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Footnotes

The Newsletter of FPRI's [Wachman Center](#) Vietnam: A Pop Quiz

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This issue of FootNotes is based on a talk delivered at FPRI's History Institute on "Teaching the Vietnam War," May 6-7, 2000. The speaker, Adam Garfinkle, is a Senior Fellow at FPRI and a senior staff member of the National Security Study Group, part of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century. He is author of *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*. The conference report is available [online](#), or by contacting 215-732-3774, ext. 201.

Note to Teachers: I taught a course on the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1980s. Each time I began the very first class with a "pop quiz." It wasn't a serious quiz, of course. I used it just to find out what students knew, and to stimulate a general discussion that would introduce students to the range of topics the course would cover. It worked very well. The very idea of a quiz got the students' attention, which was useful. Moreover, once they got over their instinctual indignation at being quizzed before they had had a chance to read or hear anything from the professor, they rather enjoyed the ensuing conversation. I have revised and updated the quiz here, to make it more appropriate for secondary school use. I have used footnotes to indicate which larger theme the question raises.— *Adam Garfinkle*

1. What year did the Vietnam War start?
 - A. 1941
 - B. 1946
 - C. 1959
 - D. 1965
 - E. 1968
2. What year did the war end?
 - A. 1954
 - B. 1972
 - C. 1973
 - D. 1975
 - E. 1989
3. Why did the United States get involved in the war?
 - A. Because it was willing to help the French in return for French support for NATO
 - B. Because it opposed the spread of Communism
 - C. Because it opposed the spread of Soviet and Chinese geostrategic reach
 - D. Because successive U.S. administrations feared the domestic political stigma of being thought "weak" on Communism
 - E. Because once engaged even a little, the prospect of disengagement raised troubling questions of U.S. credibility, prestige, and honor.
4. Why did some Americans oppose U.S. involvement in the war?
 - A. Because they thought U.S. engagement was a tactical error
 - B. Because they thought U.S. engagement was based on a larger strategic misreading of the situation
 - C. Because they thought that U.S. influence abroad was inherently evil and they wanted Communism to prevail in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia generally
 - D. Because of religious convictions
 - E. Because it put them in with the social "in-crowd" they wanted to be a part of
5. On March 31, 1968, President Johnson addressed the nation, saying he would not stand for President in the 1968 election, and offering to stop the bombing of North Vietnam in hopes of beginning a negotiated settlement of the war. Why did the President do this?
 - A. Because he properly understood the meaning of the Tet Offensive of that January
 - B. Because protests in the streets convinced him that the country was being torn apart
 - C. Because his advisors, the so-called Wise Men, unanimously told him it was the right thing to do
 - D. Because pressure from U.S. allies was growing much stronger for a reversal of U.S. policy
 - E. Because his wife, Lady Bird Johnson, prevailed upon her husband with her more dovish views of the war
6. Some have argued that the Vietnam was a civil war, others that it was an international war. Who is right?
 - A. Those who have said that it was a civil war because it was about unifying an ethnically homogenous country that used to be a single political entity
 - B. Those who have said that was a civil war because of the implications of the 1954 Geneva Convention

- C. Those who have said that it was an international war because it involved the efforts of one country, North Vietnam, to invade and subvert another country, South Vietnam
 - D. Those who have said it is was an international war because China and Russia were active parties to the North Vietnamese side, while the United States and some of its allies were active combatants on the South Vietnamese side
 - E. Those who have said it was an international war because it also involved Laos and Cambodia, and potentially Thailand and Indonesia.
7. Some have argued that the U.S. effort in South Vietnam was bound to fail because America's South Vietnamese allies were flawed. Why?
- A. Because the South Vietnamese government was, from the start, tainted by association with hated French colonialism, and could never win the sympathy of the people
 - B. Because the leaders were Catholic while the majority of the people were Buddhist
 - C. Because the government was corrupt, venal, and undemocratic
 - D. Because the government was brutal, arbitrary, and despotic
 - E. Because, in time, the South Vietnamese government's nationalist credentials were smothered by the size and nature of the U.S. military and administrative presence.
8. Define the following terms:
- A. grunt
 - B. fragging
 - C. willy pete
 - D. gook
 - E. charlie
 - F. DEROS
9. Many U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War consider themselves a special group of U.S. veterans. Why?
- A. Because they are the only group of U.S. soldiers not to return as winners
 - B. Because they feel that many Americans looked down on them unfairly as "baby killers" and louts.
 - C. Because they feel that the government has since abandoned and lied to them about health and others effects of the war
 - D. Because many veterans got hooked on drugs because of the war
 - E. Because they feel that what they did was patriotic and noble even if unavailing, while probably most Americans have a far more dour view of the war.
10. Many people have tried to draw the "lessons" of Vietnam. In what areas have lessons been "learned"?
- A. Military recruitment: An army of draftees cannot fight an unpopular war effectively.
 - B. Foreign policy: Don't try to defend an ally that is not willing to defend itself.
 - C. Strategy: Don't do things half way; fight to win or don't fight at all.
 - D. Politics: Shield national security judgments from partisan domestic politics to the extent possible.
 - E. Civil-military relations: Senior civilian decisionmakers should never take advice from the uniformed military uncritically.

11. EXTRA CREDIT: Identify the author of the following song lyric:

*Tw as in another lifetime, full of toil and blood;
blackness was a virtue, and the road was full of mud.
I offered up my innocence, I got repaid with scorn.
Come in, she says, I'll give ya' shelter from the storm.*

Answers

- 1. The answer is really all of the above: the Vietminh began fighting as soon as France was subdued; the real Vietminh effort began after the war; the NLF was founded in 1959, the war was Americanized in 1965; and the post-Tet phase in which the North Vietnamese Army took over the brunt of the fighting from the Viet Cong in a more conventional war was in 1968. This gives you a chance to explain to students the evolution of the main players and of the nature of the fighting.
- 2. The answer, again, could be all of the above. The French phase of the war ended in 1954; the Paris Accords were in 1972; the last U.S. troops left in 1973; Saigon fell in 1975; but the Vietnamese army did not leave Cambodia until 1989-and that can be thought of without too much a stretch as an extension of the conflict.
- 3. All of the above, of course. And this allows a broad discussion of politico-strategic motivation.
- 4. Again, all of the above. And this allows a discussion of U.S. intellectual life.
- 5. The answer is none of the above, of course. The majority of the Wise Men made their decisions on the basis of many factors, the most important of which was the prospective cost in lives and prestige against the uncertain prospect of winning.
- 6. One can see some merit, at least, in all these points—the first being the most dubious, however.
- 7. All of these answers are right to some extent, but the government of South Vietnam was more impotent than brutal, and far less despotic than the government of North Vietnam. Also, South Vietnam's level of corruption only shot up after the U.S. had Americanized the administration of the country. Finally, the association with the French was offset by the fact that the North was Communist, which most Vietnamese did not like.
- 8. Helps you make a point about the special language of war and the subculture of an army, and hence will let you discuss the literature of the war. DEROS, by the way, stands for "date of estimated return from overseas service."
- 9. All true; and helps you discuss the whole set of postwar veterans issues.

10. All; and all of these lessons are, I think, basically correct.
11. Extra Credit: It's Bob Dylan, of course.

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