

Fall 2012

HIST 389 003:

THE VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN LIFE
MW 1:30-2:45, Enterprise 174

DR. LAIR

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OFFICE HOURS:

M 3-4:00 & 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 27
Labor Day (no class)	Sept. 3
Last Day to Add/Drop (no tuition liability)	Sept. 4
Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition liability)	Sept. 28
Selective Withdrawal Period	Oct. 1-26
Columbus Day (M classes meet on T)	Oct. 8
Thanksgiving Recess (no class)	Nov. 22
Last Day of This Class:	Dec. 5

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 Vietnam War 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, which are detailed in the Guide to Writing Assignments:

- Unannounced in-class writing assignments (15%)
- A critical analysis of a Vietnam memoir (20%)
- A critical analysis of a Vietnam film - OR - a Vietnam-related campaign ad and its companion critique (15%)
- A college admissions essay written from the perspective of a Vietnamese immigrant (20%)
- A take-home final in which you will curate 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*

Lam, *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora*

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** that students may access on through Blackboard, Mason's course management website.

(<https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>)

Students will also be required to view "Unknown Soldier: Searching for a Father" at <http://vimeo.com/22591503>.

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://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>

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>

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. In this course, academic integrity means that:

- when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task.
- when you rely on someone else's work in any aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form.
- all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions.
- you will tell the truth about the status of your work.

For a discussion of what constitutes plagiarism, go here:

<http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/EnglishGuide/Critical/plagiarism.html>

When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification. Academic dishonesty 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 and even expulsion.



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. If there is inclement weather, consult the University's homepage for cancellation information. If the University is open, we will be having class and deadlines will be maintained. Lastly, please do not come to class if you have a serious illness, especially an uncontrolled cough or fever.



Communication & Office Hours

I encourage you to meet with me to discuss any facet of the course. Quick questions can be addressed before or after class or in email. More 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.

NOTE: I will only be using GMU email addresses to communicate with students. Please write to me from your GMU account, and check your GMU account regularly or have your email forwarded.



Decorum

In every class, students will maintain a professional demeanor and be respectful of others' opinions and contributions. Please refrain from eating, sleeping, editorial body language (heavy sighs, eye rolling, etc.), talking when others have the floor, passing notes, reading newspapers, doing the crossword, doing work for other classes, leaving early, or anything else that demeans our class. Please arrive to class on time and turn off all electronic devices 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 during class, then I suggest you spare yourself the temptation and use pen and paper to take notes. 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>

☞ 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. Writing assignments will be accepted late, but there will be penalty of one-half of a letter grade for every 24 hours, starting at 1:31 PM on the day an assignment is due. The deductions will continue each day through the weekend, even though I will not be on campus, so I urge you to communicate with me if you plan to turn something in late.

✍ Submitting Written Work

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.

C-SPAN CLASS VISIT

If logistical considerations can be worked out, C-SPAN will be coming to film our class in September. This will likely necessitate moving our class to a different room for the day in order to accommodate the extensive set-up and clean-up of equipment before and after class. Please consider this syllabus statement your formal notification that this filming will occur. Your attendance and participation in class that day will suffice as your permission; there will be no formal waivers to sign. If you do not wish to appear on camera, you will have the option of sitting behind the cameras or out of the shot. If you do not mind appearing on camera but do not wish to speak on camera, you may ask your questions of me after class or in email. If you have any questions, please let me know. The working date is September 24th, but that may change. I will keep you apprised of the actual day of the filming and offer reminders about being on time. Thank you very much in advance for your cooperation in making this exciting opportunity a reality!

WEEKLY TOPICS

Students should complete assigned readings prior to coming to class. All readings/links are available on Blackboard. This schedule is subject to change at my discretion.

1. Aug. 27 & 29 Introduction to the Course Understanding the Vietnam War

- Brigham, "The Wars for Viet Nam, 1945 to 1975," <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/index.html>
- Mintz, "Guided Readings: Vietnam War," <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/subtitles.cfm?titleID=71>

2. Sept. 5 Understanding the Vietnam War, cont'd.

• No Class Labor Day, 9/3

- Stephen Klein, "Intimations of Mortality"
- Excerpt from Edelman, ed., *Dear America*
- Excerpt from Whalon, *The Saigon Zoo*

3. Sept. 10 & 12 Understanding the Vietnam Antiwar Movement

- "Introduction to the Antiwar Movement"
- "Proclamation of Anti-draft Resistance, 1967"
- "John Kerry's 1971 Statement on Behalf of VVAW"
- "Martin Luther King Jr.'s Statement of Opposition to the War, 1967"
- "Vice President Agnew's Critique of the Antiwar Movement, 1969"
- "Conservative Tom Anderson Arraigns Student Radicals, 1969"

5. Sept. 17 & 19 The Vietnam War on the Home Front

• Paper #1 due 9/19

- Watch "Unknown Soldier: Searching for a Father" at <http://vimeo.com/22591503>

4. Sept. 24 & 26 The Homecoming

- Greene, "Yes, Veterans Say, They Were Spat On"
- Greene, "Memories of Being Spat Upon Are Vivid"
- Greene, "Not Spat Upon, They Recall the Kindness"
- Greene, "Not Spat Upon, But Hounded and Hurt"
- Shafer, "Newsweek Throws the Spitter"
- Lindgren, "Vietnam Spitting"
- Shafer, "Spitfire: Vietnam Veterans Were Gobbed on, Insist Angry Readers and Critical Bloggers"
- Lindgren, "Many 1967-1972 Spitting Incidents Are Documented in the Press"
- Shafer, "More Spit Takes: Searching the News Archives for Evidence of Spat-Up on Returning Viet Vets"

6. Oct. 1 & 3 A Contagion of War: PTSD and Agent Orange-Related Illness

- Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace*, Ch. 4

7. Oct. 9 & 10 The Vietnam War on the Silver Screen

- Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace*, Ch. 8

[Due to the Columbus Day holiday, Monday classes will meet on Tuesday.]

8. Oct. 15 & 17 "Another Vietnam": The Vietnam War as Analogy in US Foreign Policy

- Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace*, Ch. 1-3, 9

• Paper #2A due 10/17

9. Oct. 22 & 24 The Ditch: Coming to Terms with American War Crimes in Vietnam

- Lindner, "An Introduction to the My Lai Courts-Martial," http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/Myl_intro.html
- Turse and Nelson, "Pentagon Archive Lists Vietnam Atrocities"
- McMichael, "William Calley Apologizes for My Lai Massacre"
- Comments on the original *Ledger-Enquirer* story about William Calley's apology
- My Lai editorial cartoons

10. Oct. 29 & 31 "A Noble Cause" or "A Barbaric War": The Vietnam War in Electoral Politics

- Watch the ads in the folder labeled "Campaign Ads"
- Jimmy Carter's 1979 "Crisis of Confidence" Speech
- Ronald Reagan, "Restoring the Margin of Safety," 1980
- Ronald Reagan's First Inaugural Address, 1981
- News conference with President Reagan, 1982

11. Nov. 5 & 7 "The Whole World Is Watching": Journalism, Censorship, and the Vietnam War

- Burrows, "With a Brave Crew in a Deadly Fight"
- "Larry Burrows Talks about His *Life* Magazine Photo Essay"
- Vice President Spiro Agnew's Speech, 13 November 1969
- Hallin, "A Critique of the Oppositional Media Thesis"
- Schanberg, "Censoring for Political Security"
- Ferrel, "Embedistan"
- Santora, "Embedistan: Reporting With or Without the Military"
- Oppel, "Embedistan: Outside the Wire, Off the Message"
- "Picturing Casualties" (slide show)
- "Photos: Death of a Marine in Afghanistan" (slide show)

• Paper #2B due 11/7

12. Nov. 12 Flight to Freedom: Americans from Vietnam

- Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace*, Ch. 6

13. Nov. 19 Flight to Freedom, cont'd.

• Paper #3 due 11/19

• No class 11/21; Happy Thanksgiving!

14. Nov. 26 & 28 Remembering Vietnam: Commemorations of the Vietnam War

- Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace*, Ch. 5

15. Dec. 3 & 5 Course Wrap-up

16. Dec. 12 Take-home midterm due by 5 PM