

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

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Home ► My courses ► Fall 2014 ► HST 195 F14 (Escobar Meta 21179) ► October 19 - October 25 ► Forum 2 ► Week 2 - Continuing the Discussion



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Forum 2

Display replies in nested form

Move this discussion to ...

< Previous (Week 2 - Continuing th...)



Week 2 - Continuing the Discussion

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, October 19, 2014, 6:23 PM

After reading the NYT article and watching the second half of the AIM program, discuss specific examples of conflicting information you have encountered in the provided class sources (from the Herring book, PBS series, and AIM program).

Another question. Which source gets your "vote", on that specific issue (NOT overall), as having the more correct/accurate/truthful interpretation or reinterpretation?

Do not attempt to answer both of these questions in a single post or reply.

Also, be sure to change the Subject Line to something that properly describes your post. (Do NOT leave the subject at RE: Week 2 - Continuing the Discussion)

Sum of ratings: -

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Veitcong Effectiveness

by Zachary Embree - Monday, October 20, 2014, 6:22 PM

After consulting the various sources I have found something that seems to have a different view for every source. That is the actual effectiveness of the Vietcong forces when confronting and defending against US forces. Take for example in the Herring book when it is describing how the North Vietnamese forces responded to initial US tactics. At first they are terrified, but then adapt and continue to be a effective fighting force. In the Abby book their is a interview with a women who fought on the side of North Vietnam, she also describes a initial fear. Except by her accounts after they adapted she found it easier then killing the Southern Vietnamese. From the PBS series I however got the impression that American air-power and troops became a problem that the Vietcong could never really gain parity

with. The AIM program takes that one step further in my view, seemingly reducing the Vietnamese as a damaging but ultimately ineffective obstacle to US military efforts. Also one thing in particular about the AIM series is that it goes to great lengths to assure the audience that if the US had kept at it victory was inevitable. The PBS series and the Herring book go as far as to say we were doomed before we ever landed.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Veitcong Effectiveness

by Racheal Bryant - Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 11:05 AM

I would love to look these examples up. Can you list book pages for the books and approximate times of PBS series that you are talking about. I have also been trying to keep track of what is being said of the Vietcong forces, their actions and effectiveness.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Herring better than most.

by Zachary Embree - Monday, October 20, 2014, 6:45 PM

When it comes to how well anybodies forces fair against the US military, I expect a very large bias. It is just part of this countries make up, we love our military to the point where soldier are raised a step above the common man. Not only that but I have yet to meet a single person who will admit that somebody else could have done better in any war post WW1. Add in a fair amount of our material was made when people actually took the communist threat seriously. All that being said I find that when it comes to how well the North Vietnamese fared when confronted with US forces Herring slants it the least. PBS has a problem of a anti war slant and needing to reduce things into something the average viewer will understand. It lacks many of the real background details and detailed tactics. I found it focused more on the after action shots many of them corpses with no actual context. Similarly the AIM admits to being a reaction to the PBS series, but is also very vague on just how and why we would have pulled a victory out of that mess. Herring allowed me to get a sense of North Vietnam's fighting style and adaptability, and also demonstrate the United States' raw power limited by intel issues and untrained allies. By giving me the raw numbers and facts I can make my own viewpoint even if the context they are presented in is biased.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Herring better than most.

by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 10:14 AM

While PBS and AIM seem to have their own agendas, the Herring book doesn't seem too bias in my opinion. But that may just seem that way to me after all of the controversy with PBS and AIM. Herring doesn't have an entity picking it apart, and Herring is not picking apart another Vietnam show or reading material. It is easy to start re-thinking how you feel about something when someone is picking it apart for you and influencing your opinion. I agree it's easier to make your own viewpoint with how the numbers and facts are presented in the book. It doesn't seem as politically bias as AIM and PBS which allows me to trust it a little more. I am subject to change though with my view on it all, the more we delve into this!

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: Week 2 - Continuing the Discussion

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 9:50 PM

The first theme I noticed in the second part of the AIM video was Nguyen Ngoc Bich's assertion that North Vietnamese forces in the PBS series were always portrayed as revolutionaries, while South Vietnamese forces were generally portrayed as puppets, or ignored altogether. There did seem to be a noticeable absence of any real information regarding the ARVN in the first three episodes of the PBS series. Douglas Pike took this a step further and stated that the Vietnam series seemed to have a sort of disrespect for the South Vietnamese army, and that their portrayal of the ARVN bordered on racist. Pike said that the PBS series spent much of their time "slandering the South Vietnamese armed forces," with "not even a hint of sympathy for them" (AIM part 2). The New York Times article conceded that the PBS series did indeed leave out the contribution of the South Vietnamese army, and called it an "intelligent criticism" made by Accuracy in Media.

I intentionally watched the AIM video before watching episode four of the PBS series, so I was curious if I would see any degradation of the ARVN. Ten minutes in, Private Bill Ehrhart pondered why the South Vietnamese soldiers wouldn't fight. He compared the ARVN to the Viet Cong, and said, "One side seems to be chicken, and the other side seems to fight in the face of overwhelming disadvantages" (PBS Ep. 4).

In the Appy book, several accounts mention the questionable morale and tactics of the South Vietnamese. Roger Donlon recounted that, "Of the three hundred members of our Strike Force, it turned out that about a hundred sympathized with the enemy" (Appy pg. 13). Speaking of a large-scale attack on the Nam Dong Special Forces camp, Donlon estimated that about a third of the South Vietnamese soldiers ended up fighting for the Viet Cong in the battle, and said, "The first thing each of the traitors did when the attack started—and they knew it was coming—was to slit the

throat or break the neck of the person next to them” (pg 14). Richard Olsen, another interviewee from the Appy book, didn’t have the same experience with treason, but he noted that the North was generally tougher than the South. Olsen flew South Vietnamese troops into the field, and recalled being summoned to pick up a body of a fallen soldier, only to have several ARVN troops attempt to board to plane, with the excuse of wanting to come back early for the funeral. In his own words, “I thought, stay out there and fight your own war...I had the thought that we needed Americans in there to show them how to do it” (Appy, pg. 64).

According to the Herring book, part of the problem was that American presence in the war was actually having a negative effect on the South Vietnamese Army. Herring argues that, “the ARVN was largely shunted aside, relegated to lesser operations and population control, chores its officers considered demeaning and took on with considerable reluctance” (Herring pg. 198). He attributes the continued low morale and reluctance of the ARVN partially to the heavy U.S. leadership.

Phan Xuan Sinh, a soldier in the ARVN, gave a South Vietnamese perspective. “Our overwhelming hope was that the war would end,” Sinh said. “In general, my generation hated the war, but we had no choice. We were drafted.” He summarized his lack of passion for the war by saying, “...many of us thought that even living under the other side’s authority would be preferable to continuing the war. People like me didn’t hate the other side. We were forced to bear arms and saw no compelling reason to fight” (Appy, pg. 26).

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Week 2 - Continuing the Discussion

by Zachary Embree - Thursday, October 23, 2014, 12:00 AM

The effectiveness of the South Vietnamese forces I found is a subject that is frequently brought up but never really explained. So far in the PBS series and the Herring book, I have yet to see any real details about training and conscription practices that the South used over the entire course of the war. Some of the only real sense of how the people conscripted to fight on the war felt comes from the Appy book. If the troops were as unmotivated and poorly trained as they suggest, the series of losses against the highly motivated North Vietnamese makes more sense. As you described in your post, they did not want to fight and was a huge detriment to their effectiveness. I would not say reporting that a military is fighting poorly racism or slandering if they are, and you include the reasons why. PBS had the first but really never provided the second.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Week 2 - Continuing the Discussion



by Savana Cochrane - Friday, October 24, 2014, 2:07 PM

I agree with what you're saying. I just wanted to additionally mention that Sinh's comments reveal a major reason as to why America lost the war. If the majority of South Vietnamese people were equally as passionate about having an independent democratic (non-communist) country as the North Vietnamese were about instilling communism, then the outcome of the war would likely have been very different. It seems that the U.S. was fighting communism in a country where most people had already decided it was "preferable to continuing war" as you quoted.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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AIM vs. PBS won't agree because objectives are different



by Racheal Bryant - Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 9:58 PM

After reading NY Times article "Television's Vietnam: The real story", on PBS, it mentions that the rebuttal from AIM is not "particularly effective" (Paragraph 4). We all caught on to the contradicting depiction of Ho Chi Minh's in PBS verses part 1 of AIM's. While this was fair to bring up, I left part 2 of AIM with a more skeptic view of AIM's intentions. I was a little more than 13 minutes into Part 2 when I noticed AIM only used 1 Vietnamese in their rebuttal and 1 women's voice who sounded Vietnamese. PBS on the other hand seemed to pull from a larger group of people and I think PBS was fair in letting those people speak their opinion. NY Times also stated AIM was "interested mostly in its own point of view" (Paragraph 4). It goes on to say that PBS "offered room for many points of view" and AIM's rebuttal wants to "rule out all points of view except their own" (Paragraph 10).

Conflict #1: Point goes to AIM

In an interview for AIM, John McCain pointed out that PBS "portrayed an unfortunate position against POW's in North Vietnam and the treatment of Viet Cong by the Americans" (AIM Part 2 3:00). He brings up the point that PBS did not compare the POW compounds, choosing to show instead mistreatment in the field from the Americans where the battle was going on. John McCain says the "difference needs drawn". McCain voices there was never record of any mistreatments once the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong got to the American compounds.

Conflict #2: Point goes to AIM

AIM brought up the "glossing over" of May 13th, 1967 when a NY parade of a half million marched for 9 hours to show support for Vietnam Troops (AIM Part 2 10:00). PBS doesn't mention this parade which I think is one of the biggest editing errors I have noticed in this segment. PBS was not inaccurate it just didn't prioritizing their information with the same values.

Conflict #3: Point goes to PBS

Reed Irvine Chairman of AIM inc. said “the enemy was able to use our free uncontrolled media to achieve their own objectives and yet that important message was totally ignored by the PBS series”(23:00). In fact PBS does address the use of American Media in Episode 2 (37:00). PBS shows us and describes how the monks used the media to get the message across with signs and banners written in English and their native language. It is expressed well that Vietnamese were learning to use American Media to their advantage.

At the end of the NY times article it said, “Vietnam history will not be so much rewritten as it will be reinterpreted” (Paragraph 15). I believe PBS has presented the Vietnam War with the goal for the audience to understand what went on in Vietnam. I believe AIM’s goal is to educate the American people on details of why things happened so we will see their point of view that aligns with the decisions the American governments made. These objectives conflict and so will the information each party will seek to highlight.

Overall, I think the conflict between the two views comes from their values in what they wanted to portray. AIM wants accuracy while PBS wants a broad understanding of the war. It would not be hard to pick apart the PBS series if you focused on every single detail both aired and edited.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: AIM vs. PBS won't agree because objectives are different



by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 9:27 AM

By the second part of the AIM video, I too had a different view of it and questioned the intentions the show had. The first part made it easy for me to listen to everything and judge the PBS series, but after further reading and more material to go off- a different picture was being painted. I found myself able to listen to the PBS series more, the further we went into it all. I noticed a lot of similar things that you did. I found it more credible that PBS had many points of view.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: AIM vs. PBS won't agree because objectives are different



by Rachelle Wells - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 4:05 PM

One thing I noticed in the NY Times article after I read it again was when John Corry started the story he said, “The most interesting thing about “Television’s Vietnam: The Real Story” is not the program itself; it is the controversy surrounding it. Should public television show the program or not?” (NY Times, paragraph 1). It made me think about the PBS and AIM shows again and wonder if some of the other issues surrounding the airing of the series and the rebuttal to go with it have more to do with the conflict between PBS and AIM

themselves and not so much with the content of their shows. I think PBS believes in their portrayal and AIM believes in their rebuttal. After all, on AIM's website it says that they were formed in 1969 after a group of citizens got together (led by Reed Irvine) because they were concerned about the inaccuracies and one-sidedness they saw in media. For me, that helped me form an opinion about AIM and really just made me think of them as just another media source. PBS was also formed in 1969, but is much broader. I think they'll always agree to disagree.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: AIM vs. PBS won't agree because objectives are different

S

by Racheal Bryant - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 8:49 PM

In forum 1 I looked up both sources too and came to the same conclusion. They are both non-profit as well. I needed to know the background of both to understand where they were coming from. It started to shape my opinion of what was being said from the different perspectives. I had also noticed right away when the article hinted at the real story not being about the program itself.

Thanks for sharing the backstory and helping fill in the history behind PBS and AIM. I think its important for people to research their sources and decide if they think they are reliable.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Bold and opposite opinions

P S

by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 9:57 AM

The PBS series says the Americans coming back from war were "haunted". AIM tends to disagree and points out that PBS portrays the Americans from war as racist drug addicts. AIM discussed how they came back not only well adjusted members of society, but as leaders because of the war. I finally found something I agree with PBS on! I believe PBS is correct about them coming back haunted and about the negativity in general. Just my town alone has a high population of homeless, mentally ill Vietnam vets incapable of carrying out a normal life as a beneficial member/leader of society. Sadly, there are so many that came back damaged and I see it firsthand all around me. I see more damage than positivity in anyone resulting from the war. I am not necessarily saying AIM is wrong, but I am just pointing out that what I see every day in my own experience where I live gives me the ability to relate with what PBS was saying.

The NY Times article discussed the criticism that is offered by both "Inside story" and AIM that "the series makes Ho Chi Minh into a nationalist rather than a Communist"

and that “it ignores the role of the South Vietnamese Army. At this point I am seeing so much disagreement and controversy with AIM and PBS that I am having a difficult time forming a solid opinion!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Can both be right?

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 7:27 PM

I think you make an interesting point regarding the current state of Vietnam veterans. Obviously, the effects that such a long and brutal war could have on the soldiers are unarguable. But I think it bears pointing out that millions of people served in the Vietnam War, and the vast majority are not homeless or mentally ill. They obviously still carry internal and external scars with them from the war, but I think there is truth to both sides of the story. PBS is correct in asserting that many veterans came back from Southeast Asia haunted by the things they had seen and the things they had done, and sadly, have never resumed fully functional lives because of those memories. However, I can see why AIM sources like Dan Cragg and William Jayne feel compelled to put their foot down and dispel the stereotype that Vietnam veterans are sympathy cases or damaged.

The PBS series estimates that of the 2.5 million who served, three-quarters of a million are still “haunted”. First, I don’t see a reasonable and effective way that PBS could have made this estimation, and I would be curious to know what the parameters are which make someone fall into the “haunted” category. PTSD episodes? An inability to maintain a steady job or interpersonal relationships? Or could it simply be someone who has nightmares about their time in Vietnam? It is unfair to both sides to lump such a broad category of suffering and issues under one heading. Second, even if these (potentially fabricated) numbers are correct, it accounts for only 30% of the soldiers who served in Vietnam. To paint the whole lot as a “loser or a victim”, as William Jayne put it, is unfair and insensitive. Dan Cragg explains that, “The hundreds of thousands of Americans who went to Vietnam and served honorably and bravely, have got to be incensed at this terrible, terrible misrepresentation of their bravery and sacrifice on the battlefield” (Cragg, AIM pt. 2). In this case, I believe AIM makes a valid point, and that the PBS series did a great disservice to the millions of veterans who came back and resumed their lives.

I think it also bears noting that though we may have frequent personal contact with veterans who are vocal about their issues with the Vietnam War, we are also surrounded by soldiers that will never make you aware that they served in that war. Vietnam veterans look like everybody else, and in most cases, behave like anybody else. It’s a prejudicial generalization for our expectation of Vietnam vets to be that they still haven’t quite gotten it together forty years after the war.

**Re: Can both be right?**

by Racheal Bryant - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 9:30 PM

I am so glad you posted your last paragraph. I also want to add that not all Vietnam Veterans went to Vietnam and their story is all together different than what both PBS and AIM portray.

There have been several who have mentioned PTSD and veterans being "haunted" I picked up on this earlier but wanted to look for some more information. I found two articles, one from LA times and a second from NY times. Both are from this year.

NY times:

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/08/us/combat-stress-found-to-persist-since-vietnam.html?_r=0

LA times:

<http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-ptsd-vietnam-20140808-story.html>

Both articles agree that 11% of our Vietnam Veterans suffer from PTSD. While their still is some controversy what constitutes PTSD they do agree that the condition is chronic and will continue to effect them for the rest of their lives. LA times says studies show a "significant number of veterans" have PTSD. While NY times says "the vast majority of veterans learn to cope". I first thought that these two statements contradicted each other until I realized 11% of an approximate 2.5 million who served in the Vietnam war as PBS suggested is a significant number and the majority, the other 89% have learned to cope.

Both articles also mentioned Veterans at risk for PTSD increased if they were a minority, a high school drop out or enlisted before finishing high school and someone who had killed during the war. LA times also added being very young was a risk factor for PTSD.

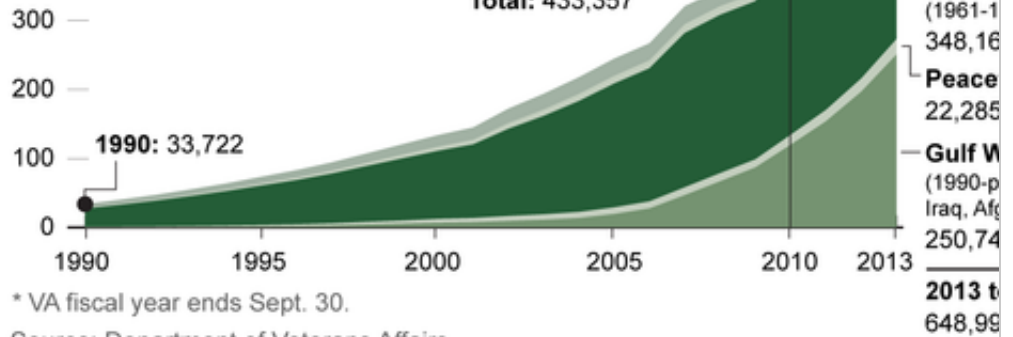
It was interesting to me that NY times wrote, "each war produces its own mental syndrome". World War I was shell shock, World War II was combat fatigue, while Vietnam's mental syndrome was PTSD. LA times added to the data with a graph that showed just how much PTSD effected the Veterans in Vietnam compared to other wars.

A steep rise in PTSD

The number of veterans on the disability rolls for post-traumatic stress disorder has nearly quintupled since 2000.

PTSD disability cases

(In thousands)



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs.

Graphics reporting by Alan Zarembo

Thomas Suh Lauder / @lat

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Can both be right?

by Savana Cochrane - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 2:27 PM

Could you please elaborate on what you mean when you say that some Vietnam Veterans didn't even go to Vietnam. Wouldn't they just be a veteran because they were in the army, and not actually Vietnam Veterans since they didn't go to war?

Also, can you help me understand the graph? Due to the increase since 2000, it appears that veterans of a war that happened in 1970, 1950, or even 1945, didn't show symptoms of PTSD until 30-55 years later. Is it usual for people to appear fine right after war and then suffer from PTSD decades later?

Thank you

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Can both be right?

by Racheal Bryant - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 4:57 PM

They are considered Vietnam Veterans because they served during the era of the war. They do not have to have served in the country of Vietnam, been in combat or been deployed to

a combat zone to be a Veteran of the Vietnam War. Veteran refers to their service, Vietnam refers to the time period in which they served.

As far as the graph goes, I posted that to show the difference in PTSD cases for each war. As you can see Vietnam has the highest number of service members with PTSD. Again, backing up the claim from PBS that a significant amount of Veterans are "Haunted" especially when compared to other wars. Not that it is a majority of the veterans, but a significant amount.

This graph might be confusing because it brings up another topic which is the treatment of PTSD and the VA's guidelines for collecting disability benefits for PTSD. The rise from 1990 is due to the regulations that the VA has made in collecting disability benefits for PTSD. In the article some claim it is hard to treat someone for PTSD when they receive a tax-free check each month for this disability.

If its still confusing I posted the LA times article's link on my last post. It explains the debate on what is considered PTSD to receive the disability payment and why the rise in claims. Either way the graph shows that Vietnam Veterans suffered far more PTSD than other wars.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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The less political, the more I trust

by Sierra Smith - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 10:13 AM

I feel like the Herring book has less subjective, more factual, and less political/controversial material. Both AIM and PBS tend to make bold statements that hit nerves with each other all based on opinions of how they perceive it all, hence the constant disagreement and controversy. I am finding that I have more trust so far with the Herring book. My view is subject to change though. The more we read and watch, we are given more tools to form what we think is fact versus bias. With how much difference AIM and PBS have, it is extremely hard to decipher what is truth between the two. That may be why I am leaning more with Herring as well. I am still trying to figure it all out. I am trying not to be so influenced with one story or another. At first I was just taking AIM's word with how inaccurate PBS but now I am seeing there is much more to this puzzle. I am glad we have other additional material to read and go off of for learning about this war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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**Who gets my vote:**

by Racheal Bryant - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 3:33 PM

I would have to say the Herring book would get my vote for having the least amount of conflicting information. So far it seems to have the most information that has overlapped all the other sources. The Appy book while the most enjoyable source for me, is more about the memories of how things happened instead of factual accounts. A lot of the stories cannot be accounted for through records or reports filed. The stories are emotional and are helpful in getting a sense of the conditions, the mindset and circumstances that surrounded the War. The two television sources have so much controversial information that I find them hard to say they would be most truthful in their interpretation. Both have agenda's and personal views on the war.

It wasn't asked but if I had to pick a source that gave me the best overall way of learning about the war, I would pick PBS. The Herring book while detailed is so dense. I find myself needing the overview or foundation that PBS provides so I can build on that with the Herring book.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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**Re: Who gets my vote:**

by Desria Hansen - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 7:58 PM

I completely agree with you that the Herring Book is very detailed. I find myself having to re-read it and read it very carefully to make sure I am still following along. I like to read the Herring book first before watching the PBS series and then tie them together.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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**Re: Who gets my vote:**

by Sierra Smith - Thursday, October 23, 2014, 11:41 AM

Although I love the Herring book, I have to re-read a lot of the material, it is so informative I tend to trail off at times! I am more attentive in the Appy book. It is basically a story book but about real things!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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**Re: Who gets my vote**

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 7:45 PM

I think most of us probably agree with you about the density of the Herring book! Although it's really interesting to get so much behind-the-scenes knowledge of

each individual event, it can all start to blur together. It really helped me to look up a timeline of major events in the Vietnam War and print it out. Each event on it is undisputed, and it mainly just includes dates without any sort of bias. But it helps me to keep the timeline straight in my head!

It's interesting to think about the function that the PBS series was probably hoping to fulfill in society. Like you, so many people were probably drawn to the television series because it is more approachable than a dense book full of dates and minute details. People who would not have picked up a book like "America's Longest War" were perhaps educated by the PBS series about a topic they would have otherwise remained ignorant about. I came into this class with virtually no knowledge of the Vietnam War, and I think that the PBS series and the Herring book have together helped me form a decent understanding. If I were not enrolled in this class, there is a good chance I would have found a PBS series about the Vietnam War intriguing and interesting. I probably wouldn't have read Herring's book all the way through, even though his is the most factual and unbiased source. So in a sense, even though I do see many flaws in the presentation of the PBS series, I think it is good that there is such a program available to provide the general public with some grasp of the Vietnam War. Even if it is slightly biased, I think it is probably a better option than remaining completely unaware.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Who gets my vote

by Racheal Bryant - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 2:36 PM

I agree, I came in with no knowledge at all and took it as a "fun" class to fill my last 3 elective credits to graduate. I have a man who parks his trailer once a year in our yard for the weekend while he shops the Coburg Antique fair. He is a Vietnam Veteran and I felt completely unaware of what that stood for. Being an American and having been a spouse of a Navy Veteran I felt this was unacceptable for me to be so uneducated about our history. I would never have read the Appy book which I love or the Herring book which I tolerate, but I would have watched the PBS series. I actually thought the bay of pigs invasion had something to do with Vietnam, little did I know how wrong I was. I also think PBS even with the flaws was a great general tool for the public to learn from. From a historians stand point I could see how some of these flaws could not be overlooked. For me I can overlook it and believe some knowledge is better than ignorance.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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U.S. Army an Effective Fighting Force?

by Savana Cochrane - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 4:48 PM

The AIM video argues that the PBS series, badly depicts the 'quality' of the American soldier. Indeed PBS editors chose to use clips where veterans say things like, "It was like a bunch of guys got together and went camping, who had never camped in their lives" and "I saw half a dozen dead Americans before I ever shot at North Vietnamese; strictly from our own mistakes," (PBS ep.4, 44:20). However, Herring states that "American troops fought well considering the miserable conditions," (Herring, pg193-194). It also says that Americans usually prevailed and that the United states inflicted huge losses on the enemy. I think when we're faced with such contradictions, we have to remember that the PBS video is similar to the Appy book in that, one persons story, experience, and opinions cannot be used to evaluate the whole the group. Just because one man in the PBS video felt his group of soldiers didn't know what they were doing or even what they were fighting against (PBS ep.4, 47:40) doesn't mean that a majority of the other Americans were equally naïve. Herring shows that 150,000 to 540,000 military personnel were in South Vietnam during any given month (Herring pg. 188). It's only reasonable to conclude that there were both skilled and unskilled, naïve and knowledgeable, drug-addicted and clear-minded soldiers. To say that the quality of American fighting was high (as in the AIM video) is a gross generalization. It remains somewhat unclear to me how much damage to the North Vietnamese and Vietcong the U.S. was inflicting. This is because both the Herring book and PBS video agree in saying that American soldiers soon saw no difference between innocent Vietnamese people and Vietcong fighters. "If it's dead and it's Vietnamese, it's VC," says Caputo (Herring pg. 194). Multiple people in the PBS video also agree that Vietnamese were shot regardless of whether or not they were South Vietnamese or Vietcong (PBS 27:30, 18:50, 36:15). Because of this, the numbers of enemy killed were extremely unreliable. So, it's hard to decide whether the U.S. army actually depleted the Vietcong forces a substantial amount, or if a good portion of the number of Vietnamese killed were not communist at all.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Watch, Read, & Continue to Build Knowledge Base



by Rachelle Wells - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 5:04 PM

There have proven to be overwhelming challenges in sifting through some of the conflicting information in the resources. One of the interesting conflicts is the condition of our soldiers and the portrayal of them in the AIM and PBS series. Starting with Dan Cragg (AIM), "I think the great unjustness of the film <PBS> is it portrays the American Soldier as a drug addict, racial bigot, and a man who murdered his officers and NCO's almost at will." He goes on to say that the other "hundreds of thousands of soldiers who served in Vietnam honorably and bravely have got to be insensitive to this terrible, terrible misrepresentation of their bravery and sacrifice on the battlefield." William Jayne from the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program states (AIM), "The PBS series, especially Episode 13, portrays the vet as a stereotyped loser, victim—the word they use is haunted. PBS did not give the other side of the picture, which is that many veterans are well adjusted—by and large and

productive members of society. Many veterans are now assuming leadership roles in society.” Mr. Jayne states, “Many of them have reported that their success so far has been achieved in part because of their experience of having served our country, not in spite of it.” In Episode 4, Bill Ehrhart gives an interview that is engaging, convincing and certainly feels like he was proud to be a Marine and he was committed to his role in Vietnam. However, Bill admits later in the episode as he talks about life after the war, “The nightmares you have aren’t about the armed combat, they’re about the 55-60 year old unarmed woman running through the rice field—I shot her and didn’t even think twice (Episode 4, 26:55).” This indicates that Bill was indeed having issues postwar and this is just one example from him. Undoubtedly, he believes he served his country honorably and bravely the way he was guided, but to say he’s not ‘haunted’ by Vietnam would be untrue. Another story, that would dispute Mr. Cragg’s statement above, is Private Jack Hill (Episode 4) as he discusses a two-company operation that took place in January 1967. The Marines were trying to clear the village, but when they went in there was immediate return fire. In this episode, PBS also interviews 3-4 Vietnamese who were in that village that day, who do not at all recall it in the same manner as Private Hill. One of which is now an adult, who was 11 years old at the time. What is clear in this interview is that the Vietnamese depict the American soldier as very, very brutal. Throwing grenades in a room full of children, where one of the interviewees states, “All I had left of my children were a few bones.” Mr. Hill’s response was, “after 3 days we did what we had to do. I’m sure there was blood and guts and I’m sure from a kid’s eye view, that’s what it was, but we did what we had to do.” Private Hill—in my opinion—is nearly smirking during this part of the interview.

Another conflicting piece of information I found was about the Tet offensive. In the AIM film, Reed Irvine declares, “The Tet Offensive in 1968 was portrayed by our media as a defeat on our side even though it was a very outstanding military victory.” However, in “America’s Longest War” Herring writes, “As in much of the war, there was a great deal of destruction and suffering, but no clear-cut winner or loser” as he wrote about the Tet Offensive (Herring, pg.240). Then to be more confusing John Singlaub declares, “Here in the United States, people thought it had been a great victory for the Communists and a terrible defeat for us. Well, we did not feel that way. We had been trying for years to get them to come out in the open so we could slaughter them, and we slaughtered them. Man, we just cleaned their clocks. It was an enormous victory for us and we should have just pressed on.” (Appy pg. 93).

AIM was founded in 1969 by a group of concerned citizens, led by economist Reed Irvine, who were “troubled by the inaccuracies and one-sidedness they saw in the American media.” (<http://www.aim.org/about/history-of-aim/>). Of course, AIM grew from there, but it is just another media resource. Is The New York Times article just another viewpoint on media coverage? Writer John Corry writes, “In 1983, this critic called the Vietnam series ‘a landmark in television journalism,’ a judgment I still hold.” He wrote that one of its great strengths was that it offered room for many points of view. Channel 13 had offered another program and Corry felt it suggested, “Vietnam history will not be so much rewritten as it will be reinterpreted.” I think I may agree with John Corry’s analysis of Channel 13: that partisan of one side or another will resist the new interpretations. Moreover, agreeably, it was likely and probably

continues to be that history cannot be reinterpreted unless the reinterpretation has their <AIM> approval.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Watch, Read, & Continue to Build Knowledge Base



by Savana Cochrane - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 6:58 PM

As far as the Tet offensive, which source gets your 'vote'? It appears that both AIM and Singlaub from the Appy book agree in that American media portrayed it as a loss, when it was actually a victory. Do you think this is accurate because more than one source agrees? Or do you think AIM is flawed by alternative motives and Singlaub has a biased view as a veteran? I would say that this is likely an accurate story, because even Herring isn't necessarily disagreeing. It seems reasonable to conclude that Herring saw no clear winner or loser because U.S media journalists, editors etc.. thought the Communists won, while soldiers in battle saw it as an American victory.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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The Winner Today is PBS



by Rachelle Wells - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 5:45 PM

When it comes to the soldiers and the portrayal of them in the PBS series, PBS gets my vote. Why? Because specifically in Episode 4 there is two different ends of the spectrum shown that really standout. The first is of a man who shows himself throughout his interview as honorable, brave but also willingly shows us that the war had a negative effect on him because he had/has nightmares. He appears open and honest with body language that suggests this as well. Then the other end of the spectrum is another soldier discussing their planned operation, but during the interview, he is clearly asked to respond to questions that come from statements from the Vietnamese. He becomes somewhat crass in his remarks and begins to smirk as he talks. My sense as this interview unfolds is that this is another type of aftermath of the war, but I do not think that PBS showing it is wrong or unjust. I think it is honest. I feel like AIM tries only to give a view of the perfect soldier.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS



by Desria Hansen - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 7:09 PM

Do you feel like the Appy book gives you the same type of honest representation as the PBS series does even though you cannot see or read their body language? Or does that make it less credible to you? To me, I feel

like the Appy book gives good representations of stories on all sides, whereas both the PBS and AIM seem to show the sides that they want to be seen.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS



by Rachel Wells - Thursday, October 23, 2014, 9:31 AM

I love the Appy book! I was trying to just give my opinion on PBS vs. AIM based off of Mr. Escobar's feedback from our Forum last week. I often feel like I get a physical response while reading some of the stories in Appy. For instance, Roger Donlon's story (Appy, part 1), Appy notes Donlon talks with a calm, even-paced voice. For me, that set the feel for the story as I read it. I noticed that my heart was almost racing and my jaw clenched as I read Roger's story and I felt his story was very credible, regardless of not being able to see him. Even though PBS and AIM may give the sides they want to be seen, I think they are often fair sides and that we can see that in some of the stories portrayed in Appy as far as there are all of the different portrayals.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS



by Sierra Smith - Thursday, October 23, 2014, 11:50 AM

I always get a sense of behavior and mood from the interviews in Appy. Even with Donlon's calm serious approach, I still caught a vibe of compassion and goodness from him. I like that I am able to feel vibes from each person. It is very detailed at a personal level in that book and I love it! PBS and AIM I suppose have a few here and there but I just don't trust everything that is shown at this point.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS



by Desria Hansen - Thursday, October 23, 2014, 2:59 PM

I love the Appy book also! I too get a lot of emotions while reading it. The Appy book is the most enjoyable to me, I feel like I get a really good representation on what they went through and I also think all their stories are very credible. I guess you do have a point that even though the PBS and AIM portray what they want to be seen, that doesn't necessarily mean that what they state is false. Thank you for your input!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 8:24 PM

I disagree with your interpretation of the soldiers in the PBS videos. I think that the first soldier you talk about, Private Bill Ehrhart, is intentionally portrayed as relatable and pitiable, because of his nightmares and demure body language. I think he is the embodiment of the anti-war movement. The second soldier, Private Jack Hill, is intentionally portrayed as crass, just as you noticed, and he is the representation of the "pro-war" soldier. PBS intentionally makes Ehrhart likable, and creates feelings of sympathy for his plight. Although Hill probably bears a closer resemblance to the reality of most soldier's psyche, he is portrayed as unfeeling and ruthless. While describing possible civilian casualties of war, Hill states that when you have an "angry eighteen-year old" wielding a gun, who just saw his friend get killed, "He's not gonna have no remorse for who's on the receiving end of that 60-calibre machine gun" (PBS Ep. 4). I think that PBS paints this statement as Hill trying to justify the murder of civilians. Rather, I see his statement as a sad concession of what wartime is like. Also notice that there are two Vietnamese sources claiming unnecessary and ruthless violence in the operation Hill describes. He is put on the spot, specifically asked about the validity of their claims. As you noted, "he begins to smirk as he talks". The Vietnam War was hugely unpopular in the United States, and soldiers came back to a hostile world in which they were portrayed as baby killers and murderers. The PBS interview was presumably not the first time Hill had fielded questions of this nature, and he was presumably rather calloused about the accusations. Charlie Sabatier's interview, on the other hand, in which he attested that American soldiers were killed largely in instances of incompetency, such as tripping and shooting a fellow soldier accidentally, are never questioned or validated. We are expected to take Ehrhart and Sabatier's accounts at face value, and feel appalled by Hill's accurate representation of war. PBS vilifies and questions Hill, and offers the personal accounts of Ehrhart and Sabatier as cold hard fact.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS

by Rachelle Wells - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 5:11 PM

I think each individual soldier's account of the war is just that, their account of the war in their eyes. For some it will be traumatic, some it will be the rush they remember most (Mark Smith's description of the most intense adrenaline high you can imagine), and for some it will be a mixture of both or even other emotions. There are soldiers like Charlie Sabatier who were drafted at a young age and describes himself as naive and the situation

upon arrival as "A bunch of guys camping that have never camped a day in their life." He also states, "I saw at least a dozen dead Americans before I shot at any North Vietnamese." As you noted, he also talked about the casualties from fellow soldiers from merely tripping and their trigger guard undone shooting someone in the back. We know from reading Appy there are other soldiers that knew nothing before going (George Watkins, Appy pg. 22 Paul Hare, Appy pg. 76). It is still my opinion that PBS showing this range of soldiers and interviewing the Vietnamese is not only credible, but also validated. I still think AIM tries to portray one type of soldier, where PBS tries to portray a range. Overall, I think the media was of no help when our troops returned to the U.S. and there was a lack of support for them. My dad went to Vietnam at age 17 as well, and I have numerous stories and pictures that really validate the full spectrum of everything we have been looking at and reading. Therefore, Hill's interview was by no means appalling and frankly, I had a father who was a bit like Hill, but then also had a side like some of the other soldiers, like Ehrhart. Because although my dad would watch 'war' movies intensely he would never, ever hunt or have guns in our home except for one in his nightstand! Thanks so much for your feedback.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Winner Today is PBS



by Timothy Hammett - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 7:50 PM

I really agree that out of the two video sources PBS and AIM that PBS is probably the less biased of the two but it is important to notice as someone else said they are only showing the stories they want to be seen. I think sometimes even when PBS shows two different points of view they show one that is clearly supposed to be the "better source". that being said the AIM video is nothing if not one sided so anything they try and say should be taken with a grain of salt in my mind. I just really like the books as they seemed to be the most unbiased sources we have. They both seem to be a lot more factual in there approach to the war as opposed to the videos which both seem to have been made with very specific purposes in mind.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Ngo Dinh Diem



by Desria Hansen - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 7:11 PM

Along with having biased reporting of Ho Chi Minh in the PBS series, I also feel that they portrayed Ngo Dinh Diem in a different, biased light as well. The AIM video addressed this briefly in the first few seconds of the second part stating, "The inaccurate political history of the PBS series and their demeaning portrayal of Prime

Minister Diem are only part of their unfair depiction of the south" (AIM, Part 2). Comparing Diem in the Herring book and the second episode of the PBS series, they both addressed the fact that Diem, by any means, did not have the greatest decision making skills. The Herring book refers to him as "Introverted and self-absorbed," but also identifies the fact that "His love for his country in the abstract was profound, but he was an elitist who had little sensitivity to the needs and problems of the Vietnamese people" (Herring p. 59) The Herring book focuses more on the political aspects of what Diem contributed both positively and negatively to the war and the effects and consequences of such actions. In the Herring book there seems to be very black and white facts with little if no biased behavior. While both sources acknowledge the fact that Diem's leadership and political skills were lacking, the PBS series tends to shed a very negative light on Diem and reside on stories and opinions that in my opinion are not helping me further my education on the Vietnam War. For example, in the second episode they interviewed a woman named Dr. Phan Thi Xian Que who spoke of a secret police under Diems control that "forced us to throw the alter to the ancestors away and to become Catholics and denounce the communist." They had more interviews and statements that, to me, seemed unnecessary and opinionated. That being said, I don't know what the PBS series had to gain from all the different stories of Diem. It almost seemed like they were trying to defend the north in certain aspects and justify why the North did some of the things they did, instead of being purely educational.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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My Vote on Ngo Dinh Diem



by Desria Hansen - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 7:27 PM

When it comes to the different representation of Ngo Dinh Diem from the PBS series and the Herring book, I would have to vote my confidence in the Herring book. Where I am not sure if some of the statements given by the PBS series on Diem are true or false, the interviews with different people seem biased and there doesn't seem to be a difference in opinions with the interviews-they all seem to point in the same direction. With the Herring book, I feel like I get more of a well-rounded representation with facts and it feels more educational from the political aspect.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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"It never occurred to me to quit"



by Hannah Morton - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 8:42 PM

With all of the different sources, sometimes it is hard to keep things straight. From the AIM program, PBS program and our reading material, we seem to be hearing different and sometimes conflicting information that makes you question "What really happened" In the AIM program we see many angry veterans. Those who have fought in the war and felt as though their time was not appreciated by the media.

From the American POW's to just those who "died with dignity and honor(AIM)". It was shown in the media that Americans mistreated those they captured, where as John McCain in AIM states that "there is not one single documented case of mistreatment" whereas the North Vietnamese would use "mistreatment to exploit for propaganda" John McCain is an interesting source for this information, because he was a prisoner of war himself. But although he says there is "NOT ONE" single documented case of mistreatment, I tend to not believe him, but we have not read about POWs much in the herring book yet. Therefore I take this information lightly. The words "NOT ONE" make me question the reality of this statement.

In "Patriots:Vietnam remembered from all sides" Anne Morrison Welsh tells a story of how the media portrayed the war. Her husband, who burned himself alive in protest was shown in the media as a sacrifice for the war. "I know Norman's death was used politically by the government in Hanoi. There's no question. They widely publicized the news of his sacrifice and even printed a postage stamp with his picture on it." In AIM it is said that they rarely showed the good things that the soldiers were doing in Vietnam, and rather chose to focus on the bad things that people were doing in order to protest the war back in the United States. There seemed to be little support for the troops and their sacrifice for our nation. AIM mentions when the men and women decided to support their troops and march in their honor, the media has chosen to focus on the parachute drop that had happened the following day. I feel that the lack of support for the troops and the media is something that we see today in our war against Iraq, and generally had happened in other wars as well. The media, generally focusing on the liberal side of the scale see the war as stepping on something else's grounds and not as a way to boost and extend our economy, whereas those on the rights side of the spectrum generally tend to feel a little different about the wars.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: "It never occurred to me to quit"



by Hannah Morton - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 8:48 PM

The questions on which program we would choose to pick. I have a hard time choosing the AIM video to be more accurate, because they are mostly stating their opinion. Most of those who are speaking in that video are veterans who felt that they were not portrayed in the right light. I would be interested to hear how people from that time feel about the way that the soldiers were portrayed. Although I agree that in the PBS video there were shown although they got little respect, the sources used in the AIM video make me question the reality behind it. Whereas the PBS video is chosen to show more of a documentary of the events that happened in that time, not the soldiers and their emotions. Not saying that is right or wrong, that is just what it appears to be to me. So far from all the sources we are using I find the interviews in "Patriots: the Vietnam war from all sides" to be the most reliable source of history. Just because we are hearing so many different sides from the protestors to soldiers to those who were affected by the war themselves. If they would have shown a more variety

of people in the AIM video that felt the same as those POWs themselves, then I would possibly feel different about which source is more reliable between AIM and PBS

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "It never occurred to me to quit"

by Zachary Embree - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 11:39 PM

While I definitely agree that as of late the actions of the US military have come under harsher criticisms as of late, I think you are failing to consider what the nation is actually not supporting. Their is a reason suggesting going back to Iraq now is considered political suicide, we went in and spent billions trying to build a country which is in the process of falling apart. It is doing something like that, getting into a long costly conflict with no pressing threat to nation security that has the nation balking. Those kinds of conflicts do not boost the economy or make good PR, but criticism is not leveled at the common soldier typically. But going back to Vietnam I think their is a solid case for arguing that media embellished what really happened to make a better story. I cannot consider John McCain to be a credible source because his personal experiences and political position as a senator makes him far from impartial. Of course that does not mean the North Vietnamese treated their prisoners well, that can be disproved by many outside sources.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "It never occurred to me to quit"

by Sierra Smith - Thursday, October 23, 2014, 12:04 PM

The "NOT ONE" statement from John McCain about POW mistreatment irritated me and made that segment lose credibility in my eyes. Both PBS and AIM have some pretty bold statements. I did not believe that statement whatsoever. It is one thing to try to make a point that maybe it's not as bad as it is portrayed to be, but to go and say it didn't happen AT ALL is where I start rolling my eyes.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "It never occurred to me to quit"

by Hannah Morton - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 5:52 PM

Looking back on everything again, I still feel the most important conflict that I had noticed was the lack of the media and the PBS film taking any time to show the march that the citizens of the United States had done in honor of their troops in the nation. But rather they had chosen to show the parachute drop. Therefore

the media choosing to focus on the bad things and the reasons why we shouldn't support the war, rather than the reasons that we should support our war and our troops.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Prisoners of War

by Jessica Ballestrazze - Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 11:33 PM

As I started watching the second part of the AIM video, I found myself quickly in agreement with their claim of unfair representation of the treatment of American POW's. John McCain, a prisoner in North Vietnam for six years, asserted that the North Vietnamese were very intentional in their treatment, interrogation and torture of American POW's. He claimed that, "The Vietnamese captured Americans for one reason and one reason alone: to use for propaganda purposes," and that they "had a calculated program of mistreatment, psychological and physical, in order to exploit the POW's" (AIM part 2).

One of the first books I ever pulled off my dad's bookshelf, at around age thirteen, was called "A POW's Story: 2801 Days in Hanoi", and it was written by Colonel Larry Guarino, who spent eight years as a hostage in North Vietnam. I remember reading about the terrible treatment and torture he endured under the Viet Minh, so I immediately believed McCain's claims that there was an "unfortunate juxtaposition between the treatment of American POW's in North Vietnam, and the treatment of the Vietnamese and/or Americans of Viet Cong or North Vietnamese prisoners" (McCain, AIM pt. 2). I started re-reading Guarino's book, and again found many accounts of brutal torture in order to garner confessions or desired writings from the prisoners. Guarino claimed that "As far as I ever knew, not a single man of the fifty-six of us escaped torture. Every man got it at least once, and some of us over and over again" (Guarino, pg. 106). Near the beginning of his incarceration, after refusing to write a letter to the American Congress pleading with them to cease bombing, Guarino had his first experience with rope torture, in which his hands were cranked behind his back, up over his shoulders, and left for extended periods of time. Generally this torture was done in order to extricate some sort of confession or personal information from the prisoner that could be used as propaganda, either in North Vietnam or America. He also spent a great deal of his time in leg and arm stocks, and in solitary confinement. He explains the treatment by saying, "You quickly learn that this is a very different ball game. It's their ballpark, and their umpires, and their book of rules. They can call 'em any way they want; they can do anything they want to you; there's no way to appeal for help....they don't give a damn about Geneva agreements concerning treatment of POWs--they don't give a damn about Geneva anything" (Guarino, pg. 32).

In Appy's book, I was surprised to find only three stories from POW's. One from an American soldier, one from a North Vietnamese soldier, and one from an American who went to prison for resisting the draft. The story from the American POW, Porter Halyburton, bears a strong resemblance to Larry Guarino's experience. Halyburton

was subjected to many of the same methods of torture as Guarino, and both soldiers speak of their experience being marched through the streets as part of the Hanoi March in 1966. This is the best verification of McCain's claim that soldiers were used as propaganda. Halyburton said, "They told us we had to endure the anger of the Vietnamese people and show that we were repentant and bow our heads" (Appy pg. 225). The crowd grew extremely agitated, and the group was beaten and stoned as they made their way through the streets. After the march, Guarino claims that one of their interrogators gave them this ultimatum: "You have seen the hatred and the determination of our people. You now have two ways to go. First way: you can cooperate with us and help us toward our complete victory. If you do this, you will be shown humane treatment...Second way: you can continue to resist...and things will become extremely difficult for you" (Guarino, pg. 94). These two accounts correlate with each other well, which helps to make the details believable, and gives strength to McCain's accusation of a misrepresentation by the PBS series. One of Halyburton's cell partners, Fred Cherry, even ended up being Guarino's cell partner for a short time. Halyburton helped nurse Cherry back to health after suffering a broken shoulder and terrible infection due to maltreatment. Guarino's account mentioned Halyburton, and stated that it was "doubtful if Fred could have survived without Haly's care" (Guarino, pg. 124).

Unfortunately, there is only one story in the Appy book to give a portrayal of the treatment of North Vietnamese POW's. Truong My Hoa's story is one of vicious torture and inhumane treatment. In fact, it could be argued that the methods and conditions of her torture exceeded those of the soldiers in Hanoi. Hoa claimed to have been kept in a tiger cage on the island of Poulo Condore for part of her imprisonment, and subjected to regular beatings and lousing with powdered limestone (Appy, pg. 228). Hoa's story seems to refute McCain's statement that prisoners in North Vietnam were treated much worse than prisoners of South Vietnam. Like the claims of the American POW's, her accusations are unthinkable and difficult to imagine. I know that South Vietnam kept far more political prisoners and POW's than North Vietnam did, but by all accounts it seems that both sides seem to be largely unrepresented in most of the sources. I hope to see more of a presence in future PBS episodes, even if it is biased, and expect that future chapters of Herring's book will touch on it in order to give a more well-rounded view of the issue.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Prisoners of War



by Rachel Wells - Friday, October 24, 2014, 11:51 AM

I was wondering if you noticed the story about Luyen Nguyen (Appy, pg. 94). He was a South Vietnamese soldier that the U.S. sent into North Vietnam on a top-secret mission. It was actually almost guaranteed to fail and Luyen states, "I believe this was a planned failure. There's no way the CIA could be so stupid." He was assigned to recruit and train commandos to be dropped behind enemy lines in North Vietnam. They worked/trained with U.S. advisers that he

describes as arrogant. His team survived for a month after they were dropped in North Vietnam because even though he was the commander he knew nothing really about the plan and process of the missions. They were put in prison and his total time in prison was 21 years! He discusses how he was kept shackled all the time and in a dark cell for the first 11 years (it discusses the torture in more detail). In 1966, he was in a prison camp with some U.S. pilots. He states, "At dinnertime I saw the guards bring trays of food for the Americans and I knew it was a U.S. ration because it was much better than what we had. They had rice, a little bit of a vegetable, a banana, a cigarette. Usually the U.S. POW's threw some of their food to the Vietnamese commandos who lived next to them" (Appy pg. 97). The story goes on to tell about his wife and children, she remarried because she thought he was dead etc. In 1990, he and his wife moved to the United States. In 1999, the U.S. Congress voted \$42,500 in compensation to the surviving lost commandos. I find it so unfortunate that because of a decision the U.S. made by having these commandos drop into North Vietnam with no real plan or confidence that it would even work, he was captured and held for 21 years of his life. He will never get that back and no amount of money would ever make up for it. It certainly gave me a new sense of compassion for the South Vietnamese.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Prisoners of War

by Desria Hansen - Friday, October 24, 2014, 8:17 PM

One thing I have noticed is that the Herring book tends to focus more on political aspects and tactics of the war and what was going on more in Washington than what was going on from a "commoners" perspective. That is one thing that I like about the Herring book, is that it seems very factual, but you're right in the fact that it doesn't tell all the problems and that is why I like the Appy book so we get different perspectives of those directly affected by the war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Prisoners of War

by Zachary Embree - Saturday, October 25, 2014, 12:40 AM

A very interesting analysis, I think by looking through out of class material the different viewpoints of the actions taken by the US and Vietnamese forces are easier to understand. When it comes too the question of who was receiving the worst treatment, intentionally or otherwise, I always try to approach it logically. I have no doubt that in some cases prisoners were purposely mistreated while in South Vietnamese and American custody, but at eh same time it was not as widespread and nothing like standard practice. The United States had almost

nothing to gain and a whole lot of international support and prestige to lose of it came out they were running torture camps, no to mention it would hurt support back home. Not to mention all throughout the conflict we were trying to win over the population, rumors of brutality could only turn more to the side of the Vietcong. There is a very good reason the military has so many rules when it comes to dealing with non combatants and they are enforced strictly. North Vietnam on the other hand did not care about their international reputation and was documented repeatedly torturing prisoners on a regular basis. As you said in your response their country was not bound by any kind of agreement to fight a "clean" war, and I can imagine they looked for any advantage to break the US's morale. That being said one side using these methods does absolutely not excuse either side of blame in this matter and I to hope the PBS series shows both sides are not unblemished.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Its really hard to choose



by Hannah Morton - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 5:45 PM

Generally for me, the best way to get and understand the things that I am reading in the Herring book are to read it twice, or take notes throughout the read. The density of the book can be shown through most of our comments. The only thing that I have to say about the NY times article. Is that they are simply doing exactly what we are doing. They are critiquing two forms of "entertainment" or "media" and trying to choose which they feel is the better source of the historical truth. Their choice being the PBS film. Therefore they are doing the same thing that we are doing. I feel the same way that the author does about the PBS program "Its great strength was that it offered room for many points of view." (NY Times) the PBS film does leave room for personal interpretation of the film. But also leaves many things open ended. Whereas the AIM video is strongly asserting their point of view onto the viewers of the shot video

Sum of ratings: (1)

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PBS vs Aim



by Timothy Hammett - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 7:20 PM

When it comes to looking at the differences between our sources the easiest example is to look at the conflicting information we are provided from both the PBS series and Aim videos we have seen so far. The PBS series seems to present the conflict in a way that is very sympathetic to the Vietcong and north Vietnamese. It shows south Vietnam as no more than a puppet of American imperialism. The Aim video however shows a much different side and points out the very real importance of loyal south Vietnamese. The PBS series also seems to really gloss over the evils

committed by North Vietnam and the Vietcong. In specific I think the Aim video did a good job of showcasing the mistreatment of American POW's and this misrepresentation of there situation. while the PBS series shows the Vietnam war as something doomed to fail from the start and something deeply unpopular in America and Vietnam with no real support. Aim videos mentions a huge march with vast amounts of Americans in support of what we were doing in Vietnam and yet is entirely glossed over by the PBS series. while it seems like I am very pro Aim videos here they are also not without fault. When Aim videos are discussing the legacy section of the PBS series they take issue with the fact that many Vietnam veterans are still (at the time video was made) haunted by the experience of war. Aim offers up one Veterans experience with others as a counter argument to simply sweep that under the rug which i think is a very poor way of trivializing such an important issue.

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which sources to believe?



by Timothy Hammett - Sunday, October 26, 2014, 7:39 PM

For me this is a very tough question to answer and I think the reason is that the best thing to do is read multiple sources and compare as we have been doing but the idea is to find one source that we believe should get our "vote" of approval on the specific issues that are questionable so i will attempt to do that. The Aim video is very biased and if viewed alone is not a very good source of information but if you view as a counter argument to what is presented by PBS then it seems a little more fair. While the PBS videos do seem to have an over arching narrative that leans more towards the Vietnamese they do at least offer speakers from multiple sides that I believe helps to offer them a little bit more validity on most issues in question. Those are just from our video sources though and If I actually have to choose a source that i believe is the most reputable then I would go with the Herring book. While PBS and Aim both seem to posses biases on a lot of issues I would say the Herring book has the least bias of all the sources and is therefore going to be the one I am most inclined to believe.

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