

HIST 3050

The United States and the Vietnam War

Ohio University, Spring Semester 2021

Instructor: **Ingo Trauschweizer**

Asynchronous; optional meetings/open office hours Tu, Th 10:30-11:50

Office: Teams – send me an email for a meeting time and invitation

Office Hours: Tu/Th 10:30-11:50 (on Teams, general channel) or by appointment

Phone: (740)593-4349 (voicemail should forward to me email)

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1. General Outline:

This course is an upper-level elective that will explore U.S. policies and strategy in the Vietnam War era (1945-1975) and the domestic and international consequences of American engagement in Southeast Asia. We will consider the origins of the conflict, both from an American and a Vietnamese perspective and in the context of the Cold War, the course and conduct of the war, its transformative effect on American political culture, the peace process, and the aftermath of the war in politics and memory. *The U.S. and the Vietnam War* holds that it is impossible to understand the Vietnam War in isolation and that domestic and foreign policies as well as military operations and strategy need to be considered as closely related issues.

For students who are interested in meeting on Teams (individually or in groups) I have set aside open office hours on Tuesday and Thursday mornings (10:30-11:50). We can also arrange for individual meetings on Teams at other times by appointment.

This is a survey course at the advanced level. I don't expect much prior knowledge or specific interest in history, but I do expect consistent participation and a willingness to work and think. I will help you wherever I can if you find yourself struggling with the material (either in its analytical aspects or because of the sheer mass of data), but you need to approach me to tell me that you are having difficulties. You may also consider forming small study groups. Learning rarely occurs exclusively in the classroom (virtual or physical)!

2. Assigned readings:

Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam Wars: A Concise International History* (2008).

John A. Wood, *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War* (2016).

Documentary: *Vietnam: a Television History* (1983) – this will serve as a substitute for textbook and longer lectures; you'll find the links on the course schedule (below) and on Blackboard

Additional readings as indicated below (accessible on Blackboard or online as noted on the schedule).

One source we will use frequently are *The Pentagon Papers*, a secret history of US involvement in Vietnam from 1945 to 1967, written by Defense Department analysts; this became public knowledge when the *New York Times* published excerpts in 1971.

3. Requirements:

Blackboard discussion:	30%
Film response paper:	10%
Two reading response papers:	40%
Term paper:	20%

This course requires you to read several substantial primary sources, book chapters, or articles per week. In order to reward your efforts in engaging the material before class meetings, you will earn 30% of your course grade by posting questions, impressions, and interpretations on the Blackboard site on a regular schedule that should allow all students to engage actively with the material. **Two posts per week are required as indicated on the schedule below.** You will not get full credit for posting after the deadlines and none for posts that don't come in later in the day. While that may seem strange for an asynchronous course, it is intended to ensure that everyone gets to interact as much as possible in this forum.

Your **two reading response papers** count for 40% (20% each). Each **reading response paper** should be 1,500-1,800 words (that's roughly 5-6 pages, double-spaced) and develop critical themes addressed in the readings, audiovisual material, and in recorded lectures. You will be asked to state a clear thesis, develop your arguments, and engage the evidence. Papers that do not actively discuss and analyze several of the sources do not warrant a high grade. More specific guidelines are posted on Blackboard. You will submit your reading response paper on Blackboard (Turnitin). For your **film response paper** (700-800 words) you may choose any one of the movies listed on the course schedule—your response paper is due at the end of the week for which the film is recommended so as to ensure you can put it in the proper historical context and use it as a different lens for that week's material.

For your **term paper** you have two options:

- A. a reading response and reflection paper much like the first two (1,500-2,000 words and on prompts that should allow you to consider the semester in all and not merely the final weeks) OR
- B. a research paper on one American's experiences in and with the Vietnam War. Either select a memoir from the range of options presented in John Wood's book or from the oral history archive on the 1st Infantry Division hosted by Alden Library. You will write a 1,500-2,000-word paper that considers how that veteran-authors life (before the war, in war, and after the war) reflects themes that we discussed in class and that may have arisen in other readings. Make sure to pick an author early on, to give yourself time to get the book, which you may need to request from OhioLink (via Alden Library's website).

To select Option B send me an email seeking permission by 5 pm on April 1

(including who you selected and what source(s) you intend to use. If you don't write to me—and get expressed written permission in return—you're de-facto opting into Option A.

I will announce extra credit opportunities in class. These will be public lectures at Ohio University or recorded or live events elsewhere that fit with the themes of this course. You can earn 1 point for each event you attend (after you sent me a short paper on the main points and takeaways). I will add up to 3 points (i.e., 3 events) to your final course grade.

4. Rules and Recommendations (please read carefully):

Attendance in meetings on Teams is optional but I think you will find that your overall understanding of the material—and probably also your posts and papers—will improve

significantly if you're part of the discussions. **Blackboard discussion posts are mandatory.** It is also expected that you will stay on schedule with the reading assignments. Talk to me if you have questions or concerns! Lectures, discussions, and readings will be integrated into a bigger picture of the history of the Vietnam War. Readings for this course are demanding. In general, you will read two or more articles or chapters in the assigned monographs per week, plus several short chapters in the textbook (optional). You should try to complete these readings early in the week and be prepared to participate actively in discussions (i.e., the two-post minimum shouldn't be the upper ceiling of your ambitions and there are other opportunities for discussion in the optional meetings/open office hours.

You will receive prompts for your reading response papers. I encourage study groups and teamwork throughout the course, but obviously your essays have to be yours and yours only. At any point in the process of thinking about an essay you're free to meet with me and discuss an argument you're developing or any problem you may be facing. The university has rules and policies in place for **academic misconduct (including plagiarism)** that you should all be familiar with (<https://www.ohio.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/students/student-code-of-conduct>). If you're uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, come see me (via Teams) and we can look at your specific questions. It is commonly defined as "to steal and use the ideas and writings of another as one's own and/or to appropriate passages or ideas from another and use them as one's own." (*American Heritage Dictionary*) The university gives me three options to address plagiarism and other instances of academic misconduct: an F for the assignment, an F for the course, or referral of the case to judiciaries. I reserve the right to select what seems most appropriate on a case-by-case basis. Make sure to save your research notes, photocopies, and files as well as any feedback you've received from me so that you can protest innocence with vigor and evidence if you should be suspected wrongly of cheating. In general, you should maintain a course portfolio in which you collect all graded assignments.

Please consider forming study groups to help others engage the argument and material of the course more successfully. Make sure to attend Teams meetings or schedule an appointment to share your concerns and talk about your progress in this class or any problems that may interfere with your performance.

Deadlines and due dates are firm and essays will be penalized by half a letter grade for every day they are submitted late. The drop box for papers will close 4 days after the original deadline. In extraordinary cases, you may ask for an extension, but you cannot wait until the last days before a deadline expires.

If you need accommodations for any sort of disability, please speak to me after class, make an appointment to see me, or see me during my office hours.

In the event of a major campus emergency or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages may be subject to change. It also may become necessary to revise the semester calendar.

I will announce any extra credit opportunities on Blackboard.

4. Course Schedule and Assignments:

(Dates are adapted from in-person class so as to keep readings and discussions on a predictable schedule)

Week 1: Introduction

Read:

Lawrence, Introduction and chapter 1

Keith W. Taylor, "The Vietnamese Civil War of 1955-1975 in Historical Perspective" (Blackboard)

Tu, 01/19 Introduction

Th, 01/21 Vietnam: a history

[Anyone who wants to do so can join group meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:50, on Teams (open channel for HIST 3050. In those meetings we will discuss assigned material and address questions about the historical narrative.)]

Short lectures (hopefully, no more than 20-25 minutes a piece):

- 1. The Vietnam War: unnecessary, unwinnable, and unending?**
- 2. What do we know about Vietnam's history (and from whom)?**

Week 2: Indochina at War

Read:

Lawrence, Chapter 2

Nguyen Ai Quoc's letter to Robert Lansing, June 18, 1919 (Blackboard)

Ho Chi Minh's Declaration of Independence, Sept. 2, 1945

(<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5139/>)

Ingo Trauschweizer, "American Ways of War since 1945" *International Bibliography of Military History*, 2012 [Blackboard]

Watch:

Vietnam – A Television History: 1. Roots of a War

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UMTL-zQSYw&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-iISK12y&index=1>)

Tu, 01/26 World War II and Decolonization in Asia

Th, 01/28 American Ways of War: Where does Vietnam fit?

Short lectures:

- 1. 1945 and beyond in East Asia**
- 2. Where does Vietnam fit among America's wars?**

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday morning (NLT 10 am): post a question derived from the readings and/or documentary

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday morning (NLT 10 am): respond to someone else's post, integrate the readings/documentary in your response

Week 3: Indochina at War (II)

Recommended movie: *The Quiet American* (1958 OR 2002) – if you choose to write on this film, deadline is Monday, Feb. 8 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Lawrence, Chapter 3

"US Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954," *The Pentagon Papers*

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent6.htm>)

"Hanoi and the Insurgency in Vietnam," *The Pentagon Papers*

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent11.htm> - the assigned section is about 2/3 of the way into this chapter)—a colleague is working on a translation of a key North Vietnamese policy document from 1959. If he gets it done in time, we'll read it instead of this section of the *Pentagon Papers*.

Watch:

Vietnam – A Television History: 2. The First Vietnam War

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlwO7CT7Hk8>)

Vietnam - a Television History: 3. America's Mandarin

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOBUyPairkc&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=2)

Tu, 02/02 Why did the US become invested in Vietnam?

Th, 02/04 Our Man in Saigon? Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Diem regime

Short lectures:

1. **The First Indochina War (1945/46-54)**

2. **The U.S. and (South) Vietnam**

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday morning (NLT 10 am): post a question derived from the readings/documentary

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday morning (NLT 10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings/documentary in your response

Week 4: Escalation, 1961-1965

Recommended movie: *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978) – paper due Monday, Feb. 15 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Lawrence, chapter 4

NSAM 111, Nov. 22, 1961 (<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v01/d272>)

NSAM 273, Nov. 26, 1963

(<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d331>)

Paper Prepared by the Ambassador in Vietnam (Taylor), Nov. 1964

(<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d426>)

JCS Chairman (Wheeler) to CINCPAC (Sharp), Feb. 27, 1965

(<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d170>)

Watch:

Vietnam: a Television History – 4. LBJ Goes to War

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpWoj4KtdHA&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=3) OR (<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x15dgtn>)

The Big Picture (1963): “Special Forces: The Hidden War in Vietnam”

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOKeHOr0xw4&t=0s&index=194&list=PL_hX5wLdhf_JwFz5l_3NRAcCYURbOW2Fl); this is a 29-minute episode of a documentary series produced by the Army Pictorial Service and shown on ABC and CBS affiliates in the 1950s and 1960

Tu, 02/09 Whose War? John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Le Duan and the Escalation(s) of 1961-1965

Th, 02/11 Did the US have a strategy for Vietnam?

Short lectures:

1. **When and how did the Vietnam War begin?**

2. **Did the US have a strategy?**

Your first Blackboard post is due on Wednesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 5: The War Effort (I)

Recommended: *Platoon* (1986) OR *We Were Soldiers* (2002) – paper due Monday, Feb. 22 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Wood, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2

Watch:

CBS news special report on the Battle of Ia Drang (Nov. 1965)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDJwgp0vCeg>)

Vietnam: a Television History – 5. America Takes Charge

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6myyhyRIWLU&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=4)

Tu, 02/16 Grunts in Vietnam: Who Fought and Why?

Th, 02/18 Office hours; writing time

Short lectures:

1. Who fought and why?
2. What defined soldiers' experiences?

Fri., Feb. 19 (5 pm): First reading response paper due (Blackboard, Turnitin)

Week 6: The War Effort (II)

Recommended: *The Fog of War* (2003) OR *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987)– paper due Monday, Mar. 1 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Lawrence, chapter 5

Watch:

Vietnam: a Television History – 6. America's Enemy

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCxjESMPGSc&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=5)

Why the US Lost in Vietnam, February 2013

(<http://www.c-span.org/video/?311102-1/challenges-vietnam-war>). Please watch the first hour, i.e., the initial presentations and debate among the four panelists.

Tu, 02/23 Westmoreland's War? (1965-68)

Th, 02/25 The War Managers: JCS, McNamara, LBJ?

Short lectures:

1. Why is there so much debate over General Westmoreland?
2. Why didn't the U.S. win (1965-68)?

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 7: The War Effort (III)

Recommended film (documentary): *My Lai* (2010 – episode in the “American Experience” series) – paper due Monday, Mar. 8

Read:

Wood, chapters 3 and 4

Heather Stur, "The Viet Cong Committed Atrocities, Too," *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 2017:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/19/opinion/vietcong-generals-atrocities.html>

Watch:

Videos on the My Lai massacre: *BBC interview of Hugh Thompson*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkFa2lSNAGc>); *Interviews with My Lai Veterans* (1970):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klx4TB33BRU>

CBS News, August 1965: The Cam Ne Incident

(<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1023127901144710>)

Tu, 03/02 Multi-layered war

Th, 03/04 A war of atrocities

Short lectures:

1. What happened at My Lai?

2. Atrocities and the Laws of War

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 8: The War Effort (IV)

Recommended: Full Metal Jacket (1987) – paper due Monday, March 15, NLT 5 pm

Read:

Lawrence, chapter 6

Watch/Listen:

Martin Luther King, Jr. speech at Riverside Church (Harlem, NY), April 1967 (text and audio: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>);

NJ public TV on the July 1967 Newark riots

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxkDJ4cQvTo>);

CBS News, 02/27/1968 (Walter Cronkite's report from Vietnam:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Toy2wFBkmg>);

LBJ's March 31, 1968 address to the nation (select passages:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxWGg3AARnI>);

CBS News retrospective on the DNC Convention riots, Chicago 1968

(<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/remembering-1968-chicagos-bloody-democratic-convention/>)

Vietnam: a Television History – 7. Tet

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLtrdXigRGQ&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPpLR5-iISKl2y&index=6>) OR (<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x15ddj5>)

Tu, 03/09 Tet, 1968: Tactical Victory, Political Defeat?

Th, 03/11 1968 in America

Short lectures:

1. The Tet Offensive

2. Why didn't the war end in 1968?

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 9: The War Effort (V)

Recommended: *Hamburger Hill* (1987) – paper due Monday, March 22 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Lawrence, chapter 7

Kevin M. Boylan, “The Red Queen’s Race: Operation Washington Green and Pacification, 1969-70”(Blackboard)

Listen:

Podcast by War Room (US Army War College) on strategy and tactics in Vietnam, 1968-73:

<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/tet-offensive-ep-1/>

Watch:

Vietnam: a Television History – 8. Vietnamizing the War

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eigMnliWKxs&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPpLLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=7)

Tu, 03/16 Creighton Abrams’s Better War?

Th, 03/18 Nixon’s War: Cold War, Vietnamization, and Escalation

Short lectures:

1. Why do we think the U.S. war effort changed and improved in 1968?
2. What happened when Richard Nixon became president?

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 10: Coming Home from War

Recommended: *Coming Home* (1978) – paper due Monday, March 29 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Wood, chapter 5

“North Vietnamese veterans’ stories,” BBC, 9 July 2015 (<http://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-33408096?SThisFB>)

John Kerry, April 1971, Testimony in Senate Hearing (read at:

<http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/3631>; or watch at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucY7JOfg6G4>);

Patrick McLaughlin on Life as a veteran and OU student

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bf0rOkWgZu0>)

Watch:

Vietnam: a Television History – 9. Cambodia and Laos

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zg3NvccZtno&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPpLLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=8)

Tu, 03/23 Coming Home from the Vietnam War

Th, 03/25 Office hours; writing time

Short lectures:

1. Veterans and Protests

Fri., Mar. 26 (5 pm): Second reading response paper due (Blackboard, Turnitin)

Week 11: Richard Nixon's Peace?

Recommended: *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) – paper due Monday, April 5 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," Nov. 3, 1969

(<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-the-war-vietnam>) or watch the outtakes linked on Blackboard;

Seymour Lipset, "Polls and Protest, *Foreign Affairs*, April 1971

(<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/24259/seymour-m-lipset/polls-and-protests>)

Paris Peace Accords, Jan. 1973

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam/treaty.htm>)

Watch:

CBS Evening News on the May 1970 Kent State shooting

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lmd6CHah7Wg>);

ABC News report, Jan. 27, 1973: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/video/jan-27-1973-paris-peace-accords-signed-signaling-52389710>

Vietnam: a Television History – 10. Peace is at Hand (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC-ILFNqfbc&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=9)

Vietnam: a Television History – 11. Homefront USA

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrwg0CKI4zo&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=10)

Tu, 03/30 At the Home Front

Th, 04/01 Nixon's Peace?

Short lectures:

1. **Framing Defeat: Who was to blame?**

2. **Making Peace: What kind an agreement was Paris, 1973?**

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Friday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Option due on what final/term paper you intend to write (Th. April 1, 5 pm)

Week 12: Abandoning Vietnam

Recommended: *The Killing Fields* (1984) – paper due Monday, April 12 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Malcolm W. Browne, "How Did it Happen?" *The New York Times*, April 24, 1975

(<http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/042475vietnam-why-mb.html>)

Watch/Listen:

Gerald Ford, April 23, 1975: Speech at Tulane

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuoQe6f189g>)

Vietnam: a Television History – 12. The End of the Tunnel

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNfg8mfpubw&list=PLB1PKHg8oRxlZCsWBgPplLR5-i_ISKl2y&index=11)

Tu, 04/06 The War after Paris

Th, 04/08 From Tragedy (1975) to Triumph (1989/91)?

Short lectures:

1. **The Fall of Saigon**

2. **The U.S. in 1975 (and in 1991)**

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 13: Lessons and Legacies (I)

Recommended: *Rambo, First Blood* (1982) OR *Rambo, First Blood, Part II* (1985) – paper due Monday April 19 (NLT 5 pm)

Read:

Lawrence, chapter 8

Wood, chapter 6

Robert J. McMahon, "SHAFR Presidential Address – Contested Memory: The Vietnam War and American Society, 1975-2001" (Blackboard)

David Petraeus, "Lessons of History and Lessons of Vietnam" (Blackboard)

Tu, 04/13 Lessons of Vietnam? Armed Forces and Foreign Policy

Th, 04/15 Legacies of Vietnam? American political culture

Short lectures:

1. Overcoming Vietnam? What did the armed forces learn?

2. Overcoming Vietnam? How did political culture shift?

Your first Blackboard post is due on Tuesday (10 am): post a question derived from the readings

Your second Blackboard post is due on Thursday (10 am): respond to someone else's question, integrate the readings in your response

Week 14: Lessons and Legacies (II)

Read:

Wood, chapter 7 and conclusion

Robert Jay Lifton, *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans* (1973),

Prologue and chapter 1 (Blackboard)

Watch:

Vietnam – a Television History, 13: Legacies 1973

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2OFHfzsYMg&list=PL2U10t-yybgEaKRFBduYE-NbvjiZg50j&index=1>)

Tu, 04/20 Veterans and Narratives: A war for all ages?

Th, 04/22 Retrospective and Review

Short lectures:

1. PTSD and the Vietnam War

2. Why are we still talking about the Vietnam War?

Term paper due Tuesday, Apr. 27 (noon) – Blackboard, Turnitin