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Imagining Saigon: American Interpretations of Saigon in the Twentieth Century

Evan Cordulack

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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Imagining Saigon: American Interpretations of Saigon in the Twentieth Century

Evan Cordulack
Decatur, Illinois

Master of Arts, College of William & Mary, 2005
Bachelor of Arts, College of William & Mary, 2003

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Doctor of Philosophy

Evan Cordulack

Approved by the Committee, November, 2012

Committee Co-Chair
Associate Professor Leisa Meyer
College of William & Mary

Committee Co-Chair
Associate Professor Hiroshi Kitamura
College of William & Mary

Associate Professor Charles McGovern
College of William & Mary

Associate Professor Kristin Hoganson
University of Illinois
ABSTRACT

Saigon has occupied an important place in the American imagination. Captivated by its French colonial past, a diverse array of American writers romanticized the city's "tree-lined streets" as the "Paris of the East" and the "Pearl of the Orient." As the United States extended its influence in Vietnam over the course of the twentieth Century, culminating during the 1960s, Saigon experienced America's growing presence. Americans composed photographs and writings, both personal and published, to make sense of the changing city and the changing public opinion of the war. The juxtaposition of American-occupied French colonial architecture with the visual manifestations of a city at war (such as overcrowding, military personal, and bombed buildings) runs throughout American representations of Saigon. These representations transformed the romantically remembered boulevards into a dystopian vision of the South Vietnamese capital brimming with corruption, street vendors, sex workers, and bars. In order to convey different ideas about Saigon, many media producers and government officials relied on the bodies of the people in Saigon to convey different meanings. This project argues that American understandings of Saigon often relied on a reciprocal relationship between human bodies and the environment around them. Bodies lent meaning to aspects of the city while the city helped construct meanings around people's bodies. In some cases, the bodies in question were those of Western men, but more often, the bodies of Vietnamese women did the work of creating American meanings for the city.
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Introduction

Saigon has occupied an important place in the American imagination. Captivated by its French colonial past, a diverse array of American writers romanticized the city’s “tree-lined streets”¹ as the “Paris of the East”² and the “Pearl of the Orient.”³ As the United States extended its influence in Vietnam over the course of the twentieth Century, culminating during the 1960s, Saigon experienced America’s growing presence. Americans composed photographs and writings, both personal and published, to make sense of the changing city and the changing public opinion of the war. The juxtaposition of American-occupied French colonial architecture with the visual manifestations of a city at war (such as overcrowding, military personal, and bombed buildings) runs throughout American representations of Saigon. These representations transformed the romantically remembered boulevards into a dystopian vision of the South Vietnamese capital brimming with corruption, street vendors, sex workers, and bars.⁴

This project deconstructs Saigon’s trajectory from the romantic town Americans described before the American War in Vietnam to the sprawling, vice-filled city they left in 1975. However, we cannot examine these two poles, clean and

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romantic/dirty and dangerous, using the convenience of timeline. The Saigon Americans encountered and represented in media did not start as safe and end as dangerous. Rather, this binary shifted constantly. At times, competing versions of the city emerged at the same time among different factions of Americans. Multiple versions of Saigon continually emerged in the American media, changing slightly each time, but generally orbiting the romantic/dangerous binary.

The ability for Saigon to have multiple meanings flows from the relationship between the its built, lived, and imagined environments. French Colonial buildings carried a history of the French presence in Saigon while the Americans living in Saigon experienced changes in the city, such as an increase in refugees or violence. At the same times, American writers and readers, both in Vietnam and in the United States, watched, looked at, and read media that described the city—conjuring a version of the city in their imaginations. From each of these sources came different meanings of the city that combined to be how Americans understood Saigon. Along the same lines, in order to understand what Saigon "was" to Americans, this project takes into consideration different elements of the American presence in Saigon. It at once considers the ways in which the United States contributed to the physical environment in Saigon, the actions of American government and military officials who influenced the lived experiences of the Americans living in the city, and various constructions of the city through the media.

In order to convey different ideas about Saigon, many media producers and government officials relied on the bodies of the people in Saigon to convey different
meanings. This project argues that American understandings of Saigon often relied on the interpretation of human bodies in order to lend meaning to aspects of the city. In some cases, the bodies in question were those of Western men, but more often, the bodies of Vietnamese women did the work of creating American meanings for the city. Depending on the viewer and the body being viewed, American, British, French, and Vietnamese bodies of different genders embodied meanings and judgments about their respective nations and ethnicities. While this project does not engage with the same primary sources, it builds on the work of Sue Sun’s work about the relationship between the US military population, Vietnamese prostitutes and venereal disease. Specifically she discusses how a “sex-education” film produced by the U.S. military represented Vietnam as a nation dependent on the United States, and this relationship got constructed in terms of gender, the female body, and prostitution.5

To understand the relationship between the various bodies of Saigon residents, as well as the geographical separation between the French downtown and other areas of the city, this project builds on Edward Said’s idea of Orientalism. From the earliest writings on Saigon, Americans engaged with an East-West binary when dealing with the city, often imbuing that relationship with Orientalist conceptions of Asian cultures. Orientalism is a term that describes the way in which the “West” (Europe and America) has viewed the “East” (Asian countries), how these “Western”

perspectives gets expressed through cultural products, and the institutions that have produced these views and products. In other words, "Orientalism" does not play out simply in the imagination, but also in the material reality of the viewers and the viewed. Orientalist thought creates and utilizes categories, such as "East," or "Oriental" and "West," that condense diverse cultures into homogenous labels. These labels allow people to easily create hierarchical differences between different cultures—for instance, the "West" is different from, and superior to, the "East."6

This project also builds on recent scholarship about the American War in Vietnam and argues that when studying the American War in Vietnam, scholars cannot take into consideration only traditional diplomatic sources, such as those found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, media or personal documents. Instead, we need to work to span these archives, often contained to academic work in a single field. Excitingly, the scholarship on the American War in Vietnam has begun to make this turn. For example, Scott Laderman's *Tours of Vietnam* considers the relationship between tour guides and Americans living in Vietnam and how the imagined culture present in the guides influenced the real experience of those Americans living in Vietnam. Laderman's work opens new possibilities for understanding the relationship between military, diplomatic, and cultural history.

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To help span these different archives, this project uses the work of Edward Soja. Expanding on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, Soja considers how people have conceived of spatiality in terms of a “Firstspace,” “Secondspace,” and a “Thirdspace.” Firstspace encompasses those “ways of thinking” that consider the arrangement of things. For instance, they might consider the location of an embassy in downtown area or the locations of different groups of people in city. Intellectuals working with “Secondspace” often focus on how people understand places through the knowledge created through representations of space. Thirdspace ways of thinking introduce skepticism into the ways people understand spatiality and “all traditional

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7 Lefebvre argues that urban spaces need to be examined in a way that is sensitive to their complexity. The physical urban environment functions on three different levels. First, people interpret the world around them. Second, people create abstract versions of the city space—such as city planners who create maps that then impact how the urban space is physically laid out. Third, people interact with other people in that city space. Lefebvre uses these three concepts in order to preserve the complexity of urban space. With three ideas always in circulation (what Soja calls the “trialectics of being”), he avoids the tendency to construct a binary—for example, city life is either lived or imagined—as a third idea will always critique, influence, and help construct the other two. One of Lefebvre’s main contributions to using the idea of “space” is that space is produced. People and organizations create an environment that is a product of their relationships with one another. The space is then capable of reproducing these relationships over time. As a result, an urban space is constructed by people and their relationship with the world around them and is simultaneously constructing that very same world. This approach to analyzing urban spaces is also called the “sociospatial perspective” and is part of what some sociologists identify as the “new urban sociology.” The basic idea is that physical space can impact social relationships. This differs from an older model known as “urban ecology.” Urban ecology uses biological metaphors and the idea of changing technology to describe changes in metropolitan areas. Specifically, the “sociospatial perspective” allows for scholars to engage in “factors of class, race, gender, lifestyle, economics, culture, and politics.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Gottdiener, “A Marx for Our Time,” 131-132; Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 18-20.

ways of confidently obtaining knowledge about the world.”9 Thirdspace analysis focuses on how space interacts with existential issues of “being and becoming” and how spatial issues influence theoretical constructions, “empirical analysis, critical inquiry, and social practice.”10 Put another way, Thirdspace combines the real and the imagined in order to understand how the world constructs meaning in a person’s life. Thirdspace provides a realm in which “everything comes together...subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined...mind and body...everyday life and unending history.”11

One of the keys to unpacking the American understandings of Saigon is the city’s downtown area. This neighborhood contained many Saigon landmarks that appeared throughout twentieth-century American representations of the city. In this relatively small area next to the Saigon River, visitors found the Presidential Palace, a large catholic cathedral, a zoo, embassies, government buildings and rue Catinat/Tu Do Street (a street with nightlife and shopping, as well as hotels that catered to Western visitors). This area was the original focus of French Colonial builders who built government buildings for French and Indochinese officials.12 Once the French left, the Americans moved into this area—leasing office space and villas for their own

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9 Ibid., 81.
10 Ibid., 82.
11 Ibid., 56–57.
government officials.

France's colonial project in Indochina started in the mid-nineteenth century and spread throughout Southeast Asia incrementally in hopes to compete with the British to trade in newly-opened Chinese ports. After several years of military actions, France took control of Saigon, and later Hanoi. By 1884, all of Vietnam was part of a French protectorate and France split the country into three sections called the "Indochinese Union."

The French in Indochina imported their own "civilizing" mission to the colony. Part of this mission was to build roads and buildings that would bolster the colonial power structure through their imposing design. French military engineers tailored Saigon to aid in the surveillance of the local population: wide streets allowed colonial authorities to observe public activities and the paucity of open spaces made it difficult for rebels to gather.\(^{13}\) The French government created buildings that touted its proud civilization. In a small area a few blocks from the Saigon River, French engineers constructed such buildings as an opera house, a palace for their governor-general (1873), and a cathedral (1880).\(^{14}\)

America’s presence in Asia began to grow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Seeking access to Asian markets, U.S. expansionist policies led to the annexation of Hawai’i and the Philippines and the Open Door policy attempted to keep trade in China open for Western interests. Amid these policies, the United

\(^{13}\) Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina*, (New York: Berg, 2001), 44.

States elevated its presence in Southeast Asia as well. In 1907, the United States State Department established a Consulate in Saigon.\textsuperscript{15} At the time, the Consulate served all of French Indochina.\textsuperscript{16} It provided “economic and commercial reporting” and aid to American business representatives stopping in Saigon—a convenient stopover for steamships to make between Singapore and Hong Kong.

The 1920s saw the French colonial government in Saigon continue to develop the city in its own image. To that end, the French colonial administration hired urban planner Ernest Hébrard in 1921 to help develop a design aesthetic specific to France’s presence in Southeast Asia and to help manage industrial growth in the cities.\textsuperscript{17} For Hébrard, developing an aesthetic meant fusing French designs with local building conventions to help adapt structures to the weather and the environment.\textsuperscript{18}

Hébrard created plans for the major cities of Indochina, including Saigon, Hanoi and Haiphong.\textsuperscript{19} Assuming that the continued development of the French part of these cities would displace the Vietnamese in the city to suburbs for workers, Hébrard figured he could develop the downtown areas of the cities.\textsuperscript{20} The plans Hébrard designed cited American zoning practices that helped to maintain property

\textsuperscript{15} Quincy Roberts, \textit{Post Report}, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788-ca. 1991, National Archives, Record Group 84 Stack Area 350 Row 70 Compartment 33 Shelf 5-2 Box 1, 1936), 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 2–3.
\textsuperscript{17} Wright, \textit{The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism}, 201–203. The French were not alone in the practice of creating an aesthetic for the cities of in their empire. The United States, for instance, hired architect and Planner Daniel Burnham to create plans for Manila.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
values by separating areas based on their desirability, or lack thereof.\textsuperscript{21} New institutions emerged in the area as well, such as banks and French corporations.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, during this time, downtown Saigon continued to develop, at least from the French perspective.\textsuperscript{23}

Hébrard also attempted to manage how the Europeans and Vietnamese interacted with one another by segregating Saigon. He didn’t think that the colonial experience for the Europeans living in Saigon should be devoid of contact with Vietnamese people, but felt that “every European district needs a native district in order to survive; it will provide indispensable domestic servants, small businesses, and labor.”\textsuperscript{24} As a result, the French colonial government established part of Saigon for permanent French housing.\textsuperscript{25}

In the early twentieth century, relatively few Americans lived in Saigon. By 1936, only four American organizations existed in Saigon—two private companies

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 209–210.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 213.
\textsuperscript{23} This seems like a predecessor to what would emerge after World War II as “modernization theory.” This theory, backed by social science, forwarded the idea that the American institutions and ideas should be exported to other parts of the world. Modernization theory worked as a Cold War ideology as its proponents believed it would introduce countries to capitalism and prevent them from Communist influence. While this French instance predates the Cold War, by comparing it to Modernization Theory, we are able to think through how the United States presence in Vietnam may or may not have been acting in a similar way. For an overview of Modernization Theory and the American War in Vietnam, see Jonathan Nashel, “The Road to Vietnam” in \textit{Cold War Constructions}, ed. Christian G. Appy, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).
\textsuperscript{24} Quoted in ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 221–222.
and two missionary groups. These groups, in addition to the staff at the Consulate, totaled about twenty Americans. Together with around 30 British residents, who made up the rest of the "foreign community" in Saigon, these Americans met socially at clubs and hotel terraces, like that of the Continental Hotel on Rue Catinat. The Consulate recommended its staff join a few French-managed clubs, specifically a French swimming and recreational club called the Cercle Sportif, and the Saigon Golf Club, a 100-or-so member club with a French, American and British membership. The Golf Club was the "social center for the foreign community outside of the Cercle Sportif and the hotel[s]." These places, while frequented by the French residents of Saigon, did not necessarily provide much social overlap between "foreign" and "French" communities. Social interactions between French, American and British residents often happened in more formal environments—be they receptions at someone's home, Government House, or formal dinners.

Even if their social circles did not always intertwine, the lives of the French and the American communities overlapped as they resided in the same part of town. The American Consulate was located at the corner of Rue Catinat and Rue Lagrandière. This location placed Americans in the middle of the French sector of the city—"the building is two blocks from the main shopping district, the principal hotel, the

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27 Ibid., 39.
28 Ibid., 36.
29 Ibid., 39.
30 Ibid., 36.
31 Ibid., 39.
residence of the Governor of Cochinchina, Government offices, Hospital Grall, the Cathedral, and the Post Office.

Some of the employees lived on the consular premises, while others lived nearby. The overlap of French and the limited American community in Saigon foreshadowed the spatial relationship between these communities that would continually emerge later in the twentieth century. The Americans followed the French in Saigon. In these early days, the Americans went to similar places to shop, socialize, and live their lives. Many of these institutions, like the Hotel Continental, persisted throughout the American War in Vietnam. While the Western population of Saigon shifted, these institutions stayed in the same place—downtown Saigon—and let the new Westerners, be it the French or the Americans, find them.

During World War II, the American presence in Saigon shrank from its already small size. In 1940, Japan took control of Indochina and Saigon, and with it, the American Consulate. In 1945 Japan recognized Vietnam as an independent state and, later in the year, surrendered to Allied forces and left Vietnam. After Japanese forces left Vietnam, the Vietminh (the Vietnamese nationalist group and led by Ho Chi Minh) stepped up to lead the country, setting up a government in Hanoi in 1946. However, the French did not want to cede control of the country and declared that the Republic of Cochinchina (the southern-most area of the country containing Saigon)

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32 Ibid., 12.
33 Living Quarters Statement, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788-ca. 1991, National Archives, Record Group 84 Stack Area 350 Row 70 Compartment 33 Shelf 5-2 Box 1, 1939), p. 4.
was a separate state. By the end of the year, military actions between French and Vietminh forces ushered in the First Indochina War.

As France fought the Vietminh for the control of Vietnam, the United States reestablished their small presence in Saigon. After the Consulate reopened on February 19, 1946, the United States moved to purchase land from the French for a new Consulate complex. This new compound, previously home to the French military court, was still in the downtown French district. The new Consulate would sit next to a park, the residence of the President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Cochinchna, and a residential property owned by the Bank of Indochina. The consular staff believed such a location would be “ideal and is unlikely to be depreciated,” and “with proper development would give the United States representation in Saigon one of the finest properties in the city.”

This new Boulevard Norodom property gave the United States a stake in downtown Saigon and the process of renovating the property promised greater U.S. influence in the area. Because the allies bombed the two-block area around the property during World War II, the United States needed to renovate the property before using it. Even though the French completed many of the repairs before the

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36 Charles S. Reed II, American Consul to Secretary of State, 26 April 1947, Classified General Records Collection, 1946-1963, National Archives.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
United States took possession, the renovation process allowed the United States Consulate General to start developing a relationship with those members of Saigon’s government who oversaw the visual aspects of the city. At the time of the United States’s renovations, only one modern apartment building had been built on Boulevard Norodom, and Saigon’s city government was planning a beautification project that the Consulate General expected would require all street-facing buildings to adhere to the same aesthetic. As a result, the Consulate General concluded that by default, the United States’ decisions on how to use and design the buildings on the property would “in a sense set the plan” for the way the Boulevard would look. All plans had to be approved by the Saigon government, but the Consulate General did not expect any problems.

In addition to the acquisition of the Boulevard Norodom property in the French downtown, the United States established an office and reading room for the United States Information Service (USIS) in 1947 at the corner of Rue Catinat and Rue des Frères Denis. By 1949, the lease on this building had run out and the Consulate

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had to help find a new location for the USIS. The Consulate leased a location up the
street from their previous Rue Catinat location on the third floor in the “Eden
Arcade,” a collection of shops that contained “fashionable stores and a high class
motion picture theater,” across the street from the Continental Hotel. The Consulate
hoped the location would provide increased traffic because it was close to the shops
and the theater. While the location lacked street frontage, it was “at the very center
of Saigon,” and closer to the Consulate’s offices.

The expansion of the American presence in Saigon came as American aid to the
French cause increased. In 1949, France dissolved the Republic of Cochinchina in
favor of a unified Vietnam. However, they did not grant this state full independence.
Nonetheless, in an effort to prevent Vietnam from being a “domino whose ‘fall’
would turn the Pacific into a Soviet Lake, denying vital raw materials to the United
States and its allies,” the United States recognized the France’s State of Vietnam
and, in 1950, gave financial support to newly formed government. The Truman
administration also created the Miliatary Assistance Advisory Group to help
distribute financial aid to the French military. By 1950, the Consulate sought
additional properties to purchase or rent in the downtown area because the Consulate

45 Ibid.
felt that area was more secure. In addition to the residence on Boulevard Norodom, which contained two apartments, the Consulate negotiated the purchase of two other properties: a "bungalow" at 13 rue Alphonse Folloit and a three-bedroom, two-bath home for the Consulate General. George Abbot, the American Consul in Saigon, urged the State Department to purchase more property in Saigon, as the Consulate staff grew too large for the additional rented accommodations (two houses, two apartments, and a hotel room). The hotel rooms Americans rented to supplement apartments and houses also kept Americans in the downtown area. Hotel Continental, as noted in the Retail Price Schedule as being the best hotel in Saigon and "the only hotel in Saigon which is considered suitable for American personnel," was located on Rue Catinat. The Majestic Hotel, next to the Saigon River and at the end of Rue Catinat, boasted renovated rooms that allowed the Consulate to recommend it for use

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As the State Department increased its staff for the Saigon Consulate and moved them into the city's downtown, the everyday lives of Americans in Saigon increasingly focused on the downtown area. In a report submitted to the State Department to give an idea of the cost of living in Saigon for Consulate employees, Consul Don Catlett included only retail "outlets...located in the downtown business district." The "cost of living report" revealed that everyday American life in Saigon was mostly contained within Saigon's downtown. Both expensive dry goods and mid-priced food could be purchased on Rue Catinat. A department store was located on Boulevard Charner, and fresh meat and produce were available at Les Frigorifiques, a store located in the same building as the Consular offices on Rue Lagrandiere.

However, the documenting of shops that Americans frequented did not provide

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52 Don V. Catlett, Consul, Retail Price Schedule, June 16, 1950, Saigon, Indochina, National Archives, ARC 1742016, RG 84, Stack Area 350, Row 70, Compartment 33, Shelf 5-2, Box 54, p. 18.
53 Ibid., 7a, 11.
54 Ibid., 11.
55 Ibid., 3, 6.
a full picture of how Americans understood the city. According to Catlett, American
women in Saigon went to many of the shops themselves, but often opted to send their
servants to Saigon’s Central Market, also located downtown, on Boulevard Bonard.
Catlett explained that shopping in general was inconsistent as it was “tedious,” and
the prices corresponded more to the shopper than the goods.\(^{56}\) If shoppers liked to
haggle for prices, they could get goods for less, but this depended on the language
skills of both buyer and seller. Moreover, Catlett explained that prices that were
demanded for goods went up if the buyer was a “foreigner,” and even higher if that
person wasn’t French.\(^{57}\)

By the 1950s, Americans increasingly focused their attention on the downtown
of Saigon. Descriptions of the city placed more importance on the area and placed
other sections of the city in the periphery. The 1953 Post Report, a guide created by
the United States Embassy to describe to Americans living in Saigon what to expect
and places to go and shop for fulfill their basic needs, described the Saigon-Cholon
area starting from the French downtown. The city “spreads out in a large semi circle
on the North side of the Saigon river.” The description focuses on the seven-block
rue Catinat, the “central avenue of the European business section.” While connecting
the river to the Cathedral, the Post report described the streets as lined not only by
shops and cafes, but also by large shade trees.\(^{58}\)

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 3, 7.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 18.
The late 1940s and early 1950s also saw the United States start to affect Saigon’s population in addition to its real estate. Since the beginning of the First Indochina War in 1946, in which the French colonial authorities fought the Viet Minh, refugees moved from rural areas to urban ones, as fighting spread through the countryside. After the war ended in 1954, a new factor caused people to migrate throughout Vietnam. As part of the 1954 cease-fire agreement, the French and Viet Minh agreed to split the country along the 17th parallel, creating a North Vietnam and a South Vietnam.59 The agreement stated that until all military forces repositioned themselves according to the new boundary, civilians who wished to live in the other part of Vietnam could do so.60 This moving of people from North to South Vietnam—what was called Operation Exodus—started in late July 1954.61 In August of that year, an American General for the Military Assistance Advisory Group took charge of the refugees in Vietnam.62 The movement of people South lasted until the middle of 1955, by which time over 800,000 people had moved from North Vietnam.63 Around 140,000 of these people were associated with the French, worked

60 Ibid.
for the military and government, or had other means to move south.\textsuperscript{64}

The United States aided those people wishing to leave the North for the South. The United States Navy, for example, provided ships to transport a large number of the migrants. At first, the refugees headed to 42 "reception centers...in and around Saigon,"\textsuperscript{65} but the number of refugees quickly outgrew the facilities available. Refugees lived all around the city—at a horse race track, in the French-built Opera House, schools and other large buildings.\textsuperscript{66} The United States, in addition to French and South Vietnamese authorities, had to construct temporary facilities outside Cape St. Jacques to accommodate more refugees. After the initial move was over, the South Vietnamese government attempted to find permanent housing for the refugees, and many of the recent arrivals settled in Saigon or the provinces around it.\textsuperscript{67} Also, the French Commissariat General built more durable housing for some of the refugees along the highways leaving and entering the city and relocated others to villages in more rural areas.\textsuperscript{68}

Refugees arriving in Saigon were met not by the relaxed city of the French and American imagination but rather one affected by civil discord. In March 1955, a battle broke out in Saigon started by the Binh Xuyen, a private army, used by the French to fight the war. They attacked the Saigon police headquarters and shelled the

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
Presidential Palace. American reporters also took note of the refugees’ living situation. One New York Times reporter described a scene he witnessed one Easter Sunday. He had observed the newly-arrived migrants come out of the Opera House where they were living, “their clothes more tatters than clothes,” and walk down Tu Do Street to the Cathedral a few blocks away, while others slept on the street outside or begged for money.

The battles fought in Saigon continued in April of 1955 as the Binh Xuyen challenged the South Vietnamese government in the city’s streets, particularly Boulevard Gallieni, a heavily populated main street that connected downtown Saigon to Cholon, where the Binh Xuyen were headquartered. Outbreaks of fire also burned a large swath of the city.

Along with the story of the fighting in Saigon and Cholon, the New York Times ran a map of Saigon. Complementing the accompanying article, this map illustrates the creation of an imagined Saigon, combining elements present in other texts, like Graham Greene’s The Quiet American. The map/article pair reveals how Saigon was organized. In the few blocks around the Presidential Palace, here called the Premier’s Palace, one could find other powerful agencies like the police. The article described

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\[^{72}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[^{73}\text{Ibid.}\]
how one part of Saigon fought while another went about its daily life. At times, the fighting happened outside the downtown districts, but at other times it entered the small French-designed area. However, the physical distance was not the only power at work that might insulate parts of Saigon from war—so did national affiliation. The reporter described an American unaffected by the war: "on a balcony an American G.I. pulled at a bottle of beer and watched the show."74

While Americans were for the most part observing other factions take part in the violence, there were some incidents involving Americans in Saigon. In July 1955, a group of South Vietnamese protestors broke into two hotels in Saigon housing the Armistice Commission to protest what they felt was the Commission’s favoring of the North Vietnamese.75 One of the hotels, the Majestic, had 57 Americans living in it. While inside this hotel at the end of Tu Do Street, the crowd looted rooms, ripped out elevators, and burned two cars.76 A few weeks after the riot at the Majestic, two American cars were bombed outside of the American Embassy.77 In September 1957, bombs exploded the United States Information Library, a U.S. military bus, and a U.S. military billet in Cholon.78 As one reporter commented, the bombs were meant to "injure Americans and destroy United States property."79

74 Ibid.
The United States undertook additional construction projects in the Saigon area in the late 1950s. The United States Mission in Vietnam was restricted by the 1954 agreement to refrain from building new military installations in Vietnam. However, it could build civilian facilities with foreign aid money, like improved runways at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon's major airport, so it could handle large jets.\(^{80}\) But by 1962, the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (the replacement for the Military Assistant Advisory Group created in the 1950s by the Truman administration) established a headquarters in downtown Saigon, with its staff living in hotels and houses.\(^{81}\)

Saigon in the early 1960s was the site of numerous coups as leaders shifted in and out of the South Vietnamese government. At the same time, protestors took to the streets on many occasions, often protesting the treatment of Vietnamese Buddhists by Catholic politicians. A new name for the communist enemy also emerged. The National Liberation Front replaced the Viet Minh as the armed branch of the Communist party working in Vietnam. The soldiers, both those formally part of the NLF or fighting for the same cause, were referred to as the Vietcong. After the United States' varying degrees of support of these administrations, and its involvement in the coups, came the period commonly thought of as American "escalation" of the American War in Vietnam. In August 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin

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\(^{80}\) Adrian G. Traas, *Engineers at War*, Center for Military History, United States Army (Washington, DC: 2010), 2.

incident—where U.S. Navy vessels allegedly came under attack by North Vietnamese forces—led to a resolution authorizing the use of U.S. military force in Vietnam. U.S. involvement proceeded as an “air war” until 1965 when U.S. Marines landed in Vietnam to protect an airbase. President Johnson then committed 150,000 troops to the war.

From the perspective of Saigon, 1965 marked a change in American life in the city. President Johnson ordered the families of service members stationed there to leave the country in preparation of an escalated war effort. As the families left, and more soldiers arrived, Saigon became increasingly crowded, expensive, and represented as a dangerous place full of vice. While Saigon always had outbreaks of Violence since the Americans had been in the city, January 1968 marked a high-point. In January and February 1968, the Vietcong executed an attack on urban areas and other targets across Vietnam. Later called the Tet Offensive, this attack included a raid on the newly-finished American Embassy in Saigon.

The de-escalation period of the American War in Vietnam followed the Tet Offensive as American public opinion turned firmly against the war. President Johnson authorized fewer troops than the military requested and in 1969, President Nixon started to withdraw troops from Vietnam. Nixon announced a gradual plan to “Vietnamize” the war—the United States would provide aid and support to South Vietnamese cause, but the troops would have to come from Vietnam. In 1973, the United States signed an agreement to end the fighting in Vietnam. While this cease-fire did not stop the fighting between North and South Vietnamese troops, it did allow
the United States to remove its military forces. After 1973, the United States Congress reduced funding to support the South Vietnamese war effort and in 1975, North Vietnamese forces entered Saigon while the last few Americans evacuated the city. After taking over the city, Saigon was renamed to Ho Chi Minh City.

In the following chapters, I use five vignettes to explore the variations and through lines in American meanings and understandings of Saigon—in other words, how the Americans helped to construct the “space” of Saigon. Chapter One explores the writing of the first American travelers arriving in Saigon. Starting in the nineteenth century, American writers travelled to Saigon and had to confront the colonial presence there. While some writers assumed a “civilizing” role, much in the spirit of the colonial power structure they found in Saigon, others attempted to separate themselves from the colonial systems in place in Saigon. However, this split between “American” and “colonial” was not an easy one to maintain. Americans visiting in Saigon often stayed in the French downtown of Saigon, where they recognized the Western urban plan and could enjoy the luxuries the French had imported by the late-nineteenth century, such as a café culture. Some American writers used these luxuries and Saigon’s development to critique French colonialism. Because the French downtown was so different from the rest of the city, some argued it was a physical manifestation of how the French were unable to manage a colony.

Many American writers contemplated what was “real” in Saigon. For some, the French presence, and sometimes the French “character,” in Saigon was superficial. In the early twentieth century, Saigon left writers with a feeling of the past—it recreated
parts of their previous experiences in France. American writers criticizing the French presence in Saigon saw the feelings of the past created by the city as inauthentic and, at best, superficial. Saigon’s success, for some, was rooted in its ability to recreate the feeling of France in Indochina. The impact of the recreation of France was lessened by the presence of the indigenous population of Saigon. As the First Indochina war started, Americans in Saigon wrote of an unstable city. For many, the authentic city still hid behind a colonial façade. But with the start of the war, behind the façade of prosperity, leisure, and French colonial architecture lurked danger.

Chapter Two examines *The Quiet American*, both the original 1954 novel by British author Graham Greene, and the American film directed by Joseph Mankiewicz in 1958. Engaging with many of the same themes as American writers both before and after them, these texts reveal how American understandings of Saigon did not exist in isolation—either in terms of national boundaries or medium. Specifically, Greene’s novel and the 1958 film challenge the divide between a “real” and “imagined” Saigon, and use the bodies of the people in Saigon to understand the city as they reveal different meanings about both local and international relations. The visual medium of the film also allowed it to utilize the power of the French colonial architecture to represent a French-controlled Saigon during a time when Americans lived in the French section of the city. The film also engages with the real/imagined divide through its set design as well as such visual cues as makeup.

Chapter Three addresses how the foreign press corps in Saigon—the journalists and photographers working for the likes of the *New York Times*, the Associated Press
and other American media outlets—enabled different factions in Saigon to impose their meanings on the city for their own political motives. More specifically, it examines the press coverage around the "Buddhist Crisis" of 1963, which stemmed from Buddhist objections to the Catholic-led government of South Vietnam. At a time when the United States could not publicly side with the Buddhists, the State Department, here represented by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., asserted itself in Saigon to send a message about its commitment to South Vietnam.

Journalistic representations of the Buddhist Crisis revealed how Saigon’s public spaces downtown served as arenas where Buddhists and South Vietnamese Government officials addressed their political issues. These images also came to represent U.S. involvement in South Vietnam, as the meanings around the Buddhist Crisis and the city merged with the war against North Vietnam. Part of this overlap came from the connotations associated with the military equipment shown in the representations of Buddhist oppression. While the State Department and military did not condone the actions of the South Vietnamese government against the Buddhists, they had previously given equipment to the troops acting against the Buddhists. Consequently, the means for oppressing Buddhists appeared as though they were supported by the Americans. Even though the United States could not control the use of previously-issued equipment, or stop photojournalists from capturing images of protests, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. did have control over his own body. Often without making an statement, Lodge placed himself in front of cameras—letting the juxtaposition of his American body against the backdrop of Saigon and its Vietnamese residents lend meaning to the American presence in Saigon. Unlike the
leaders of the South Vietnamese government, Lodge had his picture taken on the streets of Saigon, making an attempt to connect with the people of Saigon and prove that connection in a visual and public way.

Chapter Three concludes with the representation of the 1963 coup that removed President Diem from power and the aftermath of this event. Representations of the coup, particularly photographs, inverted the trends journalists established during the Buddhist Crisis. The lines between civilian and military disintegrated temporarily, the private spaces that sheltered the South Vietnamese leaders were revealed to the public, and the processions through the streets—previously limited to Buddhists—now included South Vietnamese troops. However, this mode of representing Saigon did not last long. Soon, stories of the city returned to old conventions; only now they included the city’s new permissiveness, made possible by the removal of the old regime.

Chapter Four focuses on the life of Else Baker, an American living in Saigon from 1963 to 1965. Mrs. Baker and her husband, Lee, an Air Force officer, traveled to Saigon because Lee had to work there as a liaison between the military and the press. While in Saigon, Mrs. Baker published her writing about life in Saigon. Her writing reflects her unique perspective—she was not part of the press corps or the military establishment and she interpreted the events in Saigon through domestic spaces and everyday life.

Else Baker’s tenure in Saigon is significant for a number of reasons. First, it reveals how international relations influenced, and were influenced by, domestic
spaces. Second, Else Baker’s home life sheds light on the different factions of Americans living in Saigon—specifically the tension between the military establishment and the foreign press corps. However, by interpreting her personal letters, we can see how these two groups, while at odds at times, had a close relationship as they mingled within the Baker household. Third, Mrs. Baker’s published writing shows how knowledge about the city got passed from one group of Americans living in Saigon to the next—creating a more cohesive understanding of the city in the American mind. Fourth, Else Baker’s writing documented her friendships with the women who worked in her home and shows how American domestic spaces allowed for a degree of cultural exchange and understanding. Fifth, as Mrs. Baker wrote about events in Saigon, she exposed how the politics of Saigon were linked to its public spaces.

Chapter Five starts as the American buildup begins in the mid-1960s. As the American commitment to South Vietnam escalated, different versions of Saigon once again emerged among the American press and government officials. While there were many different descriptions of Saigon in the second half of the 1960s, many writers agreed that the city struggled because of the war. Increases in prostitution and traffic, popular topics with journalists, were physical manifestations of the American presence in the city. American government officials also engaged in the discussions focused on the conditions in Saigon. Along with some members of the press, Senator William Fulbright critiqued American foreign policy by pointing at the negative conditions in Saigon, and did so by mobilizing gendered metaphors to describe the city. On the other hand, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara defended United
States policy, while arguing a wholesome version of Saigon. McNamara’s vision resonated with both military-produced media and some of the American press. Regardless of the “spin” applied to the American presence in Saigon, the United States Embassy and United States military establishment attempted to minimize the American presence in the city by constructing American bases outside of Saigon. While this move did remove many Americans from the French downtown, it changed the geography of the city—moving Americans, and the bars and sex workers that catered to them, to a different part of the sprawling urban area.

By looking at representations of Saigon produced by, about, or for Americans, this project interprets how Americans interacted with Saigon during, and leading up to, the American War in Vietnam. It seeks to realize the potential of Soja’s real-and-imagined analysis of spaces and considers the ways in which places, both real and imagined, shape everyday life. The multiple versions of Saigon that emerge in the pages of personal letters, government documents, novels and the press, along with other media, reveal the process of meaning making enabled by the circulation between real and imagined. The meanings of Saigon’s French “look” changed over time as Americans took over the spaces from the French. What was “real” and what was “imagined” mattered less than the aggregate of these experiences—it is this aggregate this project strives to examine.
Representations of Saigon in Print Culture through the 1950s

Since the nineteenth century, Americans have walked through Saigon’s public spaces, noting the city’s development, colonial system, and disparities all the while establishing a nascent American presence in the city. Early representations of Saigon in American print culture revealed the ways public space mediated and shaped ideas Americans had about the city. Through the observation of visible cultural elements, such as architecture and clothing, American writers judged the effectiveness of French colonial policy. In many of these accounts, authors displayed little background research. Rather, they based their writing on their observations of the city and the people living there, sometimes combining their Saigon experiences with other travel memories. Using what they saw, American writers combined people with roads, nation and race with infrastructure as they crafted their own written versions of Saigon for consumption by American readers.

After the mid-nineteenth century, as the French molded Saigon’s downtown into a semblance of a French town, and France’s visual dominance over the city increased, American representations of the city increasingly focused on the public areas of the city created by the French—such as streets, sidewalks, restaurants, and parks. The public-facing elements of French colonialism (such as architecture and sidewalk culture) dominated American representations of the city, and, at first, seemed to impress Americans. However, as more Americans visited the city, their writing started to reveal a complicated relationship to the French colonial process. On one hand, authors had a deep skepticism about the colonial system in Saigon. On the other hand, many American travelers enjoyed the trappings of the French colonial
system—like aesthetically pleasing public spaces and entertaining sidewalk cafes. As a result, American representations of Saigon’s public space also implicated Americans in the colonial process as they revealed American access to colonial privilege.

As Americans traveled to Saigon, the city they documented and the culture of looking in which they participated layered different meanings onto their experiences of the city itself. To American travelers, Saigon was not entirely authentic, and as a result, many American accounts of the city struggled to account for the “real” colonial layer they saw imposed upon the city. Specifically, Saigon’s architecture, plan, and leisure culture seemed to be insincere in some way. Furthermore, the unreal/real layers of Saigon shifted with American views of France. When writers criticized French colonialism, the downtown architecture and the French people moving through these spaces became unmoored from what the writers felt Saigon really was. As the First Indochina War started, the “real” aspects of Saigon had to do with the war. By the mid-1950s, Americans still entertained the idea of an insincere aspect of Saigon, which they then couched in the context of the decolonization of other Asian cultures. At the same time, American writers began to cope with their new position in Saigon—the part of Saigon they inhabited had a deep colonial imprint left by the French. American writers had to find a way to distance themselves from colonialism, while inhabiting the same spaces as the French and inheriting the racial tensions inscribed by decades of colonial rule.
Representations of Saigon before the First Indochina War

One of the earliest American representations of Saigon appeared in the memoir of Lieutenant John White, who sailed on the first American voyage to Saigon\textsuperscript{1} while on leave from the United States Navy.\textsuperscript{2} *History of a Voyage to the China Sea*, from 1824, documented White’s 20-month commercial voyage from Salem, Massachusetts to the China Sea.\textsuperscript{3} A contemporary review stated that the *History of a Voyage to the China Sea* was “the most complete and authentic account which has been published, at least in our language, of the kingdom of Cochin China.”\textsuperscript{4}

White observed Saigon, for the most part, as he walked through it in October of 1819.\textsuperscript{5} His views of Saigon, while developed before the French established their colonial presence in Indochina, revealed a way of interpreting the city. As White saw it, there was a somewhat developed area, courtesy of colonial interests, surrounded by a indigenous periphery. White’s main area of interest were the physical locations—the military citadel and the Governor’s Palace. The area and people existed outside of White’s city center included a market with female merchants selling different items in bamboo huts and a neighborhood with houses of different sorts “made of wood,

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\textsuperscript{1} John White, *History of a Voyage to the China Sea* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1823), iv.
\textsuperscript{3} White, 359.
\textsuperscript{5} White, 200.
and covered with tiles, and tolerably decent" as well as more "humble" structures.\(^6\)

These areas, however, were not without the presence of a nascent colonial system.

As White proceeded through the city, he noted that the streets were spacious and "regularly laid out, intersecting at right angles."\(^7\) For White, these streets help lend order to what he recognized as "native"—linking them to the area of the city containing the citadel.

Describing an area outside of the citadel, White constructed the city by expressing his own discomfort with the people of Saigon:

Toiling under a scorching sun, through a street strewed with every species of filth; beset by thousands of yelping, mangy curs; stunned alike by them and the vociferations of an immense conourse of the wondering natives, whose rude curiosity in touching and handling every part of our dress, and feeling of our hands and faces, we were frequently obliged to chastise with our canes.\(^8\)

Here, White's view of Saigon condescended to Saigon's indigenous neighborhoods and people. This part of the city and the people living there imposed upon White's party. Grouping dirty streets, dogs and people together, White's description provided an example of the colonial gaze. However, his gaze was challenged when the objects of it attempted to understand him. White could not accept being subjected to someone else deconstructing the meanings of his clothes and skin (the places he was touched), so he responded by assaulting the people around him. By "chastising" the

\(^6\) Ibid., 218-219.
\(^7\) Ibid., 233.
“rude” behavior of “natives,” White suggested he either brought with him, or absorbed, an understanding of “civilizing.”

The relationship between center (colonial) and periphery (indigenous) that White utilized in his memoir ran through later descriptions of Saigon. The center/periphery binary took shape both geographically and socially in an 1872 article by Walter Rose, “A Visit to Saigon,” in *Appleton’s Journal of Literature, Science and Art* described a walk through the city and an encounter with dirty streets:

> After leaving the bazaar, we passed through a long and narrow street, which teemed with mire and reeked with foul odors; for, though the French, since the city fell into their hands, have done much toward improving it, it is very difficult to impress upon Orientals the desirability of proper sanitary measures.9

Rose differentiated between the “civilized” French population of Saigon and everyone else. By casually looking at the urban development of Saigon, Rose judged the French civilizing mission as virtuous. For Rose, dirty streets resulted from an innate quality present in the “Orientals,” not in the colonial system itself.

Writers looked to the relationship between center and periphery, civilized and uncivilized, French and Indochinese, in order to critique the success of the French Colonial program in Saigon. On a trip to Saigon in the early 1870s, Frank Vincent,

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8 Ibid., 219.
an Ivy-league educated young man from Brooklyn, New York, documented a city with a growing colonial presence. Like Rose, he looked to the city's development to judge France's colonial system. He saw a rupture growing between the French Colonial presence (architecturally, developmentally, and culturally) and the rest of Saigon. His reason for the growing disparity stemmed from France's inability to run a colony. Vincent compared Saigon to parts of the British Empire:

After seeing the healthy, growing, and usually paying colonies of the British Empire in the east, a visit to Saigon, 'the infant capital of Asiatic France,' leaves a ludicrous impression indeed upon the mind of an observant, thinking, and reflecting traveller.

The "ludicrous impression" Vincent had was caused by the contrast the French created in Saigon between the infrastructure and culture they created. In his description of a new building in Saigon—the Government house, Vincent noted how out of place the two-story stucco and brick building looked when compared to its surroundings:

The appearance...of this elegant modern palace, with its grand staircases and pillars...in the midst of a tropical jungle and surrounded only by a few

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13 Ibid.
Vincent’s impression of Saigon was based on the lack of development in the city. The “infant capital” did not yet look like what he expected from a colony. The French elements of the city seemed disconnected from their surroundings. For Vincent, Saigon’s public spaces served up French leisure culture. On a street lined with trees next to the river, Vincent described how “after sundown, it is the custom of the residents to promenade, while listening to the music of one of the regimental bands.” Implied in his description of the “promenade” was the beginning of a critique of the French colonial system. Vincent believed Saigon not only provided a place for French citizens to participate in a culture of leisure, but the city also eroded the character of its French residents. Vincent claimed “morals are at the low ebb usually found among Europeans in oriental towns” as he observed that French residents “purchase” the “Annamite girls” with whom they live.

By focusing on the French leisure culture in Saigon, Vincent created the impression of a layer of superficiality in the city. He critiqued the entirety of France’s colonial project in Saigon and questioned the validity of their presence in Saigon. According to Vincent, the waterway connecting the markets of China to Saigon that France hoped to find was merely an “illusion.” In fact, Vincent extended this idea of the “illusion” to the entire French colonial project in Saigon:

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 52-53.
16 Ibid., 54.
17 Vincent, The Land of the White Elephant, 312-313.
a ‘France in the east’ is, as far as my limited observation goes, a great farce—a travesty, a burlesque upon colonisation [sic] in general. The French character is sadly wanting in many of the virtues necessary for successful pioneering in foreign lands; it lacks that sturdy, energetic, persevering trait which we see so ably displayed by the English in India and Australia and by the German settlers in America.18

In Vincent’s eyes, France’s colonial project in Saigon was not only failing, but also mocked the idea of colonialism. Blaming this, in part, on the character of the French, Vincent championed the English in India and Australia and the German settlers in the United States.

While some American writers wrote of Saigon’s aesthetic appeal and infrastructural improvements, others critiqued the French residents that accompanied these aspects of Saigon. Consequently, they not only cast Saigon’s design, but also its French population, as superficial. When talking of the French population, one other writer focused on a perceived inability of the French to do “real” work. According to this 1895 account, Saigon was “a city of fonctionnaires, and nine out of ten Frenchmen are occupied in purveying either French luxuries or French personal services to the official and military classes.”19 For Americans, Saigon’s reason for being seemed to be to deliver luxury to its French residents, without actually producing much of anything.

18 Ibid., 312.
Thus, for American authors, downtown Saigon was a place of comfort, luxury and familiarity. The luxuries available to American travelers in Saigon were embodied in the pleasing design of this part of the city. One account described the downtown area as

laid out on the chess-board pattern familiar to all who have visited the western towns of the United States, and French taste has made it very attractive in appearance. The streets are lined with rows of trees, the roads are just like those of any European city, the public buildings are numerous and stately, the shops have all the external appearance of the magasins of Paris, the cafés are at every corner and are patronized with true French conviviality.\(^2^0\)

Seemingly, the comfort American writers had in Saigon was provided by France's ability to assert control over the city through the built environment. French store signs asserted visual control over the sidewalks, reinforced by "French buildings in the business parts of town and French people everywhere."\(^2^1\) Frank Carpenter also noted that the French built "public improvements everywhere."\(^2^2\) There was a bridge that crosses the Saigon River, dry docks telephone and telegraph lines and arc lights on the main streets.\(^2^3\) To American eyes, anything French, such as clothing and language, also helped keep anxiety at bay. When Carpenter landed in Saigon, he saw "a dozen natty French girls dressed in Parisian style...and scores of well-dressed

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{21}\) Frank Carpenter, "How the French are bearing the white man's burden in the colonies of farther India," *Timely Topics*, April 4, 1902, 489-490.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 490.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
officials and merchants on the wharf dressed in white duck and white helmets, who spoke to me in French.” In addition to these conversations, Carpenter also mentioned that the French language is “everywhere” as “the natives here talk pigeon French.” However, the visual and aural dominance of the French in Saigon seemed disproportionate to the population. Carpenter estimated the population of Saigon at this time to be 40,000 people, including 2,000 French residents.

While part of Carpenter’s Saigon was distinctly French, Cholon, the town a few minutes away by a “steam tramway” was not. Cholon, according to Carpenter, was “about twice as large as Saigon,” and was more Chinese than French. As he walked through the city, he noticed that most businesses were run by Chinese merchants. The Indochinese were apparently not included in his description. He did note that there were “natives,” as they had their own newspaper, or as he called it “native journal.” But for Carpenter, Saigon was separated into simply Chinese and French sectors—the former asserting itself in his mind.

The visual dominance that the French exerted over Saigon and its representation by Americans only increased over time. Jasper Whiting, an American traveler who had travelled to France, and published letters he wrote while on a 1900-01 tour of China and Southeast Asia, dwelled on the French look of the city. Whiting’s letters

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24 Ibid., 489.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 490.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
focused on Saigon’s cleanliness, the artistry of the French colonial buildings, and the methods and overall success of creating Saigon as “miniature” Paris. As a result, Whiting’s letters stressed the importance of the city’s connection to France. However, because street-level public spaces allowed for interaction between people of different cultures, Whiting’s letters revealed the dynamics of French Colonial policy as well as the place of Americans within that dynamic. For Americans with often little investment in Saigon beyond their own desire for a good time, the street allowed experience and memory to mix. The version of France built by planners and engineers could approach, but never replicate, what Whiting had previously experienced in France. While some French residents had the ability to sharpen the resemblance of Saigon to France, others, such as the Indochinese and Chinese, potentially diminished that likeness.

Whiting’s letters from Saigon detailed the ways in which Saigon felt like a diminutive version of France by highlighting the French elements of Saigon. “There is a miniature Champs Élysées, a miniature Bois de Boulogne, and a miniature Avenue de l’Opéra, and each is adorned with statuary such as only French artists can produce.” Whiting’s appreciation of French aesthetics present in Saigon’s downtown resulted in his declaring the downtown to be vital to the city. Whiting described the buildings on Rue Catinat:

a twin spired cathedral, the Notre Dame of the city, and a beautiful Opera

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30 Ibid.
House, of which every resident is justly proud. As in Paris this latter building stands at the head of grand boulevard in the very heart of the city.\footnote{Ibid., 452.}

The constant comparison of Saigon to Paris in Whiting's letters related not only to the city's architecture, but also to its cultural experiences:

To sit outside one of these cafes late on an afternoon, at one of the little round iron tables so peculiarly Parisian, a glass of absinthe by one's side, an illustrated French journal in one's hand, and a cigarette in one's mouth, is to have a sensation such as one can experience only within the limits of the French Republic. It is indeed, very like 'the real thing.'\footnote{Ibid., 452-453.}

Whiting's focus on Saigon's authenticity weighed the merits of France's urban colonial policy in Saigon against a complex representation of the past. For him, Saigon's success lay in its ability to extend the feeling of being in France to Asia. He observed the sights of Saigon and processed them through the memories he had of France. These memories, in turn, seized upon an almost mythic version of an old France—the France of Notre Dame—as well as the more recent memory of sitting at a cafe. Needless to say, Whiting's descriptions, like many travel writers, were highly personal. However, Whiting's letters revealed important themes about American views of French colonialism. Saigon, ultimately, was about reconciling the current events of the city with some version of the past. To be sure, American writers consistently expressed a desire to find the "real" Saigon, and for Whiting, the "real
thing” was France and he understood his trip to Saigon through France’s past and his past in France.

Whiting’s letter mentioned other aspects of Saigon that made that city a close approximation of French urban areas. For example, he cited “innumerable little French shops with bright attractive windows, and decorative signs over the portals, in effect exactly as in Paris.”34 But, more than physical spaces, however, Whiting credited Saigon’s reproduction of French city life to the people living in the city. Even the people in Whiting’s Saigon are entrenched in the past:

It is the people at the tables that give to the place the real atmosphere of Paris. As in the older city, everybody in Saigon comes to the cafe at the end of the day; men and women of all classes spend the hours five to seven listening to music, sipping their favorite drinks and lightly talking with their friends on the topics of the time.35

The French people populating Whiting’s Saigon are rooted, for him, in the “older city”—Paris. Saigon, however, was a close copy of Paris, but would never replicate France’s capital completely. For him, the “natives” disrupted the French memories he drew upon in his understanding the city. He said, “were it not for the natives in the streets the stranger might very easily imagine that he was in one of the smaller provincial capitals of La Belle France.”36 The Vietnamese people in Whiting’s account contravened any colonial hope of reproducing France in Saigon.

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34 Ibid., 453.
35 Ibid., 454.
As more American traveller-writers visited Saigon, they continued to view the city as an approximation of French city. However, many described how they felt the Chinese and Indochinese residents of the city ruptured the fantasy of a Saigon as a transplanted French city. Hugh Clifford, writing for *Living Age* in 1910, wrote of such a fantasy, and how it disintegrated as he examined Saigon. After first arriving in Saigon, Clifford wrote that he looked out of the window of his hotel room on Rue Catinat, and had to “rub [his] eyes and force [himself] to remember that this in truth was Asia.” For him, what he saw in the streets is what created the colonial dynamic in Saigon. He saw “Chinese” people in service positions in downtown Saigon—pulling rickshaws and waiting on French residents. However, those working in service positions “were the only Orientals within sight: the rest were white men and white women of sorts, and the Rue Catinat was a little tawdry pandemonium of their creation.” Clifford continued to describe Saigon as an artificially engineered imitation [that] seemed to have strayed woefully far from its original, and in the process...acquired an added garishness, a new squalor, a peculiar ugliness and degradation.

American reactions to the French downtown expressed ambililence towards the city and its French presence. For some writers, the French influence in Saigon represented luxury and provided an ideal place to live. For other authors, the French

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36 Ibid., 450.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
influence simply was a fraud. Clifford’s view of Saigon as not only inauthentic but also “tawdry” introduced complexity into his version of the city. Like those writers before him, he saw Saigon through the lens of a French past. Saigon did not fare well—he measured the current Saigon by judging the distance between the original and the facsimile. Clifford assessed the city as being clumsy and ugly. However, in contrasting the Indochinese working in downtown Saigon with the artificial French surroundings, Clifford’s Saigon seemingly had two authentic selves. First, it strived to be like French cities and the better it replicated these, the more authentic it might be. Second, the ability of the Indochinese to break the replication of France suggested that somehow these people might be the real Saigon. Clifford concluded that the inauthenticity he perceived in Saigon came from the city’s lack of engagement with Asia. To him, Saigon seemed engineered to replicate a French city, and cast aside as much influence from Asian cultures as possible.

American authors started to see imperfections in the Saigon’s French influence. For instance, one writer critiqued the segregation between French and Indochinese populations. The author of the 1922 Round the World claimed that

The French have made this a veritable paradise. No cities of California or Florida are half so immaculate or so beautiful. I am not now speaking of the native cities, but of the cities made by the French government, in which the French themselves live. The natives are allowed to come up to the edges in all these French-built cities.40

40 Paul Rader, Round the World (New York: Revell, 1922), 162.
Saigon for this author was luxurious, and that luxury was preserved by the separation of European and Chinese/Indochinese populations. The beauty of the city was maintained not only by the separation of colonized/colonizer, but also by the employment of the colonized. "The streets, while not paved, are of splendid dirt and sand, and are kept clean and smooth by thousands of hands of the Annamese."\textsuperscript{41} The work of the Annamese was contrasted to the French patrons of cafes who populated the canopied sidewalks to watch the people walking around the downtown area.\textsuperscript{42} To the southwest of Saigon, the author noted, there "is a city of eight thousand Chinese, all doing business in Saigon."\textsuperscript{43}

As the number of American representations of Saigon accumulated, the city began to take on more complex dimensions. The mix of people on Saigon's streets not only provided something for Americans to watch, but also created their own culture of looking.

E. Alexander Powell's account of Saigon published in \textit{McClure's} in 1922 detailed his trip to the city, where he stayed in the French downtown area, at the Hotel Continental on Rue Catinat.\textsuperscript{44} After commenting about the hot weather, the statues of French figures at street intersections,\textsuperscript{45} how the French razed the city and rebuilt it in their own image, and, in general, how Saigon was more or less the "Paris of the

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 161-162.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 162-3.
\textsuperscript{44} E. Alexander Powell, "To Pnom-Penh by Jungle Trail," \textit{McClure's}, 1922, 107.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 75.
East, "Powell delved into the public culture of Saigon. In the evening, Powell remarked, the Rue Catinat filled with a "picturesque and colorful procession." Soldiers, "white-faced government employees," tanned planters, and women in gowns and makeup created one part of the promenade. The second half of his description of the scene focused not on the European faces and their expensive clothing, but on the people of color at work. For example, he wrote of shaven-headed Hindhu money-lenders from British India, the lengths of cotton sheeting...form their only garments revealing bodies as hairy and repulsive as those of apes; barefooted Annamite tirailleurs in uniforms of faded khaki...slender Chinese women, tripping by on tiny, thick-soled shoes, in pajama-like coats and trousers of clinging, sleazy silk; naked pousse-pousse coolies, streaming with sweat, graceful as the bronzes in a museum. Powell's descriptions of peoples' bodies captured in a performance on Saigon's streets revealed a place where onlookers constructed meanings of the city. Applying racist comparisons of people to animals, Powell demonstrated how colonialism created a street-level understanding of nation. He observed each person and placed previously acquired judgments on their present bodies. Of course, if this type of colonial gaze operated in multiple directions (beyond European/American to the "other"), Powell did not engage with it. Rather, he looked to the "café life" in Saigon.

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
as its most "characteristic feature," in order to critique what he saw.\textsuperscript{49} He felt the priorities of the French in Saigon were inverted from what they should be:

There are too many people in front of the cafés and too few in the offices and shops. There is too much drinking and too little work. It is not a wholesome atmosphere.\textsuperscript{50}

Powell's critique of France resembles previous critiques until he searched for a lesson in France's colonial policy in Saigon. Recalling an attempted jail break of political prisoners in 1916, Powell reflected on the imperial tendencies of the United States:

I should not like to see our own brown wards, the Filipinos, look at Americans with the murderous hate with which the Annamites regard the French.\textsuperscript{51}

With this statement, Powell at once acknowledged the precarious position of the United States abroad and distanced American foreign policy from the colonial policies of France. Powell highlighted the relationship of Americans to the French in Saigon by seeing them as involved in similar colonial projects, just in different parts of the world. By critiquing what he saw as a French (im)moral character, he cast the American colonial project in the Philippines as somehow virtuous. Powell implied the United States had "wards" in the Philippines who needed help where France had a system meant to extract money and resources from Indochina at the expense of the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
Indochinese. Furthermore, his connection between American colonization and the French in Indochina turned Saigon into a cautionary tale playing out in real time.

Powell’s observation of the street-level performance of leisure and work, and his comparison of the United States and France, placed Americans in a complicated position. As travelers to Saigon, Americans seemed to have access to some sort of colonial privilege that they appeared to enjoy. However, by critiquing the French colonial policy, writers like Powell cast the United States in a liminal position. The United States was not a colonizer, but was not colonized either. Instead, these writers placed the United States at the boundaries of colonialism. The writers could enter into social colonial relationships if they wished (for example, they could access certain parts of the city), without committing to the oppressive practices inherent in colonial policy. In other words, Americans in Saigon could enjoy colonization without any of the guilt or complication that the French dealt with. The enjoyment Powell derived from his colonial privilege, if not already clear, became explicit at the end of his article. After he left Saigon, he wrote how he wanted to return. He wanted

52 Powell does not elaborate a great deal on the expansionist policy of the United States in his article. Instead, he simply implies there is a difference between the United States and France. However, using the seminal work of Walter LaFeber, The New Empire, can help us speculate what he meant. LaFeber argues that foreign policy was influenced by the development of industry and the search for new markets. After the Civil War, Americans did not look for new land to farm, but new markets in which to sell their manufactured goods. This type of policy, looking for new markets and the like, he termed “expansionist” and he contrasted it to “colonial” policies that attempted to formally exert control (militarily and economically) over a people and location in order to extract resources. Taking this into consideration, we might see more of what Powell meant. France’s colonial policy was harsh and strictly about obtaining resources from Indochina, while the United States expansionist policy in the Philippines might have been less formal and outwardly oppressive.
to once again drink at a cafe on the Rue Catinat and watch "pouse-pouse coolies...in the gathering twilight."\(^5^3\) He ended his recollection of Saigon by loosely quoting Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Mandalay.” Powell wrote, “when you've heard the East a-callin' you won't never heed naught else.”\(^5^4\)

A 1937 article by Shannon McCune of Syracuse University featured a dialogue between American authors writing about Saigon.\(^5^5\) She argued that Frank Vincent’s *Land of the White Elephant* had “not stood the test of time.”\(^5^6\) While the city still had “broad tree-lined streets,”\(^5^7\) she had seen progress since Vincent’s 1872 descriptions. The palace that Vincent described as a blunt contrast to surrounding “bamboo huts”\(^5^8\) in McCune’s description was now surrounded by a park. McCune’s Saigon also had a new focal point. Among cafes, stores, offices, all “in the French style,” was the “red brick Cathedral” which “dominat[ed] the sky line.”\(^5^9\)

McCune’s Saigon had not just changed in terms of its architecture and city planning. During her visit, she observed a different relationship between the French colonial population and the Indochinese. “Now a closer harmony is being struck between the European and the Asiatic influences and Saigon is like a French

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\(^5^3\) Powell, “To Pnom-Penh by Jungle Trail,” 107.  
\(^5^4\) Ibid.  
\(^5^6\) Ibid., 33.  
\(^5^7\) Ibid., 27.  
\(^5^8\) Ibid., 26.  
\(^5^9\) Ibid., 27.
provincial town transplanted to an Oriental setting." McCune cited a 1931 census that put the population of Saigon at 123,298 people. 11,115 of these people, said McCune, were "Europeans." This harmony, however, was not rooted in the layout of residential districts. Connected to the French downtown were French neighborhoods "with fine boulevards, bordered by tamarind and teak trees forming a canopy, with villas in the midst of tropical gardens, and with well-groomed parks scattered thru it." Outside of "this center" the residential district "gradual[ly] transition[ed] to the native districts" that were crowded and contained the homes of "the bulk of the population." McCune pointed out that the Chinese people lived in nearby Cholon, making up "half the population of 134,060 persons." Despite this physical separation between populations of Saigon, McCune claimed that the streets show this mixture of Europe and the Orient even more plainly for all manner of people can be seen...totally different people mingling in the streets make the city very colorful and present strange contrasts.

Virginia Thompson's 1937 French Indochina synthesized much of the work of other authors and aimed to "to lay before the English-reading public a background for the general problems in French Indo-China." The culture the French created for themselves in Saigon interested Thompson the most. Rather than spend much time

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 27-28.
62 Ibid., 27.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 27-28.
65 Ibid., 31.
66 Ibid., 27-28.
discussing what Saigon looked like, Thompson reported that the city seemed "unmistakably French,"\(^6^8\) so much so that it would help new visitors feel less homesick.

Thompson wrote of a superficial existence of the French in Saigon. The sybaritic life she observed and read about, dominated by drinking at cafes and other "routine entertainments," spurred Thompson to claim that the "colonials are only a caricature of Europeans."\(^6^9\) According to Thompson, the French filled their everyday lives with nothing beyond the most superficial leisure activities. Spending time in cafes "call[ed] for no reading or discussion of ideas."\(^7^0\) This "anti-cultural" existence in Saigon, to Thompson, lacked "spiritual nourishment" and contained "excessive gossip, and alcohol, constant conviviality, brutalizing the natives, isolation, and depressed nerves, which is fed by a climate productive of general torpor and bad temper."\(^7^1\)

Thompson felt the overindulgence in leisure and lack of productivity among the French population in Saigon stemmed from the interactions between people of different racial groups—the problem French culture had in Saigon was a problem of being white in the "Orient":

The decadent, destructive, atmosphere which encircles the white man in the Orient is contagious even for refined and sensitive people. The presence of

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 416.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 415-416.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., 415.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 415.
new disruptive factors undermines what is left, and is completed by the absence of restraint and discipline. A gentleman in Europe degenerates in the East to the point of shouting at his servant that he is as stupid as ten thousand pigs for having served him the wrong dish.\footnote{Ibid.}

The fall from being “civilized” that Thompson outlined here not only critiqued French culture in Saigon, but also engaged in the same Orientalist tropes that she critiqued. Disavowing the elite European chastising his servant and comparing him or her to a pig, Thompson attempted to distance herself from the colonial process that sapped refinement. However, by establishing a binary hierarchy consisting only of those with white skin and everyone else in Asia, Thompson reinscribed the colonial relationships she saw as contagious and undermining.

Thomson’s critique of the French colonial culture in Saigon, like that of other authors, struggled with the sense of the real—the culture she observed appeared to mask a deeper truth. For Thompson, French leisure masked the “brutal contrast” between different classes of French residents. As she put it, “behind the brilliant façade was the stark misery of the white proletariat.”\footnote{Ibid.} Drawn to a mythic version of Saigon where they hoped to pursue a leisurely lifestyle, “many of the petty employees” did not find much but poverty.

Thompson critiqued the fantasy of colonial privilege by focusing her attention
on the position of French women in Saigon. Specifically, she saw the non-French elements of Saigon, and Asia in general, as a force corrupting white European womanhood. Thompson addressed the conditions of non-elite European women by comparing them to the "natives." "Wives had to go to the market in person to be jostled by the contemptuous native servants of their richer colleagues." Not being part of the elite in Saigon put white people (specifically women) on the same level as "natives." Thompson wrote differently of elite European women in Saigon. Where working-women were like "natives," elite European women actively distanced themselves from Vietnamese women. According to Thompson, when French men arrived in Saigon, many "surrender[ed] to the exotic," seeking the company of Indochinese women. Thompson speculated that European women, in their attempts to connect with European men, felt competitive towards Indochinese women and as a result they "tried to sever all connections with natives, except as servants." Thompson’s analysis of European women suggests that she saw elite European women as a bulwark against the decent of European people into "native" culture. Indochinese women represented the negative aspects of Asia (those that created a "decadent, destructive atmosphere") and elite European women could save them from such dangers.

French women played an active part in Thompson’s representation of Saigon. They acted against the imagined Orientalist threats by stopping the interaction between white men and Indochinese women. According to Thompson, French

74 Ibid.
women initially resisted life in the "colonies." Their coming meant the resumption of French social life, which introduced more pleasure, more grace and refinement into the colony, but which also involved bourgeois conventions and—far more important—the cutting off of their husbands from a simpler life in contact with the natives.

Drawing a line between the unrefined leisure apparently present in Saigon's cafes and more "refined" entertainments guarded by French women, Thompson saw French women intervening in the process of the corruption Asia had on white men.

While Thompson saw Asian cultures corrupting along gender lines, she drew an additional line between the adult women who came from France and the daughters they raised in Saigon. Unlike the women coming from France, the "French girl brought up in the colony" was more of a "hybrid." Thompson thought these girls were "bolder and more independent than their Metropolitan contemporaries." The assertiveness of these young women, said Thompson, came from their being accustomed to ordering servants. While these young women were ingrained within a hierarchy, Thompson claimed that they learned "early to mix with different kinds of people in a less strictly class-bound society." Life in Saigon might help young women learn social skills among different types of people:

Habits of false luxury, superficial accomplishments, and the demoralizing

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75 Ibid., 418.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 419.
79 Ibid.
custom of being waited upon—all make for a lack of perseverance, a rootlessness, and a restlessness…many French women extract their daughters by sending them back to school in France. It is fundamentally the problem of too much leisure with no corresponding idea of utilizing it profitably.\textsuperscript{80}

Once again, French women step in to save the French colonizers from the perils of Asia. Here, they send their children away from the Saigon dangers to France where they can escape the unproductive leisure they participated in when in Saigon.

\textbf{Representations during and after the First Indochina War}

The inauthenticity that writers observed and wrote about in Saigon started to undergo a transformation once the First Indochina War started. While Americans could still expect to find a pleasant travel experience in parts of the city, writers created increasingly unstable versions of Saigon. As authors searched for the real Saigon, they created representations focused on hidden dangers lurking behind a tranquil colonial facade. For many writers, Saigon was a treacherous and sinful place hiding behind a surface of prosperity and French-colonial architecture.

Robert Trumbull, the \textit{New York Times}'s correspondent for Southeast Asia,\textsuperscript{81} incorporated previous descriptions into his 1946 representation of Saigon, while dividing the city into two parts through the metaphor of the body. To him Saigon was

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
a "a city of two faces." Trumbull contrasted this with a second face that was a "dread city steeped in plot." Placing Saigon in the context of other Southeast Asian capitals undergoing a process of decolonization in the 1940s, Trumbull saw the city as "one of a dwindling number of citadels of privilege." It was not only a controlled French reproduction, but it was also an independent place with problems and politics of its own.

Trumbull's first "face" of Saigon seemed similar to the city described by previous journalists, but it added a new element in describing the "Pearl of the Orient." Introducing what would later become a theme running through American understandings of Saigon, Trumbull understood the city by understanding the body. Beyond using the metaphor of a face to describe the untrustworthiness of the city, Trumbull focused specifically on women's bodies in order to convey to readers the "good" part of Saigon. Available only to the privileged, the first "face" consisted of leisure and women:

One [face] is the Saigon of the sidewalk cafes, of the chic mademoiselles, the Parisian perfumes, and the shoes with their startling three-inch platform soles. This also is the Saigon of the loveliest women in all the Far East--slender Annamese girls who invariably wear the native costume of fitted pajamas in shining white silk covered by a silk of thin lace cassock with a Chinese neck.

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
and slit on each side from the ankle to the waist.\textsuperscript{86}

And, more than just including women in what he deemed the positive aspects of Saigon, Trumbull wrote about the process of looking, and having access to, the bodies of French and Vietnamese women. However, he clearly differentiated between the two groups by establishing a hierarchy through the nouns he used to reference them—French women were “chic mademoiselles,” while the Vietnamese women were “girls.” Trumbull’s first face of Saigon was less about the women who moved through Saigon’s downtown spaces and more about the access white men had to these women. Trumbull’s description marked the consumption of female bodies as part of the colonial privilege. The women were on display, not unlike the colonial architecture that surrounded them.

Where the “first face” was full of accessible women, and the men who looked at them, the second face expelled women completely to focus on politics and fighting. Saigon’s other side included the institutions that attempted to maintain a colonial system and those forces opposing it. In this second face, Trumbull found the Bank of Indo-China whose vast gray granite pile appropriately dominates the business section. This is the Saigon of the French Surete, the Deuxieme Bureau and the puppet Government. It is also the Saigon of the Annamese underground of Viet Minh incitation and the terror of side street plotting, murder and kidnapping.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
Trumbull’s representation stands apart from other authors’ descriptions because it splits Saigon differently. Rather than focusing on a French center placing everything else into a periphery, Trumbull chose a different type of binary. Instead of splitting the city according to his understanding of the relationships between Eastern and Western cultures (France versus everything else), he instead understood the city in terms of its positive characteristics and those forces, like colonialism and war, that threatened Saigon’s positive attributes. He took elements of the French power system, like the Bank of Indo-China and combined them with the Viet Minh. While the French downtown contained the pleasurable parts of the city for American travelers, elements of that area now were dangerous. For Trumbull, Colonialism and war threatened the good things about Saigon even as the legacy of colonialism in Saigon created cafes, shops, and women that Americans could enjoy.

Trumbull’s two faces of Saigon reveal a long-developing conversation about American views of colonialism in Saigon. For decades, American representations of Saigon wrestled with how to portray colonialism. Many travelers enjoyed the leisure culture provided by French colonialism and the more critical of these travelers sought distance from the aspects of colonialism which oppressed local peoples or reflected poorly on the French government, such as financial miscalculations and inefficiency. Trumbull’s two faces attempted to solve this problem. Saigon’s first face contained those good things Americans could enjoy (architecture, cafes, women), while the second face contained conflict and oppression.

Trumbull expanded his critique of French colonial policy a few months later in
another piece for the *New York Times*. With this update, he intensified his critique of the French in Saigon. What was previously the “first face” now became more superficial. He wrote that

the city has a conspicuous air of inflated prosperity. There are glossy motor cars, and Rue Catinat is lined with shops selling expensive luxury goods.\(^{88}\)

The first face, if it ever existed, no longer applied to Saigon. Trumbull wrote of Saigon in the past tense as

a city which once offered travelers and resident whites some of the finest living to be found in the Far East. Its fine cafes, smart French shops and chic women, its airy spaciousness and generally exotic personality won it the appellation ‘the Paris of the Orient.’ Here Western overlords lived a life of old-style colonial ease and the respectful native population worked hard to exploit the fruits of empire.\(^{89}\)

This description certainly resembled his previous description of Saigon, but it collapsed the boundaries between his divided city. The colonial parts of the city, all tainted by “Western overlords” no longer provided the luxury he saw only a few months previously. Perhaps more importantly, this description introduced the ways in which Americans started to see Saigon as both past and present. The architecture and culture still present in Saigon clashed with the atmosphere of decolonization.

Contrasting the city’s grand and problematic past, Trumbull described Saigon’s

tumultuous present in terms of caste, race and ethnicity:

Today Saigon is a headquarters for revolution. Peacefully or violently. Indo-China--like most of Indonesia--is in revolt against white domination. And despite the concessions to local ‘autonomy’ which the French have made, outright warfare is being waged by natives and French over a wide area.  

The juxtaposition of the Saigon of the past, one where a white person could find “fine living,” with a city in which “native” people revolted against white colonial actors, at first appears as a critique of colonialism. Instead, Vietnam’s post-colonial Saigon proved to be more inconvenience than revolution. The anti-colonial struggle in Saigon, according to Trumbull, did not change the city “much physically.”

Focusing on the standard of living, he related that, “shops and cafes are still here and war scars are few….White colonials struggling to retain their holdings can still live smartly and well—for a price.” However, Trumbull noted that even though some parts of the city did not show signs of war, a feeling of decline, contained in “shadows and grimness,” persisted that “signified] the passing of an era in colonialism.” Specifically, he mentioned roadblocks and curfews—reminders of possible violence. “Saigon is charged with tension even though the bright facade of beauty and charm still survives.”

The tension between the representations of the downtown commercial area of

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
Saigon and its surroundings became more pronounced as anti-French activities increased. A 1947 article in the *Los Angeles Times* by Waldo Drake contrasted the Rue Catinat with the developing war:

> Open air cafes along tree-shaded Rue Catinat are crowded all day long, chiefly by members of the French expeditionary force of 120,000 troops which is attempting to beat out almost with their bare hands the raging flames of active revolt which are fast enveloping most of this once fruitful country.”94

Contrasting the cafes and “tree-shaded” streets with the conditions of war (be they violence or other hardships) became one of the dominant representations of the city until the United States left Vietnam in the 1970s. While the French were still in power, but struggling to maintain their control, authors describing the French leisure culture and its associated luxuries only intensified their critique of French colonialism. These critiques did not necessarily condemn the French, but argued that their colonial system was somehow broken. For example, as the same article in the *Los Angeles Times* continued:

> The revolt which besets Saigon is a paradox of the Far East. Its glittering department stores are filled with recent Paris fashions in millinery and gowns and household wares. Even its corner groceries are stacked high with French wines, brandies, cheese and perfumes. Yet these same shops are so short of

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93 Ibid.
foodstuffs that five days every week are meatless.\textsuperscript{95}

Like representations of the French culture in Saigon years earlier, this writer saw the French providing a superficial layer of comfort without addressing more basic needs. In this case, they supplied decadent food and wares without attending to staples.\textsuperscript{96}

As the First Indochina War continued, American representations of Saigon became more and more bleak. What was once vibrant, albeit superficial and infected, now was "dying." Furthermore, the representations of the city described the loosening of colonial power. A 1949 article in the \textit{Washington Post} represented the city this way:

Saigon, the capital of Indo-China, is today a dying city. The hand of change is upon it. Streets are half-empty, no trade is stirring, and life is unsafe for any European who moves beyond the city limits.\textsuperscript{97}

The changes threatened the Europeans in Saigon both financially as trade shut down, but also physically should they leave Saigon.

In the same way that earlier representations of Saigon varied from period to period, American representations of Saigon during the First Indochina War continued this pattern. What was dying to one author in 1949 was again an easy life to another in 1951. According to a 1951 article in the \textit{New York Times}, Saigon offered a higher standard of living than French residents could attain in France:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Merchants, professional men and the hard-working civil servants all still live more comfortably and easily than they could in France. Off the wide residential avenues, houses are roomy, comfortable and staffed with inexpensive Chinese and Vietnamese servants who speak a little French.\textsuperscript{98}

Descriptions of the Rue Catinat as “Saigon’s Champs Elysees,”\textsuperscript{99} and the many cafes, bakeries and bars in the immediate area continued to appear in the press, only now those descriptions were more likely to include the presence of French soldiers.\textsuperscript{100}

Other parts of Saigon often described by Americans took on new meanings as well. Accounts of the luxuries available in Saigon, and the prosperity that often accompanied them, started to shift in the context of the French War. Rather than attributing the leisure and prosperity of the French in Saigon to the spoils of colonials, one author attributed French prosperity to a wartime “boom” economy. Tillman Durdin, a New York Times correspondent for Asia,\textsuperscript{101} wrote in 1952 of “an appearance of boom prosperity” in Saigon that had “an unhealthy basis, founded largely on the increasingly heavy French war expenditures in this country.”\textsuperscript{102}

The representations of Saigon’s superficiality also went through a period of transition. While writers continued to talk in terms of Saigon’s veneer or façade, they

increasingly defined the “real” or “authentic” Saigon as those parts affected by the French War. One 1951 article described the whole of Saigon as a “nerve center for a ruthless war between the French... Vietnam's capital wears a prosperous, bustling facade which serves as a thin disguise for danger and insecurity.”

Journalists also constructed Saigon’s wartime façade journalists through the attitudes of the city’s residents. In multiple accounts, American writers portrayed the French residents of Saigon as indifferent to the realities of the war spreading across the country. One author wrote how they were “stretched in endless summer along the banks of the Saigon river.” The article continued to describe how the French were not concerned with the realities of the city. “Little in the daily life of Saigon’s twenty to thirty thousand French civilians indicates the fears and uncertainties which lie beneath the surface.” The journalist then contrasted the oblivious French population with violence and the desperate social conditions present in Saigon:

French soldiers and sailors sit sipping leisureed apéritifs in a sidewalk cafe on Saigon’s main street, Rue Catinat....In a green park, fat French babies play in the shade of the trees....Vietnamese police comb through a block of straw shacks in the suburb of Giadinh looking for Vietminh terrorists....Six nuns glide in black-robed pairs past the great French cathedral in the Place de Pigneau de Behaine....On an informer’s tip, plainclothes men of the Vietnamese Sûreté unearth a hoard of Vietminh weapons in the stockrooms of

24, 1952.
104 Ibid.
a fashionable downtown lacquer and silver shop....A block away half-naked Vietnamese urchins stand transfixed before a window display of pink-cheeked French dolls. French women in wisps of bathing suits bake their tanned bodies by the green pool of the Cercle Sportif....A Vietminh grenade kills three men on the terrace of a restaurant on Boulevard Chamer.  

The contrast here between inactive French and the active the Vietnamese recalls the two-face version of Saigon of before, but now the dangers are fleshed out as wartime issues.

A pictorial in the New York Times also published in 1951 did similar work as it juxtaposed fears, military action, and Saigon’s relative calmness. Showing images of French Legionnaires marching through the city and French warships in the Saigon River with captions mentioning Viet Minh attacks, the article created a sense of an occupied city under the threat of attack. The caption read “‘Little Paris’—A French Army jeep moves down the Rue Catinat under a reminder that social life goes on. Saigon’s Vietnamese population is overwhelmingly anti-French.”  

The image captured French troops in a military jeep driving down Rue Catinat, passing underneath a banner for a “recital de gala” hung across the street, one side connected to the Hotel Continental. By capturing the “social life” of French in Saigon, the pictorial portrayed a “little Paris” that was either oblivious or resilient, or perhaps both.

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105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
In 1954, a few months after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, authors noted the lack of impact the French War had on Saigon. Peggy Durdin, a foreign correspondent who covered Asia, described Saigon as oblivious to the realities of the world. For Durdin, Saigon was "its own little walled-in world, busy, imperturbable, self-contained, bustling and prosperous." She also felt the city was insulated from the war itself as visitors, after arriving in Saigon, often asked "where's the war?" When the French War was over, Durdin quoted a French colonel's assertion that wartime Saigon did not differ from peace-time Saigon. The colonel explained that "you know quite as well as I do that Saigon was never in the war." Another article written in late-April 1954 noted that even though "the military situation at Dienbienphu remains grave," Saigon life maintained the status quo. In fact, "an outsider could not deduce from his first impressions here that there was anything special happening in Indo-China."

As the dominance of French rule faded in the city, journalists returned to an earlier model of understanding Saigon. Writers defined the "real" Saigon as the local population and over which stretched a colonial façade. As Bert Hephill writing for the Los Angeles Times phrased it, Saigon contained a European "veneer" stretched over

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110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
an “Oriental” reality. “Thoroughly Oriental, its European veneer is most apparent on Rue Catinat where expensive shops are stocked with French and European luxuries.”

Journalists relied on Orientalist notions of Asian peoples and cultures to construct a sense of the “Oriental” city that existed outside the colonial veneer. Rather than describe the nuances of different parts of the city, writers established Saigon as binary—they saw the French colonial downtown and then everything else. For example, Durdin, writing in 1954, described the area beyond downtown:

Then, for miles, stretch the Vietnamese and Chinese areas: the cramped, tenement-style houses, the lively native markets, the quiet temples where coils of spiraled incense six feet in diameter hang before grimacing gods, the restaurants smelling of spicy Chinese sauces and resounding with the sharp, insistent clatter of mahjong tiles, the little shops displaying red-lacquered pigs' faces, duck eggs especially delectable because they contain the half-formed embryo, dried squid, strange medicinal herbs and beetles, birds' nests (for soup) brought down from Annam, and the little bits of reddish gold jewelry Vietnamese buy against inflation.

These parts of the city, or as Durdin referred to them, “layers of the city,” differed from the French downtown, in atmosphere, leisure and culinary culture. The

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discussion of streets focused not on the architecture, but on strangeness and oddity. The broad boulevards and ordered city plan contrasted the “cramped” living conditions of the Vietnamese and Chinese parts of the city. The baked goods and apéritifs available at sidewalk cafes disappeared in this outer part of the city where unfamiliar foods and their respective smells mixed with a local mahjong game. Durdin’s description also casts the Vietnamese and Chinese areas of the city as dangerous. She called them places where “Vietminh plant their agents and spread their potent propaganda.”

Durdin, however, also found ways to close the physical distance between the Vietnamese/Chinese parts of Saigon and the French downtown:

Asia is increasingly paved roads, Western-style clothes for men, garbage collection and automobiles. But it is also the little Vietnamese boy sauntering past Saigon’s chic Parisian style shop windows with a five-foot snake curled indolently around his shoulders and arms. It is the combined smell of sundried fish, human excrement and soup from a traveling vendor’s pot suddenly assailing your nose in front of a big modern hotel....the delicate floating of pastel silk on pencil-slim Vietnamese women, sweet-smelling white flowers tucked into shiny, long black Asian hair.

Durdin, like many journalists, collapsed different elements of Saigon into one physical space, specifically the familiar downtown with its ever-present shops and

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115 Ibid.
hotels. However, descriptions like this one spoke to the power relations between colonizer and colonized by describing different categories of an urban scene—the fixed and the ethereal. The fixed parts of the scene were those parts of the French infrastructure like the “modern” hotel and the “chic” shop. These were stable elements in the description. They belonged. The local inhabitants of Saigon made up the more ethereal aspects of the scene. The traveling vendor, various smells, and a “sauntering” boy all existed in the French world, but could not have any sense of permanence there. However, their very presence signaled that the city was changing, the colonial system no longer had the control that it once did. The final piece of the fixed-etheral dichotomy in this description was the Vietnamese woman’s body. She was stable while her clothing moved through the description.

The appeal of Saigon to journalists and travelers seemed to be based in its ability to deliver surprising experiences. The ethereal parts of her description, those dynamic parts meant to contrast the French city, made up what Durdin felt was the “lure of the East”:

To be specific, part of the authentic lure of the East is today, as it has been for centuries, the infinite richness and variety of shape, color, smell and sound in every Asian town, on every Asian street. These never become too repetitive and familiar and they never pall. No matter how long you have been in China, Burma, Indonesia or India, every time you walk out the front door something impinges violently on your senses, you encounter something lovely or horrible, new, unexpected or unexplained. After Asia, the avenues of New York, Paris, London or Geneva seem delightful and clean—and depressingly
antiseptic, pale, well-regulated and standardized.\textsuperscript{117}

For Durdin, the relationship between the static French and dynamic Vietnamese elements of Saigon distilled the relationship between “East” and “West.” The West was boring, while the East was not. Other journalists engaged with Saigon’s excitement as well. One journalist writing in 1955 conveyed the same excitement, but focused on descriptions of violence. The writer claimed that Saigon looked nice on the surface, but “everything is out of focus and somehow wrong. The cafe sitters joke nervously about their own bravery, because wasn’t it only a couple of nights ago that somebody tossed a grenade at the Hotel Majestic Cafe.”\textsuperscript{118} The threat of violence, at least to this journalist, caused “a quality of nightmare about Saigon. It is like one of those dreams in which the horror comes, suddenly, from the realization that the normal has become grotesque and the everyday has become strange and frightening.”\textsuperscript{119} The idea that the mundane was unsafe and the unknown infringed on the order offered by the colonial power structure reflected the end of French control in Saigon.

As the French War came to an end, Saigon’s representation in the press changed from a city dominated by French interests to a city controlled by Vietnamese people. Durdin was the most outspoken about the legacy of colonialism in Saigon in 1954-1955. Writing several articles that addressed decolonization, the “lure of Asia” and

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
the Cold War, Durdin used a narrative of progress to describe multiple countries in Asia and their distancing from Communism. She also wrote specifically about Saigon. According to Durdin, the city was in a period of transition:

Saigon is one of Asia's last great European-dominated cities, outdated like the rickshaw, nearing the end of an era. The tragedy of Saigon is that it will probably have insufficient time to shake off its heavy colonial heritage and grow into something strong—and Vietnamese—enough to withstand the Communists.

For Durdin, this transition from a “European-dominated city” to a Vietnamese city was also about a transition in racial politics. Specifically, she felt white visitors to Saigon had to renegotiate their relationship to the city and its Vietnamese residents. Speaking generally of Asian countries, Durdin argued that having white skin in decolonizing Asian countries meant adjusting to feeling uneasy as the protections of Colonialism faded. She wrote that

the white man is no longer a ruler. He is a guest; often Asians go to considerable pains to make him feel an unwanted one. His color is not a sign of caste or privilege but rather a badge of (historical) guilt.

For Durdin, people's skin served as a marker of colonial legacy. The transfer of power from the French to the Vietnamese in Saigon left distinct groups of residents,

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their skin color grouping them, but not necessarily granting them—or corresponding to a set of—privileges.

Seemingly eager to distance the current political situation in Saigon from its colonial past, Durdin also presented the “white man’s burden” as antiquated and ridiculous. Durdin’s critique of “the lure of the East” as something grounded in the privileges available to the French and their allies in Saigon echoed earlier representations of Saigon. At the same time, the description of that “lure,” and the accompanying “civilizing mission” also attempted to distance Americans from that viewpoint.

The descriptions of life in Asia offered by Durdin, however, vacillated between attempts to critique colonialism and frank descriptions of why it was good to be white in post-colonial parts of the world. In a moment of honesty and self-implication with her readers, Durdin described the benefits of being white in Asia—white skin made Americans living in Asian countries feel special:

We must admit, though, in all honesty, that one reason Asia is more fun today for certain Europeans and Americans is that in the yellow-and-brown-skinned countries they felt, if not superior to the multitude, at least distinct from it.123

Being a white in decolonized Asian countries, for Durdin, no longer allowed for the privileges that might have existed under colonial rule, such as the leisure activities earlier travelers to Saigon wrote about. However, white skin allowed some travelers

123 Ibid.
Dudin also addressed how American women might find Asia exhilarating. According to Durdin, moving to an Asian city might allow them to leave behind previous associations with their hometown. Because people did not know them in their new chosen home in Asia, they could recast their identities. Even though travel in general might also grant this privilege, Durdin explained that such possibilities were available in Asia, but not European locations. American women living in France would be lost “in a mass of women” who dressed and spoke better than they did. So, by going to live in an Asian country, Americans could stand out. They had access to “a much finer house” and “better food” than their Asian neighbors. This ultimately created “for those who need[ed] it, a certain psychological satisfaction in being the only white face on an Asian street, even if all the brown faces regard[ed] it sullenly.”

Even after the French no longer controlled Saigon, the racial tensions developed under French rule persisted. However, Americans were finding themselves in the position the French were in, but the French were no longer around. Durdin argued that Americans living in many Asian countries were unfairly the focus of “resentments and suspicions” previously attributed to “colonial rulers.” Durdin described the threats and benefits that white people faced in an area jettisoning

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124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
colonialism:

The visitor with the white skin not only observes but also experiences the self-assertion of ex-colonial peoples; he is the object of their neurotic suspicions and fears, their long-suppressed resentments and hatreds as well as their gentleness and generosity. 126

Durdin’s understanding of what it meant to be white and American in Asia continued in a 1955 article titled “On Trial—The White Man in Asia.” 127 She claimed that there was a disadvantage to being white in the “Far East.” Regarding Vietnam specifically, Durdin wrote that “through the last tragic half decade, the hate and resentment of the Vietnamese for Europeans seemed palpable enough to touch with the fingers.” 128 The dislike of Europeans, or white people in general, claimed Durdin, extended to the foreign policy that accompanied them. In fact, she equated whiteness and policy when she said, “for Asians the white man—and his government—are not on a pedestal. They are on trial, or at least on probation. Asians no longer think—if indeed they ever did—that the West has all the answers to the world's—or Asia's—problems.” 129

Saigon in the mid-1950s was a city in transition. As the French left the city, Americans moved in. Once there, Americans learned how to inhabit the physical spaces left vacant by the French and many found they could harness the colonial

126 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
privilege still present in Saigon’s culture and infrastructure. At the same time, Saigon’s Vietnamese population changed as well. After the 1954 partition of Vietnam into North and South, the United States helped move those people located in the North to Saigon if they wished to flee the communist government in the North. Despite the relatively low numbers of Americans in Saigon before 1955, the early interpretations that writers created of the city shaped American understandings of the city for the next twenty years. As the American presence in Vietnam increased, Americans would look to the English-language media for how to interpret the changing city. By the end of the 1950s, the United States would see the first film shot on location in Saigon and by the end of the production, the process of transferring power from France to the United States would be complete.

129 Ibid.
In the first half of the twentieth century, American writers, as seen in the previous chapter, often understood Saigon through a binary of authenticity. Different writers defined what the “real” Saigon was differently and in the process also created a geographic and figurative center and periphery in the city. Graham Greene’s 1954 novel *The Quiet American* and Joseph Mankiewicz’s film by the same name engage in both these relationships. However, the “real” Saigon they look for is less about looking underneath a French façade, and more about how ideas mix with a lived environment to create meanings of a place. While stretching the real/imagined divide in their representations of Saigon, both Greene and Mankiewicz used Saigon’s built environment to establish a set of conventions to represent the city to Americans, they also utilized the people living in Saigon to create a sense of the city for their audiences. The role people played in representations of Saigon, however, depended less on their actions and more on the interpretation of their bodies. The meanings authors and filmmakers placed on the bodies of the people populating their narratives acted in parity with the French colonial structures that provided the skeletal support for the creatively imagined Saigon. The meanings placed upon these fictional bodies were rooted in gendered understandings of the body, which creators then extrapolated to map national boundaries within Saigon.

When deconstructing Saigon in the collective American imagination, or at least the imagination as structured through media, the line between fact and fiction started to fade. This chapter examines British novelist Graham Greene’s *The Quiet

On one level, these sources—whose genres often conjure associations of "fact" in the case of the news and "fiction" in terms of narrative film and novels—participated in a dialogue despite their relationship to "fact." However, we must look at each of these texts to see how they engage the real/imagined divide. These cultural artifacts, usually categorized as "fact" or "fiction," treated the line between real/imagined with such permeability that we must start to question the relationship between cultural texts and "historical" knowledge.

From the very beginning of The Quiet American, Graham Greene disrupted the lines between the real and imagined. The novel, based on the raw material of Greene's experiences in Saigon starting in 1951,¹ began with a short note to his friends René Berval and Phuong.² Greene asked the couple for their "permission to dedicate this book to [them] not only in memory of the happy evenings [he] spent with [them] in Saigon,"³ but also because he used the location of their apartment in the novel for the home of his one of his characters. Greene's dedication continued to explain that the "historical events" he included in the novel had been chronologically rearranged and stated that his novel was "a story and not a piece of history...about a

² While René Berval's last name has made its way into the historical record, Phuong's last name seems to have not. Greene biographer Norman Sherry says Phuong was René's girlfriend, and then inserts her last name as "Berval" (409). Greene Wrote René Berval to ask permission to use his flat location and Phuong's name in The Quiet American, her last name did not appear in Greene's letters either. “From Graham Greene to Rene,” August 3, 1955, Box 46, Folder 6, John J. Burns Library.
few imaginary characters.\(^4\)

Greene’s dedication simultaneously reveals The Quiet American as a work of fact and fiction. Indeed, Greene’s imaginary Saigon was so real he wrote a letter to Berval in 1951 to ask for permission to use Berval’s apartment as model for Fowler’s apartment.\(^5\) Outside of Berval’s/Fowler’s apartment lies additional real/imagined landmarks centrally located on and around the Rue Catinat (the street Fowler lives on) like the Continental Hotel, the Cathedral. Greene also included areas outside of the downtown area in The Quiet American. At times, the characters travel to Cholon, which adopts meanings similar to those established by the journalists investigated in the previous chapter.

The blurred boundary between fact and fiction also extends to the plot of The Quiet American. According to the dedication, at least some of the events that took place in the novel were based on real happenings in Saigon (like the climatic explosion at the end of the novel on Rue Catinat), although Greene says he altered them. Consequently, the Saigon of Greene’s The Quiet American reveals the ways in which meanings of a place get created. Greene mixed his feelings and memories of being in Saigon in the early 1950s, with actual events and fictional characters to create the setting for the novel. Part imagination, part reality, the Saigon of The Quiet American sheds light on how all writers, be they journalists or novelists constructed meanings around the city.

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\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) “From Graham Greene to Rene,” August 3, 1955, Box 46, Folder 6, John J. Burns Library.
Greene’s letter and dedication did more than establish the permeability of the line between a real and imagined places Saigon. They also showed how the process of combining reality with imagination could also apply to people—in this case, Greene does this with the person/character of Phuong. Greene borrowed the name “Phuong” for his character from an acquaintance of his living in Saigon—she is mentioned in a letter from Greene to Berval as well as in the novel’s dedication. By using her Vietnamese name, but nothing else, he creates a shell of women, into which he could create his own version of a Vietnamese woman whose sole purpose was “to be stolen from the English journalist by Pyle of the American Economic Mission.”

Greene’s primary concern with Phuong was to provide an object of desire for Pyle and Fowler. She was a body and a name. Greene needed to “borrow” the name, with permission like an apartment location, and then be free to create an imaginary character around that name—a name that provided a body, but not much else.

The novel itself focused on the relationships between three main characters: Thomas Fowler, Alden Pyle, and Phuong. Fowler, a British journalist (and the novel’s narrator) stationed in Saigon was older than the other two characters and had been in Saigon for some time—long enough to be able to explain the situation in the city and in Vietnam to newcomers. The 32-year-old Pyle worked for the Economic Aid Mission in Saigon. Pyle did not know much about Vietnam and what he did know came from texts, as opposed to Fowler who learned from his years of experience in Saigon. In order to learn about the conditions on the ground during the

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6 Ibid.
French War in Vietnam, he studied the work of diplomatic correspondents. Fowler saw Pyle as a naïve American, who believed that American aid could solve the conflict in Vietnam. Specifically, Pyle believed that the American aid could spur the creation of an authentic "third force" made up of indigenous peoples (rather than colonialists or Communists) to fight for democracy in Vietnam. Ultimately, Pyle's knowledge based in books rather than experience, made him dangerous. Both Fowler and Pyle were in love with Phuong, a twenty-year-old Vietnamese woman. Greene does not develop Phuong’s character in the same way as the two main male characters—she speaks little and we never find out a great deal about her. She met Fowler when she was 18 and they moved in together for two years until she eventually moved out and than began living with Pyle.

Greene developed the characters in The Quiet American by creating a relationship between them and the places through which they traveled. By associating character with the nations from which they came, Greene critiqued the political situation in Vietnam in the early/mid-1950s. Pyle, the American character, came to embody the United States through Fowler’s description of him. Fowler created an imaginary past for Pyle by imagining a series of snapshots from Pyle’s life in America. As imagined by Fowler, Pyle was an urban, affluent American who embodied a wholesome, corporate and leisurely lifestyle. Each of these characteristics came with a place attached. His affluence and ruggedness came from Fowler’s imagination of him “riding on a dude ranch, bathing on Long Island,” and

7 The Quiet American, 21.
working with his colleagues in a skyscraper. Fowler's imagined version of Pyle was less about Pyle and more about Fowler's understanding of the United States and its role in Vietnam—he constructed his own mythic version of America. To Fowler, the United States relationship to France and Vietnam was about an arrogant, naive, and over intellectualized application of force. The memories he created for Pyle's photo album took these characteristics and applied them to the Pyle's body. Fowler saw Pyle riding a horse, swimming while on vacation, and working in a leisurely way. Consequently, when Fowler looked at Pyle, "the Quiet American," he saw these elements of the United States. Having accomplished the mapping of national characteristics onto an individual body, Greene then could have Pyle move through the rest of the novel and his mere presence allows readers to think through the consequences of American foreign policy.

Greene's application of national characteristics to individual bodies runs throughout *The Quiet American* and it was not limited to Pyle's American body. Through Fowler's interpretations of his own body, and the bodies of others, Greene not only created a commentary about international relations, but also created meanings rooted in the local. That is to say, Greene lent meaning to Saigon through the bodies of his characters. This did not stop with Pyle and the United States. As he did with Pyle, Fowler interpreted different people through places, but he also understood places through people and their bodies. He described his first encounter with Pyle by describing the bodies of not only Pyle, but also of himself and Vietnamese women:

I had seen him last September coming across the square towards the bar of the
Continental: an unmistakably young and unused face flung at us like a dart.

With his gangly legs and his crew cut and his wide campus gaze he seemed incapable of harm.⁸

Fowler’s first impressions of Pyle were thus channeled through the boyish American’s body, focusing on his legs, short hair, and overall “campus” look. Pyle stood out; he was different from his surroundings, be they Vietnamese or French; he was American. Pyle’s young body reflected his character’s seeming naiveté (while Pyle and Fowler were talking, a car backfired and Pyle hoped it was a grenade detonation). Fowler contrasted this view with his own aging body—he no longer found the intrigue of Saigon exciting, or for that matter, newsworthy. Where Pyle’s body related to the relative youth of American expansionism, Fowler’s represented the decline of the British Empire.

Fowler found little to be excited about as a reporter in Saigon. He explained that news of explosions only made the “back page of the local paper” and they never made European newspapers.⁹ Despite Fowler’s disinterest many of the events in Saigon, the bodies of Vietnamese women piqued his interest. As Fowler thought about his own numbing to the explosions that excited Pyle, he watched Vietnamese women walked down rue Catinat by the café at the Continental Hotel where the men sat. While looking at the “lovely flat figures” in ao dais, Fowler “watched them with the nostalgia I knew I would feel when I had left these regions for ever.”¹⁰ Fowler’s

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⁸ Ibid., 17-18.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.
jaded perspective ultimately created a distinction between the Saigon for which he will be nostalgic, the Saigon of women and French colonial architecture, and the one in which a war was being fought—the Saigon of people who were not in power. The “other” Saigon was comprised of those places the one the “European Press” no longer wrote about—the parts of town where grenades exploded.

The division between Saigon’s nostalgia-inducing downtown area and the rest of the city emerged early in the novel. One evening, Fowler waited for Pyle in his rue Catinat apartment. On a landing on the stairs to his apartment sat a group of Vietnamese women and Fowler could “see lamps burning where they had disembarked the new American planes.” Fowler also “saw a girl waiting in the next doorway.” Even though he “couldn’t see her face, only the white silk trousers and the long flowered robe,” he knew it was Phuong. In this initial description of Saigon, Greene created a sense of the familiar and of the unknown. Fowler’s apartment above the rue Catinat was welcoming—quiet, off the street, a place to dine and disengage (Fowler later smoked opium in the confines of his bed). The interior space was lent its atmosphere through the feeling of nighttime rue Catinat. Once Fowler descended to the street, he met a more dangerous and unfamiliar Saigon. The street was empty except for a few people and shadows, and in the distance he could see the sign of the French War effort and the American planes that helped support them.

In addition to the street level being the place where one became aware of the war, the street also introduced women, sex, and drugs into Fowler’s Saigon.

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11 Ibid., 11-12.
Phuong’s introduction obscured her face—Fowler saw only her body and her clothing. While readers were left wondering who she was and what she was doing there, Fowler knew both her identity and her purpose—she waited for his competitor, Pyle. The danger of the street mounted as Fowler encouraged Phuong to accompany him upstairs, as the French police might arrest her—the streets were safe for a British man but not a Vietnamese woman. When Phuong and Fowler ascended to his apartment, Fowler’s apartment transformed into a “safe” opium den—Phuong prepared Fowler’s opium pipe for him. Fowler’s predictable narration described the characteristics he observed in Vietnamese women—they are fragile like birds when “taken to bed.”

Fowler’s actions in his apartment and on the rue Catinat developed a dichotomy between unknown and familiar, or dangerous and safe. Fowler could move freely between these two places. He was comfortable on the street, he explained his opium use and his understanding of sex between white men and Vietnamese women—he invited these things into his home. Fowler was in control over his own situation and comfortable in Saigon as he was able to control what elements went where—his quiet/safe apartment mingled with the exhilarating/dangerous street when he permitted it.

However, the relationship between familiar and unknown, and Fowler’s negotiation of the two, perhaps functioned more as a spectrum than a binary. On the steps leading from Fowler’s apartment to the rue Catinat—physically separating the

\[12\] Ibid.
familiar from the unknown—was a “landing.” When Fowler first left his apartment, Fowler saw a group of women, but did not think much of them—warranting only a short description in his narration. However, when he and Phuong climbed the stairs again back to his apartment, these women left more of an impression. As he walked upstairs, Fowler thought about joking with Phuong, but he reconsidered because he felt she would not understand the irony in the languages with which he was familiar—French and English. At this moment, the couple reached the landing where the Vietnamese women were sitting and talking. As Phuong and Fowler passed by, Fowler heard the women start talking—he described it as hearing some sort of song. Fowler did not know Vietnamese and Phuong had to explain what they said to him.

The women on the landing created an area of anxiety for Fowler. He understood his apartment, as presumably, there was not much to understand—it was his and he felt it was too quiet. He also understood the street and he could enter it whenever he wished. Fowler felt he knew more than Phuong—at least French and English—but at the same time, Fowler could not understand the women on the landing, or their language. The landing lay between the street and his apartment both physically and metaphorically. In this space, he was in between two places he thought he knew.

The women on the stairs of Fowler’s apartment appeared again later in the novel. Fowler returned to his apartment from a series of events that had him trapped and attacked in a watchtower overnight in the Vietnamese countryside and resulted in

13 Ibid., 12.
a stay in a hospital. As he climbed the stairs to his apartment, the women gossiped
"carrying Fate in the lines of their faces as others on the palm." Fowler’s encounter
with these women after his stay in the hospital revealed the conflicting ways his
character understood the world around him. Clearly, he acknowledged there were
parts of Saigon, and Vietnamese culture, that he did not understand. However,
Fowler believed he could still “know” these women through their faces. Their bodies
displayed their futures for public viewing. Fowler merely had to look at these women
and he could know their present and future. The interactions between Fowler and the
women on the landing revealed his understanding of Saigon as rooted not only in
places, but also in the bodies of the people who inhabited those places. This
understanding, however, did not necessarily extend to communicating with people.

Fowler’s understanding of Saigon came from the bodies of Vietnamese women.
Depending on the context, the meanings he placed upon, or extracted from, female
bodies, could denote a leisurely place, a dangerous place, or some combination of the
two. One night, Fowler, Pyle, Granger (a brash American journalist), and Phuong,
grew to Cholon for dinner and to visit a brothel named the “House of Five Hundred
Girls.” After sending Phuong to reserve a table at the restaurant next door, the three
men ventured into the brothel. Inside, they saw hundreds of sex workers with little to
do as there “was trouble in Cholon and the troops were confined to quarters and there
was no work to be done: the Sunday of the body.” Because of the lack of business,
several of the women working in the brothel fought over the customers that came in,

14 Ibid., 114.
which reminded Fowler of a story of a previous patron who had lost his pants as he struggled to escape the women and seek shelter at a police station. Of this visitor, Fowler said that “if he chose to poach on military territory, he must look after himself and find his own way out.”

Here, Fowler uses women’s bodies to describe Cholon. The “trouble in Cholon” is at once the same danger, and a different danger, than that present at the end of the passage. The French military was on the ready for fighting in the city—the city posed a risk because of the war. Having established the risk of moving through Saigon-Cholon, the passage keeps that feeling alive through the story of the visitor who had to seek refuge at the police station. However, here, he was fighting the women who worked at the brothel. The bodies of the women in the brothel were what put men at risk. More specifically, the bodies of Vietnamese women put, presumably, white men at risk. The risk of military action in Saigon, as Fowler had already expressed, seemed less important to the jaded journalist, but the risk posed by Vietnamese women seemed more real, or at least more relevant. For Fowler, the women and the city were inseparable. They were not only both considered “territory,” or something to be possessed, but also the same territory. Fowler understood these women as part of Saigon-Cholon as he would a restaurant, street, or the House of Five Hundred Girls. Each belonged to the city.

This passage also exposes Fowler’s understanding in Saigon-Cholon. Unlike newly-arrived Americans, Fowler had been in Saigon for quite some time so he had

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15 Ibid., 37-38.
local knowledge, such as the memory of the pants-less visitor to the brothel. He had seen this all before. When combined with his character's experience, Fowler's body suggested a different commentary about Saigon, particularly, the relationship of the United States to Indochina. For example, while still at the brothel, a crowd formed around the three men. Fowler decided to "divide and conquer" and took a woman aside to prevent others from vying for his business. He told her, in French, that he was old and tired. As he said this he "caught sight of Granger flushed and triumphant; it was as though he took this demonstration as a tribute to his manhood." Fowler then called to Pyle and as the American glanced back, "his face looked haggard" and Fowler speculated Pyle had never had sex before.

Fowler's tired body was also the body of a tired colonial power. His body, the aging British Empire, had been through this before. Conversant in the language of colonialism (here, French), Fowler looked at a newer entry into the colonial stage as represented in the dual bodies of Granger and Pyle. On the one hand, Granger's body, one side of the American presence in Saigon, was virile and self-satisfied. His strong body was a hawkish American presence, welcoming American involvement in Vietnam—it was initially his idea to come to the establishment. On the other hand, Pyle was unsure, exhausted and disturbed by his surroundings. While Pyle, at first, wanted to be at the brothel, he quickly became terrified by the scene and his body, looking unwell, betrayed his inexperience to Fowler. He arrived at his current

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
predicament without understanding the reality of what would happen. At this moment, Pyle’s and Granger’s bodies also signaled a transition between the old (French) and new (American) foreign powers in Vietnam. The House of Five Hundred Girls was a hangout for the French military. The French troops have left and American male bodies have taken their place. The “tradition” that Fowler recognizes of women crowding around men happens to them as they established a connection between old and new. The Americans had arrived and begun to make their mark on the city.

Fowler and Pyle eventually left Granger at the House of Five Hundred Girls to meet Phuong at a nearby restaurant and cabaret. After watching a singer, a juggler, and a comedian, the group watched “a troupe of female impersonators” perform in “evening dresses with false jewelry and false breasts and husky voices.” Fowler recognized several of the performers—he had seen them walking down rue Catinat “in old slacks and sweaters, a bit blue about the chin, swaying their hips.” As he watched them in the cabaret, “they appear at least as desirable as most of the European women in Saigon.” As they performed, several military officers “whistled to them and they smiled glamorously back.”

In a Saigon where the city’s meaning often came from people’s bodies and the idea of the “real” was in flux, this drag show created an intriguing space. Fowler’s Saigon not only derived meaning from bodies, but those bodies needed to be strictly

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19 Ibid., 45.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
male or female. Each set of gendered bodies carried a set of possible meanings that could be mapped onto the city. The appearance of men in drag challenged those possibilities. Fowler's marking of "false" jewelry and breasts established the existence, at least to him, of a real gendered divide—these were not real women. Their hybrid bodies, however, leant meaning to the city all the same. They were desirable and glamorous. While the drag show took place in Cholon, Fowler noted that he had seen "many of them during the day in the rue Catinat." As such, the hybrid bodies of the drag performers were not confined to the seemingly dangerous Cholon. Because they traveled through the different parts of the city, the bodies of these men in drag transformed the entirety of Fowler's Saigon. However, while on the rue Catinat, these bodies were perverse—they were dressed in worn clothes and showed a hint of facial hair. The imperfect performance of gendered expectations, as Fowler described it, marginalized the men through their bodies. This marginalization, however, was confined to downtown Saigon. During the evening in Cholon, the drag performers were transformed in Fowler's mind. While still "false," they were not only acceptable, but desirable. In each location, the performers had "false" elements, but in Cholon, Fowler accepted the liminal space.

Fowler's acceptance of liminal bodies in Cholon, but not downtown Saigon, was rooted in the relationship between the performers and the audience. On the rue Catinat, Fowler looked at people as they passed by and did not allow for the gaze to be directed back at him. However, the audience in the cabaret had a different

22 Ibid.
relationship to the performers. Like Fowler on rue Catinat, they took enjoyment from the bodies of others, but in this instance, the objects of the gaze also gained more control over the situation and they interacted with the audience—the Air Force officers' whistled and the performance smiled "glamorously back." Fowler's reaction to the performance was more introverted. He recalled how he engaged with the performers while they were offstage. By engaging with a memory of the performers when he was seemingly in control of their interaction, he regained control of the experience. Here, in a part of town where the drag performers were powerful, Fowler invokes rue Catinat where gender expectations were easily sorted and his control of the situation went unchallenged.

Where Fowler could mentally return to the safety of rue Catinat in his mind, Pyle, unnerved by this conscious manipulation of gender expectations, needed to return physically. Pyle told his companions that the performance was inappropriate for Phuong, but her silence in this passage confirmed that Pyle was the uncomfortable one. His discomfort lead Pyle to want to leave the restaurant and return to the safety of the part of Saigon he called home.

Later in the novel, the relative safety of the rue Catinat disintegrated as a bomb exploded near the Continental Hotel. In the passage before the bombing outside the Continental Hotel, Fowler sat down in a cafe and described his surroundings. In addition to a "dowdy middle-aged Frenchwoman," two young American women sat in the café, "neat and clean in the heat" eating ice cream "with concentration as
thought they were making an experiment in the college laboratory.” They had identical handbags and identical legs. The women checked the time and left—someone told them to leave the area by a certain time. While they didn’t know why they had to leave, one speculated that it was because a demonstration was planned—something she was bored by. As they left, Fowler judged them—they came from a “sterilized so different from [the] world [he] inhabited.” They existed in a place devoid of passion and “they did not belong to rumpled sheets and the sweat of sex.”

In his observation of these two American women, Fowler created tension between his expectations of these women’s bodies and the reality of the meanings of their bodies. Above all else, Fowler saw these women as wholesome. As the Pyle of Fowler’s imagination belonged to a city with martini lunches, these women belonged to a college campus. Fowler’s understanding of these women’s seemingly sanitary (and identical, as if mass produced) bodies merged with his construction of the “sterilized” world they inhabited—rooted in naivety and youth. In it lived Americans, like these American strangers and Pyle, who, at first examination, were pure and righteous. The gap between the sterilized American world of Saigon and Fowler’s Saigon started to widen as the American women revealed they possessed knowledge of the city that Fowler did not have. They knew something was going to happen in downtown Saigon. Not only would the eventual bombing unsettle the cornerstone of Fowler’s safety in Saigon as it took place on rue Catinat, but it would

23 Ibid., 159-160.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
also demonstrate that Fowler no longer had control over his own Saigon. The Americans' Saigon now controlled the knowledge of the city and Fowler's experiences became less relevant. In this passage, for instance, his understanding of Saigon through the bodies of these women was inaccurate—the meanings he assigned to their world were wrong. By looking at their legs, and the general campus-look, he assumed their world did not involve violence or complication. Their knowledge of Saigon ended at, what he assumed, was the interest of tourists. Instead, as Fowler started to realize, their understandings of the city were proactive (as expressed through one of the women’s knowing glance). The two Americans left the area of the bombing before it happened, leaving behind a French woman and Fowler—both, presumably, not as youthful and attractive, not part of the new reality of an American-influenced Saigon.

Fowler’s world, the Saigon he knew, began to fall apart as the bomb went off on rue Catinat. Still seated in the cafe, Fowler’s reaction to the explosion narrated the disintegration of his version of Saigon at the hands of the American version of the city. He described how mirrors fell off the wall and the compact mirror previously used by the Frenchwoman in the café to apply makeup “lay open and unhurt in [Fowler’s] lap.” Fowler sat undisturbed although his table was destroyed and he couldn’t hear. He heard a “garden-sound” in the café caused by European liquors and wines as they dripped from shattered bottles.27

As the cafe collapsed around him, Fowler’s body remained unmoved—he was

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26 Ibid., 160.
constant in a changing world around him. The Frenchwoman’s body was uninjured, although thrown from her chair, and she prioritized the restoration of the appearance of an unphased body by looking for her compact. While the explosion spared Fowler’s body, it shattered his understanding of Saigon. Fowler’s world of leisure he enjoyed earlier on the rue Catinat now lay in the form of puddles of French liquor on the floor. Even his descriptions of the space around him betrayed him—he associated the sounds he heard with the peaceful noise of fountain rather than the outcome of an explosion near bottles of alcohol. In this moment, the American world he previously saw as sterile started to reveal its true self. It was irrational, intense, and colorful. Indoors became out as garden sounds were mimicked by the vibrantly colored European liquors, no longer held by their bottles, dripping down the bar.

The explosion left more wreckage outside the café. As Fowler went to the street, he learned experienced more of the bomb’s devastation and how it continued to transform the Saigon he knew. The wreckage juxtaposed violence with the French-designed landscape. The explosion had left wreckage of cars scattered across the Place Garnier near the theater on rue Catinat, Rather than observing the graceful figures he previously coveted on rue Catinat, he now saw a destroyed male body “without his legs … twitching at the edge of the ornamental gardens.”

The bombing further transformed Fowler’s understanding of Saigon as he realized that his knowledge of the city, and his and Phuong’s place in it, was eroded by the Americans. Fowler saw Pyle at the scene of the explosion and Fowler worried

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27 Ibid.
that Phuong was might have been injured at the nearby “milk bar” she often frequented during that time of day. Pyle assured Fowler she was not there—he had known about the explosion before hand and warned her to stay clear of the area.\(^{29}\) Pyle’s knowledge of the bombing, along with the American women in the café, finalized a transition in the Saigon Fowler thought he knew. After the explosion, and learning of his ignorance concerning its execution, Fowler was unsafe in the city he previously knew and no longer knew how to seek refuge.

As Fowler wrestled with the idea of not understanding his surroundings, he left the wreckage walking up rue Catinat to where the “hideous pink Cathedral blocked the way.”\(^{30}\) Fowler also reflected on the position of the United States in Vietnam. Fowler felt Pyle “was impregnably armoured by his good intentions and his ignorance.”\(^{31}\) Fowler wrestled with his feelings as well. While he was thankful that Phuong survived the bombing because she was warned, he also felt conflicted as the victims of the bombing received no warning—“they had not been sufficiently important.”\(^{32}\)

Once Fowler understood the Americans’ role in the bombing, he saw the lines drawn between the factions present in Saigon more clearly. Americans and their allies, who had knowledge of the bombing, knew to stay away from the downtown area. Everyone else, most of the Vietnamese population of Saigon and outsiders like

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 161.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 163.
\(^{31}\) Ibid.
\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Fowler lay outside this group and as a result were left in danger of the bomb. The
bomb, exploding in front of the theater on rue Catinat, did “not discriminate,” but
knowledge of that explosion did. The two young women in the café, Pyle, and
Phuong all knew about this plan and made sure not to be in the area and told the some
people to stay away as well. The indiscriminate explosion was a display of
Americans creatively destroying the landscape of Saigon. As they tried to forward
their policy goals of seeing a “third force” come to power, they asserted their control
over the city. Americans now had the power to help, hurt, or hinder the residents of
Saigon. Americans now loomed over the French part of the city and the bombing
marked the transition from French control to American, through who controlled the
colonial part of the city.

Joseph Mankiewicz’s Saigon in *The Quiet American* (1958)

Like Graham Greene’s novel, American director Joseph Mankiewicz’s film
adaptation of *The Quiet American* created a hybrid version of Saigon. Not quite real,
but not quite artificial, the Saigon of the 1958 film combined exterior shots filmed on-
location in Saigon and interior shots filmed on a soundstage in Rome. Mankiewicz
also used people’s bodies to help lend meaning to the city. He created a hybrid
Saigon by stitching together a population from actors and extras and meshing on-
location filming with soundstage reproductions. Specifically, by casting Italian
actress Giorgia Moll in as a the female Vietnamese character Phuong, Mankiewicz

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33 Ibid.
literally placed (racialized) meanings about national boundaries onto the female body.

The film version of *The Quiet American* depended on exterior shots of downtown Saigon to create a sense of the city. Mankiewicz filmed many of the same locations that Graham Greene wrote about. However, Saigon in 1957, when the crew filmed these exterior shots, and Saigon in 1952, when the story was set, differed a great deal. Principally, the story required a Saigon under French control, but Mankiewicz was filming in a city where the South Vietnamese government, in conjunction with the United States, ruled. The ability of the downtown Saigon landmarks to stand in for previous versions of themselves was enabled by a unique attribute of downtown Saigon. The colonial architecture, at the moment of its initial design and construction, was imbued with a set of colonial meanings. These meanings had to change over time as French power waned in Saigon. However, colonial meanings of the buildings transformed into another layer of meaning on the city. It was a view into the past from the present. Mankiewicz's film mobilized this layer of past meanings that were part of the French colonial buildings. When put onto film, they were meant to give a "sense" of Saigon—a place where colonial structures attempted to rule over the people living there.

*The Quiet American* had eight, or so, exterior sequences in Saigon and each one revealed different aspects of Mankiewicz's Saigon. Fowler's witnessing of the bicycle bomb explosions showed how cinematography could use old buildings to establish a sense of an "old" French-controlled Saigon. The seemingly controlled Saigon contrasted the "other" Saigon that Mankiewicz created in scenes of markets
and Tet celebrations. Fowler’s recollection of seeing Phuong and Pyle as they went out around town demonstrated a nostalgic/romantic version of the city. The scene of bicycle bombs exploding in the fountain used the backdrop of Saigon’s architecture and editing to create two versions of Saigon: the first, Fowler’s Saigon of the early 1950s and the second, the American Saigon present in the novel that had come to fruition for the 1957 on-location filming of the city.

At the beginning of this scene, Fowler arrived at the corner of Le Loi and Nguyen Hue in downtown Saigon to investigate a tip. After checking his watch, Fowler heard sirens and then looked in their direction as a number of trucks entered the traffic circle. Vietnamese police exited the trucks and removed a number of bicycles from racks on the street corner and threw them into the nearby fountain where they exploded. The bicycle bombing scene gave viewers a sense of the city by visually placing Fowler in downtown Saigon. From the corner of Le Loi and Nguyen Hue, the camera captured several downtown landmarks left by French colonial rule and thereby helped construct a colonial presence through the architecture. From this corner, we see the French designed and built theater a block away on the rue Catinat. The Hotel de Ville is one block down the next street from Fowler’s corner. These French-designed buildings anchored the scene in the French colonial legacy by providing visual markers of French power.

The colonial architecture present in downtown Saigon allowed Mankiewicz to set his story before the end of the French War. The bicycle bombing scene not only showed visual markers of French power, but also the symbolic power of the
architectural elements of the city. The Vietnamese police prevented the bombs from
destroying part of downtown Saigon by moving the bombs from the part of the city
meant for public use (the sidewalk) and tossing them into the decorative element of
the city (the fountain). The threat of the people against the French-controlled Saigon
was neutralized by containing the physical energy within the design of the French
downtown.

Through the camera work of the bicycle bombing scene, Mankiewicz exposes the multiple Saigon's present in *The Quiet American*. The film used Fowler’s perspective and a seemingly omniscient camera angle to relate the events of this scene. The camera shots in the beginning of the bicycle bomb sequence focused on Fowler’s reaction, or at least the direction of his gaze, by placing him in the frame. For example, the film captured the traffic moving around the traffic circle from over Fowler’s shoulder. Similarly, the camera cut back to Fowler watching the bicycle bombing. The presence of Fowler’s body in the frame establishes this is his Saigon. He received knowledge of the bombing and knew something would happen in the area at a certain time and, as such, his perspective is one of control.

Even though Fowler’s Saigon was one of control and knowledge, there was a competing shot interspersed in this sequence not tied to Fowler’s perspective. The initial choice of height for this shot freed it from Fowler’s point of view. Once freed from Fowler’s line-of-sight, the camera could not only track the actions of the police officers, but could also move around the square. The wide street provided an unobstructed view of Saigon’s landscape and the camera captured nearby landmarks,
such as the Opera House. These shots, unconnected to Fowler’s understanding of the events unfolding, acknowledged the presence of another set of meanings placed upon Saigon. This “extra” perspective was the explicit demonstration of an American point of view in the city. Like Greene’s Saigon, created from his memories of real aspects of the city, this perspective highlights the Saigon Mankiewicz constructed.

Fowler’s Saigon, the Saigon of the plot (supposedly from 1952), and the current Saigon in which Mankiewicz filmed (1957), however, could work together because of the latent colonial meanings present in the city’s structures. When first conceived, French planners constructed Saigon in a way that they hoped would help control the indigenous population through enabling observation. Designing a city that allowed for easy surveillance of the population allowed those in power to maintain control over that the city. The end result, wide streets and imposing white structures different from the rest of the city, reflected the power of France’s empire. After the French War ended these structures still remained in downtown Saigon. Surprisingly, the two versions of Saigon (fictional 1952 and current 1957) can coexist. Because Americans increasingly inhabited this downtown area and took control of downtown area (see the upcoming chapters), Mankiewicz had access to this space to film. The buildings still convey power and control, and by simply setting events in the past, they represented French power instead of American and Vietnamese power. Additionally, the addition of a Mankiewicz’s perspective to Fowler’s itself attempts to control the city. The camera’s ability to construct a version of Saigon highlights the Power Mankiewicz had to remake the city as he saw fit. Mankiewicz’s Saigon is an American version of the city—claiming it from Greene and the French.
The multiple versions of Saigon in Mankiewicz's *The Quiet American* continue to develop through the movie by associating the bodies of the characters with their Saigon surroundings. This work happened both in the exterior settings Saigon and the interior sets filmed on a soundstage in Rome. Not only did Mankiewicz use the bodies of Pyle, Fowler, and Phuong to lend meaning to their surroundings, he also used the surroundings to construct the meanings around their bodies. After observing the bicycle bombings, Fowler returned to his apartment, labored up the single flight of stairs, and negotiated his collapse into a chair with the help of his cane. At this moment, he realized Phuong had left him. Fowler looked around his apartment to all the places he expected Phuong to be. He glanced at the empty table, then to the sideboard that held the drink-mixing supplies, next, the kitchen, and lastly the bed. He confirmed Phuong’s absence by opening an empty dresser drawer—her clothes were gone. Fowler understood Phuong’s company in terms of these spaces, constructing a connection between Phuong and domestic and sexual service: he could only be sure she had left after he looked to kitchen and the bed. In these various shots, Fowler’s apartment seemed empty: Phuong’s body had been part of the domestic space.

Immediately after witnessing Fowler’s realization of Phuong’s departure, Fowler considered where Phuong had gone—she had left him for Pyle. Fowler lamented Phuong’s absence on his way to a cafe and recalled how he saw the couple about town—“at the cinema, strolling, with his dog, of course, in the botanical gardens, driving past the Continental in his car, laughing and being young together.” Fowler’s recollection of Pyle and Phuong’s tour of Saigon stressed the difference in
these two men’s bodies. Fowler, who in the previous scene had sweatily limped into his apartment, aided with a cane, and collapsed into a chair, now remembered Pyle and Phuong’s youth. Their bodies were newer than his, as was their understanding of Saigon. Fowler viewed Phuong as part of his domestic space, focused inward, on the care of his body, rather than outward, on experiencing the city. Pyle’s Saigon captured the nostalgia Saigon had to offer as he and Phuong moved through its spaces of leisure—the rue Catinat and the botanical gardens.

The juxtaposition of Fowler’s aging body against Pyle’s young body, on the surface, was not entirely complicated. An American presence in Saigon came with fresh, albeit, naive, perspectives and got involved in Vietnam. What made the relationship between British and American bodies in *The Quiet American* was the linking of these bodies to the built environment. Specifically, in these scenes that focused on the old/young dynamic of Fowler’s and Pyle’s bodies, the film employed an interior set built in Rome for showing Fowler’s torpid body and an exterior setting located in Saigon for Pyle’s mobile body.

Creating sets meant to look like scenes in Saigon allowed Mankiewicz to create a version of the city he could control. When on location, the meanings of the city were more nebulous as the film captured Vietnamese people moving through the city. But dividing Saigon into seemingly real and artificial sections involved the bodies of the actors as well. Giorgia Moll’s yellow face portrayal of Phuong brought a different set of meanings to the city and extended the real/artificial divide to bodies. By having the main Vietnamese female character in the film played by this Italian
actress, Mankiewicz exerted control over the exterior areas of Saigon he filmed. The fictional character moved through real Saigon spaces, with the meanings Mankiewicz constructed placed onto her body. The earlier interior scene cast Phuong as a domestic/sexual being and the application of the Vietnamese race to an Italian actress removed any sort of national meanings that might have been placed on Phuong’s body otherwise. Any national meanings, such as those demonstrated in Greene’s Phuong, were those constructed by Mankiewicz. Unlike the existing colonial meanings of Saigon’s built environment Mankiewicz utilized, Phuong’s body was first stripped of its Vietnamese meaning, and then that meaning was carefully reapplied.

At times, the multiple versions of Saigon diverged in The Quiet American, but many times, Mankiewicz’s Saigon is the same as Fowler’s, and Greene’s, and many other contemporary writers (see chapter 1). The main similarity between all these versions of the city was the creation of the “other” Saigon. The beginning of the film focused on a Vietnamese crowd outside the central market in downtown Saigon celebrating the Chinese New Year, and the end of the film showed Fowler walking into a similar crowd in Cholon. These two moments carried different meanings for the film’s narrative, but together helped create a contrast to the Saigon of white buildings and nostalgia. The opening sequence of the film presented the credits and explained the general political context for the film against still images of celebrating Vietnamese people in Saigon. The first slide that established the location of the film as Saigon did so against the background of a dragon. This dragon moved around the square in front of the central market during a dark night amidst the sound of music
and firecrackers. Thus, the first introduction to Saigon in *The Quiet American* is the image of the exotic—the other. This place, and its customs, was different for the American, British and French characters that moved through this space than it was for the local people. Not only was this Saigon different, but also it was also dangerous. Even though French troops patrolled the crowd, Pyle’s body inevitably turned up dead floating in a river—his lifeless body pointing to the dangerous aspects of the city.

The dangerous and exotic Saigon in *The Quiet American* was not a total departure from previous descriptions of the city in the American media. However, what made this description of the city different was the use of Phuong’s body to mediate between a “safe” and “known” Saigon and the “dangerous” and “unfamiliar” city. Phuong’s body, a white female body with Vietnamese racial and ethnic prosthetics applied to it, functioned in the narrative to move from one part of the city to another. But this body also bridged the gaps in the “on location” Saigon and the fictional Saigon created by the film production. In real time, Phuong’s body helped the production to control public spaces.

As far as *The Quiet American*’s narrative was concerned, Phuong seemed to belong to the city. Her character was first introduced as standing in the shadows of a building (according to the story, this would have been on rue Catinat). Her body, half in shadow, half in light, straddled the line between the two Saigon’s. She was part of the dangerous Saigon where Pyle was just found dead, but she also had access to Fowler’s Saigon of privilege and leisure—the shadows in which she waited were
underneath his apartment. Her ability to move between these two versions of the city also appeared in this scene. She was waiting for Pyle when Fowler found her and she agreed to wait with him off the street. Before doing so, she went to inform the women on the street. After speaking with the group of women, Phuong translated their conversation for Fowler (they were laughing because they thought she was returning to Fowler). Phuong’s ability to move between the women and Fowler, between the foreign and the colonial city helped create the boundaries between these two spaces.

While most of the time Phuong’s character is strictly controlled, there are times in which her character reveals a potential for critiquing the imperial powers at work in Saigon. For instance, in the previous example, she has the ability to move between groups and engage with the women who might have been critiquing Fowler and the Western power structure present in Saigon he represents. Her skill at existing in multiple parts of Saigon, both the French and “other” Saigon, allows her character to escape scrutiny of the French power structure as well. For instance, after Pyle’s body was discovered, she and Fowler went to the French police station for questioning about Pyle’s death. Fowler was the one questioned while Phuong remained outside. While the men watched her from a window, still under surveillance, she stood in the “other” Saigon (literally in the shadows), and avoided being questioned by police.

In sum, Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* used the bodies of Saigon’s inhabitants to cast the city as romantic, dangerous, unknown yet familiar. Descriptions of, and relationships between, characters’ bodies created a sense of a city affected by years of colonialism. Each body absorbed and projected meanings
that negotiated categories of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality to create a sense of the "local"—Greene's construction of Saigon—and the "global"—Vietnam's relationship to the French, American and British. Greene's Saigon emerged from within these corporeal negotiations to interrogate the power relationships present in colonialism and how we ultimately understand "place."

The inability to separate "real" places from "imagined" bodies in Greene's Saigon suggested a relationship between people and the cities in which they lived. By contemplating the physical attributes of the characters in *The Quiet American*, the narrator's focus on people's bodies revealed the ways in which the relationships between people and physical places were not intertwined, but, in fact, mutually-constituted. *The Quiet American* exposed the ways people's bodies and the places through which they moved were part of the same discourse.

The adaptation of *The Quiet American* for the 1958 film pushed the relationship of bodies to the city and the boundary between real and imagined further. By mixing studio shots with on-location footage, Mankiewicz created different versions of the city. A dangerous Saigon mixed with a romantic one; a dated version of the city created by an old correspondent fell apart and gave way to a newer American version. Mankiewicz, however, complicated these versions of the city as he not only created a Saigon for the narrative of the story, but also placed a layer of meaning on the city that was beyond the scope of the film's story. Giorgia Moll's body clad in yellow face absorbed the meanings of the city created through the narrative and, in turn, brought those meanings to the on-location filming of the city. As a result, the line between where the fictional American version of Saigon ended and where the real
Saigon started became hard to locate.

Graham Greene’s novel and Joseph Mankiewicz film, both set in Saigon, use the bodies of Saigon’s inhabitants to cast the city as romantic, dangerous, unknown yet familiar. Descriptions of, and relationships between, characters’ bodies create a sense of a city affected by years of colonialism. Each body absorbs and projects meanings that negotiate categories of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality to create a sense of the “local”—Greene’s construction of Saigon—and the “global”—Vietnam’s relationship to the French, American and British.
Protest and Public Space: Saigon during the 1963 “Buddhist Crisis”

On May 8, 1963, tensions between Roman Catholic Vietnamese government officials and Buddhist monks came to a head. In the city of Hue, about 400 miles north of Saigon, Government of Vietnam forces ordered Buddhist monks to take down the Buddhist flag flying over their pagoda. The order prompted a riot where Buddhists alleged that Vietnamese government officials fired weapons into the crowd. The Government of Vietnam accused Communist militants of detonating the two explosions that occurred during the riot.1 Regardless of who was responsible, nine people died in Hue on that day.2 Consequently, Buddhist leaders demanded that the Diem administration halt Buddhist persecution immediately or they would start protesting.3 The Government of Vietnam did not meet Buddhist demands. Until a coup removed the Diem administration from power in November 1963, Buddhists protested their treatment by the Government of Vietnam.

The original events at Hue and the Buddhists’ demand to fly their flag over their pagoda gave rise to what the press would call the “Buddhist Crisis.”4 Buddhists made their religious persecution into a political matter, challenging it both privately, through closed-door diplomatic meetings, and publicly through street protests. The Diem administration, often unwilling to concede in either context, encountered Buddhist leaders and everyday practitioners in the streets in clashes between Buddhist protestors and police.

However, the Diem Administration and Buddhist protestors were not the only actors in the protests happening in Saigon's streets. Members of the Foreign Press amplified the public presence of the Buddhist protests and enabled the Government of Vietnam, Buddhist leaders, young protesters, and United States officials like Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. to impose their own meanings on images of Saigon.⁵ At a time when American officials could not endorse either side for fear of losing support of the other and damaging their progress against Communist forces elsewhere in Vietnam, the United States State Department asserted itself in Saigon through the spaces it controlled and, in one case, by walking through spaces it did not. By looking at both textual and visual representations of the Buddhist protests and the coup that followed a few months later, we can see how Buddhists protestors, journalists, and American officials used Saigon’s public spaces to forward their respective agendas.

**Buddhist Protests in Saigon, Thich Quang Duc, and the Role of the Press**

After the altercation in Hue, Buddhists protested in many locations throughout Vietnam and they had a large organized presence in Saigon—the seat of President Diem’s power. On May 17, unsatisfied with Diem’s response to their demands, two Buddhist monks travelled from Hue to a pagoda in Saigon to address 300 monks. They shared pictures and recollections of the Hue riot.⁶ Several days later, 500 Buddhist monks and nuns marched through Saigon in remembrance of those who died in Hue. They walked from the An Quang pagoda, where the Hue monks had

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⁴ Halberstam, “Saigon Replaces Three In Dispute.”

⁵ I am using the term “Foreign Press” to refer to non-Vietnamese journalists writing for American news outlets.

spoken a few days earlier to the Xa Loi pagoda—the main pagoda in Saigon. They
did not meet any resistance from the Government of Vietnam as police, fire trucks

The Buddhist protests of 1963 started from a contestation of space. Buddhists
displayed their flag and publicly asserted their identity. Flying this flag, instead of, or
above, the Government of Vietnam’s flag challenged the state’s power. Buddhists in
Saigon used public spaces to contest their oppression by the Vietnamese government.
By bringing these protests to downtown Saigon, the location of Diem’s palace and
residence, Buddhists specifically targeted Diem’s control of the country. The
Buddhists also placed their cause in clear view of the American press.

The Buddhists marched again in Saigon on May 30; this time an Associated
window of a hotel on Tu Do Street, ran a caption that described the action. As the
image showed, Buddhist monks and nuns staged a four-hour demonstration that
ended in front of the Vietnamese National Assembly building (the most recent
function of the French-built opera house on Tu Do street). Under the watchful eyes
of the police, the Buddhist demonstrators remained in front of the National Assembly
giving speeches and chanting hymns.\footnote{According to the caption, the marchers carried
signs in Vietnamese and English that expressed the monks were “we ready to
sacrifice [themselves] for Buddhism” and called for the Diem administration to

“practice equality.” These banners referred to the sacrifice these Buddhist protestors were willing to make: the 48-hour hunger strike was starting that day.10

Whether by coincidence or by design, the Buddhist protests in Saigon leveraged the city itself to gain exposure for their cause. Carrying banners in Vietnamese and English allowed the Buddhists to communicate with Americans, and marching to the National Assembly, which was located on the street that traditionally housed foreign reporters, provided a good possibility for coverage of their cause in the American press.

This image, the first to appear in the AP image archive about the Buddhist protests in Saigon, exposed the role of the city itself in such protests. By marching in the French-planned area of Saigon, Buddhist demonstrators encountered a physical space designed to manage an unruly population. The original French design of the city avoided using large open spaces where demonstrators could gather. It also included wide streets that would allow colonial administrators to easily observe their colonized subjects. While this urban plan still worked to control protests in downtown Saigon, unintended consequences emerged from the decision to allow the presence of the modern press corps. The French-planned downtown assumed that government officials, not a foreign press corps, would observe the population. The introduction of the United States into Saigon placed an additional presence in the city and left an opportunity for Buddhist demonstrators. While they could not all gather in one place, they could march through the wide streets, which put them in easy view

10 Ibid.
of police forces, as well as the press. As this image shows, wide streets lined with an occasional tall building allowed for the press to stay away from the protest, but still report the happenings to American readers across the world.

The authorities in Saigon did not let Buddhists use the streets for long. On June 3, the police arrested eight Buddhist monks for "unlawful assembly" in a Saigon street. President Diem defended the police’s actions by reminding Saigon residents that gathering in streets was illegal, because it caused a security threat that could be taken advantage of by the communist forces.

Along with Diem’s acknowledgment that the war, mostly confined to rural areas, could come into Saigon’s streets, other South Vietnamese leaders linked Buddhists and Communists in another way. Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem’s sister-in-law and leader of a prominent women’s group, called the protesting Buddhists pawns of the Communists. This statement came shortly after a partial apology by Diem, who claimed that his administration lacked “sensitivity” in dealing with Buddhists, but did not accept responsibility for anything else, and rolled back any progress in negotiating a solution that the Buddhists and South Vietnamese government groups might have made. Saigon’s streets reflected this lack of progress as stockpiles of barbed wire and barricades appeared on the city’s street corners in preparation for protests.

The actions of the Vietnamese Government created problems for American

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12 Ibid.
14 David Halberstam, “Saigon Situation Moving To Crisis,” *New York Times*, June 9,
officials in Vietnam. From a diplomatic standpoint, Americans did not want to make any statement in support of equality for Buddhists, as it would suggest that the United States did not support the actions of Vietnamese government. The recalcitrance of the Diem administration also frustrated American officials as it confirmed America's lack of influence in South Vietnam. American officials in Vietnam, however, had another problem. Any sort of reporting that followed Buddhist protests potentially put the United States in a precarious position. Press coverage, regardless of political underpinnings, broadcast images of Vietnamese police brutality against Buddhists to the global public. Vietnamese troops were armed with American-made weapons, a troubling fact for some American officials as regardless of what actions these arms were used for, they implied complicity on the part of the United States.

Previous aid to the South Vietnamese government was part of this image problem. The Vietnamese Government had asked the United States to use its planes to fly Vietnamese troops to Hue to aid in suppressing the Buddhist protests, and the United States had refused. Consequently, the troops traveled to Hue in Vietnamese

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16 Ibid.
17 Halberstam, “Americans Vexed By Inability To Act In Vietnam Dispute”; While Buddhists demonstrated in Saigon during The Spring and Summer of 1963. Civil Rights leaders in the United States led non-violent protests in Birmingham, Alabama. The parallels between these two movements, and the images and stories that appeared about them in the press did not escape David Halberstam. In his 1964 book Making of a Quagmire, Halberstam compared the two protest movements: “as Bull Connor and his police dogs in Birmingham were to etch indelibly the civil rights movement in the minds of million Americans, so the Buddhists used the Government's repeated clumsiness to commit their people further to their cause and to strengthen the movement.” (215)
transports, which happened to be American-made planes that the United States had transferred to the Vietnamese earlier. Halberstam asserted that “to the Vietnamese these planes still look like American aircraft.”

The United States military actively disassociated itself from the oppression of Buddhists. They stopped transporting reporters to Hue to halt the image of American planes arriving in the city from being broadcast. Lee Baker, head of the Press Information office (and husband of Else Baker), commented “we don't want the Vietnamese to think we are participating in this.” Along the same lines, General Paul Harkins, Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, ordered American military advisors to distance themselves from Vietnamese military forces if they were involved in the oppression of Buddhist protestors.

Yet discussions around controlling the images of Buddhist protests soon became irrelevant. On the morning of June 11, Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk, set himself on fire in protest over the oppression of Buddhists in Vietnam. When this spectacle took place in downtown Saigon a few blocks from the Presidential palace, on the corner of Le Van Duyet and Phan Dinh Phuong streets, Associated Press photographer Malcolm Browne captured it on camera. Browne, writing about the event a year later, recalled the events leading up to and immediately after the June 11

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
protest. The images of Thich Quang Duc that Browne filed with the Associated Press did not include any images of American involvement. There is, instead, Thich Quang Duc, Buddhist monks, the city of Saigon, and the foreign viewer, constructed through Browne's perspective.

Browne, in his article in the *Columbia Press Review*, recalled that the Diem administration held tight control over the Vietnamese press. This allowed him, for the most part, to prevent negative stories of his administration from appearing in public. \(^22\) The Buddhists needed something that was dramatic enough to get past Diem's control of the press. As such, Buddhist leaders contacted the foreign press present in Saigon, because without foreign coverage, Buddhist leaders knew their protests could be silenced. \(^23\) A few weeks prior to Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation, Buddhist leaders told members of the Saigon press corps that if the Vietnamese government did not accept their demands, a monk would set himself on fire and another would disembowel himself. \(^24\) After several weeks of uneventful protests in Saigon, journalists pursued the story of the Buddhists less vigorously, which resulted in only Browne attending the June 11 protest. \(^25\)

The images of Thich Quang Duc's protest transformed Saigon's streets into political spaces. Because the layout of downtown Saigon forced protesters into the streets, images of the protesters took on an aggressive tone. If protests took place away from the tall buildings to which the foreign press had access, the press had to

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\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
cover those protests from street level. The street level perspective had the effect of transforming viewers from observers to participants, as it violated the distance intended by the city’s original plan. The monks in this image further countered Saigon’s lack of open spaces in which to stage protests when they formed a wall of monks along the back side of Browne’s frame. In a city designed to prevent protests, Buddhists redrew their own city—making walls of people. This wall created a clear stage for Thich Quang Duc’s protest.

Buddhists in Saigon followed Thich Quang Duc’s protest by increasingly asserting their presence in Saigon, and doing so in a way that captivated the foreign press as they confronted the Diem regime. On June 13, Buddhists flew the Buddhist flag, still forbidden, at half-mast over Saigon pagodas in memory of Thich Quang Duc.26 This visual symbol, however, was countered by government forces in the form of special police guarding, and limiting access to, the pagodas.27

A few days later, the less active representation (flag flying) of the Buddhist’s resistance to Diem policies to changed again. After Buddhist leaders and Diem signed an agreement meant to ease the tension between the two groups, young Buddhists not involved in Buddhist leadership’s cooperation with Diem protested on downtown streets.28 While ten thousand people attempted to pay their respects to

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28 The Government of Vietnam issued a joint statement meant to resolve Buddhist demands. In this statement, they agreed that the national flag “should always be respected and put at its appropriate place,” to established a committee that would look
Thich Quang Duc as his body lay in state at the Xa Loi pagoda, a crowd confronted the police. After 45 minutes of rioting, in which several hundred young people threw shoes and rocks at police, police used tear gas to disperse the protestors. To control the riot, police set up barricades and prepared for a large conflict; or perhaps they just wanted to send a visual message of their own, as Vietnamese government forces positioned "tanks and armored cars in the courtyards of Government buildings." Troops also set up at street intersections with machine guns and barbed wire.

Another image from this time was this one from the Associated Press showing a Saigon street strewn with shoes, a tear gas grenade exploding, part of a dismantled barricade, and a police officer wielding a branch against a shoeless protester. Like the images of Thich Quang Duc, this image used Saigon streets to frame the political


Ibid.


actions of Buddhists. While the images of Thich Quang Duc’s protest were shocking, they were also orderly. A crowd circles his burning body, giving a wide margin around him, and he sits still in meditation. This controlled visual image of protest also appeared in the earlier image of monks and nuns protesting in front of the National Assembly. The neatly formed column of robed marchers were surrounded by a margin around them—it is a Saigon street. In the image of the June 16 riot, the margin around the protest breaks down. While there is a still a focal point in the image (the confrontation between the uniformed police officer and the shoeless protester), and there is also a ring of people around the outside of the image, the clean divide that separated protest from city is gone. Shoes, tear gas and scattered people crowd the action in the center of the image. The only open space is between the photographer and action.

During the second half of June, the conflict between the Buddhists and Diem’s administration continued to escalate. On June 19, Buddhists cremated Thich Quang Duc’s body amid—as one reporter wrote—“an awesome display of police power.” During the procession, police used barricades to prevent people from getting too close to the procession. The police’s use of barricades contributed to a changing atmosphere in Saigon. On June 22, David Halberstam wrote of a city being forcefully managed and under surveillance. “The populace of this city is sullen and resentful. There is a nervous edge to life. Streets around the palace are blocked off. Security

34 Ibid.
policemen with radiophones keep watch at many corners.\textsuperscript{35}

After Thich Quang Duc died, Buddhist monks established his legacy and Malcolm Browne’s images of his death began to broadly circulate. In the weeks following his death and cremation, Buddhists held many processions and services in his memory. At the front of their marches through Saigon, monks often carried enlargements of Browne’s image with them.\textsuperscript{36} For example, this image shows the June 21 funeral procession for Thich Quang Duc.\textsuperscript{37}

Browne’s image circulated abroad as well. On June 27, a number of American religious leaders took out a full-page advertisement in the \textit{New York Times}. At the top of the page, they included one of Browne’s images of Thich Quang Duc with the headline “We, too, protest.” Underneath the headline, they listed four items—seemingly referencing Norman Rockwell’s illustration of FDR’s “Four Freedoms” two decades earlier—that they were protesting: US military aid that enabled the oppression of Buddhists, spraying of pesticides and the use of strategic hamlets as “concentration camps,” use of aid to and American lives to “bolster a regime universally regarded as unjust, undemocratic, and unstable, and “the fiction that this is ‘fighting for freedom.’”\textsuperscript{38}

The “We, Too, Protest” advertisement confirms the success of Buddhist leaders’ plans to gain international attention. The advertisement, however, also raises

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Browne, “Viet Nam reporting: three years of crisis,” 7.
\item \textsuperscript{38} No Title (Advertisement), \textit{New York Times}, June 27, 1963.
\end{itemize}
a question. As Lee Baker suggested, the United States military did not want to be
associated with the oppression of Buddhists. Nonetheless, in this advertisement, by
pairing Browne’s image with the four issues to which they objected, these American
religious leaders suggested that the United States was culpable for Diem’s repressive
tactics against Buddhists.

Increased Involvement and Conflict in the Buddhist Protests by the Foreign
Press

As the “We, Too Protest” advertisement acknowledged a connection in print
between United States policy in Vietnam and the Diem administration’s treatment of
Buddhists, members of the foreign press corps forged their own connections with
Buddhists. On July 7, a few hundred Buddhists gathered at the Chantareansy Pagoda
to conduct a memorial service for Thich Quang Duc.39 Buddhist leaders notified the
foreign press, as well as the American Embassy, ahead of time so they would receive
press coverage.40 After the ceremony, the monks left the pagoda to process through
the city. After turning down an alley to reach a main street, police stopped them.41
While the procession paused peacefully, the foreign press had trouble with the
Vietnamese police. Shortly after a photographer took this picture, police turned their
attention to the press. Police officers tried to prevent photographers from capturing

39 “210. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State,”
40 Ibid.
41 Associated Press, Image 6307081262, AP Images, July 8, 1963,
the images of the police interactions with the monks.\textsuperscript{42} According to United States Embassy reports, when the police halted the procession, the press, working for American media outlets,\textsuperscript{43} moved into the alley to take pictures.\textsuperscript{44} Police took Associated Press photographer Peter Arnett's camera and broke it on the ground,\textsuperscript{45} while other uniformed police stood by. The reporters gave a more detailed account of their story. According to David Halberstam's report of the incident, police first tried to confiscate the camera of CBS photographer Joseph Masraf. When the other reporters tried to help Masraf, police turned their attention to Horst Faas, another photographer from the Associated Press, and Peter Arnett. Arnett tried reclaim his camera from the police, but they knocked him down. Malcolm Browne, writing about the assault a year later, remembered Arnett bleeding on the ground while getting kicked by police.\textsuperscript{46} The group of reporters then tried to get in between the police and Arnett, at which point someone threw a rock at Malcolm Browne's chest and broke his camera.\textsuperscript{47}

After the incident, a group of the reporters sent a cable to President Kennedy.\textsuperscript{48} In the letter to the President, Malcolm Browne, David Halberstam, Peter Kalischer

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[42] Ibid.
\item[45] “210. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State,” 470.
\item[48] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and Neal Sheehan described the incident. The reporters concluded that the assault by police signaled the beginning of a larger problem. This was the start of a "campaign of open physical intimidation to prevent the covering of news which we feel Americans have the right to know."  

The United States Embassy, in a telegram to the State Department, disagreed with the reporters' version of the incident. Embassy officials asked Government of Vietnam officials about their policy towards the foreign press and Vietnamese officials said there had been no change in their treatment of the press. The Embassy telegram added that the Government of Vietnam believed reporters provoked the incident by objecting to the police initially stopping the procession, and that a reporter attacked the police first. The next day, Arnett and Browne were charged with assault for the incident, and were interrogated by police. The Embassy intervened on behalf of the reporters and asked the Government of Vietnam to drop the charges. It took several meetings before the Diem administration finally dropped the charges against the reporters on July 17, and only after releasing a Government of Vietnam report that confirmed the police's version of the incident.

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50 Ibid.

51 "210. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State," 471.


53 Malcolm Browne, "Viet Nam reporting: three years of crisis," Columbia Journalism Review (Fall 1964), 5.

54 "210. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State," 471.
After the altercation between the police and the press, William Trueheart, chargé d'affaires for the United States Embassy,\(^5\) told the State Department that he did not think that the Government of Vietnam planned to harass the reporters, considering they had covered an earlier service without problem.\(^6\) He claimed that the incident represented a "relatively commonplace contretemps" between reporters and Vietnamese police.\(^7\) In a later telegram, Trueheart added that the tensions between the Government of Vietnam and reporters were running high. He commented by cable that resident correspondents had become so embittered towards GVN that they are saying quite openly to anyone who will listen that they would like to see regime overthrown. GVN no doubt has this well-documented. GVN also unquestionably considers that correspondents have been actively encouraging Buddhists. Diem is therefore most unlikely to accept view that correspondents merely carrying on normal functions of keeping US public informed.\(^8\)

Browne’s 1964 reflections on the assault saw the events of July 7, 1963 from a slightly different point of view. He wrote that “one of the major pitfalls any reporter faces is the possibility of becoming an element in one of his own stories—a cardinal

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\(^6\) “210. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State,” 471.

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Quoted in “210. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State,” 471 Footnote 4.
breach of the rules of our game." Unfortunately for Browne, the July 7 assaults put him in just this position. After police interrogated and released Browne, he and Peter Arnett had to write a story about the day’s events, despite their own involvement in them. On this day, they made the news as writers and as residents of Saigon.

The incident between the foreign press and Vietnamese police, as Browne argued, put the press in a precarious position. The press already served the political purposes of Buddhist leaders just by covering the events in Saigon. The assault by police, however, functioned a little differently. The police prevented Americans, and other members of the press corps working for American news corporations, from freely moving through Saigon. Moreover, the attack on photographers prevented American viewers from engaging in Saigon in a specific way.

Besides the attack on reporters and bombings of American space, Buddhist protests continued to bring Americans into the fold of Saigon’s politicized public spaces. On July 16, Buddhists staged a protest in front of the American Ambassador’s residence, requesting that the United States persuade the Diem administration to compromise with Buddhists. One report claimed that the protest took place at Ambassador Frederick Nolting’s home because of its close proximity to the Xa Loi pagoda. This protest was one of many that Buddhists held around Saigon. After a month-long cessation of violence between Buddhists and the

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60 Ibid.
Government of Vietnam, police stopped a protest in front of a Giac Minh pagoda by physically attacking protesters. The police used the same tactics at another protest at a downtown market. Police also barricaded streets in Saigon.

This Associated Press image taken by Horst Faas, which accompanied a July 18 article by David Halberstam in the New York Times, shows what would turn out to be an early stage in the struggle between the Buddhists and Government of Vietnam. The photograph captures protesters and police at the Giac Minh pagoda on July 17. Police are barricading the street in front of the pagoda. This image of police and Buddhists, one group trying to maintain control over the barbed wire, the other trying to take control, starkly differs from earlier images of more restrained protests. Upon closer examination, the role of the United States in this image comes through as well. The partially-collapsed banner on the right of the image, as in earlier protests, reads in both Vietnamese and English.

A second day of protests followed on July 18; and reporters relayed Saigon’s tense atmosphere. In addition to sealing off parts of city streets with barricades, police also restricted access to Saigon’s pagoda, preventing anyone from entering or exiting. David Halberstam reported that the riot police was not only enforcing the boundaries of barbed wire barricades, but were also using violence to “club

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
However, not all the protests in mid-July were violent, or for that matter, conducted by Buddhists. One group of Buddhist protesters, after being thwarted by barbed wire, sat down in the street to protest. The police, rather than responding immediately with violence, staged a counter-demonstration—plainclothes police officers carried signs stating that the Buddhists were influenced by the Communists.

While the United States did not commit publicly to supporting the Buddhists, it seemed that the two sides at least were spatially connected. One of the sealed pagodas was next to the offices of the United States Aid Mission. In the morning, a monk went to the roof of the pagoda, attached a message to a rock and threw it into the parking lot of the United States Aid Mission where Buddhist employees of the Mission took the message to deliver it. 70

Police restricted access to the pagodas for two more days, and on July 20, the Government of Vietnam released over two hundred Buddhists detained during the protests. 71 The foreign press reported that subsequent Buddhist protests met with little government resistance—police were present, but they did not physically engage with the protestors. 72 For instance, on July 30, an estimated 60,000 Buddhists gathered across Vietnam in memory of Thich Quang Duc—a quarter of these

69 Ibid.
gathered at Saigon's pagodas.73 An image of these peaceful memorial gatherings that ran in the *New York Times* shows several continuities present with previous images of Buddhist protests in Saigon.74 Thich Quang Duc's death was a public display of Buddhist protest—protest that asserted the Buddhist cause by capturing the image of Saigon locally and internationally through the foreign press. Now, in his memory, Buddhists took to the streets to pray. Where Thich Quang Duc's protests and associated images managed to combine violence and peacefulness within a single event, these later images straddled a similar boundary as a group. Here, Buddhists peacefully occupied the streets, which offered a clear contrast with the violence of riots. However, as both the caption and photograph itself—showing Saigon as the location—reminded readers, this event was connected to a larger protest movement.

**Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. and the Voicing of American Support through Saigon Spaces**

By the second half of August, the Buddhist protests started to become tense once again, partly due to a statement from the Archbishop of Saigon dismissing any responsibility of the Catholic Church in discrimination against Buddhists.75 On August 18, 15,000 Buddhists, “most of them young people,” gathered outside the Xa Loi pagoda and pledged to protest the Diem administration.76 After confrontations between protesters and police,77 the Government of Vietnam instituted martial law.78

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
On August 21, police and Vietnamese government troops raided several pagodas in Saigon, including the Xa Loi pagoda, arresting more than one hundred monks.79

Into this environment came a new ambassador: Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Arriving in Saigon on August 22, and scheduled to meet with President Diem a few days later, Lodge had very little time to grow acclimated to his new surroundings.80 However, the press felt he was up to the challenge—they represented him as a no-nonsense diplomat. A New York Times article claimed that he possessed “beneath his aloof handsome and impeccable facade a capacity for toughness and inflexibility that he will need in his dealings with President Ngo Dinh Diem.”81 Referring to his record as the United States delegate to the United Nations for President Eisenhower, the article characterized Lodge as “a man who loathed intrigue and who demanded of his own staff that the United States' position always be presented straightforwardly, often with undiplomatic bluntness.”82

The impression Lodge left on reporters, and the demands of his new job, resulted in representations of Lodge as a calming force entering a tense political situation. A few days after Lodge’s arrival, Jim Dobbins published a cartoon depicting Lodge’s new job. This copy of the cartoon appeared in the Boston Traveler on August 26, 1963, and the Lodge family saved a copy in one of their family’s

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
scrapbooks from their time in Vietnam. The cartoon, depicting Lodge’s well-coifed head barely suspended above the mud of a Vietnamese jungle, described the diplomatic situation he found himself in Saigon—unable to move and with little time to get used to his surroundings. As plants and trees stand in for buildings and streets, the perils of the jungle (like a mythic pit of quicksand) become the diplomatic problems of the United States. Dobbins captured a public political culture, even as he removed Vietnamese culture for comedic impact. The “Welcome to Vietnam” sign, and the man holding the small sign in the foreground saying “it didn’t become long to become acclimatized” resemble the nearly ubiquitous signs appearing in images of the Buddhist Crisis in Saigon.

The earlier New York Times description of Lodge not only depicted him as a no-nonsense diplomat, but also someone who was above becoming mired in intrigue. The article stated that “in Saigon, where Americans often succumb to the weird, secretive atmosphere engendered by a suspicious and dictatorial regime, the arrival of Mr. Lodge may clear the air like a summer thunderstorm.” Lodge, the person who some expected to fix the problems in Saigon, arrived in Saigon and instead of ushering in a clarifying storm, as the New York Times had predicted, was stuck in the mud that an earlier storm had created. Upon arrival in Saigon, a number of pressing issues awaited Lodge. Reporters wrote of his arrival and “acclimatizing” in a city under martial law with new rounds of protests. Because the Government of Vietnam

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had already declared martial law, along with a curfew and press censorship, the enforcement of public spaces took on a more militant tenor.

As the presence of protesters and security forces became an increasingly common sight on Saigon’s streets, journalists wrote of a city trying to regain normalcy. Public spaces were shared, albeit by force, between different political and religious factions (Buddhist, Government of Vietnam, and everyone else). One article from the New York Times wrote of Saigon’s new normal, that under martial law Saigon had “the same bustle, the same energy” that it always had. However, traffic was worse, “soldiers with new American-made rifles” stood on the street corners, and jeeps with large machine guns patrolled the city. Other than that, “Saigon looked the same and business went on as usual.” In many cases, Saigon’s return to normalcy involved recycling old conventions developed by previous generations of writers to describe the city—stable on the surface, populated by strolling women, but dangerous at its foundations. After a bout of riots one journalist wrote that Saigon “appeared to slip back to its quiet charm. Young girls in their sheath like ao dais promenaded on the Catinat. But Vietnam was deceptive, for this was a most explosive city, perhaps more now than at any time in the last four uneasy months.”

Besides returning to the American way of looking at Saigon, complete with the

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
use of female Vietnamese bodies to describe the city, journalists began to note other
signs of the American presence in Saigon, and created representations of the city
based on these changes. Because of military aid from the United States to the
Government of Vietnam, many images and reports of martial law had recognizable
elements of American influence. Whether it was military equipment or guns, or riot
tool control tactics, journalists recognized American influences in Saigon’s public spaces.
Robert Trumbull wrote in the *New York Times* that “everyone has seen American
equipment being used to put down protesting Buddhists and students. Police trucks
bear the clasped-hands symbol of the United States foreign aid program.”

On August 25, students in Saigon called for a city-wide strike and held protests
against the Diem administration. Around Saigon, police, working alongside military
equipment and personnel and a paramilitary youth group called the “Republican
Youth,” arrested hundreds of student protesters. At the University of Saigon,
police forces arrested students as they arrived at the protest, often taking them straight
from their bicycles to a police transport. At the Central Market, police tore down

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90 Robert Trumbull, “Americans in Saigon Turn Against Diem Regime,” *New York
Times*, August 26, 1963.
91 Diem’s brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, led the Republican Youth as part of the Diem
administration’s effort to unite Viet-nam politically and socially. The Republican
Youth were intended to help instill young Vietnamese with democratic ideals through
public service (as defined by the Diem administration, so things like “defending their
hamlets [and] aiding fire victims.” “Document 192, Telegram From the Embassy”
August 26, 1963.
92 David Halberstam, “Vietnam Arrests Students In Drive To Halt Protests,” *New
protesters' signs and arrested more students. Downtown, police directed most traffic onto Pasteur Street, a main thoroughfare, and anyone approaching the streets was searched and any student was arrested.93 As a precautionary measure, the Government of Vietnam stationed armored cars and anti-aircraft guns by the Presidential Palace94—remembering a 1962 assassination attempt by two Vietnamese Air Force pilots who used their planes to attack on the Palace in which guards used anti-aircraft guns against the incoming planes.95

One reporter argued that martial law hurt the United States efforts in Vietnam. Quoting an American general, he claimed that diverting troops from the war in the countryside to put down civilian protests in Saigon might set back the fight against the communist forces.96 Lodge, embodying the image that the New York Times had described months earlier, spoke to reporters during the student protests. Avoiding giving any sort of statement on the situation in Saigon, Lodge told reporters "I don't have to tell you I have arrived under very special circumstance and my time to make

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
96 Essoyan, “Saigon Revolt Nipped; Thousands Arrested.”
declarations has not yet arrived." He also retained a sense of humor, quipping:

"I've also been advised not to take any long walks."98

Henry Cabot Lodge and Emily Sears Lodge's arrival in Saigon, and the press that followed them, provided other insights into American spaces in Saigon. Emily Sears Lodge spoke to the press a few days after arriving in Saigon.99 She had gone for a swim at the Cercle Sportif, but had not ventured much into the city because of the demonstrations. She spoke mostly of her private spaces at the residence. Her yard, "although nothing in the garden has anything to do with anything in Massachusetts," made her happy. Within this relatively private space, the reporter cast Emily Sears Lodge as wishing to connect, at least somewhat, with the Vietnamese people. The reporter mentioned how Mrs. Lodge walked to the servants' quarters and played with their children, talking to them in French. Later, speaking to one of the Ambassador's aides, she wondered why the children did not play in her yard by her, he thought there might be some sort of rule against it. Always fond of children, having ten grandchildren herself, Mrs. Lodge responded "Oh, heavens...tell them to come over and play in the grass often. I like to watch them."100 Emily Sears Lodge's exchanges with her servants in her private yard suggests that she was, at the least, not interested in creating distance between her and Vietnamese people.

Moving outside their private residence, Emily Sears Lodge and Henry Cabot Lodge went for their first "leisurely stroll" through downtown Saigon on August 31,

100 Ibid.
1963. Dodging a rainstorm, they browsed sidewalk stalls and wandered down Le Loi Street—a path surrounded by French colonial architecture built at the end of nineteenth century. They then turned down Tu Do Street, an avenue made recognizable to many Americans by Graham Greene's 1955 novel *The Quiet American*; only then it was called rue Catinat. They passed several bars and chatted with a few American soldiers. Having arrived in Saigon only a few days earlier, this hour-long walk would have been a nice way to get acquainted with the neighborhood they were to call home. However, this was neither a leisurely, nor a private, walk—behind the couple, a throng of twenty or so reporters and photographers took notes, talked to onlookers and snapped pictures. The press, with a little help from the Lodges, transformed an afternoon walk into an informal act of diplomacy.

In the days following the Lodges' walk, papers around the United States picked up the story. One quoted a Vietnamese civil servant who exclaimed, “it’s a revolution! This is the first American ambassador who has ever walked along this way.” Images of the Lodges’ walk showed the couple walking alongside cafes and across streets. These images, when compared to earlier depictions of Lodge and Saigon, signal a departure, or an evolution, of representations of Saigon—they place the United States squarely within the frame.

As Lodge said upon his arrival in Saigon, he could not yet comment publicly

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103 Photo #185.201, Photograph, Box 3, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Photographs II, Photo. Coll. 185, Massachusetts Historical Society Photo Archives.
104 Photo #185.200, Photograph, Box 3, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Photographs II,
on the conditions of the city. However, by taking this walk with his wife, with reporters following closely behind, he could make a statement, of sorts, without speaking. As the comments in the press showed, this walk put Lodge, and the United States, closer to the people of Vietnam. The image of Mr. Lodge walking in front of Mrs. Lodge also contrasted Dobbin’s political cartoon of a few days earlier.

Dobbins’ cartoon suggested that Lodge was immobile, stuck in mud, and unable to get used to Vietnam before he could act on anything, having inherited a bad situation. Here, Henry Cabot Lodge is mobile, active, albeit with his hair slightly less refined, and he is free to conduct himself how he pleases. While he cannot speak about the situation in Saigon, he invents meanings of the city by placing his body in the middle of Saigon. By replacing Buddhist protesters, police, or military troops and machinery with the Lodges, these images imply a shift of power in Saigon—they demonstrate the potential for American influence in the city. The significance of the Lodge’s walk through downtown Saigon did not escape the press. One article noted that “Lodge’s unorthodox stroll was considered a demonstration of his belief in an open society and that national leaders should be as close to the people as possible.”

The article continued by pointing out that Diem and his family were “criticized frequently on grounds that they have relatively little contact with the residents of the nation they rule, except on occasionally guided tours.”

The foreign press’s representation of Diem and Nhu presented the South

Photo. Coll. 185, Massachusetts Historical Society Photo Archives.


106 Ibid.
Vietnamese leaders’ as private and removed from the Vietnamese people. On August 25, correspondent Robert Trumbull published an article based on an interview with Mr. Nhu.¹⁰⁷ Not only did he relay Nhu’s statements, but he also recounted the surroundings of the interview. Trumbull wrote that “Mr. Nhu was at ease in a short-sleeved, open-necked white shirt in his office at the Gia Long Palace, where he and his wife and the President are living under heavy guard.”¹⁰⁸ The foreign press also illustrated Nhu’s distance from the Vietnamese people through images. For example, on September 5, Nhu sat for an interview with the foreign press. This image, taken at the time of the interview by Horst Faas, showed Nhu in his study.¹⁰⁹ The framing of this image, when compared to the images released of the Lodge’s walk through Saigon a few days earlier, points to two different understandings of Vietnam. While Vietnam is present in both of these images, they suggest quite different understandings of the country. For Nhu, secluded in a palace, Vietnam enters the frame as a representation—a map on the wall behind him. For the Lodges, Vietnam is the real place around them as they step out into Saigon’s streets. Certainly, not all images of South Vietnam’s leaders were interior shots of secluded leaders. But, they did not meet the standard set by Lodge on his walk. An image, taken in July, of President Diem shows him beyond the confines of his interior space, but he is dressed in a suit—not only removed from the people of South Vietnam through dress, but also

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
by the rows of troops his is inspecting. The diplomatic impact of Lodge’s walk is hard to gauge. However, a reference to his walk did appear in a letter to him from Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Averell Harriman. Harriman wrote supportively that “the photographs in the press of your short-sleeved walk through the market place got you a lot of votes here, and I am sure make a new impression of an American Ambassador and his wife in Saigon.”

Lodge’s assertion of an American presence in Saigon’s public spaces worked in tandem with reports of other Americans’ uses of more private spaces. On the evening of September 1, Thich Tri Quang, a leader among the Buddhist protesters, and two other monks entered the US Embassy to seek shelter from police forces. This was the second such incident. A few days earlier, two monks had fled the raid on the Xa Loi pagoda and sought in the Saigon USAID office next door. The earlier incident occurred before Henry Cabot Lodge arrived in Saigon; but before he visited President Diem, he stopped to see the monks. He ordered vegetarian food for them to be delivered everyday. The two monks said that they could leave because they finally felt it was safe. The monks living in the USAID offices left on the same day Thich Tri Quang went to the United States Embassy, and it seemed that the American Embassy was happy to have them. David Halberstam reported that “the official

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embassy reaction when [Thich Tri Quang] first took refuge was the Americans were ‘delighted that of all the embassies in the city he chose ours.’ When asked by the Government of Vietnam several days later to turn over the Buddhists, the US Embassy refused.

Once again, the United States diplomatic corps, under the leadership of Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., used their management of the spaces around them to achieve political ends. During his walk, Lodge left the private (for Americans) spaces available to him and demonstrated a commitment to the people of Vietnam without making a verbal statement. Now, by seizing two opportunities to shelter Buddhist monks in American spaces, the US Embassy took a slightly more pointed, but still non-confrontational, stance against the Government of Vietnam’s treatment of Buddhists.

Other Americans in Saigon also used American spaces to engage in the political environment in Saigon. The Associated Press reported that United States officials had instructed Americans living in Saigon to change their behavior. During some of the demonstrations in Saigon, American service members living in downtown billets went to the roofs of their billets to watch the demonstration. Officials requested that the service members stop throwing garbage at the police officers squaring off against the Buddhists. The reporter also mentioned that during one protest, officers

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114 Ibid.
on the roof cheered for the Buddhist protestors.\textsuperscript{116} As a result, Americans, representing all different roles and levels of official involvement in diplomacy, utilized their “private” spaces to influence the relationship between the Government of Vietnam and the United States.

While Henry Cabot Lodge and other Americans in Saigon quietly influenced the relationship between the United States, Vietnam, and Vietnamese Buddhists, the Diem administration had been steadily devoting part of its energies on the foreign press. In late August, Ngo Dinh Nhu spoke out about the foreign press and their understanding of Buddhist protesting. Nhu saw the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc as a “clever tactic” used by Buddhists for gaining attention for their cause.\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore, such “clever tactics” were so successful that there was little the Government of Vietnam can do to counter them.\textsuperscript{118} Self-immolation, and other protests, created a “climate of formidable intoxication” that spread to Americans through the press.\textsuperscript{119}

Later in September, President Diem himself made a stronger connection between the Buddhist protests and the foreign press. In an interview with an Indian journalist, the reporter quoted Diem as saying that “Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death ‘with the connivance of foreign television.’”\textsuperscript{120} The article continued that the “President said ‘extremist elements’ in the Buddhist protest movement, with

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
television reporters, 'organized the spectacular murder of Thich Quang Duc.'

Placing the blame for the current problems within Vietnam on external forces, Diem, according to the *New York Times*, noted that "this clearly proves that the aim of the international plotters was to prevent a settlement of the misunderstanding between the Government of Vietnam and the Buddhists."121

Diem and Nhu's willingness to implicate the press in the Buddhist protests of 1963 recalls Malcolm Browne's remembrance of the time a year later. The story about the conflict between the Buddhists and the Government of Vietnam was shifting to increasingly include the press corps as an actor in the conflict. As Browne maintained, the press became part of the story. Furthermore, it seems that the various groups with an investment in the plight of Buddhists in Vietnam (Government of Vietnam, Buddhists, and the United States) all used the foreign press for their own ends. Henry Cabot Lodge used them to make a statement about the United States' position on the Buddhist Crisis through his non-verbal spatial actions. The Buddhists themselves used the foreign press to get past the Diem administration's control over the local press and gain worldwide attention. The Government of Vietnam talked about the press, in the press, which started to change stories from depicting a standoff between Buddhists and the Government of Vietnam to a second-level discussion of the press and representation of the Buddhist protests.

The idea of the press becoming the story and creating different meanings for Saigon's public spaces became even more noticeable in October 1963. On October 5, another monk set himself on fire to protest the treatment of Buddhists. That morning,

121 Ibid.
news agencies got phone calls tipping them off that something would happen at 12:00pm in front of the Central Market in downtown Saigon. This resulted in several reporters being on scene for the protest. The police responded to the protest by sealing off the downtown area with tanks and barricades. After the monk set himself on fire, plainclothes police officers attempted to stop the photographers on the scene from leaving with the images they took. After failing to take the camera from NBC television journalist Grant Wolfkill, police assaulted him. Journalists John Sharkey, NBC, and David Halberstam attempted to help him and prevent the police from taking his film with the images of the monk’s protest on it. After the attack, Henry Cabot Lodge spoke to the reporters, then filed a formal complaint to the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry.

Other United States government officials objected to the most recent attack on reporters by the South Vietnamese police. Senate majority leader, and Democrat from Montana, Mike Mansfield said he was “shocked” by the attack and felt that the reporters should be compensated with money and an apology. Secretary of State Dean Rusk also objected to the treatment of the reporters, and relayed to reporters Henry Cabot Lodge’s actions on behalf of the reporters in Saigon.

While the foreign press stressed the treatment of the reporters who had observed the latest self-immolation, a local pro-Government of Vietnam English-language

123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
newspaper owned by Americans,128 emphasized a different part of the story. The
Times of Vietnam editorial accused the foreign press of “stage managing” the
Buddhist’s self-immolation protest, stating that “foreign correspondents should be
tried as accessories to the crime.”129 Mrs. Nhu, an always vocal leader and wife to
Ngo Dinh Nhu, expressed a similar critique while on a trip overseas. However, rather
than aiming her words strictly at the foreign press, she targeted her criticism toward
the United States in general. In an interview in Paris for an ABC news show, Mrs.
Nhu said that Buddhists in Saigon were using Americans as “instruments.”130 She
felt that the United States was not acting as an ally—it seemed to not want to get
involved. Instead of participating in the events in Saigon, “they give the impression
that they consider themselves just spectators to a show.”131 Mrs. Nhu’s comments,
when combined with the Times of Vietnam editorial, cast the relationship between the
Government of Vietnam and the United States in visual terms. The United States,
enabled by the foreign press, watched events in Saigon unfold without intervening.

On October 27, yet another Buddhist monk set himself on fire in protest. This
time, Horst Faas was able to capture and file his images of the event with the
Associated Press.132 The monk staged his protest in front of the cathedral in
downtown Saigon while “Sunday churchgoers,” one press account described, “drove

127 Ibid.
September 17, 1963.
131 Ibid.
132 Associated Press, Image AP631027038, AP Images, October 27, 1963,
Horst Faas’s photograph of the monk’s protest captures a changing Government of Vietnam attitude toward the Buddhist protests. Mr. Nhu had previously maintained that there was little the Government of Vietnam could do about these protests. Malcolm Browne’s initial photograph of Thich Quang Duc showed Buddhists in control of a public space in Saigon as they circled Thich Quang Duc’s body. Later reports of self-immolation protests focused not on the police trying to prevent Buddhists setting themselves on fire, although there were “anti-suicide squads” patrolling the city occasionally. Rather, police attempted to control the images, or the circumstances of spectatorship around the protests. However, this image differed from the ones before it. First, the monk chose a different location for his protest. He chose a distinctly Catholic space—a space in front of the Cathedral—as a place for his protest. Doing so on a Sunday morning only made his protest more pointed as it was a time when the Cathedral was in use for services. Second, the main Cathedral downtown was also in the center of where Americans were in Saigon. Horst Faas’s image captured different elements that identified the location of the monk’s protest. To the left, we see the French colonial architecture. He captured the “tree-lined” streets of Saigon—written about so many times by Americans in different contexts—as well. Third, directly above the monk, Faas captured the street sign identifying the exact location of this protest—Tu Do Street.

When compared to Browne’s earlier image, Faas’s image depicts a similar


margin of space around the protesting monk. The obvious difference here is that a police officer is attempting to extinguish the fire. According to one press account of the protest, police rushed to stop the monk and were in turn stopped by the crowd, but eventually one got through and tried to put out the flames.\textsuperscript{134} The police officer in this image breaks the margin between crowd and protester, as in so many of the images of protests taken in Saigon. The crowd in this image also differs from that in Browne's photograph: the scene lacks monks. The onlookers who circle the monk, as in the previous images, appear to lack Americans.

**Images of the November 1964 Coup and Its Aftermath**

A few days after Faas took this picture, the images the foreign press captured, and the way politics played out in Saigon's streets changed. On November 2, military forces, led by Vietnamese Generals and Colonels, overthrew the Diem administration in a coup.\textsuperscript{135} At the end of the coup, both Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu were dead.\textsuperscript{136} The coup took place inside Saigon, with many of the images of the fighting coming from the downtown area around the Presidential Palace. Diem and Nhu sought refuge in the Presidential Palace, where they could be defended by the 1500 or so members of the loyal Palace guard and special forces who lived in barracks near the palace.\textsuperscript{137} The coup forces took over various headquarters in the city as well, such as the Ministry of Communication, the Navy Headquarters, the Ministry of Defense

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
and the headquarters of the police. \textsuperscript{138} *New York Times* reporter Hedrick Smith reported that the group executing the coup was "firmly anti-Communist and pro-Western. It was viewed as eager to eliminate the repressive features of the Ngo Dinh Diem Government." \textsuperscript{139}

As in previous months, tanks and guns appeared on street corners, but now they were directed at the Diem administration instead of the Buddhists. \textsuperscript{140} As information about the coup spread throughout Saigon, many shop owners closed their stores. However, Americans still frequented downtown bars and restaurants during the fighting. \textsuperscript{141} After the fighting stopped, residents of Saigon started to run through the streets celebrating the overthrow of the Diem administration. \textsuperscript{142} A group of young people burned copies of the *Times of Vietnam* outside of the publisher's office. \textsuperscript{143}

The *New York Times*, along with the story reporting the events of the coup, published a map of downtown Saigon—plotting the places of interest for the coup. \textsuperscript{144} The paper also ran an aerial photograph of downtown Saigon highlighting the various landmarks of the coup. The map and photograph mark Saigon's downtown as the location of both the coup and of government power. The *New York Times*'s map and aerial photograph also inserted American locations into the area. They not only mark the U.S. Embassy, but also the Majestic Hotel—a likely place for the foreign press to stay while covering the events in the city. Press reports and photography also

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
captured the downtown environment. A Los Angeles Times article mentioned that "troops carrying light weapons swarmed over the red tile roofs of buildings near the palace."\textsuperscript{145} Images of the coup and its aftermath disrupted most of the photographic conventions developed in the previous months. For example, military troops conducted funeral processionals through the streets. Boundaries between Vietnamese civilian and military forces broke down. Private spaces previously heavily regulated (like the interior of the Presidential Palace), became public spaces.

While photographers ventured onto the streets during the fighting, the majority of images that emerged from the coup were from the moments after the fighting had ended. Of these images, many were in direct contrast the types of images the foreign press had taken previously. For instance, one image featured two women walking across the intersection in front of the Caravelle Hotel (the residence of many Americans while in Saigon and next to the National Assembly building.)\textsuperscript{146} One Vietnamese woman brings a soda, the other, a straw, to an armed Vietnamese military guard. In the background, the photographer captured a news crew filming the scene. Images of the foreign press were not too common. The image in general contradicts the pre-coup images that featured uniformed troops or police either enforcing a boundary (barbed wire, or just a wide area of empty space) or physically engaging in a fight with people on the street. Here, the people in the street are thankful and cooperating with the troops. The change exemplified in this image parallels the

changes within the press itself. Here, by capturing the film crew on film, the foreign press acknowledged itself as part of the environment of Saigon’s streets.

Images of physical boundaries also appeared. Some of these were military-only images, such as a hole blown in the palace grounds, but the images of transgressing barricades, something that was so fraught with tension weeks before, also included cooperation between civilians and military personnel. One photograph taken on November 5, 1963, showed a crowd of civilians standing behind, and hanging over, the palace fence. Rather than resisting them, as would have been expected in the images before the coup, here the people of Saigon are handing the troops a large machine gun to the troops. While the image of a crowd passing a machine gun over the fence to troops inside the palace grounds still maintained a boundary, albeit loosely, other photographs captured a connection between civilians and uniformed service members. The soda delivery was one such image. During the fighting, photographers recorded scenes of tanks in Saigon streets, and people hiding behind them to protect themselves from gunfire. After the coup, a photograph showed Vietnamese in civilian clothes standing on top of a tank, looking at the palace and talking to the Vietnamese troops.

Thus, the public/private divide present in images of the Diem administration and Henry Cabot Lodge changed in the post-coup images. Photographers, enabled by the initial actions of military forces, took pictures that gave the public access to Diem’s previously private spaces. Images gave evidence of troops, photographers, and a crowd of looters making their way through the Presidential Palace.152 This image, of a Vietnamese soldier inside the palace,153 appeared in the New York Times.154 By highlighting the troops inside the ransacked Presidential Palace, the photographer was able to reveal the upset of power in Saigon. Like images of tanks parked in the streets, this image displays a calm setting around the subject. Violence, for the time being, has passed. The soldier in this image smiles—the oppression of the Diem regime is over.

In post-coup Saigon, photographers captured other events that upset the themes of the past months. Before the coup, photographers published images of Buddhist processions through Saigon that memorialized figures like Thich Quang Duc. After the coup, they published similar images, only these processions included different types of people. During the coup, Captain Buy Nguon Ngai died in his tank during the fighting near the palace. On November 5, an Associate Press photographer took this image of his funeral procession.155 Like previous images of processions, there is an image of the deceased at the front with a crowd behind. However, now, troops and

155 Associated Press, Image 6311050493, AP Images, November 5, 1963
civilians follow through Saigon’s streets instead of monks.

The contrast between pre- and post-coup Saigon also appeared in editorial form. The November 15, 1963 issue of *Life* featured a cover-story photo essay about the event. The opening full-page image was of the monk who set himself on fire outside of the Cathedral a few weeks prior to the coup. The next page consisted of an image, a soldier lifted above a crowd of civilians. The caption read: “Death and Victory: A week following the flaming protest of the last Buddhist suicide (left), happy Vietnamese lift a victorious rebel soldier high into the air.”\(^{156}\) The article itself, mostly told through images and captions, linked two contrasting images of Saigon. “Clutched by searing flames, a Buddhist monk martrys himself on a Saigon sidewalk. A few days later, joyous hands hoist a Vietnamese soldier in a victory that belongs both to him and the suicidal monk.”\(^{157}\)

After the contrasting pre-/post-coup images subsided in the press, representations of Saigon settled into a new pattern. In stories about the city, many reporters focused on a new environment emerging in the city. What was previously a “tense Saigon,” was now a permissive Saigon. In April 1962, the Diem administration enacted morality laws prohibiting things like “beauty contests, dancing, cock fights and boxing matches.”\(^{158}\) With Diem and the Nhus no longer in power, these laws were suspended and, according to the press, Saigon residents celebrated the overthrow of the Vietnamese government leadership by dancing and

\(^{157}\) “17 Hours that Destroyed Diem,” *Life* (November 15, 1963), 35.
\(^{158}\) Ibid.
going to night clubs. Hostesses at bars changed their clothes from "hospital-like smocks" to skirts, dresses, and pants.\textsuperscript{159} One Associated Press photographer recorded the return of dancing in Saigon by going to the Tu Do Bar.\textsuperscript{160} This image, taken on November 3, 1963 and appearing in the \textit{New York Times} on November 5, \textsuperscript{161} depicted two Americans, one in uniform, one not, dancing with Vietnamese women. After months of Buddhist protests and Government of Vietnam police actions, the press and this photographer were starting, again, to focus on Vietnamese women and American men's relationship to them and the city.

While reporting shortly after the coup attempted to depict a Saigon returning to normal, other events in the city crept into the news cycle. After the provisional government lifted the curfew and stopped the press censorship imposed during the coup on November 7—two actions that signaled the pace of change in Saigon—people in Saigon returned to their routines.\textsuperscript{162} During the Buddhist protests, Saigon had continued to endure violence and bombings because of the war. Now, however, the bombings did not compete for attention with protests in the news, and a new "terror campaign" conducted by the Viet Cong that started with Diem's overthrow continued with a new bomb exploding almost daily.\textsuperscript{163} After months of reporting

\begin{footnotes}
\item 1963.
\item 159 Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
about the public nature of politics in Saigon, reports of these bombings assumed meanings that returned to an older version of Saigon. On November 14, a bomb burst at the Imperial Cafe in downtown Saigon, injuring two American service members. In describing the incident, one story slipped into an older version of Saigon: the bomb, “thrown through a window...wrecked the Imperial Cafe on Catinat Street, in the main entertainment district.” Referring to Tu Do Street by its old name “Catinat,” while most likely a simple mistake, suggests a memory of an older Saigon returning to the representations of the city.

The combination of reporting violence and leisure in Saigon, a formula employed by journalists and authors for decades, continued through the end of 1963, while the thrill of the coup still enthralled reporters. Even though the stories describing life in the city attempted to recapture the romance of the city created by its earlier representations, these stories also showed a changing city. Hedrick Smith, a reporter for the *New York Times* who had covered the “Buddhist Crisis,” published an article titled “The Unreality of Saigon” on December 7, 1963. In his article, Smith embraced many of the previous conventions that writers before him used to talk about Saigon as the “pearl of the orient.”

If one did not look at the date of the article, at times, it would be hard to tell when Smith was writing. He wrote that “there is an air of unreality in this lush and sophisticated city with tree-line[d] boulevards that bask in a tropical sun as sampans

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quietly ply the Saigon river.” He described Saigon as alive—it “throbs with activity, as if it were asking a new pleasure in life.” After detailing streets crowded with vehicles and pedestrians, he evoked images of Vietnamese women: “bird-like women glide along on bicycles, their flowing orange, black, strawberry, ice blue or lemon-colored costumes billowing behind them.” He quoted an American businessman who expected to see signs of war in the city, but said that visitors to the city might never know there was a war going on. For those looking for the war, he wrote that the “ninth-floor restaurant of the Caravelle Hotel” provided a view of military actions going on across the Saigon River. He described luxury goods on sale in the city and at “coffeeshouses along Rue Catinat, Saigon’s famous rumor-mill, where stories are swapped of intrigue.” Smith went so far as to acknowledge that he was writing about Saigon through the memory of past representations of the city. He said of the things to do in Saigon, “almost every item from novels of the East is at hand.” He cited opium dens, “bar girls,” and the smell of food cooking on the sidewalks. He did, however, acknowledge some change between the Saigon he was writing about and the Saigon that had passed. He mentioned that the American Embassy was getting more strict with security—people now had to sign in. Furthermore, he spoke of the removal of sidewalk cafes “for Westerners” because of violence. “American soldiers sip beer and sit with girls in bistros that are protected

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166 Ibid.  
167 Ibid.  
168 Ibid.  
169 Ibid.
by screening and iron grillwork to deflect grenades."170

The focus of the press in Saigon was clearly changing. *Time* magazine on December 13, 1963 reported that several self-immolations had occurred since the coup, one near the Lodge’s residence.171 These deaths, said *Time*, did not seem to have the same weight as previous self-immolations. Perhaps the lack of backing by Buddhist monks, or as some expected, the lack of relationship of these people to the Buddhist cause, contributed to the lack of attention these events garnered.172 Regardless, it seemed that the strategy of public protest in Vietnam so well utilized by Buddhist leaders was less relevant than under the Diem regime.173

In January 1964, Halberstam wrote an article in the *New York Times* describing Saigon and the diplomatic and military planning going on there. In this article, he harkened back to an older version of Saigon—a version of the city in which violence faded to the background and leisure and romance gave meaning to the city. Halberstam’s article, like Smith’s, applied many of the conventions of previous writers to describe the city. He commented how “the lovely, slim Vietnamese girls promenade down Rue Catinat, intent on seeing and being seen,” and noted vendors cooking soup on the street, children “scurrying,” and cyclo drivers that were

170 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 The press report of these self-immolations described all three people as civilians—a 17-year old women, a “22-year old pedicab driver” and an “older man” and “telephone operator” who apparently left a note explaining his death as a result of his poor relationship with his father. The reported mentioned that the young women was suspected of having Communist associations. “End of Glow,” *Time*, December 13, 1963.
"reminders of the endurance and patience of the county." Halberstam further mentioned how one could hear, but not see, the war while sitting in the city's cafes and walking down "wide and tree-lined" streets—apparently, excluding the occasional bombings of establishments in Saigon. Perhaps in his strongest connection to an older versions of Saigon representations, Halberstam referred to the different faces of Saigon, as he quoted a Vietnamese person as saying that "the face of Saigon is European; but do not be fooled, the heart is Asian."

Halberstam, Smith, and others, summoned a different vision of Saigon after the Buddhist crisis. Saigon, for them, was returning to normal and their articles constructed Saigon in this way. Returning to a "normal," calmer version of Saigon meant recasting the characters in their stories. Gone were the monks, nuns, and young protestors, to be replaced by the return of service workers, bar girls and scurrying children. A "calm" Saigon to Americans was a Saigon steeped in the writing constructed under French colonial rule. Public spaces in the foreign press articles could be drained of political potential. Women were not protesting on the streets, but rather available to be looked at by foreigners or as Halberstam put it, Vietnamese women on the street were "intent on seeing and being seen."

At the end of January 1964, Saigon's calm was not necessarily upset, but its

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174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 One such bombing, albeit "some distance from downtown" at the Bamboo Bar occurred a little more than two weeks before this article was published. "4 Americans Hurt In Saigon Bombing," Washington Post, January 10, 1964.
178 Ibid.
normalcy was. In a “bloodless coup,” that included no gunfire, troops under the command of Vietnamese General Nguyen Khanh ousted the new ruling military leaders from their positions in the government. The coup would usher in a period of terrorism, where Saigon, while still described as a city not really at war, once again had its streets made political, but this time, through violent actions including bombings. The increased violence in Saigon, combined with feelings of anti-Americanism on the part of many Vietnamese, and the escalation of the war was to further transform Saigon from previous versions of itself.

179 Ibid.
Else Baker: Viewing Saigon through American Domestic Spaces

Else Baker arrived in Saigon in June of 1963 to join her husband, Lee, Air Force Lt. Colonel and chief of the MACV Public Affairs Office. Mrs. Else Baker lived in Saigon until 1965, when all American dependents were ordered to leave Vietnam. For a little less than two years, she explored the city, made new friends, wrote letters home, threw countless parties, and became a published writer. Mrs. Baker was one of many American women living in Saigon in the early-1960s, but her writing and documenting of American culture in Saigon, and the timing of her stay, makes her story unique.

Mrs. Baker's experiences in, and writing about, Saigon reveal the importance of domestic spaces in American foreign relations. Her house in Saigon and her job "keeping it" served as both a physical and ideological hub for her interactions with the people of Vietnam. Physically, the Baker house brought Else Baker in contact with three Vietnamese women as the Bakers hired them to staff their home. Inside private American spaces, Mrs. Baker came to have a better understanding of Buddhist and Vietnamese views of the political turmoil taking place in Saigon in 1963 and 1964. Because of Lee Baker's position rank and position in the Public Affairs Office, the Baker household also proved to be a venue for interactions between military officials and the press corps. The Bakers hosted parties that allowed the press to talk

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1 Correspondence from Lee Baker to Else, 12 June 1963, Folder 23, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University; William M. Hammond, Public Affairs the Military and the Media, 1962-1968 (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1990), 75.
to officials in a domestic setting. The understanding Else Baker developed about Vietnam through her interactions with her staff, interactions with military officials and the press, and other daily activities she undertook as she moved about Saigon, allowed her to pitch her stories to magazine and newspaper editors as a view different from that of the press corps. In this way, Else Baker's writing filtered her experiences in Saigon through the perspective she developed through her domestic space, and re-released her version of Saigon and the events taking place there for consumption by readers. Ultimately, Mrs. Baker’s tenure in Saigon shows the importance of non-state actors in the development of American-Vietnamese relations and the role domestic spaces played in the American role in Vietnam during 1963 and 1964.

Once a week (sometimes twice), Mrs. Baker wrote letters to her mother in Seattle. She wrote to her friend Mary in Denver and her husband Lee when he was away on business. In these letters, Else Baker recorded the things she witnessed and events she experienced for both others and herself—she asked her mother to save her letters as a makeshift diary.\(^2\) Her letters detailed both public events, such as coups and bombings, as well as more private moments such as her social life, development as a writer, exploration of a new city and culture, and establishment of new personal relationships. The copious record Mrs. Baker kept through her published and private writing, however, took a great amount of her time; her busy life did not always allow her the time she wanted for writing. As she said in one of her letters to her mother, “I

\(^2\) Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 29 December 1963, Folder 06, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
think I could spend most of my time writing and that would leave little time left over for ‘living’ the events I want to write about.”

Mrs. Baker reserved her more private experiences for her letters, but while in Saigon she pursued publication for her more public experiences. Even though she wasn’t part of the press pool, Mrs. Baker had her articles picked up by newspapers and the news wires. Mrs. Baker’s public writing leveraged “a different angle.” When discussing the possibility of putting together a book, she said “people are interested in more than the news accounts of political and military happenings in this country.”

Else Baker’s “angle” was that she wasn’t an insider. She wasn’t formally employed in Saigon. Her status as a “dependent” or “wife” allowed her to write about the American war from a perspective that significantly differed from the normal press corps—she ran the events of the day through a domestic space.

The crux of Mrs. Baker’s articles dealt with the public nature of Saigon’s political culture. The events she chose to cover in article form often shared their settings—public Saigon spaces. While Else Baker’s explicit purpose for being in Saigon—like that of other wives like her—may have been to support her husband, her writing also informs us of other jobs, duties, and opportunities women had while living in Saigon. Baker’s day-to-day life in Saigon consisted of many different tasks. In addition to writing, she hosted Americans new to Saigon and showed them around the city; and she tended to her own household, managing several domestic workers.

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3 Ibid.
4 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mary, 02 February 1965, Folder 19, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
Additionally, one of her roles was to serve as an “unofficial ambassador”—to borrow the words of Donna Alvah. According to Alvah, “military families in foreign locations [were] considered strategically crucial in the Cold War [and] represented the American commitment to anti-communism internationally, as well as the alleged superiority of the American way of life.”  

Baker seemed to agree to serve this type of function as well. After attending a briefing at MACV headquarters given to wives about how to answer questions about the situation in Vietnam once they returned to the United States, Baker wrote her mother: “I’ve always felt that the wives can be our best emissaries, if they know what’s going on—and our worst advertisements abroad if they don’t know what they are talking about.”  

Furthermore, Baker saw her job as a writer through the prism of being an emissary. She felt that by “writing about what it is really like for American women living here—and how they contribute by being here,” she could serve her duty.

The idea of being an “unofficial ambassador” for the United States may serve as a general starting point for understanding Else Baker’s life in Saigon, but looking at the smaller details of her day-to-day life reveal far more complicated themes. Specifically, by looking at the domestic space she created, we are able to see the ways in which international relations, as well as American political culture, were, at times,

6 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 13 April 1964, Folder 10, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
7 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 26 November 1964, Folder 17, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
worked out at the most granular and personal level. The Baker household revealed the complicated relationships between different groups living in Saigon. The house itself, located in the French downtown, owned and rented to the United States Mission in Vietnam by a Chinese citizen, highlighted some of the complicated past of the relationships between the Chinese and Vietnamese residents of Saigon. The relationship between the Vietnamese and Chinese residents in Saigon was also distilled in the Baker’s household through the presence of three domestic workers. Americans had hired “servants” for decades, and much of the advice concerning their employment was rooted in American understandings of Vietnamese and Chinese ethnic groups in Saigon.

The Baker’s domestic workers, three Vietnamese women, and Mrs. Baker’s relationship to them and their families, also showed the American home in Vietnam to be a place where different cultures came to understand one another. In a colonial framework, it seems, while in an employer/employee relationship, the four women became friends, and spent a great deal of time together. As a result, they expanded Else Baker’s network beyond the confines of the American community in Saigon and allowed to her to create meaningful relationships with Vietnamese people.

Describing the Saigon “Post” and Else Baker’s Entrance Into Journalism
The Bakers lived in downtown Saigon across the street from the Presidential Palace grounds on Cong Ly Street. Their two-story house sat on a courtyard behind an iron gate and, like much of the architecture in downtown Saigon, was made of white stucco with a red tile roof. Mrs. Baker wrote of the house's character that it was "somewhat New Orleans-French in style." Police protecting the Palace guarded their street (Cong Ly), making it relatively quiet. Starting from here, Mrs. Baker could explore different parts of Saigon, but for the most part operated in downtown Saigon. Her description of her first tour of the city provided a map of different American points of interest in the city:

My first tour of the city was a jumble in my mind--MACV Headquarters, The Embassy, The Abraham Lincoln Library, above which was located USIS, The Rex and Brink Hotels (Bachelor Officers' Quarters for unaccompanied Americans), The Caravelle Hotel (newest in town and headquarters for visiting members of the western press), the National Assembly Building and City Hall and the Saigon cathedral. Two places we did not see that day because the streets leading to them were barricaded--Gia Long Palace and Xa

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8 Correspondence from Lee Baker to Else, 12 June 1963, Folder 23, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
9 Else Baker, "Entry concerning arrival in Vietnam and first view of Saigon," No Date, Folder 26, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 2.
10 Ibid.
11 Correspondence from Lee Baker to Else, 12 June 1963, Folder 23, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
Loi Pagoda, headquarters of the Buddhist attempt to overthrow the government. It was to be months before I saw either place.\textsuperscript{12}

Mrs. Baker’s tour of downtown Saigon highlighted many of the landmarks indicated on contemporary American maps of Saigon. What this brief recollection introduces is the role of women in “mapping” the parts of the city accessible to, and frequented by, Americans. By engaging with the space around her, processing what people had written about Saigon before her, and creating an interpretation of the city through her writing, Baker created an interpretation of Saigon, and Vietnam, for those who were to come to Vietnam after her. Serving as guides, women like Else Baker helped to shape what others knew of Saigon. In other words, through her writing, Else Baker translated her everyday experiences, and the gender, race, class and sexually-based systems that she encountered became embedded into what other people knew about the country.

While most of her published writing focused on the political events taking place on Saigon’s streets, perhaps the most substantial, or at least lengthy, article about her stay in Saigon was a guide for Americans new to Saigon. “Post of the Month—Saigon” addressed the topics that one might expect to see regarding the logistics of living in a new locale. Mrs. Baker covered things like housing (what it was like and its availability), shopping (where to do it and what goods one could purchase), bringing children overseas, entertainment, and the like. Else Baker’s “Post

\textsuperscript{12} Else Baker, “Entry concerning arrival in Vietnam and first view of Saigon,” No Date, Folder 26, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 6-7.
of the Month" article revealed a specific interpretation of Saigon. For many American women, their husbands went to work, while they tended to everything else. Their day-to-day activities, often falling along traditional gendered expectations of work for women, took them out into the city in ways their husbands did not. Their time in the city, and their interpretations of those experiences, allowed American women to construct a version of the city for all Americans.

The editor of U.S. Lady, Alvadee Adams, asked Mrs. Baker to write the "Post of the Month" article because she believed that Mrs. Baker was "capable of turning out a factually correct and properly colorful picture of what Saigon is like as a place to live, both from the military and Foreign Service point of view."¹³ U.S. Lady, a magazine intended to reach members of the "Foreign Service as well as military wives and families,"¹⁴ published Else Baker's "Post of the Month" article in January 1965.¹⁵ Adams asked Else Baker to write for the audience of their magazine, while including information "for a wife who is about to go to Saigon with her husband and several children."¹⁶ Adams wanted not only the logistics of managing a household in Saigon—for example, she requested for information about schools for children and

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¹³ Letter from Alvadee Adams to General and Mrs. Westmoreland concerning U.S. Lady, 10 September 1964, Folder 22, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁶ Letter from Alvadee Adams to Else Baker concerning U.S. Lady, 20 October 1964, Folder 22, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
where to go shopping—but she also asked Baker to “tell about the host people, and
describe the flavor of Saigon in these troubled times.”17

In addition to covering both the logistics and “flavor” of living in Saigon,
Adams also instructed Else Baker to include the wives of the highest American
officials in Saigon—Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Westmoreland, ideally capturing them in
the act of entertaining.18 To accommodate Adams’ requests, Else Baker read the
Post Reports put out by the American agencies in Saigon, and combined that
information with her own experiences. “I found some gaps in all of them, from the
woman’s point of view,” said Baker of the Post Report.19 She also interviewed both
Mrs. Taylor and Westmoreland, attending a dinner with both families, with a
photographer on loan from Lee Baker’s office.20

Adams also wanted Mrs. Baker to arrange for a photograph the magazine
could use for the issue’s cover. In her correspondence with Else Baker, Adams
iterated that “a color shot for the cover is very important. It should be feminine, with
an unmistakable [sic] Saigon background.”21 Adams went on to suggest that Else
Baker might include “two pretty American teen-age girls—one a military daughter

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Letter from Else Baker to Alvadee Adams concerning U.S. Lady, 22 November
1964, Folder 22, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech
University.
20 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 30 October 1964, Folder 16, Box 01,
Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
21 Letter from Alvadee Adams to Else Baker concerning U.S. Lady, 20 October 1964,
Folder 22, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech
University.
and the other the daughter of one of our embassy people—getting ready to celebrate the TET (the Chinese New Year which General Westmoreland mentioned as being held the last of January this year).…Remember, nothing is ever better than a closeup of pretty girls for the cover of a woman’s magazine.” 22 In a letter a month later, Adams suggested another possibility for the cover. While the setting for the photograph seemed flexible, the subject of American girls was not:

If getting a typical Vietnamese background is difficult, perhaps you could have two pretty American girls…dressing up in a costume for the TET celebration…in her parents’ quarters, and [that] would cover a lot of points—pretty American girl in Saigon, colorful native dress, typical quarters.” 23

The cover that Mrs. Baker and an army photographer came up with featured two American girls with two Vietnamese girls at “the temple built in honor of Marshall Le Van Duyet…light[ing] tapers in honor of the dead.” 24 The American girls, as requested, were the daughters of people working in USOM and MACV in Saigon. By providing an article and cover focused on elements of American life in Saigon that might interest women, even though Baker also felt “much of the material is of general interest,” 25 Adams and Baker leveraged the domestic sphere in order to show Saigon as less threatening and the US mission there as cooperative.

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
25 Letter from Else Baker to Alva Dee Adams concerning U.S. Lady, 22 November 1964, Folder 22, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
The cover photograph highlighted part of the work that Else Baker’s writing in *U.S. Lady* accomplished. It successfully placed Americans in Saigon in a position where they were not just there to do a job, but also to foster cooperation with the Vietnamese. Adams’ letters to Baker insisted on some sort of representation of engaging with Vietnamese culture. While her ideas amounted more to “dressing up,” the final cover conveyed cooperation between Americans and Vietnamese rather than a one-way consumption of Vietnamese culture by Americans. Staging this cooperation through the bodies of young women revealed how families were used to bolster the American agenda in Saigon.

Much like Adams’s idea to dress an American girl in Vietnamese clothing, Mrs. Baker’s “Post of the Month” article needed to give readers a representation of Saigon and Vietnam. What she delivered engaged in a theme used by many journalists for decades. She wrote of a city that seemed calm on the surface, but contained layers of complexity underneath. To portray Saigon’s complexity and multivalent meanings, Baker sought to call upon the different senses of her readers.

We were sitting in the garden of a Vietnamese friend one night after dinner. The air, fresh and clean after a rain, was filled with the perfume of tropical flowers. The street outside bustled with traffic and the sidewalks were crowded with children looking for the prized fighting crickets which always appear after the first rains. ‘I can understand why the French hated to give it up,’ someone commented. ‘This must have been a wonderful place to live….’
Then, over the city noises, we heard in a distance the dull thudding thump of artillery fire. It was the sound of war.²⁶

This description negotiated the French past of Saigon, along with the present American/Vietnamese relationship. Baker, mobilizing the smell of flowers and sounds of children and traffic, created a sense of nostalgia, engaged our senses with descriptions of smells and sounds, and captured the negotiation of the French colonial past and the American present in Saigon. The comment about how the French had to “give up” the city, presumably voiced by an American, hints at a complicated relationship Americans had with the city. Americans lived in Saigon to cooperate with the South Vietnamese government and its people, and this cooperation extended to people’s homes. However, Americans also entertained some sort of association of Saigon with a mythical colonial past of excitement, exoticism and luxury. The “sound of war” layered on top of an otherwise sensuously described scene completed the description of this one moment: the jarring sounds were a reminder of the American present—why these Americans were in Saigon.

The mixing of the serene and nostalgic with some element of violence was a theme often used by journalists writing about Saigon. Baker’s article engaged with the duality of Saigon by noting a superficial layer, as well as a layer of meaning linked to the people living in Saigon.

On the surface Saigon shows little evidence of the war being waged around it. However, one doesn’t have to scratch very deep to find the signs. After more

than twenty years of war of one sort or another, a generation has grown up knowing nothing but war, and they have learned to live with it as part of their daily lives. We American diplomatic and military wives learn to live with it too as we go about our job of providing our husbands with a home, instead of a hotel room, to return to at night. That's why we are here.27

Like previous versions of the city created through journalists' descriptions discussed in early chapters, Baker saw a superficial layer of calm in Saigon. She used a physical metaphor of "scratching" to get beneath the physical environment of Saigon to expose a seemingly more authentic version of the city. This revealed layer was one where war and violence had become normal—an everyday occurrence. In this way, Baker added a new element to the idea of Saigon's façade. The calmness displayed in Saigon came not from a colonial façade, but rather from the acceptance of war and violence into daily routines.

Else Baker's description of Saigon recalibrated the idea of what war looks like. While the city may not have been under siege in 1964, the experiences of war had been logged into the minds of the residents, regardless of their cultures. Again, the memory of the past, in this case, the beginnings of the American War, the French War and Japanese Occupation, impacted how Americans like Else Baker lived their "daily lives." These memories were not their own—the Americans Mrs. Baker refers to most likely had not been in Saigon for too long. Instead, the impact of war on the

local population living in Saigon and those past experiences were felt by the people and somehow conveyed to the newly arrived people in Saigon.

**Domestic Relationships and Workers in American Households in Saigon**

While the "Post of the Month" article condensed Mrs. Baker’s experiences into general guidelines for living in Saigon, her writing also provided details unique to her and her husband’s life that reveal more about how American domestic spaces functioned in Saigon. In her entry from November 1964, Mrs. Baker mentioned how writing about women, and the issues that might impact them directly, was only one of the topics she would like to cover. She asserted that she would like to focus more on “what the Vietnamese people are like,” as she didn’t think it was “fair to label the whole lot [as] bad just because [it] is what makes newspaper headlines.”

To communicate more about Saigon and Vietnam than just logistic information, Baker outlined the different relationships between groups in Saigon often at the same time as covering the ins and outs of living as an American in Saigon. In describing her house, for example, Mrs. Baker told a story of international relationships not only in where they lived, but also with their landlord, Mr. Tihon.

The Baker’s landlord, Mr. Tihon, an ethnic Chinese man in Saigon, who was a past president of the Rotary Chapter in Saigon, owned a furniture store next to the

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28 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 26 November 1964, Folder 17, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
Partly through the Tihons, Mrs. Baker came to understand the status of Chinese people in Saigon. Writing to her mother about Mr. Tihon, Else Baker described her understanding of the relationships between the Vietnamese and Chinese in Saigon:

I think I've written you before that the Vietnamese don’t really like the Chinese here—because they have never become assimilated. Vietnam took in hundreds of thousands of refugees from China when they moved south ahead of the communist advance in their own country. But they still live their own lives, in their own communities completely separated from the Vietnamese.

The Chinese who have been born here speak Chinese—not Vietnamese.30 Speaking specifically of the Tihon family, she mentioned that Mr. Tihon was educated in France and moved to Saigon because of its relationship with France—it was the seat of power for the French colonial structure in Vietnam.31 The Tihon's children lived overseas, mostly in the United States.32 One of their sons was “studying music in Paris,” the other attended Vanderbilt, while their daughter graduated from the University of Maryland and moved to Denver with her husband from Hong Kong. On Else Baker’s second night in Saigon, the Tihons threw a party...
to welcome her and her husband to Saigon. Mrs. Tihon travelled to Denver to visit her daughter, and while she was there, Mrs. Baker asked a favor of her friends in Denver:

    I think Mrs. Tihon is a delightful person—she speaks English very well—but most important....I don’t imagine she knows many people in Denver and I think it would mean a great deal to her if you would contact her for lunch perhaps or have her over for dinner...they’ve been so kind to us here and there’s so little I can do to repay that kindness except perhaps to give her visit to Denver a lift....Their name rimes [sic] with T-Bone incidentally.

Mrs. Baker’s friends in Denver did invite Mrs. Tihon and her daughter’s family for an outing. After receiving a letter from Mrs. Tihon, Mr. Tihon brought the Bakers a bottle of liquor to thank them for setting up the introduction.

    Mrs. Baker reported to her Denver friends that Mrs. Tihon’s visit also left her impressed by her the Tihon’s daughter’s domestic skills:

    Mrs. Tihon was telling me how impressed she was with all the things her daughter could do, like cooking, washing and ironing and running a house. In this part of the world—especially in a family of means a woman just never

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mary and Everybody, 30 September 1963, Folder 03, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
does anything of this sort—servants do it. Even maids have maids....This is real status, I tell you.36

The practice of hiring domestic help, however, predated the Bakers’ arrival in Saigon. For example, the 1947 Post Report advised Americans about hiring servants. It suggested that an American “household in Saigon [would] usually require four servants: a cook, a houseboy, a wash man, and a coolie for the garden work and odd jobs.”37 The Post Report scaled down this estimate for apartments, noting that one should hire “at least a cook and one houseboy,” and studio, which required “one servant for cooking and cleaning.”38 A cook had the highest salary, followed by the “houseboy” and “wash man.”39

The 1947 Post Report advice for employing servants depended on the nationality of the potential employee. For example, it informed potential American employers that “good Indochinese servants are paid about 50 piasters less per month than their Chinese counterparts.”40 The difference in salary, according to the Post Report, came from the differences inherent in Chinese and Indochinese servants. Chinese servants were “better and more trustworthy” than Indochinese servants, and those who spoke English or French were in high demand, unlike Indochinese servants

36 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 20. This section appears to be crossed out.
who were "always easily obtained." The Post Report also warned not to hire both Chinese and Indochinese servants because "if the two are mixed, quarrels, recriminations, and mutual lack of responsibility usually result." 

Even as it recommended Chinese over Indochinese servants on the grounds of trustworthiness, the Post Report told Americans to remain cautious of all servants. Because "servants in Saigon tend to be careless and are not noted for their honesty," the Post Report suggested that Americans not rush into trusting their domestic workers, and to not bring delicate china nor expensive silverware....The dishonesty may be petty but it may also be on a large scale—a number of houses in Saigon have been thoroughly ransacked by thieves who worked in complicity with the servants. Until one is certain of the trustworthiness of servants it is advisable to lock drawers and closers containing clothing, linen, and valuables. Servants who are found to be dishonest, or are suspected of dishonesty, should be immediately dismissed.

The 1947 Post Report's advice for employing domestic workers not only articulated tensions in Saigon between Indochinese and Chinese populations, and the understandings the Embassy staff had of these ethnic groups, but also created distance between Americans and the people that would be entering their homes. The solution the Post Report provided for dealing with any sort of "dishonesty" was simply firing.

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41 Ibid., 18-19. This section appears to be crossed out.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., Page 19-20. Section appears to be crossed out.
44 Ibid.
the employee. In fact, the Post Report went as far as to say that dismissal was the only option as “reformation of a servant's character appears to be impossible in Saigon.”

In one instance, the Post Report bordered on acknowledging that there might be a cultural issue at work, and communication between servant/employer might be an issue. The advice about communicating with one’s employees was limited, for the most part, to saying that Americans must have “a knowledge of French in order to effect mutual understanding” with their servants. When talking about having domestic workers do things like grocery shopping, the Post Report claimed that a servant would “exact a certain percentage of the money spent; this percentage is called ‘squeeze’ in the Orient.” This skimming couldn’t be stopped, and if an American employer tried to do so, they might end up losing the servants or they would by “buy inferior and spoiled food at lower prices.” The description of the “squeeze” suggested that this phenomenon was more cultural than dishonest. While the use of the word “Orient” unfortunately does not acknowledge the diversity of Asian peoples and brings to mind different legacies of oppression perpetrated upon the “east” by the “west,” here, it also signaled the presence of some sort of cultural signifier. In this instance, the term “orient” marks an attempt to go beyond the discussion of a local culture and generalize about all Asian cultures. By saying that employees might quit over their employers policing grocery bills, and that employers

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
simply had to come to terms with it, the author of the Post Report managed to remove any blame that Americans might have shouldered. Rather than saying that this might have been an issue of communication, or something that Americans in Saigon might need to understand, it was grouped into a category of generally dishonest behavior.

The ideology surrounding domestic workers seemed to change between the issue of the 1947 Post Report and Else Baker's tenure in Saigon. Peggy Durdin, writing in 1954, described domestic workers in a larger article about the relationship between the West and Asia. The dynamic of worker/employer, according to Durdin, took on a new tone because of the French War. Durdin said of the war and household servants:

The one element of comfortable living in which the Far East surpasses the United States and equals Europe is availability of household servants. Even here things ain't what they used to be. The pre-war white 'sahib' sat under a punkah pulled by tireless little Asians while another group of silent, faithful domestics brought him a succession of pink gins, curries and condiments. Today one is likely to be served by a sullen Vietnamese couple who, your French acquaintances tell you, may well be ruthless undercover Vietminh agents.48

Durdin leads us to believe that the presence of war in Vietnam brought new worries to the French home. French employers previously could simply enjoy the luxury of being waited on. But during the war, the French in Vietnam were paranoid that

domestic workers might be subverting their homes, and should be treated with suspicion.

Starting sometime after the United States presence started to grow, the United States Operations Mission to Vietnam supplemented the Post Report with "A Booklet of Helpful Information for Americans in Vietnam." Authored by the American Women's Association of Saigon, the booklet gave much of the same information that a Saigon Post Report would, with the addition of information like where to shop for various items in Saigon. The 1958 edition of the "Booklet" included a section about servants that would apparently remain unchanged until at least 1962.\textsuperscript{49} The "Booklet" warned newcomers of the disappointment that can often come with moving to Saigon and hiring a household staff. What initially seemed like a "delightful prospect" quickly gave way to "disillusionment...because of the language barrier, difference in standards, and often American inexperience at handing large staffs of specialized servants."\textsuperscript{50} Without saying much about the culture of having a household staff, the "Booklet" implied that Americans were not used to the idea of having servants. It addressed the possible fantasies of Americans new to Saigon who saw the hiring of servants as novel. The colonial, or at least class-based fantasy of having servants, however, was also cultural. Americans often did not have the experience to run a household staff. By specifically equating a nationality with

\textsuperscript{49} This is the other year I was able to find in an archive.

\textsuperscript{50} The United States Operations Mission To Vietnam: A Booklet Of Helpful Information For Americans In Vietnam, May 1959, Folder 24, Box 17, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, 15-16.
domestic managerial inexperience, the article implied that previous residents of Saigon (such as the French or British) knew how to deal with the caste system shored up by colonialism. Thus, Americans had to learn to deal with colonialism within their own homes.

The "Booklet's" suggestions for Americans looking to hire household staffs helped newcomers negotiate the legacy of French colonialism in Saigon and use it to their advantage. The "Booklet" suggested that newly arrived Americans staff their households by finding servants through friends already in Saigon or reading the Embassy bulletin—departing Americans could place ads on behalf of their staff. 51 The continuity of domestic staff between transient American employers could also extend beyond the group of Americans in Saigon. The "Booklet" said of Chinese servants: "There are many Chinese servants who speak some English, and have worked for Americans, French or British for several years. Their caste system is rigid and they do not readily adapt to new household procedures." 52 Thanks to knowing what Americans might need to live a comfortable life, in addition to being familiar with English, servants who had perhaps worked under an older colonial regime were in higher demand. The "Booklet" still highlighted the division between Chinese and Vietnamese servants. It stated that Vietnamese domestic workers that they were "often less finished servants," but were "loyal and honest. Once they understand what is desired, they usually try to please." 53 Even though the "Booklet," like earlier

51 Ibid., 16.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Post Reports, recommended both Chinese and Vietnamese domestic workers, it warned against hiring both as there were "likely to be clashes between the two groups." 54

By the time Else Baker arrived in Saigon, the American Post Report had updated its section on servants. These changes reflected small changes in the dynamic between American employers and domestic workers. The structure of the American household seemed to be relatively unchanged. Like earlier reports, 1963 Post Report explained that a "married couple or two single persons usually require two servants--a cook and a houseboy (boy) or maid (boyesse)." 55 A family with small children might also add an "amah" to look after the children. 56

However, the 1963 Post Report also mentioned cultural issues present in Saigon. For example, in giving advice on how to pay their domestic employees, 57 the Post Report introduced a slice of Vietnamese culture. Specifically, it advised employers to give bonuses to their workers "at Tet, the Lunar New Year, which is the

54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 "Single servant to household" 1,700-2,500 piasters per month  
"Cook" 2,000-3,000 piasters per month 
"Maid" 1,400-2,200 piasters per month 
"Houseboy No. 1" 1600-2500 piasters per month 
"Laundress" 1200-2000 piasters per month 
"Amah" 1600-2500 piasters per month 
"Gardener " (daily)100-(monthly)1000 piasters per month 
"Chauffeur" 2,500 piasters per month .
most important holiday in Viet-Nam." \textsuperscript{58} Along with their bonus, employers were to give several days off to their workers to celebrate the holiday. \textsuperscript{59} The Post Report no longer gave recommendations based on the ethnicity of the workers, but rather pointed Americans to the Embassy Bulletin, which published a section of available domestic workers. \textsuperscript{60} It also suggested that new residents should ask for advice from other Americans in Saigon. \textsuperscript{61}

Another cultural update the 1963 Post Report revealed came in the form of communication. According to the Report, French was still the language of choice for Americans wishing to communicate with Vietnamese people—Vietnamese people were beginning to learn English more, but the "language was still not widespread." \textsuperscript{62} Not only was French "indispensable for many of the officers in the performance of their official duties," \textsuperscript{63} but "since most servants speak some French, a limited knowledge is highly desirable in managing a household." \textsuperscript{64}

The Post Report also gave Americans coming to Saigon a preview of what to expect in terms of living arrangements. Employers were to house their domestic workers (often with the exception of gardeners and chauffeurs) on site, usually in a

\textsuperscript{58} Post Report - Saigon, 03 June 1963, Folder 02, Box 01, Tom Matthews Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Part IV-Page 4-5.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
unit separate from the main house. It also told Americans that “servants buy their own food (most of them do not like western food).”

Mrs. Baker’s “Post of the Month Article” also addressed the employment of domestic workers. Her account confirmed information from previous Post Reports while adding new information. According to Mrs. Baker, good cooks were in demand and more expensive than other workers; for their (often French-trained) talents, Americans could expect to pay $40 per month. In return, the cook had “complete charge of the kitchen—planning of meals, purchase and preparation of food. She’ll keep a household account book which you must check periodically.” Rather than adopting the line of the 1947 Post Report, Else Baker dismissed the “squeeze” by writing: “there are those who feel all cooks cheat a little. They may or may not. Even if they do, you’ll find they can still buy more cheaply than you can.”

Mrs. Baker also offered advice on acquiring domestic staff. Specifically, she told Americans new to Saigon that were fortunate if they were moving to a house that Americans had previously lived in, as the new residents could take on the existing staff. These continuing workers would “be accustomed to working for Americans and familiar with sanitary procedures necessary to keep you on your feet. They will

65 Ibid., 4.
66 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
know a smattering of English. Having pleased one American family, they will most likely please you." 70

The Post Report and Else Baker’s “Post of the Month” article provided a great deal of information to current and prospective American residents of Saigon. However, if taken alone, each article in itself did not present a full picture of the relationships that some American women had with the Vietnamese people who worked in their home. Else Baker’s “Post of the Month” article only hints at the lives of her domestic staff. For instance, she mentioned that her cook had “an amah to care for her six younger children. This is not uncommon,” 71 but did not personalize her description too much. Luckily, in Else Baker’s zeal for writing, she documented a more complicated aspect of American life in Saigon, and how American homes could provide a place for some degree of cultural exchange, even if only on a personal level.

To help run the house, the Bakers hired two maids and a cook. Ly was the number one maid, a position whose duties were often cleaning and laundry, 72 Dieu, the number two maid, and Dieu’s mother, Lan, was the Baker’s cook. 73 During her stay in Saigon, Else Baker developed close relationships with the three women who worked in her home. Through these relationships, Mrs. Baker not only was able to experience more of what Saigon had to offer, but she was also able to describe Saigon more fully for her readers. In this way, the relationships formed within the American

70 Ibid., 15.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid. 16.
domestic space in Saigon create an understanding of the city and the Vietnamese people.

One of the ways in which Else Baker, Ly, Dieu and Lan developed their relationship was through trips around the city (often in the Baker's Volkswagen\(^{74}\)). For example, shortly after the Baker's arrived in Saigon, Mrs. Baker attended Dieu's wedding.\(^{75}\) Writing her mother about the wedding, Mrs. Baker described the trip:

I had told Lan to plan not to come to work at all on Tuesday - to stay home and get her daughter married off. Ly was going to escort me to the ceremony so I would not have to worry about finding my way....This is probably a rare opportunity we had to get to see the real 'native' section of town. They don't live too far from us here. We parked the car on one of the main streets then started on foot through a narrow alley which became more and more narrow as we went along—muddy, smelly and dirty of course - past hundreds of little huts side by each on each side of the winding alleyway.\(^{76}\)

In this case, the personal relationships forged inside the home resulted in network a expanding through the city. Attending Dieu's wedding led Mrs. Baker outside the French/American downtown area and into the Vietnamese section of the city. While the description was not overly detailed, it did record the process of exploring a city in a way that may have been unavailable to many American men. Often, American men

\(^{74}\) Correspondence from Lee Baker to Else, 11 June 1963, Folder 23, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.


\(^{76}\) Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 18 August 1963, Folder 02, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
had to work in an office, confined to the "American section" of town. In the case of Mrs. Baker, she did not have to report to an office to fulfill her duty, as she saw it, to support Lee. As a result, she could do things like attend Dieu’s wedding and go around the city developing an understanding of the city not obtainable by those working behind a desk.

On another occasion, Mrs. Baker went to Cholon with Dieu, Ly, and Lan. This time when she wrote her mother, she provided a little more of her own opinion about Saigon. Baker wrote how the market closer to downtown Saigon had many American patrons, and as a result, prices were higher. Going to Cholon, she found she could bargain with the shopkeepers. Baker also found out Dieu, Ly, and Lan had never been to Cholon:

The only thing I can think is the fact that the Vietnamese generally don’t like the Chinese much—plus the fact that anything different seems strange to them at first. But they decided they would like to go.77

This passage revealed several things about Americans in Saigon. First, many Americans stayed in the downtown area and shopped at the Central Market near where the Baker’s lived. Second, the city apparently was relatively segregated. The Chinese residents of the city lived in Cholon, the Americans lived downtown, and the Vietnamese lived in a different section. This trip, one of many that Dieu and Mrs. Baker took, not only moved them around town, but also provided an opportunity for Ly and Lan to see a new part of the town.

77 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 06 January 1964, Folder 07, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
Other elements about the layout of Saigon emerged in Mrs. Baker’s description of Ly, Dieu and Lan. The Bakers kept a busy entertaining scheduling, hosting frequent parties at their house. Dieu often had Saturday nights off, but would come back to help Ly with such social occasions. Even though Dieu, Ly and Lan had to work many of the parties that the Baker’s hosted, there was at least one that they were guests at. On Christmas day 1963, the Baker’s invited just Ly, Dieu and Lan, and their families over. This party, which Mrs. Baker wanted to throw to do something nice for her employee’s children, complicates the role of the Baker’s residence and hospitality. Not only did the Bakers throw parties for Americans, hoping to provide a sense of “home” for Americans in Saigon without their families, but the Mrs. Baker wanted to extend her hospitality to the families of the women she employed. While they could have had a party during another part of the year, they chose Christmas—a Christian/American holiday—to share with their Buddhist employees. This party was an attempt at cultural exchange focused in a domestic space and channeled through the rhetoric of family and hospitality.

Mrs. Baker’s feelings towards the women who worked at her house came out in the first article she wrote for publication. In 1963, Dieu’s new husband, a Vietnamese marine, was killed in a military action near Saigon at Trung Lap. Else Baker wrote about the events that surrounded his death from her perspective; the

78 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 08 September 1963, Folder 03, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
79 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 23 December 1963, Folder 06, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
80 Ibid.
story got picked up by the Associated Press in late-December 1963, and would be published by *U.S. Lady* and the *Saigon Post*, a local English-language newspaper.82

In a letter to her mother, Mrs. Baker reflected on the story. She described her motives for writing the story:

I wasn’t really trying to get a message about the hell of war across because the blood and gore and devastation is just as great whether it is created by war, auto accident, plane crash or any other manmade or natural disaster. What I was trying to get across is the fact that war is not a statistical game—it’s a very human game and behind each statistic or fatality there’s another tale to tell just like his one.83

Else Baker’s article about Dieu’s family coping with the loss of Long contained not only the travelogue elements, like the description of Buddhist funeral practices, but also revealed, in part, the relationships that Else Baker had with Dieu, Ly and Lan. In trying to show the “human” side of the American War in Vietnam, Mrs. Baker also demonstrated how the relationships between Americans in Saigon and the people who worked in their homes may have not been well-represented by the descriptions provided by Post Reports or other periodicals.

Mrs. Baker began the version of her article that appeared in *U.S. Lady* by briefly recalling Dieu and Long’s wedding, and the times when Long was stationed in Saigon. The description of Long’s tenure in Saigon reveals a little more about the

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82 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 29 December 1963, Folder 06, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
83 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 17 November 1963, Folder 05, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
lives of the women working in the Baker home. At one point, while Vietnamese
Marines were stationed in the city, Dieu and Ly would take their bicycles to go see
Long.\textsuperscript{84} And the Baker household seemed to very much include the friends and
family of the women who worked there as well. Another time, when the Marines
were in Saigon for a parade, their house, noted Mrs. Baker, “was the noisiest, busiest
and happiest place in Saigon as the central meeting point for off-duty Marines.” \textsuperscript{85}

Shortly after Long died and Dieu and her family went to identify his body,
one of Dieu’s brothers came by the house. Mrs. Baker didn’t know what to do with
him—he didn’t speak English—so she watered the plants with him. \textsuperscript{86} The events
around Long’s death revealed a complicated relationship between the Mrs. Baker and
the women who worked in her home. Their relationship was more than a simple
employee-employer relationship: the Baker’s house was the gathering point during a
time of crisis for Dieu’s family and Dieu invited Mrs. Baker to be with her and her
family as they prepared Long’s body for the funeral, and to attend the funeral itself.\textsuperscript{87}

Long’s death revealed a larger network than just the one created between Mrs.
Baker and the women who worked in her house. Mrs. Baker expanded the network to
another woman who worked in Mr. Baker’s office. After Dieu’s brother visited the
house, Mrs. Baker called Bichlien, Lee Baker’s secretary, for advice about the proper
etiquette for Buddhist funerals. Besides obtaining advice about when the funeral
should be held, sending flowers, and providing Dieu with some money to help pay for

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. 7, 43.
the funeral, Mrs. Baker’s call to Bichlien demonstrated how women living in Saigon created networks that intertwined with the American men in Saigon—albeit they still existed separately.

**The Politics of Parties and Entertaining in the American Home in Saigon**

The network Mr. And Mrs. Baker created in Saigon came partly from Lee’s acquaintances, but Mrs. Baker also expanded and developed that network by inviting people to their home and attending events across Saigon. The Bakers hosted gatherings, big and small. Some nights, they would just have one person over; on others, they may have had as many as sixty people, which necessitated hiring help, like a few bartenders from local hotels and police officers for security.

Because of Mr. Baker’s liaison role between the military and the press corps in Saigon, the Baker’s parties often mixed these groups. To keep her parties full of interesting conversation, Mrs. Baker often invited “some of the visiting correspondents mixed with a few couples—some from the military and some from USIS. We’ve found this to be the best formula for a party because the people stationed here get pretty tired of seeing the same old faces at parties and they rarely get a chance to meet some of the visiting correspondents.”

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88 Ibid.7.
89 Correspondence from Else Baker to Unknown (Incomplete), March 1964, Folder 09, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
90 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 06 January 1964, Folder 07, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
91 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 08 September 1963, Folder 03, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
While welcoming a diverse group of people at her parties, Mrs. Baker was particular about the type of women she would invite. Tending to want to talk more about political matters than “girl talk,” Mrs. Baker wrote her friend Mary, “if they want to talk girl talk I don’t ask them because I’d rather listen to the men talk.” Mrs. Baker’s categorization of certain topics as “girl talk” or the things men would talk about marks an interesting split in the domestic space. She cast her home as a place where people could be casual and talk about serious things—the politics of the day and the like. She didn’t approve of frivolous conversations in her domestic space. However, sometimes the party did divide itself into sections and the conversation split along gender lines. For instance, during one dinner party that included “practically all the Generals about town worth mentioning here,” after everyone ate, the “men had their little private talk here in the den.”

The Baker’s parties, while sometimes seemed to be about catching up with old friends coming through town, mostly seeming to present/embody some sort of purpose. Sometimes they would invite Information Officers and the enlisted personnel working for Lee. Other times, they had about “half newspaper people, half Information officers.” The Bakers also hosted parties to strategically introduce...
different groups of people. For example, when a friend of theirs—a press information
officer for an Admiral—visited Saigon, they held a party to catch up, but also to have
him meet the press and other information officers.96 The Baker's parties seemed to
make Lee's job in Saigon easier as well. Mrs. Baker recalled in a letter to her mother
how they had invited the "Pacific head of the United Press—based in Tokyo" to a
small dinner party. Because two UP reporters gave "Lee more trouble than almost
anyone," the couple wanted to "especially have him around to prove that we don't
really have two heads." By the end of evening, he seemed "sympathetic with Lee's
problems [and] several times made the statement that he wouldn't have Lee's job for
anything in the world. So perhaps he could pass on a little calming influence on his
boys."97 On another occasion, the Bakers wanted to host a party with both the press
corps and Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. The
Bakers felt that the Press would eventually "corner him anyhow and felt it best they
do so in [their] house."98

Mrs. Baker prided herself on being able to provide an atmosphere in which a
wide variety of people could relax but still do their job. Talking of one particularly
successful party on New Years Day, she recalled to her mother that "the generals

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96 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mary and All, 30 October 1963, Folder 04,
Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
97 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 23 December 1963, Folder 06, Box 01,
Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
98 Ibid.
came—even General Harkins. But as usual, we’re convinced they come to our house because we don’t treat them like VIP’s—they can relax and enjoy themselves.99

In addition to providing better access to military officials for the press, and vice versa, the Bakers’ schedule allowed them better access with these groups. Mrs. Baker wrote her mother about one evening when Sylvester came by their house. Lee was able to talk to him about a few work-related issues that they had not been able to discuss previously,100 but Mrs. Baker also had a chance to talk to him. She told him what she thought of the events in Vietnam “based upon talking to Blanche and Bichlien,” because she felt that he should be familiar with a Vietnamese perspective.101

By the end of 1964, the Bakers’ social calendar had become quite full, but their ability to mediate between the press and various military officials became limited. Mrs. Baker wrote, “at one time we made a very conscious effort to have all of the correspondents who come to town to dinner during their stay. There are so many of them coming nowadays that it is no longer possible for us to keep up with them.”102

In addition to having people over to their house, the Baker’s often went around Saigon to take part in different social functions. Visiting a number of

99 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 06 January 1964, Folder 07, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
100 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 15 March 1964, Folder 09, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
101 Ibid.
102 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 20 December 1964, Folder 18, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
different places, they often met up with colleagues at hotels around Saigon. Often on 
Sunday nights, they went out as a couple to a dining room at the Brink Hotel.

Sometimes they met colleagues at the Rex Hotel, the Brink’s hotel’s rooftop 
terrace, or at the Caravelle Hotel. In addition to informal meetings around 
town, the Bakers also attended more formal events. One New Year’s Eve they 
attended a “charity ball given at the British Embassy [to] benefit the war orphans.”

Mrs. Baker commented after one busy week about the impressive company they kept:

Socially we’ve really come up in the world this past week. I want you to 
know that this week we’ve had dinner with one of the Vice Prime Ministers as 
well as the Prime Minister himself. I don’t know exactly why we were 
included either time, but perhaps Lee’s name is getting known around town.

Understanding the November 1963 Coup and Saigon’s Public Spaces Through 
American Domestic Spaces

While documenting her combination of social/professional life mostly through 
private letters, Else Baker chose more public channels to share her experiences in 
Saigon’s public spaces. In the fall of 1963, Mrs. Baker transformed her relationship

103 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 18 August 1963, Folder 02, Box 01, 
Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
104 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 19 February 1964, Folder 08, Box 01, 
Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
105 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mary and Everybody, 30 September 1963, 
Folder 03, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech 
University.
106 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 06 January 1964, Folder 07, Box 01, 
Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
107 Correspondence from Else Baker to Unknown, 09 May 1964, Folder 11, Box 01, 
Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
to writing by moving from letter-writer to journalist. The *Denver Post* aided in this transition when it published a letter Mrs. Baker wrote to a friend in Denver about the November 1963 coup in Saigon.\(^{108}\) Her articles appeared in *Denver Post* and *Dayton Daily News*—local papers where the Bakers had previously lived. She also sold articles that got distributed nationally, be that through the monthly periodical, *U.S. Lady*, or by selling stories to large agencies like the Associated Press. Her coup story also appeared in a local English-language newspaper circulated in Saigon—the *Saigon Post*.\(^{109}\)

Mrs. Baker preserved her perspective on the coup that overthrew President Diem in 1963 (see Chapter Four for more information about the coup and the Buddhist Crisis) in at least two forms. First, her published account survived in the *Denver Post* article. Second, she donated a document containing her initial thoughts about the coup, perhaps a draft of the letter she sent to her friend in Denver, apparently written the day the coup ended—this document contained sections identical to the *Denver Post* article, but it also contained a few more details. Together, Mrs. Baker’s writing about the coup recorded the events of the coup, but grounded them in her house, her friends and family, and the streets of Saigon.

Mrs. Baker’s experience with the coup mostly had to do with the location of the Baker’s home. Living at the corner of Cong Ly and Hong Thap Tu streets put

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\(^{108}\) The reason Denver keeps appearing with the Bakers is that they lived in the city for a few years while Lee was “chief of staff of the Air Force Finance Center in Denver”, Else Baker, “Ex-Denverite Tells of Saigon Coup,” *Denver Post*, November 13, 1963.

\(^{109}\) Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 29 December 1963, Folder 06, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
them across the street from the Presidential Palace, which was damaged in a coup in 1962.\textsuperscript{10} It also located them four blocks away from "the Gia Long Palace, temporary residence of President Diem and his family."\textsuperscript{11} Because their house was near the places where any physical power grab would necessarily happen, the Bakers would have had an interesting perspective on any such events. In fact, the two previous American residents of their house witnessed coups from there, and the Bakers "knew when we accepted the house we'd have a 'front row seat' in the event of a third try, and we did."\textsuperscript{12}

Mrs. Baker retold the events of the coup around the story of Cuc—Ly's brother in the Vietnamese Marines. On the day before the coup began, he came by the Baker residence with a high fever. After sending him to bed and taking care of him over night, the family decided to take him to a doctor. Lee made a phone call to get permission to take him to the Marine dispensary. That afternoon, Ly, Hue, Cuc, and Mrs. Baker got in the Baker's Volkswagen and went to the doctor as the coup—unbeknownst to them at the time—was going on.

After leaving the house, they noticed that there were barricades set up on the corner of their street. But this didn't worry Mrs. Baker, as it was a common occurrence when President Diem was traveling through. Mrs. Baker kept driving until she "saw a bus stopped in the middle of the road ahead, with people milling about it. Ly, Hue and Cuc spotted trouble simultaneously and they cried out, 'Mam,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
that's no good--go home--go home.'"\textsuperscript{113} At this point, Mrs. Baker recalled in her draft, "I dropped quickly into second gear and swung it around immediately."\textsuperscript{114} As she turned the car around, gunfire started and Mrs. Baker took the car to a nearby highway. Once there, they got stuck in traffic as "truck after truck of soldiers passed, pouring into Saigon."\textsuperscript{115} Thinking quickly, and knowing they still needed to care for Cuc, the group decided to go to Hue’s house. After dropping Cuc off, Hue and Ly and Mrs. Bakers went back to Cong Ly Street.

Upon arriving back at the Baker residence, they discovered that Dieu and Lan had locked up the house, "collected their most prize possessions and tied them in a bundle,"\textsuperscript{116} and were waiting for the group to get back so that they could evacuate to the Tan Son Nhut airport as they had done when the Palace had been bombed previously (before the Bakers lived in Saigon).\textsuperscript{117} Lee called to inform everyone that the "his office had just passed to Armed Forces Radio Station a directive from the American ambassador that all Americans were to remain in their offices or quarters until further notice. A coup d'etat was under way."\textsuperscript{118} Because they had experience with coup attempts, the Vietnamese members of the household wanted to

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Else Baker, "Woman's Eye View of the Coup", no date, No Date, Folder 25, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117}Else Baker, "Woman's Eye View of the Coup," no date.
leave. After some discussion, Lan left to be with her small children, and Hue left to take care of Cuc—Ly and Dieu stayed with Mrs. Baker.

As Ly, Dieu, and Mrs. Baker stayed inside the house, the shelling of the Palace started. The sounds of gunfire “got louder and we realized that forces were moving up our street, raking the Palace grounds with machine gun fire.” They heard “heavy equipment passing our house. The windows rattled and the house shook. We could hear sporadic machine gun bursts, rifle shots, airplanes overhead and then the dull thudding ‘phoom’ of artillery and mortar fire.” Being so close to the Palace the women expected to be caught in the return fire as “attacking units had set up posts close to our house.”

Eventually, Lee returned to the house, and after everyone had gone to bed, Mrs. Baker and Lee noticed that the tone of the gunfire changing around 3am. The couple “got up and stood in the shadows away from the window, watching the battle taking place in the moonlight.” Outside, they saw as many as five tanks outside their house gate, with others firing from the nearby Rue de Pasteur. That morning, at 6:40am, the sound of weapons stopped and “Gen. Duong Van Minh, chairman of the Revolutionary Committee, came on the Vietnamese radio station to announce that President Diem had surrendered.” After the coup, Mrs. Baker as “Air Force planes

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119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
did victory rolls over the crowds [in the streets], dropping leaflets on their passes.”

However, Americans were still advised to stay inside.124

Mrs. Baker’s experience with the 1963 coup demonstrates the permeable boundary between public and private spaces, as well as the role the public spaces played in the everyday life of Americans. After spending fifteen months in Saigon, Mrs. Baker still claimed that she did not see much “turmoil” in Saigon, though what there was “of it ha[d] taken place within a few blocks” of the Baker’s house. 125 Mrs. Baker further described Saigon as part of “two Vietnams—Saigon and the rest of the country.” 126 She added that “aside from an occasional bad moment such as during the bombings against Americans—you’d never know from observing life in Saigon that this country is at war.” 127 Indeed, Mrs. Baker’s recollections revolved around everyday routines like parties, dinners, and miscellaneous errands. Through these everyday things, she told stories about the American relationship to Saigon. Her story about the 1963 coup revolved immediately around helping Cuc, but ultimately that task became elevated from an “everyday” occurrence to “newsworthy” as she tried to get home.

One of Mrs. Baker’s articles about Saigon, “Off Beat Diary: Saigon Street Corner” appeared in The Aurora Beacon-News in late-September 1964. Like many of

125 Else Baker, “To Answer A Question” (manuscript), no date. No Date, Folder 26, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
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126 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 30 March 1964, Folder 09, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
127 Ibid.
her other articles, it described events taking place on the street in downtown Saigon. In “Off Beat Diary,” Mrs. Baker told of how she watched a procession of Buddhists going to the “cemetery to bury two young men who lost their lives in recent disturbances in this city.”

The marchers included monks, “pedicabs banked with flowers,” as well as “military representatives, boy scouts, student groups, women of all ages, some men and boys— in a steady, solemn, silent and orderly procession.” While watching the procession, a white man crossed the street and started talking to Mrs. Baker. Mrs. Baker described what followed:

A middle-aged Caucasian man crossed the street and stood near me, watching the procession. We were the only non-Orientals in sight and it seemed natural we should be drawn together....‘You're an American aren't you?’ he said. His accent was French and he told me he was a long-time resident of Indochina.

He said he’d been watching trying to get the ‘feeling’ of the people.

As they watched the procession, they noticed that some of the marchers were carrying banners. The French man told Mrs. Baker that he was waiting to see if any of them displayed anti-French banners. When one finally approached, Mrs. Baker asked if he had seen any anti-American banners. He responded “no, not now. Perhaps your time will come later.” Mrs. Baker and the French man “stood together on a street

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129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
corner in Saigon—two westerners whose governments [had] opposing views on the solution to the political problems of this weary country—sharing a common bond.” 132

Mrs. Baker’s recollection of the peaceful Buddhist procession placed herself and the French man in the same physical space, sharing little other than their Western background. From this shared space, the Mrs. Baker and this French person compared how the Vietnamese people reacted to the policies of the French and United States. While France was disliked openly, Mrs. Baker and the French onlooker did not see any animosity toward the United States displayed in the crowd. The French man’s prediction that the United States’ “time will come later” suggests a commonality between the French and Americans over foreign policy towards Vietnam. Even though the two countries had different agendas in Vietnam. In 1964, the United States was increasing its commitment to South Vietnam while France publically endorsed the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Vietnam.

One of the most notable continuities in much of Else Baker’s writing (public or private) was her description of how the political events of the day took place in public spaces. One of Else Baker’s articles that appeared in the Stars and Stripes and the Saigon Daily News, 133 “Meet Mr. Salute, He’s a Life Saver in Saigon,” 134 also highlighted the public nature of politics in Saigon. In this article, Mrs. Baker wrote about one of the policemen stationed on her street—he saluted the Baker’s when he

132 Ibid.
133 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 20 December 1964, Folder 18, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
saw them, hence the nickname "Mr. Salute." Mrs. Baker first met him when he helped her open the gate to her driveway during a downpour, and he was also on duty the day of the November 1963 coup. In this article, Mrs. Baker wrote of an occasion when he was on duty as "angry demonstrators marched past our house on their way to Gia Long Palace." Mrs. Baker described how Vietnamese policemen blocked off the street as protesters swarmed the area. She went to the roof of their house to watch, only going inside once the crowd started throwing rocks. As the crowd broke through the barricades on their street, the policemen lined up outside the Baker's residence to make sure that no harm came to it or its residents. As a response to that level of protection, Mrs. Baker proclaimed, "Mr. Salute, I salute you."

Mrs. Baker's description of this demonstration shows how contentious the public spaces of Saigon could be, and yet at the same time, how personal relationships had the ability to influence the outcome of public events. In the case of "Mr. Salute," the police had a duty to protect the Palace grounds—the reason they were on the street in the first place. However, having frequently interacted with the Bakers on the street, albeit nearly anonymously, this single police officer and his colleagues yielded the street to the protestors, but did not allow any harm to come to the Americans on the street.

In an unpublished manuscript, Mrs. Baker wrote of another incident in which she got stuck in a crowd of Catholic demonstrators—clubs and machetes in hand.

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135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
These demonstrators had come into the city from a “Catholic relocation settlement on the outskirts of town,” because they had heard that Buddhists were attacking Catholics.139 In this instance, Mrs. Baker had dropped a friend off at her house and got a call from Lee while still there. “He told me that four people had been killed in a demonstration...[and] the American Ambassador [was] warning all Americans to get off the streets and to stay indoors.”140 Lee said that it would most likely be safe for her to go home if she avoided crowds. As Mrs. Baker made her way home, her car got stuck in a crowd of demonstrators, and though she contemplated abandoning her car, she was able to move through.141

In each of the stories, Mrs. Baker’s description of the events reveals the ways in which Americans in Saigon imagined themselves in the city, and hints at the ways other people in the city regarded them. On one level, staying off the streets and avoiding protestors was obvious advice for the Embassy to give Americans in Saigon when it seemed like a situation could be dangerous. However, the end result of this policy was the removal of Americans from a public space where the politics of Vietnam were being worked out. In the case of Mrs. Baker getting stuck in her car among a crowd of protestors and the policemen lining up outside their gate to prevent harm to them or their property, people in Saigon seemed disinterested in including Americans in the political process. Perhaps the police protected the Baker’s house not because the crowd would harm them, but rather because their blocking of the

139 Else Baker, “To Answer A Question” (manuscript), no date, 3.
140 Ibid., 2.
141 Ibid., 3.
American private space suggested that whatever the demonstrators wanted, it need not include Americans.

Both of these stories cast the streets of Saigon as unpredictable spaces. One moment they could be mundane, while the next they could be threatening. Mrs. Baker wrote of the private American domestic space in terms of safety. She could retreat there and find adequate refuge from the chaos outdoors. However, her descriptions of the private American areas of Saigon were often penetrated by violence from the outside. On Christmas Eve 1964, the Viet Minh bombed the Brink Hotel—the bachelor’s officer quarters where American service members stayed if they did not have families with them. Of course this bombing destroyed an American private space—rendering it absolutely unsafe. Perhaps more interesting than the event was Mrs. Baker’s brief initial description of the bombing. Because the Brink was only a few blocks away from the Baker’s house, she heard the explosion as she was outside watering her poinsettias in last minute preparation for a Christmas Eve gathering. "The blast shook the ground around us. My girls looked at me and Ly... said ‘What’s that, Mam!’ It wasn’t really a question. We all knew what it was. A black cloud of smoke could be seen over the garden wall." What was a domestic scene, full of smells like cooking turkey for the coming party, broke down as violence entered the domestic space aurally, tactiley and visually.

142 Else Baker, “At the Brink,” no date, Folder 26, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 1.  
143 Ibid.
The intrusion of the war into American private spaces in Saigon seemed to increase as American involvement in Vietnam grew. For example, in a letter to her friend Mary, Mrs. Baker wrote how the sound of jet noise increased following the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin:

I can’t help but to reflect on the changing ‘sounds’ of Saigon as I hear the jets warm up and take off at the airport, or fly over the city. It’s a sound that we rarely hear here until the last couple of months but are hearing increasingly now. It’s a sound that never ceases to send a shiver of excitement up my spine and yet, today is a sound that I listen to with a mental question mark after having just heard about the second attack against the 7th Fleet.  

After the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin, Saigon, according to Mrs. Baker, didn’t change how Americans acted. She did not see anyone panic, but all Americans were advised “to redouble precautions.”  

In February 1965, Lyndon Johnson ordered American dependents to leave Saigon. However, the American press had been reporting that this would happen for months. Else Baker wrote her mother that she talked to Arthur Sylvester about it once when he visited Saigon in May 1964 and he had told her:

‘Else, I give you the same answer that I gave you last time I was here.’ Which was in effect that the policy is to let anyone go home who wants to, but

144 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mary, 05 August 1964, Folder 14, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
145 Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 06 August 1964, Folder 14, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University; Evacuation Instructions for Dependents from MACV, 11 August 1964, Folder 25, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
essentially the U.S. government feels that having dependents here is a good thing.\footnote{Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 15 May 1964, Folder 11, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.}

Even though Sylvester reiterated that having dependents in Saigon was a good thing, eventually they had to leave—something Mrs. Baker was not happy about; "I’m not happy with it—I don’t know anyone who is. I’m especially not happy with the way it is being handled....So far, we have not received firm instructions. I’m not sure exactly when I’m going."\footnote{Correspondence from Else Baker to Mom, 09 February 1965, Folder 19, Box 01, Lee Baker Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.}

Mrs. Baker’s experiences in Saigon, and her writing about them, documented the lives of her and her network of friends, family, and professional contacts in the city. Else Baker’s writing provides us a look into what types of events might lie underneath the opinions about American involvement in Vietnam and Saigon itself that appeared in American periodicals in the 1960s. The relationship between Else Baker’s private and public writing provided us with a theoretical framework to use when examining the American War in Vietnam. Writing allowed her the time and the forum to analyze her surroundings. She considered how her physical environment interacted with how she felt and with what, and whom, she knew. By examining, and unpacking, the writing of Else Baker, we can see how moving through, and interpreting, space influenced the lives of Americans living in Saigon. Furthermore, we are able to see how different systems of power act upon people and how relations,
such as gender systems, get embedded in how we interpret cultures different than our own.
Sex, Policy, and Leisure: The American Impact on Saigon after Escalation

After the November 1963 Coup, Saigon became an increasingly American space as more individuals and organizations settled from across the Pacific. Through 1965, as described in previous chapters, many American accounts of Saigon portrayed a city untouched by war. While there were terrorist attacks, press coverage of violence served more as a reminder of the sacrifice and commitment of the United States to South Vietnam than an acknowledgement—by setting up operations in Saigon—that the United States had changed the city.

Once the United States committed more troops to the war in Vietnam in 1965, the United States’ footprint in Saigon grew. American money and troops funneled into the city worsening problems like traffic congestion and inflation. Consequently, representations of the city changed as well. Representations of Saigon transformed from those of the early 1960s which portrayed Saigon as relatively safe, and even boring, to portraits of a city stretched beyond its capacity by war. For the most part, the late 1960s Saigon represented in the press was a place of leisure and danger, capable of harming everyone who entered city limits. In the mid-to-late 1960s, reporters and U.S. government officials used the changing conditions in Saigon to critique or defend the American War in Vietnam and American foreign policy. Specifically, authors and politicians used gendered and corporeal metaphors to cast the presence of the United States in Vietnam positive or negative for Vietnamese people. Ideologically laden representations of Vietnamese and American women became a central way to discuss the war.
Despite the rhetoric about whether or not the United States had a positive or negative effect on Saigon, by the late 1960s, the United States had clearly changed the geography of Saigon. Fighting from the Tet Offensive decimated large parts of the city and the efforts of US officials to move troops out of the city were matched by new areas emerging to cater to Americans. The American presence in Saigon changed not only the physical aspects of Saigon, but also created its own meanings around the city as reporters and government officials utilized the bodies of Saigon residents (both American and Vietnamese) to discuss the American War in Vietnam.

**Reporting the American Impact on Saigon**

In 1964 and 1965, before the American buildup in Vietnam hit full stride, the foreign press devoted much of its energy on reporting the terrorist activities that targeted Americans. “American” physical spaces exploded with relative regularity; the U.S. Embassy, hotels housing GIs, bars, and recreational activities all became targets of anti-American terror drives. Even though terrorists still targeted American spaces after 1965, the American presence in Saigon assumed a different tenor in 1966. The foreign press started to comment on the condition of Saigon itself. Rather than report about the latest bombings around the city, they addressed how the city had changed.

In early 1966, reporters for American news outlets highlighted the growing problems in Saigon. A *New York Times* reporter pointed to one of the major differences in Saigon: population. According to his estimates, the city’s population had almost doubled from one million in 1954 to nearly two million in 1966. Because
of the population increase, he wrote that Saigon was "slowly collapsing under the sheer weight of people."¹

Although much of the population increase owed to refugees, the American population in Saigon also grew. With more Americans came more American money, resulting in inflation of the local currency—the piaster. Inflation and more American money in Saigon resulted in the pricing out many Vietnamese people from some activities in Saigon and ultimately led to tensions between American and Vietnamese residents. One reporter described the everyday impact of GIs as "monopoliz[ing] taxis, the best night clubs and the most beautiful girls in Saigon."² Reporters also told of racial tensions between Vietnamese and American residents.³

In March 1966, in a pattern similar to the protests of 1963, Buddhist protesters started to march to protest against the Saigon government, then headed by Premier Nguyen Cao Ky. The protests, which critiqued both the Ky government and the United States, called for an elected civilian government and a true sovereignty.⁴ Protesters also took an anti-American stance for its support of the Ky regime. By the end of the month, the protests spread to downtown Saigon (outside the Central Market) and encompassed student gatherings and marches.⁵ These actions included speeches, police-installed barbed-wire barricades and bi-lingual banners aimed at

³ Ibid.
Americans stating “Americans, We Want Friends Not Bosses,” and “Down With U.S. Obstructionism.”

April of 1966 saw the escalation of the anti-Ky/anti-American protests. On one occasion, students marched to the radio station and demanded access to protest the government, and combat police dispatched them. In another incident, student protesters violating a city curfew flipped a U.S. jeep outside an American billet and set it on fire, while “shouting anti-junta and anti-U.S. slogans” and calling Americans “imperialists.”

As in the Buddhist Crisis years earlier, some observers felt that Communist forces agitated the protests. The press reported that “United States intelligence agencies intercepted instructions to Vietcong agents” to blend with the protesters and incite more anti-American ideology. Some may debate the authenticity of this information, but the war and American officials’ worries about the Viet Cong did mix with anti-Americanism in Saigon.

As negotiations between Buddhists stalled around the issue of a timetable for National Assembly elections, more protesters marched through Saigon. One protest resulted in the ransacking of a Vietnamese newspaper office and the burning of

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motorcycles. However, Buddhist leaders called for the protesters to calm down and they closed one of their pagodas that had served as a meeting place for the demonstrators.10

Demonstrations turned violent on April 8. In crowds led by Buddhist monks, and suspected by American intelligence to contain Vietcong agitators, twelve Americans "were beaten, manhandled or chased by the mob," and another five servicemen were injured when someone threw a grenade at a "soft-drink stand" in a civilian location.11 Rioters also lobbed grenades at two police stations and in front of the Tan Son Nhut airport.12

Later in April, reporters increasingly investigated the causes of anti-Americanism in Saigon, something they had not yet really explored. Neil Sheehan published an article revealing Saigon to be more than just the place of demonstrations and riots.13 Sheehan’s article exposed the conditions, both physical and social, in Saigon that might account for some of the resentment towards Americans. Sheehan cited xenophobia, the strain on Saigon’s infrastructure of the increased population, and the Vietnamese economy as reasons that might have caused the anti-U.S. banners and slogans to appear in protests.

Sheehan also acknowledged that the Ky regime and the American support of it was the “immediate reason” for the anti-American protests.\textsuperscript{14} However, he added that while political discontent found a voice in street protests relatively easily, other issues that did not manifest themselves in that type of action, found their expression through “widespread resentment” by the Saigonese.\textsuperscript{15} Sheehan understood the South Vietnamese resentment of the fact that U.S. buildup in Vietnam happened quickly and took its toll. He also reported that years of influence by Westerners in general had contributed to the relationship between the Americans and Vietnamese specifically. One Vietnamese observer commented that “legions of white men descend on a rudimentary Asian society...you are bound to have trouble.”\textsuperscript{16}

According to Sheehan, basic needs like electricity became scarce as Americans in Saigon further strained the city’s already overwhelmed infrastructure. Saigon residents blamed Americans for using too much of the city’s electrical grid. The American build up also resulted in trash collecting in the street—not because the amount of trash outstripped what the available garbage service could collect, but because the Vietnamese garbage collectors could leave their jobs to make more money working for the U.S. military or civilian construction outfits.

Sheehan highlighted the growing economic disparity between Americans and Vietnamese, which was exacerbated by the inequitable distribution of resources. Americans seemingly had access to everything, while Vietnamese residents could

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
obtain very little. Because many Americans rented apartments, hotel rooms, and houses in Saigon, Vietnamese middle-class families could no longer find a place to live. Sheehan also reported that some landlords evicted Vietnamese tenants so they could charge more to "'the dollar-laden adolescents,' as the Vietnamese frequently call[ed] Americans."\(^{17}\) Similarly, the Vietnamese in Saigon who wanted a taxi often found it hard to get one, as taxi drivers wanted American clients whom they could charge more.\(^ {18}\)

As the cost of living for Vietnamese rose in Saigon, the disparity of living conditions only grew and the injection of American money into the economy caused an inflation. The disparity between Americans and Vietnamese residents manifested itself not only monetarily, but also in access to goods. Americans could purchase goods (like cigarettes and radios) at the Post Exchange. According to Sheehan, "such items, considered everyday necessities by Americans are luxury goods for Vietnamese."\(^ {19}\) As a result, most of these goods were beyond the reach of Vietnamese residents in the city.

The increasing lack of opportunities led to a financial strain for many Vietnamese residents in Saigon. Sheehan reported that leaders of the anti-American protest movement worried that "'traditional Vietnamese society will not survive the American cultural and economic impact.'\(^ {20}\) Sheehan and the Vietnamese people he
reported on, looked toward the “bar girl” as a representation of Saigon. Because inflation made it hard for many Vietnamese families to make enough money to live in Saigon, Sheehan reported that some Vietnamese women found it necessary to work at bars, providing company for GIs or as “mistresses.” He also related that Saigon newspapers often published stories such as the soldier “committing suicide, apparently out of shame, because his wife has been working as a bar girl.”

According to Sheehan, “the sight of thousands of their young women going to work as bar girls and prostitutes or simply walking down the street on the arm of some G.I. is galling to the Vietnamese.” Vietnamese newspapers published cartoons that addressed the impact of Americans. One cartoon showed a “new social structure” evolving in Saigon. “At the top of the social pyramid are the bar girls, below them come the prostitutes, then the pimps and bar owners and finally the taxi drivers.”

When reporting on Vietnamese sex workers, the foreign press did not monolithically victimize the Vietnamese. On the contrary, in the midst of inflation and changing conditions in Saigon, some reporters cast the GIs as preyed upon by Vietnamese women and bar owners. In February 1966, several papers introduced their readers to “Saigon Tea.” Bar girls used the drink to negotiate their company

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21 While this project does not include primary research on the lives of Vietnamese sex workers, it is still influenced by the work of Katherine Moon and her work on the relationships between American men and Korean sex workers (see Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 1997). Of particular interest to this project is Moon’s assertion that the personal relationships are intertwined with foreign relations. The personal influences the national and vice-versa.

22 Sheehan, “Anti-Americanism Grows In Vietnam.”

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
with GIs—a bar girl would sit with a GI if he bought these non-alcoholic drinks. At the end of the night, these women split the profit of these drinks with the bar owner. Consequently, Saigon Tea was never about the drink, but rather the mode of payment for women working at bars. Saigon Tea only made the news because GIs started to object to the price, not the practice. In February 1966, a single glass cost "160 piasters (about $2.70). For the same price, customers could buy two whiskies or five glasses of beer." This price had doubled since the previous month, which caused GIs to protest the high prices by refusing to buy Saigon Tea at the inflated cost. The price of drinks finally dropped in February 1966 when members of the U.S. Military Police placed five bars in downtown Saigon "off limits" and removed American service members from those facilities. When the MPs noted that the ban would not be lifted until the bar posted prices and stopped bringing unordered drinks that would go on a patron's tab.

In late April 1966, another article appeared in the Los Angeles Times claiming that the price for Saigon Tea had finally dropped to about half of what it was in February. The reporter said of this change, "thank GI Joe for this reduction in the cost of living in Saigon." While the tone of these articles are light, they are remarkable in the way they engage with the changes undergoing in Saigon. While

30 "MPs Place Saigon Bars Off Limits," Los Angeles Times, March 1, 1966.
some reporters and Vietnamese saw the American influx threatening Vietnamese ways of life—especially when reporting about “Saigon Tea” and bar girls—other reporters saw the Vietnamese as the beneficiaries of inflation at the expense of GIs.

Saigon as a Reflection of American Foreign Policy

Amid more anti-American demonstrations, notably a May Day march of 5000 people on the American Embassy, the relationship between Americans and other residents in Saigon came to a head in the off-duty lives of Americans. When not at work, Americans—most often depicted in the press as GIs—occupied many spaces around Saigon. American government officials and the foreign press lent ideological meaning to American leisure in Saigon. Speaking to an audience in early May 1966 at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, Senator J. William Fulbright delivered a speech titled “The Arrogance of Power.” In his speech, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee asserted that the United States currently found itself in a precarious position. With its involvement in Vietnam, the United States risked losing sight of its capabilities—winning the American War in Vietnam might be beyond the reach of the United States.

Fulbright argued that part of the reason for “our difficulties in Southeast Asia [was] not a deficiency of a power, but an excess of the wrong kind of power.”

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34 Ibid.
35 J. W. Fulbright, “Arrogance of Power,” May 5, 1966, Lecture at School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland. William Fulbright Papers (MS F956 144) Series 72, Box 26, File 9, University of
assertion of American force abroad, to Fulbright, could not help Vietnamese society, and the task of bringing a democratic system of government to South Vietnam "probably [could] not be accomplished by any means available to outsiders."\(^{36}\)

Fulbright’s speech not only addressed the causes of U.S. troubles abroad, but also alluded to the effects of American expansionism. Comparing the United States to other earlier empires, while acknowledging the “best of intentions” held by Americans, Fulbright asserted that the United States had a similar “fatal impact” on smaller nations that European explorers had on Tahitians and native Australians.\(^{37}\) He acknowledged that the United States has helped people in other parts of the world and done so with the best of motives. However, while delivering things like medical and industrial knowledge, Americans also “brought themselves and the condescending attitudes of a people whose very success breeds disdain for other cultures.”\(^{38}\)

Fulbright credited the negative impact of Americans in other countries to “bringing power without understanding.”\(^{39}\) Without cultural sensitivity and local knowledge, American actions in other countries inadvertently “shattered traditional societies, disrupted fragile economies,” and by showing the power and ability to exert

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 14-15.
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
force and give advice, caused people of other cultures to “lose confidence in
themselves.”

Fulbright expressed his views on American foreign relations, in part, by
utilizing gendered terms. When describing how the U.S. could use “the wrong kind
of power,” he mentioned that it could “result in a feeling of impotence when it
fail[ed] to achieve its desire[d] ends.” He then elaborated on this view, continuing
with a gendered metaphor: “we are still acting like boy scouts dragging reluctant old
ladies across streets they do not want to cross.” By using a metaphor of an
immature boy and presumably frail “old lady,” Fulbright at once attempted to critique
American power—a male presence either immature or “impotent”—while casting the
Vietnamese as women in need of help, but set in their ways.

Fulbright condemned the American presence in Saigon, citing Sheehan’s *New
York Times* article, when he claimed that “both literally and figuratively, Saigon
ha[d] become an American brothel.” As he rehashed several of Sheehan’s
observations, Fulbright seemed less worried about Vietnamese women than their
male partners. Vietnamese husbands had to “put their wives or daughters to work” at
bars or as “mistresses,” and Vietnamese soldiers killed themselves because of their
wives’ sex work. By referencing Sheehan’s article and calling Saigon an
“American brothel,” Fulbright cast the United States, and its foreign policies, as a

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40 Ibid., 15-16.
41 Ibid., 31.
42 Ibid., 31-32.
43 Ibid., 27.
44 Ibid.
corrupting force. His speech argued that because of the United States, Vietnamese
Women became sex workers out of necessity and soldiers survived the war only to
kill themselves.

Fulbright told the audience that the Vietnamese in Saigon did not passively
accept the changes that Americans had brought about in the city. He specifically
pointed to the demonstrations in Saigon that took place several weeks earlier where
"demonstrators burned American jeeps, tried to assault American soldiers, and
marched through the streets shouting 'Down with the American imperialists.'" One
Buddhist leader grouped the Americans with "the communists": both threatened the
independence of South Vietnam. This rejection of the American presence in
Saigon, said Fulbright, left "most Americans shocked and angered." The United
States "sacrifice[d] American lives and money" and the Vietnamese are "shockingly
ungrateful."

To better explain the angry feelings of some Vietnamese towards Americans,
Fulbright turned to the idea of "fatal impact." For Fulbright, the Vietnamese
protested because the power and wealth of the United States "reproach[ed] their
weakness" and "mock[ed] their poverty." According to Fulbright, the Vietnamese
worried "that traditional Vietnamese society [could not] survive the American
economic and cultural impact."

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 26-27.
49 Ibid., 27.
While critiquing the position of the United States in Saigon, Fulbright also argued that the U.S. did not set out to create this problematic situation. Returning to a corporeal metaphor to help explain the current state of affairs, Fulbright argued that no matter the intent American culture was going to disrupt Vietnamese culture—"an effect which we can no more avoid than a man can help being bigger than a child."\(^{50}\)

After Fulbright’s speech, the press and government officials seized on his comment about Saigon being an “American brothel.” While some members of the press essentially outlined his speech, others sought out people to refute his claims.\(^{51}\) For example, the *New York Times* interviewed Mrs. Oswald Lord, “a 61 year old woman who served in United Nations posts and ... on Presidential committees on the status of women, foreign aid and the International Cooperation Year,” and who had returned from a State Department tour of Asia. Lord refuted Fulbright’s claims about Saigon by pointing to the work American service members did while off duty.

"They’re not in town with the bar girls’ while off duty but are doing good, helping orphanages, rehabilitation centers and young Vietnamese.... That’s the way they spend their days off.”\(^{52}\)

Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, also disagreed with Fulbright’s characterization of Saigon during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting later that month. During that meeting, Fulbright spoke to McNamara about how people took offense at his use of the word “brothel,” and how it was “not of my

\(^{50}\) Ibid.


\(^{52}\) “Saigon No Brothel, Mrs. Lord Asserts,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1966, 11.
origin,“ although he did have it confirmed by members of “our aid program.” He went on to mention the different problems in Saigon—such as lack of garbage collection—and how he felt that problems like these were “inevitable when you inject such large numbers of foreign soldiers into [an] area” that is culturally different, and has people who have less money than Americans. To help solve these problems, he suggested moving Americans out of the city, as their presence “negate[d] all the effort in civilian development and pacification, and ma[de] it impossible to achieve it.” McNamara agreed that the US should move out of Saigon, and related that General Westmoreland agreed as well.

McNamara, however, did not agree with the characterization of Saigon as a brothel. He responded to Fulbright by saying that he had not been to Saigon since November of the previous year, but “it was not a brothel then, and I do not believe it is today.” In his objection, McNamara, like Mrs. Lord, cited the humanitarian efforts of off duty service members. He qualified his remarks by saying that not “every American over there is a welfare worker,” but he believed that not every American in Saigon was a “patrionizer of a prostitute” either. The meeting lightened in tone as Fulbright replied, “I would suspect that the Secretary of Defense

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 697-698.
58 Ibid., 698.
would not quite see the same side of life in Saigon that a newspaper reporter would.”

As the committee members laughed, McNamara said he would not “try to defend the newspaper reporters.” After more laughter, Senator Morse delivered the punch line—“how could you?”

On the more serious side, this committee meeting reveals an important characteristic about Americans in Saigon. Fulbright’s joke to McNamara about seeing a different side of Saigon, in fact, was quite true. There were two competing American discourses on Saigon emerging. One articulated the Saigon of “brothels” and social problems, and the other concentrated on humanistic aid and wholesome American values.

In the earlier years of United States involvement in Vietnam, the press and the State Department did not have much trouble constructing a wholesome version of Americans in Saigon. While violence and protests often made the news, access to the wives and families of American Embassy officials and service members living in Saigon showed American involvement in Vietnam to be about aid and support. But by 1966, that version of Saigon was increasingly hard to see. Until early 1965, around 1800 American wives and children lived in Saigon. In February 1965, President Johnson ordered the evacuation of all dependents in Vietnam after a steady escalation of violence, which included both failed and successful bombings of American gathering places in Saigon such as family homes and movie theaters. In a statement about the evacuation, President Johnson said, “we have no choice now but

59 Ibid.

to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our continued determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence." 61 Johnson's statement about the evacuation of American dependents carefully framed the evacuation of dependents in a positive way. Removing dependents from Saigon could have been interpreted as abandoning the South Vietnamese cause—it was no longer safe enough for American women and children—or because the United States was not willing to send families there, they were not committed to the project in the long run. Instead, Johnson phrased it in terms of "clearing the decks," a naval metaphor about getting ready for action, and framed the removal of dependents as part of the United States' effort to support South Vietnam.

A number of reporters followed the story of dependents leaving Saigon for their papers and magazines. The stories varied, but most of the women in these articles talked of their time in Saigon as a time of service—they were there to help the American and South Vietnamese cause. These articles also showed the ways in which the state and military establishment forwarded the same interpretation. For instance, when General William Westmoreland, commander of the United States forces in South Vietnam, spoke to a reporter about his wife's departure, he said that "she and the children have been good soldiers over here. But now it's time to leave." 62

Certainly, after dependents left Saigon, both reporters and State department officials wondered how the lack of American families in Saigon would (re)cast the American commitment to the South Vietnamese cause. One reporter claimed that the State department had debated sending dependents home for over three years, but had not done so because they wanted to use American families to demonstrate the United States’ resolve to assist South Vietnam. American women themselves backed up this interpretation of American families in Vietnam. In published interviews and private letters, American women often cast their presence in Saigon in terms of civic duty and supporting the American mission in Vietnam.

Reporters and government media looked to the remaining American women in Vietnam, mostly nurses, civilian employees of the Embassy, and contractors, to craft a wholesome representation of the United States presence in Vietnam. In 1966, the Army Pictorial Service released an episode of *Your Army Reports Today*, part of a series called *The Big Picture* about Saigon. To stress the welfare activities of troops, Episode 700 of *Your Army Reports Today* covered the daily lives of hospital personnel—specifically female nurses. Showing them at work, the film depicted women caring for American service members. The episode also followed the female nurses while off duty, as the narrator explains, when “many of the nurses [were]

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engaged in providing medical care and civic action programs,” as in the case of one nurse shown with appreciative Vietnamese children at an orphanage outside Saigon.

Episode 700 of Your Army Reports created a visual representation of McNamara and Mrs. Lord’s Saigon by providing viewers with a cinematic tour through a wholesome Saigon. The camera caught up with three female nurses in Saigon after work as they left the Third Field Hospital “after long and arduous on-duty…to see a little of the town.” The camera meets them in downtown Saigon where the three women go window-shopping, which “is the same anywhere in the world.” The narrator informs us that “despite the war, Saigon displays its share of modes and fashions” for the women to browse. The women walk down the sidewalk and encounter a street vendor as “the sights and sounds of the colorful city provide a novel and interesting experience.” They eventually walk by Saigon’s City Hall where they find that “the architecture of many of the buildings reflects Vietnam’s long association with Western culture.” We are then transported to “the rooftop terrace of the U.S. Army Officers Club,” where the women take pictures of the city.

While the trip to a clean, contained, and safe downtown was one way to spend the afternoon, Episode 700 suggests that there is another option—having fun on base. There, women might opt to spend their afternoons in the beauty parlor or in the hospital lounge. In the evening women can “catch up on the latest gossip,” talk on the phone, or write letters from the safety of their beds. To wrap up the tour of a nurse’s day in Saigon, Episode 700 directly addresses the idea of romance by showing a female nurse getting married to a male officer. “Even the U.S. Army goes along with romance as this army nurse is given timeout for wedding bells.”
Episode 700's version of Saigon—a wholesome place for Americans, and, arguably, by Americans—not only avoided obvious signs of war, but was also devoid of the aspects of Saigon that Fulbright and Sheehan had outlined. In this narrative, off-duty Americans were not paying Vietnamese sex workers for their services, but rather were helping Vietnamese children, or shopping and behaving just as they were in some sort of mythical version of the United States.

The June 1966 issue of Ebony Magazine gave a similar view of Saigon, only this time from a civilian woman's perspective. "Secretary on the Edge of War" profiles Brenda Lee, the 26-year-old social secretary for Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. in an attempt to show the "small army of dedicated U.S. civilians stationed on the fringe of war."65 The photos in "Secretary on the Edge of War" tell a story of Lee’s typical day, while leveraging the memory of terrorist attacks against American civilians to portray how the war entered Saigon. The result is a violent representation of American sacrifice meant to show the strength of the American cause through Lee’s commitment and enthusiasm for her job.

"Secretary on the Edge of War" juxtaposes current images of Brenda Lee with past images of violence against Americans. The article starts by showing Brenda Lee walking to work behind barbed wire and follows it with separate archive images of the 1965 Embassy bombing and a Vietnamese soldier with a gun across the street form the Embassy. This type of grouping—violent with mundane—continues on the next page. For instance, in one shot Lee takes notes in Lodge’s office, while in the

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next, the photographer captures the interior of the Embassy after it had been
bombed. 66

The next image shows Lee and "fellow Foreign service staffers" arriving for
another day at work "seemingly unaffected by grim reminders of [the] state of the war
in form of concrete barriers and MP guard," as they embody the "picture of carefree
bliss." 67 By describing the Embassy employees in this way, the author lent a sense of
innocence to the four women and one man in the image. Despite seeing evidence of
war, they are there to do their jobs and are not directly affected by the war in a great
way. The carefree attitude of the staffers going to work carries through the rest of the
images in the article as the photographs place Brenda Lee in different locations
around town. She braves Saigon's traffic on a "cyclo"—a bicycle-powered taxi—
browses on Nguyen Hue Street downtown and browses street vendor stalls while the
caption for the image describes a Vietnamese woman in an ao dai, and that Lee
"befriends" a Vietnamese child washing cars. One caption contrasts the level of
safety in Saigon versus the U.S.: "Brenda admires Vietnamese people's ability to be
happy despite poverty, [she] says in U.S. the same conditions would spawn
violence." 68 Another caption, paired with an image of Brenda Lee crossing a street,
mentions that the stares of the Vietnamese at her obvious African-American heritage
no longer bother her.

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 30.
After saying that she “enjoys [the] city’s slow pace,” the pictorial essay demonstrates the comfort Saigon offered Americans. It shows her playing tennis at the Cercle Sportif—“an exclusive country club for the French during [the] Indochina War”—and having lunch with two other American female civilians.\textsuperscript{69} That evening, she goes out on a double date with two Army captains. The article informs us of her dating habits as well: “she has no steady boyfriend, but dates regularly.”\textsuperscript{70} “Secretary on the Edge of War” also shows the comfort of Lee’s air-conditioned apartment as she “is about to be served coffee by her Vietnamese ‘housegirl.’”\textsuperscript{71}

“Secretary on the Edge of War” serves as a foil to Fulbright’s brothel comment by highlighting private domestic American spaces, the American women in those spaces, and representing war through non-controversial and conventional images of war and American sacrifice. The images of war (various barricades and an occasional uniform) and the descriptions of the war, such as the “distant sounds of artillery,”\textsuperscript{72} recall a version of Saigon from several years earlier, and written by civilians like Else Baker. By showing spaces like the Cercle Sportif, the images have a foundation in the French luxury that Americans living in Saigon earlier enjoyed as well.

Furthermore, when the comments of Mrs. Lord, Secretary McNamara, and Episode 700 of \textit{Your Army Reports Today} are combined, a clear ideology emerges behind this version of Saigon. The war has not ruined the city or its people. To show

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 27.
this to be the case, this group of statements and articles mobilizes a version of Saigon constructed by Americans living in Saigon and the foreign press before the American buildup started, and American dependents were evacuated. The presence of single American women who were free to move through the city serves as reminder that Saigon was still wholesome—their innocence, their “carefree bliss,” was not threatened. In addition, by expending images and copy on Brenda Lee’s dating life, “Secretary on the Edge of War” argued against the idea of Saigon as a brothel. In Episode 700 and “Secretary on the Edge of War,” Vietnamese women were not portrayed in a negative manner. Episode 700 contains a segment about Vietnamese women in the military; and “Secretary on the Edge of War,” while it focuses on the superficial, and comments on the ao dai and Vietnamese women as shop keepers and domestic workers, does not show the bar girls that other journalists like Sheehan described.

The wholesome American version of Saigon put forward by McNamara and “Secretary at the Edge of War” did not monopolize the debate over what Saigon was like. In early 1966, the Los Angeles Times ran a story that preceded Fulbright’s brothel comment, about how Saigon had changed, but which also employed the metaphor of the female body to describe the city. Robert S. Elegant in “Once Tranquil Saigon Scarred by War’s Fury” reminisced about a Saigon he previously knew, while describing the city through a gendered metaphor. The sub-title of his article sets the tone for his comparison—“Revisiting Former Queen of Eastern Cities Shocks Writer Who Recalls Old Beauty.” Elegant opened his article by comparing a return to Saigon after a protracted absence to visiting a “woman loved 10 years ago”
in an “accident ward.” He went on to describe how seeing the battered and “misshapen body...is almost unbearable against the memory of her former grace and loveliness.”

After giving an account of the traffic and familiar buildings, Elegant noted how many things were not the same, such as the decline Saigon’s French culinary culture, or the tall, new American-funded buildings standing amidst the old buildings. But according to Elegant, one thing survived the influx of Americans—sex. Even though the Diem regime shut down “opium divans and the more conspicuous brothels [it] could not whisk away the soft effulgence of sex which floated over the white-faced buildings and the sidewalk cafes. But today, the city absolutely reeks of sex—crude, commercial and instantaneous.” He portrayed the once “idyllic” Saigon River as a living being, as it differed from the one he remembered by the sounds of “the groaning of winches, the roar of tortured engines.” Elegant saw that the “ease and spaciousness” of Saigon had disappeared, and while he hoped these former attributes could return, he knew that they would not. He ended his article by suggesting that the city had died: “we shall always mourn the Saigon that once was.”

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
Other publications also engaged with the themes that Fulbright, Elegant, McNamara and Lord had inserted into the news. The Overseas Weekly, a sensational newspaper published in Germany and later in Saigon, briefly touched on Saigon. Overseas Weekly was known for critiquing the military establishment and was “adorned front and back by pinups, and crammed in between with lurid tales of scandal, crime and sin written in colorful GI jargon.”79 In June 1966, the paper ran a story about Fulbright’s comment and the conditions in Saigon. The article gives a military perspective on the debate between McNamara and Fulbright over Saigon.80 It quoted a “top army chaplain” as saying that the GIs behaved morally. A “high-ranking Vietnamese” added that Fulbright didn’t know what he was talking about.

An Army Specialist, a non-commissioned officer with technical skillset, on leave in Saigon said the city seemed like a typical GI town. However, the GI’s comment implies a change. Saigon, to the GI passing through on leave, seemed to be the domain of Americans—it was a GI town.

Another article in Overseas Weekly, “Saigon Still a Brothel? Storm Still Rages,” does more than put Saigon into context of any town with a high number of GIs or defend the actions of Americans and Vietnamese. While it provides a critique of Fulbright’s view of the city, the article begins with a few descriptive lines that

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80 Only part of this article was archived in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection. There was more on page six of the June 19 issue. “Saigon Still a Brothel? Storm Still Rages,” The Overseas Weekly (European Edition), June 19, 1966, p 1. 6 Folder 549, Box 8, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
capture the reader's attention. After quoting a proposition to a GI for sex, the article's author maintained that it was hard to walk down Tu Do Street, "Saigon’s sin strip without getting an offer like this."81 The article's introduction, because of its more sensational tone reveals the ways in which Americans mobilized the idea of prostitution for their own devices. Here, even though the words that followed the quoted proposition showed readers a different take on prostitution, the introduction used sex to pique the interest of readers. But, regardless of what the author proffered as the reality of the situation, the version of Saigon this article creates is one similar to Fulbright's account. When Fulbright talked about Saigon as a brothel, he also captured the attention of listeners/readers. He ultimately used the relationship between Americans and Vietnamese women, both real and mythic, to characterize the impact of the war on Vietnam.

While the two competing versions of Saigon permeated the American press, Vietnamese officials thought about other solutions to vice in Saigon. During a speech at the Saigon Lions Club,82 the South Vietnamese Welfare Minister Tran Ngoc Lien explained the circumstances of sex work in Saigon. Lien said the war was to blame for the increase in prostitution in the cities. "Simple-mannered country girls who have been living in a village all their lives find themselves completely lost in the cities," and because they have little job training, "they become easy prey for madams.

81 The Overseas Weekly (European Edition), June 19, 1966, p 1. 6 Folder 549, Box 8, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
82 "Vice Crackdown Seen in Vietnam." The Overseas Weekly (European Edition), September 4, 1966, 5. Folder 550, Box 8, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
These figures, the “madams and pimps,” drew Lien’s focus. He felt they should face punishment as they attempted “to push lots of virginal girls and chaste hearts in the path of sin.” The Overseas Weekly reported that Lien did not mention Americans by name in the speech, but that he blamed the reach of the vice generally on the “colossal amount of money spent for it daily by the foreigners.”

As a solution, Lien suggested the South Vietnamese government move prostitutes from Saigon to a suburban “colony.” Once in the colony, the women would be monitored and kept under medical supervision while they went about their everyday routines, like shopping, working at bars, and going to the movies. The initial plan called for the women be allowed to leave the colony without seeking approval from an administrator. Moving the sex workers would be just the first step rehabilitating the young women.

Over the course of 1966, McNamara’s version of Saigon started to fade. Lien’s speech made clear to both American and Vietnamese worries about the impact of the war on Saigon and its residents. While Lien did not explicitly blame Americans for corrupting Vietnamese women he still linked the U.S. presence to the problem, and Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. did not subsequently shy away from speaking about it. McNamara asked Lodge to answer a number questions about the

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
deteriorating conditions in South Vietnam, including anti-Americanism. Lodge summarized by telling him that “popular resentment against the American presence remains low” because many Vietnamese remember Americans are there to help them. However, he added “but the problem must be watched” as it could “flare up and...completely undercut our military success.” Even though there wasn’t much resentment against Americans, Lodge still was compelled to list the “principle irritants” such as

- the effect of the American presence on the economy—high rents, scarce taxis—
- and on the morality of the Vietnamese women, in other words high prices, bars, prostitution, and rowdyism. Some Vietnamese blame the United States for the prolongation and intensification of the war. Another theme is the destruction of Vietnamese culture, i.e., we are Americanizing the young Vietnamese.

To deal with these issues, Lodge and General Westmoreland worked to minimize the impact of Americans in Saigon by reducing the number of Americans (both military and civilian) in the city, imposing an eleven o’clock curfew, and only allowing “one-third of those stationed in the Saigon area on pass at any one time.”

The following day, the Los Angeles Times elaborated on Lodge’s comments. At the

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
time there were almost 18,000 American service members, spread across 82 different billets,\textsuperscript{94} and 3,000 civilians living in and around Saigon in addition to the 16,000 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base outside of the city.\textsuperscript{95} The paper reported that "most of the headquarters for various units" and the places GIs lived, were in already congested areas. The article, citing a "high officer concerned with the problem," claimed that were three major issues with the American presence in Saigon.\textsuperscript{96} First, Americans got stuck in traffic that made military operations inefficient. Second, the inflation caused Vietnamese people in Saigon to suffer. Third, the influence of Americans on the city strained the relationship between Americans and the Vietnamese people.\textsuperscript{97} Specifically, the article argued that the nightly activities of "drunk or abusive" Americans on Tu Do Street hurt American relationships with the Vietnamese.\textsuperscript{98}

To relieve the strain on Saigon, the U.S. constructed new administrative buildings at Tan Son Nhut to replace those currently in the city.\textsuperscript{99} About 15 miles north of the city, on a former rubber plantation, the U.S. military also set up an installation called Long Binh, which would provide additional headquarters and

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
house 60,000 troops.\textsuperscript{100} To relieve the busy Saigon port, the U.S. began construction on a new port facility up river from Saigon.\textsuperscript{101}

As the United States military and Embassy tried to move Americans out of the city, the press continued to report on the worsening conditions in Saigon. The sensational, GI-related stories from \textit{The Overseas Weekly} cast the city as a dangerous place. Terrorist bombings of GI billets led one GI to tell \textit{The Overseas Weekly} that he would feel safer in the new complex at Long Binh than in Saigon. The city was “noisy, smelly, crowded and dangerous.”\textsuperscript{102} One story from October 1966 wrote of GIs going to Saigon for recreation, where they visited “the Bars of Tu Do” and sought the company of Vietnamese women. The article split Vietnamese women into two groups: those who were outside establishments that catered to Americans, and those who were inside. The “girls” outside wore ao dais that made “them look like butterflies” and had “boyish” qualities—they were innocent. Inside “the GI joints,” however, women wore Western clothes because they could afford to—they earned more than other women.\textsuperscript{103}

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\textsuperscript{102} “GI’s Life in Saigon Ain’t Plush.” \textit{The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)}, November 27, 1966, Folder 499, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
\textsuperscript{103} “Saigon Has Girls, Sin, Viet Cong Spies.” \textit{The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)}, October 23, 1966, 12-13. Folder 499, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
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The dangerous world of Saigon that *The Overseas Weekly* reported on and helped construct threatened Vietnamese women in addition to Americans. Because *The Overseas Weekly* covered crimes committed by GIs, it also detailed some of the assaults against Vietnamese women. In an article titled “Booze, Sex, Money...,” the paper told of Truong Due, “an 18-year-old beauty with the delicate, porcelain features so many young Vietnamese girls have.” Near the Melrose Bar, a bar close to “the Plaza, one of Saigon’s biggest BEQs [Bachelor’s Enlisted Quarters],” she became “a victim of her tawdry world of booze, sex and money.” The paper first tells the story as an act of jealousy. Truong Due left the Melrose with one American, and her boyfriend Staff Sergeant William McQuaig found her “naked, in the hotel room with another American,” and allegedly killed her. The reporter did not follow up on McQuaig, but the article did include the reactions of other women working at the Melrose Bar. They said that Truong Due was too young and “loved money.” *The Overseas Weekly* later followed McQuaig’s court martial proceedings at Ton Son Nhut Air Base. According to the paper, McQuaig claimed that he and Truong Due were in his room together, but got in an argument and he accused her of being part of

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104 “Booze, Sex and Money...” *The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)*, December 4, 1966. Folder 499, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, 3.
105 Ibid.
the Viet Cong, at which point she used a handgun to commit suicide. McQuaig was found guilty of "negligent homicide, but let off lightly with only a one-stripe bust and a $300 fine."  

Because of the tabloid nature of The Overseas Weekly, it is hard to work out just what happened between William McQuaig and Truong Due. However, like many events in Saigon that only partially made their way into some sort of archived record, the actual events are only part of what created the city. The majority of stories about the interactions between American men and Vietnamese women reflect how those stories used the relationships between the men and women to talk about the war. In the instance of the reporting on McQuaig and Truong Due, the article described the latter as a young and delicate (thereby innocent) girl that had fallen "victim" to vice and the changes in Saigon brought about by the American presence. This was *before* she fell victim to the actual assault by the American service member: she was killed by "her tawdry world" before she was killed by a bullet.

However, not all articles about the city engaged so intently with sex and the relationships between Vietnamese and American residents of Saigon. Articles in *The Overseas Weekly* often utilized a sense of the unknown to describe the threats in

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109 "Sgt Fined for Girl's Death." *The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)*, March 5, 1967, p. 3. Folder 501, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri. This sentence might seem light, but it is not surprising considering the military justice system’s treatment of domestic violence cases during this time period. For a broad discussion of domestic violence in the American military, see Elizabeth Lutes Hillman, *Defending America: Military Culture And The Cold War Court-Martial* (Princeton UP, 2005).
Saigon. This convention arose in the frequent articles about Military Police (MP) ride alongs in Saigon. These nightly patrols drove through "dark streets" threatened by unseen dangers—an "ambush by the Viet Cong—a shot from the darkness, a grenade tossed into the jeep." There were also places where the patrols wouldn't go—at one point, turning around "three miles from the heart of Saigon," because ahead was "VC territory." The author explained that "machine gun companies" had to patrol these more dangerous areas, since the standard MPs were in charge of protecting GIs, not engaging Viet Cong forces.

A draft of a later ride along article gave a more in-depth view of city's threats. In this case, the threats also came from within the U.S military. This ride along revealed that the threat of bureaucratic repercussions translated into physical threats in the city. Late in the ride along, the patrol got a call that a vehicle by the Capital BEQ had hit a Vietnamese man. The MPs responded to the call, but had "strict orders to leave their hand[s] off any incident involving Vietnamese." The patrol was there for twenty minutes before the Vietnamese police arrived to help the man. One MP said, "we've got strict orders...to do nothing at an accident scene except call the Canh Sats [Vietnamese police].... If we lift one finger to help the victim and he should eventually die, we get the blame for it." This anecdote demonstrates a complex relationship between the authorities of two different police forces in Saigon. The MP

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10 "MPs with a Difference Face Shots in the Dark." *The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)*, December 11, 1966, p. 5-6. Folder 499, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
11 Ibid.
patrol said they could help keep people away from the scene of the accident, but could not help those most who needed aid. The unseen danger here, in addition to the traffic that initially caused the accident, was the threat of punishment from the American military system.

**Changing the American Geography of Saigon**

Stories that covered American life in Saigon after the American buildup started, like the MP ride along articles in *The Overseas Weekly*, exposed a changing geography in Saigon. Previously, articles about American leisure culture devoted most of their attention on the few blocks around the French-designed section of downtown Saigon. As more Americans came into the city, Tu Do Street and the surrounding neighborhood no longer served as the main hub of leisure that it once did.

Reporting about the changing landscape of Saigon, and the places where Americans went when off-duty revealed that the United States brought with it one of its own social problems—segregation. While the United States military did not segregate its units, off-duty leisure in Saigon appeared to be more segregated than other aspects of military life. Close living quarters in rural areas made off-duty segregation “in country” less of an issue, but the availability of different spaces in Vietnam’s cities allowed for the possibility of service members separating along racial lines—this was the case in Saigon.\(^{113}\)

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Khanh Hoi, or “Soulsville” as GIs in a Wall Street Journal article called it, was a four, or so, block area in Saigon, home to a “sleazy row of 20 bars that line the west side of Trinh Minh The Street, across from the Khanh Hoi docks.”\footnote{Selwyn Feinstein, “A Trip to ‘Soulsville,’ Where Negroes Gather in Saigon,” Wall Street Journal, January 4, 1967.} The reporter described the area as “a rundown wharf...on the wrong side of the Ben Aghe River from the downtown area.”\footnote{Ibid.} The bars in the area had names like The Playboy Club, Lido Bar, Three Sisters, Muy Juan, The Olympia, and Puerto Rico.\footnote{Thomas A. Johnson, “Negros in the Nam,” Ebony (August 1968), 38.; “Tan GI’s in Viet protest racial bias” Afro-American, October 8, 1966.; Jesse W. Lewis, Jr., “‘Off Duty We’re in a Different Bag,’ Patrons of Soulsville Philosophize,” Washington Post, April 4, 1967; Mike Davis, “Soulsville, Vietnam,” Afro-American, July 15, 1967.} Prices for drinks at these bars were cheaper than on Tu Do Street and the women working at the bars, according to patrons, pressured patrons less to buy drinks. Citing the U.S. Army’s Provost Marshal for Saigon, one author claimed the military was not overly concerned about Khanh Hoi. The Provost Marshal had called it “‘potentially rough’ but ‘really not a bad area.’”\footnote{Selwyn Feinstein, “A Trip to ‘Soulsville,’ Where Negroes Gather in Saigon,” Wall Street Journal, January 4, 1967.} The only special measures they took in the area was to have patrols made up of both white and African American MPs.

Likewise, R.W. Apple wrote for the New York Times that while “Negro and white soldiers can be seen together in Saigon bars, a more common sight is a group of whites headed for Tu Do Street and a group of Negros bound for the Khanh Hoi
According to Apple, Khanh Hoi's bars were "slightly down-at-the-heels...[and had] always catered to Negroes" even before Americans landed in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{119} Previously, black sailors frequented the area, and during the French Indochina War, black troops from Senegal had discovered the neighborhood. Apple found, however, that service members in Saigon "usually den[ied] that the more fashionable bars on Tu Do Street [were] segregated." Talking to an 18-year-old African-American private, Apple found that the young man did not know why he chose bars in Khanh Hoi, but "he conceded that he hardly ever spent nights out with...'white guys from the unit.'\textsuperscript{120} Other opinions of African Americans in Saigon varied, but mentioned that the women at the bars reminded them more of American women (Apple suggested that "some of the bar girls appear[ed] to be of at least partly Negro parentage"), and the music selection was more to their taste.\textsuperscript{121}

The downtown area was not only physically separated from Khanh Hoi, but also seemed socially separated to at least some African American service members. One visitor to Khanh Hoi said, "you can’t help but get the feeling...that you’re not wanted at those downtown bars."\textsuperscript{122} Another compared Saigon to Mississippi:

"Saigon is just like Mississippi.... It’s segregated. The hammers (girls) over there on

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
Tudo don’t want you around.” A GI interviewed for an article in The Nation stated that the conflict also extended to white GIs. He didn’t notice racism during combat, “but when you have to go your own way for a beer or to find a girl, you realize that Chuck [slang for white soldiers] isn’t your buddy after all.”

An article from the Baltimore Afro-American put a slightly different spin on the racial politics of Saigon. In detailing discrimination, it questioned the impact racism might have had on the goals of the United States in Vietnam. The author argued that “American-produced racism had been instilled in the hearts of the Vietnamese people,” and manifested itself in Saigon when eateries owned by Vietnamese and French restaurateurs would not serve African-American service members. One of the restaurants that would not serve African Americans, Le Guillaume Tell, according to other sources, was in Khanh Hoi. However, the article mentioned other establishments in the district, those with “lovely dark-skinned Cambodian hostesses” where “genuine soul music [could] be found,” and that treated African-American service members “like brothers instead of the plague.” The article quoted an Army Specialist, whose thoughts “echoed the sentiments of most of the colored GI’s in Vietnam” and in previous wars, by saying that “when

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125 “Tan GI’s in Viet protest racial bias” Afro-American, October 8, 1966.
126 While living in Saigon, Ann Bryan rented an apartment above the Guillaume Tell, and her address, and her letters, place it in Khanh Hoi. “Ann Bryan to Marion Von Rospach”, June 9, 1966. Folder 441, Box 6. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri; “Tan GI’s in Viet protest racial bias” Afro-American, October 8, 1966.
127 “Tan GI’s in Viet protest racial bias” Afro-American, October 8, 1966, 1.
discrimination comes from the Vietnamese and French who we’re supposed to be defending, you wonder where we’re at.”

While reporters wrote about Saigon’s downtown and Khanh Hoi as centers of American leisure, American officials still hoped to remove the majority of Americans from Saigon to help alleviate some of the problems their presence had caused. In April 1966, almost 36,000 U.S. service members lived in the Saigon area. To help stem the problems, General Westmoreland, as directed by President Johnson and the Joint Chiefs, stopped sending new units to Saigon until the ones currently stationed there could be moved.

Operation MOOSE, short for Move Out of Saigon Expeditiously, attempted to get Americans out of the city, or at least past the technical city limits, but it did not proceed quickly. The United States had to construct new facilities, move offices and people, and return seventy properties back to their Vietnamese owners. Depending on the source of the estimate, the United States government had to spend between $40 million dollars and $117 million dollars and two years to remove all but 7,900 Americans from Saigon and Cholon. Tan Son Nhut Air Base continued to house

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128 Ibid.
almost 20,000 service members. Despite this investment in time and money, the military still kept control of fifteen hotels in Saigon and nine in Cholon. One of these, the Brink BOQ (Bachelor Officers’ Quarters), the U.S. bought in 1956 for $1.5 million dollars and the other, the Ambassador, the South Vietnamese government gave to the U.S. The U.S. military, acting on the behest of President Nixon to make Saigon less inhabited by Americans to demonstrate how Vietnamization was working, undertook MOOSE II in the early 1970s. The second round of moves closed down more housing in the city, and changed traffic routes to remove military traffic from the city itself.

Moving troops out of Saigon aimed, in part, to reduce the chance of anti-American sentiment in South Vietnam. It also worked alongside measures to try to "clean up" Saigon. Nguyen Van Thieu’s South Vietnamese government decided to close down “160 cabarets and 47 dance halls” in late 1967 in order to, in the words of government officials, “diminish the debauched aspect of the city.” One Time magazine reporter saw this as a good thing, lamenting the difference between the Saigon of late-1967 to a previous version of the city. The reporter wrote that bars and nightlife had made “tawdry neon jungles of once elegant neighborhoods as the Rue Catinat of Graham Greene’s The Quiet American.”

133 Overs Politik, Dec 9.”, December 9, 1967. Folder 49, Box 1. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
135 Ibid.
136 “Cleaning Up Saigon,” Time (December 1, 1967), 27.
137 Ibid.
While moving Americans out of downtown Saigon and shutting down some of the nightlife in the city held the possibility of changing the environment of the city, the consequent build-up of the American presence outside the city only shifted the concentration of Americans from downtown to areas closer to Tan Son Nhut Air Base. In an MP ride along article that appeared in the Los Angeles Times, a reporter detailed the area near Tan Son Nhut Air Base. During the ride along with the MP "Machine Gun Patrol," the most heavily armed patrol reserved for dangerous areas, the reporter explored "an exceedingly dangerous road at an exceedingly dangerous hour." The patrol drove down Plantation Road that night. It bordered the "western edge of Saigon, connecting Tan Son Nhut air base with...Cholon." The author described the road itself as a previously normal path that was transformed after the Tet Offensive into "the most sinister strip of pavement in all Vietnam." An article in The Overseas Weekly elaborated that the "the entire Plantation district, between Tan Son Nhut and the Phu Tho race track in Cholon, is less than three years old." The Tet Offensive had demolished large parts of this area and Communist forces worked from the area because "it was so lightly policed, which today is why it has become such a rough and tasteless girlie bar strip."

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139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
Plantation Road, according to the reporters, served as a "natural front line between the city's defenders and Communists attacking from nearby paddies."\textsuperscript{142} Just a year later, however, Plantation Road's representation seemed to have changed in the press. Instead of a deserted street—a front line—it now became a dangerous place because of the bars located there, which catered to the large concentration of service members living at Tan Son Nhut. \textit{The Overseas Weekly} reported in 1971 that these bars were the direct outcome of the U.S. move to Tan Son Nhut. The additional billets near the air base were in an area where inflation had not raised rent, so it was cheaper for the military to house troops there, but also for bars to open.\textsuperscript{143}

The streets and bars of Plantation Road were constructed in the pages of \textit{The Overseas Weekly} as a dangerous place. One story told of an incident where ARVN troops shot at the Military Police at the Star Hill Hotel.\textsuperscript{144} Another article mentioned that at one time the only place formally declared "off limits" by the Military Police was the Sing-Sing restaurant on Plantation Road because of a shooting that had happened there.\textsuperscript{145} A year later, an article reported that "off limits" signs were posted in a particularly unsafe area off Plantation Road after an "angry mob" and hidden

\textsuperscript{143} "On the Plantation Road It's Still Jungle Law." \textit{The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)}, January 30, 1971, p. 2. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
\textsuperscript{144} "ARVN's Draw on U.S. Hardhats." \textit{The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)}, August 23, 1969, p. 3, Folder 505, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
\textsuperscript{145} "A Day in the Life of an MP." \textit{The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)}, 1970 October 24, p. 10. Folder 511, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
shooters targeted Military Policy. *The Overseas Weekly* also related incidents in private residences on Plantation Road. For example, a Sergeant Major shot and killed a Vietnamese woman in her apartment on Plantation Road.\(^{146}\) Another article claimed it wasn’t unusual to find several fights breaking out at the same time on the same block of the street.\(^{147}\)

The emergence of Plantation Road as a new host location for the leisure of off-duty service members, in some ways, reveals the ways in which Americans influenced Saigon’s geography. Plantation Road, as reported in the late-1960s, did not exist before the Americans arrived in Saigon. After causing major changes in the city, American journalists and politicians questioned what was going on in Saigon and eventually decided to move Americans out of the city. One of the results was Plantation Road—a dangerous place where Americans and Vietnamese still interacted, but not against the backdrop of a city that public memory might remember as peaceful or aesthetically pleasing. The same problems existed on Plantation Road that existed previously in downtown Saigon, but now the shared understanding of that area was not framed by the layers of meaning embedded in the older buildings of the downtown area. In other words, the American presence in Saigon eventually created its own meanings for the city.

\(^{146}\) “Sgt Maj Cleared in Girl’s Death.” *The Overseas Weekly (Pacific Edition)*, August 22, 1970, p. 15, Folder 510, Box 7, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.

\(^{147}\) “Overseas-pacific, Gia Dinh-police, Cathy Domke, Feb. 6”, February 6, 1970. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri.
The changes Saigon underwent in the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s reveals how gender permeates American foreign policy. Different factions of reporters and government officials used representations of American and Vietnamese women to question the effectiveness of American foreign policy and to defend the morality of the American presence in Vietnam. Ultimately, the figure of the “bar girl” shows how private and physical relationships between Vietnamese women and American men in Saigon got translated into textual forms, which in turn could be used by the politicians of the highest level to shape opinions about American foreign policy.
"Dear Dean," wrote Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. in late 1965, "I hate to add to your worries, but here is something...we're not doing...and I don't know what to do about it." ¹ At the time, Lodge was the American Ambassador to South Vietnam and he was writing to then Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Lodge’s letter came in the middle of a series of correspondences between Saigon and Washington about the role of American women in Vietnam. In these letters to the Secretary of State and the President, Lodge expressed his concern about his ability to gain influence with Vietnamese women and the diplomatic roles of American women in Vietnam. While Lodge’s correspondence reinforced the importance of American women abroad, his letters reveal much more about the diplomatic relationship between the United States and South Vietnam—they urge us to reconsider the ways in which American diplomatic relations relied on certain cultural understandings of gender.

Well after dependents left Saigon, Lodge found out that he had a problem. After several conversations with the wife of the South Vietnamese Prime Minister, Lodge concluded that she was not pleased by her husband’s position. More specifically, Lodge said that “like so many Vietnamese, she has not got a Western style, twentieth century patriotism, and she would like to have her husband at home in the evening.”² Lodge felt that she could be very influential to her husband and if the

¹ Henry Cabot Lodge to Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, December 14, 1965, Henry Cabot Lodge papers II, Massachusetts Historical Society.
² Ibid.
Prime Minister "[got] into a tight spot, [she] might make the difference as to whether he stayed in office or not." 3

Looking at his letter to Rusk, Lodge’s problem was not with Prime Minister Ky or his wife, but with the lack of American dependents in Saigon who could influence women like Mrs. Ky. “When I am asked whether we are doing everything we could do in Viet-Nam,” wrote Lodge, “I am obliged to say that we are not because there is no intelligent official American woman in touch with Mrs. Ky.” Lodge went on to explain that there was no diplomatic contact between American women and many wives of South Vietnamese leaders4, before offering a solution. 4 Lodge wanted to bring the wives of five U.S. officials back to Saigon to make contact with female Vietnamese leaders and gain their support for the economic and militaristic goals of the United States Mission to Vietnam.5

After complaining to Rusk about the lack of contact and influence Americans had with Vietnamese women in powerful positions, Lodge wrote President Lyndon Johnson. In his letter to the President, Lodge essentially outlined the same case—Vietnamese women were incredibly influential in Vietnamese society, and the United States needed its own set of influential American women to interact with them. Lodge’s letter to the President made explicit what his previous letter only implied. Lodge felt that he could not have the influence he needed with Vietnamese women.

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
Or as he put it, “obviously, there is a limit to what I can do where the ladies are involved.” Lodge argued that this was “a job for the Ambassador's wife. Nothing lower ranking will do.”

Lodge’s letters concerning the importance of the wives of high-ranking American officials in Saigon highlight two aspects of the American presence in Vietnam. First, they reveal the diplomatic role American women played in the relationship between the Government of Vietnam and the United States Mission in Vietnam. Rather than just seeing the presence of dependents in Vietnam as a rhetorical device for showing support for the South Vietnamese government, Lodge’s “problem” revealed that American women potentially forwarded American diplomatic goals in Vietnam through their contact with Vietnamese women. Second, these letters express a need for us, as scholars, to consider the ways in which understandings of gender influenced United States diplomacy.

Lodge’s inability, or perhaps disinterest, in connecting with the female Vietnamese leaders leaves us with many questions. For example, was there a gendered division of labor when it comes to diplomacy? Or, how did American gender systems influence American understandings of Vietnamese culture? We can start to answer some of these questions by looking at the results of Lodge’s letters to Washington. Because of Henry Cabot Lodge’s letters, the wives of high-ranking officials, including Lodge’s wife Emily Sears Lodge, visited Saigon for short visits. While in Saigon, Emily Sears Lodge would do things like host dozens of female

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6 Henry Cabot Lodge, to The President, December 29, 1965, Henry Cabot Lodge papers II, Massachusetts Historical Society.
7 Ibid.
Vietnamese leaders for tea. When South Vietnam was preparing for an election in 1966, Embassy officials met with her and a group of other women to discuss how to build support for the election among Vietnamese women.

Emily Sears Lodge’s activities in Saigon suggest that American women, at least those in powerful positions, had their own role to play in American diplomacy. This more informal role, seemingly only accessible by women, may have been in response to American officials attempting to understand how Vietnamese culture was structured. In his letter to the President, Henry Cabot Lodge called Vietnamese culture “matriarchal.” His need for wives of high-ranking officials was, in part, a strategy to adjust to his understanding of how gender and power functioned in Vietnamese culture.

Henry Cabot Lodge’s letters and Emily Sears Lodge’s return to Saigon open possibilities for not only understanding the relationship of Americans to Saigon, but also for the analysis of American foreign relations with Vietnam. The archive left by the Lodge’s concerning their time in Saigon makes clear that American diplomacy in Vietnam was rooted in the confluence of understandings about gender and culture—both American and Vietnamese. However, the sources presented throughout the preceding chapters, reveal the complex and varied ways Americans understood the people of Vietnam and the city of Saigon.

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9 Edward G. Lansdale to Emily Sears Lodge, August 12, 1966, Reel 25, Henry Cabot Lodge papers II, Massachusetts Historical Society.
Even though Americans held numerous views of what Saigon "was," their understandings of the United States' relationship to the city was often one-dimensional and simplistic. One of these simplified versions of the U.S./Saigon relationship came from U.S. government officials. When people like Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. and President Lyndon Johnson, discussed the meaning of the United States presence in Saigon, they often presented a straight-forward understanding of American-Vietnamese relations based in the city. On different occasions, United States government officials, as shown in previous chapters, expressed how the American presence in Saigon was to support the South Vietnamese. For example, by building the new Embassy, the United States demonstrated resolve and commitment to the South Vietnamese cause.

The government and personal archives of people like Henry Cabot Lodge do not provide us with complete answers as to the true understanding these officials had of Saigon and its people. However, they do provide enough evidence to suggest that United States policy makers understood American-Vietnamese relations through national boundaries and constructed divisions between what they saw as the East and West. Ideas of what was "Eastern" versus what was "Western" in Saigon appear throughout the chapters of this project and show a surprising resilience as they travel across media and time. From the earliest writings on Saigon, Americans engaged with an East-West binary when dealing with the city, often imbuing that relationship with Orientalist conceptions of Asian cultures. The East-West/Orientalist binary played out not only through representations of Saigon and the people living there, but also geographically. As Edward Said and others have noted, Orientalism is a term
that describes the way in which the “West” (Europe and America) has viewed the “East” (Asian countries), how these “Western” perspectives gets expressed through cultural products, and the institutions that have produced these views and products. In other words, “Orientalism” does not play out simply in the imagination, but also in the material reality of the viewers and the viewed. Orientalist thought creates and utilizes categories, such as “East,” or “Oriental” and “West,” that condense diverse cultures into homogenous labels. These labels allow people to easily create hierarchical differences between different cultures—for instance, the “West” is different from, and superior to, the “East.” Orientalist thought often falls into a pattern; “it present[s] the West as rational, progressive, adult, and masculine and the East, as irrational, backward-looking, childish, and feminine.” By convincing Westerners of the superiority of Western countries, Orientalism has been used to legitimate imperialism and the domination of peoples; it has also been used to view the Asian cultures as responding to “Western” cultures rather than producing/being responsible for advancing their own cultures.

Not all representations of Saigon and its residents engaged with Orientalist tropes, but many did. Early representations of the city portrayed the Indochinese residents of the city as animals (see Chapter 1). Later representations like Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* and Joseph Mankiewicz’s filmic adaptation (see Chapter 2) used less overt means of constructing a hierarchical relationship between

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 11.
East and West. Greene and Mankiewicz also built upon conventions established by journalists (see Chapter 1) who cast the area outside of the French-designed downtown as dangerous and uncivilized. The novel and the film both also portrayed Vietnamese women as available for the pleasure of Western men. When the American buildup escalated in the mid-1960s, the Orientalist tropes concerning Vietnamese women gained momentum in the figure of the “bar girl,” who came to represent not only danger to Western men, but also the failing of the American war effort in Vietnam (see Chapter 5).

Rather than engage with the East-West binary, a more productive way to analyze these relationships would be to treat the space of Saigon with more flexibility. In the space of this more flexible version of the city, people know each other and create different networks not bound by nation, religion, or other categories. Of course, these types of categories could still influence the relationships people had with, and to, the city; but not fixating on these categories might provide a more in-depth understanding of how people understood one another and the places in which they lived. Like it or not, Americans moved to Saigon and became part of Saigon culture, even if they were there for only a few years. People like Else Baker show how meaningful relationships evolved between Americans and Vietnamese living in the city, even in the face of a employer/employee dynamic that could have simply reinscribed a Colonial view of the relationship between American and Vietnamese cultures.

While the East-West binary runs through many of the sources in this project, another binary surfaces at times as well. In different instances, we see a barrier
emerge in the debates about Saigon between lived experiences and representations of the city. That is to say, policy makers seemed unable to cope with the symbiotic relationship between the representations of Saigon and Vietnam and the conditions on the ground. Take, for example, the debate between Senator Fulbright and Secretary McNamara about whether or not Saigon could be accurately described as an American "brothel" (see Chapter 5). This debate depended on the separation of what Americans experienced while visiting Saigon and what the press reported. On the one hand, McNamara, who traveled to Saigon and argued that Saigon had a sex work industry, but most Americans there were not patrons, used an argument grounded in the assumption that the lived experience in Saigon trumped all else. He had been there, so he knew the truth. On the other hand, Fulbright had read a newspaper article about the conditions in Saigon that led him to call the city a "brothel." The question should not have been what was "right," or which characterization represented the "real" Saigon, but that both lived experience and representation had equally circulated to construct the city of Saigon.

A more complex understanding of the interplay between American and Vietnamese cultures and how the meanings of a city are constructed might have led to different outcomes in the American trajectory in Vietnam. Is this to say that cultural understanding and a more fluid approach to how cultures interact would have changed the outcome of the American War in Vietnam? Not necessarily. However, if policy makers better understood the cultural clashes happening in Saigon, such as the struggle between Diem and Buddhists, they could have made better decisions as to help the people of Vietnam.
While policy makers should consider the impact of the cultural issues on foreign relations, they should also strive to better understand complex ideas about spatial relationships in order create better policies. Edward Soja's idea of "Thirdspace" is one possible starting point. Thirdspace is a term meant to encompass the way of looking at human existence through the combination of the lived and imagined experiences of a place. Soja argues that this is how people understand the world around them, and his term provides a framework for analyzing both social relationships and places. Had policymakers like Fulbright and McNamara considered the interaction between the representations of the Saigon and the experiences of the people living there, they might have not only resolved their disagreement, but foreseen some of the issues Saigon experienced later in the 1960s (see Chapter 5).

Examining the American presence in Saigon reveals the applicability of Soja's Thirdspace and shows how some people, to some extent, already understood the interaction between the representation and lived experience. During the 1963 Buddhist Crisis, Henry Cabot Lodge and Vietnamese Buddhist Monks used the public spaces and the press to assert their agendas in Saigon (see Chapter 3). As Malcolm Browne noted, the American press, on multiple occasions, also became part of the events they were hired to report on. However, the players in these situations seemed to view the lived/imagined relationship in these cases as causal—doing something in the public space resulted in its representation in media. A more post-modern view of Saigon (Thirdspace) would allow decision makers in the American Embassy to understand that the relationship between imagined and lived experience extended beyond this causality to bridge time and include other meanings. For example, while...
one meaning of Henry Cabot Lodge’s walk was that he was connecting with the people of Saigon, another was that the images of him walking through the city placed him in the shadow of French Colonialism. The previous meanings of oppression placed on the downtown section of the city; still existed in imagery of the city and in his asserting control over the space, he also inherited some of these meanings for the American presence in Vietnam.

This project has attempted to explain some of the ways in which Americans understood the city of Saigon. However, it is not, nor could it ever be, considered exhaustive. In his book *Postmetropolis*, Edward Soja compared the attempt to understand “lived space” as similar to writing a biography. There is no way that one could ever capture all the events, or their importance, in a single life because “there is too much that lies beneath the surface, unknown and perhaps unknowable, for a complete story to be told.” Because one cannot tell a complete story, Soja urges us to “selectively explore” spaces “in the most insightful ways we can find.”

Thus, while there are necessarily some limitations to this project, one of the greatest limitations lurks in the analysis of Henry Cabot Lodge’s correspondence about bringing American women back to Saigon in order to establish diplomatic relationships with the wives of high-ranking Vietnamese officials. To fully understand Lodge’s desire to influence Vietnamese women, a future step of this project would be to take into consideration how constructions of gender are culturally specific and to utilize Vietnamese sources. The current scope of this project does not allow for the analysis of these types of sources, but future versions of this project

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would need to address not only the ways in which the United States understood Saigon, but also the ways in which the residents of Saigon understood the United States.
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Vita

Education

  Advisors: Leisa Meyer & Hiroshi Kitamura
- Completed Ph. D. comprehensive exams (2006)
  Major field: American History
  Minor Fields: Cultural and Media Studies; Gender & Sexuality
- M.A., American Studies, College of William & Mary (2005)
  Thesis: *Consumer Under Fire: Vietnam and the Military Consumer*
- B.A., American Studies, Sigma Cum Laude, College of William & Mary (2003)
  Honors Thesis: *Race, Gender and the Marketing of Cool: Record Advertising in Down Beat in the 1950s and 1960s*

Presentations & Papers


Awards and Grants

- Arts & Science OGSR/Graduate Student Association Conference Funds, College of William & Mary (2012)
- Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute, U.S. Department of Education (2011)
- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Short-term Research Fellowship, Massachusetts Historical Society (2008)
- Southeastern Women's Studies Association Travel Grant (2008)
- Arts & Sciences Graduate Research Grant, College of William & Mary (2008)
- Research Grant, College of William & Mary, American Studies Program (2004, 2008)
- Phi Beta Kappa Virginia Northcott Brinkley Award for Outstanding Scholarship (2003)
- Batten Scholarship for Preliminary Honors Research (2002)

Service

- Graduate Student Representative, Pan-Asian Studies Working Group, College of William & Mary (2008-2009)
Teaching

- AMST 470: America and Vietnam (2008)
- AMST 470: Popular Culture in Modern America (2007)
- AMST 350: Classroom Across the Pacific (2007)
- AMST 410: Williamsburg Documentary Project, Teaching Assistant (2008)
- AMST 201: Introduction to Popular Culture, Teaching Assistant (2005)