The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War occupies a special place in U.S. history and foreign relations. For decades, it was known as America’s longest war, the only war the United States ever lost, a war that shattered Americans’ faith in their government and spawned a culture of protests that divided one generation from another. More recently, it has become the conflict against which the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya are most often compared and contrasted. In this course, we will examine the history of the Vietnam War both in its own context and as part of ongoing debates about U.S. foreign policy and military intervention. In addition to considering the war from the U.S. perspective, we will read texts that offer insight into the Vietnamese experience. We will cover a wide range of genres and disciplines, including: official documents written by Robert McNamara, George Ball, and Daniel Ellsberg; historical scholarship by David Hunt, Marilyn Young, and Hannah Arendt; and novels, films, and poetry of Eugene Burdick, Norman Mailer, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Tim O’Brien.

Books and Readings

The following books are required for the course. You can purchase them in person at Shakespeare Books (716 Broadway) or by any other means you prefer. I have also put them on Reserve at Bobst Library. All other readings can be found on the Resources section of NYU Classes in the Course Documents folder. These are marked with an asterisk.

George Herring, America’s Longest War
William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, The Ugly American
David Hunt, Vietnam’s Southern Revolution
Truong Nhu Tang, A Viet Cong Memoir
Yusef Komunyakaa, Dien Cai Dau
Dang Thuy Tram, Last Night I Dreamed of Peace
Diana Hacker, A Pocket Manual Of Style

Assignments

Over the course of the semester, you will write 2 formal essays in which you explore a specific question about the Vietnam War through an analysis of one or more texts on the syllabus. Be sure to choose topics and texts that interest and intrigue you. Essays will be graded for the form as well as the content of their analysis.

In addition, you will post a response to the day’s reading on the Forum section of NYU Classes once a week. You can choose whether to respond to Tuesday’s or Thursday’s reading(s). Just make sure to post at least 1 hour before class on the day we are scheduled to discuss the reading. One or two paragraphs will suffice. Keep in mind, responses are not summaries, but rather critical and creative commentaries intended to provoke possible areas of discussion and to serve as brainstorming for essays.
Grading:

- Essay 1: 5-7 pages (25%)
- Essay 2: 8-10 pages (35%)
- Responses: (25%) (Graded as One Unit: Satisfactory Completion of All Responses=A; one-half letter grade penalty for each missing response)
- Participation: (15%):
- Extra Credit: Timeline or Editorial

Participation Requirements:
Participation is key for your success in this course. In addition to coming to class regularly and on time, participation includes:

1) Completion of all reading assignments; bring hard copy of readings to class
4) Regular and Thoughtful Contributions to Class Discussion
5) Respectful Engagement with Others

Attendance Policy: You are allowed 3 unexcused absences, no questions asked. Except for extenuating circumstances, additional absences will be penalized.

Late Papers: Unless you have made other arrangements with me, late papers will be penalized.

On Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: A description of Gallatin’s academic integrity policy, including plagiarism and its consequences, can be found at the following link: http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html

Jan. 29: Course Introduction: Why Study the Vietnam War?

Unit 1: Prelude to War

Jan. 31: Intro: Background on the Cold War/Vietnam War
- Andrew Rotter, “Chronicle of a War Foretold: The United States and Vietnam”*
- Herring, chapter 1

Feb. 5: -Lederer and Burdick, The Ugly American (pgs. 1-42)
- Michael Latham, “Redirecting the Revolution?: The USA and the Failure of Nation Building in South Vietnam”*
Feb. 7: Lederer and Burdick, *The Ugly American* (pgs. 43-190)

Feb 12: Lederer and Burdick, *The Ugly American* (pgs. 191-285)

Feb 14: Hunt, *Vietnam’s Southern Revolution* (chs. 1-3)
[Assign Essay 1]

Feb. 19: Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir* (chs. 1, 2, 9, 14)

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**Unit 2: Escalation**


Feb. 26: **Essay 1 Due**
Johnson’s War and the Logic of Escalation:
- Herring, chapter 4

Feb. 28: - Lyndon Johnson, *Vantage Point* (ch. 11)*
- Table of Troop Numbers*

Mar. 5: - Herring, chapter 5
- Marilyn Young, “Bombing Civilians From the Twentieth Century to Today”*

Mar. 7: - George Ball, “A Light That Failed,” 1964 Dissent Memo*
- Gurman, “Revising the Vietnam Balance Sheet”*

Mar 12: *Hearts and Minds* (screening)

Mar 14: *Hearts and Minds* (discussion)

Mar. 19: **SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

Mar. 21: **SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

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**Unit 3: The Soldier’s Perspective:**


Mar. 28: Yusef Komunyakaa, *Dien Cai Dan* [book]
Apr. 2:  -Dang Thuy Tram, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* (intro-page 168) [book]
         -Hunt, chapter 6

Apr. 4:  -*Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* (171-end)
         -Christina Schwenkel, “Contested Truths: Museums and Regimes of
           Representation and Objectivity”*

Apr. 9:  *Winter Soldier* (film discussion)
         -Herring, chapter 7

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**Unit 4: Protests**

Apr. 11: -Noam Chomsky, “The Function of the University in a Time of Crisis”*
         Columbia Student Protest film (screening)

Apr. 16: Jeremi Suri, “The Rise and Fall of An International Counterculture, 1960-
        1975”*
         [Assign Essay 2]

Apr. 18: -Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* (Book I, Part 1, #s 1-2; Book I, Part
         2; Book II, Part 1, #s1-2; Part XI) (pgs. 3-10, 53-79, 219-230, 288)*
         -“Why Are We in Vietnam?” last chapter*

Apr. 23: Katherine Kinney, “Hanoi Jane and Other Treasons: Women and the
        Editing of the 1960s”*

Apr. 25: The Pentagon Papers:
        Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics”*

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**Unit 5: The End and Legacy of the War**

Apr. 30: -Melvin Laird, “Iraq: Learning the Lessons of Vietnam” *Foreign Affairs* (Nov-
        Dec 2005): 22-4*
         -Herring, chapter 8

May 2:  Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir* (chs. 21, 22, 24)

May 7:  -Hà Dang, “What is doimoi? From where did it start?”*
         -Do Nguyen Phuong, “Economic growth coupled with social advancement
           and justice”*
         -Linh Dinh, “Eating Fried Chicken”*

May 9:  -Marilyn Young, “Counterinsurgency: Now and Forever”*
         -Obama’s West Point Speech, Dec. 1, 2009*
         Essay 2 Due