

oliver stone heaven and earth

Oliver Stone Heaven and Earth: An In-Depth Exploration of a Cinematic Masterpiece

Oliver Stone, renowned for his provocative and visually compelling filmmaking, delivered one of his most ambitious projects with Heaven and Earth. This 1993 film stands out as a poignant portrayal of the Vietnam War from multiple perspectives, emphasizing the human cost of conflict and the cultural complexities faced by soldiers and civilians alike. In this comprehensive article, we delve into the themes, production, reception, and significance of Heaven and Earth, offering insights that will deepen your understanding of this extraordinary film.

Overview of Oliver Stone's Heaven and Earth

Background and Context

Heaven and Earth is a war drama directed by Oliver Stone, inspired by the memoirs of Le Ly Hayslip, a Vietnamese woman who experienced the tumult of the Vietnam War firsthand. The film is the third installment in Stone's Vietnam trilogy, following Platoon (1986) and Born on the Fourth of July (1989). It aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the war, capturing both the American and Vietnamese experiences.

The screenplay was adapted from Hayslip's autobiographical books, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places and Child of War, Woman of Peace. This dual narrative approach allows the film to explore the war's impact on different layers of Vietnamese society, as well as on American soldiers.

Plot Summary

The film follows the life of Le Ly Hayslip, played by Hiep Thi Le and later by Martha de Laurentiis in flashbacks, from her childhood through her adult years. It depicts her struggles during the war, her experiences as a refugee, and her journey towards peace and reconciliation.

The narrative is divided into several key segments:

- Le Ly's childhood in a Vietnamese village, witnessing the devastation of war.
- Her forced recruitment into the Viet Cong and her subsequent escape.
- Her emigration to the United States and her life as a refugee.
- Her internal conflict and healing process as she seeks closure.

Throughout, the film juxtaposes her personal story with the broader context of the Vietnam War, illustrating its profound human toll.

Thematic Elements of Heaven and Earth

War and Its Human Cost

At its core, *Heaven and Earth* explores the devastating effects of war on individuals and communities. It portrays the suffering of civilians caught in the crossfire, the trauma experienced by soldiers, and the moral ambiguities faced by those involved.

Key themes include:

- The loss of innocence
- The cycles of violence
- The emotional scars left by warfare

Cultural Clash and Identity

The film examines the profound cultural differences between Americans and Vietnamese, emphasizing misunderstandings and the struggle for mutual understanding. Le Ly's story highlights the complexities of identity amidst chaos and the importance of reconciliation.

Redemption and Healing

A recurring motif is the possibility of healing after trauma. Le Ly's journey from pain to forgiveness showcases the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of compassion.

Production Details

Filming Locations

Heaven and Earth was shot in various locations to authentically depict Vietnam:

- Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)
- The Mekong Delta region
- Los Angeles, USA (for scenes set in America)

The choice of locations contributed to the film's realistic portrayal of Vietnamese landscapes and urban settings.

Cast and Crew

- Director: Oliver Stone
- Main Cast:
 - Hiep Thi Le as Le Ly Hayslip
 - Tommy Lee Jones as Reverend William Porter
 - Haing S. Ngor as himself (a real-life refugee and acting veteran)
 - Martha De Laurentiis as Le Ly (flashbacks)

Stone's collaboration with Vietnamese actors and the inclusion of authentic Vietnamese cultural elements added depth to the storytelling.

Music and Cinematography

The film's score, composed by Hans Zimmer, features traditional Vietnamese music blended with orchestral elements, creating an evocative soundscape.

Cinematographer Robert Richardson employed a mix of sweeping vistas and intimate close-ups, capturing both the scale of the war and the personal stories within it.

Reception and Impact

Critical Response

Heaven and Earth received mixed reviews upon release. Critics praised its emotional depth, authentic portrayal, and Oliver Stone's direction, but some noted it as less impactful than his previous Vietnam films.

Positive aspects:

- Strong performances, especially by Hiep Thi Le and Haing S. Ngor
- Honest depiction of Vietnamese civilians
- Artistic cinematography

Criticisms:

- Pacing issues
- Overly sentimental moments
- Complex narrative structure

Box Office and Awards

While not a major commercial success, Heaven and Earth gained recognition for its cultural significance. It was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film and received praise in international film festivals.

Legacy and Cultural Significance

The film contributed to a broader understanding of the Vietnam War's impact on Vietnamese society. It challenged simplistic narratives and highlighted stories of resilience and reconciliation.

1. Broadened the scope of Vietnam War narratives beyond American perspectives
2. Highlighted the importance of cultural understanding and empathy

Inspired subsequent films and documentaries on Vietnam and war trauma

Analyzing the Artistic and Political Aspects of Heaven and Earth

Oliver Stone's Directorial Vision

Stone's signature style combines visceral imagery with layered storytelling. In Heaven and Earth, he employs:

- Visual symbolism (e.g., contrasting lush landscapes with scenes of destruction)
- Non-linear narrative to reflect memory and trauma
- Personal storytelling intertwined with political commentary

Political and Social Commentary

The film critiques:

- The futility and brutality of war
- American military policies in Vietnam
- The resilience of Vietnamese civilians amidst chaos
- The importance of reconciliation and understanding

Conclusion: The Significance of Heaven and Earth

Heaven and Earth remains a vital piece in Oliver Stone's filmography, offering a humanized and culturally rich perspective on the Vietnam War. Its focus on personal stories and moral complexity provides viewers with a nuanced understanding of history's human toll.

For those interested in war films, cultural narratives, or Oliver Stone's filmmaking, Heaven and Earth offers compelling storytelling that encourages empathy, reflection, and awareness. Its enduring relevance lies in its honest portrayal of suffering and hope, making it a must-watch for cinephiles and history enthusiasts alike.

Keywords: Oliver Stone Heaven and Earth, Vietnam War film, Le Ly Hayslip, Oliver Stone movies, Vietnam cinema, war drama, Vietnam War perspective, film analysis, historical films, cultural understanding in film

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Oliver Stone's 'Heaven & Earth' about?

'Heaven & Earth' is a film directed by Oliver Stone that depicts the Vietnam War from both American and Vietnamese perspectives, exploring the emotional and physical toll of the war on individuals and nations.

How does 'Heaven & Earth' differ from Oliver Stone's other war films?

Unlike some of Stone's other works like 'Platoon' or 'Born on the Fourth of July,' 'Heaven & Earth' emphasizes cross-cultural understanding by focusing on Vietnamese characters' stories and aims to present a more nuanced view of the Vietnam War.

What are the main themes explored in 'Heaven & Earth'?

The film explores themes such as the trauma of war, cultural differences, reconciliation, the impact of war on civilians, and the human capacity for resilience amidst chaos.

Was 'Heaven & Earth' well-received by critics and audiences?

While some praised the film for its emotional depth and perspective, others felt it was less impactful compared to Oliver Stone's earlier war films. Overall, it received mixed to positive reviews and gained recognition for its portrayal of Vietnamese experiences.

Are there any notable performances or cast members in 'Heaven & Earth'?

Yes, the film features notable performances by Tom Berenger and Joan Chen, with Joan Chen's portrayal of a Vietnamese woman receiving particular acclaim for its depth and sensitivity.

Additional Resources

Oliver Stone's Heaven and Earth: An In-Depth Review and Analysis

Introduction: A Cinematic Journey through War and Humanity

Oliver Stone's Heaven and Earth (1993) stands out as a poignant and powerful war film that explores the harrowing experiences of soldiers and civilians during the Vietnam War, particularly focusing on the perspectives of Vietnamese characters. As a director renowned for his unflinching honesty and complex storytelling, Stone delivers a film that is both a visceral war epic and a profound meditation on trauma, resilience, and the human cost of conflict.

Overview of the Film

Basic Information

- Title: Heaven and Earth
- Release Year: 1993

- Director: Oliver Stone
- Genre: War, Drama, Historical
- Runtime: Approximately 155 minutes
- Based on: The autobiography of Le Ly Hayslip, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places

Context and Background

Heaven and Earth is the second installment in Oliver Stone's Vietnam War trilogy, following Platoon (1986) and Born on the Fourth of July (1989). Unlike its predecessors, which largely focus on American soldiers' perspectives, Heaven and Earth shifts the lens to Vietnamese civilians, offering a rare and humanized portrayal of the war from their point of view.

The film adapts Le Ly Hayslip's memoir, providing an autobiographical account of her life before, during, and after the war. This personal narrative allows viewers to witness the war's impact beyond the battlefield, emphasizing themes of suffering, survival, and reconciliation.

Narrative and Plot Structure

The Dual Timeline

The film employs a dual narrative structure, juxtaposing Le Ly's childhood and early adulthood with her later life, highlighting the enduring scars of war and the possibility of healing.

- Part 1: Le Ly's childhood in a small Vietnamese village, her family's struggles, and the invasion of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces.
- Part 2: Her experiences as a refugee, her marriage to an American soldier (Steve, played by Tommy Lee Jones), and her struggles with cultural identity and trauma.
- Part 3: Her journey towards forgiveness, understanding, and reconciliation, culminating in her efforts to rebuild her life and community.

Key Plot Points

- The brutal realities of wartime Vietnam, including bombings, village raids, and personal loss.
- Le Ly's forced recruitment into both the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese militia.
- Her escape to the United States as a war refugee.
- Her marriage to a U.S. Marine, which symbolizes the complex intersection of love, war, and cultural divide.
- The ongoing emotional and physical scars inflicted by war, including PTSD and survivor's guilt.
- Her eventual return to Vietnam, seeking to confront her past and foster reconciliation.

Deep Dive into Themes

War and Its Impact on Civilians

Heaven and Earth masterfully portrays the civilian experience during wartime, diverging from traditional war films that often focus solely on soldiers.

- Civilian Suffering: The film depicts the destruction of villages, loss of loved ones, and the constant threat faced by villagers.
- Forced Recruitment: Le Ly's coerced involvement with both sides highlights how civilians are often caught in the crossfire, manipulated, or compelled into combat roles.
- Trauma and Psychological Scars: The narrative emphasizes the lasting psychological effects, including PTSD, survivor's guilt, and a sense of helplessness.

Cultural and Personal Identity

The film explores the complex identity struggles faced by Vietnamese individuals, especially those who migrate or become refugees.

- Cultural Displacement: Le Ly's adaptation to life in America, her feelings of alienation, and her attempts to reconcile her Vietnamese identity with her new life.
- Intergenerational Trauma: How war affects not only those who directly experience it but also subsequent generations.
- Reconciliation and Forgiveness: The journey toward forgiving oneself and others, particularly as Le Ly seeks peace with her past.

U.S. Involvement and War Politics

While the film centers on Vietnamese perspectives, it also critically examines U.S. policies and their consequences.

- Questioning Justification: The film subtly questions the moral and strategic rationale behind American involvement.
- Impact on Soldiers: The personal toll on American soldiers, including themes of disillusionment and moral injury.
- Complex Morality: Challenges simplistic notions of good versus evil, illustrating the nuanced realities faced by all parties.

Character Analysis

Le Ly Hayslip (Portrayed by Hiep Thanh)

Le Ly is the emotional core of the film, embodying resilience and vulnerability.

- Early Life: A young girl forced into war, witnessing violence and loss.
- Married Life: Her marriage to Steve, which symbolizes attempts at cross-cultural understanding but also exposes her to new challenges.
- Personal Growth: Her journey from victim to survivor to healer, culminating in her efforts to rebuild her community.

Steve (Tommy Lee Jones)

- Represents the American perspective, embodying both the empathy and the moral ambiguity of the U.S. military presence.
- His relationship with Le Ly signifies the possibility of reconciliation beyond political boundaries.

Supporting Characters

- Family members, villagers, and fellow soldiers who exemplify various

responses to war—resilience, despair, defiance, and hope.

Cinematic Techniques and Aesthetic Elements

Visual Style

- Color Palette: The film employs a muted, earthy color palette, reflecting the gritty reality of war and its aftermath.
- Cinematography: Use of handheld cameras and close-up shots to evoke intimacy and immediacy.
- Symbolism: Visual motifs such as rice paddies, bridges, and religious icons symbolize life, transition, and spirituality.

Sound and Music

- The soundtrack features traditional Vietnamese music intertwined with Western compositions, emphasizing cultural convergence.
- Sound design enhances the visceral experience, from bombings to quiet moments of reflection.

Direction and Narrative Pacing

- Stone's direction balances intense war sequences with poignant personal moments.
- The narrative's pacing allows viewers to absorb both the chaos of war and the subtleties of personal trauma.

Critical Reception and Legacy

Reception at Release

- Heaven and Earth received mixed reviews, with praise for its honest portrayal of Vietnamese civilians and Le Ly's compelling story.
- Some critics found the film's pacing sluggish, and others felt it lacked the visceral intensity of Platoon.

Awards and Recognitions

- The film garnered nominations and awards for its cinematography and storytelling, though it did not achieve mainstream blockbuster success.

Cultural and Historical Significance

- The film contributed to broader conversations about war's impact on civilians and marginalized voices.
- It remains a significant work within Oliver Stone's filmography for its empathetic approach and cultural sensitivity.

Comparative Analysis with Other Vietnam Films

- Unlike Platoon and Full Metal Jacket, which focus predominantly on American soldiers, Heaven and Earth centers on Vietnamese civilians.
- The film shares thematic elements with The Deer Hunter and Apocalypse Now

but offers a more personal and less political perspective.

Impact and Relevance Today

- Heaven and Earth continues to resonate as a reminder of the human cost of war and the importance of empathy.
- Its portrayal of trauma and reconciliation remains relevant in contemporary discussions on conflict and post-war healing.
- The film encourages viewers to consider multiple perspectives, especially those often marginalized or overlooked in mainstream war narratives.

Conclusion: A Testament to Resilience and Humanity

Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* is a compelling, deeply human exploration of war's enduring scars and the possibility of redemption. Through Le Ly's personal journey, the film challenges audiences to look beyond battlefield heroics and confront the complex, often painful realities faced by civilians caught in the crossfire. Its artistic craftsmanship, emotional depth, and cultural sensitivity make it a vital piece of cinematic history and a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit amidst chaos and destruction. Whether viewed as a standalone masterpiece or as part of the Vietnam War trilogy, *Heaven and Earth* remains an essential film for those seeking to understand the multifaceted impacts of war on individuals and communities.

Oliver Stone Heaven And Earth

oliver stone heaven and earth: *The Making of Oliver Stone's Heaven and Earth* Michael Singer, 1993

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Three-time Oscar winner Oliver Stone is one of the most controversial and well-known contemporary American directors. He began his professional life as a screen writer and was responsible for the scripts of *Midnight Express* and *Scarface*. As a director he made one of the all-time great Vietnam war movies, *Platoon*, and went on to helm such definitive cinematic works as *Wall Street*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers* and, most recently, *Alexander* - an epic biography of the legendary Greek king starring Colin Farrell and Anthony Hopkins. This indispensable guide takes each of Stone's writing and directorial features in chronological order, discussing them within categories such as Casting, Cut Scenes, Music Conspiracy Theory? and Controversy. It looks at the inspiration behind his work, its connection with the real world and the story behind each film's development. Whether the subject is war, politics, sport or the defining aspects of an era, Stone is an expert at polarising audience views. This is an essential reference for all fans of Oliver Stone, writer, director and one of the most influential filmmakers of the last twenty-five years.

oliver stone heaven and earth: *The Oliver Stone Encyclopedia* James M. Welsh, Donald M. Whaley, 2013 Oliver Stone has written and directed many memorable films while also developing a reputation for tackling controversial subjects, such as the Turkish prison system (*Midnight Express*), the Vietnam war (*Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*), insider trading (*Wall Street*), presidential

assassination (JFK), and a voyeuristic media (Natural Born Killers). Along the way, Stone has been nominated for more than 10 Academy Awards and three times received Oscars for his work. In *The Oliver Stone Encyclopedia*, James M. Welsh and Donald M. Whaley provide an overarching evaluation of Stone's work as screenwriter, producer, and director. While the entries in this volume address all of the usual aspects of Stone's career, they also explore new avenues of critical evaluation, especially influences such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Buddhism, which Stone converted to in the 1990s. In addition, this volume traces Stone's obsession with Latin American politics, evident in his film *Salvador* (1986), his screenplay for Alan Parker's *Evita* (1996), and the documentaries *Commandante* (2003), *Looking for Fidel* (2004), and *South of the Border* (2010). Each entry is followed by a bibliography of published sources, both in print and online. A comprehensive and engaging examination of the director, *The Oliver Stone Encyclopedia* will appeal to scholars and fans alike as the most comprehensive reference on this director's body of work.

oliver stone heaven and earth: *Oliver Stone's USA* Robert Brent Toplin, 2000 Challenging audiences and critics alike, the films of Oliver Stone have compelled many viewers to re-examine some of their most revered beliefs about America's past. Stone has generated enormous controversy and debate among those who take issue with his dramatic use of history. This book brings Stone face to face with some of his most thoughtful critics and supporters and allows him room to respond to their views. Writers including David Halberstam, Stephen Ambrose, Arthur Schlesinger Jr, Walter LaFeber and Robert Rosenstone critique Stone's most contested films to show how they may distort, amplify or transcend the historical realities they appear to depict.

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oliver stone heaven and earth: *The Oliver Stone Experience* Matt Zoller Seitz, 2016-09-13 Stone himself serves as guide to this no-holds-barred retrospective—an extremely candid and comprehensive monograph of the renowned and controversial writer, director, and cinematic historian in interview form. Over the course of five years, Academy Award-winning filmmaker Oliver Stone (*Midnight Express*, *Scarface*, *Platoon*, *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers*, *Snowden*) and New York Times bestselling author Matt Zoller Seitz (*The Wes Anderson Collection*) discussed, debated, and deconstructed the arc of Stone's outspoken, controversial life and career with extraordinary candor. This book collects those conversations for the first time, including anecdotes about Stone's childhood, Vietnam, his struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder, and his continual struggle to reinvent himself as an artist. Their dialogue is illustrated by hundreds of never-before-seen photographs and documents from Stone's personal archive, dating back to Stone's birth: personal

snapshots, private correspondence, annotated script pages and storyboards, behind-the-scenes photography, and production files from all of his films to date—through 2016's *Snowden*, and including Stone's epic Showtime mini-series *Untold History of the United States*. Critical commentary from Seitz on each of Stone's films is joined by original essays from filmmaker Ramin Bahrani; writer, editor, and educator Kiese Laymon; writer and actor Jim Beaver; and film critics Walter Chaw, Michael Guarneri, Kim Morgan, and Alissa Wilkinson. At once a complex analysis of a master director's vision and a painfully honest critical biography in widescreen technicolor, *The Oliver Stone Experience* is as daring, intense, and provocative as Stone's films—it's an Oliver Stone movie about Oliver Stone, in the form of a book. Both this book and Stone's highly anticipated film, *Snowden*, will be released in September 2016 to coincide with Stone's seventieth birthday (September 15, 1946). Also available from Matt Zoller Seitz: *Mad Men Carousel*, *The Wes Anderson Collection: Bad Dads*, *The Wes Anderson Collection: The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and *The Wes Anderson Collection*.

oliver stone heaven and earth: Gender and warfare in the twentieth century Angela K. Smith, 2018-02-28 *Gender and warfare in the twentieth century* is a collection of exciting, accessible and very readable essays that span the twentieth century, exploring the ways in which men and women have both represented warfare, and represented themselves as participants in warfare. A range of contributors from different disciplines explore these representations by examining a wide variety of sources: fiction, film, personal diaries, memoirs, non-fiction, letters, oral testimonies and more. The collection ranges from the trenches of the Western Front, through the shell-shocked inter-war years, the civil war in Spain and the disparate battle fronts of World War Two, to the complexities of Vietnam and the late century Hollywood workings and re-workings of these conflicts. The focus on gendered readings provides a thread that binds these essays together to create a comprehensive and interesting picture of the legacy of twentieth-century warfare at the beginning of the new millennium.

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oliver stone heaven and earth: Asian American Literature and the Environment Lorna Fitzsimmons, Youngsuk Chae, Bella Adams, 2014-10-24 This book is a ground-breaking transnational study of representations of the environment in Asian American literature. Extending and renewing Asian American studies and ecocriticism by drawing the two fields into deeper dialogue, it brings Asian American writers to the center of ecocritical studies. This collection demonstrates the distinctiveness of Asian American writers' positions on topics of major concern today: environmental justice, identity and the land, war environments, consumption, urban environments, and the environment and creativity. Represented authors include Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Ruth Ozeki, Ha Jin, Fae Myenne Ng, Le Ly Hayslip, Lan Cao, Mitsuye Yamada, Lawson Fusao Inada, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, Milton Murayama, Don Lee, and Hisaye Yamamoto. These writers provide a range of perspectives on the historical, social, psychological, economic, philosophical, and aesthetic responses of Asian Americans to the environment conceived in relation to labor, racism, immigration, domesticity, global capitalism, relocation, pollution, violence, and religion. Contributors apply a diversity of critical frameworks, including critical radical race studies,

counter-memory studies, ecofeminism, and geomantic criticism. The book presents a compelling and timely green perspective through which to understand key works of Asian American literature and leads the field of ecocriticism into neglected terrain.

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oliver stone heaven and earth: *Buddhism and American Cinema* John Whalen-Bridge, Gary Storhoff (1947–2011), 2014-07-31 Discusses both depictions of Buddhism in film and Buddhist takes on a variety of films. In 1989, the same year the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, a decade-long boom of films dedicated to Buddhist people, history, and culture began. Offering the first scholarly treatment of Buddhism and cinema, the editors advise that there are two kinds of Buddhist film: those that are about Buddhists and those that are not. Focusing on contemporary American offerings, the contributors extend a two-pronged approach, discussing how Buddhism has been captured by directors and presenting Buddhist-oriented critiques of the worlds represented in films that would seem to have no connection with Buddhism. Films discussed range from those set in Tibet, such as *Kundun* and *Lost Horizon*, to those set well outside of any Buddhist milieu, such as *Groundhog Day* and *The Matrix*. The contributors explain the Buddhist theoretical concepts that emerge in these works, including karma, the bardo, and reincarnation, and consider them in relation to interpretive strategies that include feminism, postcolonialism, and contemplative psychological approaches.

oliver stone heaven and earth: *Freedom and Entertainment* Stephen Vaughn, 2006 This is a story that Jack Valenti has long tried to keep secret. *Freedom and Entertainment* is the first book to offer a behind-the-scenes account of the motion picture rating system and the Motion Picture Association of America under Valenti's leadership. The book is based on the private papers and oral history of Richard D. Heffner, who headed the Classification and Rating Administration for two decades, from 1974 to 1994, and who was once called 'the least-known most powerful person in Hollywood.' The story chronicles the often tense working relationship between Heffner and Valenti, and the sometimes bruising encounters Heffner had with such Hollywood heavyweights as Clint Eastwood, Oliver Stone, Michael Douglas, George C. Scott, Lew Wasserman, Arthur Krim, Jerry Weintraub, and many others.

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oliver stone heaven and earth: Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second Jeremy M. Devine, 1999

This book summarizes and briefly analyzes over 400 films about the Vietnam War.

oliver stone heaven and earth: How White Men Won the Culture Wars Joseph Darda, 2021-05-25 Reuniting white America after Vietnam. "If war among the whites brought peace and liberty to the blacks," Frederick Douglass asked in 1875, peering into the nation's future, "what will peace among the whites bring?" The answer then and now, after civil war and civil rights: a white reunion disguised as a veterans' reunion. How White Men Won the Culture Wars shows how a broad contingent of white men--conservative and liberal, hawk and dove, vet and nonvet--transformed the Vietnam War into a staging ground for a post-civil rights white racial reconciliation. Conservatives could celebrate white vets as deracinated embodiments of the nation. Liberals could treat them as minoritized heroes whose voices must be heard. Erasing Americans of color, Southeast Asians, and women from the war, white men could agree, after civil rights and feminism, that they had suffered and deserved more. From the POW/MIA and veterans' mental health movements to Rambo and "Born in the U.S.A.," they remade their racial identities for an age of color blindness and multiculturalism in the image of the Vietnam vet. No one wins in a culture war--except, Joseph Darda argues, white men dressed in army green.

oliver stone heaven and earth: Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion Leslie Bow, 2011-10-16 Asian American women have long dealt with charges of betrayal within and beyond their communities. Images of their disloyalty pervade American culture, from the daughter who is branded a traitor to family for adopting American ways, to the war bride who immigrates in defiance of her countrymen, to a figure such as Yoko Ono, accused of breaking up the Beatles with her seduction of John Lennon. Leslie Bow here explores how representations of females transgressing the social order play out in literature by Asian American women. Questions of ethnic belonging, sexuality, identification, and political allegiance are among the issues raised by such writers as Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, Bharati Mukherjee, Jade Snow Wong, Amy Tan, Sky Lee, Le Ly Hayslip, Wendy Law-Yone, Fiona Cheong, and Nellie Wong. Beginning with the notion that feminist and Asian American identity are mutually exclusive, Bow analyzes how women serve as boundary markers between ethnic or national collectives in order to reveal the male-based nature of social cohesion. In exploring the relationship between femininity and citizenship, liberal feminism and American racial discourse, and women's domestic abuse and human rights, the author suggests that Asian American women not only mediate sexuality's construction as a determiner of loyalty but also manipulate that construction as a tool of political persuasion in their writing. The language of betrayal, she argues, offers a potent rhetorical means of signaling how belonging is policed by individuals and by the state. Bow's bold analysis exposes the stakes behind maintaining ethnic, feminist, and national alliances, particularly for women who claim multiple loyalties.

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