

**“They Set About Revenging Themselves on the Population”:**

**The “Hue Massacre,” Travel Guidebooks, and the Shaping of Historical  
Consciousness in Vietnam**

Scott Laderman

Doctoral Candidate, MacArthur Scholar  
Department of American Studies  
University of Minnesota

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During the 1968 Tet Offensive, American and Saigonese troops in South Vietnam were taken aback by the extensive military campaign waged by the combined forces of the southern National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam ("North Vietnam"). Nowhere was the warfare more sustained than the former imperial capital of Hue. While minor details may differ, Western travel guidebooks today present a virtually uniform account of the nationalist-orchestrated massacre that followed.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on "detailed plans to liquidate Hue's 'uncooperative' elements," the Lonely Planet guidebook reports, thousands of people were "rounded up in extensive house-to-house searches conducted according to lists of names meticulously prepared months before."<sup>2</sup> During the following three and a half weeks of "Communist control," either 3000, "at least" 2800, or 14,000 people - depending on which guidebook one reads - were "massacred" as the "North Vietnamese Army," according to *Fodor's Exploring Vietnam*, "set about revenging themselves on the population."<sup>3</sup> The campaign targeted "anyone considered remotely sympathetic to the Southern regime," the author for Fodor's asserts.<sup>4</sup> "Foreign aid workers," "merchants, Buddhist monks, Catholic priests, intellectuals, and a number of foreigners, as well as people with ties to the South Vietnamese government," were "summarily shot, clubbed to death," or buried or

burned alive.<sup>5</sup> Others were “beheaded.”<sup>6</sup> The “victims were buried in shallow mass graves, which were discovered around the city over the next few years.”<sup>7</sup>

Following a massive bombing campaign, the United States “regained Hue at the cost of destroying it. The North Vietnamese had attempted to indoctrinate Hue residents,” the Moon guidebook maintains, “and had killed most of Hue’s government officials. Neither side won any appreciable number of Hue hearts or minds.”<sup>8</sup> Today, the writer for Moon continues, tourists “can still see symbols over doorways indicating where residents were killed.”<sup>9</sup>

In its calculated planning and ruthless execution, the “Hue Massacre” typified Communist governance; as, by definition in the United States, Communist movements could not enjoy popular support in a truly free society, resort to widespread terror was a necessary precondition for political control. For tens of thousands of Western tourists reared in Cold War ideology and reading about the episode in their Vietnam guidebooks, the “cruellest retribution” exacted against the people of Hue would seem to merely confirm this axiom. For these individuals, it might then come as something of a surprise to learn that the accounts of the massacre presented by their guidebooks are, according to a leading Western scholar of the episode, a “complete fabrication.”<sup>10</sup> The “enduring myth” of the “Hue Massacre,” wrote Gareth Porter in a detailed study later entered into the U.S. *Congressional Record*, “bore little resemblance to the truth, but was, on the contrary, the result of a political warfare campaign by the Saigon government, embellished by the [United States] government, and accepted uncritically by the U.S. press.”<sup>11</sup>

It must be pointed out, as Porter did, that there were, in fact, executions carried out by NLF – but not North Vietnamese Army (NVA) – troops in Hue during the Tet Offensive, and these must certainly be condemned.<sup>12</sup> However, the “most careful estimate of the death toll,” that by the journalist Len Ackland, placed the number at 300 to 400, or about ten to fifteen percent of the approximate figure of 3000 cited in nearly all of the guidebooks.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the available evidence suggests that the executions were nothing like the indiscriminate slaughter represented above.<sup>14</sup> The thousands of civilians who died in Hue, according to the photojournalist Philip Jones Griffith, were in fact killed by what he described as “the most hysterical use of American firepower ever seen” during the U.S. effort to recapture the city.<sup>15</sup> The “undeniable fact,” Porter asserted, “was that American rockets and bombs, not communist assassination, caused the greatest carnage in Hue.”<sup>16</sup> Robert Shaplen wrote in the *New Yorker* in March 1968 that “[n]othing I saw during the Korean War, or in the Vietnam War so far, has been as terrible, in terms of destruction and despair, as what I saw in Hue.”<sup>17</sup> Approximately three out of every four houses in the city were completely destroyed or seriously damaged by bombs and artillery, while there were “bodies stacked into graves by fives – one on top of another.” Bomb craters 40 feet wide and twenty feet deep were “staggered” in the streets near the walls of the ancient Citadel, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site undergoing careful restoration from the incredible damage wrought during the American and Saigonese effort to reestablish control.<sup>18</sup>

## The Functions of the “Hue Massacre” in American Memory

I have begun with a detailed description of the alleged “Hue Massacre” and its foremost scholarly critique because I wish to explore the continued existence of the nationalist-sponsored atrocities as an historical reality in contemporary travel guidebooks for Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> Representations of the event in the tourism literature appear to serve several purposes. Not only does the massacre’s ruthless nature confirm the inherent malevolence attached to “Communists” in American popular consciousness, but, it could be implied, the episode also demonstrates to tourists the inability of postwar Vietnam to honestly come to terms with its own recent history. In this respect, the “Hue Massacre” functions as what Dean MacCannell designated a “truth marker.”<sup>20</sup> By virtue of its absence in Vietnamese war museums, tourists are reminded of the selectivity of Vietnamese representations of the conflict, which arguably has the effect of casting doubt on the legitimacy of the rest of the nation’s official historical narrative.<sup>21</sup> This is critical, as, contrary to most popular accounts in the United States, the conflict is framed by the Vietnamese as a nationwide revolutionary and anti-imperialist struggle for reunification and independence, and not, as *Newsweek* characterized the war two years ago during the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of the conflict, an effort by “well-intentioned policymakers in Washington” to “save” South Vietnam from its “North Vietnamese invaders.”<sup>22</sup>

Several of the guidebooks explicitly make this connection between the massacre’s absence in interpretive exhibits and the consequent unreliability of Vietnamese public

history. “There is, of course, nothing about [the massacre] in Hue’s War Museum,” the writer for Fodor’s observes, suggesting the purposeful forgetting of Vietnamese curators and historians.<sup>23</sup> Nor, for that matter, is the event acknowledged in the popular War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, whose “one-sided propaganda,” according to another Fodor’s guidebook, fails to include “information about some of the horrors perpetrated by the National Liberation Front, particularly the 14,000 people massacred in Hue during the 1968 Tet Offensive.”<sup>24</sup> In writing about the disclosure of atrocities at the same institution, the Lonely Planet guidebook is more ambiguous, simply stating that “of course” there is “official amnesia when it comes to the topic of the many thousands of people tortured and murdered by the VC.”<sup>25</sup> For tourists reading about the history of the country in their guidebooks – which my fieldwork suggests is a majority of those persons independently traveling in Vietnam – there are many such reminders of the problematic nature of the official historical narrative in museums and at war-related sites. And the guidebooks’ employment of the phrase “of course” to describe the lack of information on the massacre suggests that one should naturally expect an inaccurate depiction of the war at Vietnamese tourist attractions. The inverse of this caution, never stated but nearly always implied, is that the “objectivity” of popular Western accounts are not tainted by such an adherence to official ideology.

In her semiotic analysis of contemporary travel guidebooks, Deborah Bhattacharyya employed, among other theories, Erik Cohen’s notion of communicative mediation in examining Lonely Planet’s guidebook for India.<sup>26</sup> As Bhattacharyya

applied Cohen's term, communicative mediation involves the "selection of sights to be seen, providing information about these sights, and interpreting the sights for the tourist."<sup>27</sup> She asserted that "[w]hile a guidebook shapes the image of the destination through both selection of sights and providing information about them, it is the process of interpretation that is perhaps most crucial in this regard." The process of interpretation to which she refers "is a combination of contextualization and evaluation."<sup>28</sup> This is especially critical as a result of the perceived authority guidebooks claim to possess, as language, according to Bhattacharyya, is used in such a way as "to present a particular representation as the sole legitimate one."<sup>29</sup> In other words, the portrait of Vietnam that emerges in travel guidebooks could be considered "a straightforward, self-evident description of reality rather than ... a socially constructed representation."<sup>30</sup>

The notion of communicative mediation is fundamental to understanding the historical synopses provided by the Vietnam guidebooks. Take, for instance, the volume published by Lonely Planet, which field research I conducted in 2000 and 2002 indicates is the most widely-used in the country.<sup>31</sup> During my interview with one of its authors, Robert Storey, he stated that, despite having an opinion of the war, he strove for a "neutral" and "unbiased" account that would "describe exactly what happened." "For me, I think it's very important actually to get to the real facts," he asserted. "I have my bias, for sure. I've told you I'm pretty anti-Communist. But, on the other hand, when writing a history I don't think it's fair to play fast and loose with any historical facts. Like if we lost a battle, you have to admit we lost a battle. If we did something

wrong, we have to admit it. We did do some big mistakes. Agent Orange I [already] mentioned. [The] My Lai massacre, which was a fairly famous incident, obviously was a tragic mistake. Somebody really blew it, and you have to own up to it.”<sup>32</sup>

There are, in the opinion of many scholars, problems with viewing Agent Orange and the My Lai massacre as mere “tragic mistakes,” as this seems to suggest that the American war itself was an otherwise legitimate undertaking. Nevertheless, and of much greater consequence, Storey admitted to disregarding an influential segment of the historical literature because he found it ideologically unpalatable. After volunteering that he excluded from consideration the work of Noam Chomsky, who represents, in his estimation, the “loony left” and who wrote “left-wing propaganda” and “terrible trash,” Storey then claimed that he similarly neglected the scholarship emanating from the Indochina Resource Center (I.R.C.) in Washington, D.C., because it, too, was “too left-wing.” The problem with the I.R.C.’s focus on Vietnam, according to Storey, was that “it was giving you the wrong impression of what was happening there.”<sup>33</sup> Storey’s nod to “neutral[ity]” clearly overlooks problems with the “objectivity question,” as the historian Peter Novick characterized it, and with the selection of an explanatory framework as itself a subjective construction.<sup>34</sup>

But Storey’s reference to the Indochina Resource Center is also important when specifically considering the myth of the “Hue Massacre.” At the time Gareth Porter published his 1973 article on the episode, which has since informed subsequent scholarship, the author was a staff member of the I.R.C., which Storey readily dismissed as producing “left-wing garbage” unfit for consideration.<sup>35</sup> While I suspect that the

writer for Lonely Planet was entirely unaware of the existence of Porter's study, it points to the problem of representing *the* history of a tourist site after carefully selecting only those background materials that express a favored view.

### **Myths and Memory for Americans Coming to Terms with the War**

Scholarship on historical myths in American popular consciousness may help illuminate the persistence of the "Hue Massacre" in the Vietnam tourism literature. In his analysis of the collective memory of spat-upon Vietnam veterans, for which the author argues no contemporaneous evidence exists, Jerry Lembcke wrote that myths may function "to reverse the verdict of history, to find the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent."<sup>36</sup> While I do not wish to ascribe "innocence" to the NLF forces who did, it must be recalled, execute several hundred individuals, this is nevertheless an important consideration when contemplating representations of the "Hue Massacre" as an historical actuality in both travel guidebooks and the popular historical literature.<sup>37</sup> Over twenty-five years ago, Edward Herman and Gareth Porter speculated that belief in the "Hue Massacre" was necessary, for it "permitted the creation of a massive bloodbath if the revolutionaries were to win in South Vietnam, which ... in turn provided an important moral basis for [the] continued [U.S.] intervention as the 'lesser' evil."<sup>38</sup> This message was not lost, for example, on the authors of the Footprint guidebook, who were explicit in noting that the episode "lent support to the notion that

should the [North] ever achieve victory over the [South], it would result in mass killings.”<sup>39</sup>

Yet at the same time that it justified continued U.S. militarism in Indochina, Herman and Porter maintained, the alleged massacre also diverted attention from what they referred to as the “real and massive bloodbath” sponsored and executed by the United States in which, by the end of the war, an estimated two to three million Vietnamese had been killed. In other words, the “Hue Massacre” “was *needed*,” the authors wrote, “to help convince us that even if we were not quite as kindly toward the Vietnamese as in the rhetoric of intervention, *they* were worse.”<sup>40</sup>

In much the same way, the myth of the “Hue Massacre” today serves as a means of reversing – or at least balancing – the brutality of the war in American memory.<sup>41</sup> From their wartime image as popular resisters of American aggression, the Vietnamese nationalist forces have since been transformed into perpetrators of atrocities in Hue against “anyone connected with, or suspected of being sympathetic to, the [U.S.-backed] government in Saigon,” as the Footprint guidebook identified those thousands of noncombatants allegedly subjected to NLF terror.<sup>42</sup>

David Hunt has addressed this issue perhaps more cogently than anyone else; he wrote in his scholarly analysis of discourses in a number of leading texts on the war:

Going beyond the fact of NLF assassinations, which no scholarly study denies, the “Hue Massacre” is a Cold War narrative construction purporting to demonstrate that enemy terrorism was qualitatively different from GVN [Government of Vietnam, or “South Vietnam”] and U.S.

attacks on civilians and that it resulted in the most heinous atrocity of the war. Bombs and bullets were flying on all sides and killers under every flag roamed the streets, but the “Hue Massacre” signifies that the guerrillas killed more than the Americans and the GVN and that they killed with a uniquely blameworthy premeditation and relish. Their violence was “systematic,” meaning that it was constitutive, inevitable, and limitless in scale, in contrast to reactive violence on the other side, intended to halt the depredations of the Foreign Other.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, Hunt asserted in response to Douglas Pike’s original account of the alleged massacre for the U.S. Mission in Saigon, “only ‘fiends’ could have committed the acts that he [i.e., Pike] describes, pinpointing thousands of victims in advance, torturing and executing them, and dumping their corpses into mass graves.”<sup>44</sup> And as the massacre in fact happened, according to the leading travel guidebooks, it is not difficult to speculate about the “fiendish” impression of the nationalists with which tourists reading about the atrocity would presumably be left.<sup>45</sup>

It is crucial to note that the implications of this popular memory of the war are not merely academic. For American policymakers and peace activists alike, they are quite substantial. As the diplomatic historian Marilyn Young observed, “The way the history of war is told is crucial to its continuation. One of the startling effects of the broad public rejection of the Vietnam war, across the political spectrum, was to suggest that war itself was unnatural. If war and violence are to be restored as normal human activities, it is essential to associate them with norms: they must be seen as defending abiding values, the values of peace which a peaceful policy would endanger.”<sup>46</sup> The problem “that has plagued successive administrations since the mid-1960s,” Young

wrote, “is the way the Vietnam war broke through its official history, the official history that accompanies all wars, and engendered a counterhistory.”<sup>47</sup>

Yet this counterhistory has been largely marginalized in popular historical accounts since the war ended in 1975. And in contemporary travel guidebooks it is virtually nonexistent. For thousands of American tourists traveling to Vietnam every year whose familiarity with the scholarly literature is at best fleeting, this counterhistory is to be found almost exclusively in the narratives provided at the museums and historical sites that dot the country. But uncomfortable with the awkward jargon in which it is often presented, and warned by their guidebooks that it represents “one-sided propaganda,” tourists often turn to the only seemingly “objective” sources of information at their disposal: the historical synopses of travel guidebooks.<sup>48</sup>

However, Americans hardly arrive in Vietnam as *tabula rasae* entirely unfamiliar with their nation’s history in Indochina. Rather, if it is true that – as my field research suggests – tourists appear to have largely embraced the historical synopses extant in their travel guidebooks, it is probably because these synopses present discourses consistent with many of the largely problematic representations of the war extant in most U.S. history textbooks and in American culture.<sup>49</sup> Or, as Raymond Williams may have put it, they conform to the American “selective tradition,” which has constructed the conflict as a tragic but well-intentioned mistake rooted in Washington’s benign intentions for Southeast Asia.<sup>50</sup> At its core, this selective tradition has been shaped, according to H. Bruce Franklin, by “those myths, celluloid images, and other delusory

fictions about 'Vietnam' that in the ... decades [since the war] have come to replace historical and experiential reality."<sup>51</sup> Political and popular culture thus possess the power, according to Jerry Lembcke, "not only to rewrite history but to reconfigure memory."<sup>52</sup>

By the time they visit Vietnam, tourists have usually watched any number of the countless Hollywood films or television programs that deal with the war, or perhaps heard stories from their friends and relatives. Some might possess lived memories – as combat veterans, members of the antiwar movement, South Vietnamese refugees, or merely disinterested observers. For most first-time visitors, their experiences in Vietnam are extraordinarily formative occasions influenced by the people they meet, the sites they see, the things they read. And for many, if not most, travel guidebooks are instrumental in framing and shaping their tourist experiences and the memories with which they depart. Of the 94 tourists I interviewed throughout Vietnam in June 2000, 84 were using a guidebook. And of those 84 persons, 89 percent (75 persons) said they read their guidebooks for historical information; the overwhelming majority (60 persons, or 71 percent) claimed they knew little or nothing about the war before arriving in the country.<sup>53</sup> While it is impossible to gauge the precise extent to which guidebooks serve as a generative source of historical consciousness among tourists in Vietnam, my fieldwork in both 2000 and 2002 found that a considerable number of those I interviewed were employing the same discourses as those extant in their guidebooks, which are in turn reflective of those discourses that characterize mass-mediated American representations of the conflict.

Throughout the United States, the war in Vietnam remains enshrouded in myths that seem to lack any empirical support or that defy diplomatic common sense. As recently as 1993, for instance, two thirds of the Americans surveyed in a nationwide poll believed that U.S. POWs were “still being held in Southeast Asia.”<sup>54</sup> During my own research in Vietnam, one knowledgeable American tourist I interviewed in Hanoi – a wartime conscientious objector who is now a teacher and was visiting Vietnam for the seventh time – was insistent that there were still POWs in Southeast Asia, but that they had been moved to Laos by the Vietnamese following the normalization of relations by the United States and Vietnam in 1995.<sup>55</sup>

Also widespread in the United States is the belief, to which I alluded earlier, in returning American veterans being spat upon by hateful antiwar demonstrators. This is a particularly powerful myth and one that has been especially useful in mobilizing support for U.S. interventionism. For example, cognizant of the war in Vietnam, antiwar activists during the Persian Gulf conflict of 1991 were specifically implored to “support our troops,” obliterating the historical actuality of a movement two decades before that by and large embraced, and was in significant part constituted of, veterans returning from Indochina. One American soldier in the Gulf was quoted in the *New York Times* as stating: “If I go back home like the Vietnam vets did and somebody spits on me, I swear to God I’ll kill them.”<sup>56</sup>

To myths such as these must be added that of the indiscriminate nationalist-orchestrated slaughter, meticulously planned months before, of thousands of civilians in Hue during the Tet Offensive of 1968. The years since 1975 have witnessed a

remarkable reimagining of the war in American memory. From the demonic cruelty of the Vietnamese nationalists in *The Deer Hunter* to their subordination to the Soviets in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, the United States has, in the decades following the war, projected what some might adjudge its own wartime criminality onto the elusive Other it failed to subdue in Indochina. The “Hue Massacre,” in this respect, has provided a necessary salve for America’s wounded collective conscience. Over thirty years after the U.S.-led devastation of Hue, travel guidebooks continue to present the gruesome details of a massacre that possesses only a passing connection to historical reality. In this sense, the episode continues to serve as a neutralizing agent, reminding Americans that as horrible as “we” acted during the war, “they” most certainly were worse.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper I refer to the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as the “nationalists” instead of the “Communists,” as they are characterized in most of the guidebooks. The term “Communists” not only retains a pejorative connotation in the United States, but it is also somewhat inaccurate, as there were many non-Communists involved in the war against the Americans, although the Communist Party in its various manifestations was certainly the most effective and most dominant segment of the nationalist movement. In using “nationalists” as a

designation for the forces arrayed against the Americans, I do not mean to imply that nationalism was an attribute exclusive to the NLF and DRV.

<sup>2</sup> Mason Florence and Robert Storey, *Vietnam*, Fifth Edition (Hawthorn, Victoria [Australia], 1999), p. 314.

<sup>3</sup> Fiona Dunlop, *Fodor's Exploring Vietnam* (New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, Inc., 1998), p. 114. On the figure of "at least" 2800, see Jacques Népote and Xavier Guillaume, *Vietnam*, Second Edition (Hong Kong: Odyssey Publications Ltd., 1999), p. 134. On the figure of 3000, see Michael Buckley, *Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos Handbook*, Second Edition (Chico, California: Moon Publications, Inc., 1997), p. 255; John Colet and Joshua Eliot, *Vietnam Handbook* (London: Footprint Handbooks, 1997), p. 175; Jan Dodd and Mark Lewis, *Vietnam: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 1998), pp. 249-250; Dunlop, op. cit., p. 114; and Florence and Storey, op. cit., p. 314. On the figure of 14,000, see Natasha Lesser, ed., *Vietnam* (New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, Inc., 1998), p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Dunlop, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Dodd and Lewis, op. cit., p. 249; Florence and Storey, op. cit., p. 314; Colet and Eliot, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Buckley, op. cit., p. 255. *Fodor's Exploring Vietnam* notes that the victims' "fate was either execution by firing squad, decapitation, or being buried alive." Dunlop, op. cit., p. 114. The Footprint guidebook also mentions decapitation. Colet and Eliot, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>7</sup> Florence and Storey, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>8</sup> Buckley, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>9</sup> Buckley, op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> D. Gareth Porter, "The 1968 'Hue Massacre,'" *Indochina Chronicle* 33 (June 24, 1974), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. The study was reprinted in the *Congressional Record* of February 19, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> "[A]ll the accounts agree that NLF rather than North Vietnamese units were responsible for the executions." Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), p. 219.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217. According to Edward Herman and Gareth Porter, "Len Ackland and Don Oberdorfer have documented cases of individuals who were executed when they tried to hide or otherwise resisted the NLF in the early occupation. But these acts seem to have reflected individual decisions by NLF soldiers and cadres, rather than any policy decision to execute large numbers. According to residents of Hue, interviewed by Len Ackland in 1968, the number of executions early in the occupation was small. In the later phase, when the NLF was being forced out under military pressure, some officials and anti-Communist political leaders, earlier marked for 're-education,' were executed, but the numbers still appear to be a very small fraction of the propaganda claims. And there is no evidence in documents, graves, or from individual witnesses which suggests any large and indiscriminate slaughter of civilians by the NLF at Hue." Edward Herman and D. Gareth Porter, "The Myth of the Hue Massacre," *Ramparts* 13:8 (May-June 1975), p. 10. I cannot account for the origins of the figure of "14,000 massacred" in Fodor's *Vietnam*, which is nearly five times greater than the already inflated estimates cited in the other Vietnam guidebooks. Lesser, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> "There is little question," wrote Marilyn Young, "that there were executions in Hue, both in the initial stages of the occupation and in the last days of the battle there. And it is unseemly, even obscene, to argue about the numbers. Nevertheless, an effort to understand what happened is essential if we are to be able to grasp the war and its aftermath. The task of the NLF in Hue was not only to destroy the government administration of the city, but to establish, in its place, a 'revolutionary administration.' The disposition of those who had controlled the city until its takeover was carefully laid out: there were lists of those in the Saigon government police apparatus at all levels (to be rounded up and held outside the city); lists of high civilian and military officials (the same; both to await study of their individual cases); lists of ordinary civil servants (those 'working for the enemy because of their livelihood and who do not oppose the revolution' who were destined for reeducation and possible later employment); lists of those low-level civil servants who had at some point been involved in paramilitary activities (to be held for reeducation, but not employed). In the early days of the occupation, there were indeed summary executions.... And as the occupation ended in the firestorm of artillery and aerial bombardment, retreating NLF troops executed many of those they held in custody (rather than either releasing them or

keeping them prisoner), not in the numbers Saigon and Washington charged, but certainly enough to have posed troubling questions for the people of Hue who survived....” Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-219. Gareth Porter wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1987 that “[m]any of [the executions] were apparently revenge killings by Buddhist activists and the former Hue police chief, who fled from the military suppression of the Buddhist struggle movement in 1966 and returned with Communist forces at Tet.” Gareth Porter, “Little Evidence of 1968 Tet Massacre in Hue,” Letter, *New York Times*, October 29, 1987, p. A30.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Young, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> Porter, “The 1968 ‘Hue Massacre,’” *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Journalist Don Tate quoted in *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> An important analysis of the “Hue Massacre” in recent survey texts of the war is provided by David Hunt, “Images of the Viet Cong,” in Robert M. Slabey, ed., *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996), pp. 54-57.

<sup>20</sup> MacCannell wrote that truth markers “function to cement the bond of tourist and attraction by elevating the information possessed by the tourist to privileged status.” Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 137-138.

<sup>21</sup> In referring to an “official” historical narrative, I do not mean to imply that there is a single Vietnamese perspective of the American war. Rather, I am referring to the dominant narrative of the conflict that appears in the discourses of museum exhibits and at war sites and memorials throughout the country.

<sup>22</sup> Evan Thomas, “The Last Days of Saigon,” *Newsweek*, May 1, 2000, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Dunlop, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>24</sup> Lesser, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> Florence and Storey, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

<sup>26</sup> Erik Cohen, “The Tourist Guide: The Origins, Structure, and Dynamics of a Role,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 12 (1985), pp. 5-29. Cohen identified the “four principal elements” of the communicative component of the guide’s role as selection, information, interpretation, and fabrication. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah B. Bhattacharyya, “Mediating India: An Analysis of a Guidebook,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 24:2 (1997), p. 378.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>31</sup> Of the 94 tourists I interviewed throughout Vietnam in June 2000, 74 percent were using a guidebook published by Lonely Planet; of the total number of travelers using a guidebook – 10 of the 94 people I spoke with were not – 83 percent had a Lonely Planet. Research data on file with the author.

<sup>32</sup> Interview of Robert Storey in Jiafeng, Taiwan, May 30, 2000. Tapes and transcript on file with the author.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> Interview of Robert Storey, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 184. In his effort to resurrect the reality that many Vietnam veterans became active in the antiwar movement, at least one leading historian claims that Lembcke went too far in minimizing the suggestion that many veterans were victimized by their experiences in Vietnam and have suffered from psychological trauma as a result. Another pointed to the irony in Lembcke’s reliance on the controversial Winter Soldier Investigation sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, about which substantial questions of veracity have been raised. For more on these aspects of Lembcke’s book, see Christian G. Appy, “The Muffling of Public Memory in Post-Vietnam America,” *Chronicle of Higher*

*Education* 45:23 (February 12, 1999), p. B5; and Marilyn B. Young, "The Forever War," *Itinerario* 22:3 (1998), pp. 87-88.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley Karnow's companion volume to the ten-part PBS series on Vietnam is perhaps the most prominent example of this disdain for Vietnamese denial, as Karnow chastised the Vietnamese for not being forthcoming about the alleged massacre. He wrote:

Revisiting Vietnam in 1981 and again in 1990, I was able to elicit little credible evidence from the Communists to clarify the episode. General Tran Do, a senior Communist architect of the Tet offensive, flatly denied that the Hue atrocities had ever occurred, contending that films and photographs of the corpses had been "fabricated." I heard the same line from General Tran Van Quang, who commanded the Communist forces in the region. In Hue itself, a Communist official claimed that the exhumed bodies were mostly of Vietcong cadres and sympathizers slain by the South Vietnamese army after the fight for the city. He also blamed most of the civilian casualties during the battle on American bombing. But he hinted that his comrades had participated in at least a share of the killing – resorting to familiar Communist jargon to explain that the "angry" citizens of Hue had liquidated local "despots" in the same way that "they would get rid of poisonous snakes who, if allowed to live, would commit further crimes." Balanced accounts have made it clear, however, that the Communist butchery in Hue did take place – perhaps on an even larger scale than reported during the war.

Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, Revised Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 543. According to his notes, Karnow's source – i.e., the "more balanced accounts" to which he refers – is Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971). According to Herman and Porter, Oberdorfer, who was a Vietnam correspondent for the *Washington Post*, relied on fabricated documents provided by Douglas Pike in writing his book, which was reissued in 2001 by Johns Hopkins University Press. Oberdorfer's account is discussed in Edward Herman and D. Gareth Porter, op. cit.; and in Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, Volume I of *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), p. 347. David Hunt refers to Oberdorfer's treatment of the "Hue Massacre" as "just warmed over Pike," and he writes that the decision by Karnow and other authors to cite Oberdorfer rather than Pike is "a device that evades rather than resolves the problem of documentation." Pike's study, according to Hunt, "is, by any definition, a work of propaganda." Hunt, op. cit., pp. 56-57. Karnow's acceptance of the alleged massacre is particularly troubling in this context, as his book, judging from similarities in language, appears to have possibly been the source of the accounts provided by several of the guidebook authors.

<sup>38</sup> Herman and Porter, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Colet and Eliot, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> Herman and Porter, op. cit., p. 12. Emphases in original.

<sup>41</sup> Instances of the "Hue Massacre" being cited in the media as evidence of Communist brutality are legionary. For one such example, see Barbara Crossette, "Where Tet Meant Death, Life Goes On," *New York Times*, August 26, 1987, p. A1. See also the responses by Reed Irvine ("Hue Massacre of 1968 Goes Beyond Hearsay," Letter, *New York Times*, September 22, 1987, p. A34) and Gareth Porter ("Little Evidence of 1968 Tet Massacre in Hue," op. cit.). Irvine, chairman of the organization Accuracy in Media, has argued for the historical actuality of the "Hue Massacre" on numerous occasions.

<sup>42</sup> Colet and Eliot, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>43</sup> Hunt, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55. Pike's original reference was to "Vietnamese communists as fiendish fanatics with blood dripping from their hands" – thus Hunt's placement of "fiends" in quotation marks.

<sup>45</sup> One former tour guide from Hue that I interviewed, who spent approximately two years as an English-speaking guide in that area, estimated that perhaps "2 out of 10" tourists would ask her about the "Hue Massacre."

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<sup>46</sup> Young, "The Forever War," op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 81. Young wrote:

The challenge the war posed to America's foundational account of its own history was so powerful it could not be allowed to stand. Almost before the war had ended, a series of reversals – in language and imagery – turned the war on its head. Far from being an aggressor, the United States was a victim, its prisoners of war, helpless hostages, Vietnam itself a "quagmire" which had inexorably sucked the country down and under. President Carter, more generously, announced that the destruction had been "mutual," though what balance scale he was using – given the two to three million Vietnamese dead, the hundreds of thousands of refugees, the heaviest bombing in history – it is impossible to imagine. In the press, television, the movies, returning American veterans came to stand for the way the Nation (with a capital "N") itself had been victimized: victims of the antiwar movement, said to have spit upon them; of an Executive that forced them to fight with "one hand tied behind their back"; of a cowardly Congress which would not send more reinforcements; of a shameful populace that would not stage victory parades. The Rambo series embod[ies] a final reversal: the guerrilla is now an American, the planes and heavy weaponry are all in the hands of the Vietnamese, and the mission he pursues is not war, but rescue. Thus Americans in Vietnam buy momentos of their own suffering, symbols of their victimization.

Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>48</sup> Many tourists I interviewed expressed their discomfort with the language employed by a number of museums in discussing the American war. For instance, the National Museum of Vietnamese Revolution in Hanoi, which is one of the country's seven national museums, repeatedly refers in its exhibits to the "American imperialists," the "puppet regime" or "Ngo Dinh Diem clique" in Saigon, "America's invasion of Vietnam," et cetera. Whatever their merit, the sentiments contained within such designations seriously conflict with many popular American representations of the war in Vietnam.

<sup>49</sup> There have been numerous studies of the war's treatment in American schools. For a recent analysis of high school history textbooks, see James W. Loewen, "The Vietnam War in High School American History," in Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), pp. 150-172. A more recent study of survey texts on the war than David Hunt's previously-cited analysis is David Hunt, "War Crimes and the Vietnamese People: American Representations and Silences," in *ibid.*, pp. 173-200. For an examination of travel guidebooks' representations of the American war, see my "Shaping Memory of the Past: Discourse in Travel Guidebooks for Vietnam," *Mass Communication & Society* 5:1 (February 2002), pp. 87-110. The number of scholarly texts addressing the war's representation in American culture is enormous. Among them are H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Keith Beattie, *The Scar that Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 38-39.

<sup>51</sup> Franklin, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>53</sup> These findings should not be construed as scientific, although I suspect they are reasonably accurate. I cannot claim to have interviewed a representative sample of tourists in Vietnam, if such is even possible, although I did make an effort to speak with as wide of a cross-section of tourists as possible. Research data on file with the author.

<sup>54</sup> Franklin, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with the author, June 2000.

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Lembcke, *op. cit.*, p. 11.