



The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

in-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

“We used chemical weapons in Vietnam”: Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick explain how telling the untold history can change the world for the better 我々はベトナムで化学兵器を使用した」 語られざる歴史を語ることによってよい世界変革が可能と説明するオリバー・ストーンとピーター・カズニック Sep. 29, 2013

Joint Interview by *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* and *Shukan Kinyobi*, Tokyo, August 11, 2013

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The Japanese weekly Shukan Kinyobi and The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus jointly interviewed Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, co-authors of The Untold History of the United States, a 10-episode documentary series (broadcast on [Showtime Network](#), 2012-13) and a companion book of the same name ([Simon and Schuster](#), 2012), on August 11 in Tokyo. It was the 8th day of the duo's 12-day tour of Japan, right after they visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki to participate in the 68th memorial of the atomic-bombing on August 6 and 9 respectively, and before they visited Okinawa, to witness the realities of the continuing US military base occupation and resistance to it. Stone and Kuznick, relaxed with a few late-afternoon drinks between two large public events in Hibiya, Tokyo, talked about the importance of learning and teaching history, the “thread of civilization” as a people's “weapon of truth,” to defend against the power of the American empire, whose image has been molded on the continuing distortion of history and glorification of past wars. This applies to Japan and its government's denial of aggression in its past wars, too. The interview ranges widely over their five years of collaboration on the Untold History.

Q. At the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War in 2012, Obama reflected on the war “with solemn reverence upon the valor of a generation that served with honor,” and initiated a 13-year program to “pay tribute to the men and women who answered the call of duty with courage and valor.”^[1] Why are the experiences of the Vietnam War being glorified now? Did the war not bring about disastrous outcomes, as you argue in your book?

Stone: There has certainly been a strong drift to the right both in the United States and now in Japan. The drift to the right started with Reagan, though some people would argue that it started with Nixon, and Johnson, after Kennedy was killed - you can argue that. The drift to the right accelerated under Reagan, and it was Reagan who was most aggressive in redefining the Vietnam War as, not a disgrace, but something to be proud of. He termed negativity toward the war as the “Vietnam syndrome,” which was quite strong, considering that only ten years before we had withdrawn from Vietnam and we were really lost. I think Reagan believed that he could revamp American society by giving it economic strength and historical purpose, as Abe is trying in Japan. You redefine the history, and you redefine the economy. Reagan starts it, and George H.W. Bush does it better. He is the one who suffered from the “wimp factor,” but after the Kuwait invasion in 1991 he announces that the “specter of Vietnam has been buried forever under the desert sands of the Arabian Peninsula,”^[2] and then this is backed by Clinton. So this is the tradition now. Obama recently made a statement on the 60th anniversary of the armistice of the Korean War that “the war was no tie. Korea was a victory.”^[3] He was praising the US military extravagantly.

So, this is a different kind of syndrome in the United States. No matter what history says, the military is worshipped. If you look at Obama's statement on the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, he does not really talk about the war when he says, “we reflect with solemn reverence, upon the valor of a generation that served with honor.” You can never question your soldiers' valor. Many of the veterans who go to war want to feel that they served with honor, even if it was a losing cause or a bad cause. On the other hand, behind that is a revising of history where he is basically saying that the war in Vietnam was a noble cause. I think it was a lost cause; a bad cause. The battlefield of the future is the history. History, memory of history, and the correct memory of history is the slender thread of our civilization.

I know this in my heart, because if you think about it, in our own lives, previous lives, my life, your life, what do we have? Where are we right now? Every one of us has a history. We have loves, hates, affairs – we have gone through life and every single one of us has a say about history. Those people who remember history and have an awareness of themselves do better in life, generally speaking. They are able to evaluate themselves as they mature, they can change as I did, to evolve, if evolution comes from knowing who you are. So the very concept of denying your own past is lying at the greatest level. It goes to the heart of every individual and to the heart of a nation.

Kuznick: The Vietnam syndrome is very important. The attack on the Vietnam syndrome began as soon as the war ended. Gerald Ford during his presidency said, “We have to stop looking to the past; we have to look to the future.”^[4] This was one week before the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the end of the Vietnam War. The process began from that point, to forget Vietnam, to wipe it from history - the causes of Vietnam, and the consequences of Vietnam. In 1980, *Commentary*, a leading neocon magazine, edited by Norman Podhoretz, devoted an issue to the Vietnam syndrome. Conservatives understood at that point that unless they could change the perception of the American people about the Vietnam War, they could not intervene capriciously in other countries and expand what had become an American empire. So they made a deliberate effort to change the narrative about the Vietnam War, because Vietnam had become for most Americans by that point a nightmare. Some people saw it as a mistake, as an aberration, but many of us understood it as an extremely ugly example of an interventionist American policy that had been playing out around the world for decades. So the right-wing made a systemic effort to cleanse history, because they knew that was essential to build the kind of empire that they wanted to attain, and, as Oliver says, Reagan pursued it most aggressively. But we saw it also with Carter. Carter starts his administration progressively, but by the end he had moved to the right and was talking about the nobility of the struggle in Vietnam. Reagan embraced it directly, as did Clinton who, in his student days, had actively opposed the war. If you look at what he says, it is the same as Ford, Reagan and everybody else: the nobility of the cause - the American troops were great, just because they fought and died, and you have to wave the flag for the American troops.

This was also essential for neocon proponents of "the new American century." People behind George W. Bush again rewrote the history of Vietnam. Conservative obfuscation has been deliberate and systematic. Even in the naming. We refer to it in America as "the war in Vietnam." We talk about "the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan," but we do not talk about the "American 'invasion' of Vietnam." But that was what it was -- a bloody invasion that began slowly and built up over the years, in which the United States used every kind of lethal power, except for the atomic bomb. We had free fire zones in which we were able to shoot and kill anything that moved. It was a war of atrocities. People say that the My Lai Massacre was an atrocity, but dismiss it as an aberration. But if you study the actual history, read Nick Turse's recent book,[\[5\]](#) or look at Oliver's movies, you see that Vietnam was a series of atrocities on a smaller scale. That is why the Vietnamese are surprised by the American focus on My Lai. They know that My Lais, though on a smaller scale, were occurring throughout the country with shocking regularity.

The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC is powerful and moving. It has the names of all the 58,286 Americans who died in the war. The message is that the tragedy of Vietnam was the fact that 58,286 Americans died. That is indeed tragic. Robert McNamara (Secretary of Defense 1961-68) came into my class and said he accepted the fact that 3.8 million Vietnamese died. The memorial does not have the names of 3.8 million Vietnamese or the hundreds of thousands of Laotians, Cambodians and others. The Okinawa war memorial tells a different story. It has the names of all the Okinawans, Japanese, Americans, and all the others who died in the Battle of Okinawa, and that makes a real statement about the horrors of war. The Vietnam memorial does not. If the 250 foot long Vietnam memorial wall contained all the names of the Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians, do you know how long it would be? Over four miles! What a statement that would make. But right now, there is a campaign to forget, and Obama participated in it when he welcomed the troops home from Iraq. Obama is the voice of the empire, and empire requires forgetting, cleansing, and wiping out the past about Vietnam, Iraq, Kuwait, Salvador, and even WWII. None of these stories have been told honestly and truthfully in the United States and that is why it is so important to fight over the correct interpretation of history; otherwise U.S. leaders are going to repeat the crimes and atrocities in much the same way that they got away with them in the past.

Q. For over 10 years since the dawn of the 21st century, the US has engaged in the so-called "War on Terror." It seems that the American evaluation of the war has been ambiguous, but how much of a sense of failure is there? Has nothing changed after all? What was this war about?

Kuznick: The "war on terror" is an absurdity from the start. It is a part of an Alice in Wonderland-like through-the-looking-glass experience in which you see the world turned upside down; you are in a world of absurdity. After 9/11, 2001, the United States entered a world in which enemies were magnified into these terrifying powerful forces. 9/11 was a colossal fuck-up by the Bush administration. Minneapolis FBI agent Coleen Rowley was trying to warn the Bush administration that there were people learning to fly airplanes who had no interest in learning how to land. There were repeated warnings that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda were planning attacks on the United States. Intelligence officials knew that an attack was imminent and they tried desperately to alert Bush to this. George Tenet, the head of the CIA, was running around Washington with his hair on fire, trying to get somebody to listen -- Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, George Bush, Dick Cheney -- and they all told him to get lost. They had more pressing matters to deal with. So first of all, 9/11 was a complete failure by the Bush administration, partly of intelligence, but mostly of leadership, and then instead of viewing it as what it was -- a well-planned and well-executed operation, a crime against the American people committed by a vile group that needed to be brought to justice--they made it into a global War on Terror and pursued a neocon agenda that did more to harm the United States than Al Qaeda could have done in a thousand years.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, whom we are very critical of when he was Carter's anti-Soviet National Security Director, nailed this right from the beginning. He said you cannot fight a war against a tactic. What is the real enemy? Bush said that they hated us for our freedom. What an absurd, lying statement that was! "They hate us for our freedom!" U.S. leaders knew that they had real issues. We do not agree with the Islamic extremists or countenance their tactics, but there were issues with the US policy in Israel, the suppression of the Palestinians, and the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia, their holy land. Those were the real issues. There is no justification for what they did. It was one of the series of terrorist attacks -- the USS Cole, the Riyadh bombing, the bombings in Africa -- this had been going on for some time. But Bush and Cheney decided to use this to their advantage, and the Project for the New American Century said in its 2000 report that it was going to take a long time for US to remilitarize and increase defense spending in the way they want unless there was "a new Pearl Harbor."[\[6\]](#) The United States got a new Pearl Harbor, and then they cynically exploited this by playing on Americans' fear that they lived in such a hostile and dangerous world surrounded by enemies with frightening capabilities. This mindset has continued and Obama bought in to this. Bush, Cheney, and Obama have pushed this to the point where we have the kind of surveillance state that was exposed by Edward Snowden.

Q. Although war should benefit no one, the US government does not appear to change its war policy or fundamentally reduce the defense spending which is as much as 40% of the federal budget. Is war an inevitable agenda for US? Does it continue war because of the war profiteers within the US administration?

Stone: I think it is a very good question. I remember as a history student as a boy, you know you always hear about the war of 1812, the revolutionary war, then you hear about the war against the Creek Indians if you want to consider that a war, but it is ongoing war - battles going on with the Indians all the time. The Civil War, the Mexican War, and then a period of Reconstruction with no foreign wars, until the Spanish-American war of 1898. That was a long stretch. So the United States had a relatively austere record of war, although it was certainly aggressive. We invaded Canada in 1812 and we were repulsed by the British again. So by the time we come to WWI, we were really novices of war. I think the Civil War was extremely bloody, but WWI was like a new century, and America becomes different. A lot of American people recoiled in the aftermath of WWI, and I think that was part of the reason why we stayed out of WWII for so long. It was the strong feeling that we had been suckered by the British and French empires into WWI. Not to mention the role played by the Morgan Bank. People were really pissed off in the 1930s and understandably so. We do not overlook, but American history overlooks the Nye Committee, hearings led by North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye into war profiteering in WWI.[\[7\]](#) I found that fascinating. I have read some of those hearings and felt really angry, because although everything Nye and other critics said was true, we drew the wrong conclusions, and by the time it really mattered in Spain for us to stand up to Fascism, we did not. It is ironic how history works. (To Peter) Do you want to continue on? (Kuznick: Absolutely. We have been so focused during this trip on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and U.S.-Japan-related issues that we haven't had a chance to talk about these things.) Let's talk about war now. Be creative. Let's just talk about what war is.

Kuznick: Smedley Butler, highly decorated Marine Corps Major General said, "War is a racket."[\[8\]](#) He said that he was "a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers....a gangster for capitalism." He starts in the Philippines and then he goes through all the countries he led interventions into. He said he was a front man for Brown Brothers Harriman. The military was the arm of the bankers and the industrialists, because if we trace the history of the American empire since the 1890s, we see that it was the 1893 depression in the United States that was in some ways the beginning. After 1893, American leaders had two possible ways to go: one was to spread the wealth so that there would be enough consumers who could purchase American goods and spark the recovery from depression; and the other was to expand overseas in search of resources, cheap labor, and new markets. What did the United States do? It expanded overseas.

Stone: I am curious about that. When Henry Wallace becomes Secretary of Agriculture in the depression, he adopts a policy of recovery through scarcity. What does he do? He killed lots of pigs and cut the cotton crop.

Kuznick: That was a temporary action. He hated it. Recovery through scarcity went against the grain of Americans' core beliefs. A similar approach was evident in the Natural Industrial Recovery Act. What they were trying to do was to reduce the surplus on the market in order to raise prices. They slaughtered those pigs, but distributed them to the American people so Wallace at least was feeding the hungry on an unprecedented scale....

Stone: So, the United States paid farmers not to grow. It's crazy. (Kuznick: It's crazy, and Wallace said so at the time.) There is one thing I want to say, and this is a very important point. Wallace understood one big thing in the world – food. If people grow food for the world, there will be peace. And I think that is so true, and that is so basic because, when you look at world history, the scarcity of food has driven so many wars. I cannot believe what I heard in Japan in these last weeks; people talking about starvation during war. Wallace understood it is absolutely necessary to produce enough to feed everyone so that people do not go to war over scarce food and resources. (Kuznick: For decades, Wallace's hybrid corn fed the world.) One of the moving moments in history that Peter brought to my attention was that in 1940, Franklin Roosevelt wrote a letter to the Democratic Party that said, "The Democratic Party cannot face in two directions at once...you are either for Wall Street (money and profit), or you're for people." Roosevelt made it clear that Henry Wallace was his candidate and he would not run for his third term unless Wallace was nominated. It was a powerful letter, which the Democratic Party should read every four years and wake up, because they lost that vision.

Kuznick: I gave that letter to Ralph Nader and he quoted it in his book. In retrospect, that may have been a mistake. As Oliver said, the Democratic Party has lost its bearings today and tramples the legacy of Roosevelt and Wallace, and post-Cuban Missile Crisis John Kennedy. It now stands for surveillance; it stands for the tripling of the troops in Afghanistan; it stands for kowtowing to bankers. We would like to think the Democrats are progressive, but under the Clintons and Obama, they have devolved into more efficient managers of the American empire. They do not challenge the empire. Republicans are crude. Republicans try to impose the empire by force. Obama is smarter. He knows he can also impose the empire by deception (Stone: soft words). So he has figured out the way to institutionalize Bush policies and make them a permanent feature of American life. That is why Bush's press spokesman, Ari Fleischer, recently said we are living through Bush's fourth term. This is not true in certain aspects of domestic policy, but it is sadly close to the mark on foreign policy. And in certain ways, Obama is actually worse than Bush.

Stone: I believe in evolution. I understand why a country makes mistakes. I pray for my country every morning in meditation. I take at least half an hour in meditation. I pray for my country, and the world.... I wish... I wish people could...learn... to be sweet. Gentle.

Q: The American empire does not seem to have lasting power, mostly because of its financial difficulty. But if you look at the recent subservience of the EU in dealing with Edward Snowden's case, the US still seems to have great power and control. Where do you think the empire is going?

Stone: This is the reason why I am sticking around because it is a good story. There is tension. Okay? We do not know the outcome. No one in this room knows and even Obama does not know. That is the game. The game is, every day we engage all our political sensitivities and send our diplomats abroad and all the military. How do we stay who we are? That is what they think about. Or how do we think about the future? How do they plan for this? Do you realize that we wake up every day into this giant, gigantic worldwide Godzilla beast? How do we live with the monster? Every day we have millions of men going to work in the military, the national security complex everywhere in the world. We are a massive mobile empire, bigger than anything that anyone has dreamed of. That's one side of the story. And then the other side of the story is the misperception that if we do not grow today, if we do not eat more, what is going to happen to us? The empire's appetites are insatiable. That insecurity has to be responded to. It is like a dragon saying, "What am I going to eat today?" Do you understand how bad this can get? So for the dragon to say, "I don't need to eat as many eggs and lions and trees today. I can maybe survive on less." That is the tension of our times. That is why all those people like hibakusha and the peace activists, are bringing moral force into the universe--Buddhists, Catholics, all over the world. There is this huge energy that is emerging out there. Believe me, I feel it. There is an enormous struggle as Peter says, between the dragon with arms and we have only the truth as our weapon, and I find that to be the key issue of our days, and I am curious. So that is why I am sticking around, because, otherwise, I think I will die. If the bad guys win, I do not want to be around anymore.

Kuznick: The danger comes from having an empire with unlimited military strength but very limited moral vision and increasingly limited economic control; that creates the most dangerous situation of all. Dying empires can bring everything down with them. Countries can too. If Israel feels existentially threatened, it will almost certainly use its nuclear weapons. The United States has lost its moral authority and its philosophical vision, (Stone: to some people, not all) and the younger generation is losing its hope for a better future.

Stone: It is all those kids who cheered for Osama bin Laden's death. The majority of Americans thought it was going in the right direction. By the way, there was a poll that said 51 percent of 18-29 year olds think the Vietnam War was a good thing.

Kuznick: However, if you look at the polls about nuclear abolition, the 18-29 year olds are in favor of it. (Stone: That is easy. Vietnam is not.) So what I am saying is that they are confused. They do not have a clear understanding of history. What I'm talking about is the position the United States is in, being armed to the teeth, being able to destroy the world but losing power, influence, and moral authority. We lost it at 9/11, our response to 9/11 with Abu Ghraib, with Guantanamo, the torture, the Patriot Act, massive surveillance, George Bush's war policies...We see what we are ready to do now in the Asia Pivot. We are willing to militarize the Pacific in order to contain China. But the United States is getting relatively weaker as China and other countries are growing at a much faster rate. China spends three times as much of its GDP on infrastructure as the U.S. does. (Stone: That is about economics, only.) Yes, but militarily also. (Stone: But their military budget is still only ten percent of ours.) Well, we're weaker economically. In 2011 per capita Chinese GDP was only 9 percent of that in the U.S., but that was double what it had been only four years earlier. So much of our economy is based on finance now; so much of it is based on speculation. The United States does not produce as we used to. (Stone: We produce movies.) We produce two things: movies and academia. (Stone: armaments.) I am saying we are losing power at this crucial junction when China is rising, India is rising, and maybe Japan is finding its footing again.

Stone: This is the same argument as when Britain was losing power because Germany was gaining in 1914, but do not underestimate Britain. We are the Roman Empire. I am interested in the Roman Empire because it didn't succumb. Christianity was imposed by Constantine, and, all of a sudden, the empire extended itself for four, five hundred years. It had destroyed Jesus in 33 AD or thereabouts, Jerusalem in 70 AD. It took Rome 230 years to embrace Christianity. Think about it, we may very well turn out like Rome did; to embrace some form of this new religion and we might find our way.

Kuznick: Exactly, we still have hope; many Americans hate the direction in which the country is heading and want to see a different future. And Obama represented that in the minds of American people and especially in the minds of young people during his first campaign. That is partly why I am so mad at him,

because he took the dreams of those in the younger generation who believed in something -- and he destroyed them.

Stone: Empire. Remember, no empire lasts. Peter says this empire in the US can deny history and overcome history, and we pointed to Star Wars in our series -- how cruel this can become, from space to destroy whatever is against you. We will become a tyranny. The question is can the tyranny last? (Kuznick: and I am saying no—not as a tyranny.) Germany lasted... in 1941, no one could stop Germany, what a great moment for Hitler and then, by 1943, he was starting to run. So no empire lasts. That is all I can tell you, but the Roman Empire has defied logic by lasting the longest because you can still be in Roman Empire in 800 AD and still have some semblance of civilization in Greece and places like that.

Kuznick: But our goal is to divert the United States, to change direction before it becomes an absolute tyranny. The United States does terrible things, but there are also other things going on there. We still have the freedom to make the kind of documentaries we made and write the books that we write. Don't minimize the importance of that. People are not entirely repressed in the United States, though they are monitoring us, and they are physically capable of repressing us. There are a lot of people, even people in power and people in the military, who defy the idea that the United States should become a tyranny, a total national security state, the worst kind of dictatorship. We do not know which way the United States might go. My fear is that the United States, rather than going down, will bring down the rest of the world with it, but that is what we are trying to prevent. We are at a unique historical juncture. Our goal is to make sure that we have a future so that future generations can get it right, but the possibility is that we blow the whole thing up before that happens. Our mission is getting through this period of darkness to a point where there is a future. Oliver says that he is not expecting to see this in his lifetime, and, realistically, he might be right, but our goal is to make sure that there is a future.

Stone: I think that many people through history felt the same way. Everybody says it is a crisis now. I think in 800 AD, if you lived on the borders of Greece or Turkey, you would feel the same way. Everyone creates their own crisis in their times so this is an old story; it's a his-story. (Kuznick: But it's a new story in one way. The United States has enough nuclear weapons to end life on the planet. In 800 AD, they could not end life on the planet. They could perhaps systematically go around and kill everybody, but that is not the same thing as a nuclear war.) Stone: That is cruel. When somebody comes to kill you, that is cruel.

Q. Talking about cruelty, we saw the cruelty of the Japanese army in Nagasaki – exhibits of the Nanjing Massacre, military sex slavery, and Unit 731 at the Oka Masaharu Museum.^[9] The US too, even after its use of the atomic bomb, used cruel weapons such as Agent Orange, depleted uranium weapons, cluster bombs, and drones. The nature of war is cruel, but in the case of the US, it seems rampant. Is there any historical significance in this cruelty of the United States?

Stone: I do not believe that the United States was as cruel as Germany and Japan were. I mean I was in Vietnam; I saw Agent Orange dropped on us many times. I still do not know. Maybe I am going to be a victim of it. I do not think about it that much, but I know people have claimed they had been. We saw the results with the Vietnamese. Agent Orange was the cruelest we became. Although we developed mustard gas in WWI, we never used it. The atomic bomb and Agent Orange were the worst. When Obama talks about Syria and he says that the red line for Syria is chemical weapons, what a fucking hypocrite! Why doesn't he look at our own history? He probably would not even admit that we used chemical weapons in Vietnam. And we made a big deal about Saddam Hussein's having used chemical weapons when we were trying to justify invading Iraq. (Kuznick: But when Saddam used them against the Iranians, we initially ran interference for him at the UN, preempting a resolution explicitly condemning the Iraqi use. He was our ally. And after he used them against Iraq's own Kurdish people at Halabjah in 1988, the U.S. increased aid to his vile regime.) So who makes money off this? Dow Chemical profited immensely in Vietnam, but the students drove their recruiters off campus. But cruelty, no; cruelty is not human nature. There are always cruel soldiers in every country in the world, people who are racist, people who are stupid. But as a policy, the United States. . . , take waterboarding. We do it, but we always back away from it, whereas you have to admit that the Germans and the Japanese wholeheartedly embraced cruelty for many years. If they had been winners in WWII, we would be experiencing Unit 731 in Manchuria. (To Peter) Would you disagree with that?

Kuznick: We do not know. It is one of those unknowables, because there are other sides to Japan also. Japanese cruelty was extraordinary, and astounding, but we know that Americans were also very cruel to the Japanese. They executed the prisoners of war and knocked out their gold teeth with bayonets. We boiled their skulls in WWII, and American soldiers sent them to their sweethearts. We cut off their ears. And we added some atrocities of our own--like firebombing over 100 Japanese cities and the atomic bombings, for which there was absolutely no justification--morally or militarily--despite almost seven decades of official distortion and obfuscation. Warfare itself turns people and nations into beasts, not everybody, but enough people, especially when leadership encourages it. Then you see the massacre in My Lai. These soldiers were not monsters, these were the boy scouts, and these were the kids who made out on Friday night behind the parking lot (Stone: A lot of them were in Platoon). They did not start off as monsters. (Stone: They used to have a cliché in the US, "Give a kid a gun and you will see. He will become a killer.") But America... as D. H. Lawrence said, "American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer"^[10]

Q: Martin Luther King, in his speech "I have a dream," called for of a world without racism. How about a world without war? What kind of leadership is required to achieve that?

Kuznick: Martin Luther King's dream was not just about racism. He was one of the earliest advocates of nuclear abolition in the United States. Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King were deeply committed to nuclear abolition.^[11] They were profoundly opposed to war. King hated the Vietnam War. He waited to come out and denounced it, but he did very early, compared to the popular understanding. And the other leaders of the civil rights movement tried to stifle him. They tried to quiet him by saying, "You'll undermine the civil rights movement if you talk about the Vietnam War." But he said, "I have to do it." So, it's not unconnected. Martin Luther King knew that cruelty in one area is connected to the cruelty in another area and you have to have a holistic vision of the ways in which people are repressed. That is what we are trying to do -- you cannot compartmentalize historically what happened in the 1890s or early 1900s and what is happening today. We search for the patterns from the beginning, and that was the key to our Untold History project. That is why we try to cover such a broad period of time, because these patterns show that these were not aberrations. The patterns show that these are really intrinsically deeply grounded in the American psyche, American economy, American military, American culture, and American society. But we also wanted to show another side, because, like Japan, American history is a struggle for the American soul. In 1941, Henry Luce said that the 20th century must be the American century, and a few months later, Vice President Henry Wallace replied that the 20th century must instead be the "century of the common man." Here are two fundamentally conflicting visions of what the United States should be, and this is what we are trying to show. King understood that, and King stood with Henry Wallace, John Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Eugene Debs, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Paul Robeson, Howard Zinn, and, at times, William Jennings Bryan--the progressive forces in American history.

Stone: The question I raise is about every leader that emerges. A leader has to last, and has to deal with power, and that was why Kennedy was special. Roosevelt was special. Roosevelt had polio. Kennedy was wounded in WWII, and also had Addison's disease. I believe it is the comeback that makes the

leaders. Nelson Mandela in prison, and Aung San Su Ki in Burma - comebacks.

Q: Japan faces debate over historical issues such as the Nanjing Massacre and military sex slavery, and when we try to deal with these issues honestly we are called anti-Japanese. Do you get such reaction too as being called anti-American or unpatriotic? How do you deal with such criticism?

Stone: I think the strongest credential I can put forward would be, number one, my service in the military in Vietnam, which is hard for them to get around. John McCain can bluster all he wants, but at the end of the day, he was a bomber; he bombed people from the air and he knows that. I do not understand the man's mentality, how, after being in the prison camp like he was, he can still have such anger and hatred in his heart for the perceived enemies of the United States, possibly soon including China. McCain is what I would call an unreconstructed, un-evolved soldier; many of them exist. I, on the other hand, feel good about my mission...because I served honorably. To be honest, I mean it was not an honorable war, but I served honorably within the confines of my own understanding of the war. And at the end of the day, I became a warrior for peace, which is what I am now, not a warrior for more wars, so I feel strong about that.

And number two, I think what is very important for me is that I did not speak out until I had made roughly eighteen feature films. I spoke as a dramatist, which is my profession. I am not a historian, and I do not pretend to be. I do not have the grounding in it, but I do care about history and I can dramatize it well. Now as I speak out as a documentarian with a background of having made movies, I get criticized very often for nonsense reasons, rubbish reasons. The way they threw it at me was that I made up history, and it took me a while to understand it. Many dramatists have used history before me and I do not apologize for doing historical drama. I never once claimed that I was doing a documentary, and I was not doing a documentary, never, and they put words in my mouth. Anyway, that is why I feel that I can talk strongly without feeling shame.

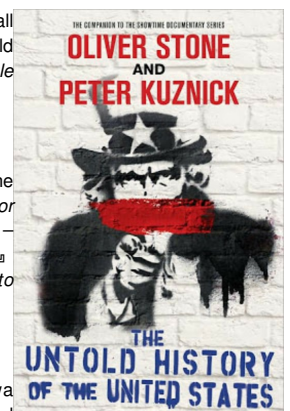
Q: At the end of your book, you entrust hope to people. Americans are responsible for dealing with what is called "American exceptionalism," but the responsibility also lies with people in Japan and the rest of the world. What can people of Japan and the world do in solidarity with American citizens in order to achieve the "century of the common people", as Wallace said, and to confront and conquer the greed for power and control?

Kuznick: It needs to be an international effort along the lines you suggest. We are getting very positive responses around the world to what we are doing, in the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Russia, Bulgaria, Israel...most countries understand the problems in the way we are laying them out because we are talking directly to Americans, but we are also talking to the peoples of the world. The corrosive nature of empire does not just affect the people in the United States, but people everywhere. We see hope in responses that we are getting everywhere, particularly among young people. We are trying to give them a different understanding of history, because we believe that history is the tool. While our enemies' weapons are military weapons, our weapon is history, understanding, knowledge, and truth.

So the question is, what is the strength of honesty and truth versus the strength of cannons, bombers, submarines, and surveillance technology? That is the battle we are in. We have seen truth win out in certain situations, prevail over military force and that is what we are trying to do and that is a global effort. We think that people in Japan should repudiate AMPO along with the US bases. [12] take leadership in the fight for the abolition of nuclear weapons and start telling the truth about their own history. We want you to do that in solidarity with the people in the United States. We know that Japan tends to be a conformist society, rather than one in which people make waves, but after Fukushima, we saw the Japanese starting to organize and protest. That happened in the 1960s with AMPO and Vietnam, and it hadn't happened in a long time on such a large scale. So we look to the Japanese, including the brave people in Okinawa, and we look to the people around the globe to join us in this effort. We think that the Untold History is a vehicle that everybody can rally around to, and it is not just about our untold history but it is for journalists like you, along with historians, to tell the untold history of Japan or the untold history of other countries, because we are all in the same boat where governments lie about the past. They lie because they know they can get away with it. But we are saying they cannot get away with it. [13]

An abbreviated version of this interview in Japanese appeared in the September 6, 2013 edition of Shukan Kinyobi.

[Oliver Stone](#), filmmaker and screenwriter, has won numerous Academy Awards for his work on such iconic films as Platoon, Wall Street, JFK, Born on the Fourth of July, Natural Born Killers, Salvador, and W. He and Peter Kuznick co-authored The Untold History of the United States, the 10-part documentary series broadcast on Showtime Network, and the book with the same title published by Simon & Schuster, 2012.



[Peter Kuznick](#) is a Professor of history and Director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at American University. Author of Beyond the Laboratory: Scientists as Political Activists in 1930s America (1987), co-editor of Rethinking Cold War Culture (2001), co-author (with Kimura Akira) of 『広島長崎原爆投下再考 - 日米の視点』 [Rethinking the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – Japanese and US Perspectives] (2011), and co-author (with Yuki Tanaka) of 『原発とヒロシマ - 「原子力平和利用」の真相』 [Nuclear power and Hiroshima – Truths about the "Peaceful Use of Nuclear"] (2011). Since 1995, he has led a study tour to Hiroshima and Nagasaki every summer in collaboration with Ritsumeikan University.

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[1] Barack Obama, "Presidential Proclamation – Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War," the White House, May 25, 2012.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/25/presidential-proclamation-commemoration-50th-anniversary-vietnam-war>

[2] A quote from G. H. Bush's radio address in March 2, 1991, quoted in many articles, for example, Mark Thomson, "Iraq: 10 Years," *Time*, March 18, 2013.

<http://nation.time.com/2013/03/18/iraq-ten-years-after/>

[3] Barack Obama, Remarks by the President at 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice, the White House, July 27, 2013.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/27/remarks-president-60th-anniversary-korean-war-armistice>

[4] "It is in this spirit that we must now move beyond the discords of the past decade. It is in this spirit that I ask you to join me in writing an agenda for the future." Gerald Ford, Speech at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 23, 1975.

<http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252291.pdf>

[5] Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*, Metropolitan Books, 2013.

[6] "Further, the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbor." The Project for the New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses – Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century*, September 2000, p.51. <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>

[7] The Nye Committee was a Senate committee led by North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye, which probed into the US banking interests in the US involvement with WWI. For details, see pp.64-85, Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, *The Untold History of the United States*, Simon and Schuster, 2012.

[8] Full text of Smedley Butler's famous 1933 speech "War Is a Racket" is available here.

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article4377.htm> Also see Douglas Lummis, "Douglas Lummis on Smedley Butler, and Butler's 'War Is A Racket' speech," *Peace Philosophy Centre*, October 11, 2010.

<http://peacephilosophy.blogspot.ca/2010/10/douglas-lummis-on-smedley-butler-and.html>

[9] Oka Masaharu Memorial Nagasaki Peace Museum

<http://www.d3.dion.ne.jp/~okakinen/English/indexE.htm> Also see "August 9 Memorial for Korean A-bomb Victims in Nagasaki 8月9日長崎原爆朝鮮人犠牲者追悼早朝集会 나가사키 원폭 조선인 희생자 추도 조조집회 메시지," *Peace Philosophy Centre*, August 30, 2010.

<http://peacephilosophy.blogspot.ca/2010/08/august-9-memorial-for-korean-bomb.html>

[10] D. H. Lawrence, novelist and poet, 1885-1930. This is a quote from his *Studies in Classical American Literature*, 1923.

[11] For the history of African-American initiatives in the anti-nuclear movement, see Vincent Intondi's work, for example, *From Harlem to Hiroshima: The African American Response to the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (forthcoming with Stanford University Press). <http://fch.ju.edu/FCH-2007/Intondi-From%20Harlem%20to%20Hiroshima.htm>

[12] AMPO is short for Nichibei anzen hoshō joyaku, or the Japan-US Security Treaty signed in 1960, which stipulates the presence of US military bases in Japan. For details of struggle against the US bases on the islands of Okinawa, which hosts 74% of the US military bases in Japan, Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

[13] Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, "The U.S. and Japan: Partners in Historical Falsification," *Huffington Post*, September 10, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/oliver-stone/the-us-and-japan-partners_b_3902034.html