ENGL. 593 REPRESENTATIONS OF VIETNAM IN LITERATURE AND FILM.

R 6:30-10
Instructor: Tony Williams

Despite 40 years since the victorious forces of the North Vietnamese Army liberated Saigon leading to the ignominious retreat of civilian and military staff from the roof of the American Embassy, the subject of the Vietnam War has formed a constant debate in the realms of history, politics, literature, and film. This seminar will focus on cinematic and literary depictions of the Vietnam War with students giving individual seminars on specific areas leading to debate, and the production of a final paper of choice dealing with any aspect of the Vietnam War.

If studies such as Paul Fussell's THE GREAT WAR AND MODERN MEMORY have shown the intersection of literature with depictions of the actual conflict, cinema has largely taken the place of literature as books such as MEDITATIONS IN GREEN and DISPATCHES by Michael Herr (a key source on APOCALYPSE NOW) reveal. However rather running blockbusters such as THE DEER HUNTER and APOCALYPSE NOW and revisionist works such as the MISSING IN ACTION series, RAMBO, THE HANOI HILTON, and John Milius's THE FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER (probably the most boring Vietnam War movie ever made, this class will focus upon certain cultural and ideological depictions.

Beginning with THE SANDS OF IWO JIMA (1949), a film that influenced the Vietnam generation of veterans until they discovered the reality of the "John Wayne wet dream", the class will examine examples such as THE GREEN BERETS (1968), Pierre Schoendoerffer's THE 317th PLATOON (1964) ) the two versions of Graham Greene's THE QUIET AMERICAN, Robert Aldrich's allegorical Western ULZANA'S RAID (1971), his masterpiece TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING (1977) before moving on to Vietnamese representations of the conflict which furnish telling rebukes to the dominant "American tragedy" ideology. These comprise THE ABANDONED FIELD dealing with a Viet Cong family under fire from "ugly Americans", WHEN THE TENTH MONTH COMES, KARMA (from the perspective of the losing ARVN side), and NOSTALGIA FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE.

The class will conclude with THREE SEASONS (1999) by returning exile Tony Bui featuring Harvey Keitel which also documents the encroaching modernization of Saigon and the developing lack of historical memory, something also common to America today.