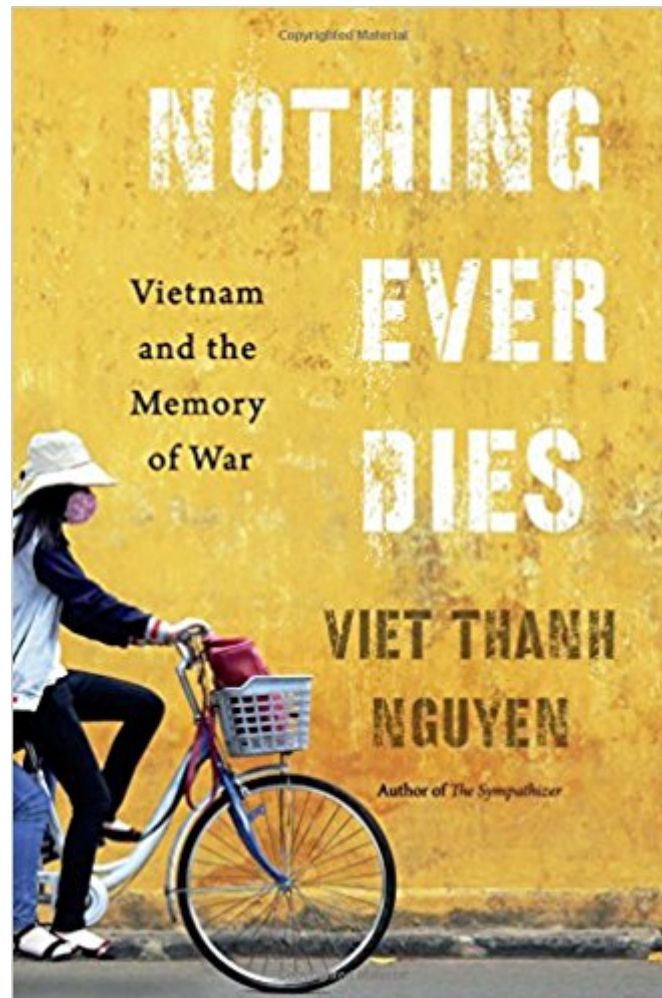


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Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam And The Memory Of War



Synopsis

All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory. From the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Sympathizer* comes a searching exploration of the conflict Americans call the Vietnam War and Vietnamese call the American War—a conflict that lives on in the collective memory of both nations. From a kaleidoscope of cultural forms—novels, memoirs, cemeteries, monuments, films, photography, museum exhibits, video games, souvenirs, and more—*Nothing Ever Dies* brings a comprehensive vision of the war into sharp focus. At stake are ethical questions about how the war should be remembered by participants that include not only Americans and Vietnamese but also Laotians, Cambodians, South Koreans, and Southeast Asian Americans. Too often, memorials valorize the experience of one's own people above all else, honoring their sacrifices while demonizing the enemy—or, most often, ignoring combatants and civilians on the other side altogether. Visiting sites across the United States, Southeast Asia, and Korea, Viet Thanh Nguyen provides penetrating interpretations of the way memories of the war help to enable future wars or struggle to prevent them. Drawing from this war, Nguyen offers a lesson for all wars by calling on us to recognize not only our shared humanity but our ever-present inhumanity. This is the only path to reconciliation with our foes, and with ourselves. Without reconciliation, war's truth will be impossible to remember, and war's trauma impossible to forget.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[Nguyen] produces close readings of the novels, films, monuments, and prisons that form the

identity of war in Vietnam, a face with carefully drawn features, familiar at a glance to the nation's people. Nguyen draws insights from Levinas, Ricoeur, and other philosophers, and his approach has affinities with that of hybridists such as W. G. Sebald and Maggie Nelson. The book is also notable for its inclusivity, addressing Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Korean experiences and the competition for narrative dominance in bookstores and box offices. (New Yorker 2016-05-09) In *Nothing Ever Dies*, Nguyen has written a powerful meditation on the manner in which memories are produced, cultivated, even empowered and subdued. He is a lucid and robust voice for the forgotten people, forgotten places, and forgotten memories most of all. *Nothing Ever Dies* is one man's powerful entreaty to a country which has seen nearly endless conflict (one war running upon the next) for generations. (Matthew Snider PopMatters 2016-05-25) Readers will discover the roots of Nguyen's powerful fiction in this profoundly incisive and bracing investigation into the memory of war and how war stories are shaped and disseminated. Ultimately, Nguyen's lucid, arresting, and richly sourced inquiry, in the mode of Susan Sontag and W. G. Sebald, is a call for true and just stories of war and its perpetual legacy. (Donna Seaman Booklist (starred review) 2016-04-01) Nguyen's work is a powerful reflection on how we choose to remember and forget. (Kirkus Reviews 2016-01-15) This thought-provoking book is recommended for all students of the Vietnam War and those interested in historical memory. (Joshua Wallace Library Journal 2016-03-01) [An] eloquent narrative of the Vietnam War's psychological impact on combatants and civilians. This is primarily a work that comes to grips with memory and identity through the arts. Nguyen succeeds in delivering a potent critique of the war and revealing what the memories of living have meant for the identities of the next generation. (Publishers Weekly 2016-05-16) Is there hope for an ethics of memory, or for peace? *Nothing Ever Dies* reveals that, in our collective memories of conflict, we are still fighting the Forever War. Nguyen's distinctive voice blends ideas with family history in a way that is original, unique, exciting. A vitally important book. (Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *To Be a Poet*) Inspired by the author's personal odyssey, informed by his wide-ranging exploration of literature, film, and art, this is a provocative and moving meditation on the ethics of remembering and forgetting. Rooted in the Vietnam War and its aftermath, it speaks to all who have been displaced by war and revolution, and carry with them memories, whether their own or of others, private or collective, that are freighted with nostalgia, guilt, and trauma. (Hue-Tam Ho Tai, editor of *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*) *Nothing Ever Dies* provides the fullest and best explanation of how the Vietnam War has become so deeply inscribed into national memory. Nguyen's elegant prose is at once deeply personal, sweepingly panoramic, and hauntingly

evocative. (Ari Kelman, author of *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek*) Beautifully written, powerfully argued, thoughtful, provocative. (Marilyn B. Young, author of *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*) In *Nothing Ever Dies*, his unusually thoughtful consideration of war, self-deception and forgiveness, Viet Thanh Nguyen penetrates deeply into memories of the Vietnamese war. [An] important book, which hits hard at self-serving myths. (Jonathan Mirsky *Literary Review* 2016-07-01) By taking the reader on a sweeping and sobering global tour of artifacts, places, art, texts, and monuments associated with Vietnam, Nguyen argues that our cultural need to reflect accurately upon our history and fully absorb its lessons is forever at war with the impossibility of ever fully knowing the truth, or retelling it accurately. [Cautioning that we cannot remember what we do not see, he lists the ways in which the U.S. has failed to fully recognize its own role in Vietnam, let alone the Vietnamese citizens it ostensibly went to Vietnam to protect.] It's fitting that *Nothing Ever Dies* has emerged at a moment when the U.S. and most of Europe are fiercely questioning America's ability to reconcile with the past. Nguyen might say that the only way we can truly acknowledge the past is to contend with how fallible our memories actually are. (Aja Romano *Vox* 2016-11-16) *Nothing Ever Dies* is an account of humanity at its darkest, a realm of war, memory, identity and pain that ventures from the jungles of Vietnam to the killing fields of Cambodia. (Jeffrey Fleishman *Los Angeles Times* 2016-11-14) A penetrating analysis by the Pulitzer Prize-winning Nguyen on how the Vietnam War has been remembered by the countries and people that have been most affected by it. (Listener 2016-11-26) In this elegantly written book, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Nguyen offers a comprehensive, balanced analysis of how the Vietnam War has been remembered and forgotten—both privately and collectively. [Examining a medley of cultural forms—novels, monuments, cemeteries, souvenirs, video games, photography, museum exhibits, and movies—] Nguyen calls attention to the inequality in the industrial production of memory and to the power of art to disable future wars. One of the book's most original—and perhaps controversial—arguments is that to avoid simplifying the other, people need to recognize both their humanity and their ever-present inhumanity and those of others as well. (Y. L. Espiritu *Choice* 2016-11-01) [A] gorgeous, multifaceted examination of the war Americans call the Vietnam War—and which Vietnamese call the American War. [As a writer, [Nguyen] brings every conceivable gift—wisdom, wit, compassion, curiosity—to the impossible yet crucial work of arriving at what he calls a just memory of this war. (Kate Tuttle *Los Angeles Times* 2017-02-16) Impassioned yet forensic. (Peter Pierce *The Australian* 2017-02-18)

Viet Thanh Nguyen is Aerol Arnold Chair of English and Associate Professor of English and

American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. His novel *The Sympathizer* won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Nothing Ever Dies, Vietnam and the Memory of War offers many riches. With great erudition and impeccable scholarship, Viet Thanh Nguyen shows us how the traumatic repercussions of war defy simplification, and how facile it is to misremember the dead. Focusing on the American war in Vietnam, and referencing other conflicts (Korea, Cambodia, the Philippines), the author challenges us to extend our understanding and compassion to participants and victims on both sides of the battlefield. By remembering others, we expand and enrich our own stance. Growing up in post-war Europe, I absorbed a good dose of aversion to the Germans and the Russians. Years later, while Europe was uniting and setting out to reconcile old enemies, I was relieved not to have to blame and point the finger any longer. After moving to Canada, I succumbed to the American version of the war in Vietnam by watching the movies (*Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter*, etc.) and reading the literary war accounts (Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, and others). I admired their artistry but seldom questioned the American one-sidedness. Reading *Nothing Ever Dies*, meant revisiting the shameful conflict within an expanded Vietnamese-American context to great personal enrichment. Particularly superb are the chapters showing how the "industries of memory" (books, TV, movies) constrain our ethical vision by practicing political partisanship and exclusion. Viet Thanh Nguyen's analytical depth and boundless intellect are here on full display. A bibliography of 22 pages of "Works Cited" attests to his curiosity and rigour. The book is compelling not least because the author weaves the painful, valiant, and ultimately fortunate trajectory of his family (from a hardscrabble village in northern Vietnam, via refugee camps, to prosperous California) into the broader framework of his inquiry. *Nothing Ever Dies* challenges us to cultivate a more compassionate sensibility and to recognize that each one of us is capable of being human and also inhuman. An engaging and empowering read.

The book arrived in the mail promptly and in good condition; no complaints there. Reading this book left me discontented and yet I plan to read through it again, more slowly. I am a Vietnam veteran who hopes to apply some meaning and coherence to what I remember. This book, on first read, anyway, did not really help with that, although I do feel rewarded with several meaningful insights, of which perhaps the most significant is that, although The United States' involvement in Indochina amounted to a huge murderous blunder, everything that happened was not just about the

Americans. *Nothing Ever Dies* would be more helpful to someone who has read more than I have, since it is full of references to other books. I intend to read some of them and to reread this book. But I think Viet Thanh Nguyen would have done better direct less energy to quoting other writers and more to expressing his own memories, perceptions, and emotions. It even seems to me that he may have been using his formidable powers of analysis and wide range of literary knowledge to avoid confronting the perceptions and emotions that were the most personal and intense for him. This may be an unfair criticism. I intend to reread the book, it definitely deserves this, to take more time with the books he cites, and then to see what I think.

Wars are fought twice over -- once on the battlefield and once in our memory -- and that is the subject of Viet Thanh Nguyen's profound and challenging but hugely readable new book. In the end, *Nothing Ever Dies* is a powerful meditation. It is a book to be read in small sips and not big gulps. It is worthwhile alone for revealing the intellectual roots of Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*, but even more so for confirming in compelling and passionate terms how we choose to remember and how we choose to forget, most notably that America is indeed fighting a forever War.

Superbly written and argued

Good subject; tough read but worthwhile.

THOUGHTFUL. INCISIVE. A MUST READ ABOUT WAR AND ITS AFTER EFFECTS, INVENTIONS AND DELUSIONS.....Lotte Marcus.

Excellent book.

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