HISTORY 3580 T01  
THE VIETNAM WAR

Instructor: Henry Heller  
Winter 2011
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Office Hours: Thursday 2:30 - 4:30 P.M., or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This half course narrates and analyzes the history of the Vietnam War from the perspective of both Vietnamese and Americans. It begins by outlining the history of Vietnam including French colonial involvement. It focuses on the American stage of the war (1965-75) with its repercussions on the rest of the world.

The course is based on a series of bi-weekly lectures interspersed by a film history of the war produced by PBS. The film series should provide the basis for class discussion both of the war and the way it was represented in the media.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

Robert MacNamara, In Retrospect (Times Books)
Truong N. Tang, A Vietnam Memoir (Random)
Phil Caputo, A Rumour of War (Ballantine)

TERM WORK, TESTS, AND EVALUATION:

Class work will be worth 60% of the final grade. There will be a one hour examination February 25 based on two of three essay questions (20%) and an essay (40%) due on the last day of class, April 8, 2011.

The essay will consist of a 3000 word comparative review of the books and the film series based on the premise "the Vietnam war was a mistake". In each case briefly relate the character of the narrative, its perspective, arguments, emphasis, biases, strengths and omissions as they relate to the premise that the war was a mistake. To what degree does a first person narrative better capture the war than a scholarly account? To what extent do nationality, gender and class affect perspective? What is left unsaid and why?

Keep copies of all work.

Evaluative feedback will be provided prior to the voluntary withdrawal date, March 18, 2011

FINAL EXAMINATION: Based on the full semester's work. You will be required to answer three of five essay questions. (40%)
Grade Distribution:

A+  (100-90)  C+  (66-60)
A   (89-80)   C   (59-51)
B+  (79-75)   D   (50-40)
B   (74-67)   F   (40-0)

Students who wish to appeal a grade given for term work must do so within 10 working days after the grade for the term work has been made available to them. Uncollected term work will become the property of the Faculty of Arts and will be subject to confidential destruction.

Academic Dishonesty
Students should familiarize themselves with the University’s policy on plagiarism and academic honesty found in the University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar 2010-2011, page 27-28. Faculty of Arts penalties for academic dishonesty include the following, which can be found at http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/media/Arts_Academic_Integrity_2009.pdf:

Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

The common penalty in Arts for plagiarism on a written assignment is a grade of F on the paper and a final grade of F (CW) (for Compulsory Withdrawal) for the course. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as purchase of an essay and repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five (5) years from registration in courses taught in a particular department/program in Arts or from all courses taught in this Faculty. The Faculty also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism or to other experts for authentication.

The common penalty in Arts for academic dishonesty on a test or examination is F for the paper, F (CW) for the course, and a one-year suspension from courses acceptable for credit in the Faculty. For more serious acts of academic dishonesty on a test or examination, such as repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department or program in Arts or from all courses taught in or accepted for credit by this Faculty.
The Indo-China Wars: A Select Bibliography


Appy, Christian G., Patriots: The Vietnam War remembered from all sides (New York: Viking, 2003), xxvii


Berman, Larry, Perfect spy: the incredible double life of Pham Xuan An, Time magazine reporter and Vietnamese communist agent (New York, 2007).


Cheng Guon, Ang, The Vietnam Wars from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective (Routledge, 2002).


Ellsberg, Daniel, Secrets (New York, 2002).


Hunt, David, *Vietnam's southern revolution: from peasant insurrection to total war* (Amherst, 2008).


Porter, Gareth, 1942 - Perils of dominance: imbalance of power and the road to war in Vietnam. (Berkeley, 2005)


Taylor, Sandra, *Vietnamese Women at War* (U of Kansas, 1999).


1. What was the geo-political context of the Vietnam War?
2. What were the terms of the Geneva accords? How did the United States choose to interpret them after 1954?
3. 1950 saw the internationalization of the colonial war in Indo-China. Explain why and how this occurred.
4. The Chinese Revolution (1949) deeply affected the policies of both the DRV and the United States. Explain.
5. The communist revolution in Vietnam was spurred by nationalism and agrarian discontent. Discuss.
6. “Almost until the moment of victory the struggle of the Vietminh against the French and Japanese placed greater emphasis on the struggle against imperialism than against feudalism.” Discuss.
7. Discuss the military strategy of the Vietminh against the French. How did it change in 1950?
8. Despite its professed commitment to anti-colonialism the United States aided French colonialism in Indo-China from 1946 onwards. Why?
9. What were the bases of support of the Diem government?
10. Prior to his assassination U.S. President John Kennedy was seriously considering American withdrawal from Vietnam? True or false.
11. Outline the battle plan of the U.S. general William Westmorland in 1965. How did it reflect the American approach to war?
12. Why did the United States choose to fight a limited war in Vietnam? How did it propose to win the war in 1965?
13. "Tet was a military defeat for the communists, but a great political victory." Discuss
14. "The anti-war movement in the U.S. must be seen as a failure." Discuss.
15. "American internal dissent directly contributed to the Communist victory in Vietnam." Discuss
16. The U.S. could not achieve its goals in Vietnam. How did Nixon's playing of the 'China card' allow the U.S. to change its goals?
17. Outline Nixon and Kissinger’s policy of Vietnamization and linkage. How did it differ from Johnson’s approach to the Vietnam conflict?
18. Up to 1969 it could be said that the U.S. military had won every engagement in the conflict. Yet from then on its morale disintegrated. Why?
19. In the 1950s and early 1960s it was commonly said that Cambodia was a paradise. How truthful was this view?
20. Explain why Prince Sihanouk attempted to pursue a neutralist policy with respect to the war in Vietnam? Why did he fail?
21. What were the bases of the antagonism between the Vietnamese and Cambodian communist parties?
22. "The failure of U.S. strategy in Vietnam was not a military one. Rather it was a failure at the economic and social level"
23. What were the effects of the Vietnam War on the U.S. both at home and abroad? How was the global balance of power affected?
24. What motivated the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979? What did it signify?
25. Why did it prove impossible to maintain the neutrality of Laos?
26. What were the consequences of the American War (1965-75) in Vietnam?
27. What impelled the Khmer Rouge massacre of its own population?
28. What were the effects of the Vietnam War on the U.S. both at home and abroad? How was the global balance of power affected?