

**HISTORY 287: The Vietnam War
(Asynchronous Online)
Spring 2021 Syllabus
January 25-May 13, 2021**

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If you need to discuss something with me, the fastest way is via email. Make certain you have "Hist287" as your subject header. I get many emails each day, and it is easy to overlook something important.

COURSE DESCRIPTION.

Why did the United States become involved in Vietnam for a quarter of a century? This course explores why policymakers today continue to debate the "lessons of Vietnam" and ordinary Americans, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians, both in the United States and in Southeast Asia, are still learning to come to terms with the impact of the war on their lives. The availability of government data in recent years clearly show that the American war in Vietnam was an extremely complex phenomenon in which a struggle for decolonization and social revolution became enmeshed in Cold War politics. As U.S. relations with the Soviet Union and China changed, so did the rationale for continued American involvement in the war, from the containment of communism to the pursuit of credibility. The causes of the communist insurgency in Vietnam were similarly complex and changing. The use of powerful new technology by one side and of guerrilla warfare by the other raised serious ethical questions. In addition, the nature of the war coincided with domestic turmoil in the U.S. and, in Vietnam, led to the displacement of huge numbers of people and strained the social fabric of Vietnamese society.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES.

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Gain a better understanding of the role Vietnamese struggle for independence played in the outcome of the war;
- Understand the factors that placed the former Indochinese colonies as a crucial battleground during the Cold War;
- Be able to critically analyze the various dimensions of the conflict with respect to the institutional structures and key individuals involved; and
- Be able to understand the global impact of the war through exploring the experiences of many involved that have been excluded from narratives of the Vietnam War era.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES.

Familiarize yourself with University policies so that you understand your rights and

responsibilities as students: <https://uwm.edu/secu/wp-content/uploads/sites/122/2016/12/Syllabus-Links.pdf>

READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS.

All assigned readings are either from the two books below, which are required for purchase, or they are available on our Canvas website under the unit with which they are associated. *The chapters and articles not from the required books are marked on the syllabus with (e) readings. They can be downloaded from our website.* The following two books are required for purchase. They are available at <http://uwm.ecampus.com>. Once you are on the homepage, follow these steps to order your books: 1) Click on “Order” at the top; 2) Choose “Spring 2021” when asked to select a semester; 3) Choose “HIST” when asked to select a subject; 4) Choose “287” when asked to select a catalog; 5) Click on “201” when asked to select a section; 6) “52314” will appear under class number.

Robert J. McMahon (ed.) (Fourth Edition). 2008. Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company).

James S. Olson and Randy Roberts. 1998. My Lai: A Brief History with Documents (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s)

Quizzes. You will take 4 timed quizzes during the session. Each quiz will be worth 5%. Together they will make up 20% of the final grade. Once you begin, you will have only 20 minutes to take the quiz. Make sure to complete all assignments for these units (readings, lectures, and films) before you start. You are allowed only one attempt. If you misspell words or provide a response that is correct but not written exactly as listed on the answer key, the system will mark it wrong. For example, the correct response to a question is “United States” and your answer is “U.S.” Do not panic. I will manually review the quizzes and give you credit. Quiz dates and units covered are listed in the “Schedule of Readings and Assignments” below.

Exams. You will take a mid-term (15%) and a final exam (21%). (*Note: Exams are under “Quizzes”*). The exams will include short, interpretive essays and multiple choice and true/false questions. The mid-term will cover only materials up to the examination date, and the final exam will include materials from the entire course, with greater emphasis on the second half. Study guides will be available to you before the exams. You will have 60 minutes for the mid-term and 120 minutes for the final exam. The essay questions will need to be graded manually so you will not receive points immediately upon completion.

Essays. You will write two essays (4-5 pages). The dates by which these must be uploaded onto the respective assignment folder are listed in the “Schedule of Readings and Assignments.” Detailed directions are available at the end of the syllabus. These two papers will constitute 20% of your grade and will be evaluated for both content and clarity. Late papers will be accepted but they will be penalized a grade for each day that they are late. *Please submit essays as Word files (.doc or .docx).*

Discussions. You will participate in four online discussions during the semester. The dates for the discussions are listed in the schedule below. Make sure you allow for time to view films and

do the readings before posting to the discussion board. You will be asked to respond to specific questions I pose AND to your classmates' responses. Your posts will be graded for thoughtfulness, clarity, and the degree to which it integrates class materials. *You need to cite at least one source (assigned readings, lectures, films, etc...) in your initial post.* You should put forth the same amount of effort in your response to your classmates' posts as in your initial post. You may respond to others as often as you wish, but only your answer to my question and your first response to a classmate will be graded. You will be placed in groups of about 25 students. My TA will be monitoring the discussions. Each discussion is 6% of your final grade.

Grades. Grades will be calculated according to the following components:

4 Quizzes (5% each)	20%
4 Discussion Posts (6% each)	24%
2 Short Essays (10% each)	20%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	21%
Total	100%

Grading Scale.

A	94-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-93	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	0-59

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

This online course will take advantage of the flexibility that the virtual classroom provides; at the same time, it is designed with the assumption that you will devote a certain amount of time each week to the course. The following class schedule gives you the unit assignments as well as the suggested order in which they should be completed. For each unit, there will be some combination of readings, films, and PowerPoint lectures. In most cases, you will have a week to complete the assignments. It is up to you to decide when to allocate your time to work on the class. For your convenience, you will have access to all course materials for the entire semester when the class begins. I will send email reminders for assignments due each week and I'll post weekly reminders under announcements in Canvas. You may work ahead; however, assignments turned in after due dates will be penalized a letter grade for each day that they are late. Review the dates and assignments for each unit carefully. *If you need an extension for any assignments, email me before the due date.* Upon reviewing your reason for requesting an extension, I will determine whether or not to grant it. I will inform you promptly of my decision.

UNIT 1: THE VIETNAMESE AND THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH FOREIGN INVASIONS

Monday, Jan. 25-Friday, Jan. 29

- Watch the "Introduction to History 287: The Vietnam War" video
- Download and read the syllabus thoroughly
- Due by 11:59p.m. on Monday, 1/25: Submit a brief introduction of yourself to the Discussion forum entitled "Introduce Yourself!" In addition to your major(s) and interests, share why you are taking this class. Please continue on the thread that I began.
- Review the following PowerPoint lectures:
 - "Vietnamese History Prior to European Imperialism"

- “French Colonial Rule and the Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism.”
- Read the following articles/chapters:
 - Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 16-46
 - Read Ngo Vinh Long, “Vietnam’s Revolutionary Tradition,” pp. 4-18 **(e)**.
(Remember that all readings marked with **(e)** are available on the course website)

UNIT 2: THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR, 1946-1954

Monday, Feb. 1- Friday, Feb. 5

- Review the PowerPoint lecture, “First Indochina War, 1946-1954”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 47-80
- Watch film, “Roots of a War.” (Note: All videos can be found on our canvas course website under that unit).
- Assignments due by 11:59p.m. on Fri., 2/5
 - Take Quiz #1 (Units 1 and 2).
 - Submit your response to Discussion #1 question and respond to another student’s post. Note that you have to answer my question before you can see your classmates’ responses.

Discussion #1

Vietnamese nationalists, including Ho Chi Minh, had hoped for U.S. support of Vietnamese independence from France. What factors contributed to U.S. policies toward Vietnam following World War II?

UNIT 3: AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN VIETNAMESE POLITICS

Monday, Feb. 8 Friday, Feb. 12

- Review the following PowerPoint lecture “American Intervention in Vietnamese Politics”
- Read the following articles/chapters:
 - Frederik Logevall, “The Diem Experiment” from The Origins of the Vietnam War, pp. 25-38 **(e)**
 - Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 80-119

UNIT 4: KENNEDY AND INCREASED U.S. INVOLVEMENT, 1961-1963

Monday, Feb. 15-Friday, Feb. 19

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “Kennedy & Increased U.S. Involvement, 1961-1963”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War pp. 120-154
- Watch film, “America’s Mandarin”
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Fri., 2/19
 - Take Quiz #2 (Units 3 and 4).

UNIT 5: JOHNSON AND DECISION FOR WAR, 1964-1965

Monday, Feb. 22-Friday, Feb. 26

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “Johnson and Decision for War, 1964-65”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 155-197
- Watch the film, " LBJ Goes to War, 1964-65”
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. Fri., 2/26
 - Submit your response to Discussion #2 question and respond to another student’s post. *Note that you have to answer my question before you can see your classmates’ responses.*

Discussion #2

The events that unfolded in the Gulf of Tonkin during late July/early August 1964 resulted in Congress passing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. What significance did this congressional action have on U.S. commitment in Vietnam? Based on the information from readings and the film, do you think President Johnson and Congress could have taken a different route? Why or why not?

UNIT 6: MILITARY STRATEGIES FOR A GROWING WAR, 1966-1967

Monday, Mar. 1-Friday, Mar. 5

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “Military Strategies for a Growing War, 1966-1967”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 198-235
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Friday, 3/5
 - Take midterm exam

UNIT 7: RACE, CLASS, AND THE DRAFT

Monday, Mar. 8-Friday, Mar.12

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “Race, Class and the Draft”
- Read the following articles/chapters:
 - James E. Westheider, Chapter 3: The Black Military Experience in the Vietnam Era” from The African American Experience in Vietnam: Brothers in Arms, pp. 17-62 (e)
 - Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 236-273
- Watch film, “Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories” (Part 1 and 3)

UNIT 8: NORTH VIETNAM AND THE TET OFFENSIVE

Monday, Mar. 15-Friday, Mar. 19

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “North Vietnam & the Tet Offensive, 1967-1968”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 274-355
- Watch the film, “Tet”
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m.
 - Take Quiz #3 (Units 7 and 8)

SPRING BREAK: March 21-28

UNIT 9: MY LAI MASSACRE AND WAR CRIMES

Monday, Mar. 29-Fri. Apr. 2

- Read book by James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, My Lai: A Brief History with Documents
- Review the PowerPoint lecture “My Lai Massacre and War Crimes”
- Watch film, “My Lai”
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Friday, 4/2
 - Upload your paper on the My Lai massacre to the assignment folder, “My Lai Paper”

UNIT 10: NIXON’S WARS

Monday, Apr. 5-Friday, Apr. 9

- Review the PowerPoint lecture, “Nixon’s Wars”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 357-400
- Watch film, “Cambodia and Laos”
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Friday, 4/9
 - Submit your response to Discussion #3 question and respond another student’s posts. *Note that you have to answer my question before you can see your classmates’ responses.*

Discussion #3

How and why were Cambodia and Laos pulled into the Vietnam War? Could they have avoided becoming entangled in this conflict? Why or why not?

UNIT 11: THE DIVIDED HOMEFRONT

Monday, Apr. 12-Friday, Apr. 16

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “Anti-war Movement during the Vietnam War”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 401-436
- Watch film, “Homefront USA”
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Fri., 4/16
 - Take Quiz #4 (Units 9, 10, and 11)

UNIT 12: PEACE TALKS: CRISIS AND STALEMATE

Monday, Apr. 19-Friday, Apr. 23

- Review the PowerPoint lecture “Peace talks: Crisis and Stalemate”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 437-475
- Watch film, “The End of the Tunnel”

UNIT 13: REASSESSING WAR

Monday, Apr. 26-Friday, Apr. 30

- Review the PowerPoint lecture, “Lessons Learned: Reassessing War”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War, pp. 476-511

UNIT 14: AMERICAN MEMORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

Monday, May 3-Friday, May 7

- Review the PowerPoint lectures:
 - “American Memory of the Vietnam War”
- Read Robert J. McMahon, *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*, pp. 512-540
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Fri., 5/7
 - Submit your response to Discussion #4 question and respond to another student’s post. *Note that you have to answer my question before you can see your classmates’ responses.*

Question #4

Based on the content in Chapter 15 (McMahon, pp. 512-540), what does the Vietnam War Memorial symbolize and for whom?

UNIT 15: VIETNAMESE MEMORIES OF THE AMERICAN WAR

Monday, May 10-Thursday, May 13

- Review the PowerPoint lecture, “Vietnamese Memory of the American War”
- Read Viet Thanh Nguyen, “On Remembering One’s Own” from *Nothing Ever Dies*. 2016. (Harvard University Press), pp. 23-46 (e)
- Read Elisabeth Rosen, “The Vietnam War, As Seen by the Victors: How the North Vietnamese remember the conflict 40 years after the fall of Saigon.” *The Atlantic*. April 16, 2015 (e)
- Assignment due by 11:59p.m. on Thurs. 5/13
 - Upload your “Reflection Paper” to assignment folder

Thursday, May 21

- Take final exam by 11:59p.m.

****I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus and will notify the class promptly.***