Seen through a Deserter's Eyes: Gendered Land of Vietnam in Robert Olen Butler's *The Alleys of Eden*

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Abstract

During America's War with Vietnam, the Southeast Asian country was conventionally imagined as an extension of the western frontier, where American males were expected to demonstrate their manhood commensurate with their mythic fathers', by engaging in a fierce battle with Indian-like Vietnamese guerrillas. If American authors write stories of GIs who escape the Vietnamese battlefield, can we assume that, in so doing, they in effect attempt to create a sort of counter-myth that challenge America's conventional ideas about masculinity, heroism, and war deriving from the frontier mythology? With this question in mind, in this paper, I will read Robert Olen Butler's first novel *The Alleys of Eden* (1981), which narrates the story of Clifford Wilkes, who deserts the Vietnam War battleground and stays in the streets of Saigon as a fugitive with his Vietnamese lover Lanh. Like the protagonists of several other U.S. Vietnam War narratives, Butler's hero initially comes to the Vietnam, motivated by a kind of anti-modern impulse that romanticizes the GIs' strenuous ways of life in the uncivilized landscapes. Closely looking at Butler's descriptions of the landscapes and people of Vietnam seen through the protagonist's eyes, I contend that Butler's deserter-hero sees the uncivilized Vietnamese terrain as a "time free" frontier untouched by the harmful effects of the corrupt American cities, where he can forget his earlier frustrating experiences at home, and be reborn as an innocent youth. However, the protagonist's actions and its terrible consequences lead him to face the harsh realities of the war that compels him to give up his initial illusions about Vietnam, and make him desert both the Army and the battlefield. Examining the ways in which the protagonist's perception of Vietnam and its people drastically changes throughout his prolonged journey across the Vietnamese landscapes, I conclude that Butler's novel about an American deserter succeeds in formulating a cogent critique of America's ethnocentric discourse that represents Vietnam as an update of the mythic frontier.

Keywords

Twentieth-Century American Literature, The Vietnam War,
Post- Colonialism, The Frontier Myth, Robert Olen Butler

I. Introduction: American Youth and the Romanticized Images of Combat[1]

> I came from San Jose, California. I grew up in the suburbs and went to public school. I lived on the last block of a new development surrounded on three sides by apricot orchards and vineyards. The high school was typically middle class. There were very few blacks. We had warm weather and cars. Most of the kids' dads were engineers at Lockheed or they worked at IBM. Most of my friends were preparing for a college degree. (Baker 7)

In this way, an anonymous Vietnam vet in Mark Baker's Vietnam War oral history book, *Nam*, begins to tell the story of his own early youth in the suburban hometown. He recalls his town and high school as "typically middle class," where most of its members enjoy the affluence of post-World War II American society. The town's largest companies were closely related to the United States' military industry, which was a vehicle for America's economic prosperity during the early Cold War period. The Vietnam vet, then, briefly recalls the ways many of the town's youngsters spent their pastime—going to psychedelic music concerts and smoking marijuana—and tells the reader how he despised the mundane lifestyle that his peers follow. For it seemed to him that they were by no means "pioneers" who endeavored to create new meanings of life, but are merely a "trendy group" who just "wanted to be the first" (7). Despite all of their pseudo-anti-social, rebellious postures, most of his classmates were preparing to go to college so as to make themselves a part of the middleclass society, and he could not stand their hypocrisy and the tedious prospect of life. Therefore, the narrator decided to enlist in the Army and went to Vietnam as an act of non-conformism, his own way to escape from and defy the mediocre American suburban life. The war in Vietnam had already escalated and his classmates were desperately trying to evade or delay the draft by entering college. By enlisting in the Army and going to the uncivilized foreign terrain right after high school graduation, he thought that he could become the genuinely first one, a "pioneer." The Vietnam vet's sentiment is succinctly surmised in his remark: "who wants to do what everybody else does anyway" (7)?

Besides feeling the desire to escape the pedestrian suburban life at home, the interviewee remembers that, in enlisting in the Army, he was particularly attracted by an idea that regarded war and the battlefield as a locus wherein man demonstrates his manhood. He remembers that he "had read all the war fiction," and that although "[i]t never had a particular fascination for [him] … it implanted this idea in [his] mind that war was a place for you to discover things" (7). The male adults of his family didn't go to World War II, and he was disappointed by their unmanly excuses—"Oh, well, I was in college"—and, in looking back, he thinks that this in part led him to enlist, because he believed that "[i]t was a major historical event and that convulsed the world, and yet they missed it. I was perfect age to participate in Vietnam and I didn't want to miss it, good or bad" (7). Although the Vietnam vet does not specify what kinds of "things" he expected to find in the Vietnamese battlefield, his remarks indicate that in defying the safety of home and instead choosing the Army and foreign warzone, he desired to identify himself with the romantic images of warriors in war fictions and American soldiers in the triumphant World War II, in which the United States military played the role of a liberator who rescued the world from the threats of the fascist Axis powers.

Despite the author's attempt to include as diverse stories as possible, reading Baker's *Nam* leads one to pinpoint a certain type of narrative that is commonly found in many of the Vietnam veterans' stories that the book recounts: a type of story that begins with an innocent, young American youth's fascination with romantic images of war, that then narrates traumatic incidents he encounters in the battlefields, and that ends in his ultimate disillusionment with the military. This type of Vietnam story reminds us of several representative Vietnam War memoirs written by ex-soldier authors such as Ron Kovic's *Born on the Forth of July* (1976) and Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* (1977). John Hellmann describes those memoirs as narrating "a common tale in which the youthful protagonist leaves behind the society of his immediate father to connect with the cultural father by entering the frontier in Vietnam. There he suffers the traumatic shock of finding that he has instead entered a crazily inverted landscape of American myth frustrating all of his expectations" (161). Indeed, several Vietnam vets' "initiation" accounts in Baker's *Nam* and the early parts of Caputo's and

Kovic's memoir both describe the ways in which young Americans were driven to the war in Vietnam by a kind of anti-modern impulse closely related to the myth of the frontier. The Vietnam vets tell us that they had been disappointed in the world of their immediate fathers, American suburban townscape, and thus decided to go to the remote battlefield, where they were to fight against the Vietnamese enemy no less bravely than their mythic fathers/heroes in the myriad of American combat romances.

It is worth noting that Kovic as well as a few interviewees in Baker's *Nam* express their admiration for heroic American soldiers in World War II, and, when enlisting to fight in Vietnam, saw them as their role models. Richard Slotkin argues that in America's popular imagination World War II has intimately been associated with the Indian War of the Western Frontier. Both during and after World War II, major American media interpreted the war against Japan in the southern Pacific theatre as another "savage" Indian War, in which the U.S. military played the role of courageous Western rangers and Japanese the role of savage Indians (318–343). John Wayne—the iconic cinematic hero whose heroic images innumerable American boys of Vietnam generation witnessed—played both the roles of frontier gunmen in the Western and heroic officers in WW II combat films. The actor has assumed the images of goodness, heroism and ideal manhood that American soldiers supposedly demonstrated in both wars. Therefore, it is fair to say that in those American boys' imagination the land of Vietnam was figured as an extension of the Indian battlefield, a popularized version of the Turnerian frontier, where they themselves would achieve great military feats like the mythic American warriors.

The battlefield of Vietnam for Americans of the Vietnam generation was not merely a physical ground on which they were expected to fight against foes, but also a symbolic space closely associated with conventional images of courage, heroism and manhood of the frontier mythology. In other words, the romantic ideas about combat and the frontier in the early ’60s served to create an American imaginative geography to conceive Vietnam an extension of the mythic Indian War battlefield. Historian Christian G Appy suggests that economic as well as racial inequity were far more decisive factors than the romantic views of the battlefield to compel American youth to fight in Vietnam (44–85). However, as Apply himself admits, the impact that society’s dominant ideas about the counterinsurgency in Vietnam had upon young Americans of Vietnam era is “hard to exaggerate” (60). These certainly helped to mask the questionable nature of U.S. intervention in Indochina and propelled Americans toward the battlefield, by placing the conflict in Vietnam in the context of the myth of America’s good wars.

If American authors write the stories of GIs who escape from the warzone, can we assume that, in so doing, they in effect attempt to create a new type of (anti-) American hero who challenges conventional images of heroism and masculinity stemming from the myth of the Frontier and America’s just wars? These GIs escape from the Vietnamese warzone, putting their reputation as American men at risk as well as facing the possibility of legal prosecution. For, besides being a physical battleground, the Vietnamese terrain that they try to desert is also a symbolic space where the GIs are supposed to demonstrate their legitimate bond with America’s mythic fathers by engaging in violent battles against their “evil” enemy. This question brings us to Robert Olen Butler’s first novel *The Alleys of Eden* (1981), wherein the protagonist escapes from the war and seeks a refuge in Saigon's streets. In this paper, with the supposition that stories of an American soldier who deserts the war challenge America's conventional ideas about masculinity and their association with the myth of the frontier, I will read Butler's *The Alleys of Eden* to illuminate the ways in which the author attempts to undermine the convention of regarding Vietnam as an update of the Frontier battlefield.

II. Robert Olen Butler's Anti-hero: An Escape from the Vietnamese Battleground

Butler's *The Alleys of Eden* tells the story of Clifford Wilkes, who deserts the war and hides in a street corner of Saigon with his Vietnamese lover, Lanh. Butler's first novel merits a close examination, since, firstly, it attempts to narrate a story of an American male protagonist whose escape from the Vietnamese warzone in many ways contradicts the vision of Vietnam as an update of Indian War and the legacy of American imperialism closely associated with the frontier mythology. Secondly, as Kathleen M. Puhr asserts, *The Allays of Eden* is notable among American war novels in that it is one of the first American Vietnam War fictions that attempted to give a Vietnamese character a central role and to create "the most fully developed portrayal of a Vietnamese woman" in this genre of novels and stories (172). Throughout his literary career, Robert Olen Butler has consistently returned to the memory of the war and the landscape of Vietnam to describe the challenges arising from the conflict that confront Americans and Vietnamese alike. While most American writers before and after him have conferred only a marginal role upon the Vietnamese people, almost making them mere backdrop of the stories of GIs' suffering, Butler, a Vietnam-vet writer whose ability in Vietnamese language led him to serve as a translator during his service in the war, tries to bring Vietnamese characters to the foreground of the story by imagining their own voice(s) and invites the reader to understand the transnational realities of the war. Just as Lanh, the heroine of the first novel, struggles to adjust to life in the United States after she relocates there with the protagonist, so do twelve Vietnamese immigrants in *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992)—a collection of short stories, which received Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1993—narrating, in their own voices, the stories of their complex identities torn between two different cultures. Although *The Alleys of Eden* is not widely read today, it calls for more careful attention, as a close examination of the Vietnamese heroin's role in the novel will lead us to fully understand the development of Vietnamese characters in Butler's later significant works as well as those in the entire corpus of American Vietnam War fictions.

The critical reception of Butler's Vietnam fictions by the few critics who have examined Butler's works extensively is mixed, and the scholars' views often conflict with one another. The debate between Renny Christopher and Maureen Ryan offers us an interesting case in point. Christopher attempts to question the canon formation of American Vietnam War literature by criticizing the marginalization of the Vietnamese in Euro-American writers' accounts and by closely reading the works of Vietnamese-immigrant writers that have often been neglected by American commercial and scholarly readership. Having examined the long history of the stereotypical representation and the underrepresentation of Asians people in Euro-American writers' works, Christopher recognizes Butler as one of the few White American Vietnam War writers who have tried to transcend the paradigms of American cultural mythology by representing bicultural experiences of the war observed by both Americans and the Vietnamese (Christopher 267–296). On the other hand, Maureen Ryan criticizes Butler for his uncritical embrace of the tradition of America's masculine heroism. Ryan argues that although Clifford Wilkes and other leading male characters in Butler's Vietnam novels are ostensibly different from the warrior-heroes of combat romances, these "strong, stoic" characters are nonetheless the "descendants of the Deerslayer, John Wayne, and John Rambo" in their own complex ways; they are in fact the "modern variations of 'American Adam'" (Ryan 279). Therefore, according to Ryan, Butler's Vietnam novels, after all, too comfortably fit into the mold of conventional American war narratives that have reproduced romantic images of white masculine heroes in America's good wars as well as biased images of the Third World and its peoples.

I agree with Ryan about her insightful suggestion that, in creating the character of Clifford Wilkes, Butler, to a certain extent, follows the traditional framework of the American Adam. However, Ryan confuses the perspectives of the fictional characters with Butler, the living author. Hence, she somewhat hastily concludes, "I suspect that Butler admires his protagonists, and expects us to do so as well, for their strong individualism and their metaphysical journeys … He wants us to acknowledge them as leaner, meaner, purer than men who haven't had a Vietnam experience …" (Ryan 293). I would rather contend that, as Christopher explains about the character of Lanh, the two protagonists of the novel—Clifford and Lanh—are complicated characters "who both resis[t] and pla[y] with the stereotypes" (Christopher 268). Moreover, Butler attempts to describe the devastating effects that the Vietnam War inflicted upon individuals—both Americans and the Vietnamese—through the very process in which the protagonists try to break the fetters of stereotypes, even though they eventually fail to do so.

My point here is that, to fully understand Butler's attempts to overturn conventional American notions of war and heroism as well as the stereotypical representations of Vietnamese characters, we should particularly pay close attention to the Vietnamese and American landscapes perceived by the protagonist. Throughout *The Alleys of Eden*, Butler traces Clifford's peregrination across the vast landscapes of Vietnam and North America. No less important than the journey between the two separate spaces in the protagonist's odyssey is his spiritual voyages across two different cultures. In charting Wilkes's physical migration between Vietnam and the United States, Butler follows the protagonist's changing attitudes towards the cultures of his own homeland and the foreign country. Initially appearing as a typical American hero who is discontented with the tedium of life in American cities, Clifford identifies himself with the images of conventional American heroism and manhood embodied by the Army. In the protagonist's eyes, therefore, the land of Vietnam firstly appears to be an uncivilized, frontier-like foreign battlefield that attracts him with its lures of violent adventures. However, one critical event in which Clifford takes part in, killing of a Vietcong suspect, drastically changes the course of his life, and immediately afterwards the protagonist decides to desert the Army and at the same time rejects the American masculine ideals he theretofore identified himself with. It is particularly important to note that in keeping with Clifford's conversion, the land of Vietnam transforms its contours, and presents another aspect that contradicts the conventional representation of Vietnam as an extension of mythic Indian War battleground. For, by deserting the warzone and the Army, Clifford also rejects America's cultural framework to define Vietnam as an extension of the uncivilized western frontier. Hiding in a street corner of Saigon with his Vietnamese lover, the protagonist now looks at an aspect of the Vietnamese land that has rarely been described in American accounts of the war: Vietnam as a homeland for its own people; a space filled with the lively activities of the Vietnamese citizens; an ancestral land on which the long history and the culture of the indigenous people have deeply been inscribed.

Pitched against American cityscapes, however, the description of Vietnamese villages and Saigon's streets also helps to shed light upon Clifford's complex relationship with the colonial mentality that underlies America's national creation myth. Although the hero attempts to overthrow conventional American ideas about war, masculinity, and heroism associated with the myth of the frontier, his perception of Vietnam, its people and culture is still framed by traditional American frontier narratives: instead of the vision of Vietnam as an Indian battlefield where American men are supposed to demonstrate courage and manhood by engaging in violent battle against indigenous people, Clifford now regards Vietnam as an update of the Edenic New World garden. In so doing, the protagonist in effect identifies his Vietnamese lover with the fertile land of Vietnam, and genders the foreign land as an essentially feminine space, as early European settlers did to the resourceful natural world of the New Continent. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily diminish the importance of Butler's work because, contrary to Ryan's criticism, the author is well aware of the hero's problematic relationship with America's cultural legacy, and time and again undermines the protagonist's illusions about Vietnam. One of the novel's most cogent artistic achievements in fact lies in the ways Butler reveals particularly American cultural framework that preconfigures the protagonist's perception of Vietnam, and demonstrates the untenability of defining Vietnam in terms of America's self-serving myth.

In order to examine Clifford's changing perceptions of the Vietnamese landscape, we should firstly pay close attention to the ways in which Butler creates the character of the protagonist. Book One, the first half of *The Alleys of Eden*, takes place in the very night of the Fall of Saigon in April 1975, as, in the bedroom of Lanh's apartment in Saigon, Clifford Wilkes remembers the significant events of his life that eventually brought him to a street corner of the South Vietnamese capital, wondering whether or not, and how he should escape to the United States with his Vietnamese lover. Butler narrates the protagonist's experiences in the United States and Vietnam until the Fall of Saigon, by describing the flash-backs of earlier events that come back to Clifford's mind. In the beginning, Clifford appears as a stereotypical American hero who is attracted to the expectations of violent adventures in a foreign terrain. Like the anonymous interviewee in Baker's *Nam* as well as the narrator-protagonist of Caputo's and Kovic's memoirs, Clifford in his youth is disappointed in the dreary prospects of life in American cities. He has been neglected by his parents, and his marriage with Francine, his college sweetheart, quickly sours. Thus, in the United States the protagonist cannot build any intimate relationship with others and eventually he enlists in the Army to seek a way out from the painful boredom of American suburban life.

It should be noted that in the protagonist's early experience in Vietnam, the land of Vietnam appears to be yet another version of America's stereotypical representations of Vietnam in that he conceives it to be a foreign extension of Indian War battleground. Butler intentionally plays with the conventional imagery of Vietnam so that he can describe the protagonist's initial fascination with the Army and subvert it later, when the harsh realities of violence disrupt Clifford's vision. Immediately after arriving in Vietnam, Clifford is enthused with the sense of rejuvenation that he feels in the uncivilized foreign environment:

> He was afraid, but at the same time he felt a simple, undeniable freedom. The bright sun, the dark-earthed ditches with dirt clods at hand, a stand of trees. The smell of earth and heat, the feel of the road were the same smell and feel of the days of summer vacation from grade school. The dirt clods to stockpile, the ditch to hide in the trees to assault as a boy. (Butler 5)

In the beginning of his service, Clifford conceives Vietnam, the foreign battleground, to be a sort of athletic playground, where frustrated American youth can display great vigor and be rejuvenated by engaging in what seems like a sequel of their childhood mock war games. Clifford's vision of Vietnam as an update of frontier battlefield is further intensified by the close bond with his fellow soldiers, a kind of which he has never been able to establish at home. A small episode that takes place in the Army highlights the intimate comradeship that Clifford finds in in the Vietnamese battlefield.

When one of his comrades, Wilson, breaks his arms as the result of his childish prank, the fellow soldiers of the intelligence unit where Clifford serves gather around the injured GI and look after him attentively. Upon seeing Captain Fleming, the unit's chief, rebuke Wilson for his recklessness and examine the injury in a "gentle" and "concerned" way, Clifford feels "the link to Fleming, to Wilson" (33).

Clifford is so deeply touched by the captain's earnest, fraternal care for his subordinate that he wonders if the true reason of the war is none of the grand theories and causes proclaimed by the authorities—the battle against communists, expanding American influence overseas, the South Vietnamese territorial integrity and so forth—but only to obtain a "moment like this" (33). Although Wilson's accident happens in a non-combat zone, Clifford supposes that "in battle these moments [may be] enhanced," for the very risk of death would bring all the men even closer. Whereupon he sees a vision of perfectly harmonious human relationship in which a dying soldier lies in a firm embrace of his comrades:

> If Wilson lay there dying from a rifle round or a shard of shrapnel, wouldn't this death be transformed into a moment of intense connectedness around him? And even for Wilson himself. In the final moments he would feel the grip of another human being on his hand, his shoulder, his head would be cradled by another human being and he'd be the center of that momentary, perfect universe beyond petty concerns, beyond trivial needs, a universe held together in empty space by the force of human connection. (33)

To the protagonist, the Vietnamese battleground initially appears to be a space filled with violence and dander. As the mythic frontier battleground of the New World once did, the Vietnamese terrain places Americans in the midst of life-threatening crises. However, the very fact of the proximity to death allows Clifford to lead a genuinely intense life that surpasses the "petty concerns" and "trivial needs" of mediocre, effeminate Americans, and that allows him to realize a "perfect universe" of intimate comradeship with his fellow GIs. Note that the excessively homo-social, even homo-erotic vision of the dying soldier "cradled" in his comrades' arms, in the protagonist's mind, assumes almost the religious sublimity of Pieta. By identifying the injured soldier surrounded by his fellow GIs with the vision of dying Christ embraced by the Virgin Mary, Clifford re-enacts the conventional theme of innocent America Adam. That is, Clifford conceives his fellow American soldiers to be selfless, courageous warriors who, risking their lives, strive to fight the enemy and help their comrades; thus, they are innocent individuals immune from the corruption and avarice of American urban life. Like the GIs in John Wayne's combat films, they are imagined to be self-sacrificing individuals fighting in America's just war.

American writers in the nineteenth century regarded the mythic frontier as a "time free" space unspoiled by the history and the social diseases of the Old World. In the same way, Clifford sees the uncivilized Vietnamese terrain as a "time free" space untouched by the aging American civilization, where he can forget his earlier experiences in the United States and be reborn as an innocent youth (Lewis 90). Indeed, the things he has left behind in America—his divorce, his broken family, some failed friendships, and the fatal illness that afflicted his late father—represent aging and decay that he detests. By contrast, the Vietnamese land and the intimate relationship with his fellow soldiers remind Clifford of infancy, innocence, and redemption. In the beginning of his service, Clifford supposes that he can abandon all the ominous signs of senility and become rejuvenated by entering into the land of Vietnam, a contemporary reincarnation of the mythic frontier battleground.

Nevertheless, Butler soon introduces a scene in which harsh realities of the war disrupt Clifford's vision, suggesting the impossibility of defining Vietnam in terms of America's own cultural framework. One day, in an attempt to rescue a comrade held captive by the local NLF [National Liberation Front] forces, Captain Fleming and his team interrogate a Vietnamese man on suspicion of his implication in the kidnapping. The interrogation in which Clifford also participates, however, turns into a torture, and the Americans end up killing the man. This event completely inverts the images of innocence and goodness that Clifford has identified with American soldiers in Vietnam.

After the incident, Clifford is seriously disillusioned with the military and decides to desert the battlefield and seek shelter in Saigon's streets. Butler attempts to challenge the conventional concepts of war and masculinity frequently reproduced in America's frontier mythology and combat romances, by describing the protagonist who—with the realization that "what [he] wanted so much, what he knew was good, had been perverted that afternoon [i.e. the day when the U.S. soldiers committed the torture]"—rejects the hypocrisy of the authorities' exposition of the war and deserts the battlefield (37). In escaping from the warzone, clifford defies the conventional ideas of manhood and heroism closely associated with the myth of the frontier and America’s good wars.

III. Edenic Garden of Vietnam versus Alien American Cities

Denying American masculine and military ideals, Clifford begins to identify himself with the lifestyles and virtues of the Vietnamese people. After abandoning the U.S. military camp and finding a hideout in Saigon, Clifford’s body becomes thinner as if he transforms from an American soldier to a Vietnamese man. When Lanh meets Clifford for the first time, she therefore asks him: “Why are you so skinny? … You’re skinny like a Vietnamese” (9). Clifford describes his own transformation into Vietnamese-like self as “Vietnamization,” an ironic appropriation of the term, which originally means the United States’ policy to withdraw its troops and transfer the responsibility of the war to the South Vietnamese government, carried out during Richard Nixon’s presidency (10). Henceforth, until the very last moment of the Fall of Saigon, Clifford seriously devotes himself to adjust to the Vietnamese ways of living. With the help of Lanh, his efforts at “Vietnamization” prove to be largely successful. Even in the midst of the night’s turmoil, Clifford still feels strong attachment to the city and its people: “He want[s] to stay in Saigon.… Saigon [i]s his home now. He f[eels] it strongly. He love[s] the city. For its energy. For its life, moment to moment” (70–71). Having deserted the Army and living in Saigon’s street, Clifford seems to desire to become a “genuine” Vietnamese.

More significantly, the protagonist’s perception of the Vietnamese landscape greatly alters in keeping with his efforts to accommodate to the Vietnamese ways of life. In other words, by forsaking the peculiarly American mythical perspective and wishing to adjust to the local people’s lifestyles, Clifford gets to see Vietnam from the Vietnamese people's viewpoints. Firstly, in contrast to the tradition of American colonial mentality that have, more often than not, neglected the indigenous people's history of any given Asian countries, the protagonist appreciates the ways in which the Vietnamese people's history and culture have continued and been recorded in the landscapes of their homeland.2) When Clifford tries to explains to himself the reason of his strong attachment to Vietnam and its people, he recalls a lovely, bucolic scenery of villages once he saw:

> I passed tiny villages deep under groves of banana and rubber trees, water buffalo lolling in yards like housecats. And ancient tombs, miniature towers and walls of pitted dark stone in the fields, Farmers buried where they toiled—no, I distort in my American way—not toiled. Buried where they lived and worked the earth, now to become part of their field. (14)

Besides the elements of the beautiful Vietnamese natural world, Clifford takes notice of the record of human history—"ancient tombs"—retained in the field. In contrast to the types of conventional American cultural imagination that tends to erase the history of the indigenous Vietnamese, Clifford acknowledges the villagers' history that can be traced back to ancient times and loves Vietnam for that very reason. In American cities, whose images will be shown shortly, Clifford is disappointed by desolate cityscapes that do not evoke any intimate historical connection with its inhabitants, whereas in Vietnam he sympathizes with the ways in which the land and its people are inseparably connected.

Secondly, Butler's depiction of Vietnam considerably differs from conventional American representation of Asia and Vietnam in that it describes the city of Saigon extensively, and portrays it as a harmonious society consisting of diverse individuals. As in the cases of many canonical American Vietnam War narratives such as Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters* (1977), John M. Del Vecchio's *The 13th Valley* (1982), and so forth that account the experiences of the war from the GI's viewpoint, American novels and memoirs have mostly taken place in jungle battlefield and seldom depicted cities where non-combatant Vietnamese people lead their daily life. Whilst those American "grunt's-eye-view" narratives are regarded by critics as an effective vehicle for conveying experiential realities of infantrymen in the fields, they have in effect served to downplay larger political context of the war and also helped to simplify the country of Vietnam to a primitive, backward society inhabited by uncivilized, treacherous villagers (Neilson 6).

Butler, by making his protagonist transcend the boundary of battlefield and relocate in Saigon, captures images of the Vietnamese city inhabited by living Vietnamese citizens, which are different from Euro-American negative portrayals of filthy Asian villages. During the night of the Fall of Saigon, Clifford recollects a vivid impression of Saigon's streets when he visited the city for the first time:

> The stores and ground floors of houses near and open full on the street like large-mouthed shallow caves. And the people's lives open too and there on the street, crouching with friends, laughing and eating at sidewalk food stands, and carving wood or tinkering with motorcycle

> engines or selling cloth, all outside, out under the hot sky and always returning my smile or word. (14)

The local people seem to maintain perfect harmony between people and the land. Unlike American metropolises where Clifford finds people isolated from each other, the citizens of Saigon seem to engage in lively, “intense” interactions with others. The streets are filled with people of all ages with miscellaneous occupations, and are also replete with various goods that they produce and sell. The inundation of the people and things on Saigon’s streets almost comes across as lacking a sense of unity and is even chaotic to a stranger’s eye. Nonetheless, Clifford finds here a beautiful concord between people, and between mankind and the place. The stores and front doors of houses facing the streets are “open” like “large-mouthed shallow caves” and thus appear to be a part of natural geography (14). In Butler’s Saigon, notwithstanding the streets that literally abound with retailers, their goods, customers, and passers-by, the people’s way of life seems “open,” and they return Clifford’s greetings and smiles and seem to beckon him to take part in their daily interactions (14). In the protagonist’s eyes, Saigon appears to be a middle ground ideally placed between civilization and wilderness. It therefore retains a perfect balance between the lively human interaction of the city and intimate human relationship that he finds in native villages. To Clifford, Vietnamese people seem to lead a “life simply and with joy,” and the ex-American soldier desires to be a part of the universe (15).

Clifford’s positive perception of the land, culture, and people of Vietnam makes a striking contrast with desolate American cityscapes that he sees in American parts of the novel. By contrast to the bucolic, friendly land/cityscapes of Vietnam, the cities of the United States, despite being the protagonist's homeland, appears to be utterly alien. While both the agricultural villages and the capital of South Vietnam, in Clifford's eyes, retain a perfect unity between its people, land, and history, American cityscapes seen by the protagonist lack the sense of harmony, all its components appearing to be disjointed and separated from each other. Clifford temporarily returns to the United States for R&R [Rest and Recreation] after 5 months of his service. The protagonist goes to the city of Carmel-by-the-Sea in California to meet Francine, only to confirm the dissolution of their marriage. In this episode of the protagonist's brief return to the United States, Clifford feels alienated from the people and cityscape of his homeland, and regards them as being devoid of nature and humanity:

> The city had seemed all concrete, hard and clean. Alien, after five months in Vietnam. The streets were deserted, to his eye. Even at midday, there was so much space unused by people. Then down the Pacific Coast highway. The trees look sculptured, the hills modeled, the highway was hard and sharp-edged and no one was in the fields, no one was buried there or moved there. It all seemed alien. This was the foreign city to his eye now. (20)

The impressions that the protagonist receives from the landscapes of Vietnam and the United States are strikingly different. Although Carmel-by-the-Sea is conventionally noted for the natural beauty of its coast and surrounding forests, to Clifford, it seems to lack all the scenic beauties of nature that he finds in Vietnamese villages, and thus appears to be "all concrete, hard and clean." In both Vietnamese cities and villages everyone exchanges friendly greetings. In Carmel, however, there is no one talking to Clifford, and the streets seem "deserted, to his eye" (20). In Saigon, the people's houses and stores are so accommodated to the landscape that they almost look like components of natural geography, whereas in Carmel even the elements of nature come across as artificial and false: "The trees loo[k] sculptured, the hill modeled …" (20). In America, the protagonist can by no means find the perfect harmony between people and nature that the Vietnamese villagers have maintained on their native soil. In Vietnam, villagers live and work on the earth and, when they die, are buried in their ancestral ground and eventually become unified with nature, whereas in Carmel "no one [is] in the fields, no one was buried there or moved there" (20). Therefore, Clifford thinks that the United States lacks all the charms Vietnam possesses and thus Carmel "seem[s] alien" and America "[is] the foreign country to his eye now" (20). By comparing the landscapes of Vietnam and his homeland, Butler delineates the deserter-protagonist's rejection of the excessively modernized American society and his empathy for the simpler, anti-modern Vietnamese ways of life.

IV. Contemporary American Pastoral: Gendered Land of Vietnam

In *The Alleys of Eden*, Butler attempts to make his protagonist reject conventional American ideas about masculinity and military heroism as well as the concept of America's good wars, by having him desert the frontier-like battleground and empathize with the Vietnamese people. Butler's critique of the myth of the frontier and America's partial representations of Vietnam is, however, more complex. As already discussed, Clifford's observation of Vietnamese villages and Saigon's cityscape is sympathetic and contradicts the vision of Vietnam as an extension of the Indian War battlefield. Nevertheless, the protagonist's relationship with America's national creation myth is twofold, and he still sees Vietnam in terms of the frontier. On one hand, Clifford attempts to reject conventional American ideas about manhood and heroism related to the images of Indian War frontier by running away from the Vietnamese warzone. On the other, however, the protagonist still interprets Vietnam within the larger framework of the frontier mythology: his euphoric view of Vietnam and his fascination with the Vietnamese people's ways of life are in fact a manifestation of his desire to see Vietnam as a pre-modern, Edenic garden, an update of American pastoral. In other words, instead of defining Vietnam as an extension of the frontier battleground, Clifford envisions the uncivilized, bucolic landscape of Vietnam as an oriental version of American agricultural frontier. Clifford acknowledges and appreciates the history of Vietnamese peasants in the fields, because the anti-modern Vietnamese ways of life place him in the "time free" space, a reincarnation of the uncivilized American frontier garden that erases his past failures. In so doing, like preceding authors of American pastoral, the protagonist genders Vietnam as an essentially feminine land and people that welcome or need American males' exploitation and support.

Like the earlier American writers such as Brown, Cooper and others, whose works R.W.B. Lewis examines in *The American Adam* (1955), Clifford perceives life in urban cities in the United States as corrupt, with people estranged from one another. Note that both of the American cities that Clifford explores—Carmel and San Francisco—are located in the westernmost part of the continent, evoking the historical moment of the official closure of the frontier about a century ago. As the terminal points of the westward migration, the cities also represent a terminus of America's modernization. In America, the once fertile land of the New World has completely been exploited and replaced with ugly, artificial, concrete buildings and asphalt roadways. There is nothing that reminds the protagonist of the experiences of mythic pioneers.

On the other hand, Vietnam—like the uncivilized frontier settings in preceding American writers' romances—is described as an ideally anti-modern landscape where the protagonist can escape from the corruption and pollution of cities as well as the memory of his past disillusionment, his broken marriage and friendships. Placed in the uncivilized Vietnamese landscape unsullied by the machines of corrupt Euro-American cities, Clifford can be reincarnated as an innocent hero who has no history. Note that, as examined earlier, Clifford feels as if going back to infancy in the early days of his service in Vietnam. Young Natty Bumppo, alias Deerslayer, is figuratively reborn afresh in the woods when he fights and kills an Iroquois warrior and is given a new name, Hawkeye, by the dying Indian (Lewis 104). Clifford and his comrades likewise rejuvenate in their battle against the Vietnamese foe in the untamed tropical landscape.

However, the seeming innocence of the protagonist and his fellow GIs is soon spoiled by their involvement in the torture of a Vietnamese. Disillusioned with the Army, Clifford deserts the battlefield and takes refuge in Saigon, and yet the idea of American hero as an innocent individual still haunts Clifford after the desertion. In lieu of the Army, the deserter discovers the pre-modern, bucolic Vietnamese society, and appreciates it as an Edenic garden where men can once again get back to their figuratively infantile, innocent state and realize intimate, filial relationship with fellow inhabitants. In this, Clifford conceives the Vietnamese villages to be an update of mythic agricultural frontier, and regards the city of Saigon as what Leo Marx calls "middle landscape," the ideal setting of American pastoral located "in a middle ground somewhere 'between,' yet in a transcendent relation to the opposing forces of civilization and nature" (Marx 23). That is, in the hero's eyes Saigon appears to be an ideal habitat that maintains a perfect balance between the energy and virtues of primitive agrarian society and the convenience of modern civilization, wherein he can sympathize with innocent, noble savages while still retaining his distinctly American character. The title of the novel that signifies Saigon's streets where the protagonist and the heroin live—*The Alleys of Eden*—is also suggestive of the deserter-protagonist's desire to regard Vietnam as an Adamic frontier landscape. When Clifford identifies himself with the Vietnamese people and their way of living, he in effect sympathizes with the image of innocence that the garden-like, pre-modern agricultural Vietnamese society evokes, and that lets him forget, if not absolve him of, the sin of the torture.

To some extent, this reflects the reality of the war, wherein young Americans' lives were unjustifiably expended by the authorities' flawed decisions. Throughout recorded history young people have always fought in wars. However, U.S. troops in Vietnam were the youngest soldiers to fight in a war that America had ever engaged in. While in the Second World War the average American soldiers were twenty-six years old, during the Vietnam War, the majority if volunteers and draftees were teenagers, and their average age was nineteen. Since the voting age was not dropped from twenty-one to eighteen until 1971, a great portion of Americans sent to fight in Vietnam did not even have the right to vote (Appy 27). In other words, many American boys in the 1960's were ordered by the authorities to fight in the foreign battlefield, only to die or be seriously wounded, with no means to have a say in the nation's political decision making.

The victimhood of American soldiers is also closely related to the dilemma that the Vietnam-vet writers such as Butler and Kovic encounter when they recount their war experiences. That is, while the representation of the GIs as innocent boys deceived by the state certainly helps to formulate a convincing critique of the fallacies on the part of American military and political authorities, too much emphasis on it can serve as a justification for the acts of violence that the U.S. military forces perpetrated in Vietnam, making the Vietnamese people's loss and suffering invisible.

It should be pointed out that Clifford's sympathy for Vietnam can be placed within the context of American literary tradition of pastoral writings that genders the frontier landscape as feminine. Furthermore, Clifford's wish to identify Vietnam with the figure of woman, specifically his Vietnamese lover Lanh, is related to his desire to justify himself as an innocent American man whose youth was wasted in the war. Annette Kolodny argues that the earliest European immigrant authors figured the untamed environment of the new continent as an essentially feminine land that allows the settlers to exploit her bountiful natural resources. Embraced in the bosom of generous Mother Nature, the settlers were thought to rejuvenate as innocent, primitive "yeomen" who shed off the ennui of the decadent Old World civilization, and who were destined to establish an Edenic garden/society in the New World. Since then, the vision of the American natural landscape as essentially feminine has become a central metaphor for generations of American writers and thinkers either in urging further exploitation of the land or in expressing their concerns for the natural environment. In short, the advocates of land development have regarded the land as a female seducer that invites her lover to make use of her abundant natural resources, whereas naturalists and nature conservationists have often evoked a vision of the uncivilized land as a virgin who faces the danger of losing her purity on account of some rapacious developers' attempts to violate her. In either cases and in numerous other occasions, the metaphor of the land as female has been deployed by diverse groups of writers to express their interest; and since the aesthetics of gendered landscape are closely associated with the history and the myth of the frontier, it has remained a compelling trope that strikes a chord in Americans' heart (Kolodny pp.3–9).

Likewise, Clifford also figures the Vietnamese land as an essentially feminine landscape that embraces him as an innocent hero who has no past. Lanh, the protagonist's Vietnamese lover, serves as a medium that connects the American deserter to the people and the land of Vietnam. When Clifford meets Lanh for the first time, he confesses his involvement in the torture of the Vietcong suspect, but Lanh accepts him and helps him to relieve, if temporarily, his sense of guilt. By living with Lanh, Clifford manages to think that he is being accepted in the Vietnamese community in Saigon, and continues living there until the very night of the Fall of Saigon. Even though Clifford is highly skilled in the command of Vietnamese language, it is through Lanh's unconditional love for him that the American deserter can believe his integration into the local people's lives. The following scene is particularly important to note in considering Clifford's relationship with Vietnam and its people. For in this scene of the protagonist's and the heroine's sexual intercourse, Clifford clearly identifies his Vietnamese lover with the fertile land of Vietnam that he inhabits:

> They [Clifford and Lanh] said nothing that afternoon but pressed their faces deep into each other's crotch their mouth swarming at each other for a long time longer than ever before devouring each other till they could not breathe … then they joined each other and lay still, clamped tight face to face, chest to chest, gut to gut, and Lanh came again and again until at last she began to weep softly against his neck and he came, but held back his own tears.—Why are you crying? he whispered./ —I love you, she said./ *I could live in you, he said, his penis still inside her./— Stay. Yes, she said.* (60, emphasis added)

Prior to this scene, Clifford is in extreme emotional distress, because he has found the news of the United States' decision to completely withdraw its military forces from Vietnam. Although since the desertion he has rejected "the life and values" of the United States and been determined to live in the streets of Saigon as a non-combatant citizen, the news profoundly disturbs Clifford, because it compels him to face the reality of life as an exile in a foreign land (59). For all his fascination with and admiration for the Vietnamese ways of living, Clifford's unstable status as an American refuge does not allow him to become an integral part of the local community. Hence, when confronted by the possibility that he may never be able to return home, and that the state of exile in the foreign land may become his permanent reality, Clifford is dismayed, feeling as if "the original meaning of all this [deserting the Army and living in Saigon as a sympathizer of the Vietnamese] ha[s] gradually worn off" (59). Nevertheless, after engaging in the prolonged and passionate acts of lovemaking with his Vietnamese lover, Clifford finds that her soothing embrace restores his "Love for Saigon" (60). In this brief episode, Butler in fact describes Clifford's and Lanh's relationship in such a way that the Vietnamese female body serves as a shelter or cocoon that protects the American deserter from the menaces of the war in the foreign terrain. The Vietnamese lover, thus identified with the mythic imagery of the New World garden where men can cast away the past and be reborn as innocent individuals, helps the protagonist to leave behind all the past experiences related to America, including the war crime he committed with his comrades. In other words, by associating Lanh with the land of Vietnam, Clifford's desires to regard himself as an innocent man whose sin is absolved by her unconditional love.

V. Conclusion: American Pastoral Undone

Butler, like many other American writers of the Vietnam War, resorts to the framework of traditional US frontier narratives in describing the land and people of Vietnam. However, Butler's greatest artistic strength lies in the ways he undoes these conventional visions and brings the reader to more multifaceted realities of Vietnam. In these revelatory scenes where Butler undermines Clifford's vision of Vietnam as an oriental pastoral, the author also subverts the myth of innocent American Adam that his protagonist seems to believe in. The two significant moments in the novel will demonstrate Butler's attempts to resist America's ethnocentric concepts of Vietnam as well as its myth of exceptionalism.

The first of the two takes place in the last days of Clifford's exile in Saigon when he begins to notice the dissonance in the harmony of Vietnamese lives. Saigon's cityscape, in which he lives, is no longer a simple, utopia-like pastoral, but it then starts to show the cracks and scars brought about by the Vietnamese people's prolonged battles against successive foreign imperial forces. Clifford walks through an arcade in the center of the city, brooding over the prospect of the imminent North Vietnamese Army's incursion. It is Sunday morning, and Saigon at the first sight looks as idyllic as it always did. It is just after daybreak and the city is waiting for the day's activities to start once again. Clifford sees a young couple walking along the arcade "in the shade and in their love" (71). Whereupon he hears a faint melody of some traditional Vietnamese music from a little afar "whining and thumping like an Ozark hoedown"(71). Associating the Vietnamese folk music with America's country and western, Clifford apparently associates Vietnam with American frontier setting. As usual, the people on the market are engaging in their own businesses, and yet retain a perfect harmony among themselves for all the diversity of their activities. The first half of this scene, which begins with the faint "whining and thumping," is depicted as though every person on the arcade is playing his or her own instrument to render one larger piece of music.

> And peddler sounds. Scissors snapping from the woman with a pan of nougats, an old man clacking bamboo sticks before his spread of fruit, a woman carrying baskets of steaming rice at the opposite ends of a long

> pole balanced on her shoulder and twirling a little drum chattering from a pair of balls dancing against it on strings. (71)

In the background the melody of the traditional music continues, and the repetition of the percussive onomatopoeias—"snapping, clacking, and chattering"—makes the protagonist feel as though the people were playing different kinds of drums with their own tools. Altogether, they seem to be rendering an enchanting, polyrhythmic piece of music. Hence, Clifford is "entranced" (71). Clifford's euphoria, however, is disrupted, when he stumbles upon a leper. The man's face is terribly deformed by the disease and he is "not in the arcade" (71). Although Clifford tries to "keep his mind on the arcade" (71), after the encounter, he cannot help noticing the people and the things that are "not in the arcade." That is, till then the protagonist has censored threatening elements of the city from his vision, by domesticating Vietnam as an extension of American pastoral landscape. However, the unexpected intrusion of the leper now undermines Clifford's illusion and forces him to recognize the dissonance in the music, the realities of Vietnam and the war that contradict the American's wishful vision. Clifford sees "a tiny boy cra[b] by, his stunted legs twisted beneath him, begging with an upward Army bush cap" (71). He can smell human flesh burning just a block away (71). Only a moment ago Clifford was in a state of euphoria, engrossed by the rhythm and the harmony of the exotic music. However, he now finds himself in utter despair, shaken by the scenes of war destruction which he himself once took part in. Those scars he finds in the city are, after all, the consequence of the chronic poverty, confusion, and violence brought about by the long history of domination by foreign imperial forces. The United States is the latest of those intruders, who has now divided the country into the two feuding states. Moreover, Clifford realizes that, despite his wish to be reborn as an innocent individual, he is after all a part of the foreign imperial power that is to blame. Thus, Clifford speaks to himself: “We [are] the predators. We who came from outside” (72).

The second example located in the very last part of the novel re-enacts the earlier scene in which Clifford identifies Lanh with the land of Vietnam. However, by contrast to the preceding scene, this episode completely undermines the protagonist’s attempt to domesticate and feminize Vietnam. After relocating in the United States, Clifford and Lanh settle in a suburban small town in Illinois. Nevertheless, the protagonist finds his love for Lanh and Vietnam becoming increasingly weaker. Interestingly, the protagonist’s detachment from his lover and Vietnam is represented by his impotence. Having realized his own inability to love Lanh as well as his alienation from Vietnam, Clifford leaves the heroine for a short while to travel across the States, only to feel a more acute sense of isolation in his home country. He comes back to Lanh’s place one last time in an attempt to restore his relationship with her. Although he is impotent at the beginning, now he senses “a brief smell of earth” outside their apartment that reminds him of the soil of the agricultural Vietnamese landscape, and this makes him see a “vision” of Vietnam that arouses his sexual desire and that reestablishes his spiritual connection to Lanh:

> He had a vision of Vietnam. A flash of sunlight in his first moments of flight, the sun flaring from a pond, a water buffalo beyond, a palm frond, an empty sky, the heat, he felt them all again now, he lay down

> on the bed, held Lanh; and he swelled with the countryside, with the sprawl of the city, Saigon, their race through the alleyways, he wanted to go back, go back to their alley room, that was their place, *Lanh had made him love the very smell of the air, the vey heat that beat down the stone walls. This was why his penis rose now, why he pressed against her with a low cry, his breath twisted tight in his chest. In her body he was Vietnamese....* (247, emphasis added)

The early part of this scene shows that, being in a state of rapture, Clifford clearly identifies Lanh with the fertile land of Vietnam, and for that very reason his attachment to her is now being restored. In the eyes of the protagonist, the Vietnamese heroine is not only an amorous lover, but also a generous, forgiving mother, who provides him with a shelter and nourishment. As discussed earlier, both of her roles are related to the images of the gendered frontier landscape reproduced throughout the history of American literature. With her mother-like, boundless generosity toward the hero, Lanh accepts Clifford and condones the acts of violence that he has perpetrated in Vietnam. Likewise, the Vietnamese garden associated with Lanh erases the protagonist's past failures, and—by transforming him from an ex-American soldier to a Vietnamese, or a "human" who transcends the boundaries of nationality, and who "is connected to a woman only"—relieves him of the excruciating sense of guilt.

Nevertheless, as in the scene of Saigon's arcade examined earlier, some intrusive noises from outside disrupt Clifford's wishful vision. In the midst of their intercourse Clifford hears "a car horn bark in the street" and "the refrigerator grinding away" (249). Although he tries to dismiss them as merely trivial issues that never matter in his earnest wish to become a Vietnamese, the sounds of American machines nonetheless remind him of his personal history as an American, for “they [are] the things that [are] imprinted in him—the synapses of culture” (249). At last, Clifford’s vision of himself as a Vietnamese living in the feminized Vietnamese land vanishes completely. The deserter once again turns into “an American soldier” and Lanh a Vietnamese “bargirl,” “a tiny little woman,” whom he bought in order to enjoy “an encounter with the Orient,” and use her as “a scale against his virility” (250). In this way, Butler undermines Clifford’s pastoral vision of Vietnam. In so doing, he reveals and ultimately subverts the protagonist’s desire to preserve his innocence—an egocentric wish that stems from the images of goodness and innocence that the United States has long identified itself with. The protagonist eventually realizes that he “bribed” her “with an apple”—the lures of American wealth and power—so that he can establish a separate peace in which all the failures of his past are forgiven (250).

The scene is important because it serves to explain the reason for Clifford’s eventual breakup with Lanh: Clifford leaves Lanh because she loses the characteristics of the generous Mother Earth that helps him to forget his sense of guilt. In Vietnam Lanh used to be a “strong woman”(123), who sheltered Clifford from threatening forces that are “not in the arcade” (71). In the United States, however, she is reduced to a vulnerable and helpless person who cannot even fulfil the easiest of daily chores because of the difficulties in adapting different language and culture. Lanh herself is frustrated by the fact and desperately complains to Clifford: “I am a child here” (163). In this way, the Vietnamese heroin transforms from a strong, generous, and mother-like lover to a powerless refugee. Uprooted from her native soil and transplanted in an alien land, she is no longer the embodiment of the Edenic Vietnamese garden who helps Clifford to purge himself of his sin. Then, for Clifford, to confront Lanh deprived of her Mother Earth character is once again to confront his own guilt, exactly because the predicament of Lanh and other Vietnamese refugees that he witnesses in America has been brought about by the acts of violence he himself once took part in.

Unable to face the excruciating fact, Clifford leaves Lanh and heads for Canada, very likely in search of another Garden of Eden that will help him forget his past once again. In the protagonist's ultimate decision to desert his Vietnamese lover, Butler thus represents the weight of the ex-soldier's trauma and remorse that he can hardly bear. At the same time, by undoing Clifford's illusion, the Vietnam-vet author also criticizes the self-righteous and egotistic tendencies that underlie America's desire to define Vietnam in its own cultural terms.

Notes

1) This paper is a revision of "Robert Olen Butler's Desertion Narrative: *The Alley of Eden*," a part of my doctoral thesis *Vietnam Fought and Imagined: the Images of Mythic Western Frontier in American Vietnam War Literature*, which was originally submitted to University of Glasgow in December 2013.

2) "Americans tend to think of history beginning when Americans enters it. Thus, in the cultural imagination, there is no Japan before Commodore Perry, no Vietnam before the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) parachuted in during the end of World War II." See Christopher 114.

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