University of Wisconsin–Madison
Department of History

HISTORY 319—THE VIETNAM WARS

Fall 2017 Mr. McCoy

I. COURSE PROCEDURES:

Class Meetings: Lectures are given in 1111 Humanities by Mr. McCoy on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 4:00 to 5:15 p.m. In addition, students will attend a one-hour discussion section each week conducted by the Teaching Assistant (TA) for this course.
N.B. Laptops may only be used for taking notes and may not be used to access the Internet.

Office Hours:
—For Marlana Margaria, Humanities Room 4274, on Tuesdays from 1:45 to 3:45 p.m. and other hours by appointment (TEL: 265-9480). Messages may be left in Humanities Mailbox No. 4041, or sent via e-mail to: <mmargaria@wisc.edu>
—For Alfred McCoy, Humanities Room 5131, Thursdays 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. and other hours by appointment (TEL: 263-1855). Messages may be left in Humanities Mailbox No. 5026, or sent via e-mail to: <awmccoy@wisc.edu>

Grading: Students shall complete three pieces of written work. On October 19, students shall take a midterm examination. On November 21, students shall submit a 5,000-word research essay with full footnotes and bibliographic references. During examination week on December 16, students shall take a two-hour final examination. Final grades shall be computed as follows:

—midterm take-home exam: 20%
—research essay: 30%
—discussion section mark: 30%
—final examination: 20%
—extra credit/film viewing: 3%

Course Requirements: For each of these assignments, there are different requirements for both the amount and form of work to be done:

a.) Midterm take-home examination: Select two questions from a list distributed in the lecture on Thursday, October 19, and turn in two short essays totaling five typed pages, with full endnote citations, at the start of class on Tuesday, October 24.

b.) Research Essay: Following format instructions under Section VII below, complete a 12-page research essay (with one-inch margins, 12 point font) on one of the topics listed in Section VI.

On October 31, students should submit a two-page outline to their TA with (a.) a one-paragraph abstract of the argument, (b.) an outline of the major points, and (c.) a bibliography. Students should discuss the outline with the TA this week.

When submitted, essays must have: (1.) a minimum of 6 references to journal articles (at least two not found on the syllabus), (2.) at least 10 articles from the New York Times, (3.) two extended quotations, if relevant, from the “Pentagon Papers,” and, if not, from other official documents, and (4.) two extended quotations with full citations from U.S. Congressional reports on the war. The completed essay should be submitted in the lecture hall at the start of lecture on Thursday, November 17.
—NB: For the New York Times, see
<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.web/proquesthn>
c.) **Discussion Section Mark:** Based on your attendance and participation, the teaching assistant will assign you a mark for your performance in the discussion section. Repeated absences will result in a loss of all marks for the section.

d.) **Final Examination:** In the space of two hours on Saturday, December 16, 7:45 am-9:45 am., students will sit a blue-book exam and answer two questions selected from a longer list of essay questions.

e) **Extra Credit:** For a maximum of three extra-credit points, students can sign up to attend a film showing at 1111 Humanities and write a short response to questions. See Section IV below for details.

**Readings:** Reflecting the controversy surrounding the subject, there is no single text for the study of the Vietnam Wars. Instead, the syllabus covers each topic with journal articles and book extracts, divided into “Required” and “Background” readings. To follow the lectures and their unfamiliar material, students should read selections from the “required” materials before the relevant lecture. In preparing essays on subjects related to the lecture topics, consult the “Background” readings for bibliographic references. These readings are available from several sources:

**Required Texts [Sold at University Book Store, State St. Mall]:**

**Optional Texts [Sold at University Bookstore]:**
- N.B. Low cost, second-hand copies available at University Book Store.

**Reference Works [College Library, H.C. White Building]:**

**Learn@UW [Available Online]:** Through “Learn@UW,” available at <https://learnuw.wisc.edu/> or via the UW-Madison home page, students can access various materials for the course, including: the Course Syllabus, Glossary of Lecture Terms, Lecture outlines, and links to relevant outside resources.

**Required Readings [Available at Campus Libraries]:**

*E-Reserve* at the College Library holds all the Required Readings (articles and excerpts from books) marked below with an asterisk (*). The procedure for accessing e-reserves for our course is as follows: (1.) Students log-on to “MyUW”; (2.) go to the “Academic” tab; and, (3.) next to the courses that students are registered for, go to “Library/Reserves’ link” and click on the link beside History 319.

The Reserve Room in *H.C. White Library* has most of the required and many of the background readings on reserve.

The *Memorial Library* has, with few exceptions, all the books and journal articles cited in the syllabus.
II. REQUIRED WEEKLY READINGS [Readings on e-Reserve are marked *]:

Week One (September 7): The Pre-colonial Vietnamese State As Context for War

Week Two (September 12): The French Conquest

Week Three (September 19): Vietnamese Nationalism

Week Four (September 26): The Rise of the Communist Party

**Recommended (Optional) Reading:**

Week Five (October 3): The First Indochina War 1946–1954

**Recommended (Optional) Reading:**
Week Six (October 10): Origins of the Saigon Regime

**Recommended (Optional) Reading:**

Week Seven (October 17): Disintegration of the South Vietnamese State

**Recommended (Optional) Reading:**

[Midterm Exam Distributed in Lecture: Thursday, October 19]

Week Eight (October 24): War on North Vietnam

[Midterm Exam Due, Start of Lecture: Tuesday, October 24]

Week Nine (October 31): Intervention by U.S. Forces

[Week of October 30: Consultation with TA Re. Essay Outlines]

Week 10 (November 7): U.S. Troops in the Villages of Vietnam
[<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081201/turse>]

**Week 11 (November 14): The Tet Offensive & The War at Home**  

[Research Essay Due, Start of Lecture: Thursday, November 17]

**Week 12 (November 21): The U.S. Bombing of Laos and Cambodia**  

[Thanksgiving Break, Thursday, November 23]

**Week 13 (November 28): U.S. Withdrawal and “Vietnamization”**  

**Week 14 (December 5): Defeat in Indochina**  

**Week 15 (December 12): The Legacy of the Vietnam War**  
**Recommended (Optional) Reading:**

**[Final Exam, Saturday, December 16, 7:45-9:45 a.m., place T.B.A.]**

**III. BACKGROUND READINGS**

**WEEK 1: The Pre-colonial Vietnamese State As Context for War**


**WEEK 2: The French Conquest**


**WEEK 3: Vietnamese Nationalism**

*Background Readings—Colonialism:*


**Background Readings—Nationalism:**


**WEEK 4: The Rise of the Communist Party**

**Background Readings—Communist Party:**


**Background Readings—World War II:**


Marr, David G. *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995).

WEEK 5: The First Indochina War, 1946–1954


**WEEK 6: Origins of the Saigon Regime**


**Background Reading—Ethnic Conflict in the Central Highlands**


**Background Reading—North Vietnam’s Social Revolution**


**WEEK 7: Disintegration of the South Vietnamese State**


WEEK 8: War on North Vietnam


WEEK 9: Intervention by U.S. Forces


Herring, George C. LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War (Austin: University of Texas, 1994).


WEEK 10: U.S. Troops in the Villages of Vietnam


Herrington, Stuart. Silence was a Weapon: The Vietnam War in the Villages (Novato: Presidio Press, 1982).


Nguyen Thi Dinh. *No Other Road To Take* (Ithaca: Data Paper #102, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1972).


Race, Jeffrey. *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), pp. 3–43.


**WEEK 11: The Tet Offensive & The War at Home**

*Background Reading—The Tet Offensive:*


Race, Jeffrey. War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), pp. 105–40.


**Background Reading—The War at Home:**


**WEEK 12: Withdrawal and “Vietnamization”**


**Background Reading—International Law and the Question of War Crimes:**


**WEEK 13: The U.S. Bombing of Laos and Cambodia**

**Background Reading—Laos:**


**Background Reading—Air War Laos:**


Background Reading—Cambodia:


WEEK 14: Defeat in Indochina


WEEK 15: The Legacy of the Vietnam War

Background Reading—The Veterans’ Experience:


**Background Reading—The Vietnam Syndrome in American Foreign Policy:**


**Background Reading—The Crisis of Socialism in Postwar Indochina:**


IV. FILM VIEWING – Extra-Credit Session & Suggested Titles:

—Extra-Credit Cinema Program: For a maximum of three extra-credit points, students can sign up to attend a film showing in 1111 Humanities. To receive credit, students shall, on two occasions, view the film and then, for 20 minutes at the end of each film showing, write a short response to questions and email it to the TA. The film will be shown at this time and date:

1.) “Platoon” (1986) (Oscar, 1986, Best Picture) [November 7, 5:20 p.m.]
2.) “Two Days in October” (2005). [November 14, 5:20 p.m.]

—Discussion Section Film Selections: At the discretion of the TA, selections from the following documentary films, running no more than 15 minutes, will be shown in sections to stimulate discussion.

3.) “Winter Soldier” (1972)
4.) “The War at Home” (1979)

—Films in Lecture: Short segments, usually less than five minutes each, will be shown, at the instructor’s discretion, in Lecture:

3.) “Winter Soldier” (1972) (pacification footage)
4.) “Memories of a Massacre” (2001) (Bob Kerrey, Gerhard Klan interviews)
7.) “Hearts and Minds” (1974)

—Miscellaneous Films: The films listed below are all highly recommended and are available on DVD at the more specialist Madison-area video outlets, or Learning Support Services:

1.) “Hearts and Minds” (1974) (Oscar Winner, 1974, Best Documentary)
2.) “Vietnam Requiem” (1984)
3.) “In the Year of the Pig” (1968)
4.) “The Quiet American” (1958) (black and white; with Audie Murphy)
5.) “The Quiet American” (2002) (color; with Michael Caine)
6.) “Born on the Fourth of July” (1989)
7.) “Full Metal Jacket” (1987)
8.) “Platoon” (1986) (Oscar Winner, 1986, Best Picture)
9.) “Heaven and Earth” (1993)
11.) “Casualties of War” (1989)
12.) “Apocalypse Now” (1979)
13.) “Indochine” (1992)
14.) “We Were Soldiers” (2002)
15.) “Winter Soldier” (1972)
16.) “Going Upriver” (2004)
17.) “Two Days in October” (2005) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liJg59WKZTE

—Learning Support Services in Van Hise Hall, College Library, and Memorial Library Microforms/Media Center (Room 443): These on-campus media centers have a collection of Vietnam feature films and documentaries that can provide visual imagery that will help this
chronicle of colonialism, revolution, diplomacy, and battles come alive. Among the films available are:

1.) “The War at Home” (1979) (VHS) - HS1.004/DVD at College and Memorial - DS557.73 W37 2003
2.) “Apocalypse Now” (1979) (VHS/DVD) - ID2.020/DVD at Memorial - PN1997 A663 2010
3.) “Hearts of Darkness” (1991) (VHS) - ID2.021
5.) “Indochine (1992) (VHS/DVD) - FR2059.149
7.) “The Fog of War” (2003) (DVD) - HS1.018/DVD at College - E840.8 K58 T75 2004
9.) “In the Year of the Pig” (1968) (VHS) - HS1.019
10.) “Memories of a Massacre” (2001) (VHS) - HS1.017
11.) “Bombies” (2001) (VHS) - ID2.141

V. VACATION READING – Suggested Fiction and Non-Fiction Titles:
1.) Bao Ninh (1996), Sorrow’s of War.
3.) Tim O’Brien (1990), The Things they Carried.
4.) Graham Greene (1955), The Quiet American.
5.) Jean Larteguy (1965), Yellow Fever.
7.) Danielle Trussoni (2006), Falling Through the Earth.
8.) Lewis B. Puller, Jr. (2000), Fortunate Son.
9.) Michael Herr (1977), Dispatches.

VI. MAJOR ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1.) Nationalism: By balancing biography with the history of modern Vietnamese nationalism, explain how Ho Chi Minh emerged as an effective leader of Vietnam’s anti-colonial struggle.

2.) Eisenhower’s Domino Theory: In a famous speech in 1954, President Eisenhower warned that should the Communists prove victorious in Vietnam, the rest of the countries of Southeast Asia would “topple like a row of dominoes” to a monolithic and expansionist Communism. Was this an accurate assumption? Please discuss some of the relevant aspects of Vietnamese communism and history that would either support or undermine such an understanding.

3.) The U.S. Role in the Coup against Diem: One Asian expert once said: “It is fair to say that the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem in November of 1963 would not have occurred without at least the tacit approval of the U.S.” Analyze the dynamics of Diem’s downfall and weigh the role of the United States in a wider context.


5.) Tonkin Gulf Incident: After voting on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Senator Wayne Morse from Oregon said: “I believe that history will record that we have made a great mistake in subverting and circumventing the Constitution of the United States. By means of this resolution ... we are in effect giving the President war making powers in the absence of a declaration of
war. I believe that to be a historic mistake.” Trace the development of the Tonkin Gulf incident and the Tonkin Gulf resolution, indicating whether you agree with Morse. Please explain and document your position fully.

6.) War in the Villages: Discuss the character of the Vietnamese village and explain why the U.S.-directed pacification policy, including the Phoenix Program, largely failed there between 1959 and 1969.

7.) Tet Offensive: Was the 1968 Tet offensive a simple U.S. intelligence failure or did it represent the inability of the White House, the Pentagon, and MACV to understand the deeper politics of the war? From this perspective, discuss the impact of this battle on the war in Vietnam and the war at home in the United States.

8.) My Lai Massacre: As his court martial began, one unnamed American told a reporter, “Rusty Calley is a scapegoat.” Using this remark as a point of departure, examine U.S. military counter-insurgency tactics in the years surrounding the My Lai incident and determine, in light of recent revelations about the “Tiger Force” and other atrocities, to what extent civilian killings were an exception, a manifestation, or a component of U.S. Army pacification.

9.) Cambodia and Laos: Analyze the impact of U.S. political and military policy upon either Cambodia or Laos between 1965 and 1975.

10.) War Crimes: Prominent intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, Bertrand Russell, and Jean Paul Sartre have argued that the U.S. government committed war crimes while fighting in Indochina. Focusing on the case of ex-Senator Robert Kerrey and the events at Thanh Phong village, determine whether his actions, and the larger Phoenix Program, were war crimes as defined by the 1949 Geneva Convention. Should ex-Senator Kerrey be indicted, like Lt. Calley, for war crimes?

11.) The Grunt’s War: Analyze the changing quality of combat in Vietnam between 1965 and 1972, focusing on its impact upon the discipline within the U.S. Army and upon the individual American soldier.

12.) The Anti-war Movement: The anti-war movement is largely remembered as a student movement. To what degree is this true? What were the various motivations that people had to be opposed to the war in Indochina? What were the various arguments they used against it? Consider the opposition that emerged from students, African-Americans, soldiers, workers, and women.

13.) Vietnamization: When recalling President Nixon’s support for Vietnamization, Richard Smyser, a State Department official, said that, “For domestic and political reasons American troops had to be gotten out of there.” Explain those domestic and political reasons.

14.) CIA Covert Operations: One scholar has said, “The Vietnam War is Exhibit A for the abolition of the CIA.” Explore the role of the major CIA covert operations in the period 1963 to 1975—including Diem’s ouster, the Desoto missions, the CORDS/Phoenix Program, and the Secret War in Laos—to assess whether reliance on covert operations contributed to the making of this quagmire.

15.) Christmas Bombings: At the Paris meetings in January 1973, Henry Kissinger claimed that “What has brought us to this point is the President’s [Nixon’s] firmness and the North Vietnamese belief that he will not be affected by either congressional or public pressures. Le Duc Tho [the North Vietnamese negotiator] has repeatedly made these points to me.” Do you agree with Kissinger that the bombings of 1972 were necessary to force the North Vietnamese to sign the peace agreement? Please explain and document your position fully.
16.) **Congressional Cut-off of Aid to Vietnam:** An anonymous South Vietnamese said: “Not only did the US not provide us with the assistance they had promised, but they did not even allow us to save face and dignity, the only assets of a poor country. It seemed better to be America’s enemy than ally, for the enemy at least had America’s respect.” Do you agree with those who argue that the staged termination of aid to South Vietnam caused its collapse? Please explain and document your answer fully.

17.) **The Fall of Saigon and its Impact on America:** After the Persian Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush said, “We have finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome.” To what was he referring? What exactly is the “Vietnam Syndrome”? And how has it affected U.S. foreign policy? Please explain and document your answer fully.

18.) **Robert McNamara’s Apology:** In his book *In Retrospect*, former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara said: “We of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who participated in the decisions on Vietnam acted according to what we thought were the principles and traditions of this nation. We made our decisions in light of those values. Yet we were wrong, terribly wrong.” Why does McNamara think the Johnson administration was “wrong”? Do you think that McNamara has correctly located the reasons for the U.S. government’s failure in Vietnam? Consider the policies of the Johnson administration in light of McNamara’s retrospective assessment.

**VII. HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH ESSAY — A THREE-STEP METHOD:**

1.) **STEP ONE — Reading & Research:**
   a.) **Sources/Research:**
      1.) All good essays begin with the three “Rs” — reading, research, and reflection.
      2.) Like most essays, a History term paper is a distillation of its author’s reading and reflections upon the subject at hand. The quality of an essay’s expression and analysis usually reflects the depth of its author’s reading.
   b.) **How to Read for an Essay:**
      1.) Using the course syllabus, begin with a general text to get an overview of the problem.
      2.) Using the syllabus or textbooks, select more specific sources.
      3.) As you read, begin forming ideas in your mind about:
         a.) your overall hypothesis, and;
         b.) the evidence you need or have found to support your argument.
      4.) As you read, take notes, either on paper, or in the margin of a photocopy of the source. As you take notes, make sure you have the bibliographic information for your source: author, title, place of publication, publisher, and relevant pages.
      5.) Towards the end of your reading, draw up an outline of the essay. If you are missing sources for the argument you would like to present, then do additional reading.
   c.) **Citing Your Sources:**
      1.) Assuming three paragraphs per page, you should have one source or note per paragraph.
      2.) Every idea that is not your own and every major body of data you use in your essay should be sourced. In particular, quotations must be sourced.
      3.) Use endnotes or footnotes in the following format:

4.) For a second, non-sequential citation of the same work a short citation:


5.) If you are citing the same source in sequence, use Ibid for second citation.

28. Ibid., pp. 79–80.
29. Ibid., pp. 80–81.


2.) **STEP TWO—Framing the Argument:**

   a.) **Outline:** With your reading done, you are ready to outline your argument. Begin by articulating the single, central question you will ask and answer in the course of this paper. Next, write a one- or two-page outline of your essay with the basic components discussed below.

   b.) **Overall structure:** Every essay, whether humanities or social science, has three basic elements—the problem/hypothesis, the evidence/argument, and the conclusion. To summarize very broadly, the *introduction* asks a question and poses a hypothesis, the *argument* arrays evidence to explore that hypothesis, and the *conclusion* reflects upon the original hypothesis in light of the evidence presented.

   Of these three elements, the formulation of a hypothesis is, by far, the most difficult. In your opening paragraph, try to stand back from the mass of material you have read and articulate a thesis, which usually analyzes *causality* (why events occurred) or *consequence* (the particular import of an event or a pattern of events). Then identify the factors, topics, or elements that you will explore to test your thesis. Ideally, these factors should serve as an agenda of the topics that you will explore in the next section of your essay, the evidence/argument.

   By the time you start writing, you should be able to summarize your argument in a first sentence for the essay akin to the following formulation: “By applying A to B, the essay will explore/explain C.” For example, an essay on the Tet Offensive might begin: “By exploring the media coverage of the Tet Offensive, it becomes apparent that a clear U.S. military victory became transformed, in the mind of the American public, into a major political defeat.” Please note: Not only has this sentence articulated an argument, but it also identified the key components or factors that will be used to structure the essay: i.e. media, military operations, and political defeat. Here are some further reflections on each of these sections:

   1.) **The Problem:** In your introduction, state the problem clearly.

   a.) If necessary, you should give your definition of any key terms that require a specific usage (e.g., “revolution”).
   b.) In stating your problem, refer to the literature in the syllabus.
   c.) A standard and often effective device is to identify two differing schools of thought about a single problem and offer resolution.
   d.) Make sure you are examining the main point, not a secondary or side issue.

   2.) **The Evidence:** In the middle part of your essay, you must present evidence—through an analytical intertwining of events and factors—to deal with the problem posed at the beginning of your essay. Be specific. Give the reader a brief narrative of an event grounded in some statistical or anecdotal evidence.
3.) **The Conclusion:** In the final page or two of your essay, reflect on the problem as stated in the introduction in light of the evidence you presented in the middle part of the essay. In this section, you can also reflect on your findings, considering issues that essay did not address sufficiently or reflecting on the limitations of your argument.

c.) **Level of Argument:** Some students produce papers that fill all the demands of the format but do not produce an argument that fully engages the problem.
   1.) Drawing upon reading and lectures, try to frame an argument that seems to address the question in the most direct and significant manner possible, drawing the most convincing possible evidence to support the case you are making.
   2.) By reading several sources with diverse viewpoints and reflecting on the authors’ approaches, you can define an appropriate question and level of analysis.

d.) **Nature of History Questions:** In courses such as this one, History involves the study of change in large-scale human communities, societies and nations, over time. In general, History essays ask you to understand or explain two aspects of change—causality or why something happened and consequences or the significance of something that happened. Thus, most History questions ask you to explain elements of the following:
   1.) In a limited period of time, explain the factors underlying a given event. Why did that event happen?
   2.) Explain the impact that an event, such as a war or revolution, had upon a human community within a period succeeding the actual event.
   3.) Over a longer period of time, explain how and why complex communities changed in a given way.

3.) **STEP THREE—Writing the Essay:**
   a.) **Procedure:**
      1.) Write an outline of about 2 pages for a 10 to 15 page essay. Each projected paragraph in the essay should be a line in your outline.
      2.) Following your outline, write a first draft taking care to introduce transitional clauses or sentences that allow the reader to follow your argument paragraph by paragraph.
      3.) Reading aloud to yourself, if necessary, edit the prose and produce a second draft.

   b.) **Sentences:**
      1.) Each sentence should be a complete sentence with subject, verb, and direct object.
      2.) Vary your sentences to include short periodic sentences, simple compound sentences, compound sentences with clauses in apposition, and longer sentences communicating detail.

   c.) **Paragraphs:**
      1.) Start your paragraph with a “topic sentence”—that is, a periodic or compound sentence stating the basic message of this particular paragraph.
      2.) Varying your sentence structure, elaborate and expand this theme into a fully developed paragraph.
      3.) Within the paragraph, try to link your sentences with words such as “similarly,” “moreover,” and “however” so that they flow from one sentence to another.
      4.) Paragraphs should not be too long. If you need a rough guide, have 3 paragraphs to a page with 8 to 10 typed lines in each.
d.) Aspire to style:
   1.) As in all forms of discourse, there is an appropriate style for an academic essay somewhere between the chatty colloquial and the overly formal.
      a.) Use a formal voice—not ponderous, just formal.
      b.) Avoid contractions (can’t, didn’t) and colloquialisms.