

Englit 1790  
Spring 2005  
Lowenstein, A

1

**FILM AND LITERATURE:  
REPRESENTING THE VIETNAM WAR**

ENGLIT 1790 (CRN 40453), Spring 2005, Thursdays 1-5pm, LAWRN 207  
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

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**Course Description.** How can we adequately represent the Vietnam War, one of the most complex, controversial, and traumatic events in American history? For every story we tell, for every voice we hear, are there not many other stories forgotten and voices silenced? This course approaches these questions through consideration of both cinematic and literary texts. We will study these forms together not to prove one “better” than the other, but to enhance our understanding of the difficulties associated with representing an event that refuses to pass easily into “history.” How does Vietnam literature depend on cinematic conventions? How do Vietnam films draw on literary techniques? How do these forms, alone and together, respond to the challenges of representing the Vietnam War? Demanding, critically complex readings in film theory and film history will open up our discussion of such questions, and students will pose (and answer) questions of their own in essays and weekly journals.

The course is divided into two interrelated halves: the first examines key films released during some of the most turbulent years of the Vietnam War (1964-1972) that tend to refer to the conflict through indirect means, while the second concentrates on films produced after the war that tend to address the conflict explicitly. Again, the point is not to prove either “direct” or “indirect” representations of the war as somehow superior, but to analyze different strategies of representation and their relation to shifting historical contexts.

**Prerequisites.** Students must have already taken Film Analysis (ENGLIT 0530) before enrolling in this course. An expert knowledge of the textbook *Film Art: An Introduction* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson will be assumed, as this is an upper-level course in film studies. Students must review this text carefully BEFORE the course begins, as they will be required to speak and write about the interaction between film technique (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound) and film narrative using the technical vocabulary presented in *Film Art*. Other recommended textbooks for review of basic film studies terms include *The Film Experience: An Introduction* by Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White and *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* by Timothy Corrigan. All of these titles are available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve.

**Course Requirements.** Grades will be determined through evaluation of the following (percentages are rough, not exact): weekly journal entries (20%); a mid-term essay (20%); a final essay (40%); and attendance/class participation (20%). Because your grade depends heavily on a number of different factors, passing the course requires that you MUST: attend all lectures and screenings; have all reading assignments and journals completed before that week’s class; participate actively by raising questions and observations during class; and turn in all assignments by the deadlines specified in the course schedule, as NO late assignments will be

accepted. Come to each class prepared with written questions/comments to speak about based on your weekly journal entry. Journal entries are due each week, must be at least one single-spaced, typed page each, and must answer the following questions in a format that emphasizes *connections* between the questions: What are the main points of this week's readings? How would you relate your reflections to this week's unit title on the syllabus? How do this week's readings cause you to reflect upon previous films/readings/discussions in the course?

Arriving late or leaving class early counts as an absence, and more than TWO unexcused absences may result in automatic failure of the course. No plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will be tolerated – any such activity may result in expulsion. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Course Texts** (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve):  
The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the course schedule:

- Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, ed., *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) [HH]
- J. Hoberman, *The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties* (New York: New Press, 2003) [DL]
- Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990; New York: Broadway Books, 1998) [TC]
- Stewart O'Nan, ed., *The Vietnam Reader: The Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Nonfiction on the War* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998) [VR]
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, seventh edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004)
- Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, fourth edition (New York: Longman, 2001)
- Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004)

### Course Schedule

WEEK 1, JAN. 6 – INTRODUCTION: IS THE VIETNAM WAR PAST OR PRESENT?  
Screening: *Hearts and Minds* (Peter Davis, 1974, USA) 110m  
In-Class Writing Exercise

WEEK 2, JAN. 13 – VIETNAM AS WESTERN: COWBOYS AND INDIANS  
Screening: *Major Dundee* (Sam Peckinpah, 1964, USA) 124m  
Reading: Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, "Appendix A – Chronology: The United States, Vietnam, and American Film" [HH, 298-349]; J. Hoberman, "Introduction: 'Suddenly . . . It's 1960!'" and "The Cowboy Election of 1964" and "*Major Dundee* – Great Society Abroad" [DL, xi-xvii; 108-132]; David Grosser, "'We Aren't on the Wrong Side, We Are the Wrong Side': Peter Davis Targets (American) Hearts and Minds" [HH]; Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried" [TC]

## WEEK 3, JAN. 20 – VIETNAM AS WESTERN: PRO-WAR OR ANTI-WAR?

Screening: *The Chase* (Arthur Penn, 1966, USA) 135m

Reading: J. Hoberman, “*The Chase* – Great Society at Home” and “Vietnam: ‘An Oriental Western’” [DL, 132-155]; Robin Moore, *The Green Berets* [VR, 17-40]; Barry Sadler and Robin Moore, “The Ballad of the Green Berets” [VR, 285]; Tim O’Brien, “Love” and “Spin” [TC]

## WEEK 4, JAN. 27 – IMAGINING A COUNTERCULTURE

Screening: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967, USA) 111m

Reading: J. Hoberman, “Born to be Wild: Outlaws of America, 1967-69” and “If You Are a Bonnie and Clyder . . . The Birth of Radical Chic” [DL, 163-185]; Tim O’Brien, “On the Rainy River” [TC]

## WEEK 5, FEB. 3 – AMERICA DEVOURS ITSELF

Screening: *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968, USA) 96m

Reading: J. Hoberman, “Nixon Time: The War at Home, 1969-71” and “The End of the Sixties” and “America’s Night of the Living Dead” [DL, 247-262]; Sumiko Higashi, “*Night of the Living Dead*: A Horror Film About the Horrors of the Vietnam War” [HH]; Tim O’Brien, “Enemies” and “Friends” [TC]

## WEEK 6, FEB. 10 – THE GAP: GENERATION AND CLASS

Screening: *Joe* (John G. Avildsen, 1970, USA) 107m

Reading: J. Hoberman, “Generational War in the Dream Life: Hey *Joe* (Where You Goin’ with That Gun in Your Hand?)” [DL, 281-296]; Mark Baker, *Nam* [VR, 303-323]; Tim O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story” [TC]

## WEEK 7, FEB. 17 – FANTASIES OF ORDER FROM CHAOS: THE VIGILANTE AND THE FEMININE

Screening: *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971, USA) 102m

Reading: J. Hoberman, “The Legal Vigilante: *Dirty Harry* and Tricky Dick” [DL, 315-333]; Keith Walker, *A Piece of My Heart* [VR, 338-350]; Tim O’Brien, “The Dentist” and “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong” [TC]

\*\*\*MID-TERM ESSAY DUE\*\*\*

## WEEK 8, FEB. 24 – CINEMA AND/AS POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

Screening: *The Candidate* (Michael Ritchie, 1972, USA) 109m

Reading: J. Hoberman, “The 1972 Campaign: Warren, George, Jane, and *The Candidate*” [DL, 345-365]; Tim O’Brien, “Stockings” and “Church” [TC]

## WEEK 9, MAR. 3 – THE WAR COMES HOME: MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

Screening: *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978, USA) 127m

Reading: Michael Selig, “Boys Will Be Men: Oedipal Drama in *Coming Home*” [HH]; Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* [VR, 561-571]; Tim O’Brien, “The Man I Killed” and “Ambush” and “Style” [TC]

WEEK 10, MAR. 10 – \*\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\*\*

WEEK 11, MAR. 17 – “MORE” THAN A MAN OR “LESS” THAN A WOMAN?

Screening: *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978, USA) 183m

Reading: Leonard Quart, “*The Deer Hunter*: The Superman in Vietnam” [HH]; Susan Jeffords, “Reproducing Fathers: Gender and the Vietnam War in U.S. Culture” [HH]; Tim O’Brien, “Speaking of Courage” and “Notes” [TC]

WEEK 12, MAR. 24 – CAPTURING HISTORY OR CREATING MYTHOLOGY?

Screening: *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979, USA) 153m

Reading: Frank P. Tomasulo, “The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film” [HH]; Michael Herr, *Dispatches* [VR, 200-233]; Tim O’Brien, “In the Field” [TC]

WEEK 13, MAR. 31 – WINNING VIETNAM?

Screening: *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985, USA) 95m

Reading: Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser, “Never Having to Say You’re Sorry: *Rambo*’s Rewriting of the Vietnam War” [HH]; Gregory A. Waller, “*Rambo*: Getting to Win This Time” [HH]; Tim O’Brien, “Good Form” and “Field Trip” [TC]

WEEK 14, APR. 7 – SOLDIERS AND THE STAKES OF RACE

Screening: *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986, USA) 120m

Reading: Clyde Taylor, “The Colonialist Subtext in *Platoon*” [HH]; Wallace Terry, *Bloods* [VR, 324-337]; Tim O’Brien, “Ghost Soldiers” [TC]

WEEK 15, APR. 14 – VIETNAM AS SCRAPBOOK: THE DESIRE FOR IDEOLOGICAL INNOCENCE

Screening: *Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam* (Bill Couturie, 1987, USA) 87m

Reading: Barry Dornfeld, “*Dear America*: Transparency, Authority, and Interpretation in a Vietnam War Documentary” [HH]; Bernard Edelman, *Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam* [VR, 351-364]; Tim O’Brien, “Night Life” [TC]

WEEK 16, APR. 21 – CONCLUSION: IS THE VIETNAM WAR PAST OR PRESENT?

Screening: *The Fog of War* (Errol Morris, 2003, USA) 107m

Reading: Tim O’Brien, “The Lives of the Dead” [TC]

\*\*\*FINAL ESSAY DUE\*\*\*