

HST 195: History of the Vietnam War F14 (Escobar Meta 21179)

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November 29 ► Forum 4 ► Fog of War



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(Vietnamization of the War) Next >



Fog of War



by Joe Escobar - Sunday, November 23, 2014, 11:38 PM

This forum thread is for Fog of War posts and replies.

After studying the required materials, address the various questions. For purposes of encouraging discussion, you may decide to separate your responses into SEPARATE posts. To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Fog of War

Sum of ratings: -

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New Perspective



by Zachary Embree - Monday, November 24, 2014, 7:52 PM

His interview really did something for me that the PBS series and the Herring book have not, made me step back and consider that all these people giving the orders and making the strategies are still human. It seems that it is easy when sitting in chair in front of a computer screen to get caught up in mistakes and the end results to condemn the men in charge. This video presented to me a counter view. There is a man with a job, maybe he doesn't agree or even like it, but he is going to work within political realities to do the best he can. The interview serves as a reminder that this was a man leading a monumental effort stuck between a rock and a hard place, a important factor to consider when looking over the our actions near the end of the war. That being said there is one line that makes me think that his recollection is not entirely truthful is when he claims he cannot remember is he authorized the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam. Frankly that sounds more like someone sticking to a line

to avoid certain kinds of questions being asked then honestly not remembering something. Considering the large issue that Agent Orange's effects became it is highly unlikely that he would "forget" the authorization of the use of chemical weapons, it just might not be acceptable to acknowledge that he did. On the other hand his reluctance to answer some questions seemed entirely justified, if the questions were along the same vein as those near the end this interview was anything but impartial. The question of if he felt guilty or responsible for the war offended me and I was not the one being interviewed, not to mention being uninformative. I think that even if LBJ or Nixon were alive and consented to doing a documentary such as this, they're not going to give any shocking revelations. It would give a better insight into the unseen political motivations that affected the war. Reelection concerns and competing budgetary problems could have had a larger effect on our methods of leaving Vietnam than it appears.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: New Perspective



by Jessica Ballestrazze - Tuesday, November 25, 2014, 9:25 PM

I agree with you that it is easy to sit behind a computer screen and dissect the Vietnam War effort and clearly recognize where mistakes were made. I think that is especially tempting for people in our position, who have access to vast amounts of unclassified information about the war. (This is not an oppositional statement, and I'm not claiming that McNamara or LBJ or Nixon didn't have adequate access to information.) Sometimes it's really frustrating while reading the material or watching the videos for this class that very few in government acknowledged with any tenacity what a terrible situation we were putting ourselves in. But then I remind myself that hindsight is 20/20, and that the political and social climate were very tumultuous at that time. This may sound a little naïve, but it always surprises me a little when I remember how many international conflicts and events are occurring simultaneously. As a really general example, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 is obviously a huge part of our national military history. When I consider that we were on the brink of a nuclear war, it seems a little more reasonable that there were mistakes or oversight in the Kennedy administration during that period with regards to policy in Vietnam. There are obviously no excuses for how far the war was escalated, but it's always interesting to think of all the other fires that were being put out at the same time.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: New Perspective



by Zachary Embree - Tuesday, November 25, 2014, 10:36 PM

Very true as big a deal as people make the Vietnam war out to be for much

of the duration of our involvement in that country the whole situation seemed to be a secondary priority of the administration. I am increasingly coming around to the idea that our presence in South Vietnam got as unattainable as it did because of our "good enough" attitude at the beginning. Early on it was clear the government and economy did not work in any reasonable fashion without massive US aid. I get the impression the administration countered assessment that with fact it was anti communist and left it at that. In the Herring book for example it emphasizes that Diem was not chosen for his great leadership skills as much as his anti communist stance and I believe the PBS series even used he phrase "good enough" when describing him. Another reason I think so many people would not acknowledge just how grave the situation was is the sheer amount of resources we had dumped into the area and the pressure that put on the people in charge to make all that pay off. When you consider many believed their career and place in history was on the line, not publicly addressing the uncomfortable truth of the situation looks more understandable.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: New Perspective



by Kasey Harmon - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 8:36 PM

I agree with you in the sense that the interview reveals more to us than the other sources do because its coming straight from the horses mouth. I do believe he feels remorse about the lives lost on both sides of the war. In the Anne Morrison Welch story she says that she read McNamara's "In a Retrospect" and said that she felt "appreciation" towards him for basically admitting the war was wrong and it was a "tragic mistake." However, I do disagree with you on the issue of whether his "recollection" is or is not all there. I feel that he is all there, but I do feel that he does not want to take claim of authorizing the use of agent orange and I don't blame him I wouldn't want to be the man responsible for the long terms effects that it has had on not only the vietnamese but also the americans who handled it.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: New Perspective



by Zachary Embree - Thursday, November 27, 2014, 2:32 AM

I totally agree with you when it comes to his sense of regret about his role in Vietnam. Just listening to his tone of voice and reading his body language throughout the video is proof enough he has regrets over the issue. If I was unclear before allow me to clarify, I do think that he is all there mentally. My only concern was as you said in your post, that some

claims of not remembering a certain details are in fact deflecting responsibility for various actions he took during the war. My specific example for this was when he claimed to not remember if the use of Agent Orange was authorized by him, which is highly unlikely considering how position and the scale of the operation would involve him in the decision making process. Honestly I also can't really fault him for not wanting to take more grief over something that happened decades ago in a different global political climate.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: New Perspective



by Sierra Smith - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 11:27 PM

You are so right! Sitting in our comfort zone with hindsight, it's easy to form and toss around opinions about what we think we know and how we feel stuff should have been handled but in the end we were not stuck in the middle of that "rock and a hard place" to really make those calls . A different perspective should always be considered. I don't really hold many faults toward McNamara besides the agent orange situation. I agree that he didn't seem too truthful. His remarks going back and forth about whether he authorized it or not seemed a little misinforming and shady.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Misunderstanding Leaders



by Rachelle Wells - Tuesday, November 25, 2014, 8:31 PM

After watching McNamara in the documentary, I would say there were some moments of clarity for me in regards to the war. Watching it also helped solidly put a "face to a name." Appy's book was Copyright in 2003, the same year as the documentary. In his preface (Appy pg. XXV) he writes, "Although most people readily agreed to be interviewed, there were notable exceptions." Robert McNamara was one that had declined Appy's several requests for an interview and actually had finally agreed at one point, but changed his mind the next day saying, "I suspect you are interested in feelings and I do not want to talk about that." In the documentary, there are times when I have a different sense of his willingness to talk about certain aspects of the war. After going back to Vietnam, he "Came to the hypothesis that each of us (U.S. & Vietnam) could have achieved our objective without the terrible loss of life." He admits that we all make mistakes—, which I completely agree—and "we know we make mistakes." He then goes on to say there's usually a learning period for those mistakes and then hopefully after the second, third or by the fourth time we no longer make the same mistake. "There's no learning period with nuclear weapons." I can interpret that however I want, but the way I am interpreting it is this: once they made the choice to use certain weaponry and herbicide, they could not

take that back once it was deployed. Therefore, even if viewed as a 'mistake' we are talking about people's lives, and now we know for the long term. His remarks in regards to Agent Orange are extremely difficult for me to separate from my personal connection at this time. The sophistication of the war and the "massive arsenal of modern weaponry" that Westmoreland was dealing with is how Agent Orange is presented in Herring (page 189). Herring does not mention McNamara and Agent Orange. Although it was used while McNamara was Secretary and McNamara states, "I'm not really sure I authorized Agent Orange, I don't really remember it." I would not want to remember that either, especially now (or in 2003) when we knew all that we did by then about the effects of Agent Orange. I would say this makes me think he is "a little foggy" on the war.

I can say that I agree with the Narrator in Episode 7, "Every American had his own version of the Vietnam War." I guess to some degree, once we fit all the pieces of the puzzle from the media, documentaries, and readings together we do end up making our own version.

I think that a documentary by LBJ could be helpful to add to my understanding of the war. It really appears in Herring (page 225-227) that there were times when LBJ would agree with McNamara and his views and recommendations. However, then he would not accept McNamara's recommendations. Eventually the relationship between the two "had soured" and McNamara accepted an appointment to the World Bank. I think he would be able to add to our understanding, albeit not what we would necessarily want to hear.

Trying to figure out if I think McNamara truly lived with some regrets about the war, or if he died with more secrets is challenging. Maybe I agree with him, "A lot of people think I'm a son-of-a-bitch. Damned if I do, damned if I don't; I'd rather be damned if I don't." What did he take to his grave?

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders



by Racheal Bryant - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 6:43 PM

Thank you for the reminder about McNamara declining to be interviewed by Appy. I remember thinking when I read that he had something to hide. After watching Fog of War, I take it now to mean he had things he wanted to say but wanted to be able to say them without the personal attacks he was used to receiving. I found it interesting that he thinks he might have been the one to authorize Agent Orange or he can't remember. In the Herring book page 106, it says "Kennedy authorized the use of defoliants to deny the guerrillas cover and secure major roads, as well as the limited use of herbicides to destroy the enemy food supplies." Maybe McNamara made a recommendation, but Kennedy was the one who authorized the use.

I also find it interesting we talk a lot about Agent Orange because of the devastating effects it had on people, but there were other "Agents" used. I

pulled this off Wikipedia, although its not the best historical source.

The Agents used—known as the Rainbow Herbicides—their active ingredients, and years used were as follows:

- Agent Pink (60% – 40% *n*-butyl:isobutyl esters of 2,4,5-T) used in 1961-1965
- Agent Green (*n*-butyl ester of 2,4,5-T) unclear when used, but believed to be at the same time as Pink
- Agent Purple (50% *n*-butyl ester of 2,4-D, 30% *n*-butyl ester 2,4,5-T, 20% isobutyl ester of 2,4,5-T) used from 1962–1965
- Agent Blue (cacodylic acid and sodium cacodylate) used from 1962–1971 (in powder and water solution)
- Agent White (acid weight basis: 21.2% tri-isopropanolamine salts of 2,4-D and 5.7% picloram) used from 1966–1971
- Agent Orange (50% *n*-butyl ester of 2,4-D and 50% *n*-butyl ester of 2,4,5-T) used from 1965–1970
- Various other strands of Agent Orange

My last thought about McNamara. I didn't take his damned if I do, damned if I don't to mean he had secrets, but rather he was tired of someone always taking his words out of context. I think by the time he filmed Fog of War, he only wanted to talk about insight to the war or life lessons. The emotional questions to me were side stepped because he couldn't go back and change any of it and he didn't feel it would benefit the situation and even if he explained it would be held against him or misconstrued. His statement, "Damned if I do, damned if I don't; I'd rather be damned if I don't" meant to me he'd rather be silent and take the fall for that, then get his words used against him. I think he was just tired of defending himself.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders

by Rachel Wells - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 7:37 PM

Once again, as we continue through the forum and through deeper evaluation of Appy, Herring, and the documentaries I personally begin to look at some of what has been written, absorb, and reconsider. I went through some of my dad's pictures again today, and that alone stirs up inner turmoil for me. The pictures that show him in the jungle, sometimes on equipment building the roads with all the dust and bulldozing over the entire dead bush.' My dad died of two types of lung cancer in June of 2013. Now, I am not trying to make this personal because I have absolutely loved this class and all of the information it has provided from all angles. Unfortunately, for me I cannot ask my dad the millions of questions it has brought for me though J With that being said, I have to acknowledge that I actually enjoyed McNamara's documentary—his body language, his voice,

and his presentation. He had some very valid points and frankly, I cannot imagine being in his shoes while he was Secretary of Defenses nor after he was Secretary.

You are right, why so much talk only about Agent Orange? Did the U.S. dump more of that than any of the other agents? Obviously some of the chemical make-up and the years are different, but what was the biggest differences? Again, I now have to agree with you about McNamara's statement in "Fog of War" when he said, "I'd rather be damned if I don't." It was probably because of people like me, that assumed he had more secrets vs. it did not matter what he said; he could not 'win' either way. Really, many of our politicians are often in a no win situation with the American people.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders

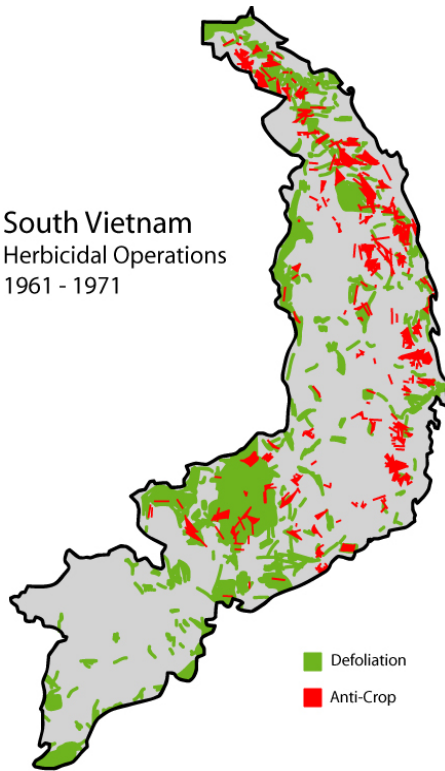


by Racheal Bryant - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 8:12 PM

The topic for Thanksgiving dinner was Vietnam this year. How appropriate that I would be studying it. I felt honored to know a little about it so I could ask those questions I had about the war. I had no idea my uncle was in Vietnam during 1968 and 69. He was there during the Tet Offensive. I loved his stories which I am told he never speaks of, but because I was curious he continued talking. He told us he had went to My Lai a few weeks after the incident there. He didn't know what had happened at the time but remembers what an eerie feeling he had when they got there. My uncle battled prostate cancer, Agent Orange was discussed and the men who have died from its exposure. I am sorry for your loss. I am glad you have the photos to look at. One of the things my uncle told me was that they all sent their photos to a specific place over there to get them developed. Not all the photos would come back. They censored the images and confiscated the ones that were not authorized. I can't wait to look at his.

I found this map of the "Agents" its interesting to see where they spread it and which type was used. They say Agent Orange is the most known because it was the most used.

South Vietnam
Herbicidal Operations
1961 - 1971



Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders



by Rachelle Wells - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 12:41 PM

That is fabulous information to treasure from your uncle, Racheal! I think I could look at pictures and talk about Vietnam for days! Being able to sort through it the way we have has been interesting and rewarding.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders



by Marquita Lucier - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 2:09 PM

The topic of conversation for my family was football => I know I brought up the topic of my History of Vietnam class on two separate occasions while talking to my brother in law who was in the Marines (1986-1994.) I think it was awesome to make a connection with your uncle and honoring him by having him share his life experiences especially his time in Vietnam. My neighbor across the street who served in Vietnam has photos he has shown me and they do not appear to show anything in a negative

light. His brother in law served in Vietnam, was exposed to Agent Orange, and has battled cancer the past few years because of his exposure. I think that the map you found is really cool thanks for sharing it.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders

by Marquita Lucier - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 2:46 PM

Rachelle, your post had very powerful words thank you for being brave and sharing your story. Sorry about your dad, it made me sad. I agree with you not knowing what it is like to walk in someone else's shoes. If you were in McNamera's position with the information presented would you have made the same decisions or different. With so many lies and deceit from our Administration in Washington during the War, it may be hard to obtain truthful or full accounts of the historical events from the Vietnam War especially from our past political figures. If there is any guilt who would want to stir up their emotions and controversy with the public at McNamera's age? Yes, Damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Sum of ratings: -

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders

by Rachelle Wells - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 7:43 PM

Thanks Marquita! When my dad was first diagnosed with lung cancer he had to stop working full-time. I went in with him to apply for Veteran's benefits and he presented his DD-214, but he told them the dates were wrong. He had actually enlisted when he was 17, not 18 like the DD-214 showed. They told him they'd have to look into the 'archives' to verify his enlistment dates. I knew my dad would not live long enough to see any benefits because of the severity of his cancers. After he died, I found letters written to his parents from the Army, paystubs etc., all with dates proving my dad was 17 (barely) and serving in the Army and Vietnam. Of course all of his picture slides from Vietnam are date stamped also, which is fabulous. I'm so proud of my dad (and all of our men & women) but find it disheartening that the government cannot acknowledge his actual service time.

It is so hard to say how I would have made decisions if I were in McNamara's shoes. I'd like to think I would never order something deadly like Agent Orange. Not only because of our

own troops, but for all involved. The decisions that our government leaders make are so powerful and have a huge impact on so many levels.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Misunderstanding Leaders

by Desria Hansen - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 9:37 PM

That is cool that you researched that about the chemicals! Thank you for sharing. You bring up a good point about McNamara always having to defend himself. I didn't really think about how difficult it would be to constantly attacked and have to defend yourself. I suppose what done was done and there was no changing it so he wouldn't want to dwell on how he could have changed things, but focus on how to learn from it.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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The Moral Minimum

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Tuesday, November 25, 2014, 9:04 PM

I think McNamara's viewpoint is really interesting, because our society generally judges politicians by their actions rather than their intentions. For the most part, I think that military action is usually ordered with some intention of good, even though it often has the appearance of malice or ignorance, and it frequently has adverse consequences. His description of the "fog of war", that "our judgment, our understanding, are not adequate," is spot on. There are incessant changes, nuances, dangers, morality issues, and considerations in wartime. It really would be impossible to effectively categorize all of those things and make infallible decisions about what is the best option for each of those categories. Each issue would require vastly different solutions, often contradictory of each other, in order to solve them in the most effective ways.

I thought McNamara's question, "What is morally appropriate in a wartime environment?" was interesting, because lines are definitely blurred. He questioned whether he would have authorized something like Agent Orange had he known the health risks, and if that would have been a criminal act. It reminded me of the concept that the law is the moral minimum. It's impossible for me to determine whether or not the US government had knowledge of the health implications of Agent Orange, but they obviously could have predicted that it would have damaged the crops and livelihoods of innocent peasants. In this case, perhaps it wasn't a criminal act to use Agent Orange because they didn't realize it would eventually kill and maim so many people. But since that interpretation of the law is the moral minimum, although it was legal, it was likely morally wrong.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Moral Minimum

by Rachel Wells - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 6:47 AM

I like how you said "moral minimum." McNamara talked about how he was very proud of his accomplishments and that he was sorry that in the process he had made errors. The old adage, "hindsight is 20/20" and as McNamara said, that does not work with war. It sure does not! Agreeably, our judgment, our understanding, are not adequate especially for me this many years later as I try to sift through all of this information. I truly cannot imagine being in that seat of power and literally having SO many people's lives in the palms of my hands making such significant decisions. Yet, this is the world in which we live and someone always has that control.

The power of Agent Orange is now well known, and Dr. Dai in Vietnam had done some primitive research, but he was still spot on with the effects of Agent Orange (Appy pg. 138-141). As you said, would the U.S. still have used Agent Orange the way they did had they known its effects? Do you think McNamara was trying to take some ownership when he said, "I don't really remember it (if I authorized the use of Agent Orange) but the use of it occurred while I was secretary (Fog of War documentary)." On the other hand, does it stand that he is "foggy" in his memory of its use, because how could one really forget about authorizing something so significant when it (Agent Orange) destroyed millions of acres and 100 million pounds were used (Herring pg. 189)? However, for the time, the situation and everything happening—I do not judge, yet continue to absorb this information and be in awe of all the political decision-making, dynamics, and loss of life. It is a lot to process.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Moral Minimum

by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 3:27 PM

Very well said in regards to the law versus what is morally right or wrong. There really is a fine blurred line when speaking about war, for what is morally ok. And I agree with you about intentions. Intentions don't always end up with the desired results. Therefore society ends up angry with things in the end due to the actions based on a certain intention.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Moral Minimum

by Rachel Wells - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 1:07 PM

I agree, especially where morals may be different for each person. When you said, "Intentions don't always end up with the desired results," we can likely say that the protesters probably did not realize some of the results their anti-war speeches and parades were having. Robinson Risner, a POW from 1965-1973 stated, "Anti-war protest and speeches caused more lives to be lost on the battlefield, increased POW tortures, and actually prolonged the war" (PBS Episode 9). Therefore, even when we talk about groups other than politicians, some of the same negative outcomes were happening. Granted Robinson is just one view I am using, but the point is that although millions were protesting the war in hopes of peace, it was having an opposite effect on many levels and causing more discord not only in Vietnam, but also in other areas of the U.S.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: The Moral Minimum

by Bryan Lewis - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 10:42 AM

I feel that his question of "What is morally appropriate in a wartime environment?" was interesting but for different reasons. McNamara said that they are 'mistakes' made in wartime that can cause needless death; and that the true crime would not be to learn from these mistakes. It made me wonder about the widespread use of Agent Orange, since it was used for over 10 years in Vietnam I am sure that some negative signs appeared before the ending the use of Agent Orange. This brought into question if using it really could have been seen as morally inappropriate, if there was evidence of the harmful nature of the chemical to humans yet the continued use of it was authorized then it could be seen as a crime against humanity. I could see Agent Orange being authorized even with the knowledge of it's harmful effects since there were other questionable decisions made during the Vietnam war such as the bombing in Cambodia.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: The Moral Minimum

by Savana Cochrane - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 5:23 PM

The moral minimum is a very good way of putting it. For the most part, laws are made to protect against the very worst actions, not to ensure the very best ones. Even so, I don't think there are very many (if any at all) morally "right" options in a war environment. McNamara points out that there's no specific rules about what is okay (or legal) to use in war and what's not. However, even if there were such a thing, it would be absurd to think that both countries would agree on the legalities of war, because as you said the lines are blurred.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Information Confirmation

by Kasey Harmon - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 8:10 PM

The McNamara "Fog of War" documentary only reaffirmed my beliefs as to why we were fighting the war. He states in his video that we as the U.S. were there not to enslave but to free Vietnam. "We looked upon Vietnam as an effect of the Cold War" he goes to say in his video. We wanted to help keep another country from falling under the communist rule and to help them retain their freedom. From the beginning we kept offering them negotiations including helping them to set up a government, and even help them to hold an election. How is this considered slavery? McNamara sounds and appears to be of sound mind and it is obvious that he has not lost any key memories of the war. He has a strong belief and he backs it up with facts we know to be true from our history books. He has no hesitations that would lead us to believe he is a "little foggy."

If Johnson or Nixon were still alive the only one I would care to listen to would be Johnson. The reason being that he was the president for the longest duration of the war. This being said I feel that he would have the most insight and knowledge for us. Nixon came along in the end to attempt an honorable ending to the war and claim hero status. He had a good game plan in the beginning but his execution was poor and failed. Johnson could have possibly helped us to understand better why we were needed in Vietnam and helped the bitter to see that we weren't just "sending our boys to die." The ones I would be more interested in hearing from would have been Truman and Eisenhower because I would like to know why we spent so much money in support of the French before the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Information Confirmation

by Zachary Embree - Thursday, November 27, 2014, 2:44 AM

I think the slavery accusation might have more grounds than you think if you look at it from a outsiders perspective. The US came in and set up a unpopular government that we disposed of several times when it did not conform to our wishes, and basically make South Vietnam depend on our military and economic aid. Taken together by a country that did not put stock on the domino theory and it looks very much like we just took over South Vietnam and installed a puppet, which soon after was forced into a war with the North. Of course their is large amounts of context that turn this situation into something entirely different, but many other countries were not aware of that. MY personal impression was less that the US was fighting for Vietnamese freedom and more to stop the spread of communism. I too would like to ask Eisenhower just what he as thinking when he set the stage for ever increasing US commitment.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Information Confirmation

by Dennis Calciano - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 1:38 PM

I don't think by any means we were trying to enslave a people that's has fought for their independence for decades. I think it's unfair for McNamara to say to the former prime minister, "Do you mean to say it wasn't a tragedy for you when you lost three million Vietnamese killed?" A lot of Vietnamese soldiers died fighting for what they believed was the independence of their country, even if that was resisting U.S. terms. It seems like a senseless war in McNamara's eyes, but the Vietnamese had been fighting for themselves long before we were there. Looking at it through the prime minister's eyes the United States was a random foreign power that South Vietnam didn't want to rely on too heavily. There were a lot of casualties, but I'm sure it's nothing any Vietnamese would take back for the unification of their country.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Information Confirmation

by Kasey Harmon - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 7:54 PM

No we weren't trying to enslave anyone. But the North Vietnamese thought we were going to end up like the French. I think what McNamara was referring to with the "tragedy" statement was, the amount of people killed from all sides of the war was a tragedy. But yes Vietnam can hold their heads high with pride for their victory, nonetheless it was still a tragedy.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Information Confirmation

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 1:12 AM

I think it's really important to remember that not all of Vietnam sought reunification, and it was not a happy ending for thousands and thousands of people. In Operation Frequent Wind, over 22,000 South Vietnamese who had worked with the American government were evacuated by the US right before the fall of Saigon, in an effort to save them from dangerous reprisals. Thousands of South Vietnamese who were not evacuated, were systematically punished with detention or execution for their support of the South Vietnamese government and war effort. Many Vietnamese from both the North and South did seek reunification. But I think your statement, "I'm sure it's nothing any Vietnamese would take back for the unification of their country" is incorrect, and a severe overgeneralization of the extremely varied political climate in Vietnam.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Information Confirmation



by Bryan Lewis - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 10:48 AM

I feel that Johnson may have been able to provide some better understanding of the war, but not as complete as it seems you may think. Yes he was President for the longest duration during the war but that also shows how little he really understood of the Vietnam War. Continuing to escalate U.S. intervention was the exact reason the Vietnamese fought harder feeling it was more an invasion. Yes we didn't come to Vietnam to 'enslave' them, but if we looked at their history we would have seen a long line of oppression by larger more powerful nations; this history caused them to be more suspicious of U.S. motives in Vietnam. Lastly I would also like to point out another reason Vietnam didn't trust our intentions, our prior support of the French government which had been oppressing Vietnam since before WWII.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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We are all human



by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 8:35 PM

Statements made by Robert McNamara seem to stress the fact that he is only human- more importantly that we are all only human and make "errors of judgment" He made me take a step back and look at it all from a point of view from anyone who was in in the limelight being judged during that time. McNamara explained that war is so complex and that our understanding is not adequate, therefore we kill because of it. "It isn't that we aren't rational- we are rational, but reason has limits". I feel like he wanted to get through to all of us that he doesn't want to be villainized for what happened in the past because there is so much complexity and with war and human nature, that the right steps aren't always taken. He felt that a lot of people misunderstood the war as well as him. He felt that with whatever he did or said that he was damned if he did, damned if he didn't.

The one and only thing he said that I felt was "a little foggy" in his recollection of the war was when he discussed agent orange. He said he would never authorize an illegal chemical and that agent orange was legal during the time of its use. He then continues to say he can't recall ever authorizing the use of agent orange. I either think he is not fessing up to being responsible for authorizing such poison, or that he truly is foggy and perhaps forgetting things with age.

I liked hearing about it from the other side of things. McNamara said he went to Vietnam and talked with previous prime minister Thu who stated, " We were fighting for our independence, you were fighting to enslave us. No amount of U.S. pressure would stop us". It's weird hearing the perception of us being the bad guy. We are conditioned to think we are always the good guys in the U.S., but that's not the

perception from everybody in the world.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: We are all human

by Racheal Bryant - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 9:30 PM

Your post is so well put with a lot of points that stuck out to me too.

McNamara does stress that humans make mistakes and in hindsight we all could make better decisions. I think that is really what the Fog of War is about. Its about not having the capacity to comprehend the complex situation in which they were in and make the correct decisions. I first thought it was about his recollections of the war, like the agent orange memory, but I think its more involved than that. I get a sense its more about the mentality at the time during the war and the outcomes that lead to unnecessary killings. The Appy book gave an example of this on page 343. I believe the example of My Lai under the leadership of Lieutenant William Calley, who was not of mental capacity to be in charge, resulted in a "Fog of War". His men followed his orders and actions resulting in rapes and deaths that were not necessary. McNamara was trying to stress the capacity of the human mind in such a chaotic time and its inability to function.

I felt he also had the need to make the point he was not a villain, bully or war criminal, but that his image was wrapped up in the negativity of the war. You could see on his face the sadness from when his words had been taken out of context or blown up and used against him. He was cautious to answer questions that were asked. While watching the entire film, he had stated a rule he followed when answering questions: He never answered the question that was asked, rather he answered the question he wished had been asked. He was a complex man, bright and strategic. The film gave great insight.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: We are all human

by Sierra Smith - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 11:38 AM

In a way could be perceived as a victim of war in a sense from misunderstandings and the cobweb of situations that took part in that war. He really did seem sad not only about the things that happened but for how every move he made and every word he said would turn into a bad thing.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Misunderstood



by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 8:36 PM

I feel that if LBJ or Nixon were around to do a documentary it would make the same effect on me as Robert McNamara's did. I believe they would probably have similar things to say... That there were a lot of misunderstandings, and that things weren't so black and white/cut and dry- there were gray areas and difficulties on what the right thing to do in the war was and that no matter what decisions were made, people would be judging one way or another.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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McNamara



by Racheal Bryant - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 8:38 PM

Full Video: The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the life of Robert McNamara



I watched the whole show and thought the chance to get to know McNamara a little better was worth it. I wondered how he got his position as Secretary of Defense and it is an interesting one. From our readings and videos I had the assumption that McNamara was the driving force and voice for a lot of what was to blame about the war. Through the readings and videos he came across to me as arrogant and a know it all. From his comments during this film it seems others have thought that about him as well. This interview did show another side of him, hardworking, passionate and dedicated. He was not quick to speak or took things lightly; he even teared up a few times which made him more personal rather than the war tyrant or dictator that he was often called. He was asked if he was to blame for the war and he believes the

war was the responsibility of the President and Johnson specifically did not listen to his advice on many occasion. According to McNamara, Johnson didn't see eye to eye with him on a lot of things.

McNamara's definition of "The Fog of War": *War is so complex, it's beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all the variables. Our judgment, our understandings are not adequate and we kill people unnecessarily.*

McNamara could have been a little foggy, but he wasn't the only one in leadership at the time who should have caught on to the fact that Vietnam was fighting for their independence while were looking at the war from a different angle. Our take was that the war was a fight that would eliminate the cold war. McNamara talks about the Vietnamese believing America was only trying to push our colonial interests. To them we were no better than the French. McNamara points out that we didn't know them well enough to sympathize with them and in a way I believe that if we had understood their fight, the outcome would have been different. Johnson was accused of being weak. McNamara explains that Johnson was worried about the Chinese threat and the threat of a nuclear war. The former foreign Minister of Vietnam comments to McNamara disputing the Chinese involvement threat by saying; have you not read a history book? Vietnam will not succumb to China; we have been fighting with them for a thousand years. Vietnam and the U.S. were fighting different wars. The war was doomed to fail.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: McNamara

by Desria Hansen - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 9:46 PM

That is so cool that you found and watched this whole video. I suppose it would be hard to ask and want to see things go a different way, but ultimately not being the one in complete control. I am sure that he wanted what was best for his country, it would be hard to discern what is the right and wrong way to achieve those goals.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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The Light of Information

by Andrew Schubert - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 9:28 PM

Certainly an 11 minute interview isn't going to provide a whole lot of insight to a concept and a time in history as complex as that of the Vietnam War. Like our Appy textbook however, it does give insight to one particular facet of this intricate story, that of Robert McNamara who was undoubtedly a key player in how events unfolded in Vietnam. I found it interesting to see him try and shed light on some of these events, although for the most part he seems very defensive. It seems clear that whatever insight is gleaned in this interview must be taken with a grain of salt,

McNamera acts very guardedly, the man probably doesn't want to stir up old wounds.

When this class began I felt vaguely cheated that some of our learning material was so old, it seemed dated. But now I'm wondering if there isn't a very good reason for that, so many people who would be interviewed may have slipping memories, or worse, be dead. Apart from McNamera's apparent defensive stance during this interview, he also acts fuzzy at certain points. His haziness regarding whether or not he authorized the use of agent orange is very telling. Either he's sidestepping a potential hazardous issue, or he in fact does not remember, either way it's a red flag in regards to the factualness of the interview. In other scenes, like the Epilogue, he states outright that he doesn't want to answer any more questions, opting for "damned if you don't", as opposed to finishing the interview.

With regards to a documentary filmed in a similar style to Fog of War focusing on LBJ or Nixon, yes it would have the potential to very informative. This is of course assuming that such obvious roadblocks - status of life, greatness of age, willingness to talk, etc. - were not factors. One thing that I've always admired about positions of power, and I think it's safe to assume that the President of the United States - would-be a position of a power, is the way that data would become readily available and freely provided. Let this, perhaps ironically, be called Freedom of Information. It really makes sense if you think about it though, LBJ wasn't in any firefights in Vietnam, JFK wasn't flying recon over the Mekong Delta, this information was provided to them so that they could make decisions to the best of their abilities. At any time they could ask for expert opinions on any number of topics. Information flows uphill in the executive branch (or at least it's supposed to) and in this sense, absolutely, an interview has the potential to open up a wealth of knowledge regarding our understanding of the war. I think perhaps a more fitting question is -would- they? Remember that Nixon was known for being secretive, I am of the opinion that any interview with him would play out similarly to Fog of War's Epilogue section.

Textbooks can be so good at relaying facts, but McNamera's right about one thing, they don't often like to play with the notion of what could have been. I think it's safe to say that they also aren't very good at relaying what was going through someone's mind at times, they aren't known for explaining trains of thoughts that lead to decisions. Books like Appy's Patriots are much more suited to that kind of exploration. For example, we may not know how Nixon justified his actions during the Watergate scandal, but stories like "Bud" Krogh's Let's Circle the Wagons (Appy; p. 436) gives insight all the same to the many-sided coin that is the Vietnam War Era.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Light of Information



by Marquita Lucier - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 1:54 PM

Well said! I think the interview with McNamera left him vulnerable to talk about past events perhaps that is why he was defensive and on guard. Sometimes not bringing up the past is a way of burying old wounds and not stirring up hurts or

"guilt," which McNamera's comment regarding whether or not he felt any guilt he said "no comment." I think that speaks for itself. I agree with you when he seemed to have a selective memory loss to the use of Agent Orange. If I were McNamera, I would not want to remember being involved in any decision making regarding the use of it in Vietnam knowing that people are getting cancer or other health issues because of being exposed to it in Vietnam. How could you sleep at night if you entertained many of these thoughts? McNamera, when he agreed to the interview and what little he shared from his memory, may have been an attempt for some peace in his life, especially in light of his age. I heard a speaker at my daughter's graduation ceremony from the U of O years ago says, "That there are two kinds of people in this life, "the giver's and the takers." "The Taker's will always have plenty of food, and the Giver's will always have plenty of sleep." My take on this is that one needs to be able to sleep at night and live with themselves, not living in torment of what ifs or could have been. It is hard to live a life with no regrets.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: The Light of Information

by Desria Hansen - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 4:25 PM

I like that you brought up the perspective that an 11 min interview will not give us a whole lot of insight. While it does give us a little bit of a different perspective, it would be interesting to jump inside his mind and really get the full story and all the facts and information. I have a very hard time trusting politicians and if McNamera seems defensive and like he is hiding something, he probably is. You are right when you say he seems very defensive and to get the whole unbiased or unaltered story would be very interesting and give us a whole different side of the story.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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What they know we might never.

by Bryan Lewis - Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 10:49 PM

I feel that McNamara brought up something that is the biggest problem about the war: misunderstanding; how we didn't understand the Vietnamese and how they didn't understand us. I feel that the only time he might seemed "a little foggy" in his recollection is when he talked about the use of Agent Orange. Though he seemed to have a problem remembering if he authorized the use of it, it also seemed that he was admitting to authorizing it without admitting to it; as politicians tend to do. This is further enforced at the end when he said "I'd rather be damned if don't." when he is talking about Vietnam implying that the damnation for being silent is worse than that of speaking. McNamara also bring up the interesting part about human nature, how we want to war, no matter how much we strive for peace we always fall back into

war. He made it seem there was a point: learn from our mistakes; he even warns us about the problem about nuclear war, there won't be anyone left to learn the mistake of it.

I do believe that LBJ or Nixon might be able to shed more light on Vietnam, though if they would is a different matter. There are often things that the public is unaware of, such as Nixon's mining of Haiphong harbor. There is information that they had, information that could be recorded somewhere. Regardless of what Nixon or LBJ might have been able to add I feel that our understanding of the war still wouldn't be complete, be it because of information they would withhold or because maybe they themselves didn't understand the war at the time. As McNamara said in the fog of war video he didn't understand Vietnamese and Chinese relations as well as he originally thought back during the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: What they know we might never.



by Sierra Smith - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 11:43 AM

You are right, there will always be things we will not know about. And for that very reason there will be misunderstandings. And as easy as it is to look back and judge Mcnamara, I have to empathize with anyone leading or involved in a war. Every move you make has consequences and it would be really tough to be hated collectively whether or not you're a good person or not being irrelevant.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: What they know we might never.



by Desria Hansen - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 3:56 PM

I agree with you that the biggest problem about the war was misunderstanding. It really puts in to perspective what is "right" and what is "wrong" and how to the communists they were doing what they felt was "right," but to us there "right" was what we think to be "wrong." I suppose that could circle us back around to what you brought up from the video about human nature and how we always fall back into war. It is crazy to me that two different views of thinking (amongst other things) can cause so much violence and pain.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: What they know we might never.



by Andrew Schubert - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 7:33 PM

I agree with you that McNamera was on to something when he spoke about misunderstanding. He's right in that regard, thus is the nature of hindsight. We misunderstood the Vietnamese ability of repelling foreign armies, and they misunderstood our intentions, believing american forces and advisers to be a colonial expedition.

With regards to the 'fogginess' of his recollecting whether or not he authorized the use of Agent Orange, I find myself believing one of two scenarios, either he did authorize it and doesn't want it brought into the light, perhaps for fear of a warcrimes tribunal, or he in fact didn't authorize it, and doesn't want it to be known that he was so out of touch with some of the operations and methods of force that were under his command. I honestly wouldn't be surprised if the latter was the case after reading so many examples of backdoor diplomacy and underhanded dealings. I've gotten that impression numerous times from sources of history, especially regarding military chains of command.

I wanted to point out that I think you misspoke in your post, when quoting McNamera, you said: "Implying that the damnation for being silent is worse than that of speaking." I'm assuming you meant this the other way around, yes? And if not, may I ask why your logic?

Finally, and I'm glad you brought it up because it seems to be a section of the interview that got widely overlooked by our class, I found that McNamera's words on war as it pertains to human nature to be very interesting if not unsettling. I must admit that although he had greater experience with human nature, and certainly with warfare, compared to myself. I disagree with his statements wholeheartedly. I don't think that war is a factor of human nature, it's not part of who we are, although it's certainly played a large role in our history. I think that the argument could be made that war is a result of fear, and although fear is a factor of human nature, the two are not mutually inclusive. Consider if you will, and remember McNamera restates this himself, we were -afraid- of the results of communism spreading to east Asia, and they were -afraid- of american colonialism. We didn't -want- a war, and neither did they. When McNamera says "I'm not so naive or simplistic to believe that we can eliminate war. We're not going to change human nature anytime soon", I have to disagree. The remedy of fear is knowledge.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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"To Err is Human"

by Marquita Lucier - Friday, November 28, 2014, 6:31 PM

I can appreciate the fact the Robert McNamara during his interview admitted to his past errors amongst his accomplishments and apologized. I can relate to his statement "That we all make mistakes," and "Hopefully we learn from our mistakes." When McNamara mentions that he doesn't know any military commander that if he is honest with himself, that he made mistakes in the application of military power, it

reminds of the quote, "to err is human," and if we are honest with ourselves I am sure we have things in our past that we are not proud of and if we could change the choices or decisions we have made we would. I liked what McNamara said about not being able to change human nature anytime soon. That our judgment and understandings are not adequate and that reason has limits. Conflict with people usually starts with misunderstandings and true intentions and he brings this point up when describing that the Vietnamese wanted their independence and they thought that the U.S. was trying to enslave them. I agree when he said that many people misunderstand the Vietnam War and him as well. The film Fog of War illustrates more of an understanding for me as it relates to the human nature as Robert McNamara's uses the example of bringing two enemies together at the highest levels to discuss what might have been. "Each could have achieved their objectives without the loss of lives." I found it interesting when asked whether McNamara had any guilt his response was, "No further comment."

If LBJ or Nixon were still alive, they may have given the same sort of response as Robert McNamara. While we might have gained additional insight and understanding of the war from two additional, perspectives provided that they were honest and set aside their pride and stubbornness. As McNamara stated, "If he is honest with himself that he made mistakes in the application of military power," we may have heard answers to some of the lingering questions that have gone unanswered about the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"



by Racheal Bryant - Saturday, November 29, 2014, 5:53 PM

I love reading your posts, they are so clear and thought out. You make me think of things I normally wouldn't have. This post made me think of Nixon and his response if he would have given one. You said we might have gained insight if Johnson and Nixon would have shared their perspectives. I believe Johnson would have shared honestly and might have given us insight as to his rejections and refusals to listen to advisors and the decisions he made. The key is if Nixon could have been honest and set aside his pride or stubbornness. It took me a while to locate what Herring had written about Nixon, he said, "They [Nixon and Kissinger] shared an obsession with secrecy." (Pg. 278) To me I immediately thought that Nixon would not share much honestly. Herring also uses words like love for power, loner, outsider, viciously vindictive and insecure to the point of paranoia. I don't know if I would trust him even if he gave a response (Pg. 278). He kept so many secrets, that I feel he would not change his ways and be honest especially since he had such a paranoid outlook. Herring also says, "Kissinger and Nixon did try new approaches, some of which in time produced their own mistakes." (Pg. 277) I think we already know he made mistakes, having him admit them would not really help clarify the war. I am however intrigued by Nixon and find myself curious about his motives. I doubt he would have ever been frank about his decisions and what made him tick. For me

Nixon himself might not have given great insight, but possibly those who worked closely with him might have.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"

by Marquita Lucier - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 1:24 PM

You are sweet and thank you for your compliments. I have always thought that you put a lot of thought and intellect into your postings. It is an interesting topic of "Falling from Grace," when one is in the public eye. They seem to have a bigger fall than the rest of us due to their potential influence and overall damage to a larger populace. I thought you might like this bit of information. =)

On September 8, 1974, President Ford granted Nixon a "full, free, and absolute pardon", which ended any possibility of an indictment. Nixon then released a statement:

I was wrong in not acting more decisively and more forthrightly in dealing with Watergate, particularly when it reached the stage of judicial proceedings and grew from a political scandal into a national tragedy. No words can describe the depth of my regret and pain at the anguish my mistakes over Watergate have caused the nation and the presidency, a nation I so deeply love, and an institution I so greatly respect."
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Nixon

I believe that it is not where a person has been but where they are going. As McNamara said we all makes mistakes hopefully we can learn from them. Nixon spent his later years visiting foreign countries and promoting peace and reconciliation. I think he took a negative situation in his life and made it into a positive one by continuing to be actively involved in helping our country and further improving his tarnished image. I think that he was a very passionate and intelligent individual who lost sight of what was best for our nation and the American people in his entire obsession with power. I am glad that after his resignation until the end of his life that he tried to repair the damaged he may have caused to our country. I was in middle school ("Jr. High,") when President Nixon resigned over the Watergate Scandal so he would not be impeached. I was disappointed and I personally as a kid liked him even though he made mistakes, and to some extent, I still admire him.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"

by Racheal Bryant - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 5:02 PM



I loved that, I learn so much from your posts, makes me wish we had in class discussions. I had no idea he worked so hard after his resignation visiting foreign countries. I wasn't alive during his presidency, but do remember hearing about his death. I wonder if being Eisenhower's vice president at the start of the war had anything to do with his determination to end the war. I had never really thought about it from that perspective. What we have read so far has cast Nixon in such a bad light that it is nice to hear his efforts to come full circle. It reminds me of McNamara's favorite quote by TS Elliot, "We shall not cease from exploring and at the end of our exploration we will return to where we started and know the place for the first time." He said that this reminded him of the journey of his life and the full circle he had come with hindsight. I hope Nixon felt the same way, seems he tried hard to turn his image into a positive one. Funny how we only hear the bad things about people, Nixon was taught to us as the disappointing president, the one who messed up. Until this class I only associated Nixon with Watergate, not the Vietnam war.

The question was posed would Nixon provide any insight to the war, I would have to say I still think if he had been interviewed before 1974 we still would not have received much from him, a lot of that is probably due to the sensitivity of the material. McNamara filmed Fog of War when he was 85. Nixon's statement and apology makes me rethink his ability to give insight to the war. It seems possible that in his old age with years behind him, he would have been able to see in hindsight like McNamara and provide some interesting perspective.

Thanks for the challenge, it adds a whole other layer of complexity to the topic, which is so interesting to try and sort through. I graduate after this term, I think Nixon would be a great person to read up on in my free time.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"



by Marquita Lucier - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 7:09 PM

Congratulations on your graduation after this term! I know you have put in a lot of hard work and dedication. It's hard to think that these men or women who have served our country were actually someone's son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife, father or mother. They are people just like you and I am not sure why we view them differently. Good luck in your future endeavors and enjoy your free time...reading about Nixon. P.S. I really

enjoyed growing up in the seventies. Moms were still at home when you got home from school, snack ready and eager to hear about your day. Then after homework, it was fun watching Gilligan's Island, Brady Bunch and the partridge family. My family always sat down for a meal together and this is something that you don't see happening much these days.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"

by Andrew Schubert - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 7:30 PM

I think that we can all relate to McNamera's statement that "We all make mistakes", I'm sure he's hardly the first individual to make that realization. And certainly, it was true before he said it, although I can understand that he'd have a particular connection to this mentality. I'm curious though, why is it that you like what he said about "not being able to change human nature anytime soon"? Personally that was one of the parts of his interview that struck me as the most outrageous. I understand that he's being honest, and I want to commend him for it, but on this particular topic it comes across -to me at least- as the historical equivalent of "well, everyone else was doing it". If our judgement and understandings are not adequate, at what point do they become adequate? Or are we doomed an eternity of conflict and fear. If reason is the power of the mind to think and to understand, are we really better off believing that it has limits?

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"

by Dennis Calciano - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 7:39 PM

I agree the video seems like an apology from McNamara. The music is really slow and solemn giving a theme of remorse. McNamara seems regretful, especially at the ending of the video, but he also makes it clear hes not the first person to make bad choices in his position. "A military commander who he is honest with himself will admit hes made mistakes with the application of military power." I'm glad I watched this video cause it helped to put a face on McNamara when all I've learned about him before made him out to be a very radical and close-minded guy. He has a lot intensity behind his voice and forms strong opinions to justify and defend his actions.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"

by Bryan Lewis - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 8:53 PM

I don't feel McNamara really made an apology, he seemed more factual. I feel the sadness of the video was more due the fact of subject matter, the Vietnam War. He seems to try and give an explanation on his involvement in the Vietnam War, and how his actions may have caused the needless death of many American and Vietnamese soldiers. I do agree about the intensity of McNamara, and I feel that this intensity may have led to some questionable decisions during the war.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: "To Err is Human"

by Timothy Hammett - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 11:15 PM

I agree that it did not really seem like an apology exactly. I would say that it was an explanation of the actions that he took which is not the same thing as saying sorry for his actions. It may not have been an apology but it served the purpose of humanizing this otherwise larger than life figure we read about that can come off as rather cold when simply reading about his actions but hearing about the WHY was very important and admitting that he had made mistakes.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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McNamara's Fog

by Arvind Raman - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 10:56 PM

Through the documentary, McNamara is basically one of the last living people who had direct involvement in U.S. govt with going to War. So what he says really can on be supported or contradicted through previous written or taped claims. He apologizes for what the Americans did, about our military tactics of using weapons, but it's more just friendly sorry.

I would think remembering whether if you signed off for the use for agent orange. That would be very important and I don't think that slipped his memory. That was something very strange I found. Also there are times toward the end of the clip, that he doesn't want name names or throw anyone under the bus. He almost plays old age card, when asked some questions.

I think Nixon and LBJ if they were forthright to talk about the experience, would give a little more detail. However I think Nixon would give more behind the scenes information to help share the components of the story. I think LBJ would not be as talkative, but offer little detail.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Fog of War

by Timothy Hammett - Sunday, November 30, 2014, 11:11 PM

It has all ready been said by other people in the forum but i think one of the big effects that seeing this speech had on me was how i view those who were involved in making important choices in the war. hindsight is always 20/20 and so sometimes we can forget how difficult it was for these commanders to make these choices based on the limited information that they might have had at the time. In this class we have the benefit of sitting at home in front of our computers and sometimes we simply can't think of these people we are learning about as human beings every bit as capable of making mistakes as we are. the commanders we learn about are not stupid or evil they are people who do not have the full picture and are forced to act. sometimes that is in the heat of battle and sometimes it is in grand strategy when commanders cant grasp what the other side is really fighting for. I would say that is the biggest impact the video had for me is that it humanized historical figures and commanders that i otherwise would have simply thought of as fact points. I think it would have been interesting to see a documentary where we could really get inside the head of people like LBJ or Nixon as they can still seem like larger then life figures. to show them in this light i really think would have helped to give us a greater understanding of their thought process and why exactly it is that they made the choices that they did. I think that understanding the reasoning they had for their approach to the war would have certainly increased our understanding of the war by volumes if we could truly understand why they took the approaches that they did.

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