




Jump to...

Fall 2010 ► HST 195 F10 (Escobar META 21581 24392) ► Forums ► Forum 1 Past Week's Discussions ► Determining the truth



Search forums

Display replies in nested form

Move this discussion to ...


**Determining the truth**  
 by [Joe Escobar](#) - Sunday, 10 October 2010, 12:39 PM

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? How can your two textbooks help you to approach this video information and be confident that you are learning accurate historical knowledge?

[Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)


**Re: Determining the truth**  
 by [Spencer Smith](#) - Monday, 11 October 2010, 05:28 PM

The first thing I do when I see conflicting historical data is look at multiple sources. For example if some one were to come up to me and say that President Clinton was not impeached during his presidency, I would immediately know that it was an untrue statement, because there are so many sources that say otherwise, it would be foolish to disregard so many factual sources. Another example is if someone was saying that we never landed on the moon and the whole NASA program was a lie. It might be fun to talk about, but to academically look at history one has to look at multiple sources and give an informed opinion rather than relying on a television show they watched or something they heard someone say because it leads to myths which is counter-productive from a historical stand point.

The 29 minute video segment we watched was a basic assault on the PBS documentary series we have been assigned to watch. There were several misleading statements made on the program, but the one that stood out to me the most is when the video claimed that Ngo Dinh Diem was falsely portrayed on the documentary as a puppet, an elitist and also claimed that he in fact did not refuse to hold elections. As I stated earlier, when dealing with conflicting information its best to look at multiple sources and see what it has to say. The other two sources that we all have readily available is our textbooks, so I searched for what the textbooks specifically said about this conflict between the two videos. In the Herring book it basically denounces how the video "Accuracy in the Media" portrayed Diem and sided almost completely with the PBS documentary. To give you specific examples, on page 59 it refers to Diem as, "lacking many of the qualities required for the imposing challenges he faced," it goes on to add that, "he was an elitist who had little sensitivity to the needs and problems of the Vietnamese people," and also "He had no blue print for building a modern nation or mobilizing his people. Introverted and self-absorbed, he lacked the charisma of Ho Chi Minh." So as far as the allegation by Charlton Heston that Diem was not an elitist and was falsely portrayed by PBS, the Herring book contradicts this notion. The Herring book also conflicts with the video as to whether Diem refused to hold elections and was seen as an American puppet. On page 66 it clearly states that, "With firm American backing, Diem also blocked the elections called for by the Geneva Accords. Such a position was awkward for the United States, given its traditional advocacy for free elections." Not only does the Herring book contradict many of the allegations the video insisted on, but also our other textbook "Patriots" seemed to echo its contradictions. On page 46 it discusses how Diem spent 4 years studying in New Jersey and how the United States was instrumental in securing his leadership role. More importantly it sheds light on the fact that Diem manipulated elections, "While claiming Communists could not be trusted to participate in fair elections, Diem held his own rigged vote and made himself President of South Vietnam."

While I only looked at the two textbooks we were assigned, I feel that the video "Accuracy in the Media" wasn't a valid source for historical data. The video's motives seemed to be more about promoting the hatred of Communism than an objective analysis of the facts. No matter what one reads it is always going to be slanted in some way shape or form. There is no such thing as a book or video that is 100% un-bias. As humans we are naturally bias sub-consciously, no matter how objective we try to be. But "Accuracy in the Media" went over the line. When one's main objective is to destroy some one's work I always question not only their validity, but also their historical merit.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...


**Re: Determining the truth**  
 by [Jinny Mc Kenzie](#) - Tuesday, 12 October 2010, 03:16 PM

I think you make a strong point in asserting that we, as humans, lack the ability to be completely un-biased. I find it interesting that so many academics have presented us with this concept and yet so often we still believe that media

and literary presentations are usually unbiased factual representations.

I also agree that the *Accuracy in Media* program was bent on perpetuating anti-communist rhetoric, and while I feel that way strongly I have to acknowledge that those feelings are to some degree influenced by my own political and philosophical beliefs. It is a double edged sword that we must all live with and yet I think there is a common balance that we can find if we can come to a place of recognition of all humans sharing equal rights to autonomy. Who are we as a nation to determine what political structure is right for anyone else? Is capitalism such a great option? We certainly don't seem better off for it. Why can't we come to a place of honesty where we can openly express to another country our desires and needs for access to some of it's resources and thereby open up the possibility, and I would go so far as to say probability, of fair trade rather than going to war under false pretense. In my opinion, true globalization will involve cooperative coexistence that eradicates the need for nationalism which I truly believe erodes our sense of humanitarianism.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 12:22 AM

I don't think that we can completely rule out the information presented to us in the Accuracy in the Media clip even though it did come off as anti-communist as well as bitter over the PBS series. It did have a couple of valid points. Bruce Low talked about how the United States was not bound to the constituents of the Geneva accord and how President Eisenhower was not a party to the convention. Which is fairly true, we read in the Herring book that the delegates from the U.S. were there only as an "interested nation" and "not as a belligerent or a principal in the negotiations" (pg 46). And that "the United States refused to associate themselves with the formal agreements" (pg 49). As to the references to Diem and his puppet government status I completely agree with you. Further evidence supporting the fact that Diem was an elitist is provided in the Herring book on pages 58 and 59. He was born into an imperial family, went to high ranking schools and when he was in office he could not connect to his people. His understanding of the effects left behind by the French were minimal, he wanted Vietnam to be imperial again. Definitely a person who could not understand the suffering of the Vietnamese in the south.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Heidi Zumbum](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 10:30 AM

Thanks for sharing Spencer. I really appreciate that you went into specifics regarding Diem. You demonstrated perfectly how to cross-reference information and more importantly, apply your own reasoning to the information. I also happen to agree with your conclusion that Diem, with help from the US, hindered elections and was unofficially a puppet at our command. During the 'containment' of Communism, the US used this approach in many countries, especially in South America. We gave power to dictators in the name of battling Communism, destroying whole nations along the way. I am glad that we are able to now study the war in Vietnam and see all sides of the conflict, not just the anti-Communist propaganda that was put out by the US government at the time.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jared Hall](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 07:15 PM

I agree with you that the Accuracy in the Media clip was biased and anti-communist and with that lost a lot of credibility. It was story about Ho Chi Minh while in China was interesting to me, but, with this time in history being so controversial, it's difficult to what's true.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jinny Mc Kenzie](#) - Tuesday, 12 October 2010, 02:59 PM

I am not a history buff, and so, when information is presented to me as historical fact I have to take it at face value that the person relaying this information is presenting it to me in what they believe to be the historical truth. That said, I recognize that we all view life from our own unique perspective and so my truth may not be the same as anyone else. In order to determine what my truth is when presented with conflicting information I believe it is important to utilize many resources, from common sense to documented proof. It is easy to find evidence to support almost any point of view, and rarely are we able to override our own prejudices and favor evidence against our beliefs. Yet the ability to open-mindedly review the evidence on both sides of an issue and weigh them without prejudice is the only legitimate academic course of action; we must be willing to be proven wrong.

In the video *Accuracy in Media* we are presented with one perspective on the truth. This perspective is a pro-American, pro-War, anti-communist perspective presented by Charlton Heston as historical fact. This video criticizes the PBS series for presenting a one-sided perspective of Vietnam that is “nothing...an American can be proud of,” instead focusing on anti-communist rhetoric purported to be the foundational cause of the war in Vietnam. This criticism is made while this video also presents a one-sided perspective of the war that is set up to glorify and rationalize American involvement in Vietnam as somehow heroic and noble. This phenomenon is common in the written history of the United States – the blind refusal to view our actions with a critical eye, instead pretending that all measures carried out by the US government and military are righteous and warranted. The books by both *Appy* and *Herring* challenge this phenomenon and require the reader to use critical analysis to come to conclusions about the war, particularly in the *Appy* book where we are invited into the memories of those willing to recount their personal experiences in Vietnam. The *Herring* book adds great credibility to what I’ve viewed thus far in the PBS videos mainly as a result of the credentials of the author himself.

Ultimately we must use our own judgment in determining the truth. I believe that there is some truth to be garnered from both sides of the argument. For instance, the Vietnamese who protested the PBS series in New Orleans likely had genuine dissonance with the materials that were presented in the series. But I would question the political alliances those Vietnamese hold. It seems logical to assume that many of the Vietnamese that relocated to the United States after the war were Christians, not Communists, and so more likely to disagree with the presentation made. We cannot then generalize and assume that all or even a majority of Vietnamese would share this sentiment, which is what I felt was being insinuated. So here we see that there is documented proof that some Vietnamese did protest the PBS series, but my common sense tells me that this is not concrete evidence of general Vietnamese condemnation of it. In this way I feel confident that I am making accurate assessments of the history of the Vietnam war as it has been presented thus far by being critical and analytical of the information presented.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Tuesday, 12 October 2010, 06:48 PM

When it comes down to history, there seems to always be more than one side to it, or definitely more than one story. So with conflicting information, I tend to ask questions in my head if this seems factual or not. This not being the best way to do so, I may turn to more resources on the Internet or a book. The two textbooks can help me approach the video information and being confident in the information I am learning about this historical knowledge by comparing the two stories. If they seem similar to the other source I am questioning, then I tend to believe it more, because there seems to be more proof that it actually happened. It is like getting two peoples sides of a story in a crime, ask them separately and individually what happened and if both stories are similar then the chances of it being true are more so than not. This may not be the best way to see if the information I am learning is true or not, because the writer may have used the videos as something to look at in writing the book or not, that's why we have got to keep our eyes peeled for something sketchy, which I must admit when reading and watching, I have a really hard time in doing so. I tend to believe what I see more so then read so that is something I need to work on.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Josiah Woods](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 06:18 PM

Total truth, there is always more than one side to every story, history or not. I found that asking yourself questions while reading is one of the best ways to absorb information. I agree it's always good to check resources such as internet and books when there are conflicting sides to a story.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Josiah Woods](#) - Tuesday, 12 October 2010, 08:54 PM

I like the question, and I enjoyed the challenge of thinking up the best answer. History repeats itself, is an age old saying. If that's true, which it is, (old habits die hard, the circle of life) so if history repeats itself, than we can obviously see a pattern if we look back into time. Assassinations, art, evolution, etc. theirs many factors that play into unraveling history. The main thing I've come to find out, is that the History of the world is best described through story: Which stories sound the same: Which points in history stand out and which ones have the most credible witnesses. The Mr. Herring book was very useful in the Vietnam war sense (as was the Patriots), because of the credible author and it being the fourth edition: It's History repeating itself and evolving for the greater good.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Todd Lowry](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 11:57 AM

Hello Josiah,

While I understand the point you are making in your post, I am going to respectfully disagree. I don't think that history is cyclical, and finding historical accuracies is as simple as finding patterns in that cycle. I think the saying "history repeats itself" is anecdotal and to broad to be applied to individual events or the causes of armed conflict. While I do agree that similarities exist between conflicts, or even historical events in general, I don't subscribe to the notion that one conflict is a cyclical representation of a previous conflict. Moreover, I see historical record as more or less static and incapable of evolving. Only the interpretation of events can evolve or devolve, not the events themselves. Even then, only as new, credible, substantiated evidence is presented.

Todd Lowry

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 02:58 PM

Josiah,

I like what your saying here, but to a certain extent I have to disagree. I am disagreeing in the cycle of history because I think that, whether it is world history or one's history... for the most part we learn from our mistakes, if we do not like things that have happened we try to prevent them from happening again. I also disagree because we have only lost one war (to my knowledge) so far and its been a good while since the Vietnam and we have been in a few and I have not seen that repeating over. But I do like your ideas and understand where you may be coming from.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Heidi Zumbur](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 10:36 AM

I love the romantic side of history that you describe. To me, the learning of history can be broken down into two groups of people. The first are the fact and date gatherers. These people are studying history in a more scientific way, breaking down meanings and results, finding cause and effect and determining impact of particular actions or chain of events. The other group focuses on the human side of history, gathering their information and concepts from an individualistic standpoint. When history is relatable and not just factual people can find greater value in it. Although some are able to be members of both groups, there is nothing wrong with wanting to examine the past through just one method.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Tuesday, 12 October 2010, 11:54 PM

To academically deal with conflicting information in a historical setting there are really only two ways to go about it. First you check sources and see which ones are more reputable. If the sources end up being equally reliable then you would look at which piece of information is more consistently used in standard works. It is always disconcerting to find conflicting points when looking back at history, it leaves a bad taste in the mouth because we can never be 100% certain

which one is true. Which can lead to weird conspiracy theories and incorrect information being spread around. History is all about "his story". In this case the viewpoints are American, Vietnamese and French for the most part. All sides see things differently and even facts can be misconstrued. For example in the PBS series it talks about how propaganda was spread to the Northern Vietnamese Catholics by the U.S. about the horrible practices of the Ho Chi Minh regime against Catholics. The accuracy in media clip has another source stating that is not the reason they left. Which side do we believe? Which side is telling the truth? In order to know this we have to use the other resources available to us. In the Patriots book there is an entry by a man named Daniel Redmond he was the debarkation officer in Operation Passage to Freedom, they transported over a million Northern Catholics down to the South so that Diem may have a political base. He states specifically that "CIA operatives flooded villages with leaflets saying that Jesus and the Virgin Mary had moved south...and it was the duty and salvation of all Vietnamese Catholics to do so as well." Redmond was there in the mix involved with the people and the operation. He appears to be a trustworthy source. In the Herring book there is reference to Catholics fleeing the North because "Christ has gone to the south" and that there were threats to their lives if they remained with the Communists. America sent support to get them out and Diem is stated to have helped them with government funding, since he himself was also a Catholic he was sympathetic. This is also a reliable source of information: George Herring has been researching and teaching about the Vietnam war for twenty five years. Also the Accuracy in Media clip states that there was no mention of Ho Chi Minhs anti-communist killing spree which influenced the Catholics to move south, when in fact they mentioned it, though briefly in episode two when they were talking about Diems brothers secret police and the killing that they did.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jinny Mc Kenzie](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 11:38 AM

**"If the sources end up being equally reliable then you would look at which piece of information is more consistently used in standard works."**

Hi Tracy,

I think you made a strong point in stating that we can never be completely certain in regards to conflicting historical information but I wanted to comment on the statement from your response that I have copied above. I think it is a mistake to imply that the popular opinion be the one we should rely on. For example, the information consistently presented regarding Christopher Columbus is that he was a great and noble explorer, heroic even to the point of deserving a whole day each year to celebrate his accomplishments. Only a few authors expose that he was a murderer and rapist whose primary motivation was greed. Despite strong evidence to support these facts popular opinion remains mostly intact. Just because an opinion isn't popular doesn't mean we should discount it, certainly when there is an equally reliable yet less popular option to consider; as academics we should question even popular ideas.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Spencer Smith](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 01:58 PM

Im always speculative when looking at history. There are so many motives that the writers of history have, and whether these motives are good or bad, it can distort the truth. Throughout many portions of history religious beliefs dictated what was being recorded, and I think its probable that inaccuracies occurred because of the sheer intimidation of those in power.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 02:06 PM

I was thinking about that as I was writing. Which is why I avoided using the word popular and instead defined it as consistently used. Granted that they mean just about the same thing. So you are correct in your criticism. As academics it is indeed our job to look at everything with a questioning eye but as mentioned earlier in my post there is only so much we can actually know to be true. Just like in the sciences even proven theories can be discounted once new technology makes them inferior. The question asked by the instructor was how do "we", as

students discern the conflicting information given to us and how "should" we deal with the conflicting knowledge. If we remain open minded then it is easier to sift through all of it and come out with a greater understanding of what happened in Vietnam and how things ended up the way they did. The truth of the matter is that we will never know for sure. We were not there. In fact I find the Herring book to be written quite knowledgeably, from the American side of things. The only Vietnamese side that we get so far is from a few entries in the Patriots book and a few clips on the PBS series. The information given to us does point to Diem being an elitist or at the very least extremely detached from his people. He even tried the protected hamlet operation again after it had failed the first time and almost led to his downfall.

I appreciate the comment, keep them coming!

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Spencer Smith](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 09:52 AM

Stories and personal accounts are misleading for various reasons. People are unreliable. Use the analogy of a crime scene. What would one rather have, physical evidence or an eye witness? At first one may tend to think an eyewitness. He/she was there and has the best account of what happened, right? why is it that 75% of wrongfully convicted men are falsely imprisoned by eyewitness accounts. "The problem is that eyewitnesses who are wrong are often more confident than those who are right" (Clark & Wells). Human beings are too subjective. They remember things from an emotional standpoint. They see the world from a very narrow scope. Think about how uneducated the average person is. Do you really want to rely on their personal account when evaluating history. I would even say that people affected by something are the worst people to go to for an objective opinion on history. People harbor so much resentment when something happens to them, or a loved one, that its very difficult to get useful information out of them.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 02:14 PM

Yes, people are unreliable but people make history. They write the books, gather and interpret the facts. Now I am not saying that we should rely only on personal accounts but to rely only on facts makes history feel detached. The personal stories make it real and easier to understand. I don't think the people in the Patriots book were evaluating the war. They were telling the world their personal experiences in it. As students if we can recognize the merit in stories as well as in the hard facts then our understanding of the Vietnam war can be well rounded. And out of all of the books, the media clips and the PBS series the main information did come across. Vietnam was split at the seventeenth parallel. The northern Catholics migrated south, etc.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Spencer Smith](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 02:18 AM

There were a lot of people evaluating the War in the Patriots book. Take for instance the account of Ngo Vinh Long, he evaluates many aspects of the war. "I became convinced that U.S. policies were wrong," is one of his clear evaluations of the war. He also states, "I tried to prove to them that the United States could only win the war by destroying the country, and they shouldn't do it." This is a man who was in charge of making maps for top U.S. officials. This is a clear and precise evaluation of the war alongside many others in the book.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 02:29 PM

Technically that was an evaluation of U.S policy not the war itself. He volunteered to make the maps for the officials because the Portuguese troops they sent in were being killed. Only to find that he did not like the way the U.S. was handling things. As events went on in the war people evaluated them, measured them and weighed their choices. Going to Vietnam today in fact you can still feel hatred in the North, from some people. I am American therefore I was involved in napalming and the murder of innocent civilians. It is hard to get the feeling of hatred off. Looking over some more articles in Patriots I have to concede that I was wrong in stating that the entries did not evaluate the war. There were statements like those from Giap on page 43, "We did not want to fight the United States, but you gave us no choice" riddled throughout the book. That is an evaluation. But its not the same as the ones I endured while traveling in Northern Vietnam. It is an impossible feeling to describe and thankfully it did not happen often, but it was as if I was below dirt. I did not feel that type of evaluation during the readings.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Todd Lowry](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 11:04 AM

Hello classmates,

Historically conflicting information and inaccuracies can not be absolutely prevented. The best a historian can do is glean as much information as possible from as many sources as possible. Then, after taking into account the credibility and reliability of those sources, make an educated decision about the accuracy of the information. If no supporting information can be found the only responsible option is to omit the information, or at the very least qualify it as unsubstantiated. In Christian G. Appy's book *Patriots*, he talks in his preface about this type of omission when he says: "Or course, everyone's memory is partial, selective, and sometimes faulty. While it is impossible to verify all that anyone says, wherever possible I have tried to ensure people have participated in the events they describe...When I had serious doubts about the accuracy or plausibility of an account, I did not include it". Appy uses interviews with parties on all sides of the Vietnam conflict giving the reader a broad overview of the conflict rather than a work justifying one position or another. The same multifaceted approach was used by George C. Herring in his book *America's Longest War*. By citing sources whose points of view circumnavigate the conflict Herring paints a picture of the conflict as a whole.

The documentary *Television's Vietnam: The Real Story*, produced by Accuracy In Media Inc. does not use a multifaceted approach in its denunciation of Vietnam, A Television History. Rather than take the facts from as many sources as they could and formulating their arguments, they took their arguments and only used those sources that backed them up. The reverse approach to one used when keeping academic honesty in mind. The interviews represented by Accuracy In Media Inc. were all American scholars, policy makers and representatives of the Vietnamese perspective. I could find no oppositional view to arguments represented in their work from which to formulate an accurate assessment of it. The arguments presented only one view on the matter, and its intent seemed propagandist in nature. Interestingly, taking this into account, Accuracy In Media Inc. claims to be "Representing the consumers of news".

Todd Lowry

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jinny Mc Kenzie](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 11:49 AM

**"The best a historian can do is glean as much information as possible from as many sources as possible."**

Hi Todd,

This statement goes right to the heart of the matter, clearly and succinctly. You write very well and I have enjoyed your posts thus far. I can't even add to what you've said you were so on target. I hope everyone reads your post in particular. Thanks for your insights.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Kristin Maurer](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 02:34 PM

I am going to quote Appy in the preface page XV. "What might happen to our conception of the Vietnam War if we simply began to hear the accounts of American veterans alongside the memories of Vietnamese who fought with and against them? What if we witnessed those distant jungle firefights through the eyes of people who regarded the battlefield as home and called the epic struggle the American War?"

Just like Christian G. Appy, we have to take into account everyone's story, not just a couple of policy makers. I like to hear first hand from all sides. From that, we can take in historical facts to gain answers. Reading books, or listening to stories that someone else is stating is all their own perception. Of course, everyone is going to have their own outlook of how and why the war happened; after all, it was war, and with war comes differences. To grasp the truth, I listen (or read) each story, through the internet, books, and videos. If some parts of their stories correspond with each other, then I can safely assume that it has relevance in history.

Some examples of differences in opinions are stated in the Accuracy in Media and the PBS series.

The Accuracy in Media video opened my eyes to see a different observation in the war. For instance, watching the PBS series made me think that Ho Chi Minh was a Nationalist who became a communist that turned violent because he was forced to fight for what he and his people believed in; their independence. The Accuracy in Media viewed him more as a long time communist that focused on violence for independence. This made me want to know a little more on Ho Chi Minh. Was he a violent, horrible communist? Or was he forced to become violent?

I looked up the biography of Ho Chi Minh on the internet to help. (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/VNhochiminh.htm>.) From his biography, it states, "When it became clear that [Ngo Dinh Diem](#) had no intention of holding elections for a united Vietnam, his political opponents began to consider alternative ways of obtaining their objectives. Some came to the conclusion that violence was the only way to persuade Diem to agree to the terms of the 1954 Geneva Conference. The year following the cancelled elections saw a large increase in the number of people leaving their homes to form armed groups in the forests of Vietnam. At first they were not in a position to take on the South Vietnamese Army and instead concentrated on what became known as 'soft targets'. In 1959, an estimated 1,200 of Diem's government officials were murdered. was initially against this strategy. He argued that the opposition forces in South Vietnam should concentrate on organizing support rather than carrying out acts of terrorism against Diem's government." **Ho Chi Minh was initially against this strategy. He argued that the opposition forces in South Vietnam should concentrate on organizing support rather than carrying out acts of terrorism against Diem's government.**

Of course, this is again, someone else's perception, but I have concluded that Ho Chi Minh was forced to become violent. I have read more stories (through our textbooks) on him protesting vs. acting out violence. He tried to settle differences first. Unfortunately, he had to do what it took for his country to be free.

The bottom line is, reading and watching from different sources all portray on how, or what that source wants to be viewed. We have to take what we receive and turn it into our own perception of what happened in history.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Thomas Rathbun-Moser](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 02:29 PM

In every historical event there's always two sides, unfortunately the winner writes history. What this means for history buffs then is that whenever we are exposed to something new we need to find the bias behind it. The nation we grow up in can change the way we see history, for example my mother is Austrian going through school she never learned about WWII. My Grandfather grew up in Austria lived in it during the war. To him Hitler is the greatest mind of our time, his words. He worked in a butcher shop, the Nazi's where by far the best customers. Because of them my grandfather had money to give to the family to buy food to eat. That is his history. The other side of course is the anti-Nazi point of view that just about everyone seems to believe. As a history major I need to be able to see both sides of any conflict, if for no other reason to make a strong argument.

When it comes to choosing a side it becomes a question of which bias would you like. Nothing is without bias, this being a history class I am more likely to believe something like the DVD series we are watching over any one personally experience. Maybe the only way to understand history is to see so many different viewpoints, so many different experiences, so many different biases that one can see the things all of the stories have in common. That way the biases almost seem to cancel each other out.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Kristin Maurer](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 07:26 PM

Hi Thomas,

I totally and 100% agree with you! Everyone has their own opinion of the way history went down. We have to take all those stories and find the similarities between them to find the answers. Excellent point!

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 02:22 AM

Thats a very powerful point you made using the analogy of your grandfather. It reaveals a lot about people's interpretation of history.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Jinny Mc Kenzie](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 09:52 AM

I wouldn't go so far as to say "the winner writes history" in any given conflict. For example, we are currently studying a class on the Vietnam war in which the author's of both of the books we are reading and the producers of the PBS series are all Americans, and the general consensus is that we did not win that war; yet we read *our* historians interpretations of the events. I think a more accurate statement is that in any given situation we are exposed to the history that those in power want us to be exposed to. In Vietnam I think we might find the scholars present a less Americanized perspective in their written history of the war for their citizenry.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Jared Hall](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 07:55 PM

Thanks for sharing that story about your Grandfather and Mother. I agree we need to take all the different viewpoints and eliminate the biases. One thing I have difficulty with, is my own bias. Especially since this history is so recent and involves the US.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate...

**Re: Determining the truth**by [Colin Gabrielson](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 07:51 PM

Well with the input of any information to the brain there needs to be ways to verify weather the information is valid or not. One of the easiest ways to know if information is legitimate is to find multiple sources to go off of. That is one way in which the two textbooks we have can help verify information, or teach us a more in depth picture of the history of the war. Of course just because you find multiple sources doesn't mean the information is 100% valid, it just increases the likely hood that it is. Conflicting information is something that is very important; it puts the information presented on both sides into question. So when being presented conflicting information with history to consider both sides of the information presented and then look for the sources and attempt to find more sources that either disagree or agree with each side of the argument.

Something also to consider is who is writing the history. You have to have an understanding to what the motives are behind the people writing the history. For example PBS may have had other motives besides just giving the most complete and accurate account of the Vietnam war. Any other motives besides those two are in my opinion something that can be damaging to the truths behind history. I saw a quote one time that said "History is not about who's right, its about who's left." Those who win the wars write history. For example if the Nazis won WWII history would have been much different and probably portrayed the Allies as the aggressors or somehow made it seem that their goals of world domination were justified.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... **Re: Determining the truth**by [Heidi Zumbur](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 08:04 PM

When conflicting information presents itself, I think it is best to find additional sources to cross reference with. In the medical field, it is common to request a second opinion when given a serious diagnosis. Studying history isn't any different. Finding other sources of information that either support or discredit the text I am working with is pretty standard. This increases the chances I have to find accurate information.

Comparing multiple sources allows me to research all of the different authors. Specifically, I am looking for any conflict of interest the author might have had, any bias based on personal experience or lack thereof and if the author is credible. To determine if a writer is credible, I am often most impressed if they are affiliated with a well-known or trusted organization or institution. Who's writing would you more likely give weight to- a PhD graduate who teaches at John Hopkins or an author who has little educational background but worked as an intern for the 700 Club?

Recognizing why the author might be promoting their particular views, arguments or facts is another solid way to validate information. Keep in mind that the publisher of the text or any sources cited throughout the writing should also be evaluated for bias in the same way. Another way to authenticate information an author presents is to see if he/she has been cited in other works on the same topic. Also reading reviews of the author can be helpful too.

I feel relatively confident in Appy's 'Patriots' based on the fact that each individual story is coming from a different source. And further, not all sources agree or were working from the same background. This is the magic of 'Patriots'. It shows us the multifaceted, multidimensional truth of the Vietnam War through the eyes of so many individuals whose views and experiences differ drastically.

As for 'America's Longest War', it identifies multiple dates, places, colleagues who gave input and other facts that can easily be proven or disproved using many of the techniques I listed above. From the reviews alone, it seems to be a pretty standard and trusted source. It was written by George C. Herring who has taught at multiple universities and it has been revised and published four times. This tells me that the text has enough credibility that the publisher has invested to reprint it, hoping to continue to make a profit from it.

Above all, evaluate the consistencies within the information and for the author and publisher's backgrounds. If it doesn't make sense or no other supporting evidence can be found to support it, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is false but it does mean that a closer, more careful examination should be applied.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)Rate... **Re: Determining the truth**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 01:47 AM

Heidi evaluated some very important factors that others have also brought to light. Bias, conflict of interest, motives, intent and background are all things to take into consideration when looking at so many sources.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)Rate... **Re: Determining the truth**by [Daniel Bonner](#) - Wednesday, 13 October 2010, 08:50 PM

I think that I'm dealing with the conflicting information in media very well. We have been assigned the video series to watch, two books to read, and the video clip we all just viewed. I could take it a step further (although I have not) and research the topic of interest by watching more documentaries, reading more books or interviewing Vietnam Veterans. I also think that whenever historical information is given we should always take it at face value and try and get another source to figure out what is fact and what is fiction. The reason I think doing this additional research is valuable is because everyone has their own perspective of what really happened or what should have happened. Take a Rorschach test for example, if everyone in this class was showed an image and asked what they see then I would be willing to bet there would be twenty different answers. Similarly, I believe historical accounts can be just as distorted in some way or another. One more reason that we deal with conflicting information is because people are biased whether we want to admit it or not. Thus, it is practically impossible to get information from an unbiased source, sure we can do our best to push or personally biases aside, but as human beings we just inherently biased no matter how much we want to be or not. I base this on the one thing that makes this world such an interesting place to live; Individuality. We all come from different

places, have different values and morals, and have had different life experiences, just like the people presenting the historical information to us in all of our books and all of our videos. The best approach that I can suggest when researching information is to read and view all of the information, then compare and analyze it all then gather what is valuable and consistent in every source. If we do this it will help us understand what really happened during the Vietnam War from all points of view.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Heidi Zumbum](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 09:54 PM

Thanks for sharing Daniel. You are very true to say that each of us can and will perceive information in a different way. This could have to do with our own personal history, our perceptions or assigned attributions or even our emotional state at the time we receive the information. Just as none of us are going to interpret the readings or videos the same way, none of us could write a history of the Vietnam war without the same factors contributing. I try to keep this in mind when I am watching and reading. My color blue isn't necessarily your color blue- we are all seeing it through different eyes. I think that is why I am enjoying reading 'Patriots' so much. It allows the reader to take in all sorts of different accounts, from different sides, backgrounds and biases.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Spencer Smith](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 02:00 AM

It seems as though everyone has come to the conclusion that history is flawed in some way. The general consensus seems to be that it depends on who you talk to, and what sources one looks at. There are some things in History that seem to be fact. The Holocaust did happen. The Ducks did go to the Rose Bowl last year. The bombings of Heroshima and Nagasaki di happen. Then there seems to be parts of History that are always questioned and looked at with greater detail. There is a spectrum with what we know as fact on one side, and what is commonly in debate on the other.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 02:04 PM

Actually there is a group out there that continues to deny the fact that the Holocaust did happen.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Spencer Smith](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 04:21 PM

Yeah, ive heard of them. There are people that believe a lot of wierd stuff.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Todd Lowry](#) - Thursday, 14 October 2010, 07:03 PM

Hello Classmates,

There is another factor to consider in determining historical truths that has not been touched on so far in our discussion. That is the **deliberate** dissemination of information known to be misleading, embellished, or outright false. Vietnam, it seems, had no shortage of such misinformation being released. In Appy's book Daniel Redman laments about the propagandistic inaccuracies in Tom Dooley's book *Deliver Us from Evil*, even going so far as to say, "But frankly, I thought *Deliver Us from Evil* was a piece of shit. When I read it I almost threw it across the room I was so mad. I kept finding inaccuracies and he really laid on that Communist stuff" (49). That same sentiment about the inaccuracies and

embellishment in Dooly's work is found in Herring's book where he says, "Urged on by his superiors and private citizens such as Cardinal Spellman, U.S. Navy doctor Tom Dooly embellished his best-selling book, *Deliver Us from Evil*, with horrific--and unsubstantiated--tales of Vietnam atrocities and exaggerated his own and America's good works in Passage to Freedom to build support for nation building and Diem" (79). That's just one case of obvious deception.

Later, in the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Herring shows how McNamara, by cherry-picking only the information useful to his ends, actually created the truth he wanted. President Johnson then took that questionable and incomplete data and announced it to the American people as fact (141-144). While not an outright lie, Herring concedes, it became a fact by their selectively looking at only what supported their intentions (144).

In 1971, The American people were handed a beautiful example of the kind of knowingly deceptive, absolutely false, information doled out to us by policymakers when whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg leaked secret Defense Department documents to the *New York Times* known as the Pentagon Papers (Herring, 299). These outlined the way "Kennedy and Johnson had consistently misled the public about their intentions in Vietnam" (299). The Pentagon Papers were a shocking look at the blatant lies policy makers passed on as truth to the American people and to the world. You can find an absolutely amazing documentary on this called *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, produced by PBS on their website, PBS.org. Here is the link: <http://video.pbs.org/video/1607704151>

So, we can see, not only do historians find themselves trying to verify firsthand accounts, they are also trying to verify official records of an incident in history. It seems that would be an incredibly daunting task if they were to rely only on official accounts or only on firsthand accounts. That is why I think to get the most accurate picture we need to have both working in tandem, with a critical eye focused on each.

Todd Lowry

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jinny Mc Kenzie](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 10:31 AM

Great argument here and I have to agree with you that *The Most Dangerous Man in America* is absolutely amazing; I highly recommend it as well.

I would further suggest for those interested, taking a look at Howard Zinn's book, *A People's History of the United States* which has a brief but powerful section on the Vietnam War. There is an abundance of information showing that the US was primarily concerned with access to the natural resources of Vietnam such as rubber and petroleum, but used anti-communist rhetoric as the soapbox from which was shouted justifications for this war. He also speaks at length to the discord felt among young black men who were being forced to fight a war supposedly in support of an oppressed South Vietnam while still experience violent oppression at home at the hands of the very people they were supposed to fight alongside of.

In 1970 my father was a young black man from Georgia in his 2nd year of college at a private Catholic school in Helena Montana (where he met my mother). This was an opportunity he received as part of the integration programs that were so prevalent at the time. When his father became ill he was forced to return home and after being out of school more than a term discovered he had been made eligible for the draft. Rather than be forced into the army at a time when being a black man in that branch likely meant the front lines and death, he quickly joined the Navy where he spent 13 years as a Fire Control Technician. My father was not a pacifist (his record of time spent in the brig for fighting is a testament to that) but he was against war and did what he had to do to avoid being in a position to have to kill. Consequently my siblings and I grew up with a father who was in a military he was adamant we never join. Is it any wonder, with the continuous onslaught of lies our government spews, that military enlistment is at an historical low? Especially considering that we are the generation of children born to those who were most greatly affected by Vietnam?

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



#### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jared Hall](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 07:36 PM

The Accuracy In Media piece did seem biased and anti-Communist, however it did bring up concerns that I had with the PBS documentary. There did not seem to be vary many grey areas when it came to Ho Chi Minh and the north. I was surprised that the revolution in the North seemed so bloodless and complete. Even with the bias, it was interesting to hear more about the history of the North. It seems like most of the history we get is of the United States and Southern Vietnam.

Because it's such a contentious time in history, I think you have to assume there's bias in both the PBS documentary and the Accuracy In Media clip.

"history is written by the victors"

I've heard of mistakes by Newspaper's from the people in that news, that when reading about history I always add an asterisk. I wasn't there, so I'm only able to read the information, relate it to my experiences, and take it for what it is.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [Jared Hall](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 08:49 PM

While reading some of these responses about the propaganda and secrecy, It reminded me of someone I knew.

He only told me harmless stories of his time during the war. He was in the Air Force and what he did was secretive(I assume classified). They flew an unmarked plane and were encouraged to mislead the people around them. Once he picked up that day's newspaper from Honolulu discarded at a completely different location. When they got back, the people who saw the newspaper thought for sure they had discovered where they had been.

He said they had a list contacts that could get them parts if needed. On their down time, they would take the plane to Bangkok or somewhere else to party.

I'll always remember the last thing he told me about the war. He said that there are things he hasn't even told his wife, and "you'll never believe what people will do when no ones watching."

I always wonder what exactly he was referring to.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 



### Re: Determining the truth

by [David Ross](#) - Friday, 15 October 2010, 09:13 PM

When I watch a video on any subject or read a book on it, I remind myself that it is produced by people with biases that want you to agree with them. There is nothing wrong with that except that I want to be able to form my own opinions and know what the truth is. When you watch these two different bits of video, the accuracy in media and the PBS special, it is pretty easy to see that they both have heavy bias in them. So the first thing I do is look for common points, they may not be easy to find but they have to be there. Then I start doing the research on those common points and try to collect as much information on those points as I can from as many different sources as I can and continue to look for more common points. Those points are what I tend to believe and base my personal views on and what I believe to be fact, at least as close as I can come to it without witnessing something first hand.

The text books are nice because they are the firsthand accounts of people that were there re-telling what they remember to be the way things happen. They may still be slanted and not 100% accurate but they go through fewer filters and remain closer to the truth and easier to believe and relate to.

No matter what we come across it will never be completely un-biased just because we are human and there isn't any way to look at something and not see it through our own perspective.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Rate... 

[Send in my latest ratings](#)

 [Moodle Docs for this page](#)

You are logged in as [Joe Escobar](#) ([Logout](#))

HST 195 F10 (Escobar META 21581 24392)