

## Lauren Benton reads an excerpt from “They Called it Peace”

In writing a global history of imperial violence, I had to reach for new ways of studying small wars. Military analysts have tended to describe small wars as manifestations of insurgency and counterinsurgency. The bias has driven them to focus on questions about how and why global powers so often failed in the face of unconventional enemies. Typical of this tendency is the minor industry in the United States that aimed at assessing why American officials made so many wrong moves in Vietnam.

But schooling sponsors of war to learn lessons from the past so they might do a better job next time, is an odd, even chilling objective. It also answers the wrong questions. Our aim should not be to help humanity master the art of war, but to understand the arc of war, the logic and practices that move antagonists with exquisite precision from conflict to conflict, and from containment right up to the edge of atrocity.