



History 350:

# The Vietnam Wars

## Nations in Conflict, 1945-1995

Summer 2015: June 1 – July 10

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### Course Organization and Description:

The Vietnam War continues to influence United States' culture, society, and politics well over forty years since the conflict's end. Contemporary foreign policy ventures are frequently compared to America's role in Vietnam, while many of the three million Vietnam veterans in the United States still search for a meaning for their participation in the war. The aim of this course is to provide students with a greater understanding of the causes and consequences of America's participation in Vietnam. By analyzing the political, military, and social history of the war, this course will illuminate a confusing and often misunderstood period of American history. Although the course emphasizes U.S. involvement in the conflict, considerable attention will be given to the impact of the war on Vietnam and its people. The course is organized around three modules: Module one will cover Vietnam's history of fighting for independence up through 1954; module two examines how the situation in Vietnam turned into an American war between 1954 and 1963; module three looks at the problems America faced fighting in Vietnam and explores the ongoing legacy of the conflict. In covering these issues, the course will concentrate on the following broad themes:

- ~ What ideological, economic, and strategic factors determined the scope and nature of U.S. involvement in Vietnam
- ~ How Vietnam's history of colonialism affected their response to U.S. intervention in their

### *affairs*

- ~ *The impact of domestic political concerns on U.S. foreign policy*
- ~ *The nature of the 'National Wars of Liberation' during the mid-twentieth century*
- ~ *The impact of the Cold War on U.S. foreign policy*
- ~ *The relationship between nationalism and communism in developing nations during the mid-twentieth century*
- ~ *The impact of U.S. foreign policies on other nations and regions*
- ~ *The ongoing legacy of the Vietnam War for the nations and individuals involved*

### **Course Objectives:**

This course aims to provide a thorough knowledge of America's experience in Vietnam; this knowledge should equip you with the ability to:

- Identify the origins and development of the ideas, values, customs, and institutions that have conditioned U.S. foreign policy both in the twentieth century and in the present
- Construct informed decisions about current foreign policy and global issues
- Critically analyze statements made by U.S. politicians or references in American popular culture about past interactions between the U.S. and the world
- Identify the potential consequences of contemporary ideas and actions through close analysis of historical events
- Demonstrate skills that can be applied to everyday life such as: improved time management and self-discipline skills, improved written skills, the ability to process complex and sometimes contradictory information, the ability to argue a case clearly and with supporting evidence, and the ability to critically analyze and evaluate differing interpretations of historical events

### **Satisfactory completion of this course fulfills your Westminster College Tier III General Education course requirement**

### **Course Format/Expectations:**

The course is taught entirely online. All course information is posted on the Westminster College's Moodle course website. All students must have daily access to the Internet. You must check Moodle every day to keep up with the announcements and to make sure that you are keeping up with the assigned activities. Make sure you become as familiar as possible with the Moodle website as soon as possible. Make sure that you have access to a reliable computer and a back-up plan for Internet access.

Remember, that the lack of time spent in class does NOT mean less work. You may find that the time spent in online activities will be considerable, but it is expected that your active participation will enhance your learning.

You are expected to take the responsibility to actively use the online learning material and to manage your time so that you complete assigned reading and online activities within the timeframes assigned. The expertise you develop in self-discipline and online learning will carry over into other areas of your personal and professional life.

In order to keep up with the assigned material, you will need to read the assigned chapters, documents, and essays every week and familiarize yourself with the main points or arguments of each. Because this course is compressed, you cannot afford to fall behind in these assignments.

## **Requirements and Assignments:**

### **Essays:**

In order to fulfill the course goals of helping you to construct informed arguments and to assist you with your writing skills, you will write **three five-page essays** based on the weekly assigned readings and videos. See the reading schedule for specific due dates. Your essays will not be summaries of the material; rather, using the readings and documents to support your own answers to specific questions that are listed on the syllabus below. Essays are **not** comprehensive: Essay one will cover the readings and documentaries from module one only, essay two will cover module two only, essay three will cover module three only. **The three essays are worth 20% each, 60% total.**

### **Online Discussion:**

To encourage your questioning and intellectual curiosity of the Vietnam War you will have the chance to upload discussion questions to Moodle every week during weeks one through five (we won't be doing this in week six because time is more limited). You must post three discussion questions by midnight every Thursday, during weeks one through five. One question must be on the McMahon book, one on the Herring book and, (beginning in week two) on the *Vietnam in HD* documentary. You must then post four answers to any of the questions posted by your fellow students by midnight on the following Saturday (the only exception is July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend when you have to post questions on the Sunday so you can enjoy the weekend). **Discussion participation is worth 25% of your final grade.**

### **Virtual Classroom Presentation: Vietnam on Film**

To further explore images of the Vietnam War in popular culture, you can select any mainstream movie on which to give an in-class presentation with images and movie clips. Your presentation will critically explore how the movie depicts the Vietnam War. Your presentation will be on PowerPoint and must be uploaded to Moodle for your classmates to see: **Worth 15% of your final grade.**

### **Summary:**

ESSAY ONE: MUST BE UPLOADED TO MOODLE DROPBOX BY SUNDAY JUNE 14 AT MIDNIGHT

ESSAY TWO: MUST BE UPLOADED TO MOODLE DROPBOX BY SUNDAY JUNE 28 AT MIDNIGHT

ESSAY THREE: MUST BE UPLOADED TO MOODLE DROPBOX BY FRIDAY JULY 10 AT MIDNIGHT

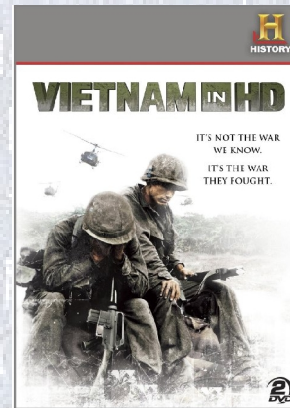
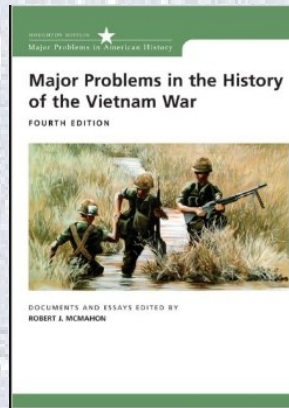
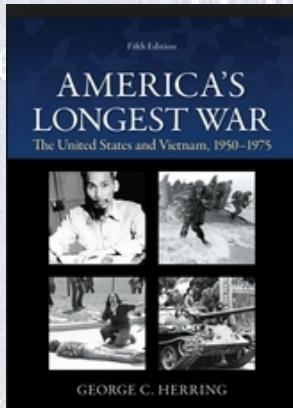
DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION: EVERY WEEK DURING WEEKS 1-5 POST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY THURSDAY AT MIDNIGHT AND RESPONSES BY SATURDAY AT MIDNIGHT (SUNDAY ON JULY 4<sup>TH</sup> WEEKEND)

VIETNAM MOVIE PRESENTATION: SIGN UP FOR PRESENTATION DATES

## Course Grading Scale:

A (93-96), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82) C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72)  
D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), F (59 or lower).

## Required Course Texts:



1. **George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition** Paperback (2013)\*
2. **Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays, Fourth Edition*** (Major Problems in American History Series) Paperback (2007)\*
3. ***Vietnam in HD***, History Channel Documentary. Either purchase the DVD or stream online from Amazon.com or Netflix

\*Available for purchase through the Westminster College bookstore

## Academic integrity:

Unfortunately, cheating has become a far more frequent problem on campuses in recent years. I trust you all, but in order to be fair to students that take the time and effort to produce their own work, no amount of plagiarism or any other form of cheating will be tolerated in this course. All essays will be run through Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism. Remember that this syllabus is your contract for this course. By agreeing to undertake this course you are agreeing to not to cheat.

## Illness and Disability:

If you suffer from any kind of illness or disability that requires special attention or accommodations to be made, please inform the instructor at the *beginning of the course* and inform the Learning Opportunities Center.

## Late Work:

In order to be fair to other students in the class, papers cannot be accepted after the scheduled submission date. Remember that COMPUTERS FAIL with alarming regularity, so save

regularly and make frequent hard copies as you type. Always make sure you have a spare copy of any work handed in. Make up exams cannot be offered.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **MODULE 1, WEEKS 1-2: THE ROAD TO INTERVENTION, Up to 1963**

#### **Week 1 (Monday, June 1 - Sunday, June 7): Vietnam: A Country, Not a War**

##### **Readings:**

**On Moodle:** (these documents will give you a basic knowledge of the Vietnam War: refer back to them frequently in the course to help you understand the material)

Vietnam War Timeline

"The Vietnam War," Encyclopedia Article

A Note on Terms

**George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975***

- CHAPTER 1: A Dead-End Alley: The United States, France, and the First Indochina War, 1950-1954

**Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays***

##### **Documents:**

Jules Ferry Justifies French Colonial Expansion, 1884

Ho Chi Minh Deplores "Imperialist Crimes," 1920

Vietnam Declares Independence, 1945

The State Department Recommends Military Aid to the French, 1950

The National Security Council Identifies Important U.S. Security Interests in Indochina, 1950

##### **Essays:**

William J. Duiker, "France's Imperial Dreams, Vietnam's Trauma"

Robert J. McMahon, "Cold War Strategy and U.S. Intervention"

**\*POST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE WEEK 1 READINGS BY THURSDAY, JUNE 4, POST YOUR RESPONSES BY SATURDAY JUNE 6 AT MIDNIGHT**

## **Week 2 (Monday, June 8 - Sunday, June 14): America's Road to Intervention**

### **Readings:**

**George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975***

- CHAPTER 2: Our Offspring: Nation Building in South Vietnam, 1954-1961
- CHAPTER 3: Limited Partnership: Kennedy and Diem, 1961-1963

**Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays***

#### **Documents:**

- Elbridge Durbrow Assesses the Diem Regime, 1957
- Maxwell Taylor Recommends the Dispatch of U.S. Forces, 1961
- Kennedy Reaffirms the Domino Theory, 1963

#### **Essays:**

- David L. Anderson, "The Tragedy of U.S. Intervention"

### **Viewing:**

#### ***Vietnam in HD***

- Episode 1: *The Beginning* (1964-1965)

**\*POST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE WEEK 2 READINGS BY THURSDAY, JUNE 11, POST YOUR RESPONSES BY SATURDAY JUNE 13 AT MIDNIGHT**

#### **FIRST ESSAY DUE: SUNDAY, JUNE 14 BY MIDNIGHT**

**Using ALL of the readings from weeks One and Two from the George Herring and Robert J. McMahon books and the *Vietnam in HD* videos, answer the following question in a five page essay:**

***Before 1960, what struggles did the Vietnamese have in gaining their independence, and why did the United States begin to have interests in Vietnam from 1945 to 1963?***

## **MODULE 2, WEEKS 3-4: VIETNAM BECOMES AN AMERICAN WAR, 1963-1968**

### **Week 3 (Monday, June 15 - Sunday, June 21): Escalation and Confrontation**

#### **Readings:**

**George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975***

- CHAPTER 4: Enough, but Not Too Much: Johnson's Decisions for War, 1963-1965
- CHAPTER 5: On the Tiger's Back: The United States at War, 1965-1967

**Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays***

#### **Documents:**

- A Vietcong Recruit Explains Why He Joined the Revolution (1961)
- A South Vietnamese Peasant Girl Becomes a Vietcong Supporter (1961)
- Ho Vows to Fight Until Complete Victory (1966)

#### **Essays:**

- Robert K. Brigham, "The Role and the Significance of the National Liberation Front"

#### **Viewing:**

#### ***Vietnam in HD***

- Episode 2: Search and Destroy (1966-1967)

***\*POST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE WEEK 3 READINGS BY THURSDAY, JUNE 18, POST YOUR RESPONSES BY SATURDAY JUNE 20 AT MIDNIGHT***

### **Week 4: (Monday, June 22 - Sunday, June 28): America's Mission Unravels**

#### **Readings:**

**George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975***

- CHAPTER 6: A Very Near Thing: The Tet Offensive and After, 1968

**Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays***

**Essays:**

Gerard J. DeGroot, "A Grunt's Life"

**Viewing:**

***Vietnam in HD***

Episode 3: *The Tet Offensive* (1968)

**\*POST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE WEEK 4 READINGS BY THURSDAY, JUNE 25, POST YOUR RESPONSES BY SATURDAY JUNE 27 AT MIDNIGHT**

**SECOND ESSAY DUE: SUNDAY, JUNE 28 BY MIDNIGHT**

**Using ALL of the readings from weeks Three and Four from the George Herring and Robert J. McMahon books and the *Vietnam in HD* videos, answer the following question in a five page essay:**

***Essay Question: Why did Vietnam become an American War by 1968, and what problems did the United States have in winning the "Hearts and Minds" of the Vietnamese people?***

**MODULE 3, WEEKS 5-6: LOSING THE WAR AND THE AFTERMATH**



**\*Plan/work ahead if you have Fourth of July plans this weekend**

**Week 5: (Monday, June 29 - Sunday, July 5): Endgame & Nixon's War**

**Readings:**

**George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975***

- CHAPTER 7: A War for Peace: Nixon, Kissinger, and Vietnam, 1969-1973



**Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays***

**Documents:**

Robert F. Kennedy Calls Vietnam an Unwinnable War, 1968  
Walter Cronkite Criticizes a Policy "Mired in Stalemate," 1968  
Nixon Advocates Vietnamization, 1969  
Martin Luther King, Jr., Declares His Opposition to the War, 1967

**Essays:**

Adam Garfinkle, "Movement Myths"

**Viewing:**

***Vietnam in HD***

Episode 4: *An Endless War (1968-1969)*  
Episode 5: *A Changing War (1969-1970)*

**\*POST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE WEEK 5 READINGS BY THURSDAY, JULY 2, POST YOUR RESPONSES BY SUNDAY JULY 5 AT MIDNIGHT**

**Week 6: Monday, July 6 – Friday, July 10: Aftermath**

**Readings:**

**George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975***

- CHAPTER 8: A "Postwar War" and the Legacy of Vietnam

**Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays***

**Documents:**

Gerald R. Ford Identifies the Lessons of Vietnam  
Jimmy Carter sees "A Profound Moral Crisis"  
A Former Army Nurse Considers the War's Impact

**Essays:**

Arnold Isaacs, "Competing Memories"  
Robert D. Schulzinger, "Viewing Foreign and Military Policy Through the Prism of Vietnam"

**Viewing:**

***Vietnam in HD***

Episode 6: *Peace with Honor* (1971-1975)

**FINAL ESSAY DUE: FRIDAY, JULY 10 BY MIDNIGHT**

**Using ALL of the readings from weeks Five and Six from the George Herring and Robert J. McMahon books and the *Vietnam in HD* videos, answer the following question in a five page essay:**

***Essay Question: Did America achieve "Peace with Honor" in Vietnam and what were some of the long term consequences of the war for both Vietnam and the United States?***

