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## The Vietnam war in literature.

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Philip Roth (1933-2018) was one of the great American novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In his novel, *The Human Stain* (2000), he describes the thoughts of a Vietnam war veteran who cannot cope with the trauma of the war :

So, tell me what happened,” they say, the little social workers, the little psychologists with their college degrees. “Did you kill anyone when you were in Vietnam?” Was there anyone he *didn't* kill when he was in Vietnam? Wasn't that what he was *supposed* to do when they sent him to Vietnam? Fucking kill gooks<sup>1</sup>. They said everything goes? So everything went. It all relates to the word “kill.” Kill gooks! If “Did you kill anyone?” isn't bad enough, they give him a fucking gook psychiatrist, this like Chink<sup>2</sup> shit. He serves his country and he can't even get a doctor who fucking speaks English. All round Northampton they've got Chinese restaurants, they've got Vietnamese restaurants, Korean markets—but him? If you're some Vietnamese, you're some Chink, you make out, you get a restaurant, you get a market, you get a grocery store, you get a family, you get a good education. But they got fuck-all<sup>3</sup> for him. Because they want him dead. They wish he never came back. He is their worst nightmare. He was not *supposed* to come back. And now this college professor. Know where he was when the government sent us in there with one arm tied behind our backs? He was out there leading the fucking protesters. They pay them, when they go to college, to teach, to teach the kids, not to fucking protest the Vietnam War. They didn't give us a fucking chance. They say we lost the war. *We* didn't lose the war, the government lost the war. But when fancy-pants<sup>4</sup> professors felt like it, instead of teaching class some day they go picketing<sup>5</sup> out there against the war, and that is the thanks he gets for serving his country. That is the thanks for the shit he had to put up with day in and day out. He can't get a goddamn night's sleep. He hasn't had a good night's sleep in fucking twenty-six years.

Philip ROTH, *The Human Stain*, Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

➤ To what extent does this document reflect the trauma of the Vietnam war ?

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1. Gook: (offensive) a foreigner, especially a person of SE Asian descent.  
2. Chink: (offensive) a Chinese person.  
3. Fuck-all: (vulgar slang) absolutely nothing.  
4. Fancy-pant: superior or high-class in a pretentious way.  
5. Picketing: a person or group of people who stand outside a workplace or other venue as a protest or to try to persuade others not to enter during a strike.