Placing the Academy

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Recently, I gave a reading on campus of some travel writing about my time spent living in Hanoi, Vietnam. Several of my students in attendance, upon hearing of a place of which they knew very little, approached afterwards and asked the simple question I hear most often about my work, from students and colleagues both: “Of all things, why Vietnam?”

By nature I’m an easily rankled person, a disappointed optimist, I suppose—probably because I (however naively) believe in justice and, as George Packer has recently written, the twentieth century didn’t see much of it and probably because tied to that belief is another one, namely, that the world could be a whole lot better place if each individual just lived up to his or her own ethics (25). But thankfully I’m married to a woman who has tact to spare and who’s helping me to see the advantage of developing some of my own, so I’ve learned to manage to fight down my initial response—which, in an indignant voice, goes something like “Our country killed four-and-a-half-million people there, gave cancer and birth defects to half a million more by spraying them with dioxin, inflicted grinding poverty on the survivors with a twenty-year embargo, and you ask me why I’m interested?”—and remember that they can in all good conscience ask that question because, aside from a few academics like myself, a few veterans still living in the past, a few business people interested in cracking open a new market, and a few politicians seeking to discredit the personality or politics of another, no one really wants to rake up the mud of the quagmire again.

I suppose that’s because so much was said already, so much innocence lost, and so much of the divisiveness of our society
Imagined Vietnams today is often traced to that tragic, brutal time when our presence in Vietnam dismantled American civil society. Those who lived through it themselves feel they’ve already dealt with it, as veterans, as former peace advocates, as the “silent majority” who watched it on TV. Those who weren’t born yet may have talked about Vietnam in a history class, but most high schools divide American history into antebellum and postbellum periods, and by the time they get through Reconstruction, World War I, the Depression, World War II, and the beginnings of the Cold War, they have little time to delve deeply into America’s war in Southeast Asia. This was true of my own experience with high school history and seems to be the general case among my students as well. In a Literature of War class I taught last year, only five out of twenty-five college seniors had read anything about Vietnam before, and the only one who had heard of the My Lai massacre was a nontraditional student in her fifties who had spent the war years sitting in and dropping out. The present state of international affairs certainly doesn’t make the situation any better, since our occupation of Iraq does indeed compel the attention of those who care about world politics but leaves little time to consider—and is only rarely and superficially put into the context of—our presence in Vietnam. For most people today, Vietnam is not just old hat; it’s ancient history.

And so I realize I must be thankful that at least these young people standing before me are interested. They want to know not only why I care about Vietnam, but why they should care too, and they’ve just given me the opportunity to tell them. Deep in my gut, I knot up that vitriolic part of myself that would have been irrepressible in my twenties, keep my indignation in check, and I answer honestly and tactfully, “A lot of people suffered and died there, and I think it’s important to ask ourselves why.”

Answering that question—Why?—has been a long process and still demands a great deal of my energies, but getting to the point of asking it wasn’t easy either. In fact, much of what passed for knowledge about Vietnam, the cultural representations I was inundated with as a youth, stood in the way of its articulation. My adolescence was the age of America’s Vietnam era reconstruction, the heyday for Hollywood films about the war. Because of my age, I received, consumed, and accepted these films without critical thought. As the country coped with the humiliation of losing the war, as the military struggled to regain its prestige, as veterans found their way from being pariahs to prodigal sons, the American
film industry not only captured their redemption, it helped engineer it. The Deer Hunter, Apocalypse Now, First Blood, Missing in Action, Rambo, Heartbreak Ridge, Red Dawn, Platoon, Hamburger Hill, Full Metal Jacket, Good Morning, Vietnam, and Born on the Fourth of July, all released during my most impressionable years, played a formative role in how I thought of Vietnam: as a dense jungle, a dangerous place, a place of betrayal; as a setting for tests of American character and endurance. But more than anything else, it was the place that had ruined a generation of men, cheated them of their rightful place in American society, humiliated them and made them less than the proud men they were supposed to be. Thus, for me, as for many Americans, Vietnam existed exclusively in the context of these American crises of identity, as the setting for these stories about American character. In fact, in the movie that might be Hollywood’s greatest cultural impact of the late twentieth century, Vietnam was completely internalized by the main character, maintaining it as an important place for the character’s development, yet denying it any real representation whatsoever. First Blood’s John Rambo doesn’t lose his prestige in Vietnam; rather, his experiences there endow him with the superhuman survival qualities the film celebrates. The war is what causes his own society to treat him as an outcast, and thus the real message is that Vietnam is so horrific it no longer needs to be represented as a place at all. Instead it’s something the hero carries with him, like a disease that has infected him, and thus the country, turning it on itself.

When I was sixteen, I visited the newly erected Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., colloquially known as the Wall. I had no context to put the experience of visiting the Wall into, other than the films I’d seen, and so I had no way of knowing then that a wall listing the Vietnamese dead would have to be a cliff, seventy-seven times the height. It didn’t even occur to me that there should be a Vietnamese wall; after all, the war in Vietnam was really about us, not them; they were just the inscrutable, black-clad enemy, angry and fierce. Even so, I had a hard time relating to the list of names or to the sense of loss and destroyed lives that the movies depicted. My uncle had served in the war, but he had never talked to me about it and seemed okay, not at all like the men in the films. He was a bank manager. Despite this apparent contradiction, I accepted what the film industry had been projecting for the last ten years: that the real crime of Vietnam was that it made America
turn on itself, that we could redeem ourselves entirely by willing it so, and that this memorial was meant to be a small part of making good on society’s restitution.

Thanks to an exciting and energetic teacher, at twenty I began to study the war in depth, along with the subsidiary wars in Cambodia and Laos, and it was then that images of the real Southeast Asia burned something up for good inside of me and made me realize I could never again see the world in the same way. I read for the first time about the massive bombings of Laos and Cambodia and saw children’s crayon drawings of the first airplanes they’d ever seen, dropping the bombs that killed their families. I read the secret Rand study of the American efforts in Laos, in which “a wealth of useful lessons [were] embedded” (most notably the kind of CIA and Special Forces tactics that have been refined and put to use in Afghanistan and Iraq), all of which was made more poignant by the fact that Laos was merely a “secondary theater,” ravaged entirely because of the war in Vietnam (Blaufarb 89). At twenty-one I read about My Lai for the first time, read accounts of little girls explaining how they’d seen their younger sisters raped and killed, read how William Calley grabbed a wounded baby by the heel who had crawled away from an irrigation ditch full of dead bodies, tossed it back to the pile and shot it dead. Equally disturbing, I read how some Americans turned Calley into a hero and how quickly he was returned to public life. I saw Eddie Adams’s famous photograph of Saigon Chief of Police Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting his bound prisoner in the head and Nick Ut’s equally famous picture of nine-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc screaming, running from the napalm blasts that scorched her unclothed body. I saw a film called Vietnam: After the Fire about the massive ecological devastation of the war, saw huge tracts of dead mangroves and jungles, saw large glass jars containing severely deformed fetuses in formaldehyde, their double heads, twisted faces, misshapen limbs all attributed to their parents’ exposure to Agent Orange. And finally came the question the films of my youth refused to articulate: Why? Why did this happen? How did this get turned into the movies I’d seen? How could we, how did we, come to this?

Vietnam became a place of hidden crimes, and, like Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County, it was the location of every sort of human suffering and depredation, kept from the mainstream’s sight by physical distance and cultural alienation. But more than that, it seemed that our own government, through hubris and hypocrisy,
and our culture, through short memories and an all-consuming desire for pleasurable entertainment, were keeping the lid on Vietnam, making it difficult for Americans to learn the truth for themselves, difficult for even the best stories by the best authors—the O’Briens, the Wrights, the Browns—to make any substantial impact. Vietnam was, as far as I could tell, the setting for the darkest chapter of American history, and somehow the cultural force of America rolled on, as if that place and those crimes never existed. The guilt American society as a whole should have experienced for having committed such heinous crimes had been shifted entirely to the guilt it experienced for not treating its returning soldiers as heroes, even though the whole point of the best of the books and movies from the war was that there were no heroes. I began to realize that the will to forget, the twisting of truth, and the insistence on pride were all screens whose common, primary characteristic was an intentionally maintained ignorance about Vietnam as a place itself. If Vietnam wasn’t a real, independent, and self-substantial place and if that place had nothing to do with the American character, then its people and their suffering would not have to be confronted. The economic embargo initiated after the fall of Saigon was very much a part of this willed ignorance. If there is no commerce, there is no connection, no news, no tourists, no reports from the field, no knowledge whatsoever that the place still exists.

For twenty years, America held a hand before its eyes every time it looked to Southeast Asia, saying “I don’t see you”—long enough to imagine, supposedly, that no one would remember what really happened there or, better yet, that people would remember only what Hollywood had projected onto the screen.

And because of that censure, because of those intentional misrepresentations, I realized that as a place Vietnam still wasn’t real to me, despite my initial studies. In contrast, I’d never been to France or England, yet evidence of the existential validity of those places was all around me, all the time, in the fiction I read, in the films I saw, in the language I spoke. But Vietnam continued to exist only in my imagination, potentially as repressed nationalistic guilt, clearly intensified by the fact that very few of my fellow citizens seemed to feel it at all, and then only as a shadow cast by the American occupation, a dark place where crimes had been committed and whose people were simply the victims of our incredible violence.

At twenty-four, these realizations forced me to begin to study the history of America’s role in Vietnam, focusing most intently on the
formative years of the two countries’ relationship, when American advisors first arrived to assist the French fighting to retain their colony and then in the 1950s and early 60s, when Americans engineered the partitioning of the country and installed Ngo Dinh Diem as president of South Vietnam. It would have been easy to continue to see Vietnam simply as a setting for American action, the place in which those advisors enacted their faith in American exceptionalism. The top CIA advisor in Saigon, Edward Lansdale, regularly read to the president from Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, as if establishing American-style democracy was just that easy, a matter of simple, rational thinking. The Michigan State University Vietnam Public Administration Project advisors were just as confident, at first, that training in American public administration methods could transform South Vietnam into a viable American-style democracy. They expanded the reading lists from *Common Sense* to selections from John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and *Reader’s Digest*.

But unlike the American nation builders, I decided that it was important to learn something about Vietnam itself, to understand it finally, as best I could, as a place in its own right, without putting it into the context of American interests. I studied the language and culture from Vietnamese teachers and was befriended by Vietnamese graduate students who invited me over for dinner and helped me practice the language. I read histories of the country translated from the Vietnamese. In my imagination I began finally to see a picture of a place that might actually correspond to the people who lived there and whose culture had developed from it. And even though that picture was just as imaginary, I knew it had to be more real, had to be closer to a true sense of the place, if only because the range of values associated with it had grown dramatically. It could still be a dangerous place, with dense jungles and the possibility of betrayal, but it was also a place where there were ten different names for rain and hundreds for shades of green. It became a place where mountains had once been the home of gods, or a dragon’s spine, or even just the force in tandem with the sea that helped a culture develop its sense of self, and it was no longer a place where the hills were named by their height in meters or the arduousness of the terrain represented by the lines of a topographical map. Foods and rituals and people became bound up in that imaginary place: aspirations and fears, times for giving gifts and harvesting crops, customs and folklore, stories about what is important about Vietnam as a country and who the Vietnamese are as a people.
These stories had a profound effect on me. In one, for example, two brothers are very close. When the older brother marries, the younger is initially happy for him but later saddened by the inevitable distance that comes between them. In his sadness, he wanders through the forest and sits by a river, lamenting what he regards as the loss of his brother. His sadness transforms him into a limestone boulder. The older brother, who was torn by his love for his wife and the love for his brother, eventually goes to look for his lost sibling. By the river, he sits on a limestone boulder and laments his loss. His sadness transforms him into an areca palm. The wife misses her husband and brother-in-law. She goes to look for them and stops at the limestone boulder, shaded by the areca tree, and laments her loss. Her sadness transforms her into a betel nut tree. Together, the limestone, the areca palm, and the betel nut were presented to the king when he visited the area, and the story so moved him that he proclaimed that the traditional preparation of the betel nut would forever be a part of marriage ceremonies, as a reminder of the need for balance in filial piety and amorous love. Betel is still a part of marriage ceremonies and is still chewed by many people in Vietnam today. The story’s depth of love and suffering and divided loyalties cannot be lost on anyone aware of Vietnam’s troubled history, and a variety of its metaphorical applications certainly were not lost on me. In my imagination the place became rich with emotion, bound with my own sense of love and honor and duty.

When the opportunity arose for me to live in Hanoi, I didn’t hesitate. Professor Rob Proudfoot invited me to join the University of Oregon Vietnam National University Sister University Project, of which he was the director, and I was honored to accept. Rob had been teaching in, and developing cultural ties with, Vietnam since 1993, when he became the first visiting professor from the United States to teach in Vietnam since the war. While there, we worked with the Vietnam Women’s Union Museum, met with teachers from Vietnam National University and the University of Hanoi, and made trips to cultural centers such as Kiep Bac, Con Son, and Co Loa. I also worked for a business newspaper, trying as best I could to make sense of how the new wave of Westerners, heralding the miracle of international development, compared to the American nation builders of the 1950s and 60s. To my amazement, much of the rhetoric had been recycled, at times sounding word for word like the same advice.
But the place was finally real. Almost immediately, I began to realize that the readings I’d done had given me a sense of the shape of Vietnamese culture but none of the individual details. I realized that without living there, what I was trying to understand was akin to understanding America by reading Paul Bunyan stories but never eating a McDonald’s hamburger or knowing English but never seeing it flash across the screens at Times Square. There in Hanoi, I was finally beginning to feel the texture of Vietnamese life, coming to learn what this place was, and allowing its charm to become a part of me.

In some ways, Hanoi reminded me of Eugene, Oregon, where I’d been living the last two years. Both are green cities, with wide avenues lined by huge trees, and there’s a vibrant street life, with cafés on the sidewalks and people everywhere. In the late fall came the rains, which also seemed like home.

But in other ways it couldn’t be more different. Nothing could have prepared me for the brilliant green of the rice paddies outside of town under a bright August sky. It feels as though you can actually sense the rice gathering in the rays of the sun, absorbing all that incredible tropical solar energy and then releasing it again in a bright, yellowy green, as if it were the only color that ever existed. Nor could I have predicted how much I would marvel at the waves of two-wheeled traffic surging through the streets, some of the bikes piled six or seven feet high and just as wide with wicker baskets or hatstands or bamboo cages full of pigs or dogs or chickens. Nearly a thousand years have been captured in Hanoi’s architecture, which ranges from the Temple of Literature at Van Mieu, erected in 1072 CE, to the mix of hulking, old colonial administration buildings, more recent Soviet-style buildings, and tall and narrow apartment buildings with French windows and balconies with wrought-iron railings. Just as surprising, though I should have expected them, were the new glass and steel structures of globalization, clustering, for the most part, at the edges of town.

I lived in the Ministry of Education guesthouse, an architecturally mixed building—a hybrid of French colonial and 1960s Soviet functional styles—where Vietnamese teachers and school groups normally stay when they come to the capital on cultural field trips. There was no air conditioning in my room or airtight windows sealing me away from the city, so in my mind a Vietnamese morning will always be tied to the sound of street vendors hawking sticky rice and, later, woven mats and fruits and baskets and plastic bowls.
and steamed rolls and just about everything else. And afternoons
to the roll of rain on the tile roof of the university buildings across
the alley, dripping into the puddles below. Nights to the melodi-
ous drunken pronouncements of the snack shop owner next door
winding his way home through the alley; and cool days to the smell
of deliciously strong coffee wafting up from the guesthouse café.

The way of life to which these sounds and smells belonged had
nothing to do with America. They were the sounds and smells that
have been Vietnam for centuries. That life has always been one of
hardship, but it has also been one of great camaraderie and friend-
ship. Joining friends at an outdoor café for a drink or some tasty
treat after a long day or hustling to sell a last piece of fruit or to get
out from under the rain have always been a part of Vietnamese life.
And though those things by themselves aren’t so very different from
my American experience, the texture of them is different. The food
is different, sure, but more important is the emphasis on the social
sense of togetherness. The Vietnamese even have a special verb for
it, nhau, that includes eating, drinking, and chatting with friends
and is predominantly used for afternoon get-togethers. Americans
do those things too, but certainly not with enough regularity and
social importance to develop a verb for it. Perhaps more important,
the margin of success in these endeavors seemed much narrower—
the girl who didn’t sell all her produce wasn’t working an hourly
wage. And maybe that was just it: all over were signs of a dignified
people struggling to live happily, without the profligate and gaudy
trappings of success flaunted all around them all the time. There
is a sense that these people have earned every cent they’ve got the
hard way, without hundreds of years of institutionalized subsidies
and the oppression of others. The signs of their deep humanity,
resilience, thrift, and innovation were everywhere.

For a while, it seemed every person I encountered was engaged in
some way in this dignified struggle to get ahead, to take part in the
economic expansion made possible by the government’s renovation
policy, Doi Moi. For the most part, it seemed these were burdens
taken in good spirits; after all, everyone had been much poorer dur-
ing the years of the American embargo, and despite the incredible
burden the war had placed on several generations, there seemed
to be a general willingness to forget the past, to move on, and to
take advantage of the international wealth coming into the city.
“Why dwell on the painful past,” it seemed most people thought,
“when the future’s so bright?” Everywhere I went I found gracious
and friendly shopkeepers, café owners, and gallery curators. Even the university intellectuals I met were keen on the possibilities the new economy seemed to hold. But just as I was beginning to be persuaded that this era of hope really did have something for everyone, I discovered the exception to the rule.

On a sunny day in November, I was shopping for books. I left a store to visit the next one up the street and nearly ran over a young man lying on the sidewalk. He was on one hip, propping himself up with one hand while supplicating me with the other. His fingers were stumped and twisted, some joined together, his feet gnarled at the ends of useless legs. He spoke to me, but his words weren’t right; they were soft and indistinct, unintelligible. But I knew what he wanted. And more important, I recognized the telltale signs of exposure to dioxin, since many of the children I’d seen interviewed in *Vietnam: After the Fire* shared these problems. Here, in one human being, was the physical presence of the war that was otherwise so much removed from every other experience I’d had in Hanoi. Here was the only real reminder that even though Vietnam won the war, the United States was continuing to inflict casualties. Here was one person whose future didn’t look bright and who could as likely forget the past as he could ignore the telltale signs of it on his body. The U.S. government wouldn’t talk about it, let alone take responsibility, even though the Veterans Administration listed nine Agent Orange–related illnesses qualifying exposed U.S. vets to special dispensation and the manufacturers of Agent Orange (Dow and Monsanto, mainly, among others) had already paid a large settlement to those same vets. No amount of Doi Moi was going to make things better for this young man. I took all the loose bills from my pocket and laid them into his hand. There might have been ten or twenty thousand dong there—about a dollar and a half. I have regretted not dropping my entire wallet into his lap ever since.

Later, when I inquired into what kind of health care he might be getting, a Vietnamese colleague from the newspaper explained that the Friendship Village took what care they could of the worst dioxin poisoning cases, but otherwise the guy from the street would be left to the same predicament in which the rest of the populace found themselves: with the advent of a market economy and with international money finally flowing, the first informal “reform” was the socialist system of health care. Of course, it still existed in theory. Anyone could go to the hospital and expect to see a doctor.
after a day or two. But there might not be any treatment available, no tests or surgery or medications, unless the patient could pay the doctor an off-the-record bonus. The new international money dispersed itself into the economy only in the slowest, trickle-down fashion. Government officials might receive a little extra from international companies wishing to expedite the permitting process, and tourist shop owners might be getting a little more here and there, but it would take a long time for those dollars to see their way into the hands of the typical Hanoian, and they might not ever get outside the city.

And thus Vietnam became for me not only a place of great charm and beauty but also one of deep responsibility. Seeing that man suffer—and knowing that my government not only inflicted that life upon him but also that it is the leading agent in the globalization process that values commodity production and access to labor markets over the subsidization of the health care system that might otherwise offer him some comfort—made me realize that even the questions that had gotten me into all this in the first place weren’t the right questions to be asking. Now I wanted to know, How can I help?

Recognizing first what Vietnam, the place, really was and second that it was changing rapidly wasn’t difficult. My own hometown back in Ohio hardly resembles the place I grew up. What was difficult was conceptualizing the degree to which Vietnam was changing, and the pace of that change was an exponential factor faster than anything I’d ever seen. Essentially closed off from the world for decades, wearing the blinders of a forty-year-old struggle for independence before that, then reemerging on the world scene only to be confronted by the Spice Girls, Super Nintendo, the IMF, and legions of transnational corporations was enough to make me wonder how many of the typical Vietnamese had any idea what they were in for. But who was I to tell them what to do? I certainly wouldn’t (even if I had the power to do so) deny them the right to embrace some aspects of Western materialism after so many years of being deprived of even basic necessities. And I have no intention of trying to “preserve” some antique, desperately poor identity just for the sake of what I find charming.

And yet, as Fredric Jameson writes of the role of the Western imagination in globalization, I couldn’t help but feel that there must be as many paths to development, indeed, as many definitions of what developed might mean, as there are nations in the world. But,
as citizens of the nation leading this globalizing process, and thus the people most capable of improving its domineering nature, it really is up to us whether to embrace and celebrate difference, allowing nations like Vietnam to determine their own paths to development, or to allow it to be crushed by the monolithic, free-trading, Western democratic vision that the U.S.-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund tend to espouse. It’s up to us, says Jameson, to imagine a better way. In order to do that, I decided, Americans must first be able to imagine that a place like Vietnam exists without its American character-building content, and to do that, they have to know what that place is really like. Beyond that, it seemed desperately important that the United States take some responsibility for the worst of its actions or, at the very least, take a special interest in providing for a people it had wronged. The trick then, ironically, was to reach out to American hearts and minds. Which is where I am today, teaching and writing whenever I can about a place far from here, Vietnam, with the hope that my efforts will change this place, the United States, so that the first place can decide for itself what it wants to be. It’s a complicated arrangement, I know. I’m aware that each time I represent Vietnam, it is in some way a misrepresentation. But I am also aware of, as Linda Alcoff has suggested, what’s at stake in these (mis)representations. The image of the young man with his dioxin-related ailments continues to motivate me, to make me remember that more depends on my success than my own career. I see the smiling faces of the friends I made in Vietnam, so sure of the brightness of their futures, of the improvement of the world they live in, and I think how likely Hanoi’s air will soon resemble the smog of Bangkok unless some other way is envisioned. I remember the charm of the mixed architecture, the traditions represented by places like Van Mieu, and the beauty of the tree-lined streets, and I worry that with each new international high-rise that goes up, those qualities become more endangered than ever. If I can capture that initial beauty, if I can make the charm of Vietnam come across on the page, if I can reach out to my nation of story-hungry citizens and fire their imaginations, then maybe I can make them see it’s a place worth reconsidering.

I write to counter what Vietnam means to so many Americans, to provide a different picture than the one created by Hollywood or even the one created in the stellar works of America’s veteran authors. I write about a place experiencing global change at warp
speed, a place that emerged from forty years of armed conflict into a world at the height of the postmodern moment, on the cusp of the next great technological leap of globalization. I write about a culture rich with traditions meeting with postmodern unmoorings—about a silky texture of life being wrapped in polyester. I write to make Vietnamese people real with real problems and legitimate concerns, bent on finding their own way in the world, to an American audience who, for the most part, has seen them only as black pajama-clad barbarians whom we could’ve beaten if we had just been allowed to by Congress. I write to remind Americans that even though they may have forgotten the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese do indeed still exist and are still suffering because of us. I write to make that place as real as I possibly can and to demonstrate how this place in which we live is irrevocably bound to that one, tied together by our choice to go there and do what we did, forever linked by common experience and responsibilities.

When I teach, I try whenever I can to assign Vietnamese literature, to create in my students’ minds the fabric of life there. In my literature of war course, I have them read many of the same books and see many of the same films that had such a profound impact on me as an undergraduate, making them aware of the horrible, lingering effects of the war and of the need for action. In my travel writing workshops and courses on theories of globalization, inevitably the examples that I use to talk about representing the other, or creating a sense of place, or examining the effects of World Bank or IMF policies on local cultures are Vietnamese examples. Whether these examples create that place for my students I’m not sure, but I think it does them good to begin to think about Vietnam as having a special place in my interests and in the world. If nothing else, it brings them to that same simple question that my students posed after hearing me read the travel writing—“Why Vietnam?”—and creates in them the potential for finding out more, arouses their sense of justice, and motivates some of them to do something to make things right. After all, these are the sorts of things that began to make Vietnam mean something to me, fifteen years ago.
Notes

1. *Heartbreak Ridge* and *Red Dawn* are not films about Vietnam, but veterans of Vietnam play important roles in both of them, contributing to the notion that the men who were outcasts would in time become heroes. The time between these films was compressed even further for me, since I was not old enough to see *The Deer Hunter* or *Apocalypse Now* in the theater and saw them on video in 1986 after seeing *Platoon*.

Bibliography


