

LIT 380: The Vietnam War in Film and Literature

M/W 6:45–8:00p

Online only, synchronous

Email (preferred method of contact): aroback@iit.edu

Office hours: M/W 5:30–6:30p

Introduction

The period during the Vietnam War (ca. 1955 - April 30th, 1975) was one of the most socially impactful periods in 20th century American history, and the aftereffects of this war remain a significant part of our collective consciousness. The period also produced a wealth of stories that dealt with abstract issues of geopolitical relations as well as the effects of the war on combatants, observers, and civilians. The Vietnam War precipitated a social and political change that intertwined with counterculture and civil rights movements, and ultimately produced a legacy of distrust (of government, authority, and foreign military interventions in general) that resonates in literature and film depicting the war. This course will explore the themes and cultural context of key novels and films depicting the war and dis-/re-integration of the veterans and civilians affected by the war. This will involve reading/viewing period reporting, historical accounts, non-fiction, memoir, poetry, short fiction, novels, films, television shows, and popular music of the time.

Required Books

Author	Title	ISBN (linked to Amazon)
Greene, G.	<i>The Quiet American</i>	0143039024
Herr, M.	<i>Dispatches</i>	0679735259
O'Brien, T.	<i>If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home</i>	978-0767904438
Williams, J. A.	<i>Captain Blackman</i>	978-1566890960
Halderman, J.	<i>The Forever War</i>	0312536631

All other readings will be available on Blackboard.

Required Films

Director	Title (Year)
Kellogg, R. and Wayne, J.	<i>The Green Berets (1968)</i>
Stone, O.	<i>Platoon (1986)</i>
Kubrick, S.	<i>Full Metal Jacket (1987)</i>
Lee, S.	<i>Da 5 Bloods (2020)</i>
Cimino, M.	<i>The Deer Hunter (1978)</i>
Cosmatos, G.	<i>Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985)</i>

Note: We'll watch excerpts from some television episodes and short documentary pieces. I'll try to make them available online when I can, but you may have to rent/purchase the occasional short piece. You are responsible for watching the films in the above table on your own time before the date that we discuss them. Use any library service or streaming application you can to reduce your cost, so long as you are viewing the entire film in a standard quality print.

Note on readings/films/course content

A complete discussion of the Vietnam War by nature must include readings and films that contain language, descriptions, and images that are difficult to read/watch. Readings, films, documentaries, and other materials in this course will include descriptions/visuals of combat, violence, death, sexual assault, as well as other disturbing content. If you feel like this content will impair your ability to read/view course materials and complete coursework, you should talk to me immediately at the start of the course. I encourage all students to preview material ahead of time if you feel this might be an impediment to your participation in this course.

Assignments

Response papers (20%)

You'll write five response papers where you'll compare and analyze readings/films. I will provide topics for these papers and ask you to address critical concepts that we have covered in our class discussions, but you can feel free to modify the topics or write on something different (you may want to run it by me first). Your job will be to take a stand on an issue and provide evidence from the pieces you are analyzing to support your position. Each paper will be approximately 750 words in length. I'll drop your lowest grade provided you submit all the papers (and they are of the proper length and consistent with the quality of your other work in the course). Papers missing at the deadline will receive a grade of zero, and will factor into this component of the course grade.

Midterm exam (15%)

An online exam that will test your comprehension of course concepts and readings/films up to that point.

Final Exam (20%)

A comprehensive, online exam that takes place during the final exam period.

Final paper (30%)

You'll write a research paper that discusses one film and reading from class, as well as another film that we have not watched. I'll be looking for your ability to construct a thoughtful and articulate analysis that integrates your knowledge of the cultural context of the Vietnam War. You'll also perform research to support your points. More details later in the semester.

Participation (15%)

I expect the majority of the conversation during our live sessions to be generated by students. I will occasionally have very brief lectures on critical concepts, but the most of discussion in the class will be student generated. We will have small group discussions and other activities from time to time. Each student should expect to make at least one contribution in class every day. Please come to class ready to share the insights you had in your response papers. Sitting silently day after day and contributing nothing to the discussion will earn you no points in this category. I don't prefer calling on students or having reading quizzes, but I can modify this part of the course to include those activities if discussions are lagging.

Attendance policy

You can miss three class meetings for whatever reason. After that, I will reduce your final grade in the course by one letter grade per absence. If you miss more than six total class meetings, you will receive an 'E' as your final course grade.

Having a lot of work in your other classes is not an excuse for missing this class, nor are extracurricular activities that are not related to official university events or professional development.

Family and health emergencies happen and are excused absences; however, you must notify me as soon as reasonably possible if such a situation arises. If you stop attending class without a notification, I will assume you are not coming back and issue a grade of “E” for the semester. If you receive an email from me regarding absences and you do not reply, I will make the same assumption.

FAQ and tips for a successful semester

- I don't accept late work, but I will grant extensions given reasonable extenuating circumstances (I decide what is reasonable). If your assignment is not in by the deadline and I don't hear from you, I will give you a zero.
- If I give you an extension due to an extenuating circumstance and you fail to meet the agreed upon deadline, you will receive a zero on that assignment.
- There is no extra credit in this course.
- You cannot fail to submit assignments by their respective deadlines and then turn everything in at the end for partial credit. Refer to the first bullet point in this section for clarification.
- **Take notes.** They will be invaluable during the exams which are open-note/open-book.
- Please refer to the relevant course document (syllabus/course schedule/assignment guide) before emailing me with questions. Questions about submission method, dates, or requirements that can be answered by the above documents will result in friendly reminder to consult these documents.
- Don't make the mistake that you can pack all of the readings in right before the exam--that won't work out well for you.
- Make friends with a classmate so you can borrow notes if you are absent.
- **If you are having trouble with the coursework or understanding the material, come talk to me.** I have office hours and I'm happy to talk after class. If you have a conflict and can't make it to office hours, send me an email to set up an appointment to meet in person.

Plagiarism

You are expected to adhere to all IIT rules regarding academic honesty and conduct. Please familiarize yourself with the [Student Handbook policies](#). Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas without appropriate attribution of those ideas to the original author. Reordering words or sentences but conveying the same ideas as another author and representing those ideas as your own still constitutes plagiarism. If I detect any plagiarized content in your work, you will automatically fail the assignment and, depending on the severity of the infraction, the course. Additional penalties may be imposed by the University, such as academic sanctions and/or expulsion. If you are concerned that your work might constitute a breach of academic integrity, contact me via email before turning in your assignment and I will advise you. I will report plagiarism to the appropriate university authorities without exception and issue failing grades as necessary to prevent academic dishonesty.

The Writing Center (SH 232-233)

The Writing Center is a tutoring service that helps students develop writing skills critical to success in academic and professional pursuits. I strongly encourage any student to visit the Writing Center if you are having difficulty with any part of the writing process or if you simply want some feedback on your writing from another writer. Since you will be writing a great deal in this class (and, presumably, your entire life), it is to your benefit to take advantage of this free service to help you become a better writer.

Accommodation for students with documented disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. In order to receive accommodations, students must obtain a letter of accommodation from the Center for Disability Resources. The

Center for Disability Resources (CDR) is located in Life Sciences Room 218, telephone 312.567.5744 or disabilities@iit.edu.