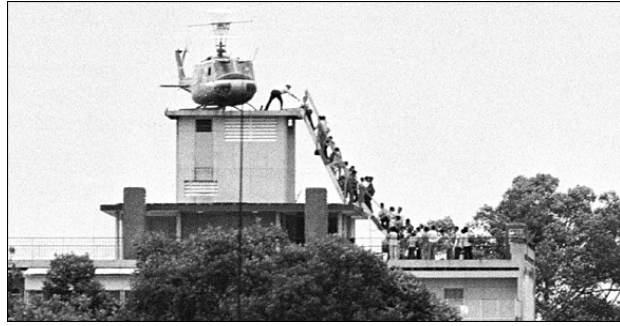


History 615 005:

***Vietnam & America at War***

Fall 2011  
Thursdays 7:20-10:00 PM  
Krug Hall 209



Dr. Lair  
[mlair@gmu.edu](mailto:mlair@gmu.edu)  
Robinson B346  
703-993-2159

Office Hours  
Thursdays 4-6 &  
By Appointment

**IMPORTANT DATES**

First Day of This Class	September 1
Last Day to Add	September 6
Last Day to Drop	September 30
Thanksgiving Recess	November 23-24
Last Day of This Class	December 8

**Introduction**

Americans went to Vietnam with the best of intentions: to be of help. They wanted to help the South Vietnamese people resist oppression; to help the South Vietnamese government fend off a communist insurgency; and to help South Vietnam develop economically. But these efforts bore fruit of a different kind. Between 1961 and 1975, over 2,500,000 Americans served in Vietnam, with troop strength peaking at 542,000 in 1968. Of those who served, over 58,000 died and 300,000 were wounded, including 150,000 who required hospitalization. In the US, the savagery of the war brought forth a storm of controversy that eventually coalesced into a national antiwar movement. Some protests involved 1,500,000 people nationwide, and others drew 750,000 marchers to the nation's capital. One of these resulted in the arrest of 11,000 demonstrators, the largest number of people ever arrested in a single protest.

The war was fury for the Vietnamese people as well. Statistics vary, but reasonable estimates suggest that 250,000 South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and another 650,000 wounded. Of America's enemy, about 600,000 North Vietnamese soldiers and Viet Cong insurgents were killed in action, and the number of wounded is unknown. The greatest toll was exacted on civilians. About 500,000 noncombatants were killed, 80 percent of them in South Vietnam. 1,000,000 were wounded, again mostly in South Vietnam. The war rendered 5,000,000 South Vietnamese (about 1/3 of the population) homeless and created some 800,000 orphans, while American soldiers fathered (and mostly abandoned) Amerasian children numbering perhaps 100,000.

These facts are an unsettling place to begin, but they provide a sense of scale and remind us what was at stake. The story is epic, and a seminar of this kind can only scratch the surface. This course will provide an introduction to the history and historiography of the Vietnam War, including the strategy and tactics of the United States and the Viet Cong; U.S. nation building in South Vietnam; individuals' experiences serving in the war on both sides; the antiwar movement; war crimes; and the war in novel and film.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Professional historians recognize that “history” is not an immutable set of facts, but rather a collection of competing interpretations. Historiography is the study of historical writing, bounded in this case by writings related to the Vietnam War. The emphasis in this seminar will be on the historiography of the Vietnam War. That is, we will examine a variety of approaches to the study of the war and its interpretations, paying special attention to its social history, especially as it relates to American social history in general. We will examine several different types of sources (a “classic” text of the Vietnam era, several argument-driven monographs written by professional scholars, a third-person narrative, an oral history collection, a diary, two memoirs, two strategic analyses, a journalistic exposé, a novel, and a documentary film), considering the merits and weaknesses of each approach to the study of the past. For the argument-driven monographs, we will pay special attention to how the author frames his or her questions and the design of the project to answer them. Students will focus on framing their own questions, conducting research into the course readings, evaluating the course readings in writing and during discussion, and writing their own historiographic essay on one facet of the Vietnam War.

## **Assessment & Assignments**

Grades will be assigned based on completion of the following:

- Informed, constructive participation in every discussion: 25%
- Presenting one of the course readings to the class and helping to lead discussion: 20%
- Two 750-word book reviews: 15%
- A 4,000-word historiographic essay on a subtopic of your choosing: 40%

### Informed, constructive participation in every discussion. (25%)

Students are expected to come to class every week prepared to engage the evening’s readings in depth. The ability to ask questions and discuss ideas is a vital part of your historical training, so silence is not an option. Students who never participate in class will get a zero for their participation grade, meaning that the highest possible course grade would be 75%, or a C.

### Presenting a course text to the class and helping to lead discussion. (20%)

This assignment includes three components:

- 1) The discussion leader(s) will compile a bibliography of works related to the course text to distribute in hard copy to the class. You should also send me a soft copy so that I can upload it to Blackboard.
- 2) At the start of class, the discussion leader(s) will provide a brief (15 minutes) introduction to the book(s) that addresses the following points: a basic statement of the book’s thesis or content (keep this short, since everyone will have read it); the author’s background, credentials, or relationship to the story; reactions to the book, including scholarly reviews, if relevant; and, most importantly, the historiographic discussion into which the book fits.
- 3) The discussion leader(s) will then start the discussion with three prepared discussion questions. Framing questions is at the heart of what historians do, and framing questions for discussion is a particularly challenging part of the teaching profession. Questions should be open-ended in nature (avoid yes/no questions or either/or binaries), address an important facet of the reading, and generate substantive conversation. Questions will be typed and turned in after class along with the bibliography. Typed questions may include salient points, such as ideas or quotations—essentially your own thoughts on the question—on the written version you hand in.

Because of the size of the seminar (up to 18 students), some students may partner to present the same book. Those students will have to work as a team to divide the tasks enumerated above, but they will be evaluated as individuals.

Discussion leaders will touch base with me in person no later than one week before they lead discussion. **At this time, they will submit drafts of their discussion questions and bibliography.** Effectively, this means that for the week you will be introducing the readings and leading discussion, you will have to read/work a week ahead.

Two book reviews of 750 words, or about 3 pp., each. (15% total)

These essays should follow the standard format for academic book reviews demonstrated in the *Journal of American History* or the *American Historical Review*. Issues to address include:

- What questions does the book seek to address?
- What is the author's argument?
- What kind of evidence does the author use to construct that argument?
- What assumptions does the author make?
- What is missing from the book? (be realistic; books can't include everything)
- How effectively does the author make his/her case?
- What are the book's chief strengths and weaknesses?

Please consult the formatting requirements posted on Blackboard. Papers are due in class the day the book is discussed. Students will sign up for one review from each half of the course. **Students may not review the book(s) for which they are leading discussion.**

• *A 4000-word historiographic essay on a subtopic of your choosing. (40%)*

A historiographic essay describes and analyzes the record of historical writing on a specific topic: the origins of the field, the debates that have shaped the literature on a given subject, various scholars' answers to those questions, and reasons for the changing lines of inquiry. Your papers should identify, summarize, and discuss the literature for a subtopic of the Vietnam War. You may use a topic suggested by one of our reading assignments, including the one for which you lead discussion, or you may come up with one of your own. For each work you discuss, consider its place in the literature, and then analyze how the author's method, argument, evidence, and conclusions contribute to that literature:

- What questions does the book attempt to answer?
- How have other works answered similar questions?
- What is the author's thesis?
- How does that thesis differ from those of other authors?
- What is the author's method?
- How persuasive do you find the author's arguments?
- What assumptions does the author make?
- What is missing from the book? (be realistic; books can't include everything)
- How and why does the field appear to have evolved over time? (required)

Each paper will discuss 5-7 books and/or articles in depth. Please consult the formatting requirements posted on Blackboard.

Students will submit a one-page **prospectus and an annotated bibliography by 5 PM via email on Monday, October 24.** A hard copy of your final essay must be turned into my mailbox in the History Department reception area no later than **5 PM on Tuesday, December 13.**

## **COURSE POLICIES**



### **Academic Integrity**

Mason students are bound by an Honor Code, which states, “Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.” Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. I will report students suspected of dishonesty to the University’s Honor Board for disciplinary action, including failure of the course. For a discussion of what constitutes plagiarism, go here: <http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/EnglishGuide/Critical/plagiarism.html>



### **Attendance and Punctuality**

Regular attendance is required, and frequent absences will negatively affect your participation grade. Please arrive to class on time. If you need to arrive late or leave early, please sit near the door to minimize the disruption.

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.

Serious Illness: 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 that is mutually convenient.

Email Addresses: I will only be using GMU email addresses to communicate with students, so please activate your GMU account and check it regularly.



### **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 coursework for other classes, leaving early, nodding off, or anything else that demeans our class. Please arrive to class on time and turn off all electronic devices before class begins. Laptops for note taking are ok; laptops for surfing the Internet are not. Students who behave in an inconsiderate manner will be warned the first time and may be dismissed from class if the behavior persists.

Laptops: If you take notes on a laptop, especially if you are tap-tapping away in a manner that suggests IMing or other multitasking behavior, be prepared without notice to share your class notes with me. Multitasking in this way is demeaning to the course, distracting to both students and instructor, and an impediment to you realizing your fullest potential. Students who are caught using laptops inappropriately will be prohibited from using them in class.

### ☼ 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, <http://ods.gmu.edu>. 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).

### ☞ Late Assignments & Make-ups

There will be no make-ups for missing your night to present to the class. Writing assignments will be accepted late, but there will be penalty of one-half of a letter grade for every 24 hours, starting at 10:01 PM on the night 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. For papers you submit via email attachment, please use Microsoft Word and the following file name (not subject header for the email, *file name* for the document):

YourLastName.HIST615.NameOfAssignment.FA11.doc(x).

### ☆ Other Useful Campus Resources

Writing Center: A114 Robinson Hall, 703.993.1200, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

University Libraries "Ask a Librarian": <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS): 703.993.2380, <http://caps.gmu.edu>

University Policies: The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in University affairs.

### **Required Readings (in the order we will read them)**

- Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*
- Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965*
- Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*
- James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968*
- Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*
- John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*
- Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath*
- Dan Thuy Tram, *Last Night I Dream of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram*
- Christian G. Appy, *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*
- Pete Whalon, *The Saigon Zoo: Vietnam's Other War: Sex, Drugs, Rock 'n Roll*
- Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*
- Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War*
- James E. Westheider, *The African American Experience in Vietnam: Brothers in Arms*
- Kara D. Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*
- Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

You might be interested in reading the handout *How to Read a History Book* that I have posted on Blackboard in order to help you get the most out of your reading.

## **Schedule of Readings & Assignments**

1. Sept. 1: Introduction to the Course  
Sept. 6: Last Day to Add
2. Sept. 8: The Orthodox View  
FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*
3. Sept. 15: The Revisionist Perspective  
Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*  
H-Net *Triumph Forsaken* Roundtable Review  
<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/TriumphForsaken-Roundtable.pdf>
4. Sept. 22: The US & Colonial Vietnam  
Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*
5. Sept. 29: Nation Building in South Vietnam  
Carter, *Inventing Vietnam*  
Sept. 30: Final Drop Deadline
6. Oct. 6: American Strategy in Vietnam  
Summers, *On Strategy*  
Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*
7. Oct. 13: The Insurgency  
Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir*  
Tam, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*
8. Oct. 20: The Soldier's War  
Appy, *Working Class War*  
Whalon, *The Saigon Zoo*
- Monday, Oct. 24: **Prospectus & bibliography due!**
9. Oct. 27: War Crimes  
Bilton & Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*
10. Nov. 3: The Antiwar Movement  
Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*
11. Nov. 10: African Americans in Vietnam  
Westheider, *The African American Experience in Vietnam: Brothers in Arms*
12. Nov. 17: American Women in Vietnam  
Vuic, *Officer. Nurse. Woman.*
13. Nov. 24: Thanksgiving Break—No Class
14. Dec. 1: Vietnam as Postmodern Novel  
O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*
15. Dec. 8: Vietnam on Film  
No reading: we will screen and discuss *Sir! No Sir!*
16. Tues., Dec. 13: Final essays are due by 5 PM in my mailbox in the History Department (Robinson B359).