

The Vietnam War

Professor Fredrik Logevall

Spring 2026

Course Description

This course covers the long struggle for Vietnam waged between 1940 and 1975. Students will examine the conflict from various angles with particular attention to the period of direct American involvement. Beginning with French military efforts and concluding with American defeat, events will be considered in their relationship to Vietnam's history, to US politics and society, and to the concurrent Cold War. Questions addressed will include: Why did the war happen? Why did the US become involved? How was the greatest military power in the world defeated? Could an alternative strategy have worked? How does the conflict continue to resonate with Americans?

Course Readings

Students are responsible for purchasing any readings below that are not available online. All other readings in the syllabus will be provided. Readings not linked in the syllabus will be uploaded to the learning management system.

1. Brigham, Robert. *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*. Public Affairs, 2018.
2. Greene, Graham. *The Quiet American*. Penguin Classics, 2004.
3. Herring, George. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2014.
4. Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War: An International History in Documents*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
5. O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. Houghton Mifflin, 1990.
6. Tang, Truong Nhu. *Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath*. Vintage Books, 1986.

Course Requirements

- Watch all course lectures
- Complete all course readings
- Submit five short papers (500 words each)
- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Participate in at least three Q&As

- Complete a 15-page (~3,750 words) research paper or project of appropriate rigor
- Complete a course evaluation (A survey link will be sent to your Gettysburg email during week eleven of the semester.)

Learning Objectives

1. Analyze and debate the war and its place in US history.
2. Place US decision-making on Vietnam in its wider domestic and international context.
3. Challenge and rethink the ways the United States remembers and teaches the war and its place in American history.

Class Schedule

Week One: February 5: French Colonialism and Vietnamese Nationalism

Readings

- Tang, *Vietcong Memoir*, xi–32.
- Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, xiii–19.

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
 - First post due: Sunday, February 8
 - Second post due: Wednesday, February 11
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Week Two: February 12: The First Indochina War

Readings

- Herring, *America's Longest War*, 3–51.
- Tang, 33–62.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
 - First post due: Sunday, February 15
 - Second post due: Wednesday, February 18
 - Short Paper One due: Wednesday, February 18
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Three: February 19: "Sink or Swim with Diem"

Readings

- Greene, *The Quiet American*, all.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
 - First post due: Sunday, February 22
 - Second post due: Wednesday, February 25
 - Final Project/Paper Question due: Wednesday, February 25
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final project or paper will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing.
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Week Four: February 26: JFK and a New Insurgency

Readings

- Herring, 53–133.
- Lawrence, 39–76.

Additional Reading

- Fredrik Logevall, "Kennedy and What Might Have Been," in *The Vietnam War: An Intimate History* by Geoffrey C. Ward (Penguin Random House, 2017).

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
 - First post due: Sunday, March 1
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 4
 - Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, March 4
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Five: March 5: Americanization

Readings

- Tang, 63–87.
- Herring, 135–175.
- Lawrence, 77–95.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Week Five
 - First post due: Sunday, March 8
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 11
 - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due: Wednesday, March 11
 - Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
 - Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final project/paper.
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Week Six: March 12: A Bigger War, 1965–1968

Readings

- O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, first half.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
 - First post due: Sunday, March 15
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 18
 - Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, March 18
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Seven: March 19: Murmurings of Dissent

Readings

- O'Brien, second half.

Additional Reading

- Fredrik Logevall, "Rethinking 'McNamara's War,'" *The New York Times*, November 28, 2017.
- Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (UNC Press, 1993), Chapter 1.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - First post due: Sunday, March 22
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 25
 - Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, March 25
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Eight: March 26: The Tet Offensive/Campaign '68

Readings

- Herring, 233–275.
- Lawrence, 117–136.

Additional Reading

- Fredrik Logevall, "Why Lyndon Johnson Dropped Out," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2018.
- John A. Farrell, "When a Candidate Conspired with a Foreign Power to Win an Election," *Politico*, August 6, 2017.

Assignments

- Project/Paper Preview due: Wednesday, April 1
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
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Week Nine: April 2: Nixon and Vietnamization

Readings

- Herring, 277–304.
- Lawrence, 137–154.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
 - First post due: Sunday, April 5
 - Second post due: Wednesday, April 5
 - Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, April 8
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Ten: April 9: Laos and Cambodia—and Kent State

Readings

- Brigham, *Reckless*, 82–159.

Assignments

- Rough Draft due: Wednesday, April 15
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
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Week Eleven: April 16: End of a War

Readings

- Herring, 304–352.
- Tang, 145–257.
- Lawrence, 155–172.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
 - First post due: Sunday, April 19

- Second post due: Wednesday, April 22
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Week Twelve: April 23: Could It Have Gone Differently?/Legacies

Readings

- Herring, 352–380.
- Tang, 258–310.

Assignments

- Final Project/Paper due: Wednesday, April 29
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Course and Program Policies

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5%

if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67
C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

Complete a thesis identification - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

Complete a primary source evaluation - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?
- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

Complete a book review - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

Discussion Board Posts (18% of grade – 2% per discussion board)

Students will interact in nine discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students**.

Question-and-Answer Sessions (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2-paragraph Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

Final Project/Paper (42% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts and podcasts, documentary editing and transcription, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians

have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing) and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (what is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%)

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan on utilizing in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Project or Paper Preview (5%)

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.