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Week 1 - Determining the truth

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, April 12, 2015, 9:55 AM

This is a history class. We are trying to determine what really happened in history. How do you/should we deal academically with conflicting information (such as is being presented in the PBS videos, web videos, and AIM video this week)? How can your two textbooks help you to approach this video information and be confident that you are learning accurate historical knowledge?

Be sure to use SPECIFIC examples from class materials to illustrate your point or to support your position. Cite your sources in your posts and replies. Use parentheses. Examples (PBS Episode 1), (AIM historian "Smith"), (Herring p.34), etc.

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: Change the subject line of your post to something more descriptive. DO NOT leave the subject line Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth

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Research and considering the source

by Timothy Conway - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 12:06 AM

Historically, information can be contradicting and “historical fact” is no different. It depends what bias’ you have on a certain subject or things you may have heard from a third party and possibly not a solid source. For example: person (A) may just listen to Rush Limbaugh or watch the Fox News Channel and person (B) gets their information from The Today Show and CNN News. These two individuals would most likely have contradicting views on politics, current events and even history. Why? Take the motivation and sources into account. You have to consider the source and motivation of each of these media spectrums. In order to make an informed decision or find out if the “historical fact” is true, academically we must set true bias aside and consider and research that particular source that is putting out that information. Another example: What is the motivation behind the video put out by Accuracy in the Media Inc.? What interests would they have to “debunk” the PBS series *Vietnam: A Television History*?

An argument can be raised about PBS being a liberal media outlet but what is its source of income? Accuracy in the Media (AIM) Clip was hosted by conservative former NRA president Charlton Heston and is a conservative non-profit news media watchdog. What are the sources for this media watchdog? PBS is a publicly funded media outlet and is suppose to provide both sides and produce non bias historical information. They have a good track record for the most part. AIM is funded by 3 major conservative donors which are 2 millionaires and a billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife. With information, Academia needs to be open and non-bias, research and site sources, consider credentials and motives for any information claiming to be historical fact.

Text books that are written in an academic way should be a source of fact, not fiction. The use of the two text books in this class work very well because so far in the course the information seems to be cross checking with the PBS series, which is an academic process to verify a fact. Such as the view on Ngo Dinh Diem seemly having a tough time consolidating power in the south and having repressive policies on the Buddhist and Communist in the South. The *Americas Longest War* text

book and the PBS series had the same account on the Coup detat on Diem and his Brother. (Herring: P126-133) and (PBS series: episode 2: *America’s Mandarin.*) The text book *Americas Longest War* and *Patriots* have many sources cited within the text itself and listed at the bottom of the page. This academically not only shows and gives the source credit but it also allows the reader to follow up on that source to research and solidify that fact. Reading these two books simultaneously with the PBS series, gives me the confidence that the information I am receiving is historical fact. What previous bias' or political views I have has no relevance to the information I receive. As a student I have a duty to make sure that the information is correct and factual by researching and considering the source. Major part of being a student and scholar is to use these tools.

History is not just a story of human kind but should be a library of facts so future generations can learn from it and not make the same mistakes of the past generation.

Sum of ratings:**3 (1)**

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Re: Research and considering the source

by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 8:41 PM

I have never heard of this particular media watchdog prior to this video, so I am obviously curious as to how you knew the information provided about them, whether it was already knowledge you had or if you did additional research either during or after the video. Regardless, I appreciate that you understand that it is not only important to distinguish fact from exaggeration but also to know where the information is coming from. The old rules of journalism to never reveal your sources doesn't work in the time of mass media, so I like that you took examples from some of the more recognizable sources that often cause discussion among the different political parties.

I agree with you in regards to textbooks, however, I also still see that its a gradual process in getting the truth into these accounts. Just as information is now so much more readily available, so many sides are presented and quotes can often be misinterpreted (such as assumed Khrushchev's remarks) so even quoting from a specific source can sometimes bend the reality.

Sum of ratings:**2 (1)**

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Re: Research and considering the source II

by [Timothy Conway](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 4:07 PM

Previous to this video I was not aware of AIM. I figured there were conservative watchdog groups out there but we as a society today, don’t really hear about them because the media is saturated in liberal views. Dylan: I did do additional research on the group Accuracy In Media Inc. What really got me thinking was why Charlton Heston was the host? Usually you have a host or narrator that is more skewed to the left, such as Alec Baldwin, Susan Sarandon etc... Not only the host but I noticed that the non-profit group had an I.N.C. after the name and made me more curious to what were their motives behind producing such a film. Money and political views was my guess. I just did simple research and found out basic information on this group, such as being conservative and having 3 very wealthy donors.

Fact vs. exaggeration: I see two differences between the PBS series and the AIM film. One the PBS series seems to have more factual information that can be verified by different sources. It had first hand testimonial accounts from such people as; Bill Moyers, presidential aid and a respected journalist, the commander in Vietnam, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, and Ray Cline (Dept Director CIA.) The second difference that I noticed is what the PBS series had and the AIM film did not was interviews from the North Vietnamese side: Gen. Phung The Tai and Col. Bui Tin to name a few. This gave a more rounded view of Vietnam and harder to exaggerate because you have two sides of the story that can verify times, events and places that confirms factual information. The AIM did not have a two sided stance; it was clearly exaggeration at its best and did not have solid expert opinions like the PBS series did.

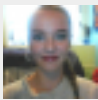
The Herring text book and the PBS series are complimenting each other very well, the series was made in 1983 and produced by Public Broadcasting a long time trusted source of information and the book was published originally in 1979 than it was revised in 86’, 96’ and 2002. Usually in revisions new information that is learned is added, and false or outdated information is omitted. This applies if the publisher McGraw-Hill Education is living up to academically ethical standards of publishing accurate information from dependable sources. I guess we as students need to take this into account as well. Not only should we look at the producers of films, but publishers of textbooks, magazines and articles. This would be our intellectual ethical duty as well.

I agree with you that quotes can and do get miss interrupted. Khrushchev’s remarks on “wars of liberation” in front

of the United Nations were interrupted as fiery and provocative. United Nations Speech, October 12, 1960: "You will not be able to strangle the voice of the people, which roars out and will go on sounding: Down with colonialism! The sooner we bury it, and the deeper, the better."(*PBS series: Americas Mandarin*) The west saw it as an excuse to have communism fill the vacuums of over thrown governments and spread communism through out the world. Imagine if Barrack Obama gave the same speech with a more modern appeal and language maybe referring to terrorism instead of colonialism. How would this particular speech be interrupted? I would have to answer with optimism and pride that we as a society would back such "wars of liberation " or "wars of freedom." To reiterate, we as students should look and research both sides of arguments, first person testimonies and the sources of materials and broadcasts being produced as factual information.

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Re: Research and considering the source
by [Leah Boysen](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 7:33 AM

I can some what agree with Timothy, about having to put biases aside and getting the true facts out their to the public, and something you should be able to learn from with future generations. However I think theres a big cause of why that doesnt happen in day to day life, our political system and the media (the media being news, i.e. Fox), have to work with each other to know what type of information their going to realize to the public, its not about hey this happened the world needs to know, its wow this happened okay what doe's the world get to know. Also now a days you can feed into what you wanna hear, so if your more liberal you can watch news channels that are more left, but then you dont hear the other side of the story and your only getting a certain kind of information, this also goe's for the right side too. I agree that people should be giving the facts, however I think its hard to just get facts, you really have know who's giving you the facts, and look into getting the facts from more than one source, or sources with different opinions.

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Re: Research and considering the source
by [Neil Pena](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:36 PM

I agree a lot with what you say about the ideas behind the video of the accuracy in media clip. Questions do have to arise such as the ones you stated. What is the motive behind the AIM video to try to discredit and in your words debunk the views presented in the PBS video series. Another aspect of your finding that I too came across was being able to cross reference some of the statement provided in the PBS video series and first hand stories from the text Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides by Christian Appy. In one specific example I found that the statement in episode three of the video series talking about what actually happened in the Gulf of Tonkin where in fact what the government told the public was a unprovoked attack by north Vietnamese boats was truly a covert opsration funded by the CIA for unmarked south Vietnamese patrol boats attacking 2 North Vietnamese island bases. I found that the statements paralleled with the story told by Bernard Trainor on page 5 of the patriots book where he talks about the same mission being lead north on the basis of in his words, "My intelligence said it was a communist R and R center so that was that."(pg. 5 Patriots) Another aspect of determining truthfulness in the accounts of the statements made by some of those in the AIM clip goes hand in hand of what you said about finding the biases. Thinking about biases I took in the fact that the ideas and views from the home front were different from those on the frontlines. When the AIM clip takes in testimonies of people who studied the war from inside the country and the views of those from people on the frontline will differ greatly. A good example of this is when we sent in ground troops and the cause for this. People back in the States were told we sent them in to protect American assets but to the people on the front line were told to kill the Viet Cong. I would think we would both agree that to determine fact and fiction one has to look at all aspects and sides through different resources of the information provided to us to truly depict what information is reliable.

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Re: Week 1 - Exaggerations in arguments
by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 1:53 AM

The question, 'how should we deal with conflicting information,' begins for me with the quality if the arguments. I will stipulate that comparing credible conflicting information poses problems, however my analysis of the AIM Historian video found exaggeration in arguments troubling and hard to get past. For example:

From the AIM Historian video, Steven Morris, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, states that, "If we

recognize the fact that he (Ho Chi Mehn) was primarily a communist, we understand why his victory constituted a great setback for the cause of human rights in his part of the world, because as a communist he felt it necessary to use massive violence against non-communists who might potentially threaten his power.” (AIM Historian “Morris”)

In this statement I believe Morris needs to make the case that being a communist means it becomes necessarily to use massive violence against non-communists that threaten your power. Ho Chi Mehn probably did use massive violence on his enemies, but not necessarily because he was communist. The U.S. can unleash some pretty massive violence on their enemies too, and nobody’s accusing the U.S. of being communist.

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Re: Week 1 - Exaggerating 2, Heston on Dien

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 3:03 AM

In the AIM video, Charlton Heston criticizes PBS for purposely portraying South Vietnam President Diem in an unfairly negative way. While Heston narrates in the background, the offending PBS video is shown to support his point. In the video, President Diem is seen at Andrews Air Force Base being met by President Eisenhower. The two presidents are shown speaking briefly to the crowd using microphones on an elevated platform, then together they get into the back seat of an open convertible and drive away. During the all of this, Heston narrates: “The way in which the series introduces Premier Dien undermines his authority as a nationalist leader. He’s shown arriving at Andrews Air Force Base where he’s welcomed by President Eisenhower; the message is Dien, the puppet, has come to Washington to see the man who pulls the strings.”

For Heston to suggest PBS intentionally used this footage to show Diem as an American puppet is an interpretation I find unjustified. When I see a U.S. President meet someone at the airport and give them a ride, it does not seem undermining to me.

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Truth from Both Sides

by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 8:09 PM

Similar to politics, history has many sides to the story, and many viewpoints that conflict and attack the other. So often when trying to determine what aspects could be true, I not only research the information provided, but equally important, where the information is coming from. So when watching Accuracy in Media, hearing that it was a “Media Watchdog organization in Washington D.C. representing the consumers of news”, I was immediately skeptical of who actually produced the program and what it contained. They used a celebrity narrator most notably known for being the President of the National Rifle Association, which immediately led me to know that their viewpoint was pro-war, pro-American. So even before any comparisons were made, it was obvious to me what side of the fence this information was coming from.

The broadcast did mention that the PBS series made changes when it was re-aired (13:14), however, this information should have been upfront in their argument against the series instead of barely being touched on. Instead of using proof of the series not getting information accurate, they chose to present their information with flashy graphics and ominous music any time Communist footage was being shown. As history repeats itself, the way the information in this video was presented was very reminiscent of how Terrorism was presented after 9/11.

If, however, a person did not notice these aspects, it is up to them to look at the facts that were presented on all accounts. A couple of noticeable variations between the texts of this course and this video would need to be addressed. The first is during the video's interview with Dolf Droge, who talks about Vietnam only knowing who Ho Chi Minh was for roughly a year's time. However, in Episode 1 it is mentioned that Nguyen Ai Quoc was a well known Nationalist and it was revealed that he in fact was Ho Chi Minh which increased his acclaim.

Another interview during Accuracy in Media that had some omissions was that of William Stearman, who in opposition spoke of words that Ho Chi Minh said near the end of his life in 1969, attempting to solidify the position that Ho was always devoted to Communism and the Soviets. However, Stearman failed to recall that Ho himself when speaking to his people on the day of their declaration of independence quoted several lines from the United States, showing he was at the time willing to work with and maintain a relationship with the U.S. Both the PBS series and Herring mention this as well (Herring, p.8).

So knowing where your information comes from, knowing how the information is being manipulated, whether it be music, graphics, or using stock footage to make your point, it is important when dealing with history to remember that there are always conflicting arguments, and history can be completely different for each individual.



Necessary Research for Accuracy
by Adam Mellott - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 10:31 PM

After watching the AIM video, it seemed to have a strong bias toward the PBS video series *Vietnam: A Television History* in respect to how Ho Chi Minh was not portrayed as a true “bad-guy” from the get-go as he should have been. Charlton Heston states that the PBS series “glossed over the negative side of Ho Chi Minh’s career” and Dolf Droge, Agency for International Development (AID), elaborates on how Ho Chi Minh betrayed his so-called Nationalist allies to the French Security Police showing his true Communist direction in life (AIM Heston and Droge). AIM’s pathway seems to take the PBS video series objective of utilizing 13 1-hour episodes to breakdown the Vietnam war and try to re-focus on specific parts of they series that they feel should have been elaborated on in more depth. This is a legitimate concern and warrants explanation, especially when Bruce Loeb, Department of Speech Communications, Idaho State University, makes the comment that “every myth has to have a hero, and in the PBS series it is clearly Ho Chi Minh. Every myth has to have a villain, and the villain in the PBS piece, of course, is South Vietnam and the United States” (AIM Loeb). These statements provide neither resolution or peace from the war itself for Americans, but do tend to question the PBS video’s accuracy.

The PBS video series lays out a fairly accurate timeline of events for individuals, like myself, learning about the Vietnam war but does have some moments that cause frustration and a feeling that the U.S. was completely in the wrong. Having the ability to utilize the AIM video, the PBS video series *Vietnam: A Television History* as well as the Herring book and the individual accounts from the Appy book allows us a broader and more accurate depiction of the war from a variety of angles allowing for some clarification. All sources are necessary to gain a better understanding of what really happened.



Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy
by Dylan Kohn - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 8:48 PM

I agree that it is difficult to both trust and accept some of the actions of our country during the Vietnam era after reading some of the aspects in the Herring book as well as viewing the PBS series. So do you think that the AIM video is responding more to the negativity towards the U.S. than actually being upset about Ho Chi Minh's portrayal in the series? To me it seems rather coincidental that there is protesting over a film that doesn't show the United States in the highest regard, primarily because we still see this type of demonstration in the War on Terrorism.

Because we both agree that the Herring book provides a relatively accurate timeline, I'm also curious as to how you respond to the Appy book and the memoirs of those directly involved in the war. Whether or not any of the stories we've read there would in your opinion lean one way or the other when discussing the PBS or AIM series.

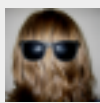


Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy
by Adam Mellott - Saturday, April 18, 2015, 9:56 PM

I know what you mean. When compiling notes from the AIM Video and cross-referencing some of its key concepts with the the PBS Vietnam series, I seemed to get a main point of frustration and focus that Charlton Heston and the AIM video gravitated towards. This point becomes vivid when Bruce Loeb, Department of Speech Communications at Idaho State University, states that “every myth has to have a hero, and in the PBS series it is clearly Ho Chi Minh. Every myth has to have a villain, and in the PBS piece, of course it is South Vietnam and the U.S.” (AIM). However, if you just watch the PBS video series four historical reference, you see more of a timeline of events without the focus on one specific target as the AIM video does.

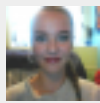
I truly enjoy reading the accounts in the APPY book. This book brings a level of intrigue, and having this book as a resource allows one to expand on the video content and get language directly from the source, at times, as well as from both Vietnam and American sources. I cannot say that they make me lean one way or another, but they do definitely help to clarify some of the vague references that are touched on during the videos.

Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy
by Thomas Brokaw - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 9:08 PM



When you say the PBS video has moments that “cause frustration and a feeling that the U.S. was completely in the wrong,” they probably were. Unless you accept Charlton Heston’s assertion that PBS is altering history to satisfy a liberal narrative. I believe Heston would say Vietnam was a war against a threat of world domination from a single, massive International Communist group that included the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and North Vietnam, all controlled from headquarters in Moscow; and Ho Chi Mihn is simply one of their soldiers. Or, Heston was wrong and had no evidence to support his assumptions regarding sinister motives by PBS. I have, however, noticed that since South Vietnam did fall in 1975 to the North, predictions from Conservatives that Communists must be stopped in Vietnam or Communism would spread to other countries, never happened.

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Facts vs. Opinions
by [Leah Boysen](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 12:37 PM

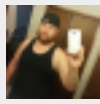
I believe I’ve ask myself this question before, how do we trust the information or the facts that others are giving us? There are many examples that show us, the programs that we should be able to trust with the truth of facts, we cannot. Some examples of this are shown in the (AIM video), when the video talks about how (PBS)made a documentary video about Vietnam, and that PBS acted like they didn't know everything that was going on in Vietnam and with Ho Chi Mehn, and in the end of the (PBS)documentary they relieved these unbelievable facts, that they already knew, but just pretended and played along. Now this video was released in the 80’s, however this fact of not giving your audience the honest truth, has been going on a very long time, and is still going on today. Another example is the documentary (Corporations) which tells people about how big name companies like Fox news doesn’t have their audiences best interest in mind and hides facts. Now this has a lot do with the government, however back to the question about how do we know what we're learning in this class about Vietnam is the truth, in the weekly videos I found them really matching up with the book (Herring) information. Knowing that there are companies that don’t want their audiences do know the whole truth, it can be tricky to know if what your learning is the truth.

Will with our class as an example and our material were learning from, the book Herring and the weekly video’s theres information that Im getting multiply times from each source. I also think another thing to think about is the weekly videos and the (Herring)book are giving you facts about what happened, the producers or the authors aren't telling you how they feel, or if they think something was stupid, others being documented or wrote about in these medias may have said their opinions on certain things, but the producers or authors are just stating that, their not commenting on it and giving their opinions. So I think this is something major when learning another, is if a certain opinion or bias is coming up over and over again or is being pushed in your face, it may not be giving all the facts or the truth may not be presented, and your opinion could have been different.

With other the book, this could get tricky, however the (Appy) book is about people who were involved in Vietnam and their story, and yes its stating opinions and how they felt. However its not the whole book stating peoples opinions that are the same over and over again, it tells you about American soldiers, it tells you about Vietnam citizens, Vietnam soldiers, and people going over to Vietnam it gives you a lot of different opinions so you can not only learn from them, but come up with some of your own opinions.

Learning is such an important skill throughout your whole life, and finding good sources is a skill in itself. So with just our class in mind, I think we are getting real historical information, but I can only state this opinion from what I’ve learned so far.

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resolving the conflict
by [Kevin Cargill](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 8:17 PM

My approach to this topic, and digesting the information I am receiving in it, is the same as my approach to life in general... that there is a happy medium. What I mean by this is that in every situation there are at least two points of view, possibly more, and most times these views conflict. They may only conflict in part, or may be polar opposites of the same occurrence, but they all have some middle ground, where the stories converge and a moment of truth may be found. But I find the importance lies more in what you take away from the overall experience, and not so much the “truth” that may have been found along the way. I give for example some contradictions I seem to have found between the pbs video 3 “LBJ Goes to war” and firsthand accounts from the Redmond story in the Appy book (pgs 48-49). The video, to me, depicts the North

Vietnamese as cold hearted murders that went from town to town working their way south pillaging, plundering, and killing all the way. While Redmond’s recounting of the experience shows it to be more of political propaganda on Americas behalf, wherein we moved a million people to a place where they had no homes, no family, and no jobs, just so we could look like the hero’s on the home front... my point is it doesn’t matter whose view of the situation is correct, but that we look at both views and pull the facts from those views and build a truth around that.

In regards to the questions posed about the books helping us along our path to historical accuracy, I have found in specific the Appy book to be immensely helpful in this aspect. Although some of the opinions may be skewed by time or perspective, overall firsthand accounts speak pretty powerfully to me. When you add to this all the information as it is presented, (by this I mean this sort of step by step year by year break down of the entire war) in the herring book along with the videos, though they may contradict at points, I find the entirety of the information starts to paint an overall picture (the middle ground) that allows you to look past small particular details of the situation that may be at odds, and find the overall truth, and how it impacts you.

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Re: resolving the conflict
by Christina Bergman - Friday, April 17, 2015, 2:57 PM

Kevin, I profoundly agree with you. While I was writing my initial post, I felt like I was answering the questions, but I had a nagging feeling that I was missing some concept, even after it was done. But, after reading your post, I realized that you’ve articulated what I could not. I agree that it’s important to “converge” the stories, as you say, and find “a moment of truth” only after a confluence of the stories has been achieved. I also agree with you when you say that, “...the importance lies more in what you take away from the overall experience, and not so much the “truth” that may have been found along the way.” After reading this, the feeling that I was missing something disappeared. It was a total, “Aha!” moment. Because it really is just as important to figure out your own opinions about something as it is to figure out others’. If you just put together a list of facts, if any of them conflict with each other, there’s no way of changing that, no way of figuring out the “truth”, without forming an opinion. And I think that’s really the key to putting all of this information together into a cohesive story and learning from it. Only after you’ve done that can you take something away from the experience, otherwise it just remains information, and that's what is most important.

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Conflicting Information
by Christina Bergman - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 8:32 PM

When presented with conflicting information, it can be very difficult to figure out the truth. I find it is most important in such a situation to really consider: What is the truth? What does that really mean? For every person involved in something, the “truth” of the matter can be different. They may all be witnessing the same event, but that does not mean that they are having the same experience. People have biases and it’s best to see their “facts” not as facts at first, but as claims to be evaluated. It is also good to be aware of your own biases and recognize when you are not being fully objective about a subject. In this class, we are lucky to have many references to learn from, which I think is the best way to receive information. Although, learning from multiple sources presents a problem. After a while you might end up with an awkward patchwork of information. However, it is better to be able to see the gaps, contradictions, or falsehoods in a story than never have the opportunity to question its completeness. It isn’t better to believe in just one side of the story and dismiss all the rest because there is usually at least some truth in all of them. We can use our textbooks to interpret the information presented in the videos and pool all of the information to create a more complete story. Even though there may be differences when it comes to some things, there is still much information that is presented as more or less the same. For example, (I know this is very obvious, but it works for an example’s sake) none of the sources deny that Ho Chi Minh was a communist. And both the videos and the Herring book give facts to support that idea, so it is hard to believe that “Ho Chi Minh was a communist” is an illegitimate claim. But, when it comes to how important that denomination was to him and how much or what he did in the pursuit of making Vietnam a communist country, opinions vary fairly dramatically. It is clear from the PBS videos that they believed communism to be of secondary importance to Ho Chi Minh. In an interview with Abbot Low Moffat he blatantly says in regards to Ho Chi Minh that “...he was first a nationalist and second a communist.” (*Vietnam: A Television History* Episode 1). But, the AIM video makes it clear that they strongly disagree with that view. Stephen Morris makes it plain that he argues that Ho Chi Minh was primarily communist and Dolf Drodge tells us about how Ho Chi Minh would betray Vietnamese nationalists to the French and how he even turned around and protested against one of their arrests, making it seem like his nationalism was a complete ruse (AIM historians Morris, Drodge). Even though these are contradicting views, now that we are aware of them, we can consider both possibilities, fact check using our books, and merge the information to create a more cohesive story that is maybe not as simple and straight-forward, but more accurate

because it takes into consideration more than one view

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Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth

by [Jessica Seiler](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 8:57 PM

Identifying reliable sources of information

Identifying reliable sources of information on historic events is not an easy task. While we are told that the media is required to follow ethical standards that dictate factual and unbiased news reporting, readers bare the responsibility of measuring the media's compliancy with that standard. When identifying which sources are truly reliable, I believe we need to consider a variety of factors including the source's authority and source of funding, the inclusion of emotional or personal biases or opinions of the author or editor, and the source's proven record of accuracy and balanced reporting. PBS' production of Vietnam: A Television History summarized the major events of the war in a 13-part series. PBS has a long history of news reporting and seems to be well regarded and trusted. Accuracy in Media (AIM), a media watchdog, provided a rebuttal to the PBS production by attacking many components of it. AIM's website specifically states that it is a "politically conservative" organization, which may result in biased interpretations of the PBS' production. Both publications had some negative or emotionally charged content. The PBS series starts by setting a negative view of the Vietnam War by stating it was one "without front lines or clear objectives" (PBS Series 1). While the AIM rebuttal had some interesting points, such as pointing out that the PBS series did little to draw attention to the horrific treatment of American prisoners of war, it lost credibility when it told us that the "imposition of communist rule inevitably results in human tragedy." (AIM). While many would agree, it is not necessarily a statement of fact as much as it is an observation or opinion.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth

by [Daniel Hovet](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 12:58 AM

I have to agree with Jessica's point towards the end of her post- I almost made my first post about the same thing- and upon reading the other posts here, I believe there are a number of people who feel similarly. That point is that while the AIM video may have raised some interesting points/highlighted previously unmentioned information, the admittedly politically-oriented nature of the AIM group cast a shadow over the content; there were a number of times where political points seemed to be being argued rather than historical ones. When someone making an argument is known to hold certain beliefs/ideological views, it reflects on the argument; one needs to look at it more closely. The best way to deal with a conflict like the AIM video and the PBS series is to learn more about the subject, from as many places as you can. More information never hurts, and the picture can sometimes be cleared up by adding greater detail.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Different sources and non-bias lenses

by [Timothy Conway](#) - Saturday, April 18, 2015, 5:17 PM

Daniel, I agree with you and Jessica in the fact that arguments can be obscured by someone or some company's beliefs and ideological views. The AIM film was a good example of that. It seemed to have a strong conservative and "hawkish" view on Vietnam and Communism. The AIM film was clearly one sided as well, and the "facts" presented tends to be discounted from the beginning. The PBS series seemed to be providing both views and first hand accounts from the people that lived through and helped make policies on the Vietnam War. The more first hand accounts that are provided should and will lend more qualifications to the information provided, such as in the book *Patriots*.

We academically must not automatically discount information being provided because of the beliefs or political ideologies of a source and look at the information through a non bias lens. Take Fox News for example: there are millions of people in America that will not watch it because of its more conservative stance, and others will not watch CNN because of its liberal stance. As consumers of news and "facts" that are presented by both of these media outlets we should cross check these "facts" and determine what is true our selves. All though there are opinions in academia, there are underlying hard facts that provide the solid foundation of truth. That truth becomes knowledge. Knowledge is the ultimate goal of being a student and scholar, so we owe it to ourselves to take our bias lenses off, examine the evidence and decide what is fact or fiction.



Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth
by [Kevin Cargill](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 4:20 PM

i totally agree. it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the truth from the propaganda in this day and age. i don't want to get on some conspiracy theorist rant here, but the media is obviously the fourth branch of the government, the media is told what to tell to the masses and the average person believes every word of it. i believe national media outlets are a poor place to start ones search if truth is truly the goal. start with books written by people who witnessed the accounts first hand, or books written by someone who interviewed a witness to the event and then formulated there opinions to the situation, thus giving you three perspectives of the situation, yours the interviewers and the eye witnesses.... and so on and so fourth, and then lastly if you feel your search is not complete, then use main stream media, hopefully main stream media without a political bias...but god luck



Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth
by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 6:13 PM

You bring up a really good point here about first hand information. I agree that it's the best place to start. Most likely, that's what's going to be the least skewed. I always like to compare information to the game of "telephone". The farther along the line it travels, the more it probably changes. So, the closer you are to the source, the better off you'll be.



Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth
by [Neil Pena](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 11:39 PM

To identify bias in the media can be a tricky thing. For the most part ideas and facts can be taken out of context and thrown in a quote to better the stance of a certain view in the media. A huge example of media and the news can be seen from Fox news and CNN news because the view is adhering to a population of people that don't further look into the facts. PBS tries to give a point of view that stays factual but the problem with that is it only shows the one point of view. In the Appy book there is available information from both points of view that one can draw a conclusion and determine what are facts and what is just inferences from fact. One instance in the Aim video portrays the president of Vietnam in a negative way and doesn't factually state anything but opinions. I find that to draw conclusions from more academic text such as the Appy book in giving relevant information rather than opinionated. When it was mentioned that the PBS series had made changes to the original broadcast I found that the things said must have been stated in a way that could have been misinterpreted and for that reason people could have drawn conclusions that were not intended because of the lack to look into the facts more. Skepticism of certain opinions stated in the media can help a better understanding of the facts and makes available the distinctions between fact and fiction. When there are citations of certain information to prove there point as it does in America's Longest War gives a little more ease to figuring out the stance on the subject. The quote, "while the administration studied various choices, pressures mounted for expanded American involvement in Vietnam." From that line you can depict that it was formulated to bring you to a side because they never mention exactly what choices directly initiate the pressures. The best way to determine fact and opinion is to just research the sources and ask questions about the material presented in front of you. Questions of, where did you find this information and how is this conclusion drawn from fact can help form a more well-rounded stance on a subject.



Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth
by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 8:57 PM

I agree it is difficult to determine fact and truth in current media outlets, and often times it is because these media outlets are for profit in their reporting. So if they can be wild and outlandish and get viewers, subscribers, and followers, they've done their job. Even media categories like sports have the over-the-top opinionated personalities to rise a reaction from the viewer. I like that you caught on to some of these aspects, and that you see that both AIM & PBS don't necessarily

have to prove their point but they just have to provide doubt to the opposite stance.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Week 1 - editing does not mean plot
by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 11:54 PM

In the AIM video, at the end, Elbridge Durbrow, US Ambassador to Vietnam from 1957-1961 says he believes an important part of the Vietnam story has been left out: the part where Hanoi denied its involvement with fighting in South Vietnam in 1961. I believe he would have told a different story because he had a different perspective. Charlton Heston seems to want to turn omissions from the PBS documentary as some kind of anti-American subversive plot, where I do not see the evidence for a plot.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Want the Truth? Cast a Wide Net and Cross Your Fingers.
by [Daniel Hovet](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 12:57 PM

It is important to be well-versed when trying to deal with conflicting information in the historical record. One needs to learn from an abundance of sources about any one subject; each source will have its own particular emphasis or viewpoint, intentionally or otherwise. By gathering as much information as possible, one can start to fill in the gaps from one source, or see behind the words of another.

Consider how in the AIM video, Charlton Heston argues that the PBS series whitewashed Ho Chi Minh and placed him upon the pedestal of being a hero. While the AIM video does reveal some things that were not mentioned in the other sources, such as Ho Chi Minh's dubious past, where he collaborated with the French for financial gain, assisting in the arrest of Vietnamese nationalists, such as Phan Boi Chau. However, Heston seems to want to place Ngo Dinh Diem on that same pedestal of heroism, discussing his popularity in 1954 as a nationalist and including Edward Lansdale's account of how Diem was known for his "honesty" and "strength of character". This conveniently avoids any reference to when he was actually in power, whereupon the PBS series, the Herring Book, and the Appy book all make compelling cases of his growing repression, unreasoning attitude, oligarchial tendencies and isolation. Consider: "[Diem] retreated...into isolation, relying almost exclusively on Nhu [his brother], a frail and sinister man who tended toward paranoia and delusions of grandeur" (p.112, Herring). Around this time, both North *and* South Vietnam were engaged in "morally ambiguous" behavior (to use a euphemism). The NLF were indiscriminate with their assassinations and terror attacks, and Nhu's secret police were truly draconian, for instance.

So one should always cast their net as widely as possible, use as many primary sources as they can (one of the reasons I like the Appy book so much is its first hand accounts, to which there are both upsides and downsides), and be mindful.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: Want the Truth? Cast a Wide Net and Cross Your Fingers.
by [Bradley O'Connor](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 6:31 PM

I strongly agree with what Daniel has to say. I believe one should use as many sources as they can. I also relate to Daniel as he states how he likes the Appy book because you get a wide variety of knowledge from each of the first hand accounts. These accounts allow for better learning as we begin to realize what was actually going on in peoples heads at this time. I have to say reading these accounts are very interesting and I feel like I am gaining more and more respect for these people through every reading.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Want the Truth? Cast a Wide Net and Cross Your Fingers.
by [Jessica Seiler](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 2:21 PM

I agree as well. In order to make something "reliable" one must use as many sources as possible to get a wide variety of information with less margin of error for biased information. A history book may give 100% try information but the writers of there text books are simply regurgitating basic knowledge of events from the past. Appy, on the other hand, is giving people the chance to knowledge us on what happened at these events during their eyes. Information that we regularly wouldn't read from a textbook. It shows the pure intentions of these people and not just

the political side of these events.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Want the Truth? Cast a Wide Net and Cross Your Fingers.

by [Kevin Cargill](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 4:04 PM

i would have to agree as well. i try to look at it like a puzzle that we are trying to put together. all of the stories have some pieces to the puzzle, but no one story has every piece. therefore the more point of references we take on, the more pieces of the puzzle we have, and the better the end picture looks.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Want the Truth? Cast a Wide Net and Cross Your Fingers.

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:38 PM

I believe it is reasonable to cast your wide net, but not necessarily accept all versions and aim for the middle. In the case of the AIM video, I found their motives to be suspect, their reasons for their beliefs unsubstantiated and their conclusions flawed. AIM showed film footage of Ho Chi Mihn with high-level Communists in Moscow and from there assumptions flowed.

Ho apparently did turn in Nationalist Phan Boi Chau to the French, as Dolf Droge says in the AIM video. That move is the basis for the conservative argument that Ho was a Moscow controlled Communist and not a Nationalist. After all, would a true Nationalist cause serious problems for another Nationalist? Would Mitch McConnell cause problems for President Obama, both Nationalists? Ho's nationalist vision may have been different that Chau's, but to have assumed Ho took out Chau because Ho was Communist and Chau a Nationalist seemed to be unjustified.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Necessary Research for Accuracy - II

by [Adam Mellott](#) - Saturday, April 18, 2015, 1:51 PM

Following all of the posts and comments, all of the references that we given to watch (AIM and PBS videos) and review (Appy and Herring books) compliment each other yet have their own key points thus filling in the blanks. I truly see where each has its strengths, PBS video tends to lean toward the US being in the aggressor, the AIM video points the direction of aggression is Ho Chi Minh, while the books give a broader history behind both. Although I am still reading through the books, one thing for certain is that without all of the sources compiled and the points of view from all angles revealed, this would be a lot harder to follow than it already is.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy - II

by [Daniel Hovet](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 12:41 PM

Something that occurred to me with regards to the nature of the sources we are using in this class is that when compared to the Appy book and the Herring book in particular, the PBS series contains dramatically less information than the books. Of course, this is due to it being a television series, with a limited run time, where only so many words can be spoken over the course of an episode; also, some would say that since it is a visual medium whereas the books are not, there will obviously be less of a focus on the actual detailed information, and more of an attempt to create an experience for the viewer, with visuals and sounds (and in all honesty probably a considerable amount of editing). This can be a very good thing; for instance, a audiovisual recording of someone giving a speech will reveal body language, tone of voice, and much else that simply could not be obtained by reading a transcript of that speech.

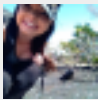
Consider how in the PBS series second episode, we see an excerpt from an interview with Henry Cabot Lodge, the ambassador to Vietnam at the time of Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination. It lasts about a minute or two, with Lodge detailing how he tried to help out Diem when he called him the night of November 1st, just after the coup had begun. Lodge makes a great deal about how he tried to reason with Diem, and offered him protection, escape, and/or asylum, all of which Diem refused. That's the last we hear about that in the PBS series. The Herring book, on p.130, casts this whole thing in a very different light then what I had originally thought; the book claims Lodge deceived Diem about how much he knew, and allowed the coup orchestrators to decide Diem's fate, despite what he claims to have said over the

phone.

Now, I am not sure exactly what the exact story here is, and maybe no one does, but the point is, I would never have known there was more to the story if I hadn't also read the Herring book. This is just an example, just *one* example, I am **not necessarily** implying either source doctored facts or mislead the viewer/reader. Again, the point is that some mediums and sources, i.e., a television series, simply cannot usually give as much information as one could obtain from other sources. This is another reason why one should partake of as many sources as one can- because of the limitations of the mediums involved.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy - II

by [Jessica Seiler](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 2:26 PM

It's interesting that while reading your post I thought of the saying, "there's three sides to every story, your side, my side, and the "right" side." In order to fully understand an event that is being told in a history book or even in a video, there needs to be a lot more information than just viewing it from one side. Not only should we see it from every side, like how you mentioned how different sources viewed it differently, we need to be able to see the views of people involved that don't have political standings. Hence why the Appy book is so great.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy - II

by [Bradley O'Connor](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 5:08 PM

Jessica, I agree immensely with what you're saying here. There is always so many sides to a story whether it's your side, my side or the "right" side. The apply book shows us what many never understood, and that was the point of view from these people being apart of it all. We all have our thoughts and opinions as well as everyone else, but when we get to view the ones of the many people who were involved you start to realize that there is so much we don't even know.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Necessary Research for Accuracy - II

by [Adam Mellott](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 6:41 PM

Taking it a step further, when you dive into the Herring book, which explicitly describes each of these situations in detail, it truly brings the picture of what happened to life. An example would be reading about the assassination of Diem and his brother Nhu which is well explained, including its reasoning, in chapter 3 (128-131). This is what makes it so nice to have all of the sources to get a full picture.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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PBS, Herring info vs. Why Vietnam?

by [Timothy Conway](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 9:58 PM

To continue on Adam's point, the Herring book does a great job of explaining the Tonkin Gulf incidents. The Johnson Administration portrayed it as "unprovoked attacks on the U.S. ships innocently steaming in international waters." (Herring: p.146) This is the main stream view of what provoked the U.S. in the Vietnam War. After watching the PBS series and reading *America's Longest War* by George C. Herring this was new information to me and was presented by two different reliable sources. So I would take this as the true report of what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin. "The United States may not have been seeking to provoke another attack, but it did not go out of its way either, the administration kept the destroyers close to North Vietnamese shores, where they were vulnerable to attack." (Herring: p.147) This was also presented in the PBS series episode 3 *L.B.J Goes to War*. In the web video *Why Vietnam?* This incident was not fully described and the in-depth report was not portrayed in this video, it was used as propaganda to justify the United States into escalating the war. Having the PBS series, the Herring book and the Appy book as resources in the study of the Vietnam War are good tools to learn from and in determining the truth.

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