

# ***My Black April [Excerpt], 2013***

**Viet Thanh Nguyen**

Black April is the term that Vietnamese Americans have come up with to name the anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, April 30th, 1975. This is the day when South Vietnam disappeared forever from the maps of the world, if not from the maps of many hearts. On that anniversary day, if you happen to be in the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon, in the cities of Garden Grove and Westminster, in the County of Orange, in the State of California, in these Altered States of America that are no longer the same because we came, you will see the last remnants of the Republic of Vietnam gather in a dazzling array of military uniforms and ao dai as they mourn their lost country, South Vietnam...

On the other hand—do we have to call this anniversary Black? Really, Vietnamese people? Is that the best we can do? After all, isn't White the color of death in Vietnam? Don't we, on funeral days, strap around our foreheads a White scarf of mourning? Didn't we, when we first came to America, think that we had come to a White country? A country of indistinguishable White people who liked White bread, which was a problem because we liked French bread, which, if you think about it, is a problem in and of itself? A country where, in certain states, snowfall would turn the land White in the most evident sign that this country was not like our country, where it never snowed, although that would have been nice if it did, given how hot our country was, which we only discovered on our return many years later? A country that had produced some clever fellow who, in planning for the demise of our country, decided that the song with which to warn fellow Americans in Saigon that they should run for the helicopters was White Christmas?...

But of course Black April will never be White April because one of the first things we learned in coming to this country was that it was not really a White country, or not only a White country. Rub the White off this country and you'll see: it's actually non-Black beneath...

The point is: Why Black April, Vietnamese people? If you think I'm wrong, let's call it White April, just for once, and see what White people say. Let's call it White April just to remind ourselves of our own customs of mourning, since some of us are into preserving our culture. Let's call it White April just to honor the White people who so often surround us and the White culture in which we so often find ourselves. Let's call it White April just to remind White people that White has more than one shade of meaning and that some of us haven't forgotten what some White people did. Let's call it White April just to let Black people know that we're with them, or, if that's going too far for some of us, not against them...Yes, Vietnamese people, if we have to call April anything—although who's to say we have to call it anything at all—just for once let's call it White.



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Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *The Sympathizer* is a New York Times best seller and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Other honors include the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the Edgar Award for Best First Novel from the Mystery Writers of America, the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction from the American Library Association, and the First Novel Prize from the Center for Fiction, among others. His other books are *The Committed*, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* and *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*. He is a University Professor, the Aerol Arnold Chair of English, and a Professor of English, American Studies and Ethnicity, and Comparative Literature at the University of Southern California. He is also the author of the bestselling short story collection, *The Refugees*, and co-founder of DVAN.