

History 103D Spring 2006 Room TBA  
War and Mediation: the Vietnam Wars in History, Film, and Story



Professor Diane Shaver Clemens, 3223 Dwinelle Hall , Office Hours Th 4-5:30pm or by appt  
642-1102 (message), 642-1971 (history dept ), athena1@berkeley.edu

The Vietnam Wars took place over a long span of time (1945-1975) and over two continents divided by the Pacific Ocean. We will study the history and historical interpretations of those events. But they came into the awareness of the American public via many and complex routes from contemporary reports to the present. Press reports, TV coverage and documentaries, historical surveys, and, in the aftermath, fiction and film have all helped construct that war in our modern consciousness. We will study this mediation by focusing primarily on film representations relating to Vietnam, using fiction, oral histories, TV documentaries, and historical analyses to provide context for our understanding of the films. We will devote one week's session to a film showing and then part of the next week for finishing the films (none of them fit into a single seminar session) and to discussion, reports, and TV documentary presentation based on that experience and our related readings. Our final weeks will take up Francis Ford Coppola's stupendous 1979 film, newly revised and released as *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

**Class e-mail list:** 103dseminar@lists..berkeley.edu

**Instructor's e-mail** athena1@berkeley.edu

After our first meeting, please e-mail me your e-mail address so that I can put you on the list.

**Class website:** Material for this course can be found at

<http://www.mip.Berkeley.EDU/classes/history16/diplomatic/>

title of relevant files will be headed 103d- (e.g., 103d-SyllabusSp06.html)

An excellent general site for Vietnam War resources, research and reference is:

<http://tigger.uic.edu/~rjensen/vietnam.html>

|

**Requirements: Attendance at all meetings is essential.** If you must miss a meeting because of personal or medical exigencies please let me know beforehand: missed sessions will require make-up work.

1. **A short written reaction and report** (approx 3 pages) on (1) each of the assigned texts, due as we proceed, and
2. **A reflective synthesizing paper** (or paper/review on specific topic of your interest) due at end of semester, 5-7 pages, items 1 and 2 together to total the equivalent of approximately 20-25 pages of written work.
3. I may ask specific class members to volunteer for a short report on certain subjects or matters of their particular interest or specialty, for example, Bergerud's section on the Tet Offensive. Recognition will be made in final grade assignments for those who give reports--experience has shown the class agenda is often sufficiently full and animated.
4. **After each in-class movie please e-mail a short response**, (specific scenes, overall quality, agendas of film, questions raised, etc) **to the class e-mail list** for use in our discussion. Put movie title in subject heading. Put your name at end of the comment in the body of your text.

Grades are based on in-class discussion and submitted e-list movie commentary, and on your text reviews and final paper. **Failure to attend seminar sessions will result in reduction of grade unless adequate reason is presented and make-up arrangements are made with instructor.**

Texts:

Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, A succinct history of 45 years of US involvement with Indo-China, both abroad and at home.

Eric Bergerud, *Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning: The World of a Combat Division in Vietnam*. Bergerud, a UCB Ph.D. has made a career of accurate and detailed writing of Vietnam and World War II (Pacific) military histories. This book is largely constructed from interviews and oral histories of veterans of the 25th Infantry Division who took the main shock of the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive.

Michael Herr, *Dispatches*, stoner accounts by a combat reporter from the heart of Vietnam battle and weirdness. Herr does the voice-overs in *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam*. An unflinching view of the war and of North Vietnamese society from the North Vietnamese point of view, written by a NVA veteran.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, by now perhaps the classic 20<sup>th</sup> century novella. Belgian King Leopold I presided over the Belgian Congo, a private slavocracy larger than Europe in one of the darkest episodes of late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonialism. Conrad's story of an English ship captain who makes his way up the jungle-haunted Congo river to rescue Mr. Kurtz, a would be do-gooder and reformist "gone native," indeed quite mad, is both autobiographical and provides the contextual paradigm for Coppola's epic movie which is also concerned with a later imperialism gone very sour.

Films: we will begin with *The Ugly American* (1962) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1967), a view

of French colonialism that is essential viewing in these times (mandatory at Pentagon).

Other possible films: *The Deer Hunter*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Heaven and Earth*, *We Were Soldiers* (your further suggestions and preferences are welcome)  
For *Apocalypse Now Redux* seminar members need to be familiar with Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, which underlies Coppola's film. The Penguin Great Books of the 20th Century version, 1999, is recommended.

**Beginning schedule:** After opening introductions we will try to get jump-started the first week with the opening half of *The Ugly American*.

### Paper schedules

Text comments (approximately 3 pages): Seminars do not work well unless members together do the reading on schedule. These reports should demonstrate to me that you have significantly involved yourself with these course texts. Young can be read in two weeks, Bergerud, Ninh, Herr, and Conrad are readable as a week's work each.

Feb 1 Paper due on Young, **The Vietnam Wars**,  
Feb 15 Paper due on Bergerud, **Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning**  
Mar 1 Paper due on **Dispatches**  
Apr 5 Paper due on **The Sorrow of War**

If you want to do a research topic for your final paper, there is a good interval here between papers in which to work

Apr 26 Paper due on **Heart of Darkness**  
May 3 **Final paper due**, about 7 pages, can be summary of course experience or can reflect experience with a topic you wish to explore further, e.g., other movies and/or fiction, or a particular aspect of the Vietnam war.

**Week I** Jan 18 introductions and begin *The Ugly American* Start reading Young, **The Vietnam Wars**

**Week II** Jan 25 Finish *The Ugly American* and discussion and possible report (e.g., early phases of US involvement, Geneva Conference of 1954 or a volunteered topic. Continue Young  
Send e-mail commentary (several paragraphs at least) to class list  
[103dseminar@lists.berkeley.edu](mailto:103dseminar@lists.berkeley.edu)

**Week III** Feb 1 *The Battle of Algiers* 3 page paper due on Young's **The Vietnam Wars**  
Begin Bergerud, **Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning**.

**Week IV** Feb 8 finish *The Battle of Algiers*. Discussion and possible report (e.g., the Tet Offensive, or a volunteered topic).  
e-mail commentary on The Battle of Algiers.

**Week V** Feb 15 *The Deer Hunter*. 3 page paper due on Bergerud, **Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning** Begin **Dispatches**.

**Week VI Feb 22 *The Deer Hunter*.**

E commentary due on *The Deer Hunter*

**Week VII March 1** Discussion, reports, possible video material. 3 page paper due on **Dispatches**

**Week VIII March 8** *We Were Soldiers* (or *Platoon* or *Full Metal Jacket*, or another suggestion) begin *The Sorrow of War*

**Week IX March 15** *We Were Soldiers* E-commentary due before Spring Break

**Week X March 22** *Heaven and Earth*

**Spring Break, March 27-31**

**Week XI Apr 5** finish *Heaven and Earth* Paper report due on **The Sorrow of War**  
e-commentary on *Heaven and Earth*

**Week XII Apr 12** *Apocalypse Now Redux* Read **Heart of Darkness**

**Week XIII Apr 19** *Apocalypse Now Redux*  
e-commentary on *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

**Week XIV Apr 26** *Apocalypse Now Redux* finish and discussion. Possibly some of Eleanor Coppola's documentary, *Hearts of Darkness*, on the travails of making *Apocalypse Now*.  
Paper report due on **Heart of Darkness**.  
e-commentary on *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

**Week XV May 3** Discussion, **final paper report due**, approximately 7 pages, can be summary of class experience, additional movies or reading, or based on outside research if you discover a topic that you wish to explore.