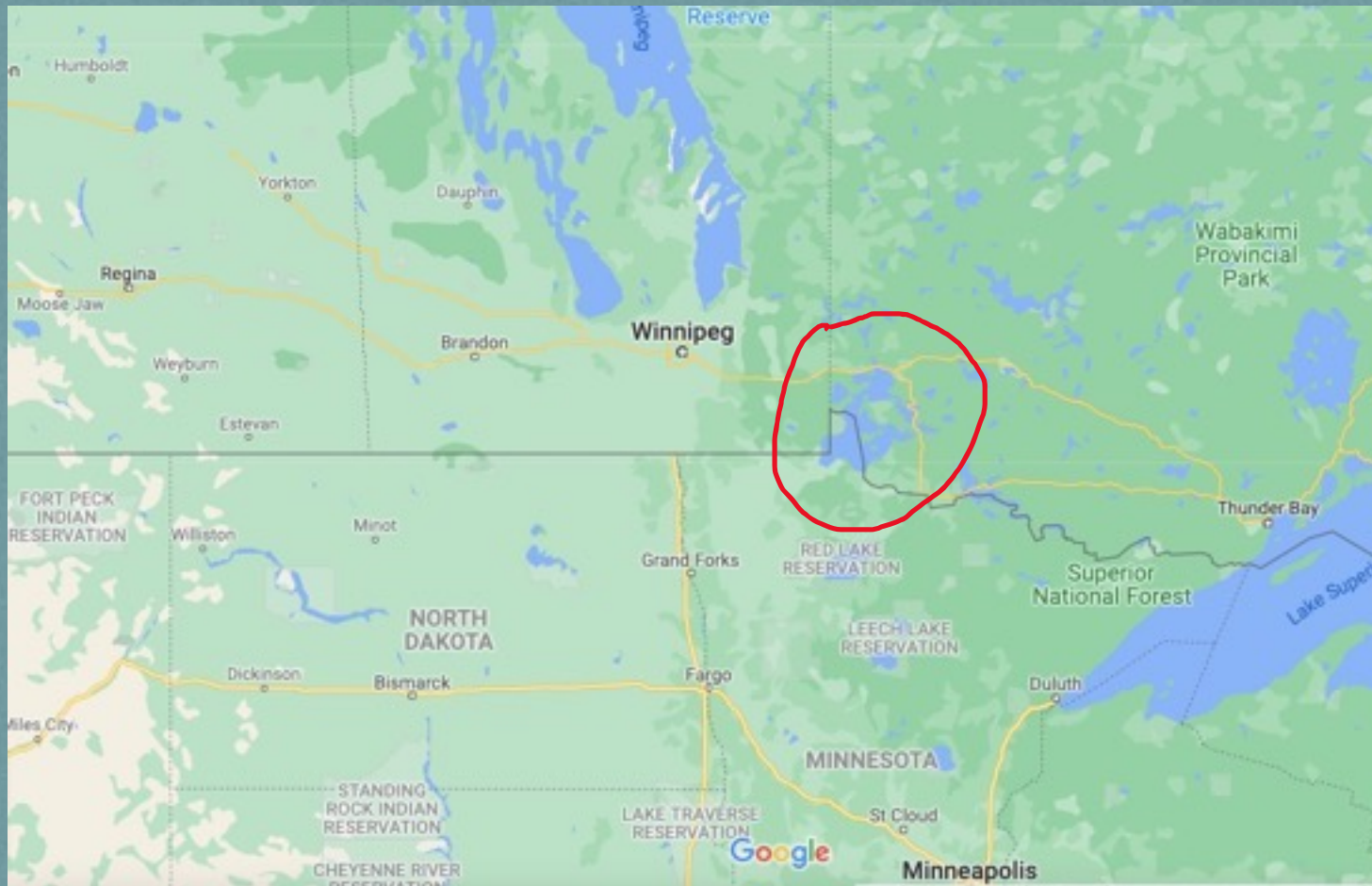
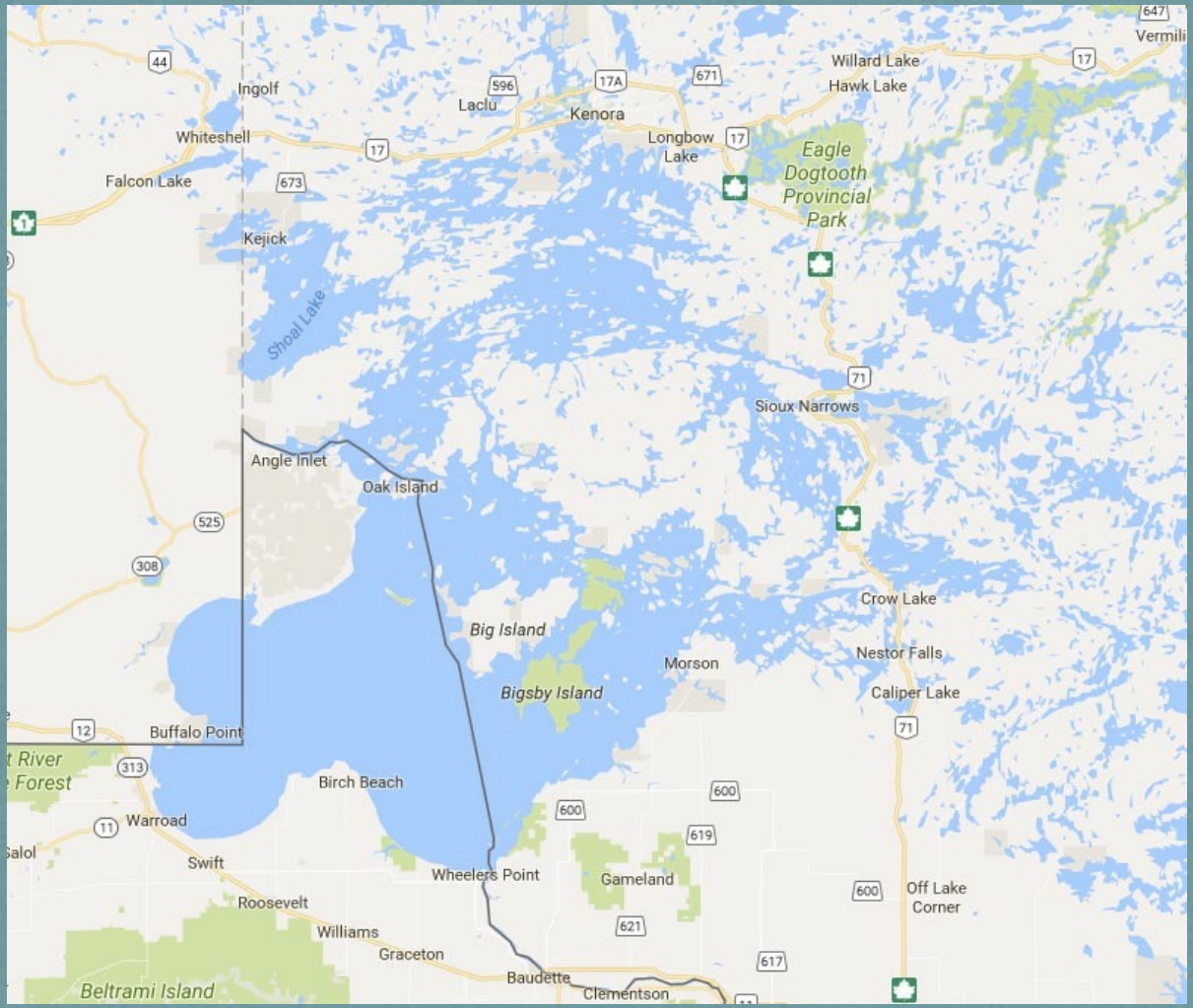


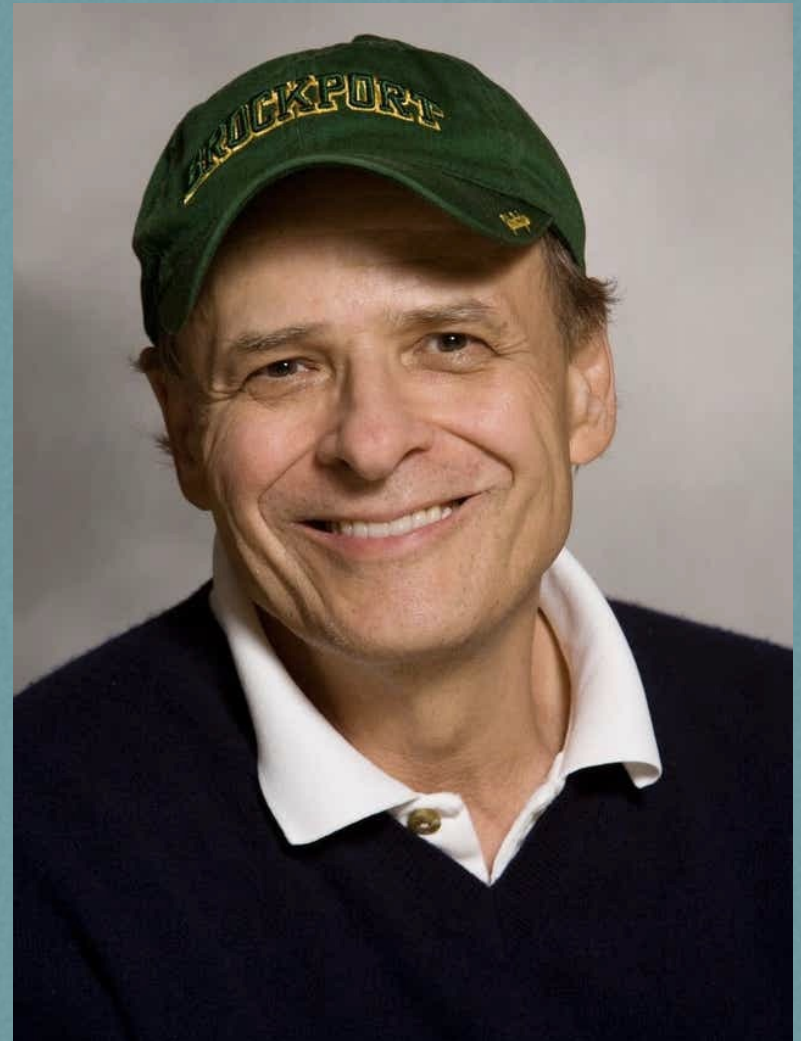
# *In the Lake of the Woods*





# Experimental Structure

- 5 types of chapters:
  1. Accounts of the time spent at the Lake of the Woods (i.e. Ch. 1, “How Unhappy They Were”). Third-person narration.
  2. “Evidence” chapters. Quotes, footnotes.
  3. Accounts of the further-back past (Wade’s childhood, Vietnam)
  4. “Hypothesis” chapters. Virtual time. What might have happened.
  5. Authorial footnotes: metafictional portions of the text in which the historian/biographer discusses the difficulties of histories, etc.



# Reasons for this Structure?



- Reader has to take active role in solving the mystery?
- Like a trial, assembling the evidence?
- Makes it seem more “real”?
- Makes us question the nature of “truth” itself?

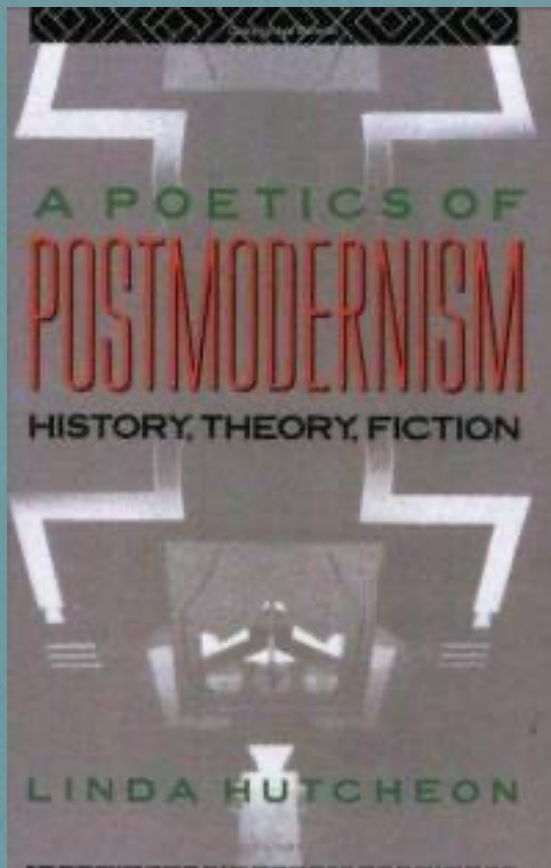
# Evidence Chapters

- Some of the quotes in these chapters are “real” and others are not.
- What’s the effect of including “real” and fictional on the same level?
- Can you tell one from the other?



The actual Lake of the Woods  
In Minnesota

# Linda Hutcheon and Historiographic Metafiction



- In her book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon coins the term “historiographic metafiction”
- Works are dubbed “historiographic metafiction” because of their conscious self-reflexivity and concern with history.

# Historiographic Metafiction, cont.

According to Hutcheon:

- Earliest histories contain fictional elements
- They are implicit amalgamations of fact and myth
- Composition of the word “history” itself contains the word “story”
- Yet, as realism took root, history came to represent “objective” fact and the novel came to represent subjective “fiction”

# Modern and Postmodern Response to History

- Modernists and postmodernists challenged the authority of histories by acknowledging that the “fact” presented is the author’s subjective interpretation.
- Historiographic metafiction is “novels that are intensely self-reflective but that also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge (Hutcheon 285-286).”
- Historiographic metafiction bridges the fissure between historical and fictional works by recombining the two genres.



# Suspense in Chapter One

- We know something bad's happened, but we don't yet know what is it. The election had been lost, but is this enough to explain John and Kathy's unhappiness?
- Emphasis throughout on the fog, foreboding
- p. 3: First mention of Kathy's disappearance: "In less than 36 hours, she would be gone." How did you take this when you first read it? What did you think it meant?
- pp. 2, 4: already an emphasis on pretending.
- "Kill Jesus"—seems disproportionate to losing the election?
- Chapter ends with Wade's memory of how "alive" Kathy's hand feels. Makes us question whether or not she's still alive?

# Imagery

- Opening page sets up many of the dominant images that will be used in the novel:
  - Fog (later passage about seeing through a glass darkly, p. 45) Our inability to see, to know, to get at real historical truth of events?
  - Mirrors (the full-length mirror in John's head, also narcissism of turning inward—solution finally that which most appeals to us, book more about our own psyche than the mystery of Kathy Wade?)
  - Lake/Labyrinth (vast, unexplored wilderness; mirrors the human psyche? Chronology is difficult, memory unreliable)
  - Trapdoors (images of falling and of sin; loss of innocence; later in the book, see pp. 283 - 284 especially).

# Verona



What do you think about John and Kathy's dreams of Verona? Verona is also the setting for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

# John Wade's Father

- Discuss Wade's relationship with his father. You might note, especially Wade's relationship to loss—the desire to kill? (p. 14) and what happens at his father's funeral (p. 42).

# John and Kathy

- What do you think about John Wade's relationship with Kathy?
  - What, for instance, are we to make of the repeated image of the two snakes eating each? (one + one = zero)
  - What about the spying?
  - p. 71: He says he want to live inside of Kathy
- This might remind us of certain passages in *The Things They Carried*:
  - p. 11: (about Jimmy Cross's love for Martha): "he wanted to sleep inside her lungs and breathe her blood and be smothered"
  - Mary Anne's desire to ingest Vietnam, to eat it
  - p. 228 (about Linda): "Even then, at nine years old, I wanted to live insider her body. I wanted to melt into her bones—*that* kind of love."

# Magic

- p. 27: According to Tony Carbo, politics and magic are related: transformations, trying to change things.
- p. 27: According to the Magician's Handbook, magic confers power
- But magic depends on mystery, keeping secrets
- Magic/illusion as a metaphor for writing/storytelling?

# O'Brien's Essay: "The Magic Show"

- Illusion involves the creation of a new and improved reality. Writing is the same.
- "Above all, writing fiction involves a desire to enter the mystery of things: that human craving to know what cannot be known."
- "In many cultures, including our own, magician and storyteller are embodied in a single person—Christ both a miracle-worker and a teller of parables."
- In fiction, there is an "incorporeal but nonetheless genuine 'aliveness' to characters. The writer, like the shaman, serves as a medium between two different worlds—the world of ordinary reality and the extraordinary world of the imagination."

# “The Magic Show,” cont.

- Good storytelling involves “a plunge into mystery of the grandest order”
- Plot involves the mystery of the future: what will happen? But it need not give the impression of finality. “The plot mystery of life—what will happen to us, to all of us, to the human race—is unresolved and must remain that if it is to endure as a compelling story.”
- A satisfying plot involves not a diminution of mystery but rather a fundamental enlargement.
- Fundamental mystery of otherness explored in character. Characterization is achieved not through a pinning down process but rather through a process that opens up and releases the mysteries of the human spirit.



# Narrator

- Why does O'Brien include this figure?
- First introduced at bottom of p. 30 (very end of Ch. 6):

“Yes, and I’m a theory man too. Biographer, historian, medium—call me what you want—but even after four years of hard labor I’m left with little more than supposition and possibility. John Wade was a magician; he did not give away many tricks. Moreover, there are certain mysteries that weave through life itself, human motive and human desire. Even much of what might appear to be fact in this narrative—action, word, thought—must ultimately be viewed as a diligent but still imaginative reconstruction of events. I have tried, of course, to be faithful to the evidence. Yet evidence is not truth. It is only evident. In any case, Kathy Wade is forever missing, and if you require solutions, you will have to look beyond these pages. Or read a different book.”
- Does this suggest that the seemingly omniscient past and memory chapters are invented creations as well, constructs of the past, invented by the biographer/historian?

# Secrets

- This novel about secrets?
  - John’s secret involvement in My Lai that he purposefully erases from history
  - The secret of what happened to Kathy Wade?
- Secrets particularly relevant to *this* war?
  - Presidents lied to, misled the American public (Kennedy and his “advisors”; LBJ dissembling about the extent of American involvement because he didn’t want to distract from his Great Society programs; Nixon secretly bombs Cambodia and enters into secret peace talks with North Vietnam)
- General lack of knowledge about the history, the people of Vietnam (see pp. 72-73)
- Different “stories” about the war—a war against Communist aggression? A war of national liberation? A civil war?

# The My Lai Massacre



# Charlie Company



- Nothing unusual--very average company
  - Mostly high school graduates between ages of 18 and 22
  - Fairly even division of black and white soldiers
  - Seemed a cross-section of American society
  - Slightly understaffed, which was typical

# Ernest Medina



- Commanding Officer was Captain Ernest L. Medina
- Harsh disciplinarian, nickname “Mad Dog”
- Yet considered fair

# Lieutenant William Calley



- Leader of Charlie Company's 1st Platoon
- Middle-class, raised in Miami
- Described as boring and bland; had enlisted when draft seemed imminent
- Had some college, so sent to Officer Candidate School, didn't do well--trouble reading maps, rated as having no leadership ability
- Tried to impress Medina
- Most men remembered him as fairly incompetent, universally disliked

# Quang Ngai



- Charlie Company deployed to northern Quang Ngai Province in Jan. of 1968
- Same area of Vietnam where O' Brien is stationed one year later
- Charlie Company assigned to locate and eliminate 48th Vietcong Battalion
- Feb. and March a difficult period--deaths and injuries, mostly through booby traps
- Culture of violence develops

# Pinkville

- Speculation that 48th Battalion was hiding out around My Lai 4 (American name for cluster of villages in area designated “Pinkville” on maps)
- Intelligence reports assumed most civilians would be at market in the early morning
- Remaining villagers expected to be Vietcong or VC sympathizers



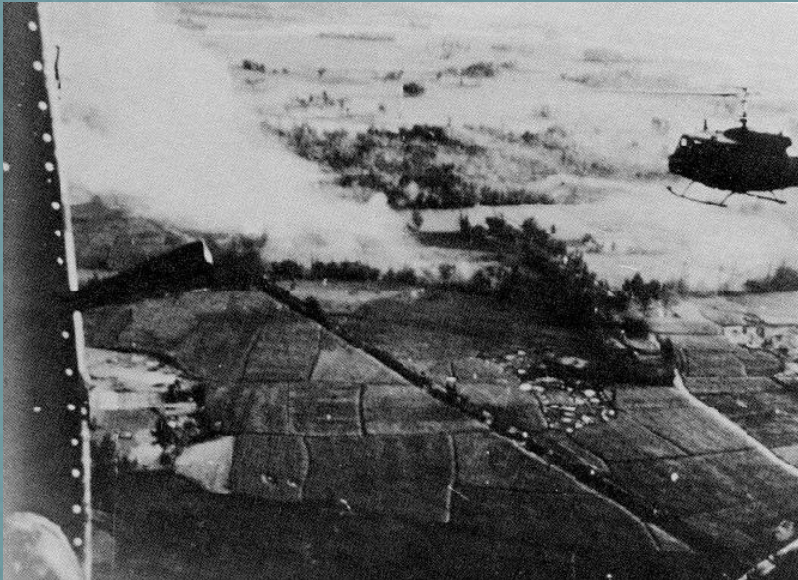


# The Orders

- Medina's orders remained vague-- different men heard different things and interpreted these orders differently, especially what he said about women and children
- Certainly told to destroy the village



# The Assault



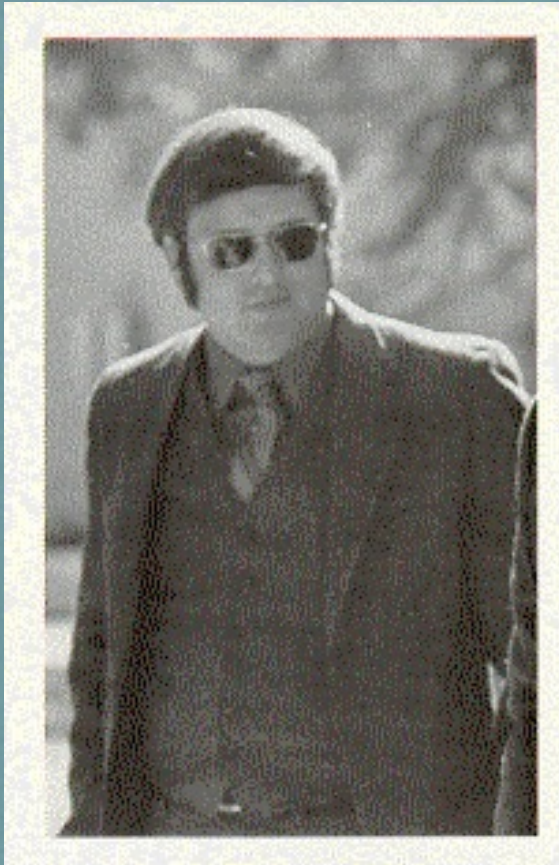
- March 16, 1968:  
Charlie Company (105 men strong) helicoptered in
- On the ground by 7:40 a.m.
- Expected heavy enemy response, but received no hostile fire

# The Massacre



- Confusion reigned: village divided by bamboo trees, banana trees, hedgerows--soldiers couldn't see what was happening elsewhere in the village
- Numerous atrocities committed
- Babies, children, elderly shot
- Women and girls raped and sodomized
- Scalpings; torture
- Huge numbers rounded up and machine-gunned
- Dozens of bodies left in ditches

# The Journalist



- American Army photographer, Ron Haeberle present
- Took color photos
- Later court-martialed for failure to stop a war crime, withholding evidence of war crimes
- Acquitted

# Results



- Best estimates that between 400-500 unarmed Vietnamese were killed that day



- Only one American casualty: a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the foot

# Hugh Thompson



- Not everyone participated
- Helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson, Jr. landed between civilians and U.S. soldiers, threatened to open fire on soldiers if they didn't stop the killing
- Reported the atrocity to his superiors
- Yet, Thompson's report delayed, diluted, never acted upon

# Cover-Up



- Major cover-up took place afterward
- After brief, perfunctory investigation, authorities concluded no infractions of military code had occurred
- Case blown open by Ronald Ridenhour, a Vietnam veteran who had heard stories, investigated rumors
- Wrote anguished, 18-page letter in March of 1969 ([read Ridenhour's letter](#))
- Sent to 30 prominent men in Washington



# Exposure



- Ridenhour's letter prompted investigation by Peers Commission ([read a summary of the Peers Commission report](#))
- Story started hitting newspapers around the country in Nov. 1969
- Life Magazine reprinted Haeberle's color photos in Dec. 1969

# Big Questions Raised



- Was My Lai indicative of the war (as protesters argued)?
- Or was My Lai an anomaly (as the military claimed)?
- Where does blame lie?

# Court Martials



- Army filed war crimes and obstruction of justice charges against 2 generals, 4 full colonels, 4 lt. colonels, 4 majors, 6 captains, 8 lts., and several enlisted men ([read more about the court martials](#))
- Most enlisted men were no longer members of the military and thus immune to prosecution by court martial

# Court Martial Results



- Only William Calley was found guilty
- Convicted of premeditated murder of 22 civilians
- Sentenced to life in prison at hard labor
- Sentence reduced several times, paroled in Nov. 1974 after serving fewer than 3 years, mostly under house arrest

# Historical Atrocities

- Massacres at Sandy Creek and Little Big Horn (257)
- British infantrymen and American soldiers during the Revolutionary War (259)
- Why include these? Do these precedents excuse the Americans at My Lai? Do they put My Lai in context?
- What do they suggest about America's past?

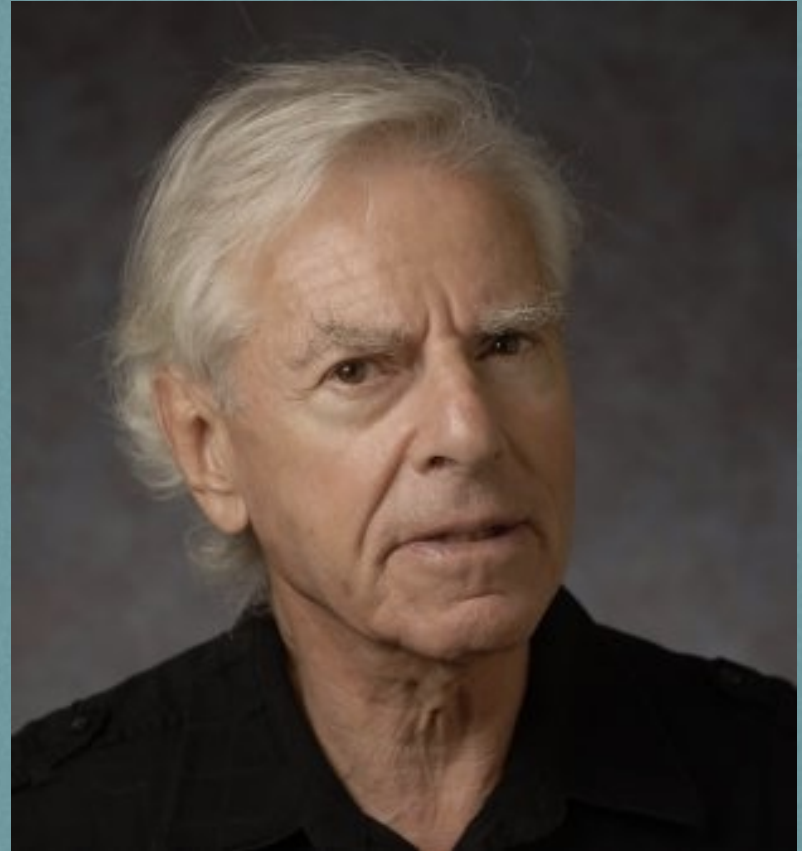
# Denial of History?

- See long footnote, p. 298 (very end of Ch. 30): “It’s odd how the mind erases horror”
- Historian H. Bruce Franklin argues that the book is NOT about our inability to get at the truth, but that it’s about denial—our fundamental reluctance to admit or accept an ugly truth

# H. Bruce Franklin and Denial

Briefly, Franklin argues that:

- The novel "is not as indeterminate or unresolved as it may seem."
- Only one theory of what happened NOT presented in hypothesis chapters, but rather in the chapters, "What He Remembered," "how the Night Passed," and "What He Did Next"
- This is the "midnight boil" theory—that John murdered his wife, although he cannot remember this
- John Wade, like the American nation itself, committed acts so horrible that they continually evoke denial
- Many readers as well would rather indulge in elaborate fantasies of denial than face the ugly truth of what happened



# But....

- Does Franklin overlook the narrator's footnote on p. 30, when he claims that ALL of the book is, to some extent an imaginative construction--not just the hypothesis chapters?



# END

- Why *conclude* with the happy ending hypothesis?
- Footnote, p. 300: A matter of taste and aesthetics. Our preferred ending tells us more about *ourselves* than about what really happened? (Mirrors)
- Footnote, p. 301: Why doesn't the narrator stop there (with the happy ending), where his heart tells him? Has to admit that secrets and mysteries cannot be solved?
- P. 302: Perhaps what we're left with is that we don't even know *ourselves* as well as we think? If John did kill Kathy, does he even realize it?
- P. 303: Can we believe that he was not a monster but a man? . . . Could the truth be so simple? So terrible?

# Scenarios and Evidence

- Which do you believe?
  1. Kathy left by herself (ran off with a lover; left abruptly in fear after finding the plants; perhaps committed suicide)
  2. The midnight boil (John murdered Kathy)
  3. They planned it together

# 1. Kathy left by herself

- P. 33: Kathy had a habit of disappearing
- P. 84: She just found out about Thuan Yen herself. Perhaps horrified, scared, couldn't live with this knowledge. "She understood his capabilities."
- Affair with the dentist
- P. 173: the need to make herself vanish
- Body never found
- Boat never found (p. 83: life vest missing as well)
- Claude's trust
- John seems surprised, worried the day after her disappearance
- P. 219: Kathy's a gambler
- She's angry about the abortion
- She's been unhappy for years with her role as a political wife (p. 113)
- She has her own secrets; is on valium and Restoril (p. 250)
- **More** chapters devoted to version of this hypothesis than any other

## 2. John murdered Kathy

- P. 14: John's reaction to earlier deaths is the desire to kill (his rage in general; lack of mental stability)
- p. 17 (also, p. 22, 272): John fears Kathy will leave him or at least look at him differently after news of Thuan Yen emerges? Can't stand the fact that she knows?
- P. 44: Perhaps he wants revenge for her earlier betrayal when he was in Vietnam?
- P. 50-51: Boiling the plants
- P. 61: The image of the two snakes eating each other; sounds dangerous. His love so possessive that he will consume her?
- P. 83: He knew exactly what he would find when he looked in the boathouse. (Because **he** put her in the boat and sunk it?)
- P. 119: John feels like an actor
- P. 124+: Wouldn't he have heard the motor kick in if she left in the boat by herself?
- P. 131+: A memory chapter, not a hypothesis chapter? Dream or reality?
- P. 189: The "convenience" of a faulty memory
- P. 286: The narrator seems to believe Kathy is under the lake
- P. 298: The mind erases horror

# 3. They planned it together

- Talk of Verona, a new life from the beginning
- A way to escape campaign debt
- Their love for each other
- Kathy is **like** Wade in many ways (does she play the role of the magician's "lovely assistant"—the woman who gets sawed in half or vanishes?)
- P. 167: Even as a child, Kathy has her own secrets
- P. 95: She knew about the spying
- P. 61:  $1 + 1 = 0$  (they're both gone)
- P. 76: Other times, he would see himself performing the ultimate vanishing act.
- P. 97: In every trick, there are two carefully thought-out lines—the way it looks and the way it is
- P. 99: Definition of a misdirection—any technique used by a magician to divert the audience's attention from noticing some secret maneuver
- P. 192: The "double consummation (see also p. 241 when he considers "causal transportation")
- P. 282: Final admission to Claude that he didn't hurt Kathy.
- P. 296: Tony Carbo (unsentimental, nobody's fool) believes they planned it together
- P. 297: Bethany Kee says Kathy "had the guts" to plan it