History 271: The United States in Vietnam 1945-1975

Fall 2006

Perhaps no episode since the American Civil War has been as divisive as United States political and military intervention in Vietnam. The conflict dominated American politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and its many legacies -- political, economic, cultural and psychological -- are felt to this day.

This unit examines the origins, evolution and impact of the Vietnam War (as it is known to Americans -- to many Vietnamese it is the "American War"). In addition to reviewing the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the class will explore the political, cultural and social forces that influenced the behavior of the various Vietnamese and American parties. The objective of the unit is to develop a coherent perspective on what became one of the costliest wars in American history.

Instructor:

Chris Beam, Lecturer, Department of History

Office: 3 Canham House, 146 Wood Street
Office hours: Monday, 1:00-2:30 p.m., and Wednesday, 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon, or by appointment.

Students who have questions about any aspect of this course should feel free to contact the instructor at 753-6986 or via email at cbeam@bates.edu.

Class schedule:

The class will meet Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week. Most of the sessions will be taken up with a lecture on the topics listed below. The others are reserved for group discussions, guest speakers and video presentations.

Class sessions: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 2:40-4:00 p.m., 300 Pettigrew Hall

Special events such as guest speakers will be scheduled as soon as arrangements are made. Hence the syllabus may be revised.
Readings and writing assignments:

The course is organized around a comprehensive study of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, an analysis of the U.S. domestic opposition to the war, and other readings including primary documents which have been placed on two-hour reserve in Ladd Library (as have the instructor's military service discharge papers) or are available on the Internet.

Reading assignments should be completed by the beginning of class. It is recommended they be read in the order listed.

There are three writing assignments -- a short write-up on a major U.S. policy statement on U.S. intervention in the war, an exercise based on primary-source documents, and an eight to ten page research paper based on one of several options. Instructions for the writing assignments will be handed out or posted separately.

There will also be a final examination -- take-home or in-class (students' choice).

Attendance:

Attendance at all sessions will be taken and is required, unless an excuse is obtained from the instructor before class or as soon after class as possible. It is a major element of the "class participation" component of the final grade. Unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade.

The grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- Class participation (including quizzes) 10 percent
- Writing assignment #1 15 percent
- Writing assignment #2 15 percent
- Writing assignment #3 30 percent
- Final exam 30 percent

Reading list:

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

Small, Melvin, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds.*
ASSIGNMENTS

September 6 (Wednesday): Introduction to the Course

September 8 (Friday): Discussion – Perspectives on the Vietnam War

September 11 (Monday): Vietnam: The Land, the People and Two Thousand Years of History
Reading: Nguyen Khac Vien, "Vietnamese Account of French Conquest" (reserve)

September 13 (Wednesday): Video presentation - Vietnam: A Television History, part 1

September 15 (Friday): The French Empire in Southeast Asia, 1858-1919: Conquest and Consolidation

September 18 (Monday): Discussion – "Lessons" of the French Conquest

September 20 (Wednesday): The French Empire in Southeast Asia, 1919-1941: The Vietnamese Responses

September 22 (Friday): World War II: Japanese Occupation, French Collaboration and Vietnamese Resistance, 1941-1945
Reading: Ho Chi Minh, Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, September 2, 1945 (reserve) or at http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5139/

September 25 (Monday): Video presentation - Vietnam: A Television History, part 2

September 27 (Wednesday): The French Try Again: The Struggle with the Viet Minh, 1946-1954
Reading: Herring, chap. 1

September 29 (Friday): Discussion – The U.S. and the Cold War: The “Lessons” of History
Readings: Ho Chi Minh's 1946 Appeal for Help (hand-out)
National Security Council 1952 Policy Statement on Southeast Asia (reserve)

October 2 (Monday): After Dienbienphu: Cease-fire and Partition
Readings: Herring, chap. 2
October 4 (Wednesday): The Creation of South Vietnam and the Origins of the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong), 1954-1961
Reading: Herring, chap. 3

October 6 (Friday): Discussion – What Was Lansdale Up To?

[October 9 (Monday): no class]

Reading: Kennedy, John F., "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961" (reserve) or at http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/johnfkennedyinaugural.htm (text, audio and video)

October 13 (Friday): Crisis in South Vietnam, 1963-1965
Readings: Herring, chap. 4

October 16 (Monday): Discussion: The U.S.-South Vietnamese Relationship: Were Ambassador Taylor’s Remarks Justified?
Reading: Ambassador Taylor’s Meeting with South Vietnamese Generals, December 24, 1964 (reserve)

[October 18 (Wednesday) and 20 (Friday): Fall recess -- no class]

→ October 23 (Monday), 4:00 p.m.: Writing assignment #1 due

October 23 (Monday): The Second Indochina War, 1965-1967: On the Ground
Readings: Herring, chap. 5

October 25 (Wednesday): Guest speaker: Web Harrison (Bates ’63), USMC, Vietnam 1965-1966

October 27 (Friday): The Second Indochina War, 1965-1967: At Home
Reading: Small, pp. 1-74

October 30 (Monday): Workshop on primary sources and instructions for writing assignment #2, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, first floor, 70 Campus Avenue – Group 1
November 1 (Wednesday): Workshop on primary sources and instructions for writing assignment #2, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, first floor, 70 Campus Avenue – Group 2

November 3 (Friday): The Draft: How the Selective Service System Worked
Readings:  
Michael D. Shafer, "The Vietnam Era Draft: Who Went, Who Didn't, and Why It Matters" (reserve)  
James Fallows, "What Did You Do during the Class War, Daddy?" (reserve)  
Mrs. Philip C. Beam, letter to Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-ME), September 13, 1967, and Muskie's response, October 13, 1967 (reserve)  
Edmund S. Muskie, letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson, February 20, 1968 (reserve)

November 6 (Monday): Discussion - Debate over opposition strategy and tactics

November 8 (Wednesday): Tet 1968 and the Crisis of American Politics
Readings:  
Herring, chap. 6  
Small, chap. 5

→ November 10 (Friday), 4:00 p.m.: Writing assignment #2 due


Readings:  
Herring, chap. 7  
Small, chaps. 6-7  
Edmund S. Muskie, "Address...at Bates College...October 15, 1969" (reserve)  
Richard M. Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam, November 3, 1969" (reserve) or at  
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixongreatsilentmajority.html (text and audio)

November 15 (Wednesday): The Origins of Vietnam Veterans Against the War
Video presentation: Television news reports on Operation Dewey Canyon III
Reading:  
John Kerry, "Statement on Behalf of the Vietnam Veterans against the War" (reserve) or at  
http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/VVAW_Kerry_Senate.html  
Small, chap. 8
November 17 (Friday): Discussion – The Politics of "Positive Polarization": Nixon versus the Antiwar Movement

[November 20-24: Thanksgiving break – no class]

November 27 (Monday): The Fall of a President: Vietnam and Watergate
Reading: Herring, chap. 8


December 1 (Friday): In Country and at Home: GIs and Veterans, 1965-1973
Reading: W.D. Ehrhart, "A Letter to McGeorge Bundy" (hand-out)

→ December 4 (Monday), 4:00 p.m.: Writing assignment #3 due

Readings: Small, chap. 9
  Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Time to Break Silence,” April 4, 1967 (reserve) or at http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm (text and audio)

December 6 (Wednesday): Sideshows: Laos and Cambodia

December 8 (Friday): Discussion - Legacies of a War
Readings: Walter V. Robinson, "Professor's Past in Doubt" (reserve) and related articles at http://history.ucsc.edu/history157/ellis.htm

→ December 12 (Tuesday), 1:15-3:15 p.m.: Final examination