

Outside Reading Assignment, Term IV

For this last outside assignment, you have two choices of what book you'll read. In each case, the book speaks to the ideas of cross-cultural interactions and the effects of recent wars. Depending on what interests you more, you are free to choose whichever you prefer of these books:

***Catfish and Mandala*, by Andrew X. Pham. Published in 2000.**

Pham is a Vietnamese American man whose family fled Vietnam as a result of the Vietnam War. Connected intimately to the South Vietnamese government, Pham's family had to follow a harrowing route to get out of Vietnam a little while after that government fell. Now about 30 and living on the West Coast of the U.S., Pham decides to bicycle around the country of his birth, trying to discover a sense of himself and where his "home" is. This is a great memoir that considers ideas of identity in a global world, and gives a personal, micro-scale glimpse into some of the ideas you've considered the past two years of MGC classes. Note: one of Pham's siblings takes her own life, and the book does discuss this; if you do not want to read it, that's completely fine and I'd suggest you choose the other book.

***Redeployment*, by Phil Klay. Published in 2014**

Published in spring of 2014, this collection of short stories revolves around the Iraq war of 2003-11. Klay served as a Marine in Iraq and, like O'Brien and Vietnam, draws upon his experiences there to create these fictional stories. Like *The Things They Carried*, the collection has a number of different voices and stories, and they cover different aspects of serving in the Iraq war or life upon returning to the U.S. Hailed by some critics as the most realistic and, according to the *New York Times*, "the best thing written so far on what the war did to people's souls." Given that most Americans have experienced this time period as if we were at peace, it's a great insight into what the war has meant to those most intimately touched by it.

NOTE: It's fine with us if you either buy your chosen book or get it at the library. Don't bother "gaming" it; these books are basically the same length (a bit over 300 pages - but these will read faster than your past two books, we promise!). Pick the book based on your interest.

DIRECTIONS:

- Rather than two essays of 3-4 pages, this time we're having you do one essay of 5-6 pages. That essay will be due **Friday, May 20**.
- To avoid possible procrastination, there will be two midpoint check-ins, when we'll ask you to read to a certain point and write a short reflection. Those midpoints will be 4/29 and 5/6.
- For those of you preparing for the AP, it's fine to skip these midpoints - please just talk to me in advance.
- Your paper will be worth up to **100 points**, using a rubric similar to those ones from past terms. You should assume your response will be assessed according to your thesis and analysis, use of evidence from the book, relevant outside information, structure, and writing quality.

Consider any of the following questions as you reflect (obviously, some questions work better with one book than others):

- *What ideas does it give about what it means to be “American”? Or how others view Americans?*
- *What ideas does it suggest about being an immigrant to America?*
- *Does it suggest anything about the diverse origins of the people of America, or our diverse interests?*
- *What ideas does it give about America’s impact on other communities?*
- *What insight does it give into American foreign policy motivations and effects?*
- *Do the ideas in the book reinforce the ideas of American exceptionalism?*
- *What lessons might it offer about future American actions, or its sense of itself?*
- *What parallels do you see between this story/book and material from this year’s history/English classes?*

Based on these questions, or one of your own making, **let’s discuss your thesis by Monday, May 16.**

Be sure to use plenty of specific ideas and anecdotes from the book, and use citations like you do in English and have done on previous papers.