

CHAPTER 16

A NECESSARY SALVE: THE 'HUE MASSACRE' IN HISTORY AND MEMORY

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When Richard Nixon appeared before a national television audience on 3 November 1969, he had before him an unenviable task. Having been elected by a citizenry increasingly anxious to bring American involvement in the Vietnam war to an end, the president found himself confronting the twin, and seemingly contradictory, goals of appeasing this growing sentiment while, at the same time, maintaining the American military commitment and thus the 'credibility' of American power. To achieve the former objective, Nixon proposed 'Vietnamization', a gradual withdrawal of US combat troops coupled with heightened aerial bombardment and an intensified effort to train the Republic of Vietnam's (R.V.N.) armed forces. To legitimize the latter, he appealed to those he called the 'silent majority', the tens of millions of Americans that, the president claimed, supported US policy in Southeast Asia but, unlike members of the antiwar movement, did not take to the streets in demonstration. Nixon framed his appeal in simple moral terms. Pleading with his compatriots to appreciate the implications of a 'precipitate [American] withdrawal', the president hearkened what became known as the 'bloodbath theory'. A justification for continued intervention, the bloodbath theory posited that a US withdrawal from Southeast Asia would lead to such widespread massacres of Vietnamese sympathetic to the American presence that the United States was morally obligated to maintain its military commitment.

At the heart of the theory lay the so-called ‘Hue Massacre’, a series of alleged atrocities undertaken by the Vietnamese revolutionary forces throughout their weeks-long capture of Hue, the central Vietnamese city that once served as a seat of royal power, during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Although it faced serious evidentiary challenges, a basic narrative of the massacre soon developed. Entering the city with lists identifying American and R.V.N. sympathizers, it began, the revolutionaries immediately began rounding them up. What followed was ‘a bloody reign of terror’, according to Nixon’s November 1969 speech, ‘in which 3,000 civilians were clubbed, shot to death, and buried in mass graves’. The narrative’s symbolic power was obvious. A ‘sudden collapse’ of American support, Nixon cautioned his countrymen, and ‘these atrocities of Hue would become the nightmare of the entire nation’.¹ The message resonated. Following the speech – an event viewed by over 72 million people, a figure three times greater than those who had watched the president’s inauguration just ten months earlier – approximately 400,000 letters, telegrams, and postcards poured into the White House, ninety per cent of which favoured Nixon’s plea for continued intervention.²

While not all of the missives addressed, let alone accepted, the bloodbath scenario, a number of them – from one governor’s warning that ‘our immediate capitulation’ in Vietnam would ‘scar our souls with the remorse of a people who, wearily after 200 years, first stamped their approval on genocide’ to the head of the Retired Officers Association’s applause for Nixon’s ‘enduring efforts’ to end American participation in the war ‘in a manner that will not only illuminate [sic] American casualties but prevent wholesale slaughter [sic] of the Vietnamese...’ – expressed not even the slightest reservation about the theory’s legitimacy.³ Neither did a number of editorial writers. Those at the *Orlando Sentinel*, for example, soberly predicted massacres following an American withdrawal that ‘might approach the genocide of Hitler’s Germany in the 1940s’.⁴

While the Hue atrocities thus served to substantiate the bloodbath hypothesis during a moment in which US policy was undergoing serious challenges, the atrocities would also soon be exploited for another political purpose: to ‘balance’ the emerging stories of the US-perpetrated massacre at Son My (My Lai). And their utility did not end with the war’s conclusion. After 1975, memory of the executions would help to restore moral integrity to the American campaign and, among overseas Vietnamese, legitimacy to the exiles’ earlier support for the Saigon regime. Given that government’s brutality and corruption, as well as the conflict’s widespread remembrance as a ‘bad’ war, this was no inconsiderable achievement.

A Contested Narrative

Forty years after the Tet Offensive, precisely what happened in Hue remains uncertain. The postwar Vietnamese government, anchoring

its legitimacy in the revolutionaries' earlier resistance to France and the United States, has not been eager to reopen the wounds of the past, while antiwar scholars, no longer feeling compelled to puncture the bloodbath hypothesis, have moved on to more immediately pressing concerns. Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss the incident as merely a distant chapter of Vietnamese and American history. Its significance – not to mention its perceived utility at a time of 'revisionist' proliferation – persists. For right-wing academics seeking to restore nobility to the American cause, the Hue executions remain an article of faith. For the historian Mark Moyar, for example, they are a 'massively documented fact', though one for which he has failed to cite any credible documentation.⁵ Among likeminded pundits, the massacre, insisted one such commentator, represents an 'embarrassment' for 'the left' that has been 'swill[ed] ... down their collective memory hole where it now largely remains, a grim testimony to their immorality, hypocrisy, blind political bigotry, and capacity for hatred'.⁶ And within the Vietnamese diaspora, the Hue atrocities have been adjudged, according to one published account, 'the most barbaric and worst crime of all in our country's historical tragedies' – and, importantly, one about which younger generations 'need to know'.⁷

Yet while the conventional narrative serves a useful function to celebrants of American global power, its basic outline enjoys little support among scholars who have closely examined it. It is true that uncertainty exists about the precise details of what occurred in Hue. But this uncertainty should not be confused with affirmation of the claim – one that has been popularly enshrined as truth – that some three thousand civilians were methodically executed by the Vietnamese insurgents. There is no credible evidentiary basis for this version of events. Even the traditional narrative's foremost architect had, by 1988, retreated from his wartime allegations about the scale of the atrocities. Nevertheless, the dubiousness of the Hue Massacre – by which, through the use of capital letters, I am referring to the conventional narrative of what transpired – has not tarnished its reliability in popular memory or elements of the scholarly literature.

The story of how this basic narrative achieved popular currency is ultimately a story of Cold War propaganda. Originally a discursive construction of an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (A.R.V.N.) political warfare battalion, the Hue Massacre was given its respectable veneer in a controversial 1970 document authored by Douglas Pike for the United States Mission in Saigon. According to Pike, an employee of the United States Information Agency and a staunch proponent of the bloodbath theory, the 'meaning of the Hue Massacre' seemed 'clear'. If the insurgents were to 'win decisively in South Viet-Nam (and the key word is decisively)', a succession of events would follow. 'First, all foreigners would be cleared out of the South, especially the hundreds of foreign newsmen who are in and out of Saigon. A curtain of ignorance would

descend. Then' – and here Pike conjured an explicit allusion to Nazi Germany – 'would begin a night of long knives. There would be a new order to build. The war was long and so are memories of old scores to be settled. All political opposition, actual or potential, would be systematically eliminated.' Communist justice, he asserted, would be 'meted out to the "tyrants and lackeys..." The communists in Viet-Nam would create a silence. The world would call it peace.'⁸ Given the undeniable force of the author's language and its utility to pro-war partisans, the report seemed destined to reach an audience far broader than diplomats and military planners. It soon did. Perhaps most significantly, *Reader's Digest* excerpted the study just months after the American invasion of Cambodia – and the explosion of antiwar agitation it sparked – in its September 1970 issue.⁹

Yet if the conventional narrative was welcomed within some quarters at a time of tremendous national polarization, its verisimilitude did not go unchallenged. Countering those who viewed the episode as a harbinger of what might follow a revolutionary victory, a number of scholars, many of them active in the antiwar movement, believed the official account to be a largely unsupported instance of pro-war propaganda. Foremost among these critics was the political scientist Gareth Porter. In outlets ranging from the *Indochina Chronicle* to the *New York Times*, Porter challenged the Nixon administration's bloodbath hypothesis, demonstrating its reliance on problematical evidence, faulty translations, and inconsistent logic. For the Cornell-trained political scientist, whose published 1974 dissection of the atrocities narrative has influenced much postwar scholarship, the 'enduring myth' of the Hue Massacre 'bore little resemblance to the truth, but was, on the contrary, the result of a political warfare campaign by the Saigon government, embellished by the [United States] government, and accepted uncritically by the US press'.¹⁰ Decades later, Vietnam specialists would concur. The historian David Hunt, for instance, noted the logical inconsistencies in the conventional accounts and concluded that Pike's study for the United States Mission was, 'by any definition, a work of propaganda'.¹¹ Indeed, in 1988 Pike readily conceded that he had earlier been engaged in a conscious 'effort to discredit the Viet Cong'.¹² Yet given the politics and perceived credibility of the narrative's foremost wartime critic – Gareth Porter was an outspoken opponent of American policy in Southeast Asia and, before 1978, one of the principal sceptics concerning the earliest evidence of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia – the tenability of the Hue Massacre has remained a matter of bitter contestation.¹³ This is in spite of what has amounted to, in essence, a nearly wholesale scholarly rejection of Pike's study and the emergence of further support for Porter's wartime critique through the postwar research of Ngo Vinh Long.¹⁴

To be sure, the question of whether or not there were executions in Hue is not in dispute. Porter and other scholars agree that members of

the National Liberation Front (N.L.F.) killed non-combatants during the Tet Offensive, and these certainly merit our collective attention. However, the most reliable enumerations of those killed range from 300 or 400 to a more precise 710, estimates that constitute from ten to twenty-five per cent of the approximate figure of 3,000 typically cited in support of the conventional narrative, which is a figure from which even Douglas Pike had distanced himself by the late 1980s.¹⁵ Yet problems with the traditional narrative go far beyond an inflation of its scale. The available evidence suggests that the atrocities were, in fact, nothing like the indiscriminate slaughter presented by Pike, Nixon, and other champions of US militarism. This is, historically speaking, not surprising, as all accounts concur that the executions represented a stark departure from N.L.F. policy – a point, conceded by Pike, that would be ignored in later statements on the potential for a postwar bloodbath.¹⁶

While there undoubtedly were a number of individuals killed immediately after the insurgents' capture of Hue, scholarship on the issue has provided a very different portrait from that reported by proponents of the conventional narrative. According to Porter, the N.L.F., which sought to create a revolutionary administration in the city, entered Hue with lists containing certain residents' names and dividing them into several categories. These included persons who had worked for the R.V.N.'s secret police apparatus, those who were high civilian or military officials, and those who were ordinary or low-level civil servants in the R.V.N. government. Many of these individuals were slated for temporary imprisonment outside the city or for 'reeducation' under the revolutionary authorities, although others – in particular those from the first category, who were personally involved in the repression of the resistance movement – were summarily executed.¹⁷ But citing interviews with 'most of the people involved', Ngo Vinh Long concluded that most of the killings occurred 'at the last minute' as the insurgents found themselves forced by an American offensive to abandon the city. '[T]hey were afraid their organizations in Hue were exposed, he explained, and if the captives were allowed to live, the guerrillas believed, they would have sought vengeance against the clandestine revolutionaries remaining in Hue.'¹⁸ Somewhat similarly, Porter and Len Ackland claimed in 1969, in the first study to be critical of the conventional massacre narrative, that the bulk of the executions 'were not the result of a policy on the part of a victorious government but rather the revenge of an army in retreat', referring to the disposition of persons originally identified for 'reeducation' but executed when, following US attacks, it became 'increasingly apparent that the [National Liberation] Front would not be able to stay in Hue indefinitely'.¹⁹

A prominent feature in many accounts of the Hue Massacre is the 'shallow mass graves' said to contain the revolutionaries' victims – an image that penetrated US popular consciousness in the 1980s in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). In the film, the uncovering of

the Vietnamese corpses offered one of the few moments in which the protagonist, Joker, appeared truly repulsed by the bloodshed in Vietnam. A lieutenant on the scene explained to him, 'Well, it seems the N.V.A. came in with a list of gook names. Government officials, policemen, A.R.V.N. officers, schoolteachers. They went around their houses real polite and asked them to report the next day for political re-education. Everybody who turned up got shot. Some they buried alive.' Yet this Hollywood vision presented a stark departure from reality. Whereas civilian reporters were shown to be examining a mass grave in Kubrick's production, Gareth Porter found that investigation of the sites by independent journalists was in fact strictly prohibited and that official claims about the graves were often contradicted by the available evidence. The only Western physician known to have been given access to the sites, for example, wrote that the number of bodies in the graves he examined was inflated sevenfold by the United States and the Saigon authorities. Most of the victims, he added, appeared to have been killed as a result of the combat in Hue, with many of the corpses clothed in the threads of military uniforms. Even the R.V.N. government's minister of health expressed scepticism about A.R.V.N.'s claims. '[T]he inconsistencies and other weaknesses of the various official documents, the lack of confirming evidence, and the evidence contradicting the official explanation, Porter wrote, 'all suggest that the overwhelming majority of the bodies discovered in 1969 were in fact the victims of American air power and of the ground fighting that raged in the hamlets, rather than of N.L.F. execution.' The 'undeniable fact', the political scientist asserted, 'was that American rockets and bombs, not communist assassination, caused the greatest carnage in Hue'.²⁰

Embracing the Conventional Account

Perhaps because of the greater confusion in 1968 about exactly what transpired in Hue, the Johnson administration was less aggressive than its successor in highlighting the atrocities' propaganda value to American and R.V.N. officials. Nevertheless, before the fighting in the former imperial capital had even ended, the State Department drafted a presidential statement for southern Vietnamese dissemination that celebrated the 'military valor' of the US and R.V.N. forces while decrying the revolutionaries' 'incredible brutality and terror against civilian officials and an innocent populace which accompanied their attack on a sacred city at a sacred time'.²¹ For months afterward the events were addressed by the White House unit responsible for making 'the most effective use of the information coming in from Vietnam to put out our position over here at home', whether in presidential speeches, press briefings and leaks, or in 'background material' for Johnson's 'use on the Hill'.²² However, it was not until late in 1969, months after Richard

Nixon assumed the presidency and when reports of the Son My (My Lai) massacre first began to appear in the American press, that the atrocities in Hue achieved considerable political currency.

From that time until shortly after the war officially drew to a close, the Hue Massacre – together with exaggerated accounts of the land reform executions in northern Vietnam in the mid-1950s – was cited repeatedly in Congress, in the media, and among pro-war activists in an effort to bolster support for an increasingly embattled US foreign policy.²³ 'While US leftists shout and proclaim a gospel of dissent against all throughout our land, Representative John Rarick proclaimed in a typical statement, 'their counterpart, the Communist Vietcong, slaughter thousands of innocent men, women, and children in South Vietnam, if for no other reason than the victims reject communism and are not yet under party control.'²⁴ The interventionists' goal was simple: to make continued warfare, rather than its cessation, the morally imperative choice. Redirecting charges of criminality and immorality levelled at the conflict's American architects, the logic of the bloodbath theory rendered opposition to the official US position an effective endorsement of the mass slaughter of thousands or even millions of Vietnamese.²⁵ 'That there would be a massive bloodletting is something that is taken for granted by virtually every serious student of Vietnamese affairs, Senator James Eastland maintained in 1972.'²⁶ The debate was simply over numbers.²⁷

In addition to bolstering support for continued US intervention, the Hue Massacre played a crucial ideological role when, months after the March 1968 event itself, reports began to appear in the United States about the Son My atrocities perpetrated by American troops. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, recognizing the threat this posed to US assertions of moral superiority, suggested to Richard Nixon that the White House should remind Americans about 'Communist terror tactics in South Vietnam', including the executions in Hue.²⁸ The basic framework US officials should employ was summarized by Nixon speechwriter Pat Buchanan. Atrocities such as those at Son My were 'done *against* the policy of the American government', Buchanan counselled the president. Conversely, a '*policy of atrocity is the policy of the enemy we confront in Vietnam... Any individual who cannot see the difference between the isolated acts of members of the American army, and the premeditated and systematic atrocities of its Communist enemy in the field, he continued, 'does not know what this war is about – or what his society is about.'*²⁹ The message was replicated widely. Whereas the massacre at Son My, 'if true', was 'committed against all instructions of the American [g]overnment', Senator George Murphy maintained in a representative example, the atrocities at Hue 'were carried out as part of the officially ordered plan and design to establish a Communist government in South Vietnam'.³⁰ For champions of continued intervention, the Hue Massacre could thus be used to remind Americans that the

Vietnamese revolutionaries, unlike US officials, had no concern for the sanctity of human life.

Among the Vietnamese the Hue atrocities performed a similarly ideological function. Visual imagery of bodies being excavated from mass graves, and the devastated relatives of these victims mourning their heartfelt losses, was circulated in a brief film presented by the psychological warfare unit of the R.V.N. armed forces.³¹ (The film appeared before an American audience years later in a 1987 exhibition organized by the Washington Project for the Arts.)³² Also employing print, the R.V.N.'s American embassy published a special issue of *Viet-Nam Bulletin* dedicated to the 'red mass murder' in Hue, as well as the sympathetic counsel offered to relatives of the 'red victim[s]' by the R.V.N. president, Nguyen Van Thieu. 'Look at these sad faces, then look at these coffins, Thieu pleaded in a eulogy for the deceased. 'Is this the final freedom offered by the Communists – to lie in a coffin in the ground?''³³

The Hue Massacre – as a potent symbol and rhetorical device – did not disappear once its interventionist utility dissipated in 1975. In 1988, for instance, Representative Newt Gingrich, the Georgia Republican who, six years later, would emerge as speaker of the House of Representatives, pointed to 'the human cost of Democratic failures', chastising a member of the opposition who had earlier 'engaged in self-deception' by suggesting that 'some of the people buried in the trenches at Hue may have been killed by American bombs'. Gingrich professed disgust. '[T]his particular liberal Democrat, he fulminated, 'had to blame America for the bodies which virtually every historian agreed were the deliberate acts of the Communists in Hue.'³⁴

Right-wing activists and authors have likewise drawn on the Hue executions to criticize the left, the mainstream press, and the antiwar movement – which are synonymous, according to many of these critics – for their alleged inattention to revolutionary terror while focusing on atrocities perpetrated by American troops. According to Gerard Jackson, for example, what transpired in Hue was not unusual but was merely 'the most shocking example of the North's barbaric policy' of 'terrorism by mutilation and massacre'; the 'cold-blooded business of calculated mass murder' in Hue, Jackson's headline writer concluded, was 'the massacre the left wants us to forget'.³⁵ In the midst of the 2004 presidential contest, writers from the *National Review*, the *Washington Dispatch*, and other outlets employed John Kerry's silence on the Hue executions when testifying before Congress in 1971 to portray the Democratic contender as, at best, a Communist dupe or, at worst, a dishonest propagandist.³⁶ At the very least, he was unfit for command.

Among elements of the Vietnamese diaspora, the Hue Massacre has come to symbolize the genocidal threat of the wartime revolutionary movement, in effect justifying the exiles' earlier support for the R.V.N. regime. For many members of the overseas community, the factual basis of the atrocities narrative is beyond reproach; the critical scholarship

refuting it is either unknown to them or has been ignored or dismissed. The editors of a book published by the Vietnamese Laity Movement in the Diaspora, for instance, sought to 'collect fragments of the truths available to remind one another and to advise the younger generations that the 1968 massacre at Hue is the most barbaric and worst crime of all in our country's historical tragedies'. The editors did not address studies challenging the conventional account. Their principal concern was the education of those too young to have experienced the war at first hand; the atrocities provided a crucial lesson. 'The facts in this book are not unfamiliar [to] most Vietnamese who kept themselves abreast of the situation when the war was going on,' they wrote. 'But for those who live under the communist rule and are affected by the communist propaganda, especially the younger generations, and for a vast majority of foreigners who, for a time, could only have access to secondhand sources of information that were brutally tampered and distorted by the anti-war reporters and journalists, these are the truths that they need to know.'³⁷ The exiled Buddhist activist Le Huu Dan agreed. Drawing for support on a documentary film produced by the right-wing outfit Accuracy in Media, Dan published a volume in 1998 that in considerable part focused on the 'savage killing of thousands of Hue's civilians with tremendous cruelty'. The Hue Massacre, he wrote, was a crime 'unprecedented in the history of human kind' that exceeded even 'Pol Pot's crime[s]', for the N.L.F., according to Dan, killed a Buddhist monk, a transgression for which, he said, not even Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge had been accused.³⁸

The atrocities emerged as a contentious public issue in 2003 with a dispute between elements of the overseas community and the curatorial staff at the Oakland Museum of California. During that Bay Area institution's preparations for a historical exhibit on California and the Vietnam war, Mimi Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American staff researcher at the museum, was dismissed days after her submission of a memo complaining about various shortcomings she perceived in the exhibition's initial organization. Among these was insufficient attention to the Hue executions.³⁹ Nguyen's termination – which museum officials denied was related to the memo but declined to explain, telling reporters they could not discuss personnel matters – led to outrage within the Vietnamese diaspora.⁴⁰ Letters were sent to the museum, and within days an online petition criticizing the exhibition and Nguyen's dismissal had gathered hundreds of signatures. While most signatories simply lent their names to the document without providing additional comments, among the minority who did offer their remarks were two individuals who specifically referred to the need for the museum to publicly memorialize the Hue Massacre.⁴¹

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The atrocities in Hue hold an important position in the study of war and massacre. Unlike well-documented events whose memory is suppressed for reasons of political convenience, the conventional story of the Hue executions is, at base, a poorly documented narrative that has nevertheless been popularized so as to achieve convenient political ends. The reasons are not difficult to discern. For American policymakers and politicians, belief in the atrocities provided a moral basis for prolonging a devastating intervention whose objectives were largely geopolitical. For overseas Vietnamese, traditional accounts of the executions justified their collaboration with a corrupt wartime regime. And for the broader American populace, the Hue Massacre has, then and since, allowed the nation to redirect guilt over its own wartime criminality onto the elusive Other it failed to subdue in Indochina. In this respect, the narrative has provided a necessary salve for America's wounded collective conscience. Over thirty years after the inglorious American withdrawal, stories persist of a gruesome and premeditated slaughter of thousands of civilians at the hands of the Vietnamese revolutionaries. In this respect, the Hue Massacre continues to serve as a neutralizing agent, reminding Americans that as horribly as 'we' acted during the war, 'they' most certainly were worse.

Notes

1. Richard Nixon, 'Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam,' 3 November 1969, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1969* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), 902.
2. On the A.C. Nielsen figures, see Henry Rahmel to Herbert Klein, 20 November 1969; Nixon Presidential Materials Staff [hereafter N.P.M.S.]; White House Central Files [hereafter W.H.C.F.]; Subject Files: Speeches (Ex); Box 106; Folder: SP 3-56/Nationwide T.V. and Radio Address re: Vietnam at Wash. Hilton Hotel, November 3, 1969 (3 of 3); National Archives II, College Park, Maryland [hereafter N.A. II]. On the hundreds of thousands of letters, telegrams, and postcards to the White House, see Herbert G. Klein to Pope Hill, 24 January 1970; N.P.M.S.; W.H.C.F.; Subject Files: Speeches (Gen); Box 106; Folder: SP 3-56/Nationwide T.V. and Radio Address re: Vietnam at Wash. Hilton Hotel, November 3, 1969 (2 of 2); N.A. II. Klein added that in addition to the 400,000 individual correspondents, 'hundreds of thousands of names were signed to petitions'.
3. Tom McCall to Richard Nixon, 12 November 1969, and 'Governor McCall's Statement on President Nixon's Vietnam Message', 3 November 1969; N.P.M.S.; W.H.C.F.; Subject Files: Speeches (Ex); Box 107; Folder: SP 3-56/PRO, [11/4/69]-11/13/69; N.A. II; and W.R. Smedberg III to Richard Nixon, 4 November 1969; N.P.M.S.; W.H.C.F.; Subject Files: Speeches (Ex); Box 107; Folder: SP 3-56/PRO, [11/4/69]-11/13/69; N.A. II.
4. 'President on Solid Ground in Search for Vietnam Peace', Editorial, *Orlando Sentinel*, 5 November 1969; N.P.M.S.; W.H.C.F.; Subject Files: Speeches (Ex); Box 106; Folder: SP 3-56/Nationwide T.V. and Radio Address re: Vietnam at Wash. Hilton Hotel, November 3, 1969 (1 of 3); N.A. II.

5. Mark Moyar, 'A Call to Arms', *Passport: The Newsletter of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations* 38, no. 3 (December 2007), 17.
6. Gerard Jackson, 'The Media, Abu Ghraib, and the Forgotten Massacres', *BrookesNews.com* (24 May 2004), www.newaus.com.au/042305_Abu_Ghraib.html (accessed 23 September 2004).
7. Phong Trao Giao Dan Viet Nam Hai Ngoai [Vietnamese Laity Movement in the Diaspora], *Tham Sat Mau Than o Hue: Tuyen Tap Tai Lieu / The '68 Massacre at Hue: Documentation* (Reischstett, France: Dinh Huong Tung Thu, 1998), xi.
8. Douglas Pike, *The Viet-Cong Strategy of Terror* (Saigon: United States Mission, Vietnam, 1970), 42.
9. Douglas Pike, 'The Bitter Story of Hue', *Reader's Digest* 97 (September 1970), 105–9.
10. D. Gareth Porter, 'The 1968 "Hue Massacre,"', *Indochina Chronicle* 33 (24 June 1974), 2.
11. David Hunt, 'Images of the Viet Cong', in Robert M. Slabey (ed.), *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1996), 56.
12. Douglas Pike to Patricia Way, 11 November 1988. I am grateful to Grover Furr of Montclair State University for furnishing me with this document.
13. On Porter and the Khmer Rouge, see George C. Hildebrand and Gareth Porter, *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976); and Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, United States House of Representatives, *Human Rights in Cambodia*, 95th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), 34–53. By 1978, as the evidence of widespread atrocities grew more compelling, Porter retreated from his initial scepticism and accepted Khmer Rouge responsibility for the horrific human rights situation in Cambodia.
14. For historians' rejection of Pike yet curious embrace of the conventional narrative, see Hunt, 'Images of the Viet Cong', 56–57. Ngo Vinh Long's research on the Hue executions has not yet been published, but he summarized his findings in Ngo Vinh Long, 'Vietnam Today', *Critical Asian Studies*, 34, no. 3 (2002), 459–64. He also discussed his research with me in a private conversation at the 2004 annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Washington, DC.
15. Pike acknowledged in 1988 that '[t]here are differences of interpretation as to the number,' and that he 'think[s] about 1,200 [were executed] but it could be less, for there are many [residents of Hue] who simply vanished'. Pike to Way, 11 November 1988. On the figure of 300 to 400 executions, see Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 217, who cited the contemporaneous research of Len Ackland. Young was presumably referring to the interviews reported in D. Gareth Porter and Len E. Ackland, 'Vietnam: The Bloodbath Argument', *Christian Century*, 86, no. 45 (5 November 1969), 1414–17. But elsewhere, citing an unpublished study, Ackland was reported to have learned from US and Vietnamese officials that approximately seven hundred Vietnamese were killed by the insurgents, and that this figure was generally consistent with Ackland's own investigations into the matter; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 346–47. More recently, Ngo Vinh Long concluded that 710 persons were executed in Hue; Ngo Vinh Long, 'Vietnam Today', 464.
16. Pike, *The Viet-Cong Strategy of Terror*, 31. See also Stephen T. Hosmer, *Viet Cong Repression and Its Implications for the Future*, R-475/1-ARPA (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1970), 76.
17. Porter, 'The 1968 "Hue Massacre"', 8–9.
18. Ngo Vinh Long, 'Vietnam Today', 464.
19. Porter and Ackland, 'Vietnam', 1415–16.
20. Porter, 'The 1968 "Hue Massacre,"', 3–5, 6, 8.

21. Walt Rostow to Lyndon Johnson, 25 February 1968; Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963–1969 [hereafter L.B.J. Papers]; National Security File [hereafter N.S.F.]; Country File – Vietnam [hereafter C.F. – Vietnam]; Box 70; Folder: General Military Activity, 2 C (7), 2/21–29/68; Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas [hereafter L.B.J.L.]. It is unclear whether the statement was ever released.
22. George Christian to Lyndon Johnson, 22 August 1967; Office Files of Fred Panzer; Box 427; Folder: Viet-Nam Information Group; L.B.J.L. I am indebted to John Wilson of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library for locating and providing me with a copy of this document. On the attention of the Vietnam Information Group to the Hue executions, see Talking Notes [hereafter T.N.] No. 7, 29 February 1968; T.N. No. 8, 6 March 1968; T.N. No. 11, 19 March 1968; and T.N. No. 16, 30 April 1968; L.B.J. Papers; N.S.F.; C.F. – Vietnam; Box 100; Folder: Public Relations Activities, 7 E (4)b, 2/68–4/68; L.B.J.L.; T.N. No. 17, 6 May 1968; L.B.J. Papers; N.S.F.; C.F. – Vietnam; Box 101; Folder: Public Relations Activities, 7 E (5), 5/68–6/68; L.B.J.L.; and T.N. No. 25, 30 July 1968; L.B.J. Papers; N.S.F.; C.F. – Vietnam; Box 101; Folder: Public Relations Activities, 7 E (6), 7/68–8/68; L.B.J.L.
23. On the land reform executions, see Edwin E. Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 216–22.
24. *Congressional Record*, 91st Congress, 1st Session, 21 April 1969, 9826.
25. Indeed, the United States ambassador to Indonesia, Francis J. Galbraith, placed those calling for an American withdrawal from Vietnam in the same moral universe as ‘those who are guilty of the atrocity at My Lai’ in that both were ‘afflicted by the same inability to feel the plight of the people of South Vietnam’. Francis Galbraith to Richard Nixon, 8 December 1969; N.P.M.S.; W.H.C.F.; Subject Files: Speeches (Ex); Box 106; Folder: SP 3-56/Nationwide T.V. and Radio Address re: Vietnam at Wash. Hilton Hotel, November 3, 1969 (3 of 3); N.A. II.
26. Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, *The Human Cost of Communism in Vietnam*, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), 2–3.
27. For his part, Richard Nixon went back and forth over whether he should identify the total as being in the ‘millions’ or merely the ‘hundreds of thousands’. Conversation No. 333–21, Executive Office Building, 26 April 1972, Nixon White House Tapes, N.P.M.S., N.A. II.
28. Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon with attachment [‘Communist Terror Tactics in South Vietnam’], 4 December 1969; N.P.M.S.; National Security Council Files [hereafter N.S.C.F.]; Alexander M. Haig Special File [hereafter A.M.H.S.F.]; Box 1004; Folder: My Lai Incident (2 of 2); N.A. II.
29. Patrick Buchanan to Henry Kissinger with ‘Questions and Answers’ for Richard Nixon, 5 December 1969; N.P.M.S.; N.S.C.F.; A.M.H.S.F.; Box 1004; Folder: My Lai Incident (1 of 2); N.A. II. Emphases in the original. See also ‘Questions on My Lai’, no date; N.P.M.S.; N.S.C.F.; A.M.H.S.F.; Box 1004; Folder: My Lai Incident (1 of 2); N.A. II.
30. *Congressional Record*, 91st Congress, 1st Session, 10 December 1969, 38223.
31. Video Recording 342-USAF-48733, ‘Viet Cong Massacre in Hue, Vietnam, 1968’, Record Group 342, N.A. II.
32. Program Notes for ‘War and Memory: In the Aftermath of Vietnam’, Washington Project for the Arts, 15 September–19 December 1987, Clippings File: Vietnam War Films, Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley.
33. ‘In Memory of Hue, Tet 1968’, *Viet-Nam Bulletin*, Viet-Nam Info Series No. 28 (Washington, DC: Embassy of Viet-Nam, April 1970), 2, 4, 7.
34. *Congressional Record*, 100th Congress, 2nd Session, 1 August 1988, 19685.

35. Gerard Jackson, 'Hue: The Massacre the Left Wants Us to Forget', *New Australian* 66 (16–22 February 1998), pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10189/20021026/www.newaus.com.au/news29b.html (accessed 28 February 2004).
36. See, for example, Mackubin Thomas Owens, 'Vetting the Vet Record', *National Review Online* (27 January 2004), www.nationalreview.com/script/printpage.asp?ref=/owens/owens200401270825.asp (accessed 12 March 2004); Hugh Hewitt, 'The Kerry Files, Volume II', *Daily Standard* (19 February 2004), www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/751gbmvt.asp (accessed 29 August 2004); and Greg Lewis, 'A Quarter Century of Disinformation', *Washington Dispatch* (2 March 2004), www.washingtondispatch.com/article_8268.shtml (accessed 29 August 2004).
37. Phong Trao Giao Dan Viet Nam Hai Ngoai, *Tham Sat Mau Than o Hue*, xi–xii.
38. Le Huu Dan, *Tuyen Tap Su That / Accounts of the Truth* (Fremont, Calif.: Xuat Ban Publishing Co., 1998), 7. For a refutation of the author's charge about monks under the Pol Pot regime, see Chanthou Boua, 'Genocide of a Religious Group: Pol Pot and Cambodia's Buddhist Monks', in P. Timothy Bushnell, Vladimir Shlapentokh, Christopher K. Vanderpool, and Jeyaratnam Sundram (eds), *State-Organized Terror: The Case of Violent Internal Repression* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1991), 227–40.
39. For press coverage of the affair, see Pueng Vongs, 'Vietnamese Slighted in Vietnam War Exhibit', *CaliToday* (4 November 2003), news.ncmonline.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=5cd7175cb57b97fb83228d2c2b286a1a (accessed 27 February 2004); Joyce Nishioka, 'Inclusive or Exclusive?' *AsianWeek* (21 November 2003), news.asianweek.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=a5d28df0f1f884b0bd046c14f1adbf2 (accessed 3 March 2004); Vanessa Hua, 'Oakland Museum Show Stirs Trouble', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 December 2003; and Carol Pogash, 'In Imperfect Compromise, Exhibit Tells of Vietnam Era', *New York Times*, 7 September 2004. The exhibition and the case of Mimi Nguyen are also treated in Loan Dao, 'What's Going On with the Oakland Museum's "California and the Vietnam Era" Exhibit?' *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005), 88–106.
40. On the museum's response to the protest over Nguyen's dismissal, see Nishioka, 'Inclusive or Exclusive?'; Hua, 'Oakland Museum Show Stirs Trouble'; and Pogash, 'In Imperfect Compromise, Exhibit Tells of Vietnam Era'.
41. The text of the petition, the signatures, and the comments, including those of Que H. Le (No. 101) and Lien Ton That (No. 200) discussing the Hue Massacre, were at www.petitiononline.com/111403/petition.html (accessed 13 March 2004). The petition can now be found online at the Internet Archive (though without the signatures and comments); <http://web.archive.org/web/20040329154925/http://www.petitiononline.com/111403/petition.html> (accessed 22 July 2011).