

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
Department of History
Fall 1987

History 573-2 Colloquium: The Vietnam Wars Thursdays 2:25-4:25 Smail

This colloquium deals with the great upheaval in the former colony of French Indochina which began with the Japanese occupation in 1940 and is by no means over today in what are now officially the three nations of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. What most Americans think of as "The Vietnam War" (1965-75) was only one phase--though an exceptionally violent one--in the decades-long warfare in Indochina. Americans, too, understandably tend to view these events from a vantage point here at home, looking outward across the Pacific at distant and alien lands over there. We also tend, equally understandably, to be more interested in what we were doing over there and whether what we were doing was right or wrong, sensible or not, than in what was happening in and to the societies primarily concerned. This course will present a longer and wider view of these events. It will take full account of the Chinese, French and Americans as they enter from the outside to play important roles in the history of Indochina, but it is centered on the history of Indochina. It is only by making a serious effort to see the story from a mental vantage point inside Indochina that Americans can gain a fuller understanding of the terrible events in which we were so deeply involved--and are still troubled and divided about.

Class sessions

The first session will briefly survey the history of the region from late B.C. to 1940, and will take the form of lectures from interludes and questions. For the rest of the semester sessions will be devoted mainly to discussion papers (see below) and readings.

Papers

Students write two papers:

- 1) A discussion paper of 5-6 typewritten pages based on one of the several dozen questions provided in the course syllabus. You will supply copies (one for each student member, two for me) in the class box in the department lobby no later than Tuesday noon in the week you lead class discussion on the topic of your paper.
- 2) A research paper of 10 to 15 typewritten pages, due no later than the last class session.

Discussant

Each member of the class will serve as discussant, commenting on one of the discussion papers.

Reading

The required texts are Duiker, Herring & West, in the bookstores. As generally in colloquia you will be doing a lot of reading. In the syllabus I have endeavored to supply the fullest possible information about where you can get your hands on the required and suggested readings. In registration week I will collect as many of the appropriate books from the various libraries on campus as possible and plant them in the history department library (HDL). I would appreciate a bit of time from as many of you as possible to speed up this chore.

Exercises

Two map exercises and two quizzes (see syllabus)

Kinko Course Packet

Be sure to get your set

Grading

Discussion paper 25%, Commentator 5%, Research Paper 40%, General Discussion over the Semester 25%, Exercises 5%

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SYLLABUS

A. HISTORY TO 1940: lectures/questions on geography, ecology, history
Sessions 1 - 3: September 3, 10, and 17

Reading - General (see Readings Finder. * = required reading)

*Hejzlar

*Patco & Rev

*In Search of SE Asia, 68-73, 122, 179-84, 301-12, 328-33

*Cotter, "Towards a Social History of the Vietnamese Southward Movement"

*Duiker, Road, chaps. 2 & 3 (text)

Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial

Woodside, Vietnam and the Chinese Model

Woodside, Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam

Truong Buu Lam

Chandler, chaps. 3, 4, 7, 9

1. Why borrow the Chinese model? What kinds of Vietnamese borrowed what cultural items, and why? (Not for auction)

Woodside, Chinese Model

B. JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND FRENCH/VIET MINH WAR (1940 - 1954)
Sessions 4 - 6: September 24, October 1, and 8

Reading - General

*Duiker, Road - chaps. 4 - 7

*Herring, Longest War - chap. 1

*Shaplen, Lost Revolution 1 - 99

Williams, W. A., McCormick, Thomas, America in Vietnam

Porter, Vietnam, a History in Documents

*Trullinger, Village at War, chaps. 1, 3, 4, 5

*Fall, Street Without Joy (read a chapter or two)

Greene, The Quiet American

2. What were the most important legacies of the Japanese occupation?
(not for auction)
3. In what ways were confucianism and communism compatible and historically connected? In what ways not?

*Nguyen Khac Vien, "Confucianism and Marxism in Vietnam"

*Nguyen Du, Tale of Kieu vii-xviii (browse in the text)

*Woodside, Community & Revolution, chaps. 2 and 5

Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, chap. 2

4. Was it luck or skill that made the August Revolution? Why was it centered in Bac Bo?
5. Survey the ways in which Nam Bo differed politically, socially and economically from the other two Bo in this period. How can one account for these pronounced differences?
6. In 1945, after decades spent confined in colonial Indochina, Vietnamese of various political persuasions -- soon followed by Cambodians and Lao -- began again to take part in international politics. At the same time world powers other than colonial France turned their attention to Indochina. Survey the main international political developments rising in or affecting Vietnam and its Indochinese neighbors between 1945 and shortly before the Geneva conference.
7. Assess the battle of Dien Bien Phu: the French and Vietnamese strategies and tactics, and the significance of the battle itself in the whole story of the French/Viet Minh war. (not for auction)

*McAlister, John, "Mountain Minorities and the Viet Minh"
 Fall, Hell is a Very Small Place
 Roy, The Battle of Dien Bien Phu

8. What did the various parties at the Geneva Conference want for themselves? What did they want to deny others? What did the Geneva "Agreement" agree to, if anything?

Kahin, Intervention, 48 - 65
 Cooper, Lost Crusade, 75 - 101
 Randle, Geneva 1954

C. DIVIDED LAND, UNEASY PEACE (1954 - 1965)
 Sessions 7 - 9: October 15, 22, 29

Reading - General

*Duiker, Road, chaps. 8 & 9
 *Herring, Longest War, chaps. 2 to 4
 *Shaplen, Lost Revolution, 100 - 187
 Williams/McCormick, America in Vietnam
 Porter, Vietnam, a History in Documents
 *Trullinger, chaps. 6 - 8
 Halberstam, chaps. 1 - 15
 Sheehan, sample a few
 Kahin, Intervention, chaps. 3 - 8
 Hammer, Death in November
 Chen, "Hanoi's Three Decisions"
 Kahin, "Political Polarization"

9. Is Diem's family best understood as American collaborators, Trung Bo mandarin catholics with a peasant Bac Bo Catholic following, the only kind of Saigon government possible at the time, or what?

*Shaplen, "Diem"
Cooper, 144 - 62

10. What was the National Liberation Front, a Hanoi front or a distinctively Southern movement? From the middle 1960's, when more and more northern half troops were infiltrating into the southern half was this an invasion of the South? (not for auction)

*Kahin & Lewis, 107 - 20, 132 - 7
*Lewy, America in VN, 15 - 16

11. What factors were most important in accounting for the political-military success of the NLF: patriotism, good theoretical analysis, terror tactics, organizational genius, devotion to the cause, or what?

*Race, War Comes to Long An, chaps. 2 - 4
Pike, Viet Cong, browse

12. In rough order of importance what were the most significant U.S. policies and programs in the southern half of Vietnam during this period.

13. Why was land reform the single most important movement in the northern half in the period during and shortly after Geneva? Was it primarily political, social or economic in purpose?

*Elliott, "Political Integration"
*Moise, Edwin, "'Classism' in North Vietnam, 1953-1956," pp. 91 - 105
in William Turley (ed.) - Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective
Moise, Land Reform in China and Vietnam, chaps. 8-12

14. Explore the cross-links between the two main forces that struck the highland minorities of VN between the 1940's and the 1970's: all-out war and intrusion by ethnic Vietnamese. How much did it matter what political color these Vietnamese were? In what ways did highlanders respond to these new conditions?

*Hickey, Gerald, Free in the Forest, xvii-xxi, chap. 1

15. Sort out the main players in the Laos game 1945-75: Lao elite & commoners; "conservatives," "neutralists," and Pathet Lao; various ethnic minorities; Vietnamese communists, French colonialists, CIA agents, Thai battalions & Thai family connections.

*Adams & McCoy, Laos: War & Revolution chaps 7, 10, 12 (suggested 1 - 6, 9)
*Langer & Zasloff, North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao, 9 - 81
*Brown & Zasloff, "The Pathet Lao & the Politics of Reconciliation in Laos, 1973-4

D. THE BIG WAR (1965 - 1975)

Sessions 10 - 14: November 5, 12, 19, Thanksgiving substitute, and
December 3

Reading - General

*Duiker, Road, chaps. 10 - 12

*Herring, Longest War, chaps. 5 - 7 and chap. 8 to p. 269

Williams/McCormick, America in Vietnam

Porter, Vietnam, a History in Documents

*Trullinger, chaps. 9 - 13

*Lewy, America in Vietnam, chaps. 2 - 4

Berman, Planning a Tragedy

Isaacs, Without Honor

Kolko, Anatomy of a War

Snepp, Decent Interval

Dawson, 55 Days, the Fall of South Vietnam

16. Summarize the distinctive political-military strategies of the US and the Vietnamese communists from 1965 to 1968, and show how these rose out of each side's particular strengths and weaknesses.
17. How did the US, after closely watching events in Vietnam from 1945, end up walking into defeat there in 1965-68?
 - *Ellsberg, Papers on the War: "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine"
 - *Kattenberg, The Vietnam Trauma, chaps. 4 and 5
18. "The Army Concept," and the logic of large bureaucracies.
 - *Krepinevitch, The Army and Vietnam, 3 - 17, 65 - 73, 80 - 87, chaps. 6 & 7
 - *West, The Village (text)
 - *Gallucci, Neither Peace nor Honor, 1 - 11, chaps. 4 & 5
 - *Braestrup, Peter (ed.), Vietnam as History, 109 - 23; a good short book to browse in
19. What policies in Vietnam were possible, and not possible when Nixon and Kissinger took office in 1969? What did they seriously expect: a negotiated two-Vietnam settlement, indefinite war, a "decent interval," successful Vietnamization, or what?
 - Lewy, America in Vietnam, chap. 5
20. Explore the numerous ethical and social-political issues raised in Baskir & Strauss's book on the Vietnam-war draft.
 - *Baskir & Strauss, Chance and Circumstance

21. Sort out the main social forces and political actors (domestic and foreign) in Cambodia 1940-75. How was Cambodia finally pulled down into the maelstrom of the Vietnam wars during the years 1970-75.
- *Frank Smith, "Cambodian Peasant Life: A Social History," 1 - 29
 *Shawcross, Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia, chaps. 1, 8, 9, 11, 15 - 19, 23 - 24
22. Hellman's American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam argues that American fiction dealing with the 1965-73 war is based on a deep-lying mythic sense of the westward movement, the tension between settled society and the wild frontier. Thus Viet Cong become Indians and 19 year old marines become Daniel Boones. Test the case he makes.
23. How close can one come to a convincing case i) that the U.S. could have won in Vietnam, or ii) that the U.S. could not have won? (Not for auction)
24. Present a case for the proposition that U.S. engagement in the war was morally wrong. Be sure to say when, from 1945 onward, this was or became true, and whether it necessarily required a prompt U.S. departure. (Not for auction)
25. Present the case for the proposition that U.S. engagement in the war was morally right. Be sure to say whether it could have become morally wrong at some later date as and if the war continued, and whether this view required the U.S. to stay on as the war carried on. (Not for auction)
- *Lewy, "Vietnam: New Light on the Question of American Guilt,"
Commentary 65/2 (Feb. 78) 29 - 49
 *Kattenberg, The Vietnam Trauma, 287 - 303
 Garrett, Ideals and Reality
26. Discussion: What "lessons" from the Vietnam Wars are being drawn by various groups as regards Central America today? Which, if any, are historically sound? Which, like "Munich," so often in the 1960's, are historical myths drawn on to bolster people's present-day opinions?

E. AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON (1975...)
 Session 15: December 10

Reading - General

Kiernan, Ben and Chanthou Boua (eds.), Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981
 Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power
 Vickery, Cambodia 1975-1982
 Vickery, Kampuchea, Economics and Society

27. Outline the structure of relations between Cambodia, China, Laos, Russia, Thailand, Vietnam & the U.S. after 1975. What were the main structure-determining forces and countries? Could the seven have lined up any other way? Were the conflicts that ensued inevitable?

*Duiker, Road, pages 331 - 41

*Sheldon Simon, "The Indochina Imbroglia & External Interests"

*David Elliott (ed.), The Third Indochina Conflict, chaps. 2 - 4

28. What happened in Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea and how can one explain it?

*Frank Smith, Cambodian Peasant Life, p. 30 to end

*David Chandler & Ben Kiernan (eds.), Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays: pieces by Kiernan, Barnett, Shawcross and Boua

*Chandler, "Revising the Past in Democratic Kampuchea"