

The Quiet American and Bloods are two different accounts of the Vietnam War in various stages of the war's development. Both portray a different approach to warfare by diverse types of American people.

The contrast in the cultural backgrounds of the main characters of each book dramatically changes the way in which the Vietnamese soldiers view them as enemies. The state of American involvement is increased from a covert type in *The Quiet American* to an active military engagement in *Bloods* which makes it difficult to compare the two as equals. One theme that is synonymous in both works is race played a large role in the interaction of these Americans with the Vietnamese people they encountered and even their own allies. The Quiet American is basically a novel about a U.S. government agent who is in Vietnam in the 1950s while the French are at war with the Viet Minh. The agent, Alden Pyle, is a Harvard educated white upper class man. His mission is to economically support a "Third Force".

This private army battles both the communist Viet Minh and the French colonialists. Communism and colonialism are ideals that are not accepted by his morals and superiors and eventually caused his death. Bloods is simply a collection of stories narrated by African-American Vietnam veterans. The characters in Bloods have very different morals and upbringings than those displayed by Pyle. Most of these men returned to homes that did not improve because of the struggles they survived. Despite all of the obstacles they faced many of these men became decent, successful people. Race is quite clearly a factor in the Pyle's job and how his death is explained to the world media. His covert actions were kept a secret in order not to create an international incident. The main character, a British reporter states, "It wouldn't have done to cable [the newspaper] the details of his true career, ... for it would have damaged Anglo-American relations, the Minister would have been upset. The Minister had a great respect for Pyle - Pyle had been had taken a good degree in - well on of those subjects Americans can take degrees in" (Greene21). As you can see from this text his educational background also plays a part in him being able to have a high profile job. His position made his confrontation with the enemy less exposed. So from the beginning he had an advantage over the men in Bloods, because having a college education was not something that was really available to many African-Americans of the time.

Most of the narrators in Bloods were poor and had little chance for college educations. Emmanuel Holloman says, "I only finished the eighth grade... but I got my GED by the time I graduated and shipped out to Vietnam" (Terry79). This limited them to being common soldiers as opposed to government agents like Pyle was. The color of their skin was the basis for them to be placed in more dangerous roles than whites. According to Richard Ford, "Nha Trang was like a beach, a resort... They were playing football and basketball. Nobody walked around with weapons. They were all white. And that's what freaked me out. All these white guys in the rear" (Terry36). It is obvious to see that because of their color these men did not have the same privileges as other soldiers of other races. Their enemies viewed the characters from these two books in unlike ways. Pyle was allowed to mingle among Vietnamese society under the guise of being employed by the American economic aid mission. His affluent nature and Ivy League education helped cast little suspicion from the authorities on his activities. His cover occupation allowed him to move somewhat freely through out the country, but not always out of harms way. His enemies were wary of him but they did not openly attack him as in war, because his goal was not easily interpreted. The true mission he was to accomplish was kept hidden from close friends and acquaintances in order for it to be completed. Pyle's life was so secretive that it allowed him not to be viewed as a threat to people in Vietnamese society. The narrators in Bloods were often openly attacked and ambushed. Moving through the jungles of Vietnam was no easy task. The territories they crossed were dangerous, filled with disease, poisonous animals, and enemy soldiers.

Their enemies were terrified of their warrior like performance and did not wish to engage African-American soldiers unless they had to. African-Americans were viewed by the Viet Cong to be the most ferocious fighters the Americans had. The war in which they fought was openly publicized and often on television. There was no doubt in the minds of Vietnamese society that these men were in their country for only one purpose, to kill. The two styles of American warfare in these books are very difficult to compare. The similarities in both works are the cultures of the characters and the impact that race and education make on their positions in the Vietnam War. These factors also play a part in how they were considered by the people they were fighting. Race had a huge impact on the way the characters of these two books interrelated with Vietnamese people and their own associates.

Works Cited  
Greene, Graham. *The Quiet American*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002  
Terry, Wallace. *Bloods*. New York: Balantine, 1985

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