#### History 50: 512: 381

# America in Vietnam – A Political and Military History, 1950-1975

Fall 2018

Tuesdays, 6:00-8:50 PM

Location: Rutgers, Camden County College Blackwood, Madison Room 207 Instructor: Dr. Martin G. Clemis
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 5:00-6:00 &

9:00-10:00 PM, Madison 122 Email: martin.clemis@rutgers.edu

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Course Description: This course examines the American war in Vietnam by exploring a substantial portion of the scholarship produced over the past four decades. Although it will examine the origins, events, and consequences of the conflict – including its political, military, diplomatic, and social dimensions – the course is specifically designed to explore the retrospective "meaning" and "lessons" of America's lost war in Southeast Asia as contained within contentious debate among scholars, journalists, and participants. For some, the war in Vietnam was an immoral catastrophic failure: an unwinnable conflict that never should have been fought by the United States. For others, American intervention was a noble cause: a necessary war that could have been won had different political and strategic avenues been taken. These diverse interpretations, along with other significant arguments advanced by the orthodox and revisionist schools constitute the major focus of this class.

#### **Course Requirements / Assignments:**

In order to receive a satisfactory grade in this course, students must complete the following assignments:

- 1. Attendance / Course Engagement This is a collaborative learning course. What this means is that the student is the primary focus of instruction, not the instructor. As a result, the course is not lecture-based but is founded on class discussion and dialogue among students and the instructor. Peer instruction, therefore, is a fundamental component of this course. Critique, debate, and discussion of assigned readings and additional outside material are vital to a healthy pedagogical environment. Moreover, they are an important part of your grade. Good attendance is also mandatory (you cannot participate in discussion or collaborate with your peers if you aren't here). Attendance is required and will be regularly taken. I am well aware that missing a class may happen occasionally, but regular absence will be noted and affect your class participation grade. As this class meets only one day per week, any student missing more than two classes will be in danger of failing.
- Weekly Reading Responses Each week, students are required to submit a response
  to the weekly discussion prompt provided by the instructor. Each question is directly
  tied to that week's readings. A list of the reading prompts is found on this syllabus.
  Responses must be 500 to 700 words (single-spaced) and submitted in class in a

Microsoft Word document using *Times New Roman* 12-point font with one-inch margins. Include your name, the date, and the corresponding week number for each reading response.

Book Reviews (3) – Students are required to select, read, and review three outside historical texts about some aspect of the Vietnam War. I have provided a sizable list of books on this syllabus. The list, however, is by no means exhaustive. Therefore, please feel free to select books outside of the instructor's list. If you do so, however, make sure they are from academic presses connected to major universities (i.e. University of North Carolina Press, Oxford University Press, etc.). All outside books chosen for review must be approved by the instructor. Book reviews must be 700 to 1,000 words (single-spaced) and include the book's thesis, method and sources. Book Reviews must be submitted in a Microsoft Word document using Times New Roman 12-point font with one-inch margins. Be sure to include your name, the date, and the corresponding number for each review (i.e. Book Review #1, #2, #3). Students must bring a hard copy to class and submit an electronic copy using the "Assignments" tool on Sakai. Book reviews are due on the following dates: the first is due Tuesday October 9 (Week 6); the second is due Tuesday October 30 (Week 9); and the third is due Tuesday November 27 (Week 13).

Detailed instructions on how book reviews are to be constructed along with samples can be found in the "Book Review" folder on Sakai. There you can also find instructions on how to develop the skills required for "strategic" reading—a method that will allow you to dissect a historical monograph and extract critical information in a timely and efficient manner. Make sure you consult the "Strategic Reading" instructions prior to reading your chosen books as it will help save time and reduce stress.

There are several ways students can acquire the books they choose to review: 1) purchase them online (used copies of most titles are available on any number of used book sites, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Abe Books); 2) borrow them from the Rutgers library—if they are unavailable, the university can order books for you through E-ZBORROW and Interlibrary Loan (ILL); 3) borrow the books from your local library or use interlibrary loan.

I suggest you choose and acquire your books within the first two weeks of the semester so that you have adequate time to complete the assignment. Also, choose your books carefully and try to pick works that share the same topic because you can use them to complete assignment #4 (see below).

I strongly urge students to consult professional reviews of the titles they choose. These can be found in any number of peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Academic journals are available through the Rutgers library website and its databases. For information on how to access databases on the Rutgers Library website, click on the "Introduction to Rutgers University Libraries" link found under the "Library Resources" folder on Sakai.

4. **Historiographical Essay** – As a capstone project for this course, students are required to submit a historiographical essay on a topic of their choosing. Historiography is just a fancy word for the collective body of literature on a historical topic. For example, the historiography of the Vietnam War consists of all scholarly published works (books and articles) that have been written about that conflict. An historiographical essay is a brief survey of select secondary literature on a given topic. The purpose is to identify a larger discussion or debate among historians on a particular topic. Historiographical essays are not research papers. Rather than study past events directly, they examine different, sometimes competing, interpretations of those events as presented by professional historians.

To complete this assignment, students are required to gather and analyze five scholarly works that all deal with the same topic. These can be books, articles, or a combination of the two. Also, students can apply the three books they choose to review (assignment #3 above) toward the five sources required to complete the historiographical essay. The topic and a bibliography of the works you will use to complete this assignment, including any book not found on the reading list, must be submitted for approval by the instructor in a Microsoft Word document by October 9 (Week 6). Essays must be 2,500 to 3,000 words (double-spaced) and submitted in a Microsoft Word document using Times New Roman 12-point font with one-inch margins. Footnotes are required, and citations must follow Chicago/Turabian format. A citation style guide can also be found in the "Historiographical Essay" folder on Sakai. I would also suggest consulting Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (University of Chicago Press). This book is an excellent resource on all aspects of college research / writing. This assignment is due by midnight Tuesday December 18. Students can upload their essays using the "Assignments" tool on Sakai.

**Grading –** Grades will be based on the following percentages:

Course Engagement	15%
Reading Responses	15%
Book Reviews	30%
Historiographical Essay	40%

### **Required Texts**:

- ➤ Herring, George C. <u>America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975</u>. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001.
- ➤ Hess, Gary R. <u>Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War</u>. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2015.
- > All additional readings are available in PDF format in the "Additional Readings" folder on Sakai.

#### **Course Schedule**

The dates listed below are tentative and may change as the semester progresses.

Week / Date	Theme	Readings
<b>1</b> 9/4	Introduction Vietnamese History Vietnamese Communism and "People's War"	
<b>2</b> 9/11	Debating the War in Vietnam	Hess, Chapter 1 Moyar, "Vietnam: Historians at War" (Available on Sakai)
<b>3</b> 9/18	The United States, France, and the First Indochina War, 1950-1954	Herring, Chapter 1
<b>4</b> 9/25	Nation Building in South Vietnam, 1954-1961	Herring, Chapter 2
5 10/2	America's War in Vietnam: Necessity or Mistake?	Hess, Chapter 2
<b>6</b> 10/9	Kennedy and the War in Vietnam, 1961-1963	Herring, Chapter 3
<b>7</b> 10/16	Lyndon Johnson and the Road to War, 1963-1965	Herring, Chapter 4 Hess, Chapter 3
<b>8</b> 10/23	America at War, 1965-1967	Herring Chapter 5
<b>9</b> 10/30	Pacification and the "Other War" in South Vietnam	Komer, "Impact of Pacification" (Available on Sakai)
<b>10</b> 11/6	Debating American Strategy	Hess, Chapters 4-5
<b>11</b> 11/13	The 1968 Tet Offensive	Herring, Chapter 6 Hess, Chapter 7

12	Thanksgiving Week	
11/20	No Class – Follow Thursday Schedule	
13	Nixon, Kissinger, and	Herring, Chapter 7
11/27	Vietnam, 1969-1973	Hess, Chapter 8
14	From Geneva to Black April	Herring, Chapter 8
12/4	and Beyond, 1973-	Hess, Chapter 9
15	Vietnam in Myth and	TDD
12/11	Memory	TBD
12/18	Final Exam Due	

## **Weekly Reading Prompts**

Due Date	
9/18	Why did the United States help France in its bid to maintain colonial rule in Indochina? What global events helped shape Washington's decision to back the French? How did the First Indochina War pave the way for America's war in Vietnam?
9/25	Briefly discuss "nation-building" in South Vietnam? What were its key components, its objectives, and its challenges? Why was it so difficult to achieve?
10/2	Was the Vietnam War a "necessary" war or a "mistaken" war? Briefly discuss which historical interpretation, Orthodox or Revisionist, you find more convincing concerning American intervention in Southeast Asia.
10/9	Why was the "limited partnership" between the United States and South Vietnam during the Kennedy administration so frustrating and problematic? What impact did this contentious relationship have on America's Vietnam policies?
10/16	Briefly described the developments / events that carried the United States to war in 1964-65. Also, Gary Hess describes the scholarship on America's movement toward war in Southeast Asia as 'if only' history. Choose ONE of the 'if only' scenarios posited by either the Orthodox or Revisionist schools and discuss why you agree or disagree.
10/23	Briefly describe the military strategy implemented by the United States between 1965-1970. How effective was this strategy?
10/30	What was pacification? Briefly discuss its objectives, its elements, and why it was such a critical aspect of the war in South Vietnam.

11/6	Briefly discuss which historical interpretation, Orthodox or Revisionist, you find more compelling concerning American military strategy in Southeast Asia. Was the Vietnam War 'winnable' for the U.S. and its allies if different strategic roads had been taken? Or, was American intervention an 'unwinnable' enterprise that was doomed to failure regardless of the strategy employed by U.S. policymakers?
11/13	Why is the 1968 Tet Offensive considered a pivotal moment in the history of the Vietnam War? Briefly discuss the political and military fallout generated by this event.
11/27	What was Vietnamization? Also, briefly discuss which historical interpretation, Orthodox or Revisionist, you find more compelling concerning the Nixon administration's handling of the Vietnam War. Did the policies put in place by Nixon and Kissinger achieve victory, one that was later thrown away when the United States abandoned South Vietnam? Or, were they a futile attempt to save a hopeless situation – a failure to achieve either peace or an honorable exit from the war in Vietnam?
12/4	Why did the war in Vietnam continue despite the signing of the Paris Peace Accords and America's departure from Southeast Asia? Also, what explains the defeat of the South Vietnamese government in April 1975?

## **Book Review Reading List**

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Bergerud, Eric. The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province (1993)
       . Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning: The World of a Combat Division in Vietnam (1993)
Berman, Larry. No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam (2001)
Boot, Max. The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam
       (2018)
Bowden, Mark. Hue 1968: A Turning Point of the American War in Vietnam (2017)
Boylan, Kevin M. Losing Binh Dinh: The Failure of Pacification and Vietnamization, 1969-
       1971 (2016)
Bradley, Mark Philip. Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam
       1919-1950 (2000)
Bradley, Doug. We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War (2015)
Buzzanco, Robert. Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era (1996)
Cable, Larry E. Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine
       and the Vietnam War (1986)
     . Unholy Grail: The US and the Wars in Vietnam, 1965-1968 (1991)
Carter, James M. Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968 (2008)
Catton, Philip E. Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam (2002)
Chapman, Jessica M. Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s
       Southern Vietnam (2013)
Clodfelter, Mark. The Limits of Airpower: The American Bombing of North Vietnam (1989)
Daddis, Greg. No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the
       Vietnam War (2011)
   . Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam (2014)
      . Withdrawal: Reassessing America's Final years in Vietnam (2014)
Davidson, Phillip B. Secrets of the Vietnam War (1990)
Duiker, William J. The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam (1981)
   . U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina (1994)
   . Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam (1995)
Elkind, Jessica. Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War (2016)
Ellison, D. Hank. Chemical Warfare during the Vietnam War: Riot Control Agents in Combat
       (2011)
Elliott, David W.P. The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta,
       1930-1975 (2006)
Gelb, Leslie H. and Richard K. Betts. The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked (1979)
Gibson, James William. The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't Lose and How We Did (1986)
Greiner, Bernd. War Without Fronts: The USA in Vietnam (2009)
Hagopian, Patrick. The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the
       Politics of Healing (2009)
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- Halberstam, David. The Best and the Brightest (1972)
- . The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era (1988)
- Hammond, William M. Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War (1998)
- Hass, Kristin Ann. Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1998)
- Hendin, Herbert. Wounds of War: The Psychological Aftermath of Combat in Vietnam (1984)
- Hennessy, Michael A. Strategy in Vietnam: The Marines and Revolutionary Warfare in I Corps, 1965-1972 (1997)
- Hammond, William M. *The U.S. Army in Vietnam: Public Affairs, The Military and the Media,* 1968-1973. (1996)
- Harris, J.P. Vietnam's High Ground: Armed Struggle for the Central Highlands, 1954-1965 (2016)
- Hastings, Max. Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945-1975 (2018)
- Hiam, C. Michael. Who the Hell Are We Fighting?: The Story of Sam Adams and the Vietnam Intelligence Wars (2006)
- Hunt, Michael H. Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968 (1996)
- Hunt, Richard A. Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds (1995)
- Jacobs, Seth. Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963 (2006)
- Jeffords, Susan. The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War (1989)
- Jones, Howard. My Lai: Vietnam, 1968, and the Descent into Darkness (2017)
- Kahin, George M. Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam (1986)
- Kaiser, David E. American Tragedy: Kenndy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War (2000)
- Khong, Yuen Foong. *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (1992)
- Kimball, Jeffrey P. Nixon's Vietnam War (1998)
- . The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy (2004)
- Kimbrough, Natalie. Equality of Discrimination?: African Americans in the U.S. Military

  During the Vietnam War Era (2007)
- Kolko, Gabriel. Vietnam: An Anatomy of a War, 1940-1975 (1987)
- Kort, Michael G. The Vietnam War Reexamined (2017)
- Krepinevich, Andrew. The Army and Vietnam (1986)
- Lair, Meredith. Armed With Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War (2011)
- Lawrence, Mark Atwood. The Vietnam War: A Concise International History (2010)
- Lehrack, Otto J. No Shining Armor: The Marines at War in Vietnam (1992)

- Lembcke, Jerry. The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam (1998)
- Lepre, George. Fragging: Why U.S. Soldiers Assaulted Their Officers in Vietnam (2011)
- Lewey, Gunter. America in Vietnam (1978)
- Li, Xiaobing. Voices from the Vietnam War: Stories from American, Asian, and Russian Veterans (2010)
- Lind, Michael. Vietnam: The Necessary War (1999)
- Logevall, Fredrik. Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam (2001)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam (2012)
- Lomperis, Timothy. *The War Everyone Lost and Won: America's Intervention in Vietnam's Twin Struggles* (1993)
- Longley, Kyle. Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam (2008)
- MacPherson, Myra. Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation (2001)
- Mariscal, George, ed. *Aztlan and Vietnam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (1999)
- McKenna, Thomas P. Kontum: The Battle to Save South Vietnam (2011)
- McMaster, H.R. Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam (1998)
- Milam, Ron. Not a Gentleman's War: An Inside View of Junior Officers in the Vietnam War (2009)
- Moise, Edwin E. *The Myths of Tet: The Most Misunderstood Event of the Vietnam War* (2017)
- Moser, Richard R. *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* (1996)
- Moyar, Mark, Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965 (2006)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam (2007)
- Nguyen, Lien\_Hang T. Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam (2012)
- Olson, James S. aand Randy Roberts. My Lai: A Brief History with Documents (1998)
- Peterson, Michael E. *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (1986)
- Prados, John. Vietnam: The History of An Unwinnable War, 1945-1975 (2009)
- Preston, Andrew. The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam (2006)
- Pribbenow, Merle L. Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam (2002)
- Race, Jeffrey. War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnam Province (1972)
- Record, Jeffrey. The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam (1998)

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Robbins, James S. This Time We Win: Revisiting the Tet Offensive (2010)
Roberts, Mervyn Edwin. The Psychological War for Vietnam, 1960-1968 (2018)
Rotter, Andrew J. The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast
       Asia (1987)
Scott, Wilbur J. Vietnam Veterans Since the War: The Politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and
       the National Memorial (2004)
Shaw, Geoffrey. The Lost Mandate of Heaven: The American Betrayal of Ngo Dinh Diem,
       President of Vietnam (2015)
Shay, Jonathan. Achilles in Vitnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character (1995)
Sherwood, John D. Black Sailor, White Navy: Racial Unrest in the Fleet during the Vietnam
       War Era (2007)
Shkurti, William J. Soldiering On in a Dying War: The True Story of the Firebase Pace
       Incidents and the Vietnam Drawdown (2011)
Sorley, Lewis. A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last
       Years in Vietnam (1999)
    . Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam (2011)
Spector, Ronald H. The United States Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support, The Early Years,
       1941-1960 (1983)
 . After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam (1993)
Stanton, Shelby L. The Rise and Fall of An American Army: US Ground Forces in Vietnam
       1965-1973 (1985)
Stur, Heather M. Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era (2011)
Summers, Harry G. On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War (1982)
Tomes, Robert R. Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975
       (1998)
Turse, Nick. Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam (2013)
Veith, George J. Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-1975 (2012)
Viet Thanh Nguyen. Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War (2017)
Vuic, Kara Dixon. Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War (2010)
Wadell, William M. In the Year of the Tiger: The War for Cochinchina, 1945-1951 (2018)
Walton, Dale C. The Myth of the Inevitable US Defeat in Vietnam (2002)
Werner, Jayne and Luu Doan Huynh. The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American
       Perspectives (1993)
Westheider, James E. The African American Experience in Vietnam: Brothers in Arms (2008)
Wiest, Adrew. Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN (2008)
_____. Triumph Revisited: Historians Battle for the Vietnam War (2010)
 . The Boys of '67: Charlie Company's War in Vietnam (2012)
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\_\_\_\_\_. Charlie Company's Journey Home: The Forgotten Impact on the Wives of Vietnam

Veterans (2018)

Wilkins, Warren. Grab Their Belts to Fight Them: The Viet Cong's Big-Unit War Against the U.S., 1965-1966 (2011)

Willbanks, James H. Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War (2004)

. The Tet Offensive: A Concise History (2007)

Wirtz, James J. The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War (1991)

Wright, James. Enduring Vietnam: An American Generation and Its War (2017)

Ybarra, Lea. Vietnam Veteranos: Chicanos Recall the War (2004)

Young, Marilyn B. The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990 (1990)

Zierler, David. The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think About the Environment (2011)

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