America in Vietnamese Eyes; Vietnam in American Eyes
Honors Seminar
Spring 2012
01:090:277:01
Tuesdays 1:10-4:10 PM
35 College Avenue, Room 302

Professor David S. Foglesong
Department of History
Office: Van Dyck Hall, Room 215
Office hour: Wednesday 2:30-3:30
dsfoglesong@gmail.com

Course Description
A nation’s images of a foreign country can have significant impacts on its military actions, political direction, cultural values, and everyday life. Mental pictures of another land may affirm or challenge the superiority of one’s own nation, reinforce or undermine national unity, explain failures, and justify violence. Simplified or distorted representations of a foreign country may be more projections of hopes or fears than reflections of actual knowledge. Yet such images still may have important effects, ranging from the escalation of military interventions to liberation from the weight of cultural traditions.

In this seminar we will focus on the mutual images of two nations whose interaction, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, was extremely poignant, powerful, and tragic.

Some of the questions we will investigate are: How have changing Vietnamese images of America – as a revolutionary land of liberty, a counter-revolutionary oppressor, a paradise of material abundance – influenced political, economic, and cultural developments in Vietnam? How have different American images of Vietnam – as a backward land that needed to be modernized, a domino or pawn in the Cold War struggle against communism, a victim of American indiscriminate violence, a land where tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers died – affected U.S. government policies and Americans’ views of their role in the world? How did Vietnamese views of the United States compare to their views of France? How did Americans differentiate their roles in Vietnam from the French involvement in the country? How did U.S. leaders misperceive and misunderstand Vietnam? How have U.S. soldiers depicted Vietnam and the U.S. war there in memoirs and novels? How have U.S. war memorials portrayed the American military involvement in Vietnam? How have American filmmakers
revised popular memories of the Vietnam War? How have images of successful, wealthy Vietnamese Americans undermined nationalism in Vietnam?

We will examine such questions by reading historical studies, memoirs, and novels, by viewing films and documentaries, and by visiting the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Holmdel.

**Course Requirements**

1. **Regular attendance** at seminar meetings. **Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 3% from the final course grade.** Absences will be excused on the basis of serious illness or a death in the family after documentation is presented. If the campus is open and class is not canceled, absences will not be excused because of weather.

   Students may use the absence reporting website ([https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra)) to indicate the date and reason for an absence. However, this will not eliminate the need to present documentation for excuse of absences.

   Students will be expected to comply with the Classroom Etiquette Policy (http://history.rutgers.edu/undergrad/policy.htm). Cell phones must be switched off and meals must be eaten before the start of class.

2. **Active, informed participation** in class discussions, based on completion of the assigned reading by the dates specified below. This will count for **20% of your grade** for the course.

3. **One brief (10 minute) oral presentation** to open discussion of the assigned reading. The presentation should concisely summarize and critique the major argument(s) contained in the required reading. This will count for **10% of your grade** for the course.

4. **Weekly short (roughly 500-word) essays** in response to the common reading and films. These essays will focus on developing critical perspectives on the arguments and interpretations presented in the reading. Each essay will count for **5% of your grade** for the course. **Total: 45% of course grade.** Due: on the day of the related class discussion.

5. **One short (500 to 1000 word) essay** in response to the class visit to the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial and the related reading. This essay should explain what you find most interesting, striking, controversial, or moving about the memorial and the exhibits
in the educational center. It also should reflect on Americans’ responses to the Vietnam memorials in Holmdel and Washington, DC. The essay will count for **5% of your grade**. Due on February 21.

6. One brief (10 minute) oral presentation to the class on April 24 about an individual who shaped American images of Vietnam or Vietnamese images of the United States. This will count for **10% of your grade**.

7. One longer (2000 to 3000 word) paper about an individual who shaped American images of Vietnam or Vietnamese images of the United States. This will count for **10% of your grade** for the course. Due on May 1.

Some possible subjects: David Halberstam (reporter), Paul Conrad (cartoonist), Oliver Stone (filmmaker), Tom Dooley (medical missionary and author of *Deliver Us From Evil*), William Lederer and Eugene Burdick (authors of *The Ugly American*).

**Assigned Reading**
The following books have been ordered through the Rutgers University Bookstore:


Additional required readings have been placed on electronic reserve at Alexander Library. To access them, go to www.libraries.rutgers.edu, click on "Find Reserves," type "Foglesong" in the search field and click on "instructor."
Schedule of Discussions and Reading Assignments

JANUARY 17: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE.
   PowerPoint presentation: The Vietnam War in American Political Cartoons

JANUARY 24: MUTUAL IMAGES BEFORE THE U.S. WAR IN VIETNAM

Required reading:
Bradley, Imagining Vietnam and America

Recommended reading:

First short essay due.

JANUARY 31: U.S. POLICYMAKERS’ IMAGES OF VIETNAM


Required reading:
Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965 (1992), Chapters 1, 6, 9 [E-Reserve]

Recommended reading:
Deborah Shapley, Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara (1993)
Daniel Ellsberg, Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers

Second short essay due.
FEBRUARY 7: VIETNAM IN THE EYES OF U.S. SOLDIERS

**Required reading:**

**Recommended reading:**
Christian Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*
Mark Baker, *Nam*
Al Santoli, *Everything We Had*
Wallace Terry, *Bloods*
Tim O’Brien, *Going After Cacciato*
Stephen Wright, *Meditations in Green*
Karl Marlantes, *Matterhorn*

**Third short essay due.**

FEBRUARY 14: TRIP TO NJ VIETNAM VETERANS’ MEMORIAL, HOLMDEL

**Required reading:**
“Summary History of the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial & Vietnam Era Educational Center” (five pages) [E-Reserve]

FEBRUARY 21: VIETNAM WAR MEMORIALS IN THE UNITED STATES

**Required reading:** [E-Reserve]

**Recommended reading:**
G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (1995), Ch. 5
Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (1997), Chapter 2

**Essay on Vietnam memorials due.**
FEBRUARY 28: AMERICA IN THE EYES OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN  
requirements:  
Duong Van Mai Elliott, The Sacred Willow, esp. Preface and Ch. 9-15  

Recommended reading:  
Le Ly Hayslip, When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman’s Journey from War to Peace (1989)  
Dang Thuy Tram, Last Night I Dreamed of Peace (2007)  

Fourth short essay due.

MARCH 6: THE VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN DOCUMENTARIES  
View part of “Hearts and Minds” (1974)  
requirements:  
Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, ed. From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film (1990), Chapters 16, 17, 18, 19  

Fifth short essay due.

MARCH 13: NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK.

MARCH 20: THE VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN MOVIES I  
View parts of “The Deer Hunter” (1978)  
requirements:  

Recommended reading:  
Albert Auster and Leonard Quart, How the War Was Remembered  
Michael Anderegg, ed., Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television  

Recommended viewing:  
“Platoon” (1986);  
“Full Metal Jacket” (1987)  
“Born on the Fourth of July” (1990)  
Sixth short essay due.
MARCH 27: THE VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN MOVIES II
View part of “Apocalypse Now” (1979)

**Required reading:**
From Hanoi to Hollywood, Chapters 1, 3, 8.

**Seventh short essay due.**

APRIL 3: THE VIETNAM WAR IN AMERICAN MOVIES III
View part of “Rambo: First Blood Part II” (1985)

**Required reading:**
From Hanoi to Hollywood, Chapters 5, 6, and 15

**Eighth short essay due.**

APRIL 10: VIETNAMESE-AMERICANS, THE UNITED STATES, AND VIETNAM: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL CHANGES

**Required reading:**
Andrew Lam, Perfume Dreams

**Recommended reading:**

**Recommended Viewing:**
“The Beautiful Country” (2005)
“Journey from the Fall” (2007)

**Ninth short essay due.**

APRIL 17: NO CLASS. WORK ON PRESENTATIONS AND FINAL ESSAYS. INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS IN VAN DYCK 215 TO DISCUSS RESEARCH FOR FINAL ESSAYS AND PREPARATION OF PRESENTATIONS.

APRIL 24: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

MAY 1: FINAL ESSAY DUE IN FOGLESONG MAILBOX, VAN DYCK HALL.