

# Disorienting the Vietnam War: GB Tran's *Vietnamerica* as Transnational and Transhistorical Graphic Memoir

*By Caroline Kyungah Hong*

Asian American artists have long been important contributors to U.S. mainstream comics—Jim Lee, Ernie Chan, Bernard Chang, Sean Chen, Cliff Chiang, Larry Hama, and Greg Pak, to name just a few—but until recently there has been a relative absence of Asian American protagonists and stories in the medium. Historically, when Asian or Asian American characters have been featured in U.S. mainstream comics, they have often appeared as racist caricatures, orientalist stereotypes onto which national anxieties and fears are projected.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, there is an emergent, alternative tradition of Asian American comics and graphic narratives<sup>2</sup>—by creators such as Lynda Barry, Fred Chao, Hellen Jo, Derek Kirk Kim, Lela Lee, Thien Pham, Lark Pien, Jason Shiga, GB Tran, Jen Wang, Belle Yang, Gene Luen Yang, the editors and the artists of the *Secret Identities* and *Shattered* comics anthologies, among many others—that is garnering both critical acclaim and popularity with diverse audiences.<sup>3</sup> These twenty-first-century graphic narratives have to contend with a long legacy of visual imagery, not only in comics but throughout U.S. popular culture, that has reified stereotypes of Asian Americans as the yellow peril, the perpetual foreigner, and the model minority. For instance, in his 2006 award-winning graphic novel *American Born Chinese*, Gene Luen Yang revives and satirizes the figure of the slant-eyed, pigtailed, bucktoothed “heathen Chinese,” an image that was enormously popular and widely circulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yang’s reappropriation of this old yet familiar racist image speaks to the ways in which traces of much earlier representations of Asians and Asian Americans continue to haunt contemporary visual culture and media.<sup>4</sup> As these kinds of racialized and stereotypical images persist, even as many are heralding a post-race era and post-racial critical paradigms, graphic narratives are uniquely equipped to help us engage the contested categories of race, the material realities of U.S. race relations, and the politics of representation. As Hillary L. Chute and Marianne DeKoven write in their introduction to the 2006 *Modern Fiction Studies* (MFS) special issue on the graphic narrative, “one might say, in the present moment, images have never been more important, or more under siege” (771).

As an English professor, I have found graphic narratives to be eminently teachable. Because of the form’s accessibility, intimacy, and universality, as well as its facilitation of heightened identification and the integral role of the reader in constructing meaning (McCloud 36, 68), the graphic narrative is especially effective at promoting reading and intellectual inquiry both in and out of the classroom. For my students who are visual learners, they are more engaged by and proficient at analyzing this hybrid visual-verbal form, gaining practice and confidence in their critical skills.

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For other students, studying graphic narratives challenges them to develop and exercise new ways of reading, which leads them to reflect on the impact and import of different mediums, reading practices, and issues of literacy. In both cases, the form also encourages students to slow down when reading (Chute 9; Mitchell 200) and allows them to “become more facile at jumping around the text, looking for connections, repetitions, contradictions” (Mitchell 204), which is crucial for improving their close reading techniques, a fundamental skill of literary criticism. Furthermore, because my English courses do not differentiate between graphic narratives and more “traditional” literature, students develop complex yet expansive definitions of what counts as “literary” and are actively engaged in the work of canon formation.

Graphic narratives are thus generative and versatile teaching tools in the English classroom, as well as a range of disciplines, from history and fine arts classes to area studies and interdisciplinary courses. As a teacher of Asian American literature and culture in particular, I appreciate that “the diegetical horizon of each page, made up of what are essentially boxes of time, offers graphic narrative a representational mode capable of addressing complex political and historical issues with an explicit, formal degree of self-awareness” (Chute and DeKoven 769). This metatextual quality of the visual-verbal form “reminds us at every turn (or panel) that what we are experiencing is a representation” (Versaci 6). And as Derek Parker Royal notes, graphic narratives “are well suited to dismantle those very assumptions that problematize ethnic representation, especially as they find form in visual language. They can do this by particularizing the general, thereby undermining any attempts at subjective erasure through universalization” (9). The form’s unique interplay of words and images and its negotiation of both “the visible and the invisible,” the “silent dance of the seen and the unseen” (McCloud 92), has special significance for Asian Americans, who are simultaneously invisible and hypervisible in our ambiguous socio-cultural position as “the national abject” (Shimakawa 3). Asian American graphic narratives “intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of representation” (Chute and DeKoven 772).

The Asian American graphic memoir is an important subgenre of Asian American graphic narrative. Earlier Asian American graphic autobiographical works, like Henry Kiyama’s *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* (1931) and Miné Okubo’s *Citizen 13660* (1946), tell personal stories that are also profoundly collective, especially in their portrayals of distinct Asian American histories, such as immigration, exclusion, internment, and war, and in their accessible treatment of themes and issues like citizenship and belonging, hyphenate and hybrid identities, gender and sexuality, the complex nature of stereotypes, and so on. GB Tran’s *Vietnamerica*, published in 2011, continues this important cultural and political work and, I would argue, is an exemplar of the incredible representational and pedagogical potential of Asian American graphic narrative.

Through the stories of Tran’s extended family, *Vietnamerica* engages the historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts of the Vietnam War and its aftermath, a history that is itself both invisible and hypervisible in U.S. popular and visual culture. As Michele Janette has pointed out, most American narratives about Vietnam have emphasized “silence and trauma,” dramatized “veterans’ necessary and fascinating accounts of the American experiences, delineating ‘Nam’ as a surreal hellscape,” and “have almost entirely ignored the autonomous nation, people, and culture of Vietnam” (ix). In her introduction to *Mỹ Việt: Vietnamese American Literature*

in *English, 1962–Present*, Janette identifies two kinds of Vietnamese American literature: “Tales of Witness,” which are “paradigmatic narratives . . . that are based in personal experience and driven by the need to inform, to educate, to correct the record and claim a spot in the American psyche” (xix), and “Tales of Imagination,” “the exceptional, the idiosyncratic, the deconstructive, and the experimental works of Vietnamese American literature in English” (xxii). GB Tran’s *Vietnamerica* works to bridge these two modes of representation, spanning Vietnamese American literary and cultural history.

Tran’s graphic memoir can and should be read as part of a growing body of contemporary Vietnamese American literature—by writers such as Linh Dinh, Andrew Lam, Kien Nguyen, Andrew X. Pham, Aimee Phan, Dao Strom, lê thi diem thúy, and Monique Truong—that shares concerns with history and memory, the multigenerational and collective, the transnational and global. In form and content, these works “push the boundaries of what a Vietnamese American and an Asian American text is at times, expected to represent” (Pelaud, “New Phase”), by “articulating new identities that cannot be fixed in time” and “subjectivities that are always in flux and vary greatly” (Pelaud, *This Is All I Choose to Tell* 1). In response, a number of Asian Americanist scholars have begun to examine the complexity and diversity of twenty-first-century Vietnamese American literature and culture, much of which does not solely or narrowly focus on the Vietnam War.<sup>5</sup> Isabelle Thuy Pelaud argues, in *This Is All I Choose to Tell: History and Hybridity in Vietnamese American Literature*, that “[t]he association of Vietnamese American literature only with the Viet Nam War is problematic because it obscures the complexities of hybridity, the subjects’ postcolonial, refugee, immigrant of color, and transnational experiences, and therefore misses a large part of what is being said and presented in the texts” (132).

When contemporary Vietnamese American writers do focus on the Vietnam War, their works provide what Helena Grice calls “the ‘reverse angle’ on the Vietnam conflict” (948), writing “with, against, or aside from normative narratives of the Viet Nam War and its aftermath” (Pelaud, *This Is All I Choose to Tell* 58). In doing so, Tran’s graphic memoir challenges the racial phantasms that Sylvia Shin Huey Chong names the “oriental obscene” (9). In *The Oriental Obscene: Violence and Racial Fantasies in the Vietnam Era*, Chong explores the ways in which the “specter of Vietnam” continues to haunt the U.S., especially in visual culture and media (2). *Vietnamerica* is a “visual palimpsest” (7) that dramatizes this haunting from a Vietnamese American perspective and can be seen as a response to one of Chong’s framing questions, “What does it mean to view the present through the lens of the past?” (1).

On the surface, *Vietnamerica* seems like a familiar Asian American coming-of-age story, at least in the context of an Asian American literature classroom. GB (Gia-Bao) is a second-generation Vietnamese American man, born and raised in South Carolina and later Arizona, the youngest of four siblings.<sup>6</sup> For most of his life, he is largely uninterested in Vietnamese history and culture and ignorant of his own family’s past. That is, until his last surviving grandparents die within a few months of each other, and he travels to Vietnam with his parents for the first time. It is there that he comes to learn, “a man without history is a tree without roots” (Tran 8), a quotation supposedly from Confucius, which I return to later in this essay, repeated throughout the narrative.<sup>7</sup> However, this graphic memoir is not just about GB’s individual quest to reconcile his identity. Tran’s focus here is more on the tree and its roots, and less on the man (62).

*Vietnamerica* can be read as an example of Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” which “describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they ‘remember’

only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (9). GB certainly experiences postmemory's "basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness" (9). And prior to his trip to Vietnam, his postmemory is shaped more by the absence of memory than its presence, "mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation—often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible" (9). It's also important to note how Tran complicates postmemory by expanding the effects of memory and trauma beyond the first and second generations and the parent-child relationship. *Vietnamerica* is a panoramic portrait of GB's family across generations, a saga of a heterogeneous family tree, with members who fought on both sides of the conflict, that is represented through a multiplicity of voices and experiences. Tran's graphic memoir thus engages in what Viet Thanh Nguyen calls "ethical memory," or "memory work that recalls both one's own as well as others" (144), as well as what Hillary L. Chute refers to as "an expanded *idiom of witness*, a manner of testifying that sets a visual language in motion with and against the verbal in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form" (3).

*Vietnamerica's* multiple voices and experiences are represented through Tran's stunning and complex visual style: the use of different colors, from dark, rich reds and oranges, to muted blues, yellows, and browns, as well as black and white; the variety of panels and borders in size and style, as well as the use of bleeds and spreads; the use of distinct lettering, both printed and cursive, and different types of speech balloons; a range of both realistic and surreal images, including highly stylized images like communist propaganda posters (Tran 46, 186, 188, 190) and actual photographs (136); and the use of gutters, negative space, and all-black pages, to identify some of the stylistic elements of the book.

Tran's extraordinary stylistic choices enable the reader to follow an intricate narrative structured around memories that flow across shifting time and space, in particular through the layering of multiple acts of telling and multiple journeys to Vietnam, not just GB's. Though many of the memories come from GB's mother, Dzung Chung, several characters contribute stories at various moments in both the graphic memoir's timeline and its structure, repeatedly circling back to reveal more of the past, so much so that it is sometimes confusing as to who is doing the telling and when.

It is through these multiple tellings that GB finally learns, for example, the story of how his parents fled Vietnam on a cargo plane on April 25, 1975, right before the fall of Saigon, with the help of their American friend Leonard. He also learns of all the people they had to leave behind. He hears about how his father's childhood friend Do was captured and suffered in labor camps for years, never making it out of Vietnam; how his paternal grandfather Huu Nghiep had abandoned his family to fight for the Vietminh and died a communist war hero; how his father Tri Huu had been an artist like him, a painter, and had to give it all up; how Tri Huu's first wife had been a Frenchwoman who eventually left him and their two kids, GB's two oldest siblings; how Dzung Chung had been Tri Huu's student in the eleventh grade. And the list of revelations goes on. Though this is Tran's work, and it obviously cannot exist without his authorship and art, we don't see GB participating in these tellings until near the end of the book, when he begins to actively ask questions and seek answers that ultimately lead to the creation of the book itself.

The form of the graphic narrative—framed, fragmented, full of gaps—can be a powerful analogue for memory, and *Vietnamerica's* circular, nonchronological,

repetitive structure enacts memory's fluid patterns and the irregular, always unfinished processes of accessing the past, uncovering histories, and constructing genealogies. Tran has stated in an interview, "in a way, I also think it was my subconscious wanting to simulate how disorienting it was for me to unravel my family's history in the first place" (Hogan). GB's family history, its immense impact on GB, what it means to be Vietnamese American—Tran shows that these are puzzles that cannot easily be solved, stories that don't always make sense and can never be complete. He visualizes this idea quite literally, for example, on the hardcover inside the dust jacket, which depicts a jigsaw puzzle, perhaps of GB's face, in mid-assembly, the pieces of which show sections of the faces of GB's family members.

At first glance a seemingly typical "visit the homeland and return to your roots" kind of story, the graphic memoir is framed by GB's first trip to Vietnam at age thirty. However, in piecing together the puzzle that is the past, Tran decenters the homing plot by layering the text with multiple trips to and within Vietnam. Like time in the text, space in *Vietnamerica* is also constantly shifting and changing. Tran depicts several different Vietnams over the course of the narrative, a place multiply and palimpsestically invaded, occupied, colonized by the Japanese, the French, and the Americans, a place indelibly marked by both communism and global capitalism, a place that appears to have radically changed yet also, as GB's father observes, "looks pretty much the same" (Tran 86).

When he gets to Vietnam, GB, even as a New Yorker, is totally unprepared for and overwhelmed by the chaos of Saigon. Though raised by Vietnamese parents and thus not entirely foreign to the culture or the language, GB is more tourist than native. Tran captures his extreme culture shock in a two-page series of panels (50–51)—a spread that depicts contemporary urban Vietnam, hectic, loud, fast-paced, and overcrowded with people and vehicles, and a number of humorous smaller panels that demonstrate how out of place GB is, whether because other Vietnamese are unable to understand his pronunciation of "pho" or because he has a shaved head, which is seen as bad luck. And in the center of these scenes that demonstrate his social and cultural difference is GB's facial expression of total alienation and panic.

What Tran does to complicate and decenter this funny yet fairly unremarkable scene is to replicate it a hundred and fifty pages later, but this time with GB's parents (201–3). On Tri Huu and Dzung Chung's first trip back to Vietnam, almost two decades after they fled, and over a decade before GB agrees to go with them, they experience a similar shock and defamiliarization in a place they once called home. Despite feeling confident that they can find their way to their old home, they get lost, stunned and confused to discover that "Vietnam's changed" (201), as much as they themselves have changed in the twenty years they've been gone. The expressions on their faces echo yet also precede the look on GB's. The nonlinear structure, which reverses the order of these two trips to Vietnam, depicting GB's trip narratively before his parents' much earlier return, serves to close the gap between the two trips and render the timeline of these histories less important than their parallel nature. Rather than emphasize chronology and hierarchy, Tran creates a genealogy that highlights shared experiences across generations, something unimaginable to GB prior to his journey.

There are several other such parallels throughout *Vietnamerica*, but here I will focus on one more. In a bleed about halfway through the graphic memoir, Tri Huu digs a hole in their backyard, and the smoke from his cigarette (smoke being one of many visual motifs throughout the text) wraps around him and up into a collage of images from that particular moment's past, present, and future (142). At the top, Dzung Chung

talks disdainfully in the present about the “junk” that Tri Huu has held onto for decades. On the bottom, we see images from the past depicting the origins of these personal artifacts. In the middle, we see Tri Huu discovering that these items have been given away, presumably sometime in the near future. This is another instance of Tran collapsing the narrative’s timeline in order to emphasize the connections across events, rather than the isolated experiences. And as Tri Huu continues to dig, it is unclear if the digging signifies his desire to bury or to excavate the past.

Dzung Chung calls her husband’s mementos “trash” and is eager to get rid of them. As she boxes up old photos, letters, and other relics from Vietnam, she says to GB, “I tell you these things, but you’ll never understand. How could you? We left Vietnam so you would NEVER have to know what it’s like” (151). The sealed box is an attempt to put away the traumas of the past, not only for themselves, but also for GB. But even if GB can never fully know what it was like for his parents (as a condition of postmemory), he can know *some* things, and Tran suggests that he must learn these things in order to fully reconcile his own identity and relationship to his family. As a metaphor of containment and order, the sealed box is the antithesis of the graphic memoir’s narrative structure, which is unruly and purposefully out of order.

His parents’ boxing of the past has a significant impact on GB. After their trip to Vietnam opens the figurative box for them and reconnects the two of them to their shared history, Tri Huu gives GB a book on the Vietnam War as a high school graduation gift. They had “realized their Vietnam only existed in stories and fading memories” and that “customs and shared history were being lost within the span of a single generation.” The gift of the book represents their hope “that someday [he]’d want to learn” (207). Unfortunately, GB has inherited his parents’ impulse to contain the past, and he tosses the book into a box of his own to be sealed and stored away. The following page illustrates what GB does not yet realize, that he is not merely boxing the book, a single object, but a vast collective history, signified by all the tiny figures he is packing away (208). GB himself is portrayed sitting in a box, not knowing the limits he has placed on his own becoming by packing up that history.

Fortunately, boxes do not necessarily have to be sealed permanently. Both his parents’ and GB’s own attempts to contain and put away the past are unsustainable. Years later, when GB’s parents ask him again to accompany them to Vietnam, he initially refuses. But while finally unpacking boxes in his new Brooklyn apartment, GB comes across the book that his father had given him, inscribed with the aforementioned quotation that Tran attributes to Confucius, “A man without history is a tree without roots” (278). On this second-to-last page of the text, Tri Huu’s gift and its message change GB’s mind about going to Vietnam. His and his parents’ boxes were not just similar or parallel; their contents were inextricably intertwined, encapsulating the past, and bridging time and space to shape the present and future, if only opened. And as fractured and scattered as their family is, though there are no dramatic reconciliations or transformations, Tran demonstrates the interconnectedness of even the most divided family. As he writes, “Individuals pick sides. Families don’t” (35).

It’s interesting to note that the quotation “A man without history is a tree without roots,” which bookends the text, is perhaps not from Confucius at all.<sup>8</sup> Though there are a couple sayings believed to have been written by the disciples of Confucius that mention roots, I was unable to find a source to confirm the attribution of this precise quotation.<sup>9</sup> Joseph R. Levenson, a U.S. historian of China, in volume 1 of his trilogy *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (1958), insists, “[a] nation must always remain faithful to its own history and its own culture in order to maintain an

independent existence on earth. For a people to keep faith with itself and progress courageously, it ought not to renounce its own old civilization lest it becomes like a river without a source or a tree without roots" (Levenson 106). This reference to "a tree without roots" connects the individual man of Tran's quotation to the collective, specifically the nation. As far as I can tell, Tran's quotation comes closest to a saying commonly attributed to Marcus Garvey: "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots" (Chang 222). However, the likely original source for this statement is actually Charles Seifert's *The Negro's or Ethiopian's Contribution to Art* (1938)<sup>10</sup>: "A Race without knowledge of its history is like a tree without roots" (5). This trail of misattribution is quite fitting in relation to the transnational and palimpsestic nature of Tran's work. Tri Huu's (and by extension, Tran's) misquoting of Confucius, whether intentional or not, complicates and confuses this potentially self-orientalizing move, linking GB's family history as much to U.S. racial politics and history as to Asian cultural contexts.

Indeed *Vietnamerica* is as much rooted in the Trans' experiences in America as those in Vietnam, and perhaps surprisingly those experiences are the ones that appear to most divide and fracture their family. On first arriving in the States as refugees, they seem to have finally attained "freedom" and "liberty," as they enjoy the superficial trappings of the American Dream (Tran 229). But as time passes, they have to confront the harsh realities of immigrant life. In a dark two-page spread, the Trans are depicted on a Scrabble board, the letter tiles spelling out the words "in a foreign culture threatening our own," interspersed with images like that of the family all sleeping in one cramped room, the mother working as a waitress and buying groceries with food stamps, the father being yelled at, the oldest son being made fun of and called racial epithets, while the youngest children eat American fast food and play video games (108–9). The Scrabble board suggests that navigating and surviving in the U.S. is a kind of game, a game in which the Trans are at a severe disadvantage.

Though leaving Vietnam was necessary, Tran highlights the subsequent rift it caused in their family, visualized in a panel that looks like a family photo, with the dejected expressions of GB's parents and his two oldest siblings in stark contrast to the grinning faces of the two American-born children. Below that image, Tran depicts how the family and the nation are literally and figuratively remapped by the realities of immigrant life, how the collective "freedom" and "liberty" they had expected to enjoy had given way to "the Great Generational Divide" and the "Sea of Cultural Loss" (97). After five years in the U.S., the family is naturalized. But the shine on the American Dream has long faded, as the immigration official declares, "Your journey has ended" (243).

On the last page of the text, the final words of *Vietnamerica*, set against a white background, are GB asking his mother, "Can I still go to Vietnam with you?" (279). Thus the graphic memoir ends with a beginning, with a question rather than an answer. Jade Hidle argues "that the open-endedness is purposeful, that the discomfort the reader may feel is part of the discomfort felt by those of us who are perpetually negotiating our identities. In this context, a memoir does not inherently aspire to reconciliation or linearity, as the structure of Tran's book underscores. The cycles through time suggest that 'the journey' is, especially for the children of immigrants, never-ending, ongoing." As Sandra Oh notes, writing about the work of comics artist Adrian Tomine, "[w]orking against closure within a medium enabled by closure . . . gestures towards the constructedness of identity, while yet remaining enframed within it. This condition is one of both possibilities and limitations but also one that gestures

towards an as yet unknown future" (149). The text's ending suggests that GB's future, though unknown, is brighter for having asked the question, for having taken the journey.

And though the graphic memoir's subtitle, "A Family's Journey," implies a singular voyage, *Vietnamerica* represents multiple journeys, with shifting points of origin and destinations. The text may end with the beginning of GB's journey, but his trip is propelled by an artifact of his parents' trip, which was in turn propelled by artifacts of many earlier journeys taken by their family, small and big, from and to South Carolina, Arizona, New York, Florida, Langston, Vungtau, Mytho, Saigon, and back. Tran suggests that, for Vietnamese Americans, and Asian Americans more broadly, the journeying is continuous, that concepts like home and homeland, here and there, then and now, are never quite stable or certain.

Shane Denson theorizes that "the transnational work of comics and graphic narratives—their propensity toward various acts of border-crossing, adaptation, and reimagination—[is] a more or less natural extension of volatile core processes at work in the act of reading comics" (272). This is certainly true in Tran's work. The transnational and transhistorical framework of the graphic memoir, visualized in the proliferation of planes, bridges, and hybridized and palimpsestic spaces throughout the text, is evident even in its title, which refuses a literal and figurative hyphen—*Vietnamerica*, rather than Vietnam-America or Vietnamese American. Through his use of an unconventional narrative structure, his rich and varied stylistic choices, his use of layered motifs like the tree and the box, Tran manages to capture the "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity" of Vietnamese Americans, to borrow Lisa Lowe's terms. Asian American graphic narratives like *Vietnamerica* demonstrate the diversity of Asian American cultural productions and exemplify what the form of graphic narrative can do for Asian American literary and cultural studies and the larger U.S. cultural landscape.

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#### Notes

I would like to thank this special issue's guest editor Pamela Thoma for her guidance and the anonymous *AALDP* reviewers for sharing their expertise and helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the exhibition *Marvels and Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in U.S. Comics, 1942–1986*, drawn from the William F. Wu Collection, curated by Jeff Yang, and originally sponsored by NYU's Asian/Pacific/American Institute in collaboration with the NYU Fales Library and Special Collections. The heart of the exhibit is organized around eight of the most prevalent and enduring archetypes of Asians in U.S. comics—the Alien, the Kamikaze, the Brute, the Lotus Blossom, the Guru, the Brain, the Temptress, and the Manipulator—and places those images alongside their historical and cultural contexts and quotations from contemporary Asian American artists. For more info on the exhibit, see the NYU A/P/A Institute website at <http://www.apa.nyu.edu/gallery/marvels&monsters/intro.html>; and "'Marvels and Monsters.'"

<sup>2</sup> For more on the terms "comics" vs. "graphic narrative," see Royal 11–14; and Chute and DeKoven 767–70. Royal uses "'comics'" when referring to sequential illustrations or images whose meaning is contextualized within the page layout . . . and 'graphic narrative' when referring to a broader mode of storytelling in which images are an

inextricable component" (11), the latter able to "best capture the comics medium in most of its permutations" (14). Like Chute and DeKoven, I generally prefer "graphic narrative" to refer to "a range of types of narrative work in comics," though I also use "comics" because the term "has its own weight and history" (Chute and DeKoven 767).

<sup>3</sup> Several of these comics artists were featured in the exhibition *Alt.Comics: Asian American Artists Reinvent the Comic Book*, curated by Jeff Yang for the Museum of Chinese in America in NYC and originally exhibited with *Marvels and Monsters*. For more info on the exhibit, see the MOCA website at

[http://www.mocanyc.org/exhibitions/marvels\\_and\\_monsters\\_and\\_altcomics](http://www.mocanyc.org/exhibitions/marvels_and_monsters_and_altcomics).

<sup>4</sup> For example, there have been controversies over similar racist images and cartoons published in newspapers at Dartmouth College and the University of California, Berkeley. See Yu; "More Letters to the Editor"; and "Letters to the Editor."

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Duong; Janette; Pelaud, "New Phase"; Pelaud, *This Is All I Choose to Tell*; and Võ.

<sup>6</sup> I try to distinguish between the author-artist and the protagonist by referring to the latter as GB and the former as Tran.

<sup>7</sup> My copy of *Vietnamerica* has very few page numbers. When possible or appropriate, I try to describe the general location of the panels I discuss, in addition to estimated page numbers.

<sup>8</sup> I am very grateful to one of the anonymous AALDP reviewers for pointing out that this quotation might not in fact be from Confucius.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Sayings of Confucius*, there are two mentions of roots. In Book 1, verse 2, one of the disciples of Confucius says, "Few men that are good sons and good brothers are fond of withstanding those over them. A man that is not fond of withstanding those over him and is yet fond of broils is nowhere found. A gentleman heeds the roots. When the root has taken, the Way is born. And to be a good son and a good brother, is not that the root of love?" And in Book XIX, verse 12, another disciple says, "The disciples, the little sons of Tzu-hsia, can sprinkle and sweep, attend and answer, come in and go out; but what can come of twigs without roots?"

<sup>10</sup> See "Marcus Garvey."

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