
Black Vietnam Veteran, Trauma and Identity: Analysis of Historical Trauma in Spike Lee's *Da 5 Bloods*

Reni Renatawati¹, Achmad Munjid¹

¹Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

✉: renirenatawati2001@mail.ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

As part of the postnational study, this study aims to identify the trauma Black Vietnam veterans suffered in the present time and their stance as Americans in *Da 5 Bloods*. Using a qualitative method in collecting the primary data from the conversation that happened in the film, as well as finding secondary data from books, journal articles, and the internet related to the study to support the analysis, this study also used historical trauma theory by LaCapra to help define the meaning behind the conversation and construct a more comprehensive view on the traumatic aspect in history. Based on the discussion, this study finds that Black Vietnam veterans are still most likely to suffer from PTSD in the present time because of their mistrust toward the VA and other Vietnamese despite being an ally. At the same time, the experience Black Vietnam veterans had from serving their country thus defines their perspective toward the government and the US as a whole because of how they were and are treated. In the end, the experience from the war made their stance against the war and its cruelty become crystal clear.

Article information
(Filled by Editorial Management)

Received: 25 Apr, 2025

Revised: 19 Oct, 2025

Accepted: 21 Oct, 2025

Keywords: *da 5 bloods*; *film*; *history*; *trauma*; *Vietnam war*

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v12i2.106263>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/106263>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

INTRODUCTION

As a war that ended 50 years ago, the Vietnam War is notorious due to its nature and the fact that the US lost it despite its attempts to fight against growing communism in Vietnam. Starting in 1965 and continuing until 1973, when the US withdrew its military support from Vietnam, the war in which the US was involved was not solely fought by Whites; rather, it was a conflict in which people of color, especially Blacks, participated. In terms of percentage, Black soldiers comprised around 10-11 percent of the US armed forces in Vietnam, according to Westheider (2007). Hence, many would consider the Vietnam War a historical conflict without any racial segregation occurring between Whites and people of color.

However, digging deeper into its historical aspects, many parts of the war itself have been written not only from the perspective of the losers but also defined by Whites as the majority, with little consideration given to the involvement of people of color. In addition to demonstrating that segregation still exists even among US citizens, it also reveals that the history of the Vietnam War and its accounts made by the US have become less impartial, even in the present

time. In the same report, the reason why non-whites, including Black Vietnam veterans who participated in the military struggle, find it difficult to open up about their past is due to their lack of education and economic opportunity, as well as their skin color (Wood, 2016, p. 27). In other words, the marginalization of Black Vietnam veterans in expressing their trauma from the war arises from limited access to education caused by the low incomes earned by Black people.

Though nowadays the history of the Vietnam War has become more accessible, with diverse perspectives from people of color sharing their memories of the past through biographies, memoirs, and fiction, including films, these media rarely address the narratives of Black veterans in Vietnam. Relating film to the veteran experience in Hollywood, Beattie (1998) explained that, due to the culture within the Hollywood industry, where maximizing profits is crucial among numerous competitors, the messages in cinema have become negotiable to satisfy consumers' desires rather than conveying the truths of Black Vietnam veterans in this context.

Connecting historical narrative, trauma, and film produced in the US, LaCapra (2014) notes that to define a

more thorough historical narrative through trauma, the narration of fiction can be employed, as it comprises a structure and events that convey meaning to the audience. Hence, examining the meaning or signs depicted in a narrative reveals how trauma contributes to the historical narrative. Although there were many arguments about whether film is part of literature, the relationship between both can be observed through visual elements, dialogue, and narrative created in the reader's mind (Cruz, 2014, p. 39). Cohen (1979) also argues that, as film possesses certain images that depict meaning and words can produce meaning and images based on the reader's imagination, both literature and film share the same system of meaning despite differing forms.

Films then possess both close characteristics and opportunities similar to literature in explaining the relationship between trauma and history. This, in turn, gives Black Vietnam veterans a platform to share their experiences serving their country in Vietnam. Among the many films that use the Vietnam War as their backdrop, *Da 5 Bloods* prominently utilizes the perspective of Black Vietnam veterans in modern times. The film tells the story of four

Black Vietnam veterans who return to Vietnam to find the remains of their fallen squad leader and retrieve the gold they hid. It employs flashbacks to help viewers understand why they act as they do in the present. By depicting their trauma, struggles, and perspectives on their identity and their nation, *Da 5 Bloods* not only reminds the audience of the Vietnam War that occurred in the past, but also illustrates that the struggles faced by Black personnel in Vietnam continue beyond the casualties and racial segregation during the war.

Considering the explanations provided previously, this war was notable for its contradictions, both to the public and to the veterans themselves, as evident in historical accounts. Even if one thoroughly examines historical records, there may still be some bias or absence, especially concerning minority groups. As skepticism over the historical narratives presented by the US has grown recently, alongside rising civil awareness among minorities, a change in the historical narrative has become necessary, particularly when the past relates to trauma that can help define history through the experiences of those who firsthand endured the event as victims (LaCapra, 2014; LaCapra,

2016). Consequently, as *Da 5 Bloods* used Vietnam and Black Vietnam veterans as its primary focus, the film revealed how their trauma from the war persists even well after the conflict ended, reflected in their memories frequently portrayed in the movie, alongside their conversations and actions influenced by the past. It demonstrates that the film did not solely rely on entertainment purposes; it also serves as a tool to unveil the hidden struggles of Black Vietnam veterans in contemporary society.

The article presents the issue of historical trauma experienced by Black Vietnam veterans in the present, as illustrated in *Da 5 Bloods*. Furthermore, given that the discussion surrounding Black GIs and their service in Vietnam has been insufficient thus far, this article explains the depiction of Black GIs' trauma from the Vietnam War in the present day, and the portrayal of Black GIs' stance as Americans in *Da 5 Bloods*.

METHODOLOGY

Since this article focuses on *Da 5 Bloods* and the issue of trauma affecting the victims, or Black veterans in this case, the post-national perspective is implemented here to help redefine values that the US once

held, particularly through the eyes of minorities. The post-nationalism perspective in American Studies exists because of the need to reconstruct the value that the White majority has constructed through the opposition of the minority, because of its nature to recognize the existence of other people in the US, for the sake of redefining the old values the US had (Pease, 2001, p. 5). Therefore, this perspective exists to allow the Black community, who are minorities, to alter the perspective of the US shaped by the White majority in the past.

The theory of historical trauma is utilized to examine *Da 5 Bloods* and its correlation with past trauma in contemporary times. LaCapra (2014) notes that since history and trauma are seldom connected, this theory provides a framework for analyzing both through the event and its structure. By exploring specific traumatic historical events from the perspective of the victim, who is not confined to the traumatized, through documentary and radical constructivism or the narrative structure that encompasses performative elements, rhetoric, ideology, and political standpoint, this theory offers a more comprehensive understanding of

traumatic historical experiences.

LaCapra (2016) also explains that trauma often affects individuals in a manner that leads them to react repetitively and compulsively to their traumatic memories through nightmares, overreactions, and various other responses long after the traumatic event has occurred; thus, the victim remains in a state of acting out or is unable to relieve the past. In applying LaCapra's historical trauma theory to *Da 5 Blood*, the data collection process begins by watching the movie to gather conversation between characters and scenes that depicts trauma suffered by black Vietnam veterans, specifically the ones that represent acting out. Furthermore, the analytical process uses qualitative analysis by understanding the themes used in the narration or conversation (Creswell, 2009). It is continued by identifying both the absence (empirical lack) and the loss (which once existed but was taken away).

DISCUSSION

Da 5 Bloods is a film directed by Spike Lee, who used the Vietnam War as a backdrop and focuses on the experiences of Black GIs serving in Vietnam during that time ('Spike Lee Breaks Down Black History in *Da*

5 Bloods I Netflix', 2020). Emphasizing his statement that many of the historical narratives in the US are false, this film becomes a piece that depicts various facets of the historical trauma caused by the war, which endures in the present, as well as the stance of Black GIs as part of US citizens. These findings are discussed in the following section.

Black GI and Trauma in the Present Time

In *Da 5 Bloods*, PTSD is one aspect that depicts how the trauma brought from the Vietnam War becomes part of Black GIs' lives in the present time, which Paul represented.

PTSD and Its Relation to Mistrust toward Veteran Affairs

According to LaCapra (2014), the state of melancholic, impulsive, and repetitive acts of remembering and re-living the trauma is a part of the acting out or state of being haunted by the past. While connected to PTSD and its symptoms caused by exposure to traumatic events in the past that remain in one's memory in the present time, it cannot be denied that the past within that individual has not yet been worked through. Hence, by understanding the troubles of the past, it not only shows the

cause of the trauma but also opens the history through the eyes of the victim. In one conversation between Paul and Otis in the present, his trauma and its cause are still an issue, although the war has long been over.

Otis : Whoah, whoah, whoah. Blood, we're all broken
Paul : Not like me, man. Norm and I were holding those gooks back when the man bought it. I see him. I saw him die, man.
Otis : So what, you're Blaming yourself?
Paul : You don't even know.
Otis : Paul, when we get back to the world, I'd like you to come with me to a meeting.
Paul : Man, I don't do dat sit in a Circle whinin' 'bout your Shit Group Thing, man. I don't do it. Never have and I never will.

(Lee, 2020, 54:26 - 55:12)

The conversation shows the absence of being able to protect his comrades, which is caused by the loss of a comrade, leading to PTSD for them, especially Paul. Paul's personal flashback of how Stormin' Norman, his leader, dies during an ambush in front of his eyes (Lee, 2020,

2:06:34-2:07:04). Hence, through the combat condition where Norman's death is sudden, it is in line with a study by Dohrenwend et. al. (2008). Though PTSD and trauma have nothing to do with one's ethnic or racial background, the exposure to combat that Black GIs witnessed in Vietnam apparently plays a role in defining their trauma. Therefore, what Paul implied here was the reality that the exposure from constant combat in Vietnam, and Stormin Norman's death, affected the way he thought of himself and the VA, which did nothing and understood nothing about the war.

Another matter that is also shown through the conversation above did not end with exposure to combat, which caused PTSD; it also portrays the absence of the Veterans Affairs (VA)'s understanding in dealing with PTSD for Vietnam veterans, leading to the loss of trust toward the VA, worsening Paul's condition as a Black Vietnam veteran. Paul is shown to be fonder of talking to Norman's ghost than going to the rep talk that the VA provides for returning Vietnam veterans. His reasoning for not going to a VA is that it knows nothing about the war and only makes his trauma worse (Lee, 2020, 1:56:12). It aligns with the

condition many Black GIS undergo. A study explains that psychologists should start reconsidering the way they approach returning veterans with PTSD, where bonding becomes important to make them both feel accepted, as well as making a comfortable environment for them (Garcia, 2017, p. 59). However, for some other Black veterans, it is more than just finding the right way to be comfortable; it is about a lack of trust toward the VA that is controlled by whites, since they control the war itself (Westheider, 1997, p. 32).

Besides the exposure from combat, including witnessing Stormin Norman's death, the absence of proper understanding from VA regarding PTSD and trauma that black Vietnam veterans may worsen their mental condition in the present time. With the combination of personal mistrust and belief that the VA knows nothing about war, including some traumatic past, Paul shows how acting out is still being carried out by many Black veterans despite the long-gone war in Vietnam. Though the causes of PTSD are varied and cannot be defined with one view only, what Paul has been through shows that both the exposure to battle, the treatment he receives that does not meet the need for

Black Vietnam veterans, including their viewpoint for the VA, may also take tolls in shaping their trauma in the present and memory of war.

Mistrust toward the Vietnamese

Looking back at PTSD and its symptoms that might have occurred to Black Vietnam veterans in *Da 5 Bloods*, there was one concept of mistrust toward the Vietnamese that the movie portrayed that also needs to be examined. The melancholic state in historical trauma did not end in its repetitive nature; emotional explosion related to memories also plays its role here (LaCapra, 2014, p. 21). In this case, the Vietnam War acting out the movie also refers to the act of blaming and despising the Vietnamese people in the present time.

Paul : Hey, man, what the... what the fuck are they staring at man?
Melvin : Who?
Paul : Those two right there. Shit. Those two over there, they've been staring at us for the last ten minutes.
Eddie : Just chill, man. Just chill
Paul : Chill? People staring at me, man. Staring at all of us

Vinh : Those gentlemen just buy you this drink. They are formers Viet Cong and wanna welcome you all back to their country.
(Lee, 2020, 9:45 - 10:15)

Looking into this data through historical trauma (LaCapra, 2014), it can be determined that the loss and absence through symbolism in a fictional work can be determined through the narration and interpretation behind it. Hence, from the conversation, the lack of trust to the Vietnamese despite their kind remark cause by the loss of comrades, shown through Paul's statement that his suspicion toward the Vietnamese is because the people who buy the drink may be the one who killed Stormin Norman, their leader (Lee, 2020, 10:46 - 10:56). Along with this case, another datum also provides how different Paul with Otis and Melvin when it comes to Vietnamese. It shows how Paul's stance with the Vietnamese was as if Charlie or Viet Cong still existed in the present time, despite Vinh being on their side.

Otis : Where were we?
Melvin : What about right here?
Otis : But I think that Vinh should...
Paul : Mmm-mmm. Mmm-mmm. Vinh is out. He in

cahoots with Charlie
(Lee, 2020, 1:35:15 - 1:35:30)

Although it occurs later in the film, the themes of absence and loss discussed here remain constant: the lack of trust towards the Vietnamese due to the loss of comrades plays a significant role. Paul's viewpoint of the Vietnamese is partly rooted in the trauma he experienced, influenced by how his friends interacted with various Vietnamese individuals. While understanding generally that the suspicion between the US and Vietnam intensified due to a clash in perspectives, with the US embracing a futuristic, optimistic, and profoundly faith-based view of technology, and Vietnam characterized by patience, caution, and adherence to old superstitions, both sides struggle to amend their relationship. The attitude of Black veterans towards the Vietnamese was more positive compared to that of White veterans, as they witnessed the inequality faced by the Vietnamese (Westheider, 1997).

It stems from the concept of being oppressed by the White majority and the perception of the war as a racist conflict against the Vietnamese, aligning with a statement by

Brown, who observed how White personnel lower the Vietnamese through their actions (Terry, 1992, p. 319). The recurring emotional breakdowns Paul exhibits not only depict his struggle to process the trauma of witnessing death in the past but also indicate that his mistrust and anger towards the Vietnamese are not rooted in hatred; rather, encountering them serves as a stressor for his mental condition.

Black Vietnam Veterans and Their Perspective as US Citizens

Besides showing the trauma that persists in the present time, *Da 5 Bloods* also brings up the issue of being part of US citizens from the perspective of Otis, Paul, Eddie and Melvin as Black veterans returning to Vietnam. Throughout their journey, it is revealed that their stance as Americans changes not only because of their race but also because of the war.

Doubt and Mistrust toward the US government and the Nation

The involvement of Black GIs in the Vietnam War has a similar yet distinct perspective on the conflict. Although their participation in the war is not clearly portrayed, a statement later in the film mentions that they are

being forced to join the war because white college students were evading the draft (Lee, 2020, 36:52 - 37:02), suggesting that they were not privileged enough to escape recruitment to Vietnam. To worsen their condition as Vietnam veterans, one dialogue raises questions about their government and nation.

Paul : On the real man, we got back from Nam, we didn't get nothing but a hard damn time
Eddie : Folks called us Baby Killers
(Lee, 2020, 7:26 - 7:46)

Taking the data above to the theory and historical account, many reports of returning Vietnam veterans dealt with prejudice from the US public because of the war. The cause of the assumption that the war was unjust and immoral appears because of the damage the US inflicted on Vietnam, which was portrayed by the media, thus leading to a prominent hatred of returning veterans, even of the Black GIs (Randolph, 2021). For example, Ford described how people considered his service in Vietnam dirty despite some encouragement and relief from his family and friends. In the same book, Kirkland also mentioned how people around him called him crazy for serving in Vietnam (Terry, 1992). Though the scene above did not yet say

anything about racism that often conflated with the condition Black GIs had, their perspective in that dialogue showed that being unappreciated was one part of being a Vietnam veteran despite one's racial background or that, as written In some reports, there were fear in some Black veterans that the prejudice for them might occurred concerning the racial and anti-war riot back in the US during their service (Westheider, 2007, p. 161).

Their stance, being doubtful of the government and the nation, cannot be separated from the background that shapes their understanding. Since historical trauma also relies on the memory and the past that shape an individual into who they are, flashbacks from memory also play a role in the way it may affect their consciousness, changing their identity or even perspective on something. In one flashback, racism plays a role in fostering mistrust toward the government and nation, as seen through the character named Stormin' Norman.

We ain't ripping off Shit! Who feel like they're ripping something off? WE was the very first People to die for this Red, White and Blue. Yea that's right. It was a soul brother, Crispus Attucks at the motherfuckin' Boston Massacre. We been

dying for dis Country from the very get, hoping one day they'd give us our rightful place. All they give us was a foot up our black Asses. Well, fuck that. I say The USA owe us! We built dis Bitch.

(Lee, 2020, 26:51 - 27:54)

As the leader of the platoon, Norman shapes the understanding the surviving veterans had, and one of his views, which his fellow shares heavily in the present, can be seen through their attempt to repossess the gold for their kin.

According to the statement, Norman's point pertains to the social condition of the Black community in the US. The awareness of being used by the government negatively increases as the civil movement gained momentum. Though in the process of being part of US citizens during the Vietnam War, the Black community are allows to be a high-ranking officer or join the war for economic or career influence, they have to fight for their place amongst other white officers because of the hesitation happened within the military caused by the probable threat despite the equivalency in aims and rights (Randolph, 2021; Westheider, 1997). Even during the fight against North Vietnamese for what many believe as patriotism and the attempt to be admitted as part

of the US citizens, the government's approach to the war and its use of manpower that relies on the economic and educational status of the population, make many people from the Black community in an unfavorable position have no other choice but to be sent to Vietnam as an Army infantry (Philips, 2012, p. 198).

This condition is contradictory to the ideal of equality that the US offers as a nation, as believed by many people, as a nation that gives equality to its people. Sending off mostly Black people to the Army, where they are stuck in the infantry due to a lack of knowledge required in other sections of the military, adds to the rising casualties Black GIS suffer, thus making the war in Vietnam and the intentions of the US government questionable to White, including Black communities. Norman's statement about having a foot up their Black ass indicates that Black GI involvement in the war that is unjust does not stop in the racism; it has a relation to the way the government send them to fight or die in a battle in Southeast Asia.

In addition to what is related to how the government treated Black GIs, it is depicted in one narration that Paul does. Though it is meant

to be a narration directed to the audience, he explains how many of the US military policies take effect in the growing mistrust the Black GI has, even in the present time.

This fucking place here... Bathed me in that lymphoma Agent Orange herbicidal stew. Those army bastards, they scorched the earth with it. spray that shit in the air and the water, my bloodstream, my cells, my DNA, and my motherfucking soul! But I ain't dying... from that shit. You will not... kill Paul. You hear me? Hear me.

You will not kill Paul. And the US government will not take me out. I will choose, when, and how I die. You dig, you couldn't kill me then, with three tours, you sure in the fuck can't kill me now.

(Lee, 2020, 1:55:10 – 1:58:06)

Several key points that reveal the cause of mistrust in both the government and the nation can be highlighted. First is the usage of Agent Orange or chemical herbicide under government surveillance. Though the use of Agent Orange is to kill the plantations in Vietnam that the enemy uses to conceal themselves during the ambush, it had an impact on people who were exposed to the substances in both the short and long term. According to Westheider (2007), not only

does the government pour more than 1 ton per gallon of Agent Orange into Vietnam and other regions near it, but they also deny the effects of the chemical that the veterans suffer. Specifying what Paul says about Agent Orange that remains in his body, it is related to how the government treats Vietnam veterans who are exposed to the chemical. Though the government is aware of the effects Agent Orange have on their military personnel in Vietnam and is willing to give compensation to them, there is a record stating that the government do not ask for the veterans that they are indeed exposed to the chemical through many procedures, only later to be proved ineligible by the government (Wilcox, 2011).

The condition from Agent Orange thus leads to the second aspect, which is the complete belief that the US is the one that also took part in the killing plot in Vietnam. The interpretation of Paul's statement on the government can be seen through his service. Early in the movie, he tells us that he serves for three tours, from 1967 to 1971, and he survived all of the combat and operations thrown by the government, including Operation Junction City (Lee, 2020, 17:52-18:04), an operation to destroy North

Vietnamese forces near the Cambodian border. While this operation is said to be necessary to cut their supply lines and communication and disrupt their military power, it is shown that in the fights, especially for Black GIs, they suffered around 14 per cent of casualties despite the falling number after 1967 (Westheider, 1997, p. 13). Therefore, Paul's statement that the Government cannot kill him is connected to the number of casualties and the strategy the government threw to US military personnel in Vietnam, which added to the turmoil even amongst Black GIs in Vietnam.

By combining all the explanations above and focusing on the data, the absence that caused Black GIs to lose trust in the government and their nation comes from the feeling of not being treated as equals in the war that had been promised in the past. As LaCapra (2014) explained, the lack of a strong foundation affects the fundamental beliefs that people hold, which in this case applied to Black Vietnam veterans. Although a counterargument may arise from patriotism and the need for economic and career stability, this presents a contradiction due to the lack of equality value that the government and

the nation show towards these Black veterans.

This inequality is evident in how they are treated during and after the war from the perspective of the victims. From being overlooked for their service and labelled as baby killers despite fulfilling their roles, to facing mistrust from their fellow White Americans both in the military and during the war, and even becoming victims of Agent Orange and the government's military strategies, all these factors contribute to the loss of trust among Vietnam veterans as depicted in the film. This situation was not only traumatic for Black individuals who were sent to Vietnam without appreciation, but it also represents a paradox in which they became sacrificial offerings by the US for the sake of freedom from communism.

Hatred of Conflict: Black Veterans Against War

The Vietnam War and Black veterans had a rather unique relationship. Not only did it develop their identity as part of the Black community, but it also changed their perspective on war. Though it was not explicitly stated, two events showed how Black veterans saw the war as an unnecessary cause. In a discussion between Black veterans after meeting

with a handicapped Vietnamese boy who begged for money, Eddie's comment depicts his distaste for war.

Melvin : Now he got more in his damn cup than I got in my wallet.

Eddie : Man, they'll take you

Paul : Shit.

Eddie : It's a damn shame

(Lee, 2020, 7:11-7:21)

While in the end, the US mostly relied on their and their allies' military power, they also attracted the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people by providing humanitarian aid. One of the aids the US provided was a medical civic action program (MEDCAPS) and medical readiness training exercises (MEDRETES) where medics from the US were present to treat the Vietnamese from the impact of the war (Jenkins, 1988, p. 4). While the MEDCAPS were present as it was for the Vietnamese, the impact was completely the opposite, as despite its attempt to prevent aggressive intervention and attract Vietnamese hearts, the impact on the US and Vietnam was relatively minimal, as the program's potential is poor in execution (Wilensky, 2004, p. 129). This then led to further struggle for better health examinations for the Vietnamese

and the morale of the war. Adding to the argument before, Black GIS and their opposition to the war occurred because of a critical realization that the war was unjust for the Vietnamese and Black people, who also struggled with discrimination by the White people, which came from Mohammed Ali and Martin Luther King Jr. (Cortwright, 1990, p. 52). Hence, as Eddie exclaimed, it indicates that both the war and its medical program, which is done in Vietnam, do no good for other Vietnamese who are also victims of the war.

In another event, symbolism described how the war should never have happened in the first place. In this case, symbolism provided a deeper meaning of certain ideas, emotions, and specific events. Relating to LaCapra (2014), the significance of symbolism with historical trauma highlights the absence and loss that must be revealed to understand the context behind an event as depicted in narration. In one conversation in the film, Eddie compared the past and present to argue how the war was supposedly conducted back then.

Otis : Wow! Will you look at this?

Melvin : It's a whole different place.

Paul : I can't believe this

Eddie : They didn't need us. They should've just sent Mickey D's, Pizza Hut, and The Colonel, and we would have defeated the V.C. in one week.

(Lee, 2020, 17:42-17:52)

By using chain restaurants to defeat V.C., Eddie indicates that the military approach the US government took in the past was unnecessary, as Vietnam could have developed to a completely different place compared to the past, especially when connected to the purpose that put the US in Vietnam in the first place. Following the historical record, while the US and its involvement in the Vietnam War was because of the emergence of communism during the Cold War and to have a more democratic nation, the fight in Vietnam also was the chance the US took because of the possibility for building a free market within the country, though it is not the sole aim for the US to infiltrate Vietnam in the beginning (Dole, 1995, p. 38). Because of the thought that Vietnam was a poor third-world country that would not survive without the help of the US, it became an intriguing approach for the US to intervene.

Although the military approach is meant to be

limited, the war lasts longer than the government expected. Moreover, though the Black community may find the war as an opportunity to prove themselves as Americans and improve both their economic and career prospects, another narrative by Paul portrays how Black veterans saw themselves in the war, as well as how the war was a ruthless act.

See, we're bloods. We got a bond. We fought... in a immoral war that wasn't ours, for rights.. for rights we didn't have. They're my brothers

(Lee, 2020, 2:10:10-2:10:32)

Two points correlate with one another. When Paul says that the war is an immoral war that was not their doing, despite the growing spirit to serve the US during its early involvement, the Vietnam War is a war without purpose and importance for US society, especially the Black community. Referring to history, the change in view Black veterans have from pro to against the war has a relation with the awareness coming from civil awareness back in the US, where the opportunities and equality that the US said to them as second-class citizens were absent (Westheider, 1997, p. 132). Furthermore, Philips (2012) explains that despite the offers to have a stable

income and career in the military, racial segregation still exists in positions, military policies, including those of other White officers. In the war itself, many times Black veterans explain their relationship with Whites are not good because of racial segregation happening in Vietnam that often put both into a fight amongst themselves, as well as putting an awareness that the war in Vietnam are a war for Whites from the way, as Edward states, because of how some individuals put a Confederate flags, a flag that was symbolize a white supremacy and slavery (Terry, 1992, p. 18).

Hence, judging from the conversation and narration, the loss of faith in the good cause of war happens due to the absence of both the purpose of the war that Black GI feels, as well as the acknowledgement of Black GI for their service. Since LaCapra (2014) argues that a perspective can be defined through events and structures that still concern people in the present time, the conversation that Eddie brings about the war being shameful, comparing the military aggression in war with the chain restaurant to defeat the enemy, including Paul's remark of the war as immoral thus reflecting a truth that the war

is worth to be against at because of how it is inhumane for the Vietnamese, as well as how it did not put Black community in a better situation despite being sent to a war that is considered as not their war.

CONCLUSION

The answer to the trauma that persists in the present time with Black Vietnam veterans in *Da 5 Bloods* is depicted through the mistrust toward the VA and other Vietnamese, despite being their partners during and after the Vietnam War. It is proven to be caused by the absence of understanding the Black Vietnam veterans' experience thoroughly, even after losing Stormin' Norman. On the other hand, Black Vietnam veterans' stance as Americans is portrayed through their loss of trust in the nation and government because of the absence of equality that Black Vietnam veterans feel as part of the US citizens; their stance as veterans who lose the faith toward war as the answer in Vietnam came through the absence of shared purpose and the acknowledgement for the service that Black veterans can feel. This article contributes to developing an extensive understanding of Vietnam War history through the eyes of

Black Vietnam veterans who are often ignored in US history.

REFERENCES

Beattie, K. (1998). The Vietnam Veteran as Ventriloquist. In *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (pp. 58-96). New York University.

Belhaj, R. E. M. (2024). Taking on the Black Trauma of Vietnam: Spike Lee and *Da 5 Bloods*. *Leiden Elective Academic Periodical*, (4), 11-24.

Cohen, K. (1979). *Film and fiction: the dynamics of exchange*. Yale University Press.

Creswell, John W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publication.

Cortwright, D. (1990). Black GI Resistance During the Vietnam War. *Vietnam Generation*, 2, 51-64.

Cruz, D. T. (2014). Literature and Film: A Brief Overview of Theory and Criticism. In *Postmodern Metanarratives: Blade Runner and Literature in the Age of Image* (pp. 38-49). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lee, S. (Director). (2020). *Da 5 Bloods* [Film]. Netflix.

Dohrenwend, B. P., et. al. (2008). War-related posttraumatic stress disorder in Black, Hispanic, and majority White Vietnam veterans: The roles of exposure and vulnerability. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 21(2), 133-141. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20327>

Dole, B. (1995). Shaping America's Global Future. *Foreign Policy*, 28-43.

Garcia, H. A. (2017). If you've never been there you wouldn't understand: The evolutionary reasons for veteran mistrust. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*, 11(1), 53-62. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1037/ebs000076>

Jenkins, E. (1988). Medical Civic Action Programs (Medcaps) And Medical Readiness Training Exercises (Medretes) As Instruments of Foreign Policy.

LaCapra, D. (2014). *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

_____. (2016). trauma, history, memory, identity: what remains? *History and Theory*, 55(3), 375-400. Retrieved from

<https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10817>

Levin, E. C. (2021). An Exploration of Implicit Racial Bias as a Source of Diagnostic Error. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 81(4), 496-510. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1057/s11231-021-09327-6>

Pease, D. (2001). Dislocations: Transatlantic Perspective on Postnational American Studies. *The 49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies*, (8).

Philips, K. L. (2012). *Machine gun blues: Black America and the Vietnam War*. In *War! What is it Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (pp. 188-227). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Randolph, J. (2021). *Remembering the Experience of War: A Sensory Study of the Vietnam War and Collective Memory* (Master's Thesis). Fort Hays State University. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.58809/ABB T8412>

Still Watching Netflix. (2020). Spike Lee breaks down Black History in Da 5 Bloods I Netflix.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy0DKN3gTM8>.

Terry, W. (1992). *Bloods: An Oral History of The Vietnam War by Black Veterans*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Westheider, J. E. (1997). *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War*. New York: New York University Press.

Westheider, J. E. (2007). *The Vietnam War*. Greenwood Press.

Wilcox, F. A. (2011). *Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Wilder, S. A. (2024). Da Time is Out of (a Spike Lee) Joint: Haunting Genre as Late Style in Da Sweet Blood of Jesus and Da 5 Bloods. *Black Camera*, 16(1), 162-180. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2979/blc.00036>

Wilensky, R. J. (2004). *Military Medicine to Win Hearts and Minds: Aid to Civilians in the Vietnam War*. Teas Tech University Press.

Wood, J. A. (2016). *Veteran narrative and the collective memory of the Vietnam War*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.