

Fall 2011

HIST 389 003:

THE VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN LIFE
MW 1:30-2:45, Krug Hall 5

DR. LAIR

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OFFICE HOURS:

M 3-4:30 & by appointment WR



"On the contrary, the soldier above all other people prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. But always in our ears ring the ominous words of Plato, that wisest of all philosophers: "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

—Gen. Douglas MacArthur, in a speech to the cadets of the United States Military Academy's Class of 1962

IMPORTANT DATES

First Day of This Class	August 29	Selective Withdrawal	Oct. 3-28
Labor Day (no classes)	Sept. 5	Columbus Day Make-up	Oct. 11
Last Day to Add	Sept. 6	(Monday classes meet on Tuesday)	
Final Drop Deadline	Sept. 30	Last Day of This Class:	Dec. 7

COURSE DESCRIPTION

"Vietnam" has alternatively meant a place; a war; an era in American history; personal, political, and cultural turning points; an explanation for social ills like homelessness and addiction; a cause of mental and physical illness; a crime; a crucible; and a cautionary tale. How can one word be fraught with so much meaning? This course will examine the lessons and legacies of the Vietnam War, including the myriad ways the war has influenced American politics, foreign policy, and culture. Topics to be covered may include the homecoming Vietnam veterans received; the role Vietnam service has played in several presidential elections; the image of the Vietnam veteran in popular culture; Vietnam on film; the advent of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a diagnosis; Agent Orange-related illnesses; Vietnamese migration to the United States; changes in military doctrine; changes in US foreign policy; media censorship and "the credibility gap"; body recovery and the POW/MIA controversy; and efforts to remember and commemorate the war. Students are also encouraged to read the news in search of topical legacies of the Vietnam War.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course will combine readings, lecture, documentary films, and discussions. Skills developed in the course include formal and informal writing, research, textual analysis, public speaking, and critical thinking. Special emphasis will be placed on drawing connections between the past and the present.

ASSESSMENT

Grades represent an assessment of your work, not a reward or a sanction, and not an evaluation of you as a person. A's are reserved for truly excellent work; B's are assigned to accomplished work; C's are assigned to average work; D's are assigned to below average work; and F's are reserved for work that suggests a lack of comprehension or care. There will be no "grading curve" in this class.

Final grades will be based on the following assignments:

- Unannounced in-class writing assignments (15%)
- A critical analysis of a Vietnam memoir (20%)
- A critical analysis of a Vietnam film (15%)
- A paper on an example of the Vietnam War being in the present-day news (10%)
- An essay on how the Vietnam War has impacted your own life (10%)
- A take-home final in which you will outline a museum exhibit called "The Vietnam War in American Life" (30%)

READINGS & FILMS

Optional:

If you have little to no familiarity with the Vietnam War and the Vietnam antiwar movement, these survey texts will be extremely helpful:

Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*
 Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds*

Required:

Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War*
 Tran, *Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey*

And **ONE (1)** of these:

Ehrhart, *Passing Time: Memoir of a Vietnam Veteran Against the War*
 Kidder, *My Detachment: A Memoir*
 Puller, *Fortunate Son: The Autobiography of Lewis B. Puller, Jr.*
 Van Devanter, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam*

The required readings also include **documents, articles, and online sources**. These will be announced 1-2 weeks in advance of when we will discuss them. They will be announced in class and via email. Some will be hard copies distributed in class, and others will be links or citations that students will access on the World Wide Web or through Blackboard, Mason's course management website (<https://courses.gmu.edu>). Students are responsible for making sure they know what to read each week. The best way to do this is to come to class regularly!

Students will also be required to view some **films** on their own time. These will be made available through the library or may be found online. Students without access to a personal computer may watch them in the Johnson Center Library.

Students are expected to take thorough notes on all of the readings and films, and your comprehension of any of these texts (including the films) may be subject to assessment via unannounced in-class writing assignments.

USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES

Patriot Web: <https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/>

Blackboard: <https://courses.gmu.edu>

Writing Center, Robinson A114, 703-993-1200, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), SUB I Room 3129, 703-993-2380, <http://caps.gmu.edu>

Free Academic Skills Workshops: <http://caps.gmu.edu/learningservices/workshops.php>

University Policies

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

COURSE POLICIES

Please read these policies and make sure you understand them. If you have questions, please ask. You are expected to know these policies and to plan your work schedule, transportation, etc. accordingly.

Academic Integrity

Mason students are bound by an Honor Code (<http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>), which states, "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously, and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free exchange of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind), please ask for guidance and clarification. Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. I will report students suspected of dishonesty to the University's Honor Board for disciplinary action, including failure of the course.

Attendance and Punctuality

Regular attendance is required; you can't participate if you're not in class. Also, please arrive to class on time. If you need to arrive late or leave early, please sit near the door to minimize the disruption. Please do not come to class if you have a serious illness, especially a fever or an uncontrolled cough.

Communication & Office Hours

I encourage you to meet with me to discuss any facet of the course. Quick questions can be addressed after class or in email. Substantive conversations are best reserved for office hours. If you cannot come to regularly scheduled office hours, please contact me about arranging a meeting time on a Wednesday or Thursday that is mutually convenient.

Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. Please write to me only from your MasonLIVE account, and check it regularly. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

Decorum

In every class, students are expected to be intellectually present, to behave in a professional way, and to be respectful of others, including the instructor. Please refrain from eating, sleeping, editorial body language, talking when others have the floor, passing notes, reading newspapers, doing the crossword, doing coursework for other classes, leaving early, or anything else that demeans our class. Please arrive to class on time and turn off all electronic devices (see note on laptops below) before class begins. Students who behave in an unprofessional manner will be warned the first time and may be dismissed from class if the behavior persists.

Note-taking on laptops is fine and even encouraged, but if you cannot discipline yourself to remain offline for just three hours per week, then I suggest you spare yourself the temptation and use pen and paper to take notes in class. To prevent Internet surfers from distracting other students, **all laptop users are required to sit behind the other students.**

& Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please talk to me as soon as possible (though you can wait until office hours, in the interest of privacy). <http://ods.gmu.edu>

❄ Inclement Weather

On bad-weather days, consult the University's homepage for cancellation information. If the University is open, we will be having class and all of the rules regarding attendance and punctuality apply. That is, snow on the roads does *not* equal an automatic extension on assignments.

👉 Late Assignments & Make-ups

Acceptable reasons for missing class are serious illness, a genuine family emergency, and being on fire. Be prepared to show documentation for all of these if you miss a deadline.

✍ Submitting Homework

Unless otherwise specified, all written work will be submitted as email attachments written in Microsoft Word. You must use the following file name: YOURLASTNAME.HIST389.[Assignment Name].doc or .docx. (Please note that this is the file name, not the subject of the email to which you attach the file.) Assignments must be sent from your GMU email account, and yes, you do have to come to class even if you have an assignment due.

WEEKLY TOPICS

The readings for each week will be announced 1-2 weeks in advance in class and via email. Students should complete assigned readings prior to coming to class. This schedule is subject to change at my discretion.

1. Aug. 29 & 31 Introduction to the Course
Introduction to the Vietnam War
2. Sept. 5 & 7 Introduction to the Vietnam War, cont'd. • No Class Labor Day, 9/5
3. Sept. 12 & 14 Introduction to the Vietnam Antiwar Movement
4. Sept. 19 & 21 Introduction to the Vietnam Antiwar Movement, cont'd.
The Impact of the War on the Home Front
5. Sept. 26 & 28 Homecoming and Readjustment: The Making of the "Vietnam Veteran"
6. Oct. 3 & 5 "Another Vietnam": The War as Analogy in US Foreign Policy
7. Oct. 11 & 12 The Ditch: Coming to Terms with American War Crimes in Vietnam
[Due to the Columbus Day holiday, Monday classes will meet on Tuesday.]
8. Oct. 17 & 19 The Whole World Is Watching: Journalism, Censorship, and the War
9. Oct. 24 & 26 "A Noble Struggle" or "A Barbaric War": Vietnam and Electoral Politics
10. Oct. 31 & Nov. 2 Flight to Freedom: Americans from Vietnam
11. Nov. 7 & 9 A Contagion of War: PTSD and Agent Orange-Related Illness
12. Nov. 14 & 16 "You Are Not Forgotten": Body Recovery and the Vietnam War
13. Nov. 21 & 23 Going Back: Battlefield Tourism to Vietnam • No class 11/23; Happy Thanksgiving!
14. Nov. 28 & 30 The Vietnam War on the Silver Screen
15. Dec. 5 & 7 Remembering Vietnam: Commemorations of the Vietnam War
16. Dec. 14 Take-home midterm due by 5 PM in Dr. Lair's mailbox in Robinson B359.