HISTORY 3365: The Vietnam War
Department of History,
Dalhousie University
Winter 2014

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Course Description

The Vietnam War is one of the most controversial subjects in American history. Anyone familiar with this period acknowledges that there is simply not one interpretation of the conflict. Scholars remain divided on a number of key questions, including: Why the US went to war; which American president was more responsible for how the conflict unfolded; could the US have “won” the war if it had adopted a different strategy; did public opinion and the anti-war movement play a role in ending the war; and why did some Americans support the war while others did not. This class is designed to address these questions and a multitude of others. However, students should not expect to find any easy answers. The history of the Vietnam War is a history of interpretations. Given that this is the case, in this course, you will not be taught “the” history of the war. Instead, we will concentrate on the various interpretations available, or the “historiography” of the war.

“Historiography” can best be understood as a study of historical interpretation. It highlights the changes in methods, interpretations and conclusions that historians have made over time. In short it is a history of history. Those interested in questions of historiography have generally assumed that there is no one single “history”. Instead many scholars, albeit not all, believe that historical stories must be understood as a series of incomplete and contradictory narratives that are “ideological” in nature and sometimes tell us more about ourselves than the event or period under examination. In employing the term “ideology,” it is important to note that I am not limiting myself to the grand narratives of Marxism or Liberalism, but rather all ideas that have become politicized. To paraphrase Carl Von Clausewitz, history, like war, is politics by other means. This is, of course, a controversial hypothesis but it is one that any student interested in the [hi]stories of the past must come to terms with, whether they agree with its underlying assumptions or not.

It is my belief that as professors we have an obligation to prepare you for the real world, beyond simply rote memorization. Thus I believe my role is to encourage you to be better writers, better public speakers and better critical thinkers. This course is designed with these three goals in mind. To my mind the [hi]stories about the Vietnam War are importantly only within this context. In this class, “history” is merely a tool we use to become better citizens.
Textbook Requirements

For this course you are required to buy two textbooks. The first Frederick Logevall, *Embers of War: The Rise of an Empire and the making of America’s Vietnam*, Random House, 2012 is available in the book-store or as an E-book that can be purchased on line through amazon or chapters. The difference in cost is substantial.

The second book you are required to read substantial portions of, but it is available only on a print on demand basis. This means that if I had the bookstore order 30 copies and only 20 of you purchased it, I would have to pay for the remaining books. So instead I have ordered three copies and they will be put on reserve at the library. Should you wish to order your own, new or used, copy of this book you can do so through the bookstore or on-line. The book is Gary Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America’s Lost War*, Wiley/Blackwell: 2009. I am told that it will take two-three weeks for the book to come in. You are not required to read this book until Week Four.

You are also required to read a number of articles in this course. The articles are available on line or on reserve at the Killiam Library.

Course Requirements

**Book Review**

For this course you are required to do a single spaced, one-page book review. The review must be twelve point font similar to New Times Roman. In the review you must use Chicago Manual of Style footnotes. [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html)

Both the text of the assignment and its footnotes are to be on the one page. **Assignments over one page will not be graded.**

In the book review you must explain what Fred Logevall’s argument is, identify which school of thought his central argument fits into and provide one or two points that illustrate why you believe this to be the case. This will be somewhat difficult, as according to one reviewer, “in its effort to provide an authoritative synthesis, the book tends to hide its argument, offering narrative instead of polemic.” This of course is nonsense, as all historians have arguments, or something that they are trying to convince us of, and our it is our job as scholars to figure out what their thesis is and to expose it. **The book review is due by 9:00 AM Friday, October 10, 2014. You will lose 5% for each day you are late. The penalty starts at 9:01 AM on October 10th.**

**Scholarly Debates**

You are also required to take part in a scholarly historiographical debate. There are six debate topics to choose from. Each debate team will consist of between four to six players, two to three players on each side. The topics are outlined below. A sign-up sheet is available on my office door. When signing up for your topic, please consider the timing of the debate (how it

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corresponds to the other work you have due during the semester) and those whom you choose to have on your team. This is especially important because not only will you be judged individually on your oral performance and the substance of your argument but your team’s overall performance will also be graded in the sense that the team that “loses” the debate will “lose” 3% of their final grade. For example, if you receive an A- on the substance part of your argument and lose the debate, your grade will be dropped to a B+.

Each student on the debate team must come to class prepared to give an argument that is between four and five minutes long. If you go over five minutes you will lose 2 marks from your oral presentation (and final) grade. If you are under four minutes you will also lose marks from your oral participation (and final) grade. You are required to use both primary and secondary sources in your debate speech and it is expected that you will go beyond the sources in your textbook to develop your argument. If you fail to use either primary or secondary sources you will lose 2 marks off your substance of argument (and final) grade. It is critical that the audience knows what sources you used.

Each team will also have the opportunity to give a five minute rebuttal. A timer will be used to ensure that both teams get an opportunity to have five minutes. However, this rebuttal is “a free for all.” That said, it is expected that everyone will be respectful of their colleagues. More than anything else these debates are about knowing your own strengths, that of your team, your oppositions weaknesses and perhaps most importantly, who your audience is.

**Attendance and Participation**
You are required to attend each class. There are 13 classes in the semester. You will receive one mark for every class you attend. Students who attend all 13 classes will receive a two mark bonus grade. You will lose two marks for each class you miss for an undocumented reason.

You are also required to complete the weekly readings and actively participate in the seminar and debate discussions. Students who come to class and have not done the readings, will be asked to leave the class and complete them in another location. Those who do the readings but fail to participate will not receive a grade higher than a B- for this component of the course. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

**Grading**
Book Review 20
Debates: Oral and Substance 20/20%
Attendance 15%
Participation 25%

Dalhousie University has recently instituted a common grade scale across the university. The new grading scheme is as follows:

Excellent: A+ 90-100, A 85-90, A- 80-84
Good: B+ 77-79, B 73-76, B- 70-72
Satisfactory: C+ 65-69, C 60-64, C- 55-59
Marginal Pass: D 50-54
Inadequate: 0-49
Class Schedule

Week One, Friday, September 5, 2014
Course Introduction
(Film) Letters from Vietnam

It is advised that you start reading Fredrik Logevall’s book *Embers of War* this week. The book is 800 pages long and you first writing assignment on the book is due in less than a month.

Week Two – Friday, September 12, 2014
Professor Corke must leave class at 11:30 AM
(Lecture) Cold War Historiographies

Week Three – Friday, September 19, 2014
(F) CNN: The Vietnam War
(Discussion) The Historiographies of the Vietnam War
Required Reading

Week Four – Friday, September 26, 2014
(F) The Fog of War: Lessons From the Life of Robert McNamara
(D) Historiographies of the Vietnam War
Required Reading

Week Five – Friday, October 3, 2014
(D) Embers of War
Required Reading

Week Six – Friday, October 10, 2014
* Book Review Due
(D) Reviews of Embers of War
Required Reading

Week Seven – Friday, October 17, 2014
Debate # 1: Was the Vietnam War a “necessary or a mistaken war”
Required Readings

Week Eight – Friday, October 24, 2014
Debate # 2: Could the Vietnam War have been avoided?
Required Reading
• Gary Hess, “’Kennedy Exceptionalism’ or ‘Missed opportunity for Peace’ or ‘Lost Victory?’” – The Movement Toward War, 1961-1965 in Necessary War or A Mistaken War?” in Gary Hess, Vietnam: Explaining America’s Lost War, p.p. 50-84

Week Nine – Friday, October 31, 2014
Debate # 3: Could the United States Have “Won” the War in Vietnam
Required Reading

Week Ten – Friday, November 7, 2014
Debate #4: Did the Media and the Anti-War Movement play a significant role in ending the War in Vietnam.
Required Reading

Week Eleven – Friday, November 14, 2014
Debate # 5: Did Nixon and Kissinger’s Foreign Policy bring a “lost victory” or neither “peace nor honor?”
Required Readings
Week Twelve – Friday, November 21, 2014
Debate # 6: Should Daniel Ellsberg Have Gone to Jail for Releasing the Pentagon Papers?
- Required Reading –

Week Thirteen – Friday, November 28, 2014
Class discussion: What I learned in HISTORY 3365

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

All students in this class are to read and understand the policies on academic integrity and plagiarism referenced in the Policies and Student Resources sections of the academicintegrity.dal.ca website. Ignorance of such policies is no excuse for violations.

Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence, which may lead to loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or even to the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived. At Dalhousie there are University Regulations which deal with plagiarism and, prior to submitting any paper in a course, students should read the Policy on Intellectual Honesty contained in the Calendar or on the Online Dalhousie website. The Senate has affirmed the right of any instructor to require that student papers be submitted in both written and computer-readable format, and to submit any paper to be checked electronically for originality. As a student in this class, you are to keep an electronic copy of any paper you submit, and the course instructor may require you to submit that electronic copy on demand.

What does academic integrity mean?
Academic integrity means being honest in the fulfillment of your academic responsibilities thus establishing mutual trust. Fairness is essential to the interactions of the academic community and is achieved through respect for the opinions and ideas of others. “Violations of intellectual honesty are offensive to the entire academic community, not just to the individual faculty member and students in whose class an offence occurs.”
[Intellectual Honesty section of University Calendar]

OSAA Syllabus Statement on Accommodation:
Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests, quizzes and exams should make their request to the Office of Student Accessibility & Accommodation (OSAA) prior to or at the outset of each academic term (with the exception of X/Y courses). Please see www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca for more information and to obtain Form A, Request for Accommodation.

A note taker may be required to assist a classmate. There is an honourarium of $75/course/term. If you are interested, please contact OSAA at 494-2836 for more information.
The Writing Centre:  
The Dalhousie Writing Centre Killam Library Learning Commons G40C. For more information or to make an appointment visit our website at http://writingcentre.dal.ca Call 494-1963 E-mail writingcentre@dal.ca Our Hours are: Mon, Tue, Thurs 10am - 6pm, Wed 10am - 7pm, Fri 10am - 4pm, Sun 1pm - 5pm.

University life can often be challenging. However, with help from the Studying for Success program, you too can become a more effective learner. Attend our workshops or drop in for individual study skills sessions, where we can help you with Time Management, Critical Reading, Note taking, Preparing for Exams, and much more. We at SFS would like to make your university experience a more rewarding one. Don’t wait until it’s too late! Let Studying for Success help you find smarter ways to study.

For more information or to make appointments, please:
- visit our website: www.dal.ca/sfs
- visit our main office in the Killam Library, Room G28 (main floor)
- call 494-3077 or
- email the Coordinator at: sfs@dal.ca