



# Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era

*Heather Marie Stur*

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Beyond Combat investigates how the Vietnam War both reinforced and challenged the gender roles that were key components of American Cold War ideology. While popular memory of the Vietnam War centers on the "combat moment," refocusing attention onto women and gender paints a more complex and accurate picture of the war's far-reaching impact beyond the battlefields. Encounters between Americans and Vietnamese were shaped by a cluster of intertwined images used to make sense of and justify American intervention and use of force in Vietnam. These images included the girl next door, a wholesome reminder of why the United States was committed to defeating Communism; the treacherous and mysterious "dragon lady," who served as a metaphor for Vietnamese women and South Vietnam; the John Wayne figure, entrusted with the duty of protecting civilization from savagery; and the gentle warrior, whose humanitarian efforts were intended to win the favor of the South Vietnamese. Heather Stur also examines the ways in which ideas about masculinity shaped the American GI experience in Vietnam and, ultimately, how some American men and women returned from Vietnam to challenge homefront gender norms.

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