

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number and Title: SEMS 210: Vietnam War in History and Memory
Faculty Name: Carrie Waara, History
Semester and Year: Summer 2006

Suggested Pre-requisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Vietnam is a beautiful country and a proud people, yet for Americans, it is irrevocably shadowed by American's longest war. This course will examine the history and legacies of our involvement in this Southeast Asian conflict, which extended into Laos and Cambodia, 1942-1975. We will analyze Vietnamese and American political, diplomatic and military events, decisions, themes, cultures, and controversies. We will situate the war within the larger historical contexts of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and decolonization and post-colonial nation-building following World War II. The earlier story of Vietnamese resistance to Chinese and then French colonization is a key foundation for understanding the later conflict. This course should also stimulate our understanding and empathy for the historical actors and bystanders, perpetrators and victims, decision-makers, soldiers and protestors who are an integral part of the Vietnam War story. We will analyze the uses and abuses of history and the relationship between personal and public memory. Ultimately, this course should enable you to draw conclusions about historical memory and national imagination both in Asia and in the United States.

COURSE OBJECTIVES Learning Outcomes

Knowledge: By the end of the course, you should be able to

- (1) identify major geographic features (names and locations of major cities, bodies of water, the Mekong Delta, mountain ranges, coasts and plains, and surrounding nations) and their significance in the conflict;
- (2) know the differences between and historical roles of the two major regions, North and South Vietnam;
- (3) know the origins of the Vietnam War, and its changing relationship to issues of imperialism, colonialism, modernization, economic development, and the rise of militarism and nationalism in the twentieth century;
- (4) know some of the major eras, events, groups and individuals in the war's history
- (5) appreciate the diversity of perspectives and interests in the war as well as larger connections to world history;
- (6) interpret contemporary Southeast Asian developments with reference to past traditions and global trends.

Skills: By the end of this course, you should have advanced your ability to

- (1) Read for content knowledge and information,
- (2) Read for significance that connects with the Big Picture questions and problems of historical inquiry,
- (3) Evaluate sources for relevance, validity and bias,

Participate in collaborative learning through class discussion and exercises,

PAGE 2

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE: Major and minor units of study to be covered. On summer voyages there will be 75-minute class meetings every day at sea, totaling approximately 22 sessions.

1. Introduction and Overview
2. Images, Perception and Misperception
3. Vietnamese Geography: A Place and a People
4. History Before the French Colonial Era
5. The French Colonial Era and the Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism
6. World War II, the Roots of American Involvement, and the August Revolution
7. The French Return and the Franco-Vietminh War
8. The Geneva Solution and an Experiment in Nation-Building
9. Cold War Crises and the Fall of Ngo Dinh Diem
10. America Goes to War
11. The Concepts of Limited War and War of Attrition
12. How the Battle of Ia Drang Valley Changed the War
13. South Vietnamese Nation-Building: "The Other War"
14. War at Home
15. The Tet Offensive and Political Crisis
16. The Televised War and the Election of 1968
17. Nixon and Kissinger: Vietnamization and Widening the War
18. War Weariness and Neither Peace Nor Honor
19. The End of the Tunnel
20. After the Fall: The Wounds Within and Uneasy Relations
- 21 & 22. Group Interviews and Reports from the Greater Generation

FIELD COMPONENT:

1. Take detailed notes when you tour an official Vietnam War (Vietnamese call it "the American War") historical site, analyzing how the tour guide and/or written or visual material narrates the history of the site, from what points of view s/he explains the past, how the tour of the site is organized (what is shown in what order--and think about why) and how the site itself is represented to us (what is preserved, what is restored, what is re-enacted, what is missing.) Write a detailed, 3-page reflection of the tour experience, drawing on the historical knowledge you have gained through our course readings, lectures and discussion.
2. Observe carefully the variety of cultural and historical influences that appear on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi. Photograph or sketch or describe in detailed words two scenes, sites, sights, incidents or artifacts that catch your eye and make you think about these cities' history, especially historical connections with French colonialism and "the American War." Be keen to notice and evaluate changes and continuities over time. Drawing on the historical knowledge you have gained through our course readings, lectures and discussions, write a 3-page reflection explaining why you find this image or incident significant.
3. Do a mini-independent study on a topic related to the Vietnam War that interests you. Seek out people, places, written materials, and artifacts to help you learn as much as possible about your chosen subject. Write a 3-page paper organizing your newly-gained knowledge to demonstrate *how* (through what kinds of sources and experiences) and *how much* you have learned.
4. Keep a voyage-long intellectual autobiography on the Vietnam War, recording your thoughts about readings, lectures, discussions, tours and experiences in Vietnam, with the goal of demonstrating, by voyage end, the growth and development of your historical consciousness and empathy.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

1. Mindful reading and wakeful attendance (30%): Class participation will count heavily in your final grade. Your presence in class makes a unique contribution to our group and your absence is noticed. It is important that you **take notes in class** and that they be accurate and thorough. It is imperative that you **read** the assignments **before** class to understand fully the lectures and to participate intelligently in discussion. Preparation also gives you the chance to raise questions about the reading during the appropriate class session--though questions are welcome anytime. Finally, note well what Henry James wrote in *The American Scene*:

I draw courage from the remembrance that history is
never, in any rich sense,
the immediate crudity of what "happens," but the much
finer complexity
of what we read into it and think of in connection with
it.

2. **A map exercise** (10% of total grade).
3. **In-Class Final Examination** (30%)

4. Three Field Component Assignments (20%)

- 5. Four-page paper** reflecting on and analyzing the novel *The Sorrow of War* by Bao Ninh. Draw on the historical knowledge you have gained through our course readings, lectures, discussions and field experiences in Vietnam. (10%)

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: George Donelson Moss
TITLE: Vietnam: An American Ordeal
PUBLISHER: Prentice Hall
ISBN #: 0-13-060033
DATE/EDITION: 2002/ Fourth Edition
COST: \$50

AUTHOR: Bao Ninh
TITLE: The Sorrow of War
PUBLISHER: Riverhead Trade
ISBN #: 1573225436
DATE/EDITION: 1996; Reprint edition
COST: \$14

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

You may suggest a maximum of four books per course for the Reserve Collection. Our librarian will consult the library collection to see if we already have these books.

If we do not have the books, the librarian will purchase them for the permanent collection.

If you are listing more than four books, please indicate those books to which you place top priority, and the librarian will do her best to acquire those. If those you indicate are not available, she will try to acquire additional books that are on your list.

You may also bring books and materials from your own collection to be placed on Reserve.

AUTHOR: Tim O'Brien
TITLE: The Things They Carried
PUBLISHER: Broadway
ISBN #: 0767902890
DATE/EDITION: 1998 Reprint edition
COST: \$15

AUTHOR: Graham Greene
TITLE: The Quiet American
PUBLISHER: Penguin Classics
ISBN #: 0143039024
DATE/EDITION: Reprint edition 2004
COST: \$15

VIDEO TITLE: Vietnam: A Television History
PUBLISHER/STUDIO: Wgbh Boston
ASIN: B00026PA6G
DATE/EDITION: 2004 Revised and edited
COST: \$79