

History 336
Spring 2009
Vietnam: The American War
Prof. Karl Benziger

Office Hours: Tues. 10:00-10:45 A.M. and Thurs. 12:30-1:30 P.M., or by appointment
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The Vietnam War or as known to the Vietnamese, the American War, remains fertile ground for a study of contested memory and history among the Vietnamese and American people, among others. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* former Secretary of Defense under Richard Nixon Melvin Laird claimed that, “we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.” Whereas, Robert McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense and major architect of the war declared in his book, *Arguments Without End* that the war might have been avoided altogether. By 1968 the Joint Chiefs of Staff were recommending troop levels in Vietnam that neared eight hundred thousand soldiers. Echoes of the Vietnam debates have been raised by politicians as they attempt to draw lessons from the war in their assessments of the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Vietnamese continue to debate the political results of this conflict as well. In the aftermath of the conflict, authors such as Duong Thu Huong have argued against the model of communism propagated by the Vietnamese government in spite of its worthy goal of national independence.

In order to understand the issues surrounding this war, we will examine the history of the American involvement in Southeast Asia and the foreign policy decisions that led to the insertion of over 500,000 American military personnel. We will analyze the conflict not only from the point of view of the major players on the world stage, but also from the various points of view of the Vietnamese people. Further, we will take into account popular interpretations of the Vietnam War in the United States and evaluate the impact of these interpretations in the shaping of American policy.

Our class time will be split between lectures, class discussions of the readings, group work and student presentations. All students will be required to lead at least two class discussions based on critical questions derived from the assigned readings. Each student will participate in a Cold War reenactment that summarizes the policy discussions that lay behind a critical moment of the war. Students will then write a 12-14 page research paper based on the position of the character or interest group they represented during the reenactment. Finally each student will write a book review based on one of the three books: *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam*, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History*, or *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Peace Agreement*. I will provide you with a detailed instruction sheet regarding these assignments. In addition, we will have a mid-term, final exam and several short writing assignments. The format for the exams will be short answer, identification, and essays. All papers must be typed or word-processed and are

due at the beginning of class on the date assigned. Be sure to contact me if you are going to be absent or have any questions regarding the class. Please keep a copy of this syllabus in your notebook, as you will need to refer to it frequently in regard to reading assignments and student presentations.

Required Texts:

George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th edition.

Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*.

Robert J. McMahan ed., *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*, 3rd edition.

You will be assigned one out of the following three books:

Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Peace Agreement*.

Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963*.

James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History*.

Recommended:

William Thomas Allison, *Military Justice in Vietnam: The Rule of Law in an American War*.

David L. Anderson, ed., *Facing My Lai: Moving Beyond the Massacre*.

Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides*.

Dixie R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against Japan*.

Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam*.

_____, *Planning A Tragedy: The Americanization of the Vietnam War*.

_____, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam*.

Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*.

James Carroll, *An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War that Came Between Us*.

Jeffrey J. Clark, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, The United States Army in Vietnam*.

Cecil B. Currey, *Victory at Any Cost: The Genius of Vietnam's Genl. Vo Ngyen Giap*.

Andreas W. Daum et. al., ed., *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*.

Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*.

Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.

Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*.

Lloyd Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From WW II to Dien Bien Phu, 1941-1954*.

Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of the American War in Vietnam*.

Marc Jason Gilbert ed., *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*.

- William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War*.
- George C. Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Vietnam War*.
- Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now: American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War*.
- Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*.
- David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War*.
- Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*.
- Jeffrey P. Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*.
- Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*.
- Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy At Home And Abroad*.
- Michael E. Latham, *Modernization As Ideology: "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era*.
- Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam*.
- Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fred Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*.
- Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*.
- Michael Lind, *America's Necessary War*.
- David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*.
- Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia Since World War II*.
- Robert S. McNamara, ed., *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy*.
- Charles E. Neu, ed., *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War*.
- Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*.
- Joseph A. Palermo, *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy*.
- Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25 Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam*.
- Robert Pisor, *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh*.
- Orrin Schwab, *Defending the Free World: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War, 1961-1965*.
- Thomas S. Scoville, *Reorganizing For Pacification Support*.
- John M. Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America's Vietnam War*.
- Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*.
- Melvin Small, *Anti-Warriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds*.
- Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir*.
- Bui Tin, *Following Ho Chi Minh: The Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel*.
- Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966*.
- Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*.
- Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars: 1950-1975*.

Electronic Sources:

National Archives and Records Administration www.nara.gov

Cold War International History Project www.wilsoncenter.org (go to programs)

Federal Government Resources Historic Documents www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/fedhis

Organization of American Historians www.oah.org

The United States on the World Stage www.ric.edu/worldstage

Adams Library:

Foreign Relations of the United States

Congressional Record

The United States Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships

Selected handouts will either be distributed in class or made available at the reserve desk of the library.

Grading:

Book Review:	15%
Mid-term exam:	20%
Final exam:	25%
Paper and Presentation:	25%
Participation and short papers:	15%

Class Schedule:***History and Memory of the Vietnam War: 2005***

Jan. 21

Introduction

Jan. 26-28

Memory: The War in Retrospect

Read: McMahon, pp. 511-517, Essays: 525-538.

The Colonial Legacy and American Involvement in Vietnam: 1945-1960**Memories of Colonialism: Dreams of Independence**

Read: Herring, pp. 3-24, McMahon, pp. 17-24, Essays: 24-35, 35-48. Atlantic Charter and other documents.

Feb. 2-4

American Commitment: The Cold War in Indochina: 1945-1953

Read: Herring 24-51, McMahon pp. 50-60, Essay: 73-86.

Diebienphu: Geneva and After: 1954-1960

Cold War Reenactment: Operation Vulture Read: Herring 53-78, McMahon, pp. 88-94, 274-276. SEATO Treaty.

Feb. 9-11

Laos and the Problem of Falling Dominoes

Read: Herring, pp. 79-87, McMahon, pp. 94-100, 276-282, 357-358, Essays: 101-112, 112-121.

Into the Fire: 1961-1968**...More Dominoes, More Advisors, More Aid and a Coup:
1961-1963**

Read: Herring, pp. 89-129, McMahon, pp. 124-137, 282-289, Essay: 138-151, 151-157.

Feb. 16-18

Tonkin Gulf Crisis: Escalation: 1964-1965

Read: Herring, pp. 131-169, McMahon, pp. 159-165, 289-290, Fabian Hilfrich, "Visions of the Asian Periphery: Vietnam (1964-1968) and the Philippines (1898-1900)."

1965, Turning Point: The American War in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement

Cold War Reenactment: July, 1965 Read: Robert S. Browne, "The Freedom Movement and the War in Vietnam," *Freedomways*, A McComb, Mississippi, Protest July 28, 1965, Senator Wayne Morse in Opposition to the Continued Escalation of the War in Vietnam August 10, 1965, McMahon, pp. 165-173, 428-431, Essays: 177-189, 189-204.

Feb. 23

People's War: Attrition and Strategic Hamlets: 1965-1967

Read: McMahon, pp. 207-213, 290-293, Essays: 293-302, 303-312.

Feb. 25

Mid Term Exam

March 2-4

Winning Hearts and Minds: Stalemate and Dissent

Read: Herring, pp. 171-223, McMahon, pp. 213-219, 360-362.

Winning Hearts and Minds: Legitimacy at Home and Abroad

Read: McMahon, pp. 431-439, Essay: 224-230, "Muhammad Ali: The Measure of a Man" *Freedomways*, Ralph D. Abernathy, Howard Levy, J.H. O'Dell, "The GI Movement vs. the War: A Symposium," *Freedomways*

March 9-13 Spring Break!!!

- March 16-18 **Tet: Broken Dreams and a New Policy: 1968**
 Read: Herring, pp. 225-247, McMahon, pp. 315-326, 329-331,
 Essays: 336-343, 344-355. **Book Reviews are due today.**
- Jockeying for Peace**
 Read: Herring, pp. 248-261, McMahon, 332-335.
- Of War and Peace: A New Policy, 1969-1973*
- March 23-25 **Presidential Politics and the Matter of Vietnam**
 Read: Herring, pp. 262-268, Kimball, pp. 1-102, McMahon, Essay:
 365-377.
- “Peace with Honor”: 1969**
 Read: Herring, pp. 271-281, Kimball, pp. 103-176, McMahon, pp.
 387-395.
- March 30- April 1 **“Vietnamization”**
 Read: Herring, pp. 281-288, McMahon, pp. 362-363, 395-399.
- Cambodia: 1970: “The Side Show”**
 Read: Herring, pp. 288-296, Kimball, pp. 177-212, McMahon, pp.
 399-402, Essay: 443-453.
- April 6-8 **Kent State: “The Side Show”**
 Read: Kimball, pp. 213-285, McMahon, pp. 440-445, Essays: 446-
 459, 466-473.
- Americans in Combat**
 Read: McMahon, pp. 234-249, Essays: 250-260, 260-271, Gregory
 L. Vitica, “One Awful Night in Thanh Phong,” John Kifner,
 “Brutal Vietnam Campaign Stirs Memories and Questions.”
- April 13-15 **The Easter Offensive: 1972**
 Read: Herring, pp. 296-310, Kimball, pp. 286-337, McMahon,
 Essay: 405-419, 419-425.
- Negotiations and Triangulation**
 Read: Nixon Explains the Five Power Centers, Kansas City, MO,
 August 2, 1971, other documents will be provided. McMahon, pp.
 402-404.
- April 20-22 **Linebacker I: Having it “My Way” and a Presidential Election**
 Read: Herring, pp. 310-320, other readings will be provided. **All
 Papers Due.**

Linebacker II: “Peace,” 1973...

Read: Herring, pp. 323-368, Kimball, pp. 338- 371, McMahon, pp. 476-481, Essays: 492-500, 500-509.

April 27-29

The End: 1975 and the Aftermath

Read: McMahon, pp. 488-492, 515-519.

*Aftermath: American Foreign Policy After Vietnam***Lessons of History*****Cold War Reenactment: Vietnamization: What’s not to like?***

Melvin Laird, “Iraq Learning the Lessons of Vietnam” and
“Interchange: Legacies of the Vietnam War”

May 4

Final Reflection

Review

Please keep in mind that the syllabus is only an outline. Throughout the course we will make adjustments for student presentations and at least one additional guest speaker.

Outcomes Assessment

If you are enrolled in any of the following programs: History Secondary Ed., Social Studies, RITE, or History B.A. You may choose to include your research paper for your student portfolio consequently the paper should demonstrate competence or mastery in the following departmental learning outcomes:

1. Understand how historians gather, interpret and analyze a wide range of primary and secondary source data/material (including literary, geographical, political and socio-economic material) and how historians construct a coherent narrative from this information (NCSS standards 1.1,1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 2.1 and RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1).
2. Demonstrate the skills of historical analysis and interpretation, such as compare and contrast, differentiate between historical facts and interpretation, consider multiple perspectives, analyze cause and effect relationships, compare competing historical narratives, recognize the tentative nature of historical interpretation and analyze the influence of the past (NCSS standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2).
3. Think chronologically and comprehensively, identifying temporal structures of historical narratives and comprehending the meanings of historical texts, monographs and documents, including their audiences, goals, perspectives and biases (NCSS standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2).

4. Develop research capabilities that enable them to formulate historical questions and themes, obtain and question historical data, identify the gaps in available records, place sources in context, and construct reliable historical interpretations (NCSS 1.1, 1.2, 1.4 and 2.1 RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.3).
5. Demonstrate their knowledge of the history, culture and values of diverse peoples and traditions throughout the world and compare patterns of continuity and change (NCSS standards 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.9, and 2.1 RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.7).
7. Formulate and explain their own interpretations of the past by examining and communicating them with clarity and precision in a variety of oral and written assignments (NCSS standards 2.1 RIBTS 2.1).
8. Demonstrate research skills utilizing the full-range of available materials including those found in libraries, archives, museums and electronic resources (NCSS standards 1.2 and 2.1 RIBTS 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.4).
9. Demonstrate the skills necessary to be an independent and lifelong learner (NCSS standards 2.1, RIBTS 1.3, 7.1, 10.2, 10.4, 11.5).