

## History 279

### “THE VIET NAM WAR”

Prof. Robert K. Brigham

Spring 2021

Class Meeting: MW 1:30-2:45pm, Zoom

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:00pm & by appointment

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#### **Course Description**

An examination of the origins, course, and impact of America's involvement in Viet Nam, emphasizing the evolution of American diplomacy, the formulation of military strategy, the domestic impact of the war, and the perspective of Vietnamese revolutionaries.

#### **Course Requirements**

Each student is required to write: a 1000-word essay; a 3000 -word research paper, and a final essay. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Attendance is mandatory. Laptops are allowed in class, but they must be used for note-taking and document research only. Any violation of this policy will result in a recorded absence for the day of the abuse and the loss of in-class computer privileges. I require that all students read the College's *Originality and Attribution: A Guide for Student Writers at Vassar College* before the second day of class. Students missing more than two classes will be penalized one letter grade for each unexcused absence.

Attendance and Participation	20%
Essay#1	25%
Research Paper	30%
Final Essay	25%

#### **Required Textbooks:**

Dang Thuy Tram, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* (Three Rivers, 2008) ISBN 9780307347381.

Duong Van Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow* (Oxford, 2017) ISBN 9780190614515.

Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies* (Harvard, 2016) ISBN 9780674979840.

#### **Essay Assignment #1, Due, 3/10:**

The Vietnam War ended over four decades ago, yet a significant number of questions remain open for debate. Not the least of these is the character of the National Liberation Front and the

nature of its relationship to the Vietnamese Communist Party. In many ways, the controversy surrounding the NLF is the key to understanding the war because the conflict was always about the political future of Vietnam below the seventeenth parallel.

This assignment asks you to read from a variety of sources that address this question specifically. After your close reading, I want you to write an argumentative essay that best represents your position in this intense debate. No outside research is needed; you simply need to respond to the readings that do fairly represent the various schools of thought.

The essay should be 1000 words, typed, and double-spaced. All pages should be numbered.

### **Research Paper, Due May 24, 2021**

There are three steps in writing your research paper for this course.

- 1) Meet with me during office hours to discuss your interests and possible topics and sources.
- 2) Keep a research journal during the entire research project. Here, you will outline your proposal, take notes on secondary works, and begin to formulate your own ideas. It is also a good idea to do a series of "low-stakes" writing in the journal (to be shared with me or not).
- 3) A final draft of the research paper is due on May 24. Research papers must be 3500 words in length (double-spaced). Papers should have a clearly defined thesis and should demonstrate each student's proficiency in handling primary materials. The paper must have endnotes or footnotes and a bibliography. We will consult Kate Turabian's A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Fifth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) or The Chicago Manual of Style, Thirteenth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) for proper bibliographic and note form. Social Science is an art as well as a science. Seek stylistic grace and use attractive, as well as proper, English. You should apply all the standard rules of good writing. Nearly all can benefit considerably and quickly by buying and using White and Strunk's, The Elements of Style. A single evening with this little book will pay large, long-range returns. May I also suggest that students read Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff, eds., The Modern Researcher.

### **Final Essay, Take-Home Exam due May 29, 2021.**

#### **Originality and Attribution:**

You must properly cite any quotations, ideas, or concepts that are not your own. Any deviation from this practice is a breach of academic integrity. You are required to read the College's "Originality and Attribution" before our first class meeting and must follow proper citation form outlined in Turabian or the Chicago Manual of Style.

#### **Class Discussion:**

Student participation is an integral part of any successful class. Everyone is expected to come to class prepared to discuss the various reading assignments. I expect that each of you can bring to class your own particular nuanced views from your studies outside the History department. I also want each of you to make space for others to talk and to take space for your ideas. Part of my evaluation of your participation will also be based on your ability to listen, to serve as an equity peer for class discussion, and your support of fellow students.

### **Academic Accommodations:**

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented learning differences and/or other needs. Please schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodation that may be needed for the course. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, located in the Old Laundry Building, Disability and Support Services (ext. 7584). I am very serious about supporting students with learning differences or other needs.

### **Semester Timetable:**

#### **2/17: Introduction and overview**

#### **2/22: Life Under the French**

Required reading: *Sacred Willow*, pp. 1-91.

Of Interest:

Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution*.

David Marr, *Vietnamese Traditions on Trial*.

David Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism*.

Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille*.

#### **2/24: Origins of the Revolution**

Required reading: William Duiker, "The Revolutionary Youth League: Cradle of Communism in Vietnam," *The China Quarterly* 51 (July-September 1972): 475-499. JSTOR.

Of Interest:

Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Vietnam*.

Alexander Woodside, "History, Structure, and Revolution in Vietnam," *International Political Science Review* 10 (April 1989): 143-157. JSTOR.

Kim Huynh Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945*.

David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*.

Huynh Kim Khanh, "The Vietnamese August Revolution Reinterpreted," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30 (August 1971): 761-788. JSTOR

*History of the August Revolution*.

David Marr, *1945*.

Stein Tonnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945*.

Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*.

#### **3/1: The First Indochina War**

Required reading: *Sacred Willow*, pp. 92-172.

Of Interest:

Fred Logevall, *Embers of War*.

Mark A. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*.

Kathryn Statler, *Replacing France*.

Colonel Dang van Viet, *Highway Four: The Border Campaign, 1947-1950*.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, *Unforgettable Days*.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, *Dien Bien Phu*, Fifth Edition.

Bernard Fall, *Street Without Joy*.

General Henri Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*.

### **3/3: The Idea of Nation-building**

Required reading: Bernard Fall, "South Vietnam's Internal Problems," *Pacific Affairs* 31 (September 1958): 241-260. JSTOR.

Of Interest:

Robert F. Randle, *Geneva, 1954*.

David Anderson, *Trapped by Success*.

Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*.

James Carter, *Inventing Vietnam*.

### **3/8: The Insurgency**

Required reading:

"Excerpts from Law 10/59," <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc6.html>

"The Platform of the National Liberation Front," at <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/docnlf.html>,

Philippe Devillers, "The Struggle for the Unification of Viet Nam," *China Quarterly* 9 (January-March 1962): 2-36. JSTOR.

White Paper, "Viet Cong Infiltration into South Vietnam," at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d378>

Of Interest:

Carlyle Thayer, *War By Other Means*.

Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong*.

Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir*.

Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*.

David Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*.

### **3/10: Kennedy Responds [Essay #1 Due]**

Required reading: "Rusk-McNamara Report to Kennedy, November 11, 1961," at <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc7.html>

Of Interest:

Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*.

Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect*.

Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*.

David Kaiser, *American Tragedy*.

David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*.

Robert S. McNamara, James Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, *Argument Without End*.

### **3/15: The Buddhist Crisis**

Required reading: Charles A. Joiner, "South Vietnam's Buddhist Crisis," *Asian Survey* 4 (July 1964): 915-928 [JSTOR].

Please view (**Trigger Warning**, very graphic violence): <http://y2u.be/Xr2Rr2dCtB0>

Of Interest:

Robert Topmiller, *Lotus in a Sea of Fire*.

Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*.

George Kahin, *The United States in Vietnam*.

Ann Blair, *Lodge in Vietnam*.

Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*.

### **3/17: Sink or Swim with Ngo Dinh Diem**

Required reading: "The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem," *The Pentagon Papers* at: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon2/pent6.htm>

Of Interest:

"The Coup Against the Diem Government," *Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, Volume IV, Vietnam, August-December 1963*, at:

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d3>

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d10>

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d10>

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d11>

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d12>

Phil Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*.

Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*.

Dennis Warmer, *The Last Confucian*.

Ellen Hammer, *A Death in November*.

Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation*.

Ed Miller, *Misalliance*.

**3/22: Gulf of Tonkin**

Required reading: "Senate Debates Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,"  
<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc9.html>

Of Interest:

Edwin Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*.

Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*.

Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy*.

**3/24: Johnson and escalation, 1964-1965**

Required reading: "Excerpts from McGeorge Bundy's Memo to President Johnson, February 7, 1965," <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc10.html>

Of Interest:

Fred Logevall, *Choosing War*.

George Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*.

Gordan Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster*.

H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*.

**3/29: The Village War**

Required readings: "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale," The RAND Project, at:  
[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_memoranda/2006/RM4507.3.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2006/RM4507.3.pdf)

Of Interest:

Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An*.

Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*

John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*.

Mai Elliott, *RAND in Southeast Asia*.

Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters*.

Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*.

**3/31: Spring Break****4/5: The Ground War**

Required reading:

"First Infantry Division in Vietnam," holdings at First Infantry Museum, at:

[http://firstdivisionmuseum.nmtvault.com/jsp/browse.jsp?collection\\_filter=a09d01a9-ab07-4cc3-83a0-be6ac1ad1f67](http://firstdivisionmuseum.nmtvault.com/jsp/browse.jsp?collection_filter=a09d01a9-ab07-4cc3-83a0-be6ac1ad1f67)

Of Interest:

Jeffrey Clarke, *Advice and Support*.

John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*.

William Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*.

Ronald Spector, *Advice and Support*.

Greg Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*.

James Willbanks, *A Raid too Far*.  
James Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*.

**4/7: Discussion:**

Required Reading: Mai Elliott, *Sacred Willow*, pp. 173-425.

**4/12: China and the Soviet Union**

Required reading: Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," *The China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995): 356-387. JSTOR.

Of Interest:

Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*.  
Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*.  
Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*.  
Donald Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle*.

**4/14: The Tet Offensive**

Required reading: Ang Cheng Guan, "Decision-making Leading to the Tet Offensive," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (July 1988): 341-53. JSTOR

Of Interest:

Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*.  
Don Oberdorfer, *Tet*.  
Ronald Spector, *After Tet*.  
James Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*.  
Marc Gilbert and William Head, eds., *The Tet Offensive*.  
James Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive*.

**4/19: The Battle for Hue City**

Required reading:

<https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/HD/Brief%20Histories/Hue%20City%20PowerPoint.pdf?ver=2019-05-23-083625-390&timestamp=1558615163718>

Of Interest:

Eric Hammel, *Marines in Hue City*  
Eric Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*  
John Ligato, *The Gunny*  
Mark Bowden, *Hue, 1968*  
John Laurence, *The Cat from Hue*

**4/21: Experiencing War**

Required reading: *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram*

Of Interest:

Karl Marlantas, *Matterhorn*.

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*.  
 W.D. Ehrhart, *Vietnam-Pekasie*.  
 Nguyen thi Dinh, *No Other Road to Take*.  
 John Ketwig, *And a Hard Rain Fell*.  
 Hal Moore, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*.  
 Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*.  
 Myra McPherson, *Long Time Passing*.  
 Lynda Van Devanter, *Home Before Morning*.  
 Lawrence Baskir and William A. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance*.  
 Christian Appy, *Working-Class War*.

#### **4/26: The Press**

Required reading: Robert Elegant, "How to Lose a War: The Press and Vietnam," *Encounter* LVII (August 1981): 73-90 at  
<http://www.wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/Vietnam/Readings/elegant.htm>

Of Interest:

David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*.  
 William Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*.  
 Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War*.  
 Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent*.  
 William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War*.

#### **4/28: The Anti-war Movement**

Required reading/viewing: David Dellinger on the Anti-war Movement at:  
[http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V\\_25F744A5332949FC817D0B5A475098E5](http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_25F744A5332949FC817D0B5A475098E5)

Of Interest:

Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*.  
 John Balaban, *Remembering Heaven's Face*.  
 Tom Wells, *The War Within*.  
 Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*.  
 Terry Anderson, *The Movement*.

#### **5/3: No Class**

#### **5/5: Pacification**

Required reading: Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, "The Dynamics of Violence in Vietnam: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System" (handout)

Of Interest:

Lewis Sorley, *A Better War*.  
 Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*.  
 Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*.  
 Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program*.  
 Richard Hunt, *Pacification*.  
 David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*.



**5/10: Peace with Honor**

Required reading: "President Nixon's Speech on Vietnamization, November 3, 1969,"  
<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc14.html>

Of interest:

Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor*.  
 Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*.  
 William Bundy, *A Tangled Web*.

**5/12: Cambodia and Laos**

Required reading: "President Nixon's Speech on Cambodia, April 30, 1970,"  
<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc15.html>

Of Interest:

William Shawcross, *Sideshow*.  
 John Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*.  
 Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy*.  
 Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*.  
 David Chandler, *Voices from S-21*.

**5/17: Waging War for Peace**

Required Reading: "Excerpts from the Paris Peace Accord,"  
<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/doc16.html>

Of Interest:

Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*.  
 Lui van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*.  
 Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*.  
 Greg Grandin, *Kissinger's Shadow*.  
 Walter Issacson, *Kissinger*.  
 Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*.  
 Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Vietnam Tragedy*

**5/19: The Fall of Saigon**

Required reading: Malcolm W. Browne, "The Fall of Saigon," at:  
<http://events.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/saigon/>

Of Interest:

David Butler, *The Fall of Saigon*.  
 Dana Sachs, *The Life We Were Given*.  
 Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval*.  
 Dale Andrade, *The Easter Offensive*.

**5/24: Legacies of a war [Final Draft of Research Paper Due]**

Required reading: Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*.

Of Interest:

Charles Neu, *After Vietnam*.

James Carroll, *American Requiem*.  
 Arnold Issacs, *Without Honor*.  
 Scott Laderman, *Tours of Vietnam*.  
 Chris Appy, *American Reckoning*.

**Final Exam Essay due on May 29, 2021 by 5pm as a Word attachment sent to me at:  
 robriham@vassar.edu**

### **Notes on Writing the Research Paper**

#### Getting Started: The Planning and Thinking Process

1. Think carefully about the question you have chosen to answer. Are there complexities in the question that you can use to enrich your approach?
2. You should always begin with the text/documents before answering a question. Reread the text/documents or at least all the portions that seem significant to the question; chances are you will catch far more the second time around and it will improve your paper. Never try to write the paper first and find quotes to “force into it” for so-called proof.
3. You should always create some kind of an outline, even if it is no more than a bunch of concepts and quotes scribbled down with arrows connecting them. Few people can write a coherent, let alone compelling, paper without knowing their thesis and the points they will discuss ahead of time.
4. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite. You will often make discoveries while you are writing the first draft. Go back and rewrite so that your argument provides a unifying frame for the paper. Always draw on the documents to support your argument. Highlight that this is what you are doing. For example, “In a 1961 White House position paper, the Kennedy administration argued...”
5. You must properly cite any quotations, ideas, or concepts that are not your own. Any deviation from this practice is a breach of academic integrity. You are required to read the College's "Originality and Attribution" before writing your paper and must follow proper citation form outlined in Turabian or the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
6. Pick a topic that interests you. You will have to live with this subject for a number of weeks.
 

Style Issues

  - 1) A strong and concise (but not vague) introduction with a clear thesis statement is the best way to engage your reader from the start. It also helps you to focus your thoughts. You need not have a perfect introduction before writing the body. A working introduction and thesis will do fine so long as you go back and flesh it out later. In fact, it is a good idea to rethink the introduction once the paper is complete; the initial plan does not always match the end result.

- 2) Avoid “mega paragraphs,” especially in the introduction. Treat each paragraph as the development of a single idea, or as one facet of a larger concept. The problem with very long paragraphs is that they quickly lose focus, and the point of the paragraph gets lost. If a paragraph is more than a half a page long, chances are, it is too long.
- 3) Use concise language. Omit needless words and phrases. A happy reader is more likely to be persuaded. Delete such phrases as “It has always been true...” “It is clear that...” “The fact was that...” You can improve your prose by cutting adverbs. This rule is often very clearly, evidently, and completely true. If this is a problem for you, do a word search for “very” and “ly” and check each adverb. Do you need it? Absolutely? Some people like to use adjectives in pairs: “Schelling’s limited war theory was exciting and thrilling to Kennedy’s advisors.” If the two adjectives are synonyms, omit one.
- 4) Simplify. Many Vassar students tend to “overwrite.” That is, they use academic jargon (ten dollar words) when simple, straightforward language (ten cent words) is best.
- 5) Avoid passive voice. Check all “to be verbs.” The best way to do this is to read the paper in draft form carefully. We want strong verbs. Check each one.
- 6) In general, we write in the past tense about events and present tense about authors. Do not switch tenses. See me if you are confused.
- 7) Watch out for dangling modifiers. These will never help you. For example, “Loading their weapons, the trees hid thousands of Communist soldiers.” You must place the modifying clause (loading their weapons) beside its subject (soldiers). Also be sure that the subject is clear when you start your sentence with a pronoun.
- 8) Generally, commas go inside quotations marks and footnotes go outside. The exception is semicolons and colons: they go outside quotation marks. If one clause of a sentence is dependent (like this one), separate the clauses with a comma. In other cases (like this) each clause could stand on its own as a complete sentence; in such cases use a semicolon or a colon, not a comma.
- 9) Possessives. If you can replace “it’s” with “it is” and the sentence makes sense, use an apostrophe. Otherwise, use “its.” When something is owned, use an apostrophe.
- 10) Spell check and proofread. You should have no mistakes in any paper you hand as your best academic work. Spell checks are limited. “Ill right thee paper too day.” “Four egg sample, it did nut cash any off this problems.” Read aloud to listen for awkward phrasings and rhythm.
- 11) Citations. For a book in a footnote: George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 2-34. Second citation of the same work, Herring, *America’s Longest War*, p. 23. For a journal: George C. Herring, “The Vietnam War Revisited,” *Journal of American History* 23 (Summer 1997): 876-877. For a newspaper: *The New York Times*, 30 April 1975, p. 2. Government documents are specific. See me for help with these. Underline book titles, journal titles, and newspaper titles.

