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Week 2 Forum

Why Vietnam? and The Longest War

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Why Vietnam? and The Longest War

by Joe Escobar – Saturday, October 3, 2015, 10:24 PM

This forum thread is for Why Vietnam? and The Longest War posts and replies.

After studying the required materials, address the various questions. To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT – SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Why Vietnam? and The Longest War

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How It All Connects

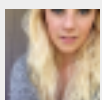
by Caitlyn Lloyd – Tuesday, October 6, 2015, 9:39 PM

In the video "Why Vietnam" I saw many connections to the book "America's Longest War". The video made sure to touch on a lot of key points, where as the book explained those points. In the video, the Geneva Conference gets brought up. It is explained as what divided Vietnam into two, and giving the North over to the communists. The book agrees with the video, however it explains it much more in detail. In the video, it does not talk about the Geneva Conference being the "out", but in the book it is explained on page 45 as "The British, Soviets, and Chinese took the lead conference and sought mainly to end the war and thereby avert U.S. Intervention." To someone who knew nothing about the Geneva Conference, they might be confused when reading this passage if they had only seen the video. The video felt like more of a summary to the Chapter One reading assignment. Though, I do not see the book and video contradicting each other, the book does go into much more of the important details of the Geneva Conference. Such as, what it was about. To some it was ending the war, to others it was to end the war with U.S. intervention, and to some it was about splitting Vietnam into the North and South, but mainly it was about restoring peace in Indochina.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Re: How It All Connects

by Sydney Bachman – Saturday, October 10, 2015, 1:38 PM

I get what you are saying about how it may have been confusing if someone were to have only watched the video. In my opinion like your own they both followed the same premise of what had been achieved by the Geneva conference but in the execution of giving out the information they were far different. In the book you see not only what they got from the meeting but also the process and how hard it was to get the countries to

agree. The film didn't even touch on the process of reaching the agreement and also didn't give much detail on what the outcome was either. When I was watching the video I expected more than the three generic statements that they gave. The statements were, the division of Vietnam by giving communist the north, ending French rule on Vietnam, and also providing the ability of peace for communist North Vietnam. (Why Vietnam?) If I or anyone else was to only watch the video I don't think they would be aware of just how important the conference was. The three statements do give you a small view to go off of but they themselves fall short of getting the whole picture.

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Re: How It All Connects
by [Tami G Egli](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 8:28 AM

I had the same thought that the book gave a lot more detail. With regards to the Geneva conference my thought on how people perceived the outcome was that it was an end to the colonial rule of France. Thus why France had to start pulling out their troops. It also laid the groundwork for Vietnam to hold general elections in hopes that the North and South would be reconnected within two years and allow them to be an independent country.

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Re: How It All Connects
by [Justin Murphy](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 12:15 PM

I definitely agree that compared to the book, the video hardly goes into detail. However, I would like to point out that since the video was published in 1965, the video was more than likely intended as a propaganda video and therefore was contradicting the book on many points. The video paints Ho Chi Minh as a fear monger and a bringer of terror and destruction, where as the books describes Ho Chi Minh as a man that wanted to reunite Vietnam, even if he had to bring terror and destruction to the enemies of Vietnam.

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Re: How It All Connects
by [Rachel Klein](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 11:44 PM

I can definitely see how you might have come to these conclusions. Both the book and video follow the general timeline of events. However, one must take into account the fact that the video was basically a propaganda piece created by the US government. It only conveyed the American perspective. On the other hand, the book is more encompassing of the various sides and provides more research to support its claims.

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Waves of Empire
by [Selene](#) [redacted] Wednesday, [redacted]

“Why Vietnam” and *America’s Longest War*

These two sources provide very different accounts of the reasons for United States involvement and eventual war in Vietnam. The account presented In “Why Vietnam”, the pro-war propaganda film created by the United States government, was deeply troubling, not least of all because of it’s parallels to the rhetoric employed to support the war in the Middle East that we wage today. It is disturbing because we know it’s falsehood, as evidenced by the account given in *America’s Longest War*.

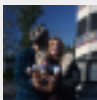
In “Why Vietnam”, the war is presented as a humanitarian effort to aide a vulnerable people from actively

aggressive tyrannical rule. It begins by drawing connections to Hitler and Mussolini, sure to unanimously elicit connotations of pure evil. In the case of Mussolini,the history of his invasion of Ethiopia and Haile Selassie’s request to the League of Nations for aide. Of that time, the film states “nothing was done...but the lesson was learned”. The implication is that the situation in Vietnam is comparable, with the North playing the part of Mussolini and the South as Ethiopia. This is really an incredible leap. Mussolini’s Italy was a European force invading and attempting to colonize an impoverished country. The Viet Minh was an indigenous political party. Despite this glaring inequality, the emotional effect of the comparison was probably effective.

The film gives a brief history of the struggle in Vietnam, beginning, somewhat bafflingly (due to United States involvement in the area for years prior, as described in *Americas Longest War*), with Dien Bien Phu. It describes the situation as a “three–corned struggle” with “communist Vietnamese fighting non–communist Vietnamese and some of both fighting the French”. The idea that there was a battle going on among the Vietnamese during the siege of Dien Bien Phu is not something I encountered in *America’s Longest War* or anywhere else. In *The Longest War*, the battle is presented clearly as a Vietnamese attack on the French occupiers only. The battle was a huge effort for the Vietnamese, with peasant women forming massive human chains to carry supplies into the area (*America’s Longest War* pg 37) and costing the lives of 10,000 Vietnamese (pg. 44). This indicates a strong Vietnamese effort against the French.

The film goes on to say that “the Communists” won the battle and took over Vietnamese rule. The Geneva agreements “ended French colonial rule” and gave the North to “the Communists” as long as they “acted in good faith”. It says that 1 million Vietnamese fled south to “avoid communist rule”, after which time “the Communists” began to mercilessly attack villagers, leading the South to ask to United States for support. *America’s Longest War* tells a very different story. As I mentioned earlier, the United States had been involved in the area for years. Vietnam is a strategic land mass, with access to key waterways, a border with China, and plentiful natural resources such as rubber. The United States originally backed the communist Vietnamese government in it’s first efforts to expel the French in 1945 (*America’s Longest War* pg 3). I suspect that the intention of the United States at that time was to take over privileged access to the area from the French by means of diplomacy with the new Vietnamese government. At that time, communism was not perceived as a threat. As events unfolded worldwide over the next decade, the United States began to see communism as a unified anti–capitalist empire, the single most dangerous prospect to the capitalist empire of the West. Now the United States saw French rule as the best means of securing capitalist interests in the area. The United States began to fund the French army to subdue the communist Vietnamese. The United States did not want to go to war itself, but funneled a total of \$2.6 billion to the French to fight the Vietnamese (pg 50) by the time the Geneva agreements were reached. This is the point at which “Why Vietnam” claims South Vietnam begged for aide and the United States was compelled to respond, being “committed to helping a free people defend their sovereignty”.

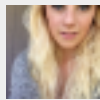
What the film tries to pass off as a humanitarian necessity of honor, the book reveals as a quagmire of greed and racism. Vietnam has been under siege by competing empires for most of it's history. The relationships between these empires shift over time, and the people of Vietnam were caught in the crossfire. There is an interesting quote in the film. It says “Peace in our time, a shortcut to disaster”, meaning that war now is the only way to prevent future bloodshed. This is nonsensical logic. The only way to ensure disaster is to wage war.



Re: Waves of Empire

by [Selene Steets](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 8:57 PM

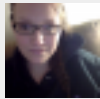
That is such a good point. It seems like Vietnam was almost constantly either occupied or at war for literally thousands of years (pg 4–5). It’s somewhat funny that *Why Vietnam* both mentions that the country was very recently occupied by the French, and then goes on to paint the picture that South Vietnam was it’s own stable country, able to make a unified request for American aide. Really, South Vietnam hardly existed at all. It was artificially created at the end of the battle of Dien Bien Phu, pretty much at the exact point that the film says it requested aide. *Why Vietnam’s* version makes no sense.



Ho Chi Minh

by [Sydney Bachman](#) – Wednesday, October 7, 2015, 8:45 PM

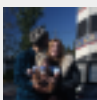
In both “Why Vietnam?” and “America’s Longest War” they discuss Ho Chi Minh’s plans for Vietnam. “Why Vietnam?” states that Ho “was planning a reign of terror in south Vietnam”. (Why Vietnam?, 6:40) On the other side of the spectrum is “America’s Longest War” where Ho is seen as only trying to fight France for their own independence.(Herring, 3–8) Both the video and the book give his motivations for war in a completely different light. The book made Ho into someone who was fighting for freedom much like Americas did during the revolutionary war. The video made him seem as if his only goal was for a hostile takeover. When I was going over the material I found that the Herrings insights seemed to have more backed up facts then the video. The main reason I believe him is that he discusses the fact that Ho previously asked the U.S. for help.



Re: Ho Chi Minh

by [Caitlyn Lloyd](#) – Thursday, October 8, 2015, 8:38 PM

I noticed that too! The book made Ho Chi Minh look like he was fighting for freedom, and genuinely wanted a positive outcome. He came across in the book as someone who takes care of and really cares for their country, thus the reason he was called Uncle. When I watched the video, I was sort of surprised at the "hostile take over" he was planning. At 6:50 in the video they describe Ho as "The communist leader of North Vietnam, who plays the kindly, smiling grandfather, but behind the smile is a mind which is planning a reign of terror in South Vietnam in which children and adults alike will be the victims." I noticed the book really didn't describe him in this way, but I do agree with you in that book seemed to have more credible facts than the video.



Re: Ho Chi Minh

by [Selene Steets](#) – Saturday, October 10, 2015, 8:50 PM

I agree with you both that Ho Chi Minh was portrayed very differently in the book and the film. The book clearly portrays him as a man who is deeply committed to his country, and also happens to believe that communism is what is best for his country. But while I definitely do not buy *Why Vletnam’s* story that he was a sadistic despot akin to Hitler, I also have some hesitancy about the heroic kind of language the book uses in describing him (see page 6). While here it does admit that he “was also willing to sanction the most cold-blooded methods to achieve his aims”, the overall affect of this and much of the readings is than Minh was quite admirable. I think this might be a pendulum swing, and an over-correction of the anti-communist portrait. Horrible things happened on both sides of the war, and while the United States was an invading force, Ho Chi Minh was still responsible for much horror and destruction himself. He inspired millions of Vietnamese to go to their deaths, and the North also killed civilians. If not for Minh, would a future diplomatic leader have been able to establish Vietnamese freedom peacefully? Maybe it would have taken more time, and the Vietnamese were sick of living under the thumb of outsiders, but all

war is an atrocity.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Ho Chi Minh

by [Justin Murphy](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 11:55 AM

I agree that "Why Vietnam?" painted Ho Chi Minh in a harsher light than *America's Longest War*, however the video shows how much fear the American government had towards communism. Through the book and the video it appears that, for America, the struggle in Vietnam was not a war, but a battle in the larger war: the war for democratic and free government. The confusion and fear of communism in America stems from their fears of Soviet Russia and conversely forced America to act, and propaganda is a useful tool to persuade people to action. In light of my views on the "Why Vietnam?" video, I looked up the publication date, which happens to be 1965, which allows a larger context to understanding the differences between the two sources. The video was most likely intended to persuade the American people to accept the war effort.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Ho Chi Minh

by [Rachel Klein](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 11:54 PM

I would definitely have to agree. The video made Minh out to be some sort of Communist monster and not so subtly suggested the superiority of America. I also think that the book did a much better job of providing supporting information in an all-around way.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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The Initial Challenge of Advising and Training in South Vietnam

by [Bernard Untalan](#) – Wednesday, October 7, 2015, 10:50 PM

The event I’m choosing to discuss, which was highlighted in the brief video and expounded upon in further detail in Herring’s book, is the initial deployment of military advisers and trainers to South Vietnam in the mid-late 1950s.

The official government informational film *Why Vietnam?* paints a rather romantic picture of the US effort to equip, train, and organize the South Vietnamese Army--portraying the relationship as one of mutual ideology and corresponding levels of motivation, to seamless success. While Herring acknowledges that great strides were made with such a difficult task (considering the circumstances and state of forces inherited from the French), he tellingly states that “official rhetoric bore little resemblance to reality” (pg. 72).

The facts on the ground betrayed a much more complex and challenging process. Herring highlights numerous obstructions and impediments such as a poorly constructed command system, training for the wrong type of mission (i.e. guerilla vs. conventional warfare), and cultural and stylistic clashes between the two disparate nation forces. While Herring is critical of this period, he is also generous (perhaps also realistic) in pointing out that there were a lot of unknown variables at the time which are obviously now known with the benefit of hindsight, a benefit not afforded at the time to provide the proper foresight.

The video *Why Vietnam?* for the obvious reason that it is what a government informational video (propaganda piece, perhaps more accurately) does not divulge such challenging realities.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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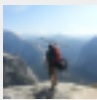
Re: The Initial Challenge of Advising and Training in South Vietnam

by [Justin Murphy](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 12:57 PM

I wholeheartedly agree that the book is able to use the "benefits of hindsight" that the video was not afforded (or at least not with as much hindsight). Although, I'd like to expand on the book's ability of hindsight, by referring to the book's ability to express the difficulties that the American government had with the South Vietnamese government. George Herring pointed out that "the American aid program had at best mixed results," and "it did little to promote economic development or improve conditions in the villages" (74) which leads me to conclude that the video not only was unable to use hindsight as well as Herring, but expressly avoided the issues that the U.S. had within Vietnam.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Re: The Initial Challenge of Advising and Training in South Vietnam

by [Bernard Untalan](#) - Sunday, October 11, 2015, 11:27 PM

Yes, I agree. As the official video was essentially a propaganda piece and meant to drum up morale and support of the war, those complexities would definitely not be mentioned. Also, what I found funny and perhaps almost deceitful (at the very least, incomplete) was the rosy picture the official video painted of the US troops and South Vietnamese troops getting along and working together. While I think ultimately there was cooperation and a productive relationship, Herring mentions the difficulties in leadership and cultural differences that led to both nations suspicious of each other while they were trying to work together and that there were and always will be those fault lines when engaging in this kind of cross-cultural effort. Barriers will always exist, no matter how well-intentioned we are.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: Minh was a Communist

by [Rachel Klein](#) - Wednesday, October 7, 2015, 11:11 PM

In my opinion, the single fact most significantly related to the Geneva conferences and the division of Vietnam is that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist. As a main result of the Geneva conferences, the division of Vietnam was thought to be a defense against the inevitable spread of Communism through Minh. According to the video, America viewed Minh's ultimate goal as the evil spread of communism through southeast Asia. The book portrays his ultimate goal as the unification and independence of Vietnam as a whole. Personally, I tend to side with the book's version of things. Everything that I have watched and read so far has led me to believe that Minh was a Nationalist first and a Communist second.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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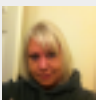
Re: Minh was a Communist

by [Caitlyn Lloyd](#) - Thursday, October 8, 2015, 10:19 PM

Hi Rachel,
I do tend to side with the book a little more too. I believe the facts presented are more credible. I was sort of surprised that Ho Chi Minh was described the way he was in the video, since I had first done the reading. The book portrays Minh as a Nationalist like you had pointed out. He is presented in a way that suggests that he really wants unification throughout Vietnam. So, when I saw in the video that he was planning a reign of terror on the South I was a little confused. Like you, I tend to agree a little more with the facts that the book presents, and also agree that Minh was a Nationalist first and a Communist second.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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US Officially Intervenes

by [Tami G Egli](#) - Thursday, October 8, 2015, 11:28 AM

Information that struck me was in the video that in 1961 the Vietnamese in South Vietnam sent out an urgent cry for help and it was at this point that the US intervened promptly and officially. Before this point, Diem wanted our financial assistance but did not want our troops there except in training and advisory positions, because he wanted to maintain control. Once Diem was killed and the internal struggle intensified, the US needed to step in at this point because the country was more vulnerable to attack from the North and other communist countries wanting to take it over. The book informs that because of the escalation of fighting in the countryside between

the factions and also the crisis with the Buddhist monks, the US had already started implementing new strategies to deal with the guerilla warfare and also advise Diem’s own military officials on their impending coup. When Diem was killed the US military was already in place to take more control.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: US Officially Intervenes
by [Sydney Bachman](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 9:11 PM

I agree with your statement. The book and the film both had the same event but the way it is protrude just like all the events of the war differ slightly. I understand that both discuss the fact that once Diem was assassinated the U.S. took more steps toward involvement but they give a slightly different view when it comes to the speed and intensity of U.S. actions. Like you said the film goes into how they asked us for help while the book just talks manly about how we were already prepared to intervene.

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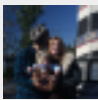


Local Elections – A conflict between America's Longest War and Why Vietnam?
by [Justin Murphy](#) – Thursday, October 8, 2015, 9:24 PM

The *Why Vietnam?* clip proclaimed that the North Vietnamese communists abolished free elections within North Vietnam while South Vietnam continued the support of free elections in the south. However, George C. Herring explained that the South Vietnamese government "abolished traditional local elections and began to appoint village and provincial officials." The two source materials are in obvious conflict on the facts of free elections in Vietnam. When looking at the source materials, it become clear to me that George C. Herring's *America's Longest War* is a more reliable source because Herring cites source material and research. In *Why Vietnam?* the narrator portrays a bit of a bias when describing the events that lead to Americas involvement in Vietnam, stating "if the Communists act in good faith" when referring to the agreement to divide Vietnam that could lead to eventual peace. The "if the Communists" wording of the film tells me that the narrator, or whom ever wrote the narration, did not believe the Communist North Vietnamese wanted peace. The constant talk of the "Communist war-machine" in *Why Vietnam?* also makes the information within the film less than credible, at least to me, and makes the film appear to be a propaganda feature and not a historical piece. To me, there is little doubt that Herring is the source with the incorrect information, however, with Herring, if I believe him to be wrong I can check the sources he's provided for *America's Longest War* and figure out on my own whether he's right or wrong.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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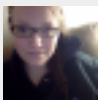


Re: Local Elections – A conflict between America's Longest War and Why Vietnam?
by [Selene Steets](#) – Saturday, October 10, 2015, 8:53 PM

I’m so glad you brought up the matter of the elections! It is such an important point. In all the materials we have read/watched, besides the government sponsored film, we learn that the communists were eagerly awaiting a free election, because they knew they would win. In fact, the whole reason for postponing the election for two years after the Geneva accords was because it was clear that the communist party would win easily in a general election, and the West did not want that to happen (this is from "Vietnam A Television History part 1"). *Why Vietnam* flat out lies about the reality of the election process because to tell the truth would be to admit that the communist party of the North had widespread popular support in the country, meaning that it would be the legitimate government body.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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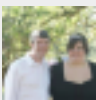
Re: Local Elections – A conflict between America's Longest War and Why Vietnam?
by [Caitlyn Lloyd](#) – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 11:12 AM

There are so many great points here! The matter of free elections is a big one. Thus far we have been learning that the communists were awaiting a free election, for the simple fact that they would win. I wish the

film touched on it more, but it just gave us a quick snip saying "In the South, free elections were taking place." I do agree with your claims of the narrator or narration being biased. The whole time I was watching it I was thinking it sounded like a propaganda film. I like how you pull out the term "Communist-war machine", I would like to point out that the described Ho Chi Minh's invasion of the south as a "reign of terror over the south." A lot of your writing points out what I was thinking in the back of my head while watching the film. As I stated to a different classmate above, I do learn more toward Herring as far as credibility. I enjoyed reading what you had to say!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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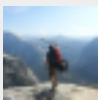


Global Containment of Communism–Vietnam
by *Tonya Winkelman* – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 10:54 PM

Before the escalation of the Vietnam War, North Vietnam had been taken over by communists. Communists of N. Vietnam planned strategically to take over South Vietnam and turn it into a communist country. President Dwight Eisenhower had a tough decision to make. This was either to be a full-blown war, or to contain N. Vietnamese and their allies as they spread into South Vietnam. A full-blown would have been catastrophic to all involved parties. Leaving the option to contain as they spread, the U.S. had a very dominant goal of containing communism wherever it may spread. Eisenhower opted to send in military advisors, succeeding Eisenhower was President John F. Kennedy who maintained the military advisors but also sent in some military troops. By the presidential term of President Lyndon Johnson the U.S. military had been sent in to defend South Vietnam in a full blown conflict. This war was predicated by the 1954 Geneva Accords, which formally kicked out the French and divided Vietnam into North and South Vietnam. This entire conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam was purely a result of an Eisenhower era doctrine of containing communism wherever it tried to expand.

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Re: Global Containment of Communism–Vietnam
by *Bernard Untalan* – Sunday, October 11, 2015, 11:36 PM

I appreciate how you outlined the escalation of US involvement in the war through the succession of our presidents during that era. It seems that as each new president took office during the conflict, the ante was upped and greater involvement became inevitable. Though, as you pointed out, ultimately all this was based on Eisenhower era doctrine concerning the containment of communism. Thanks!

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◀ Patriots and PBS

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