

## History 191:

### Vietnam: The American War

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In the 21st century the American way of fighting has become synonymous with counterinsurgency. The "War on Terror" has lacked many fixtures of conventional warfare, from a formal declaration and popular involvement to clear and shared notions of who are our enemies and what constitutes victory. While this predicament may seem novel, its original outline is



most clearly discerned in what Americans call the "The Vietnam War" and what Vietnamese consider "The American War." "Vietnam: The American War" explores that conflict—one of America's longest and most tumultuous—in order to interrogate the confusions, contradictions, and asymmetries of modern American warfare. By examining the conflict's origins and impact on both America and Vietnam, it will ask students to consider why we fought, what we accomplished or lost, and whether a liberal democracy can justify waging war against an ideology in a land not its own.

This is an eclectic survey of the war from 1930 to 1975, although we will occasionally venture outside that window. The course's intent is to make you familiar with both the basic contours of the conflict as well as the myriad ways of approaching it. If you enjoy political or diplomatic history, then you have something to look forward to. If you enjoy social or cultural or transnational or any other kind of history, then you have something to look

forward to. If you enjoy being challenged with new or difficult perspectives, then you have something to look forward to.

Class will consist of lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays, and a discussion section on Fridays.

### **Reading:**

The following books have been ordered at the UR Bookstore. They are also on 2-hour reserve in Rush Rhees Library. Many are available at a substantial discount online. If you choose to purchase the Herring or Kennan online, please consult with us to make sure you purchase the correct edition. Additional readings will be found under the Reserves section on Blackboard, and most films can be found under the Streaming Video section. However, F.T.A. and Rambo will have to be viewed on DVD, available on reserve at the Art and Music Library in Rush Rhees. Alternatively, either can be rented and streamed on Amazon Instant at low cost.

#### Required Texts:

Appy, Christian. *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*  
Bilton, Michael, and Kevin Sim. *Four Hours in My Lai*  
Herring, George. *The Pentagon Papers*  
Kennan, George. *American Diplomacy*  
Tang, Truong Nhu. *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath*  
Young, Marilyn. *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*

#### E-Reserves:

Allen, Michael J. *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*  
Appy, Christian. *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*.  
Department of the Army. *The Law of Land Warfare, July 1956*.  
Elliot, David. *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930-1975, Volume I*.  
Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*.  
Nguyen, Lien-Hang. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*.  
Pham, Andrew X. *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam*.  
Stur, Heather Marie. *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*.

**Films:**

*American Graffiti* (1973)

*Hearts and Minds* (1974)

*F.T.A.* (1972)

*Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985)

*Vietnam a Television History, Episode 1* (1983)

*Vietnam a Television History, Episode 4* (1983)

**Course Requirements:**

Reading assignments of approximately 100 pages are to be completed each week. Some weeks this will be supplemented by other materials, such as films or music. All readings must be completed by discussion section, held each Friday, on the week in which they are assigned. Both attendance and participation in discussion section is mandatory. Unexcused absences will be counted against a student's grade. In addition, students must submit (via email) a question based on the week's reading by 11:59PM Thursday, and should expect their questions to be discussed the following day in section. Each student will be responsible for two analytical papers, 6-8 pages in length, on topics we will assign, and a 3-5 page review of the film *Hearts and Minds*. Refer to the reading schedule for due dates. Students will also take an in-class Midterm Examination on February 26, and a comprehensive Final Examination at the end of the course. Final grades will be determined by the rubric below:

Class Participation and Weekly Questions --- 15%

Analytical Papers --- 15% each

Midterm Examination --- 15%

Review Paper --- 10%

Final Examination --- 30%

**Academic Honesty:**

Students should fully familiarize themselves with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/index.html>. We will enforce a zero tolerance policy on cheating and plagiarism. Students found giving or receiving unauthorized aid on an exam, or who commit plagiarism on writing assignments will fail the course - no questions asked. Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse. Those unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and what requires citation should contact the instructors - they are more than happy to help - or consult the materials accompanying this syllabus.

## **Students with Disabilities:**

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL, 1-154 Dewey Hall, 585-275-9049) offers a variety of disability services for undergraduates and graduate students in Arts, Sciences & Engineering. These services aim to provide an inclusive experience and equal access to academic content and program requirements. They can help you to request needed accommodations for your success in this class. You can learn more at: <http://www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/undergraduate/disability>. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us as well.

## **Topics and Assignments**

13 January -- Introduction

15 January - Vietnam - History to 1945

**Assignment: Hearts and Minds [Film/Blackboard]**

20 January – Everyday Life in Vietnam

22 January – Discussion

**Assignment: Elliot (3-64); Tang (1-24)**

25 January – Imperialism to WWII

27 January – The Cold War

29 January – Discussion

**Assignment: Kennan (1-109)**

1 February – French War in Vietnam

3 February – Diem Regime

5 February – Discussion

**Assignment: Young, p. 1-88; Vietnam a Television History, Episode 1 [Film/Blackboard]**

8 February – Origins of Vietnamese Communism

10 February – Fall of Diem

12 February – Discussion

**Assignment: Young, p. 89-104; Tang (25-116)**

15 February – American Entry

17 February – Everyday Life in America

19 February – Discussion

**Assignment: Young 105-149; Pentagon Papers (5-11, 16-17, 23-41, 51-59, 66-68, 75-82); American Graffiti [Film/Blackboard]**

22 February – Johnson's War (1963-64)

24 February – Law and The War

26 February – **MIDTERM EXAM**

**Assignment: Pentagon Papers (86-93, 97-106); The Law of Land Warfare (3-40, 98-112) [Blackboard]**

29 February – McNamara's War (1965-67)

2 March – Tet Offensive

4 March – Discussion

**Assignment: FIRST ANALYTICAL PAPER DUE**

**Young (150 - 231); Pentagon Papers (109-118, 129-131, 137-140, 148-153, 182-185, 194-204)**

14 March – The Media War

16 March – My Lai Massacre

18 March – Discussion

**Assignment: Bilton (1-24, 47-141); Vietnam a Television History, Episode 4 [Film/Blackboard]**

21 March – The Antiwar Movement: Origins and Development

23 March – Race, Gender, Class

25 March – Discussion

**Assignment: Working Class War (86-116, 206-49, 298-321); Stur (215-41) [Blackboard]**

28 March – The Draft

30 March – The War at Home: Politics and the Suppression of Dissent

1 April – Discussion

**Assignment: Working Class War (11-44); Bilton (315-378); Alice's Restaurant [Song/Blackboard]**

4 April – Weapons of War

6 April – Nixon's War (1969-72)

8 April – Discussion

**Assignment: Young (232 - 280); Tang (156-175); Herr (65-79)  
[Blackboard]**

11 April - GI Antiwar Movement

13 April – Laos and Cambodia

15 April – Discussion

**Assignment: SECOND ANALYTICAL PAPER DUE**

**American Reckoning (183-217) [Blackboard]; Nguyen (153-93)  
[Blackboard]; F.T.A. [Film/Reserve]**

18 April – American Exit (1973-75)

20 April – Aftermath in Vietnam

22 April – Discussion

**Assignment: Young (281-329); Tang (199-233, 258-289)**

25 April – Aftermath in America

27 April – Myth and Memory

**Assignment: REVIEW ESSAY DUE**

**Allen (291-305) [Blackboard]; Pham (62-70, 143-161, 197-212, 323-331)  
[Blackboard]; Rambo: First Blood Part II [Film/Reserve]**