

MARILYN B. YOUNG: A TRIBUTE

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I think our continuous task must be to make war visible, an inescapable part of the country's self-consciousness, as inescapable a subject of study as it is a reality.

- Marilyn Young

General, man is very useful.
He can fly and he can kill.
But he has one defect:
He can think.

- Bertolt Brecht

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Marilyn Young was a remarkable historian, colleague, public intellectual, and person, and an inspiration to many scholars and students. Countless young historians benefited from her encouragement and support. She brought a courageous, passionate, critical intelligence to the study of US foreign relations and a skepticism and irreverence to the pretensions of academia, with unflagging warmth and humor, an acerbic wit and a fierce dedication to justice that she brought not only to her academic scholarship, but to her public presence in newspapers and on radio and television.

She wrote with searing irony in the field of US foreign relations history known, at the moment she entered it and long after, for mimicking the cool, managerial style of State Department discourse. In her voice and themes, she brought together, in her own unique way, something like I. F. Stone's muckraking journalism, Joseph Heller's sense of the dark absurdities of military-bureaucratic thinking, and Kurt Vonnegut's sense of the horrors of war. One of my favorite Marilyn moments involved her opening salvo on a SHAFR panel dealing with the study of US empire. A previous speaker had off-handedly mentioned their membership in the Council of Foreign Relations. Marilyn began her comment, coolly, with "I am not a member of the Council of Foreign Relations," to riotous, appreciative laughter.

Not long after Marilyn's passing, I decided to sit down, read and re-read her body of scholarship over the course of a year, with an eye towards gathering the things I'd learned from her, discovering what I still had to learn, and bringing forward things that I wanted others to know about her thinking. Most of all, I wanted to do what I could to convey Marilyn's extraordinary voice.

To that end, I've done two things here. I begin with what I take away from Marilyn's work. Then I've written brief summaries of some of her essays, and found quotations in which she expresses a key argument or in which the special whiplash of Marilyn's writing cracks. I haven't gotten through all of them, but here's a first installment, mostly grounded in her essays on war, memory, popular culture and imperial ideology that followed the publication of *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*.

"It probably will not do for historians to howl or cry," Marilyn states in her 2012 SHAFR presidential address, "but it is certainly our work to speak and write so that a time of war not be mistaken for peacetime, nor waging war for making peace." I'm grateful to Marilyn, among other things, for showing us—with verve, commitment and insight—what that looks like.

First, here are some things that I take away from Marilyn's writings: about the histories of war and US empire, and about the task of their historians. Some of what follows paraphrases ideas that she expresses directly in her work; in other cases, I'm pulling to the surface what's more implicit and in still others, I'm essentially riffing.

Historians can and should think about their work, at least in part, as *exposé*: as revealing inconvenient or disturbing truths that the powerful do not want those subjected to their power to know, especially about the human consequences of state violence.

Scholars should approach the study of the US in the world as a critical and ethical enterprise, rather than a managerial and technocratic one; the suffering of civilians in war needs to form part of this ethics.

US foreign relations are far more violent than traditional US diplomatic history would suggest. Avoiding, rationalizing and erasing this violence is essential in the project of denying that the US has an imperial history. And denying that the US has an imperial history is essential to minimizing the role of violence in the US's relationships to the wider world.

Technocratic mindsets—at base, the masking of politics as management—have been essential in rationalizing American state violence, making it invisible in ontological terms, and insulating its perpetrators from an ethical confrontation with their actions.

War has an expansive, potentially self-perpetuating character, in which the boundaries between “war” and “peace” become dangerously blurred or eliminated. It is geographically expansive (wars waged in the name of the domino theory, for example); temporally expansive (wars used to justify later wars); and socially expansive (involving and jeopardizing civilians as well as combatants.) Monitoring where these boundaries lay and how they are discussed, acted upon and fought over is central to the work of critical scholarship.

Advanced technology, especially in the field of aerial warfare, has enabled a dramatic broadening of war's victims, while sanitizing its imagery: in the US case, the promise of minimized US casualties and

aura of technological sophistication became central to militarized American culture and politics, especially in the 20th and early 21st centuries.

Ethical double-standards about the differential value of human lives are at the heart of US warfare in the 20th century; there has been a vicious cycle between war-making and the devaluing of the lives of those targeted or victimized by US wars.

Because of their serious and often deadly consequences, the dynamics of military-official thinking and discourse are worthy of intense scrutiny. As part of this scrutiny, we cannot take those in power at their word, despite the formidable incentives and temptations to do so.

The ways that wars and military occupations are remembered have profound political implications for the present: the memory of past wars lays the political, ethical and legal groundwork for the way wars are waged in the future, the kinds of wars that are possible, and the ability of publics to prevent and stop them.

The task of writing critical histories of war persistently confronts nationalist and state-led efforts to recuperate past wars. States harvest their old wars for tactical, prescriptive guidance and, especially, to overcome latent or overt antiwar and anti-imperial sentiment. Sometimes as trauma, sometimes as aspiration, history is plundered for negative examples, positive models, and analogies. “Good wars” are protected so that they can supplant the memory, imagery and discourses that surround “bad” ones. Historians must subject such searches for easy “lessons” in the past to relentless analysis.

Criticisms of a war (including by historians) which focus solely on tactics and strategy but avoid larger questions regarding the ends of the war or the ethics of war generally often provide some of the most enabling rationales for war. The same is true of critiques that focus on gaps between the intentions of those waging war and the ways they engage in combat, the classic case being the Vietnam War, in which many Americans have separated the United States’ “failure” from its “good intentions.”

The erasure from the historical record of those subjected to military violence should be understood as coterminous with the violence of war itself, often beginning with the ways war-making states discuss and record, or fail to discuss and record, their victims. Silencing or erasing victims clears out the

discursive space in which the victorious can then justify their conquests and reserve any claims of victimhood to themselves. Registering the existence of those harmed by military violence and, where possible, reconstructing their experiences, is essential to the writing of critical histories of war and empire.

For the half-century after its end, the Vietnam War was the spoken and unspoken ground for Americans' debates about war, and US foreign policy more generally. It was specter that those committed to war needed to vanquish or displace, a negative referent that had to be articulated as "tragedy" precisely so that it could insulate future wars from its taint.

Across time and in multiple contexts, Americans' anti-war and anti-imperial consciousness has been stronger than often thought. But it has also almost exclusively focused on war's costs for Americans, especially US soldiers, their families and communities.

This fact has meant that the "hearts and minds" most at stake during US wars have often been those of Americans; historians must study efforts to generate and sustain mass support for war "at home" with an awareness that this support could never be taken for granted. Hollywood war movies—often generated at the intersection of state and corporate agendas—are one site where efforts to produce and manage hegemonic consent become visible.

Historians can and should look at war imagery (especially, in the 20th century, Hollywood films) as involving intricate moral economies of self-protection and self-sacrifice, duty and self-interest, in which visions of the rightness of particular wars, of wars in general, and the question of who benefits from them and who pays for them, are presented and negotiated, often in complex and contradictory ways. We can also look at films as ways that war and militarization shaped Americans' consciousness at the most intimate levels of the imagination.

Opposing empire can be fun. Skewering the pretensions of the powerful, deconstructing manipulative imagery, and clearing out obfuscations in order to open up the space for better worlds can be a source of creativity, pleasure and community.

Marilyn's article-length pieces

[My summaries are followed by quotations from the piece itself.]

“Revisionists Revisited: The Case of Vietnam,” *Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter* 10 (1979): 1–10.

In her 1979 Bernath Memorial Lecture, Marilyn criticizes “revisionist” attempts to recuperate the Vietnam War, which she sees manifest in academic and popular interpretations that the war began with good intentions, but emerged as a “tragedy” because it was badly waged. She sees in this emphasis on tactics and separation of means from ends, as an insidious effort to bracket the United States’ actual ends across six presidencies: to deny peoples of Southeast Asia self-determination. She especially takes to task Guenter Lewy’s *America in Vietnam*, which both focuses on tactics, and attempts to frame US military practices—the forced relocation of village populations, the use of napalm and defoliants, tiger cages—as justified by international law. The stakes for this misremembering of the Vietnam War are high: an emphasis on tactics renders oppositional, antiwar politics a matter of political management by unaccountable military planners, while tactical lessons prepare the way for future US military projections.

A general outline of the revisionist history of the war is easy to describe: the U. S. foolishly but with benevolent intent, intervened in Indochina in order to defend a legitimate South Vietnamese government against brutal aggression from its northern Communist neighbor. Somehow our good intentions got lost in the shuffle. Out of misunderstanding and excusable ignorance, we were caught defending a dubious and increasingly unattractive ally. ‘What started off as an act of counterintervention against a foreign intervention,’ Zbigniew Brzezinski explained to a reporter recently, ‘became a national liberation struggle, and we got bogged down in it.’ The language is interesting—we counter-intervened against a foreign intervention. America is apparently at home everywhere, though surrounded by foreigners.

The most recent version of the proper lesson is also the most narrow and succinct. In an op-ed essay, Richard Betts, co-author of *The Irony of Vietnam*, argues that there are few things to

be learned from Vietnam except this: 'Never commit massive conventional forces in a civil war on behalf of a weak government against disciplined revolutionaries with sanctuaries.' Obviously, this leaves us with many attractive alternatives: we can commit small amounts of conventional forces on behalf of a strong government in a civil war against unruly revolutionaries. Or we can commit nuclear forces on behalf of a government whose strength, like the discipline of its adversaries, becomes irrelevant.

For Lewy and others who think as he does the goal of national policy, despite minor changes in language, remains what it was before Vietnam. In Brzezinski's words it is 'to make the world congenial to ourselves, to prevent America from being lonely in the world...' A more modest statement of imperial purpose than you might find in the Fifties or Sixties, perhaps, but its import is the same: the world must respond to the definition of American need.



Photograph by Kyōichi Sawada of a South Vietnamese mother and her children, whose names apparently went unrecorded, wading across a river, having fled a US bombing raid on their village on September 6, 1965. Marilyn insisted that histories of US foreign policy include both war and those who directly suffered its impacts.

“This Is Not a Pipe, This is not Vietnam,” *Middle-East Report* 21 (1991): 21-24.

In this piece, Marilyn discusses the overwhelming shadow of Vietnam in discussions of the Persian Gulf War; the moment President Bush said the war was not Vietnam it was, in effect, Vietnam. She counters the resurgent myth that the US could have won in Vietnam had it unleashed its full force by reviewing the sheer scale of the US military power used in Southeast Asia. She discusses the lessons taken from Vietnam by the US military in the Persian Gulf, including press control and sanitized imagery free of Iraqi casualties. As a patch over a lingering “Vietnam syndrome,” commentators turned the conflict into World War II, casting it as a clear-cut moral crusade requiring US intervention.

There would be no body counts in this war. Thus, through over a month of bombing and a week of ground fighting, no estimates of Iraqi losses were ever offered, nor did the press demand them. The result was a televised war relatively innocent of dead bodies; a war that, except for the bombing of the Baghdad shelter and the desperate oil-soaked cormorants, would not spoil one’s dinner. Indeed, the wildlife allegedly destroyed by Iraq’s “ecological terrorism” substituted for images of humans wounded by American bombs.

But for all that, Iraq was neither Vietnam nor World War II. It was itself: It was a war fought not to end all wars, nor to make the world safe for democracy, but rather to make the world safe for war itself.

The US can destroy Iraq’s highways, but not build its own; create the conditions for epidemic in Iraq, but not offer health care to millions of Americans. It can excoriate Iraqi treatment of the Kurdish minority, but not deal with domestic race relations; create homelessness abroad but not solve it here; keep a half a million troops drug free as part of a war, but refuse to fund the treatment of millions of drug addicts at home. Westmoreland’s dictum [“We won the war after we left”] may this time be reversed: we shall lose the war after we have won it.

“The Age of Global Power,” in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 274-94.

In this wide-ranging essay, Marilyn affirms the project of “de-centering” US history, but simultaneously calls for caution: in light of the global, hegemonic character of American power, the historian cannot just establish a perspective “outside” of the United States as if it were a perspective outside of American power. She then discusses the very real way in which American power, especially military power, and its implications for others, has often been invisible to policymakers, a factor that diplomatic historians need to take into account even as they shift into transnational modes. She criticizes H. W. Brands and John Gaddis, among others, for their “taking America at its word” and apologetic conflation of US national interest and universal values. She discusses the Spanish-Cuban-American War and Philippine-American War as instances in which the impact of US state violence on people outside the United States was transmuted—at least to Americans—by an emphasis on their righteous intentions. She then takes readers through a number of cases in which a moralizing American exceptionalism shaped Americans’ perceptions of their participation in wars, from World War II through Korea to Vietnam. She ends with criticism of ostensibly transnational thinking in which the “the singular referent is American,” reflecting the “self-aggrandizement of the truly powerful” and the “solipsism of the majority of America’s inhabitants.” (291)

To write the history of the United States in the world from outside its claims to a limitless horizon means to take the country as simply one nation among others. This is true and also not true. So the problem is not only how to think about the United States without reinstating its own centered sense of itself but how to do this without ignoring the success it has had in achieving, in Melvyn Leffler’s words, a ‘preponderance of power,’ a centralizing power, in the world. (275)

For a conviction that an American empire, as opposed to those established by other nations, is democratic, that American interests are consonant with the last, best hopes of all mankind, occludes both the fact of U. S. power and the effect of its exercise. The syllogism is simple: all nations deserve freedom and democracy; the United States embodies both, and its policies, despite some excesses, seek to bestow them on others. Such an ambition, in the

absence of military and economic power, would be impossible; but the ambition renders the power itself innocent, harmless, essentially invisible to itself. (279-80)

Efforts to internationalize America's history, to diversify and multiply its culture, need to keep in mind the reality of American hegemony and its dominant, self-absorbed culture. Of course that hegemony is continuously challenged, both at home and abroad; of course, the United States is not exceptional, only exceptionally powerful. De-centering America in one's head is a good thing. But it does not itself create a world free of its overwhelming military and economic power, and it is crucial to remember the difference or the effort to de-center American history will run the danger of obscuring what it means to illuminate. (291)

"In the Combat Zone," *Radical History Review*, No. 85 (Winter 2003), pp. 253-64.

In this interpretive critique of four war films released between 1998 and 2002 (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *We Were Soldiers*), Marilyn situates them within the longer ideological history of war films and US ideologies of war, emphasizing the moral anchor of World War II; the difficulties of affirmatively incorporating the Vietnam War into nationalist imagery; the "sentimental militarism" of films stressing unit-based brotherhood and sacrifice; and the paradoxes, ironies, and ambiguities that accompany confidently pro-war representations.

No one can identify with a B-52 and, as Michael Sherry pointed out long ago, we rarely witness bombing raids from below. Ground combat proves much more satisfying. The camera always faces out against the enemy, or inward at the grievous wounds enemy fire causes. The individual soldier fighting for his life becomes the victim of war; those he kills, since they are so evidently bent on his destruction, the perpetrators of violence. His innocence is ours. (255)

War stories written from inside out vary by geography, but they always tell the same story: death, fear, brotherhood. Bravery, courage, and the capacity to commit atrocities are not determined by the cause in which they are displayed. "It's about the man next to you," one of the characters in *Black Hawk Down* says, "that's all it is." The flat statement, that one kills

and dies for the man next to you, never leads to the obvious question: what are you both doing there? (256)

There is something odd about these recent representations of America's messianic mission. From Private Ryan to the Delta Force officers in Somalia and Hal Moore in Vietnam, these Americans sacrifice their lives only for one another. Private Ryan's war, for example, proves the obverse of movies made during World War II, when the individual had sometimes to be sacrificed for the sake of the mission. Ryan reverses the moral of the story: the lives of a group of men are risked for the sake of a single individual... And who can doubt that "we" are a worthy cause? (261)

"Now Playing: Vietnam," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (October 2004), pp. 22-26.

In this essay, Marilyn provides a brief history of Hollywood movies about the Vietnam War, suggestively arguing that teaching with these movies will prove more challenging over the decades as students more and more distant from them in time may come to see them as organic by-products of the war itself, rather than as ideological constructions with their own political histories. Marilyn then takes readers through some of the main moments in the history of Vietnam films, from a first, 1970s moment focusing on American soldiers' rage, powerlessness and guilt, to 1980s "noble grunt" movies, to post-9/11 efforts to recast the war as a noble enterprise. Along the way, she points out the need to keep in mind war movies' latent content, as distinct from their manifest content: that ostensibly anti-war movies can be received in pro-war ways, and vice versa.

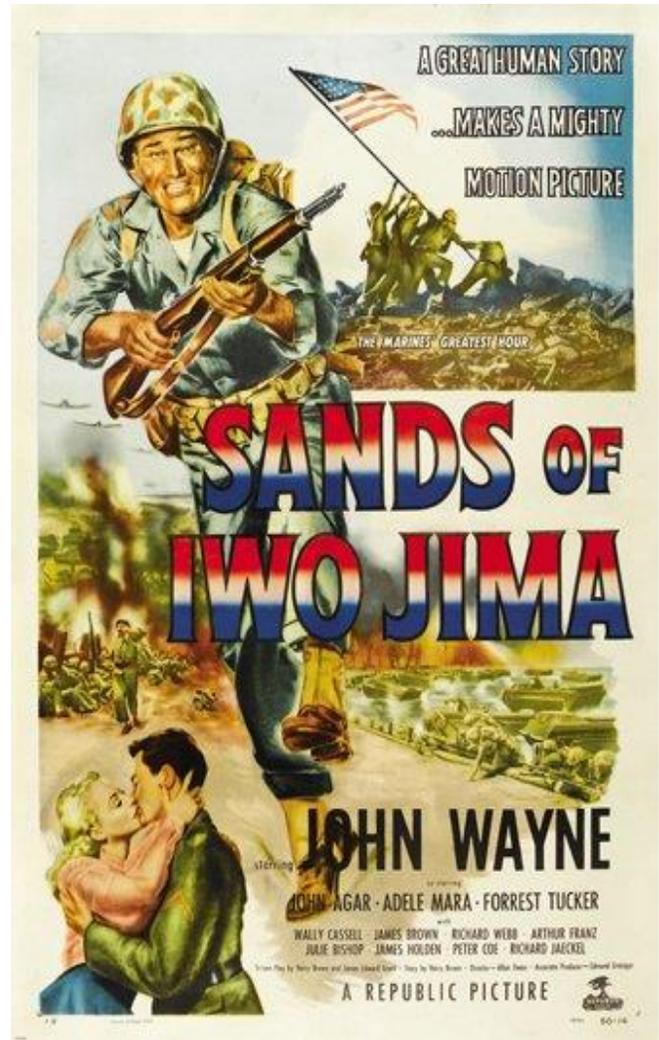
Many veterans will tell you they went to war with images of John Wayne and *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) in their heads. They have probably forgotten that Wayne played a depressed, angry alcoholic in the movie and that he dies in the end... Not very long after the release of the movie, the men who fought in Iwo Jima, or their younger brothers, went back to war in Korea. Their sons came of age in time for the television reruns of *Sands of Iwo Jima* and service in Vietnam.

“Imperial Language,” in Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young, *The New American Empire: A 21st-Century Teach-in on US Foreign Policy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

Here Marilyn contrasts the languages of empire (of stable, incorporating control) and imperialism (of force and imposition), and uses the dichotomy to explore the perceptions of American soldiers on the ground in US-occupied Iraq--reflecting in particular on the role of language in military occupations, especially the insistence that the occupied speak your language--and to critically analyze commentators on the Iraq War, especially Robert Kagan. As she shows, Iraq War debate was haunted by the legacies of US military intervention, from the Philippines to Vietnam.

The vocabulary of imperialism, consisting as it does mainly of imperatives, is not that hard to learn: stop, go, fast, slow. Aging veterans of old wars know how to say this in Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese. Younger ones say it in Arabic and Pashtun. (33)

[Maj. John] Nagl does not wonder what he and his troops want from the Iraqis facing them. Perhaps the answer is too obvious: he wants them to behave themselves, to be good. There is a further question: how has it happened that Maj. John Nagl has the right and the power to ask hundreds of people in a country not his own to behave themselves (35).



A movie poster from the 1949 war film *Sands of Iwo Jima*, starring John Wayne. As Marilyn often noted, US soldiers in Vietnam later recalled bringing images of heroism and patriotic mission they had acquired from this and other “good war” films to Southeast Asia.

Central to the task of both empire and imperialism in the invisibility of the imperial object or, for it comes to the same thing, the assumption of their simplicity, their transparency. (36)

[Reports of civilians killed by US attacks] appear with some regularity on the inner page of the newspaper of record, usually carrying only an anonymous Associated Press byline. They conclude with a standard denial of wrongdoing by senior U. S. officers and/or the promise of an investigation in the future. The flatness of these accounts, the absence of named reporters, the remoteness of the locale, the consequent invisibility of both victim and perpetrator remove these deaths from all orders of explanation. They are literally accidental (38).

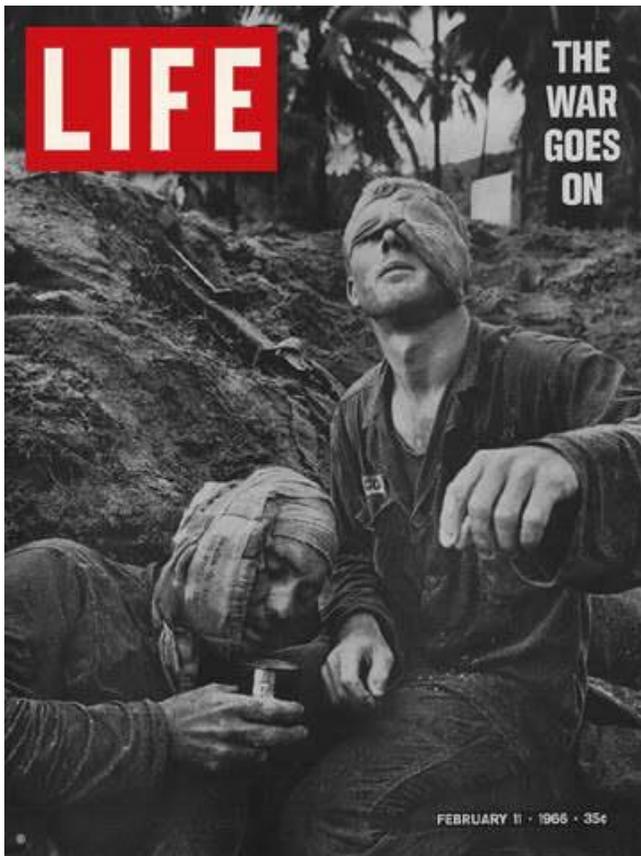
"Why Vietnam Still Matters," in John Ernst and David Anderson, eds., *The War That Never Ends* (University Press of Kentucky, 2007), pp. 1-12.

This essay describes the ongoing presence and hold of the Vietnam War on post-9/11 discussions of the US "war on terror," as registered in repeated references, both denials and affirmations—"we don't do body counts"—alongside the partial casualization and normalization of the war for Americans, as indexed by American tourism to Vietnam, and war reenactment culture. Morally and legally unresolved issues from Vietnam, she argues—assassination, torture, the indiscriminate bombing of densely populated areas, the expansion of presidential power, the defining of dissent of treason—enable their repetition.

The overwhelming majority of the books written about the war, and virtually all the movies made about it, are concerned solely with America and Americans: how the war divided the country, alienated a generation, destroyed public trust in authority; how the psychic injuries to those who had fought in Vietnam resisted healing; how the war had come close to destroying the American military.

It might be more accurate to say that, although the United States lost in Vietnam, it was not defeated. Defeat in a war in which criminal acts have taken place, or, because it was a war of aggression, constituted a violation of international law as such, has resulted in international trials an acknowledgement of the crimes of war and crimes against humanity committed,

even the payment of reparations to victims... It is impossible to imagine an international trial or an official national self-examination with respect to the widely criminal behavior of the United States in Vietnam or Iraq.



Life magazine cover, February 11, 1966. The original inside caption reads: "Himself wounded in the head during 1st Cavalry Division's Operation Masher in South Vietnam (see p. 22), Pfc. Thomas Cole, a medic, attends a wounded comrade, S/Sgt. Harlson Pell." Whatever the publisher's intent, such images of vulnerable US soldiers in danger could animate American antiwar sentiment that Marilyn argues was in many cases stronger than historians have assumed.

I think that it is necessary for historians to continue to press for the necessity of a coming to terms with Vietnam. Else, when one day the war in Iraq ends, or maybe just simply stops, the United States will once again fail to come to terms with the damage done by this unprovoked war of aggression, laying the groundwork for the next war.

"Counterinsurgency, Now and Forever," Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young, *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or, How Not to Learn from the Past* (New York, London: New Press, 2007), pp. 216-229.

Marilyn describes the evolution of counterinsurgency (COIN) in Vietnam and its fusion of military and civilian operations, reviews Iraq War-era reflections on COIN in El Salvador as positive models, narrates the recurrent forgetting and re-learning of COIN by the US military, and probes the political tensions and contradictions within counterinsurgency, especially when it comes to its blurring of boundaries between consent, coercion and violence.

Proud of their knowledge of how the enemy operated—not necessarily the Vietnamese, but any enemy—[President Kennedy and his advisors] quoted Mao: the guerrilla is a fish swimming in the ocean of the people. Dry up the ocean, and the problem is solved. No one paused for very long over the metaphor: what, after all, would it mean to dry up the ocean? (217)

The authors [of a short essay for the *Military Review*] lay down a set of necessary conditions that must be fulfilled in order to defeat an insurgency. Many of these conditions would seem to be beyond the capacity of the U. S. military implement. Thus, the first principle is the establishment of a legitimate government... The authors do not tell us how a foreign power can confer legitimacy on another country's government. Indeed, the contradiction seems ab initio and insurmountable—unless you ignore it, as [the authors] do. (222)

Over and over again, Sassaman [a colonel using counter-insurgency techniques in Iraq] met resistance of any kind with massive force, and taught his men to do likewise. Like the Vietnamese, the Iraqis, according to Sassaman and the troops under his command, understood only the language of force. In any event, it was the only language any of the Americans spoke other than English. (224)

The essay [on counter-insurgency] ends with authors' own lesson from Vietnam... "Our enemies are fighting us as insurgents because they think insurgency is their best chance for victory. We must prove them wrong." The authors ignore the possibility that insurgency fight the United States as insurgents because they have no other choice, rather than because they decide to leave behind their aircraft carriers, precision bombers, drones, B-52s, and attack helicopters. (225)

Major Gregory Peterson has been persuaded by a course at Fort Leavenworth's School of Advanced Military Studies that the U. S. experience in Iraq can usefully be compared to that of the French in Algeria... That the French wished to continue exercising a sovereignty that they had established in the nineteenth century, while the United States has declared that it does not now and never will wish to exercise sovereignty in Iraq does not seem to have been considered by Peterson or his instructors. (229)

“The Hurt Locker: War as a Video Game,” *Perspectives on History*, Vol. 47, Nov. 2009.

In this essay from the AHA’s “Masters at the Movies” series, Marilyn takes on *The Hurt Locker*, which she sardonically admires as the archetypal Iraq War movie: one that radically isolates individual, masculinist heroes from larger questions of the US military campaign in Iraq and which drops viewers in the subject position of courageous US soldiers facing bombs treacherously placed by Iraqis, while bracketing the question of bombs dropped on Iraq by the United States. She ends, powerfully, with an account of another bomb diffusion effort: efforts by Vietnamese people, funded by Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, to diffuse live ordinance remaining from the Vietnam War, weapons which have killed some 42,000 people since 1975; the effort has not attracted ambitious Hollywood filmmakers like Bigelow.

In some ways *The Hurt Locker* is a 21st-century *Triumph of the Will*. Like Leni Riefenstahl, Kathryn Bigelow is a brilliant filmmaker with a taste for iconic images and the masculine heroic mode.

The Hurt Locker is the perfect Iraq War movie, allowing the audience to support the troops without needing to wonder whether they should be fighting there in the first place. It offers no explanations, no apologies and only a thin patina of regret. It’s too bad, as Bigelow said in an interview, that the powerful .50-caliber sniper’s rifle had to be invented, but what an amazing weapon! As if to say, it’s too bad a bomb unit must roam the streets of Baghdad, but what amazing men!

“I was Thinking, as I often Do These Days, of War’: The United States in the Twenty-First Century,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (January 2012), pp. 1-15.

In her SHAFR presidential address, Marilyn powerfully revisits many of her central themes: continuities between 20th century US wars; euphemisms and denials of US empire; the naturalizing of asymmetrical warfare; the role of mass media, and especially film, in inculcating a war ethos in the American public; the challenges of legitimating the Korean War before the American public; the rise and fall of counter-insurgency doctrine during and after the Vietnam War; and the invisibility of most of the victims of the “war on terror” to American audiences.

I think our continuous task must be to make war visible, an inescapable part of the country’s self-consciousness, as inescapable a subject of study as it is a reality. (2)



Antiwar protestors carry an inflatable globe through New York City as part of the massive, worldwide protests of February 15, 2003 opposing the Bush administration’s relentless drive towards war in Iraq; between 10 and 15 million people in 600 cities marched that day. Marilyn’s scholarship was animated by both antiwar politics like these, and a sense that more peaceful worlds were possible.

Counterinsurgency is a war for all seasons.... Judging by the past, if counterinsurgency does not work in Afghanistan, it will be interpreted as *having* worked, or will be said not to have been pursued long or hard enough. (12)

The major in charge of this area of Afghanistan insists that the move was not an abandonment of the area (In which over one hundred American soldiers and uncounted others have died) but rather a “realigning to provide better security for the Afghan people.” A less senior officer put this differently: “What we figured out is that people in the Pech really aren’t anti-US or anti-anything; they just want to be left alone. Our presence is what’s destabilizing this area.” Neither the reporter nor the officer went on to generalize from this observation. (13)

It probably will not do for historians to howl or cry, but it is certainly our work to speak and write so that a time of war not be mistaken for peacetime, nor waging war for making peace. (15)

“Counting the Bodies in Vietnam,” in Emily Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick, eds., *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of U. S. Body Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 230-240.

Here Marilyn provides a history of the “body count,” a paradigmatic abstraction of modern US warfare, with an emphasis on the Vietnam War and its long aftermath: as it emerged as a metric of military success, body counts encouraged US military personnel to kill civilians indiscriminately. She also discusses costly US efforts to recover American war dead in Vietnam, even as living Vietnamese war victims were neglected. There would be no body counts in the Iraq War, at least not of Iraqis. Marilyn quotes Donald Rumsfeld: “Well, we don’t do body counts on other people.”

One problem was finding the enemy so as to be able to use U. S. firepower and then count the results... Often bodies could be collected without any combat at all. David Bressem, a

helicopter pilot, told an ad hoc congressional committee that his unit had equipped their helicopters with sirens. “Anyone taking evasive action could be fired on,” he said, by which he understood “someone running or trying to evade a helicopter or any fire.” (233)

All along, in Korea and in Vietnam, the bookkeeping had been double entry: the fewer American bodies the better; the more enemy bodies the better. American bodies had names, and every effort was made to recover the dead and ship them home along with their personal effects. (235)

I'll close, for now, with the three quotations Marilyn uses at the start of the epilogue of *The Vietnam Wars*, which bring together many of her thoughts on war, history and memory:

History is a source of strength for us.

- Pham Huy Thong to an American student
Hanoi, January 1973

... we have always been people who dropped the past and then could not remember where it had been put.

- Gloria Emerson, *Winners and Losers* (1976)

Many of us have some of the war still inside us. This creates difficulties in lives.

- Le Luu, Vietnamese veteran and novelist