

The War on Film: The Struggle for Answers from the Celluloid Images of Vietnam

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the wide availability of celluloid images of America's involvement in the Vietnam War, a scholarly approach to films on the subject is at once challenging and exhilarating. The 1983 Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Series, *Vietnam: A Television History*, alone spans thirteen volumes. And although early dramatic treatment of the War was limited and sometimes laughable, the more recent efforts of the past fifteen years have added greater emotional dimensions, and yet, films such as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Hamburger Hill* often cloud the political issues involved, particularly for students with little or no knowledge of the conflict.

Some of my colleagues and I who teach U.S. History, given the demands of the second semester of instruction, often fall short of time to give America's longest war fair and complete treatment. There is no disputing the fact that semester B of the course requires eighty years of the Nation's history, compared with just sixty-five in the first half of the class. In addition, the grand topics of the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement all arrive before Vietnam, should the course be taught chronologically. More often than not, I suspect, the War does not receive the attention needed for a meaningful examination of such an all-pervasive event, one that haunts the political, social and military forces of the generations that follow.

Without making accusations, perhaps there are additional reasons my colleagues and I fall short of complete coverage of Vietnam. For one, the events and nature of the War are complex and controversial. An undeclared war of staggering duration, a war of attrition, the War cannot be summed up in a few major, decisive campaigns, like the familiar engagements of World War II: Midwar, Guadalcanal, the Battle of the Bulge and D-Day. Instead the U.S. effort dissolves into a series of guerrilla engagements, sporadic firefights, and deadly pyrotechnic displays. Such a war hardly lends itself to a narrative explanation, one that can capture the imagination of most high school students.

A second reason Vietnam is often glossed over is that, to date, we as a nation draw different lessons from our involvement. Just as there are those that point to the phenomenal waste of tens of thousands of American lives and perhaps a million Vietnamese dead, some claim that total war could have secured a democratic South Vietnam. The latter group de-emphasizes generations of fierce Vietnamese resistance to colonial rule and an American effort that, after more than ten years of fighting and a widening of the War into neighboring Cambodia and Laos, failed to produce any

significant stabilization of the Republic of South Vietnam. Nor was the National Liberation Front, though frequently routed by American and the South Vietnamese armies, any nearer to being subdued in the South, and the Hanoi government in the North was still unwilling to agree to American terms for a peace settlement.

Furthermore, the fact that few positive consequences from the battlefields of Southeast Asia exist is compounded by the records of the leaders of the Vietnam Era. From the beginning, Mr. Johnson's deception over the Gulf of Tonkin, through General Westmoreland's purportedly false body count reports, and finally Nixon's campaign for a secret end to the War, one that involved the covert bombing of neighboring Cambodia, Vietnam is remembered more for its shameful politics than for the efforts of the young men involved. Even now, as the government tries to conceal its black eye from the havoc reeked by Agent Orange, it's easy for educators to shrink back in horror at all the bad news associated with the War.

Film to the Rescue

The danger film generally presents is the threat of simplification. And yet, due in part to the social and political fallout that the War brought about, the points of view available on film are varied and often quite compelling. Given teacher direction that leads students to approach film with a more critical eye, the barrage of images can serve to clarify and reinforce instruction on the War.

This unit attempts to provide guidance toward some possible uses of film in the classroom. The objectives of using film on the topic include:

1. Students are able to hypothesize about the motivations of filmmakers, both narrative and documentary, who attempt to capture the period of the Vietnam conflict.
2. Students are able to compare/contrast the portrayals of the War presented in feature films as opposed to accounts from readings used in class.
3. Students are able to describe the nature of the War, including the popular terminology from the period.
4. Students are able to explain the influences of the media on public opinion at home, policy decisions on the War, and national politics, as daily evidence of the War came home and into American living rooms nightly.
5. Students are able to judge the fairness and accuracy of portrayals of veterans as lost and wounded souls.

Toward that end, the following films and videos, in excerpt or in entirety, as time permits, are recommended:

Feature Films: *The Green Berets* (1968), *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the 4th of July* (1989), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and *Forest Gump* (1993).

Documentary Films: *Vietnam: A Television History* (1983), episodes “Tet” and “America’s Enemy”.

STRATEGIES

Film as an Approximation of Battle

Feature film generally provides one of two kinds of visual examples in the case of Vietnam: an approximation of the nature of the War or a vivid, negative example of the way the War was not. Either can be of great utility in the classroom. Of course, as veterans will tell, film is a poor means for getting at the feeling of being under fire. In the absence of first hand experience, however, film can hint at the horrors common to combat. At the same time, however, the nature of film, with its dependence on linear narrative and its tendency, especially in American features, to focus on the experiences of a single individual, means that, particularly on the subject of war, an institution which makes a vast array of experiences probable, the narrow focus will often mislead its audience. Perhaps this is a key reason why many veterans scoff at filmmakers' attempts to capture battle. Even the "ultra-realism" of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or Oliver Stone's *Platoon* is still missing all but what a few hours of the images that a director chooses to share. We are unlikely to see, for example, the unbearable boredom that lulls in combat create, since that doesn't lend itself well to selling movie tickets, something the above directors know a great deal about.

In the case of negative examples, although the majority of films on the Vietnam War manage to avoid the clichés of the World War II drama, such as overt jingoism, decisive well-planned heroically-executed battle objectives, and an absence of the pain and carnage that is war, there are two films that do a commendable job of misrepresenting the War: *The Green Berets* and *Hamburger Hill*.

What is perhaps most remarkable about *The Green Berets*, starring and co-directed by John Wayne, is that it was released in 1968, the same year as the Tet Offensive, the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.. It is remarkable because the film is so out of step with the mood of much of the Nation and with the nature of the conflict, so much so that reviewer Renata Adler in her New York Times review of the movie blasted Wayne's version of the War:

"*The Green Berets* is a film so unspeakable, so stupid, so rotten and false that it passes through being funny, through being camp, through everything and becomes an invitation to grieve not so much for our soldiers in Vietnam (the film could not be more false or do greater disservice to them) but for what has happened to the fantasy-making apparatus of this country" (Auster and Quart, 34).

It has the feel of a bad World War II picture, made complete with Wayne's fortress-style defense of an operations outpost, aptly named "Dodge City" and the inclusion of a character named Kowalski. At one point in the film, as George Takai of Mr. Sulu fame slaps a Viet Cong who had been working within the outpost, Wayne's character steps in to restore "decency" to the proceedings. And following the film's overdrawn, climatic battle for the outpost, when the North Vietnamese overrun the camp and raise the flag, Wayne calls in a Puff ship that mows down the enemy in thirty seconds, and the outpost is regained. By the end, Wayne wants us to learn that winning the hearts and minds of a simple people requires simple solutions involving paternalism and destruction.

The other exceedingly false portrayal of Vietnam, *Hamburger Hill*, a film stamped with the official approval of the U.S. Department of Defense, is more subtle in its distortions. Based on a true incident (a battle did rage for a hill) the film asserts that Vietnam was not lost on the battlefield. Instead, our nation's will to support those involved crippled our boys. The filmmakers advance that argument in a series of scenes devoted to the troops discussing the mood back in the States. Faced with a public that sees them as baby killers, their will to fight is sapped. And yet, despite the handicap, a few members of the company depicted manage to take the objective hill, albeit at the loss of the majority of their fellow soldiers. So in the case of *Hamburger Hill*, the filmmakers offer that poor results in Vietnam come, not from the mistaken judgment of those whose arrogance committed our young men to the rain forests of Southeast Asia, but from a public who could not stomach the grim necessities of guerrilla warfare.

Images of the Injustices and Tragedy of America's Longest War

For a potent counter to the above films, Oliver Stone's *Platoon*, which is regarded as the most "Vietnam-like" of more recent features on the subject, will serve reasonably well, provided that teachers prepare classes for "grunt-like" behavior and expletives. The film also includes the glamorization of drug abuse among the platoon, a scene that could be used for good discussions about why so many felt the need to escape through substances and how Stone could have challenged viewers by showing misuse in a different light. On the plus side, students are likely to identify with Charlie Sheen's character, one of two FNG's (Fucking New Guys). As he acclimates to the first few of his 365-day tour, so does the viewer. The battle scenes are notable for their confusion, though students may find themselves laughing during the final brutal engagement (please see my final thoughts, "Afterword"). Most importantly, the film does an excellent job of differentiating between those who, despite their personal feelings, served heroically and competently, and others who abused their positions of petty power and descended into excessive brutality against villagers and sometimes one another.

Filling in the Gaps

Of course, even Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone cannot escape the limitations of his medium. To fill the holes left by fairly traditional film narratives of the conflict, students should spend some time reading accounts of the War, both fictional and non-fictional accounts of combat experiences. Given the inevitable limits on time, short fiction and poetry, as well as letters home provide the quickest route into the mind of a "grunt". There are some collections on the topic, though, just as with the heightened realism of films on "Nam", language is a concern, as is some of the graphic subject matter. Two popular collections are *Touring Nam: The Vietnam Reader* and *The Vietnam War Reader: The Definitive Collection*.

Each volume provides fiction and non-fiction of varying length, in some cases as grand as a novella. As is generally the case with written work, it is less problematic to pause and discuss the details that might be beyond general student knowledge and, obviously, the reading may be done outside class. The hope is that in-class comparisons that students make between written and visual accounts of Vietnam can make students more critical of what they have and will see on the War.

Media Images of Correspondents in Vietnam

Since Vietnam was the first war whose progress was reported each night and morning on television, complete with color footage and body counts, this became our first televised war. Although it was rather different from the unedited visions made available from CNN and the networks during the Gulf War, the impact of the news coverage, particularly in an age which pre-dated cable, must have been profound indeed. My earliest memories of the War were of my brother and I watching the CBS Morning News with John Hart, when he delivered the body counts before school. I doubt I grasped the full meaning of the numbers in first or second grade, though it is likely that the comments my brother made about them had a deep impact.

With the exception of *Born on the 4th of July*, which only has one scene in Vietnam, all the feature films above, if only for a moment, show press coverage of the War. Here our filmmakers attempt to set the record straight on the war most Americans saw in their homes. Depending on the film, however, the need of recording to be "unbent" varies a good deal. By raising the topic, educators have the opportunity to raise the following questions related to press coverage during wartime in a democratic society:

1. What are the responsibilities of a war correspondent?
2. How can images shown back home be manipulated by those in the media?
3. Can coverage of conflicts endanger the lives of those in the field?
4. What do the various portrayals of the media say about our soldiers' attitudes toward the press corps?

Since many attribute daily reminders of the War to changing public opinion on the conflict, it is important to look at the light in which filmmakers cast members of the media, for they were the crucial bridge to U.S. public opinion, for better or worse.

Soldiers as Victims

Despite the limits of a short U.S. memory, Vietnam was not the first war in which its combatants had a difficult time readjusting to civilian life. In this century, the doughboys of the Great War came back with what was described as "shellshock". More sophisticated by the end of the Second World War, GIs came home with "battle fatigue". By the time "post-traumatic stress disorder" disabled Vietnam vets, we were in the grips of what some have called the "me" generation. Whether self-centeredness contributed to vets' problems or not, it does seem that a greater percentage of those coming home from Vietnam have had more trouble rejoining American life.

While it is true that some who served in Vietnam have had extraordinary trouble coping with their involvement, Hollywood's depiction of troubled vets has been especially cruel and exaggerated. Of the films that devote time to the subject, *Born on the 4th of July* is the most praised for its portrayal of Ron Kovic's autobiography, perhaps since Kovic co-wrote the screenplay. Other films have been less kind, such as *Taxi Driver* and *Rambo: First Blood*. The latter is the tale of a vet who is only accomplished at killing, one who can bring down a helicopter with a rock. Even Kovic's tale, which is ripe with savior images of Ron as the redeemer of the sinful nation, does not hint at those such as John Kerry of Massachusetts, who emerged from the War as a credible, critical statesman, or the thousands who return shaken yet functional, eager to move on with their lives while being vocal against military adventurism.

It is important, then, for students to hypothesize how vets were able to escape the cliché of the "wounded vet". It might be useful, in this regard, for students to interview vets about their experiences and, if possible, to ask them about the experiences of those around them. Certainly there may be a reporting bias, since students are not likely to encounter vets with severe depression. Within certain populations, there may be few to serve as resources. In this case, perhaps one or several vets can serve as guest speakers. It is likely that students will see that not all vets gave up and dropped out.

To examine the cliché, however, both *Born on the 4th of July* and *Forrest Gump* can be useful. In *Gump*, Forrest's commanding officer in the field, Lieutenant Dan, loses his lower legs and is bitter at having survived, unlike his forefathers. In Dan's mind, the possibility of facing life after combat makes the living envy the dead. After his fall, however, he is reborn, baptized while surviving a storm in the Gulf of Mexico, and emerges as successful businessman along side Forrest.

Ron Kovic's fall is further, more bitter, due in large part to the shoddy treatment his government gives him in the form of a horrifically run VA hospital. Following his rehabilitation, Kovic transforms himself from a naive patriot to a bitter vet who attempts to escape the guilt of having accidentally killed a fellow soldier. In the end, Kovic becomes active in Vietnam Veterans Against the War by protesting on the floor of the 1972 Republican National Convention, until he is ejected as a "traitor" with shouts from delegates such as, "You should have died over there." In the final scene, a cleaned up, smiling Kovic prepares to address the Nation at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. Although both tales bow to the Hollywood tendency toward a happy ending, at least they raise some of the issues some vets had to face: hostile homecomings, guilt, non-communicative families, being used as a tool for the staunchly patriotic, and adjustment to shattered bodies.

In conjunction with the available film narratives, excerpts from Bobbie Anne Mason's *In Country*, the very short work, "*Don't I Know You?*" from Tim O'Brien and the poem "*Incoming*" by Kevin Bowen provide sobering imagery to happy endings above.

The Nature of the Enemy

A final strategy will be to devote some time to the enemy. How and why were the Vietnamese who resisted foreign intervention such a formidable foe? Spending some time looking at their fierce determination will go a long way toward explaining why the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the North Vietnamese could defeat the technological superiority of the world's supreme military machine.

For the most part, American features focus on the effect the War has upon U.S. soldiers, usually as victims of either the madness of the conflict or betrayal at home. There are some moments of sympathy for the enemy in the popular *Good Morning Vietnam*, when Robin Williams unknowingly befriends a VC activist because he wants to date the boy's sister. *Full Metal Jacket's* climactic scene, or perhaps anti-climactic describes it better, in which Private Joker and his comrades kill the sniper reeking havoc upon the company, also shows America's enemy for what it was: determined, yet desperate and tragic. In the other features mentioned, however, the NLF and the North Vietnamese Army are seldom seen. Nor are their motives much of an issue for filmmakers.

Toward this goal, then, the *Vietnam: A Television History* episode best suited to deal with the techniques and motivations of the other side is the one entitled, "America's Enemy: 1945-1967". Here we see villagers manufacturing the crude yet effective weapons of guerrilla war, such as land mines made from unexploded American bombs. We also see the results of America's bombing of the North, as the episode interviews doctors and a coffin maker's workshop, complete with child-size models for the youngest victims of America's air campaigns. The program makes clear how U.S. air power only made those in the North more determined to expel American forces and influence. In all, the video does

a good job of dispelling the myth of the mindless, brainwashed communist hordes that are depicted in most feature films on the War.

ACTIVITIES

Note: Though film does not generally inspire active participation among learners, careful use of film, when combined with explanation and written works, can capture student attention and heighten student interest and engagement.

Given the above mentioned time limitations which are common to the end of the term, I have limited the activities involving film instruction to just five, and given a ninety-minute block schedule, a week-and-a-half to two weeks of class-time is optimal.

Activity One: Arrival

Materials: Films - *The Green Berets* and *Platoon*; Readings - "Arrival"

Assignment: Interview of a veteran

Objectives: Students should be able to:

- A. Explain a brief history of French colonial involvement in Southeast Asia/Vietnam;
- B. Identify Vietnam and its major features on a map of the region;
- C. Explain the roots of United States involvement in the region;
- D. Identify some of the lies and deceit that fueled U.S. involvement; and
- E. Describe what the War was like for "New Guys".

A through D would best be provided by the teacher, including explanation of the following terminology:

Dien Bien Phu	Domino Theory	Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
Gulf of Tonkin	National Liberation Front	1964 Presidential Election
Indochina	Republic of South Vietnam	People's Republic of North Vietnam

Show: Arrival scene from *The Green Berets*, in order to contrast its first impressions of Vietnam with those of *Platoon*. The Arrival scene begins seven to eight minutes into the movie, portraying Vietnam as organized and the troops, both the Americans and the South Vietnamese Army, as gung-ho. Also note how Jack Soo's colonel character sounds a lot like the "good injun" of the cowboy and Indian movies. Show until Provo tells Wayne's character that he'll have to think about his legacy, a running gag which sets up the film's bizarre, half-humorous conclusion to the film. About 12 minutes.

Show: The opening of *Platoon*. Students should be able to note the confusion, the effect of showing body bags, and the War in the eyes of the new guy, Charlie Sheen's character, Chris. Show until Chris says he may have made a big mistake coming to Vietnam as he is digging a foxhole. About ten minutes.

Discuss: The differences between the two moods, music, characters and anything else that occurs to students.

Read: Tim O'Brien's "Arrival", from *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (O'Nan), perhaps best done as a group to be able to explain some of the terminology. The story describes a new guy's first few hours in Vietnam as a member of Alpha Company. It provides strong images of still further confusion and division among U.S. Forces.

Assignment: Write a newspaper story about what a new recruit can expect in his first few hours of his tour of duty in Vietnam. The story should also include some information about why the U.S. says we should be there.

Note: In preparation for Activity Five, poll students to see how many have access to a Vietnam vet. If it's low, ask about the possibility of a guest speaker. Perhaps students can interview vets in pairs or in groups of three. Focus of the interview should be upon coming home, though any information about the experience will be valuable to record.

Activity Two: America's Enemy

Materials: *Vietnam a Television History*, "With America's Enemy: 1945-1967"; *Fire in the Lake*, pp. 190-95

Objectives: Students should be able to:

- A. Explain who the NLF/Viet Cong were;
- B. Explain the role of villagers in supporting the NLF;
- C. Explain motivations for the anti-colonial effort; and
- D. d. Identify some of the results of America's use of force, especially the use of air power

Introduce: Who the U.S. Forces could encounter and how NLF and People's Liberation Army were supplied in the South (villages, Ho Chi Minh Trail)

Teacher Resource: from *Fire in the Lake*, pp. 190-95

Show: A good introduction to the enemy is to watch the "Enemy" episode from VTH.

Discuss: What do you think it would have taken to defeat such an enemy?

Total vs. Limited War: Was *force* going to win hearts and minds?
Why do you think America underestimated such an enemy?

Assignment: Write a journal entry. If we had known (assuming U.S. leadership did not) about the Vietnamese will to expel all foreigners from its soil, should we have become involved in Vietnam? Explain, giving evidence from the video.

Activity Three: Media Coverage of the War

Materials: Video—*Hamburger Hill*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *VTH*, episode "Tet"; Reading—"Dispatches" from *Fire in the Lake*, and "Ambush".

Objectives: Students should be able to:

- A. Debate the dilemmas surrounding media coverage of armed conflict;
- B. Discuss the role of the reporter in a democratic society;
- C. Discuss the ways in which the media is portrayed in films on Vietnam and what those portrayals say about troop attitudes toward coverage of the War; and
- D. Hypothesize on the effects of television coverage of the War upon audience attitudes toward the U.S. effort.

Since this was a televised war, albeit a pre-recorded and edited one, most films depicting Vietnam pay some attention to the subject of media coverage. From those that give the media a central role, such as David Johanson's naively critical newspaper reporter in *Green Berets*, to the opportunity to get a cameo, as Francis Ford Copola did in *Apocalypse Now* (1975), most films on Vietnam demean media coverage of the War.

As way of introduction, read an excerpt from *Dispatches*, by Michael Herr, chapter II. It's available in *The Vietnam War Reader*.

Watch:

- A. Portrayal of the media as unsupportive from *Hamburger Hill*, which comes about 1:16 into the movie.
- B. Show staff meeting at *Stars & Stripes* ("Grunts like to read about dead VC.") Then forward to the reunion of Pvt. Joker and his buddy from Paris Island, through his meeting of the company.

Read: "The United States Enters the War" from *Fire in the Lake*, pp. 362-64. The excerpt asserts that for at least the first few years of war, correspondents in Saigon ate up daily briefings with little critical questioning.

Discuss: What is the role of a war correspondent in a democracy? Should we in any way limit press coverage? To whom are they responsible? How can that coverage be distorted or suppressed and why would correspondents do so?

Watch: Some footage (first four to six minutes) from *Vietnam: A Television History*: "Tet, 1968".

Discuss: What do you think the effect of seeing such images had upon the Americans back home?

Homework: Read, "Ambush" by Tim O'Brien to prep for comparisons with the following day's video, *Platoon*.

Activity Four: Life of a Grunt

Materials: Film—*Platoon*, *Platoon* Study Guide

Since *Platoon* has received much praise, including the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1986, the film deserves to be shown in its entirety. Educators should screen the movie; it contains a lot of profane language, what could arguably be called glorified drug abuse and graphic violence. Careful "editing" can remove most of the potentially offensive drug abuse, but the other two are difficult to avoid, as is expected in a feature that tries to accurately capture the experience of combat.

Study Questions

During and after the film, students may answer the questions below:

- A. How does *Platoon's* portrayal of Ambush compare with O'Brien's? (Homework, Activity Three)
- B. What is the nature of the conflict between Sgts. Barnes and Elias? With whom does Chris side and why? Which do you think is right? Why?
- C. In what light does the film cast American soldiers? Give examples.
- D. Does Chris do anything you would consider as heroic? Explain.
- E. Write Chris's last letter home describing the movie's last firefight and Chris's thoughts about the War now that he's going home.

Activity Five: Wounded Vets

Materials: Film—*Born on the 4th of July* and *Forrest Gump*; Reading—"Don't I Know You?" and "Incoming" (poem) from *In Country*, Chapter 30.

Objectives: Students should be able to:

- A. Discuss/identify some of the legacies of the Vietnam War, including loss of faith in national politics, the shame associated with Vietnam veterans, chronic health threats to vets, doubts about the invincibility of the American military, diminished patriotism, the difficulty of fighting an unpopular war, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- B. Reexamine the stereotypes associated with Vietnam vets.

Students should be presented the political and military implications mentioned above. The issues specific to vets can be addressed following the video presentation.

Show: From *Born on the 4th of July*, Ron's homecoming, when he is given a parade on Independence Day and gives a speech to his hometown (approximately 1:15:00 into the film). Though the language is rough, the scene in which he confronts his mother when he comes home drunk is also good to show his political metamorphosis. (Skip barroom between parade scene and this one.) Next, the scene in which he is thrown from the floor of the Republican National Convention in Miami is good for the insults hurled at Ron, a man who had served his country, such as, "You should have died over there!" Continue to see a cleaned up, smiling Ron about to address the Democratic National Convention in 1976.

Show: Lt. Dan confronts Gump for saving his life (1:22:00). Fast forward to Dan and Forrest on the dock through his redemption after the storm (begins at approximately 1:55:00).

Discuss: What would it have been like to serve for a year or more in Vietnam, watch friends die, perhaps receive debilitating wounds, only to have the Nation prefer to forget the sacrifices you had made?

Read: "Don't I Know You" by Tim O'Brien, about the strange experience of going home on a jumbo jet, following a tour in Vietnam (from Greenberg and Norton's collection).

Read: "Incoming" (poem) about the isolation felt by vets back home.

Note: One of the problems unique to Vietnam vets (vs. vets from previous wars) is that rather than troop ships, vets most often flew home. Though more comfortable, flights meant vets had little time to "debrief", or think through their experiences. Thus many vets were shocked to find themselves in the jungle one day on the streets of their hometowns a day or two later (Auster and Quart, 77-78).

Assignment: Read Chapter 30 from *In Country* by Bobbie Anne Mason, available in O'Nan's *Vietnam Reader*. Emmet, the vet in the story, explains why it has been so hard to come home. Discuss the three works the following day. Also discuss interviews with vets before turning in.

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Films

Born on the 4th of July. Director Oliver Stone, 1989.

Forrest Gump. Director Robert Zemeckis, 1993.

Full Metal Jacket. Director Stanley Kubrick, 1987.

The Green Berets. Director John Wayne, 1968.

Hamburger Hill. Director John Irvin, 1987.

Platoon. Director Oliver Stone, 1986.

Documentary Films

Episode "With America's Enemy: 1945-67" of *Vietnam: A Television History*. WGBH Boston. PBS Video. 1983.

Episode "Tet: 1968" of *Vietnam: A Television History*. WGBH Boston. PBS Video. 1983.

AFTERWORD

As I planned the unit on Vietnam, I decided that I would attempt to teach some or all of the unit, as time and patience allowed. In the spring of 1999, then, I taught what I could.

Be forewarned: So many horrifying images over about a two week period, several times a day becomes draining. Students said it didn't affect them to the degree I felt. Part of the problem was running to video stores each night, avoiding late fees and queuing the tapes for the next day's showing. Most of the exhaustion, however, comes from the sorrowful imagery of war, especially when some students miss the point and smile and laugh at the violence on screen. *Platoon's* final scene was especially prone to inappropriate response.

Nevertheless, after reading some of their final exam essays, many could lay out a convincing argument for why we should have thought twice before plunging into Vietnam.

Peace. Matthew Coan

Service on Celluloid is a captivating podcast that takes a deep look at depictions of World War II on film over the last 70-plus years. In-house experts at The National WWII Museum, along with special guests, hold lively debates on the historical merits of treasured classics and smaller films alike. Films highlighted in this series include *Fury*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Schindler's List*, *The Great Escape*, and *Twelve O'Clock High*. This entertaining series examines Hollywood's portrayals of "good and bad" of the 20th century's most dramatic event. Think of the War in Vietnam and the image in your mind is likely one that was first captured on film, and then in the public imagination. How those photographs made history is underscored throughout the new documentary series *The Vietnam War*, from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. The series features a wide range of war images, both famous and forgotten. Gilles Caron's atypical vertical image of a face-to-face encounter exposes deep cultural divide and distrust. Still images rarely give straightforward answers but they do offer illuminating clues for those who take the time to delve into them. Caron's career in photography was very short – 1966 to 1970 – but his exceptional talent, intelligence, commitment and ubiquity leave us with an unmatched visual legacy. The Vietnam War represents a crucial moment in U.S. contemporary history and has given rise to the conflict which has so intensively motivated the American film industry. Although some Vietnam movies were produced during the conflict, this article will concentrate on the ones filmed once the war was over.

FILMS PRODUCED DURING THE WAR

The widespread feeling of culpability about an intervention very often judged as unfair, was the reason for a prudent silence in Hollywood during most of the conflict. As John Ellis points out, there are several consequences that define the act of attending a film projection. They concentrated on the effects of the struggle on those who returned, avoiding a further inquiry into the reasons that determined the U.S. involvement.

The War on Film: The Struggle for Answers from the Celluloid Images of Vietnam.

Article. Matthew Coan. View. *A People's History of Empire, or the Imperial Recuperation of Vietnam? Countermyths and Myths in Heaven and Earth.* Article. The film provides critical correctives to the limited representations of most Hollywood Vietnam War films, contributing to a fuller historical accounting of the war. As a political construction, it contributes to the American recuperation of Vietnam as an object of neoliberal imperialism. The film's historical and political-economic context suggests that its countermyths are in the service of a new type of intervention by the United States: enclosing Vietnam within the neoliberal economic Washington consensus. View. Show abstract.