she argues, extends into the present the mythologies that the evacuation of Saigon in 1975 was a noble “rescue” mission by Americans to “save” helpless South Vietnamese from the communists, and that the ten-year US military presence in Vietnam was a response to the fledgling nation's request for assistance in repelling the foreign aggression of communism. Framed within that narrative, she says, the story of Vietnamese Americans is really code for the heroic altruism of Americans—a story line she rejects. *Body Counts* is a valuable counterweight to the 2015 film *Last Days in Vietnam* commemorating the US role in the Saigon evacuation, and the author's

interviews with Vietnamese Americans complicate the efforts of many US scholars to disconnect the war years—“Vietnam is more than a war”—from today's Vietnam and its diaspora.

The studies of commemoration and representation such as those cited challenge conventional views of war as indelible—feelings sealed in the emotional fabric of individuals or fixed in some compartment of the brain. In that vein, the years following Vietnam spawned a whole new generation of scholarship on the meaning of memory qua memory, the literature of which is reviewed by Jenny Edkins in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Edkins uses the war in Vietnam and World War I as case studies to distinguish between memory as something that we *have* versus memory as something that we *do* and *create* through a socially mediated process such as commemoration. Her contention that memories exist only in the state of the creative moment of their present challenges the validity of preexisting, “archived” memories that can reappear, unbidden, as “flashbacks” symptomatic of trauma.

Studies of war trauma dominate the recent literature on the war in Vietnam, and while the image of the trauma-stricken US veteran figures most centrally in these books, there are notable others, such as Gina Marie Weaver's *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War*. Weaver complements Turse (*Kill Anything*), although Brenda Boyle's *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives: A Critical Study of Fiction, Films, and Nonfiction Writings* provides the same view, while taking readers into deeper theoretical waters. Living up to its title, Boyle's book is also appropriate for holdings in film, literature, and gender studies.

## Legacy Studies

IN HIS AUGUST 25, 2014, *NEW YORK Times* column, Frank Bruni wrote about the climate of gloom and pessimism that pervades the United States, noting that visions of unbounded opportunities for advancement on an ever-expanding frontier now seem quaint. Only a few months earlier, his colleague at the *Times*, Paul Krugman, chided his fellow economists for their “addiction to the apocalypse,” their doomsday forecasting both exploiting and contributing to a national narrative running counter to the City on the Hill imagery in which the United States once cast itself.

Scott Laderman and Edwin Martini's edited volume *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War* is a sampler of essays on legacy topics, some of which are explored more broadly in the following books.

## Vietnam and the Rewriting of the American Narrative

EDITOR CHARLES E. NEU, IN THE LEAD chapter for his *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War*, cites the legacy of the war for having rewritten the American story from one of a nation of hope that would be emulated around the world to one of a nation suffering defeat and disappointment, now anxious about the uncertainties in its future and longing for the recovery of its past. Rewriting the past, as much as recovering it, is a theme of David Kiernan's *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, which views key episodes of US history as far back as the Civil War as revised in their telling to make them a better fit for the way Americans want to remember the war in Vietnam. David Wyatt writes in *When America Turned: Reckoning with 1968* that Americans' failure to accept the loss of the war—and the accompanying loss of innocence—has “imprisoned [us in] a self-defeating belief in our own and [the] nation's purity of intent.” Wyatt sees the “compression” into one year (1968) of many history-turning events—the Tet Offensive, Lyndon Johnson declining to run for reelection, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and the Democratic National Convention, which adjourned amid antiwar protests and police brutality—as the reason Americans still must reckon with that year.

For his chapter in Beth Bailey and David Farber's edited volume *America in the Seventies*, William Graebner notes the pall of the Vietnam defeat that bequeathed the Watergate political crisis, the shrinking of US global economic options, and the postmodernist turn away from the Enlightenment promise of a better world through knowledge and truth. David Sirota's decadal focus in *Back to Our Future: How the 1980s Explain the World We Live in Now* shows how the conservative movement, galvanized by Ronald Reagan's

election as president in 1980, blamed liberal permissiveness and radical duplicity for the loss in Vietnam and sought national restoration through a back-to-the-future route through the 1950s. Sirota points out the mythical elements at play in that use of the 1950s and warns of its dangerous revanchist fantasies. Keith Beattie joins Sirota in debunking Edenic visions of a prelapsarian United States with *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War*, a book with renewed relevance as the discourse of “healing” gains listeners in the new war era of the twenty-first century. The disturbance to national identity created by Vietnam carried into political culture, shaping presidential politics into the 2000s. Bernard von Bothmer's *Framing the Sixties: The Use and Abuse of a Decade from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush* shows presidential candidates spinning public memory of the sixties to suit their political purposes.

## Legacies in Policy

WITH THE RETURN OF THOUSANDS OF service personnel from the Middle East, the issues surrounding their reentry to society and wherewithal going forward is frequently front-page news. Educational benefits for veterans are a centerpiece of those concerns, and Mark Boulton's *Failing Our Veterans: The GI Bill and the Vietnam Generation* roots the political controversy over funding for those benefits in tensions that linger in public memories of Vietnam and its veterans. More affecting still is the news commentary about the failure of “the war on drugs” and the need for legislative and judicial changes in that field. In *The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs*, Jeremy Kuzmarov reveals that “war” to have been born out of the Nixon administration's preoccupations with veterans returning from Vietnam with addictions to hard drugs. Kuzmarov debunks the idea of widespread drug use in Vietnam and explains how the portrayal of strung out veterans also contributed to the denigration of their image. Edwin Martini's *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975–2000* documents the ways the US battlefield war was continued by other means once the shooting stopped. The front lines of this postwar war were drawn by US policies that isolated Vietnam for trade relations and a cultural campaign to write a narrative of “mutual destruction” into the public memory of the war. As

noted above, Martini's *Agent Orange* is essential to considerations of reparations for herbicide use in Vietnam and regulation of its use going forward. David Zierler's *The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think about the Environment* is particularly valuable as a humanities-science crossover study that can inspire the interdisciplinary leanings of faculty and students and inform the thinking of policy makers.

## Legacies in Gender Relations

PHILIP JASON'S *ACTS AND SHADOWS: THE Vietnam War in American Literary Culture* notes that the subfield of gender studies known as men's studies arose from recognition that the US sense of manhood derived from men's martial accomplishments, and that the loss of the war in Vietnam would be a blow to male pride and self-esteem. Furthermore, the concern was that the damage would bleed beyond the postwar anguish of veterans themselves into the nation's male-identified collective culture, where it would impair public confidence in the future. Central to those studies was the folklore of female perfidy held responsible for battlefield letdowns, à la *Lysistrata*, which gained traction in the cultural histories of modern wars—for example, in Tokyo Rose. In *Hanoi Jane: War, Sex, and Fantasies of Betrayal*, Jerry Lembcke recalls the role played by women's organizations such as Women Strike for Peace in opposing the war in Vietnam, and delves deeply into the vilifying of Jane Fonda as a scapegoat for the US defeat.

The scapegoating of homefront feminism for the loss of the war inspired a backlash of hyper-masculinity that manifested in the militia movement of the 1980s. James William Gibson explores that link in *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America*. John Dipple in *War and Sex: A Brief History of Men's Urge for Battle* argues that wounded masculinity—be it the consequence of previously lost wars or the relative loss of superiority due to women's movements for equality—motivated men to reaffirm their masculinity through combat throughout the twentieth century. Dipple uses the post-Vietnam US experience to extend that trajectory into the present. In *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*, Susan Faludi

reprises the case she made in *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* that the push-back against gains made by the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was fed by fears that an overly feminized culture had sapped American men of their will to war and cost the nation its victory in Vietnam. Zaretsky (*No Direction Home*) found that the family values agenda that powered cultural conservatism into late-twentieth-century prominence was born out of anxieties left by the POW experience and the central role women played in fighting for their release—surely one of the most consequential legacies of the war.

## Legacies for Military Policy

ANY DOUBTS THAT THE WAR IN VIETNAM stalked US military strategy and tactics into the future were dismissed in 1991 when President George H. W. Bush declared, after victory in the first Persian Gulf War, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome.” But that victory, Robert K. Brigham points out in his *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?*, was in fact due to the United States having altered military strategies because of the syndrome. Subsequently, he argues, the United States became bogged down Vietnam-like after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 because the syndrome (aka the lessons of Vietnam) was once again being neglected. Brigham’s book is organized around well-supported “yes” and “no” answers to the questions prompted by its title, making this an excellent book for undergraduate readers. Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn Young’s *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or, How Not to Learn from The Past* is an edited volume with chapters written by accomplished academic and independent scholars in styles that are accessible to readers at all levels. The comparisons made between the two wars range widely, from the rationales constructed to justify US intervention in the respective cases to the geographic and cultural makeups of the two regions and the ideological and professional backgrounds of the policy makers. Richard Shultz’s *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy’s and Johnson’s Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* does not bfit a “lessons” classification à la Brigham and Gardner/Young, but its exposure of the clandestine ingenuity (and nastiness) of US Special Operations against its Vietnamese enemies is unsurpassable as a foreshadowing

of the off-the-books tactics employed in Iraq and Afghanistan that shocked the nation as their use became public.

By its title, Michal R. Belknap’s *The Vietnam War on Trial: The My Lai Massacre and the Court Martial of Lieutenant Calley* would seem to belong on the shelves with histories of the war. One chapter details the military operations that resulted in the massacre, but the book is primarily a history of the trial’s legal procedure, which pre-law students will find to be a valuable tune-up for the legal cases already generated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Belknap provides biographical sketches of the My Lai veterans and the key figures in the legal case, a thorough chronology that runs from the beginning of the war through the trial and the many appeals of Calley’s conviction, and an extensive bibliographic essay.

## Studies of Literature, Film, and Photography

IN HIS *ACTS AND SHADOWS*, PHILIP K. JASON points out that American literature on the war in Vietnam has gone through four phases: battlefield accounts, the situation of returned veterans, the Vietnamese immigrant experience, and writing that uses the war as background experience in the transformation of fictional characters. The book’s ten short, readable chapters survey the literature that comprises these themes plus two guides for teaching chapters that professors will welcome. H. Bruce Franklin’s *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* is a tour de force study of comic books, *Star Trek*, news coverage, and films appropriate for students from beginner to advanced. The most comprehensive and engaging entry in this category is Mark Heberle’s edited volume *Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art*. The volume includes papers by Tim O’Brien, Philip Beidler, Wayne Karlin, Michael Zeitlin, and thirty other critics who convened in 2005 at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa. Brenda Boyle’s edited collection *The Vietnam War: Topics in Contemporary North American Literature* and her study *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives* should be available to serious scholars. The contribution of Katherine Kinney’s *Friendly Fire* to gender studies is accomplished largely through studies of film and literature, which makes it fit for entry here as well.

Peter Cowie’s *The Apocalypse Now Book* is a behind-the-screen look at the making of director Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 drama, one of Hollywood’s most important films about the war. Tim Page’s *Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side* collects the work of photographers who documented the North Vietnamese and “Viet Cong” sides of the war. It is an excellent companion piece to the books by Larry Berman, David Hunt, and Robert Topmiller, all cited above.

## Recent Document Collections and Reference Works

THE ESSENTIAL NEWER PUBLICATION IN THIS category is *The Vietnam War: A History in Documents*, edited by Marilyn Young and John J. Fitzgerald. The book is written for undergraduate history students as a how-to manual for using documents—declassified government documents, correspondence, photographs, and cartoons—selected copies of which are included in the book. The editors tie the documents together with brief paragraphs to compose an attractive introductory narrative history of the war itself. James Lewes’s *Protest and Survive*, with the history of the GI antiwar movement woven in, is also more than a compendium of documents. Bradley and Werner’s survey of music popular with in-country troops (*We Gotta Get out of This Place*) with historical and cultural annotation also serves as a good reference work.

For his content analysis of war coverage, *The Weekly War: Newsmagazines and Vietnam*, James Landers compares 100-plus stories from each of the magazines *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News & World Report* between 1965 and 1973 for both their ideological and policy orientations and their accuracy against the historical record as known today. He includes descriptive material on the work lives of in-country reporters as well as brief and thoughtful comments on the television and newspaper coverage of the war. (Landers chides the popular memory of Vietnam as “the living-room war,” “America’s first television war,” as “erroneous,” a notion “which fed the myth of television’s impact on the public.”) Landers’s insights extend beyond the reportage of the war to controversies arising from its conduct and outcome, making this a substantive book

that is well organized and refreshing to read. Merle L. Pribbenow's translation of the Military History Institute of Vietnam's *The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, published as *Victory in Vietnam*, is a reference volume for scholars and advanced students for comparative studies of the historical records through which the memory of the war continues to unfold.

## Moving Forward

IN THE LATE 1990S, THE ACQUISITION EDITOR of a university press told this author that the turn of the century, then approaching, would beget a cottage industry of studies on the way the twentieth century would be remembered and represented; books accessing the memory studies of the US war in Vietnam, he predicted, would fill large sections of bibliographies on that topic.

In the years that followed, the number of publications on the humanities and social science sides of post-Vietnam War American studies have seen his forecast come to pass. Still, in the course of preparing this essay, the amount and quality of the work completed over that twenty-year period has been surprising. The rethinking of how and why the United States got into the war—indeed, what the war actually *was* in which the United States became involved—has reopened historical studies on the war itself to such a degree that the most revealing studies may still lie ahead.

The studies of commemorative practices discussed here are really just beginning, with the transnational character given them in the aftermath of Vietnam continuing to define their cutting edge for the way wars in the Middle East will be marked. Likewise, the prominence of Vietnam veterans in fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of that war is already scripting the coming-home story of the younger generations of veterans, a legacy that will endure in American identity for decades.

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## Television and Film

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*Last Days in Vietnam*. Rory Kennedy. PBS, 2015.

*Sir! No Sir!* David Zeiger. Displaced Films, 2005.

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The War in Vietnam: Studies in Remembrance and Legacy, 2000-2014. Article. Jun 2016. Choice Curr Rev Acad Libr. Jerry Lembcke.Â

This essay organizes books published between 2000 and 2014 into groups of studies of new commemorative practices, such as those in Australia recognizing the collaboration of Australian and South Vietnamese forces; studies of the cultural and political implications of veteran representations in film and folklore; new biographies and autobiographies of war and antiwar leaders through which Americans can see new facets of the war and postwar years; and studies of the war's still-unfolding legacy for US foreign policy and military strategy. Learn about the war that enmeshed the United States in a battle against communism in Southeast Asia for more than twenty years.Â

Lyndon Johnson and the war in Vietnam. In August 1964, the US government received word that two North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. President Lyndon Johnson requested authorization from Congress for the use of military force, resulting in the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which laid the groundwork for the full-scale US military commitment to Vietnam.