Critical Perspectives on the Vietnam War

Anticipated Weekly Class Schedule: T, TR 9-1

Course Description

The American war in Vietnam caused the death of over three million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans. Despite the magnitude of the dislocations and rupture experienced by the Vietnamese, at least ninety percent of all studies of the “Vietnam War” in English privilege American experiences and perspectives. Relatedly, most courses on the Vietnam War in American universities focus mainly or even completely on the American experience in Vietnam and the long-term consequences of the war on American society; rarely are works by and about Vietnamese assigned in these courses. Departing from the almost-exclusive focus on the American experience, this course examines the impact of the American war in Vietnam on three populations: Americans, Vietnamese (both North and South), and the Viet Kieu (the post-1975 population of overseas Vietnamese). We will supplement scholarly texts on the Vietnam War with cultural texts produced by both Americans and Vietnamese, including films and documentaries, novels and poems, and visits to war museums and monuments. As this is an Ethnic Studies course, we will pay particular attention to the role of race, gender, sexuality and colonialism in our examination of the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

Course requirements:

1) Group project: The group project will require 3 to 4 students to work together. The project will focus on a “text” or cultural object such as museums, films, monuments, novels etc., which pertain to the themes of the course but are not covered directly by the course. The group will present their projects to the class in the last 2 weeks of the course.

2) One midterm paper

3) One final paper

4) Attendance and active participation in class. Discussions will focus on the readings. Everyone is expected to have completed the reading assignments and to be prepared to participate constructively in the class discussion.

Reading and Lecture Schedule

Week 1 – A Brief History of the Vietnam War

Selections from Mark Atwood Lawrence. 2010. The Vietnam War: A Concise International History. Oxford University Press. [Examines the American role in the war within an international context.]

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**Week 2. America’s Difficult War: The “Vietnam Syndrome”**


Selections from: Milton Bates. 1996. *The Wars We Took to Vietnam: Cultural Conflict and Storytelling*. UC Press. [Examines the conflicts that that Americans brought to the Vietnam War: the divisions stemming from differences in race, class, sex, generation, and frontier ideology.]

**Student Presentations**—Screening brief excerpts of *Platoon, The Deer Hunter, First Blood* and *Rambo: First Blood II*

**Week 3. Hanoi’s War—The North Vietnamese**
- Nguyen Thi Dinh. 1976. *No Other Road to Take*. Cornell University Press. [first-person account on the rise of the National Liberation Front]

**Possible Excursion: Cu Chi Tunnels and Ben Duoc Monument**
- **Cu Chi Tunnels** were the location of several military campaigns during the Vietnam War, and were the Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tết Offensive in 1968. The tunnels were used by Viet Cong soldiers as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous North Vietnamese fighters. The tunnel systems were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces, and helped to counter the growing American military effort.

- **Ben Duoc Monument**: Monument to the war martyrs from 40 cities and provinces, who died on the battle fields in Saigon - Cho Lon - Gia Dinh during the wars against the French and Americans.

**Week 4 — The South**

**Film:** Song Trong So hai/ Living in Fear (2005). Director: Bui Thac Chuyen. [about a Southern Vietnamese veteran who makes a perilous living in the postwar era by defusing American ordinance.]

**Possible Excursions: Tu Du Peace Village, Children’s Agent Orange.** Located in the Tu Du Maternity Hospital in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, Peace Village is home to 60 orphaned children whose lives have been drastically impacted by the effects of Agent Orange.

[Background source: Agent Orange Record: http://www.agentorangerecord.com/agent_orange_history/]

**Other Possible Excursions:**
- **War Remnants Museum** [a war museum in Ho Chi Minh City that primarily contains exhibits relating to the “war crimes” committed first by the French, and then the Americans.

**Week 5: Vietnamese in the United States: The War That Never Ends**


Truong, Monique T.D. “Vietnamese American Literature,” in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (219-46)


**Documentary:** *Saigon, USA*, by Lindsey Jang and Robert C. Winn. Documents the struggles over identity and competing memories of the Vietnam War in Southern California’s Little Saigon.