

History 365G / AMS 321
The Vietnam Wars
Unique number 39120
Tuesday, Thursday, 2-3:15 p.m.
JGB 2.216

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:15-1:45 p.m.; Thursday, 3:30-4:30 p.m.,
and by appointment

This course has two main objectives. First, it aims to introduce students to the complex and controversial history of the Vietnam Wars during the second half of the twentieth century. Although we will spend most of our time examining the “American war” of 1961-1975, the course places this event within a broad geographical and chronological context. We will spend a good deal of time considering Vietnamese history as well as the French, Japanese, British, and Chinese experiences in Vietnam predating U.S. intervention. As we move toward the 1960s, we will focus increasingly on the major controversies surrounding U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Why did U.S. policymakers believe the defense of South Vietnam was worth a massive expenditure of lives and other American resources? Why did the United States fail to achieve its objectives? Was the 1961-1975 war winnable for the United States in any meaningful sense? What social, political, and cultural impacts did the war leave on the United States, Southeast Asia, and the world?

Second, the course aims to encourage students to think like historians. That is, it requires students to evaluate primary sources (documents as well as memoirs and films), weigh competing interpretations of historical events, and defend their own conclusions in argumentative essays. Indeed, students will be evaluated largely on the basis of a series of such essays (both the take-home paper described at the end of this syllabus and essays written during in-class tests).

Students are not expected to have any familiarity with the Vietnam Wars, but they should have a basic understanding of U.S. and world history since 1941. Students lacking this background should consult Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War* and/or a standard U.S. history text such as Davidson, et al., *Nation of Nations*.

Requirements

1. Five brief quizzes (lowest score dropped, 15 percent)
2. 75-minute test on February 28 (25 percent)
3. Final exam, May 17, 2-5 p.m. (30 percent)
4. Paper of 5-7 pages, roughly 1,500-1,800 words (30 percent)

Required readings

Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (1977)

Duong Van Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (2000)

George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 5th edition (2013)

Mark Atwood Lawrence, ed., *The Vietnam War: An International History in Documents* (2014)

Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1996)

Photocopies readings posted to Canvas

Other Important Notes

- Attendance at class is required, but there will be no formal mechanism to monitor absences. Students will be responsible not only for all course material discussed in class but also for all announcements about course logistics and all handouts distributed.
- The instructor may occasionally hand out primary sources or other materials for use during class. These should be treated as required reading.
- Quizzes will be announced one class period in advance and will be given during the first 10 minutes of the class periods in which they take place. Students arriving late will not be allowed to take the quiz, and there will be no makeups under any circumstances. Each student's lowest quiz score will not count toward her/his term grade.
- Each quiz will cover the reading for the day on which the quiz is given, as well as the readings and lectures from the two previous class sessions.
- Students can find the syllabus on the course Canvas site, along with lecture outlines, documents, and copies of any other relevant material handed out in class. We will also use Canvas to report grades and to receive and return the take-home papers.
- Students who attend class are required to arrive on time, stay for the entire session, and obey basic rules of civility and decorum. Students may enter or leave in the middle of the class period only with permission of the instructor. Using cell phones, sending or receiving text messages, and using laptops for purposes unrelated to the course are strictly forbidden. Students using laptops must sit in the first two or three rows of the lecture hall.
- If you have a disability requiring accommodations, please let the instructor know no later than February 10. To receive accommodation, a student must give the instructor a letter from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). A student may request accommodations from SSD at 471-6259 or <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.
- Participation in discussions during class is not a course requirement. Students should be aware, however, that they may receive substantial extra credit for regular and constructive participation.
- All of the required books are available for purchase at the University Coop. Materials handed out during class will be posted to the Canvas site for the course.
- Under no circumstances will the instructor or Supplemental Instructor make available lecture notes.
- This syllabus and all materials presented in lectures are copyrighted by Dr. Mark A. Lawrence. No materials may be directly or indirectly published, posted to the internet, or

rewritten for publication or distribution in any medium. Neither these materials nor any portion thereof may be stored in a computer except for personal and non-commercial use.

- Paid note-takers are strictly forbidden from attending this class.
- Students must be fully aware of university rules regarding academic dishonesty. The instructor assumes full compliance throughout the semester and will rigorously enforce all university procedures in cases of violations. For more information about the university's expectations for academic integrity, see:
http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.
- This course may be used to fulfill three hours of the U.S. history component of the university core curriculum and addresses the following four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, critical thinking skills, personal responsibility, and social responsibility.
- By UT Austin policy, you must notify the instructor of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class or assignment in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to make up missed work without penalty.
- Late papers will be penalized one-third of a grade (for example, from a B+ to a B or from a B- to a C+) for each 24-hour period they are overdue.
- The course will employ the grading system that permits the use of pluses and minuses (A-, B+, B, B-, etc.).
- A grade of C will be given to students who fulfill the basic course requirements. This means you come to class regularly and adequately recite information from readings and lectures on your exams and papers without adding analysis of your own. In other words, a C will be given for average work. To earn a B or an A, you should come to class every day having read and actively thought about that day's readings. Your exams must show original and critical thinking and analysis on the topics we explore in the class and integrate ideas from lectures and readings. To receive an A, your work needs to be truly outstanding, revealing a mastery of the material and an ability to put it all together in an original and thought-provoking way. A grade of D will be given for work that falls short of the requirements or that is too error-laden to be considered good college-level material, with F's reserved for work that shows little to no effort or comprehension.
- While the roster indicates your "official" name according to UT's records, the instructor is eager to learn the name you wish to be called. Please let him know your preference so he can maintain accurate spreadsheets and rosters. Also, if you have a pronoun preference that you would like him and other students to be aware of, please let him know. The goal is to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.
- Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here: <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/appendices/appendix-h/>

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

January 22	Introduction: Big Questions
January 24	Imperial Encounters READING: Elliott, prologue-chapter 2; Doc. 1.1
January 29	The Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism READING: Elliott, chapter 3-4; Doc. 1.2
January 31	Colonialism and Cold War READING: Herring, pp. 3-25; Elliott, chapters 5-7; Docs. 1.3 and 1.7
February 5	The End of the French Era READING: Herring, pp. 25-51; Elliott, chapter 8; Docs. 2.4 and 2.5
February 7	The Geneva Settlement READING: Elliott, chapters 9-10; Doc. 3.1
February 12	Nation-Building in the North READING: Elliott, chapter 11; Doc. 3.3
February 14	Nation-Building in the South READING: Herring, chapter 2; Doc. 3.2
February 19	A New Insurgency READING: Elliott, chapters 12-13; Doc. 3.5
February 21	JFK and the Vietnam Problem READING: Herring, chapter 3; McNamara, preface-chapter 1; Doc. 4.1
February 26	Two Murders READING: McNamara, chapters 2-3; Doc. 4.4
February 28	MIDTERM
March 5	LBJ and the Vietnam Problem READING: Herring, chapter 4; McNamara, chapter 4; Doc. 5.5 and 6.2
March 7	Decisions for War: Part I READING: McNamara, chapters 5-6; Doc. 5.2
March 12	Decisions for War: Part II READING: McNamara, chapters 7-8; Doc. 5.1
March 14	The Air War READING: Herring, chapter 5; Elliott, chapter 14; Doc. 6.6
March 26	The Ground War READING: McNamara, chapter 9; Caputo, prologue-p. 39; Doc. 6.3
March 28	Veterans Panel READING: Caputo, pp. 40-74

- April 2 Politics of War: Diplomacy and Nation-Building
READING: Caputo, pp. 75-109; Doc 4.6
- April 4 Politics of War: Public Opinion and Protest
READING: Caputo, pp. 110-149; Doc. 6.4
- April 9 The Tet Offensive
READING: Herring, chapter 6; McNamara, chapter 10; Doc. 7.1
- April 11 A New Kind of Stalemate
READING: Caputo, pp. 150-208; Doc. 7.5
- April 16 Nixon, Kissinger, and Vietnam
READING: Herring, chapter 7; Doc. 8.3
- April 18 Expansion and Contraction
READING: Caputo, pp. 209-262; Doc. 8.6
- April 23 Toward the Decent Interval
READING: Caputo, 263-335; Doc. 8.7
- April 25 Peace at Last
READING: Elliott, chapter 15; Caputo, 336-354; Docs. 9.1 and 9.2
- April 30 The War after the War
READING: Herring, chapter 8; Elliott, chapter 16; Doc. 9.5
- May 2 Nations in Torment
READING: Elliott, chapter 17-epilogue; Doc. 10.1
- May 7 Contested Legacies, 1975-1989
READING: McNamara, chapter 11; Gary R. Hess, "From the Streets to the Books: Origins of an Enduring Debate" (Canvas); Docs. 10.2 and 10.3
- May 9 Legacies of Vietnam in the Post-Cold War Era
READING: H. Bruce Franklin, "Missing in Action in the Twenty-First Century" (Canvas); Doc. 10.6

ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Each student must write ONE essay on a topic drawn from the list below. The essay should be between 1,500 and 1,800 words in length (roughly 5-7 pages of double-spaced, 12-point type). No matter which question you choose, be sure to state a clear thesis and to support your argument with specific evidence drawn from readings and lectures. Also, be sure to use footnotes to cite all information, argumentation, and quotations drawn from your sources. Provide a title and a word count. Students may not submit more than one paper. Please choose your topic carefully. For all of the essays, you may wish to draw on parts of the document book that are not strictly required.

1. (Due February 12) Many historians and other commentators have criticized U.S. policymakers for rebuffing Viet Minh appeals for support in 1945 and then backing the French war effort five years later, arguing that the United States should have remained true to its anticolonial traditions and recognized Ho Chi Minh's movement as fundamentally nationalist, rather than communist, in inspiration. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this way of thinking? Think about whether the United States erred in rejecting Ho's appeals and permitting the return of French control. Think too about whether there were reasonable alternatives to the course chosen by Washington.
2. (Due February 19) It is August 1, 1954, and you are the U.S. secretary of state. President Eisenhower has asked you for advice about the policy the United States should adopt toward southern Vietnam. Write a memo advising the president. Try to limit yourself to information you could reasonably have known at the time. Be sure to organize your memo in a clear and concise fashion. Remember that the president is a busy person and expects direct and succinct advice.
3. (Due March 7) The most famous films dealing with the Vietnam War focus on the experiences of U.S. combat soldiers after 1965. Several lesser-known films focus on the relationship between Americans and Vietnamese recipients of U.S. aid and advice in earlier "advisory" years. Write an essay comparing and contrasting any two of the following films from this genre: "The Quiet American" (1958 or 2002 version), "The Green Berets" (1968), and "Go Tell the Spartans" (1978). You may wish to consider how the films depict American motives, the attitudes of the Vietnamese people, and/or the effect U.S. personnel have in Vietnam, among other possible subjects. (If you use film version(s) of "The Quiet American," you may use either the 1958 or 2002 version, or you may use both as your two films.)
4. (Due March 26) It is December 1, 1964, and you are the U.S. secretary of defense. President Johnson has asked you for advice about how to proceed in Vietnam. Write a memo advising the president. Try to limit yourself to information you could reasonably have known at the time. Be sure to organize your memo in a clear and concise fashion. Remember that the president is a busy person and expects direct and succinct advice.

5. (Due April 4) Many Americans understand the Vietnam War and the controversies that surround it through the high-profile movies that have been released in the years since 1975. Write an essay comparing and contrasting two of the following movies that appeared between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s: “Deer Hunter,” “Apocalypse Now,” “Platoon,” and “Full Metal Jacket.” You are free to focus on any dimensions of the films that you consider significant, though you might consider, for example, the characterizations of American decision-making, the personal qualities of ordinary ground troops, the ways in which Americans interact with Vietnamese, and the depiction of the physical environment in Vietnam.
6. (Due April 11) Historians have often pointed out that the “antiwar movement” was hardly a single, unified movement. Yet distinguishing different schools of thought and identifying lines of fracture between different groups is not easy. Write an essay exploring the range of opinions that made up the antiwar movement. What do you see as the key distinctions among different strands of the “movement”? In answering this question, please draw on the documents posted to Canvas for essay 5.
7. (Due April 25) Many commentators have sharply criticized Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger for failing to end the Vietnam War in 1969 and for continuing the fighting for four more bloody years. Others defend Nixon and Kissinger for making the best of a difficult situation. What is your opinion of this controversy? Think about whether the American administration erred by refusing to end the fighting during its first year in office and how you would rate the administration’s new approach to waging the war.