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Continuing the discussion

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 1:07 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). More importantly, which source gets your "vote", **on that specific issue**, as having the more correct/accurate/truthful interpretation or reinterpretation?

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Lies upon lies

by Marcus Farset - Tuesday, April 21, 2015, 5:18 PM

The event that happened in the Tonkin Gulf is described completely different in the Herring book and the Patriots book. The Herring book does not say that the LBJ administration flat out lied about the attacks on the American destroyers, and describes the head officials wanting to retaliate heavily after they faked the second attack. In the Patriots book it says no Americans, not even congress knew that the Johnson administration lied about the events in the Tonkin Gulf, and North Vietnam was the target of U.S military operations and hardly even provoked it. In this situation, I would have to side with the Patriots book because there has been multiple times so far where the president lied to the public about instances like this so he could save his reputation and not have people disagree with him.

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Re: Lies upon lies

by Joseph Foley - Tuesday, April 21, 2015, 10:31 PM

Marcus,

This is an interesting point of contention. Thank you for bringing it up. President Johnson, like many other political leaders during the conflict, did not always appear to be honest (of course certain espionage reasons being exempt). There is a lot of speculation in regard to LBJ's motives and level of drive to be involved with the Vietnam War. Personally, I think that if it weren't for the conflict in Vietnam, he would be regarded as one of the most successful presidents of his generation. He led the charge for groundbreaking work in civil rights and many other arenas on the domestic front.

Despite being disappointed to have acquired the Vietnam War, he certainly had his part in the downfall. His urge to end the war resulted in investing even more U.S. troops and resources. The bombing campaigns and endless need for more troops began to look more like a black hole. The U.S. press had taken a turn against the war, and the anti-war pitch dominated media. Any positive solutions were beginning to look bleak.

Many have also commented on his potentially poor military advisors and or communication chain. It is obvious that President Johnson faced many difficult circumstances, but he must be held accountable for his part. Challenging circumstances or not, was this military venture worth so many human lives? It is also important to evaluate the big picture and acknowledge the chain of U.S. presidents involved with the Vietnam War. LBJ is but a part of a lengthy history U.S. history with Vietnam.

There were many falsehoods told during and after the Vietnam War by politicians (including presidents) and of course media. Our four resources for this course highlight multiple discrepancies and overlapping truths. I have found that even the skewed information can provide good insight. Some of President Johnson’s blunders give us a good gauge of the shear stress and confusion of the situation on all sides.

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Re: Lies upon lies
by [Jeffrey Moat](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 10:30 AM

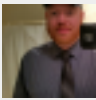
I have to agree with you about Johnson, Joseph. It's a shame that he is remembered more for his involvement in the war than his work on social and civic issues.

It reminds me of another point of contention in the source materials in regards to our necessity to be in Vietnam. This is something I've yet to find a satisfactory summation to 'win' me over. The Herring book paints a picture of a long protracted chain of events that lead to our involvement in Vietnam stemming from our dedication to the French and our distrust of Communism. But it does this in a way that shows a clear progress of decisions that kept us engaged. The PBS documentary seems to have a mildly suspicious tone inferring a sense of 'invasion' (at least that is what I got from it) in our troops being in the country. Whether that was to mirror the sentiment of the Vietnamese or was politically charged I can not be sure.

But the AIM program caters to an idealism of honor and duty that I'm surprised they tried to sell. They explain Vietnam as inevitable and gloss over all the finer points of complication. Their perspective seems to be that not only did we have to get involved, but it had to be so in a military campaign.

So when I think about the decisions of Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson I try to understand the ramifications of making different choices and try to determine as best I can which of those decisions were based in altruism and some were 'best case scenario' situations.

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failed policy of Diem, Failed example of AIM
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Tuesday, April 21, 2015, 10:29 PM

In the AIM video, Charlton Heston stated “The in accurate political history in the PBS series and their demeaning portrayal of Prime Minister Diem are all part of their unfair depiction of the South.” I find this conflicting in the fact that the Herring book and the PBS series did not seem to be demeaning towards Diem and seemed to be fair in the representation of him and of South Vietnam. To be fair is not always to compliment but to be truthful. Regarding the relationship of the U.S. and South Vietnam, President Kennedy made reference to the South: “It is our offspring, we cannot abandon it, we cannot ignore its needs” and “inspiration to those seeking to obtain or maintain their liberty in all parts of Asia—and indeed of the world.” (Herring: p.53).This was addressed by Kennedy in front of the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV) in 1956.

In the beginning, the relationship between Diem and the U.S. was very encouraging. United States political decision makers said Diem was the best man to hold the line from communist expansion in South East Asia. I believe his Catholic religious foundation helped bridge a gap between a western nation like the United States and an Asian nation such as South Vietnam. Christianity was a commonality between the two. The AIM video does not state in anyway the positives points of the Diem regime, nor does it tell about the failed negative policies either. With out examples I would say that Accuracy in Media was stating an opinion dressed in a factual statement addressed by Charlton Heston. Diem had many failed policies and Kennedy’s advisers insisted that sweeping political reforms were needed but Diem resisted. Both the PBS (episode 2: Americas Mandarin) and Herring book (p.112) report that “Diem retreated more and more into isolation, relying almost exclusively on Nhu (his brother), a frail and sinister man who tended toward paranoia and delusions of grandeur.” “The suspicious and beleaguered Ngos tightened rather than relaxed the controls. The National Assembly pliantly passed laws prohibiting all types of public gatherings, weddings and funerals...” Laws like these alienated and grew the gap between the South Vietnamese and the Diem regime. In both the book and the PBS series they stated how Diem had a secret police that was headed up by his brother and was the strong arm of Diem’s government. The AIM video portrays Diem as a victim of the PBS series and was unfairly depicted. I would strongly disagree.

The Buddhist Crisis is an another example of how the Diem’s government was not only out of touch with the people of South Vietnam but the U.S. partnership as well. (Herring: p. 117) “an upheaval among Buddhists in the major cities of South Vietnam suddenly introduced a dramatic new threat to the Diem regime and new complications for an already faltering American policy.” In 1963 the Buddhist insurrection was gaining steam. Taking the first hand account of Malcolm Browne referring to the Buddhist protests: “ I don’t think the intelligence services or the South Vietnamese government... really understood the depth of anti-Diem sentiment throughout the South and not just among the Viet Cong.” (Appy: p. 67) there were many disenfranchised people in South Vietnam resulting from Diem and his policies directly.

The source that gets my vote for correct and accurate interpretation of truth is the Herring book, *Americas Longest War. Patriots* by Christian G. Appy and the PBS series: *Vietnam a Television History* are good and reliable sources for reinterpretation of the events that took place during the Vietnam War. With first person accounts and interviews by people who experienced Vietnam directly lends it credentials in telling the history of the war.

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Re: failed policy of Diem, Failed example of AIM

by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 7:21 AM

Timothy,

I definitely agree that in *America’s Longest War* and throughout what we’ve seen so far in the PBS series that the portrayal of Prime Minister Diem was not demeaning. However, I do believe that in the PBS series that the people of South Vietnam are portrayed as weak, not proud of their country and not willing to fight. It seems as though the PBS series portrays individuals with respect but when it comes to groups of people things tend to get a little more demeaning. This was quite apparent to me with specific regards to how the portrayed the Americans, the French, and the French and most obviously the South Vietnamese.

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Re: failed policy of Diem, Failed example of AIM

by [Timothy Conway](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 7:05 PM

Samantha, you bring up a good point about the PBS series, it does not do groups like the South Vietnamese justice. The book *Americas Longest War* gives examples of the Vietnams long history and resisting rule by foreign powers. “While borrowing extensively from China, the Vietnamese also fiercely resisted its rule... Perhaps the most famous of their heroes, the Trung sisters, led a major first century AD rebellion against the superior Chinese.” (Herring: p.4) and “Three times in the thirteenth century, they repulsed the legendary Mongol warrior Kublai Khan... pioneering methods of guerrilla warfare later used against the French and Americans.” (Herring: p.4) These were early examples of the Vietnamese people’s tough and extensive history of being a defiant culture. To repel a fierce conquer like Kublai Khan, shows the absolute resolve of the Vietnamese people. The PBS series skimmed over this in the first episode *Roots of War*. Could this be a time constraint issue? I don’t think it was, the PBS Series could have taken 10 more minutes to give justly examples. I would agree that the series does seem to build up individual people while generalizing peoples as a whole. The Buddhists and anti-communists were a big cultural dynamic in the south and deserved more coverage in the series.

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 2:50 AM

The AIM video was critical of the portrayal of the South Vietnamese as weak and less than their Northern counterparts. Douglas Pike was especially offended by the PBS documentary and called their portrayal of the North Vietnamese Army as slanderous. He would have felt better had PBS characterized the North Vietnamese as something the evidence seems to show they were not.

In episode 3 of the PBS video, Jack Valenti, Presidential Aid to Johnson, was reliving a conversation he had with President Johnson when they were worried about the unstable conditions in South Vietnam and the South Vietnamese Army falling apart. He was in the Johnson Administration and seemed to me to be a reliable source in that he was there and heard the concerns from the lips of President Johnson.

Private Bill Ehrhart, from the PBS video number 4, referred to the South Vietnamese soldiers he said, “They wouldn’t fight.” “One side seems to be ‘chicken’ and of the other side fights in the face of overwhelming disadvantages,” referring to the North Vietnamese. He seemed to be a very reliable eye witness.

My Vote for accuracy goes to the Herring book. I believe the PBS documentary tells a story and tries to be as objective as possible. The AIM video represents an expected conservative political view.

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight

by [Jeffrey Moat](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 5:30 PM

I felt this portrayal also lent credibility to the Herring book. There seems to be a general disarray that the south was perpetually in. The AIM program inferred that the PBS documentary painted them as cowards and that is just not very accurate. Stories like Luyen Nguyen's (page 94 from the Appy book) are a great example of this. His team were brave enough to enter combat, but the spirit to fight seemed to be lacking.

That seems to be the case in many examples across our sources materials, honestly. I think we can safely attribute that to the North being somewhat unified (however they accomplished that, that is of course another discussion) militarily by comparison.

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight

by [Adam Mellott](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 1:28 PM

AIM steers you to believe that the PBS video is advocating for the North and portrays the North Vietnamese as “saints, revolutionaries and dedicated” (AIM Pike, Bich). I definitely understand how frustrating it is for Americans to watch a series on this when American soldiers have historically been stripped of their honor for fighting this war when they gave their lives for it, but the Herring book, in my opinion, broadens the overall view and describes how the North Vietnamese tactics were in deed effective and due to the fact that they were familiar with the fighting areas were able to “fight at times and places of their choosing and on ground favorable to them” (196). America was put into a situation where they were just not in control or allowed to take control due to LBJ and his administration.

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight

by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 5:42 PM

You’re right, Luyen Nguyen’s story is a great example of somebody who obviously isn’t a coward. He knew he wasn’t coming back, but he went anyway. His men lacked spirit, I agree, but I also think they were lacking more than that. From what was being said in the story, it seemed like they were really unprepared. Nguyen even says, “They had no experience of combat. When they didn’t see the enemy they thought they were completely safe.” (Appy 96). So, I think it was both spirit and experience that was the problem. At least for that specific program that their team was part of, I feel like that was the reason the North had the upper hand.

And another good example I found in the Appy book at the bottom of page 163 gives the number of fatalities and wounded for the US military and the South Vietnamese. It says that, “The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (the South Vietnamese military) suffered some 224,000 deaths and more than a million wounded, sobering figures indeed for Americans who assume that the United States did virtually all the fighting...”(Appy 163-164).

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight

by [Timothy Conway](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 7:41 PM

Christina, I agree Luyen Nguyen was not a coward and the PBS series needed a story like this. That story would have been a good representation and that the South Vietnamese in general were not weak and cowardice. This would have taken away Accuracy in Media's argument of PBS bias against the South Vietnamese. To add to

your observation, of the South's army lacking not only spirit and experience but the lack of motivation was very strong. They were a people who have been under colonialism and foreign for many generations. This can demoralize a population and the U.S. did not do anything to fix that, they seemed to make it worse. "I often told my men, you are fighting for your country, not the Americans, but the U.S. advisers told the commandos-- we hired you, we pay you, you should obey us and ignore the Vietnamese." (Appy: p.95) This statement was powerful, instead of helping the South Vietnamese feel strong and worthy of fighting for their country, they felt like mercenaries and subordinates or colonists of the United States government. In dealing with a former colony, the U.S. failed to "liberated" their minds and make them feel like a sovereign people. So yes I agree, their spirit was lacking to fight. The North Vietnamese did seem to be under a more unified and spirited leadership.

Your example in the Appy book p. 163-164 was a good citation. To me that part of the book resonated powerfully with me. The Herring book and the PBS series so far have not stated that fact. Ill be waiting to see if they do. I think if the AIM video wanted to show the South's commitment to the war and support their claim on the PBS negative view on the South, they should have stated such a statistic.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight
by [Joseph Foley](#) - Saturday, April 25, 2015, 12:07 AM

This is an interesting topic. Thanks for the post. The complexities of the Southern Vietnamese factions and loyalties could be studied for years. All of our sources describe South Vietnam defenses as unstable in one or way or another. There seem to be more failures than successes. Many point to a lack of stable leadership, support and buy-in.

Southern villagers were caught in-between two deadly forces and had to appease them both, walking a tightrope with the hopes of not being shot. Northern Vietnamese soldiers and American forces were both vying for their allegiance. Both forces were also not afraid to use force. Uprooting thousands of villagers to crowded hamlets did nothing to improve relations with the U.S.

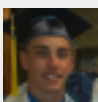
Jeffrey brings up a valuable point below in reference to the Luyen Nguyen interview in Abby's, *Patriots*. Nguyen was an experienced Southern Vietnamese soldier and did not lack courage. His men were well-trained but they did not have real battle experience, or military/tactical support in the north. None of the commandos in this particular project sent to North Vietnam returned south during the war. Nguyen bravely participated knowing that he would most likely never return home.

Soon after Nguyen landed in North Vietnam he was captured. He lived as prisoner of war in Northern Vietnam for 21 years before returning south. Nguyen refused to give the north information in exchange for early release. Nguyen was as loyal as they come, but he did complain of fellow soldiers only fighting for the financial perks.

I think both videos display shades of truth via their own perspective, while also missing the big picture. The Southern Vietnamese army showed signs of success and resilience, while also conveying confusion and broken communication. It would be unfair to not offer all sides of the story. Vietnam's rich history provided an intricate webbing of local politics prior to American involvement.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight
by [Marcus Farset](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 11:29 AM

Another point that supports this idea of the Vietnamese not fighting is in the Herring book on page 181 when one of the American officials said "I wish the Southen members of the clan would display the fighting qualities of their Northern brethren." Also when it said the ARVN's mode of attack best depicted, according to a standard American joke, by the statue of a seated soldier in the national military cemetery. I think the South Vietnamese could have been less inclined to fight, which all of the sources say, because the Americans were taking over pretty much all military activities, but in no way do I think they were weak, they believed in being free.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight



by [Adam Mellott](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 1:36 PM

I agree Marcus. If the South were allowed to help instead of being "shunted aside, relegated to lesser operations" (198) then the South might not have been so resentful and morale would have increased. Not saying this would have changed the war, but it definitely would not have hurt it.

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Re: South Vietnamese wouldn't fight
by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 5:52 PM

I also agree. If they felt like they had an equal part in everything, morale would have been much higher.

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Re: McCain credible
by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 3:41 AM

In the AIM video Congressman John McCain expressed anger that the PBS video failed to dig deeper into the North Vietnamese use of American POWs for propaganda purposes. He also criticized PBS for not criticizing Jane Fonda for meeting with the North Vietnamese and reporting 'falsehoods' regarding treatment of American POWs by the North. I thought his words were powerful and very credible. I think some of McCain’s perspective was lessened because of the way it was used by the AIM video. For example, when they are showing an old video of Jane Fonda smiling with North Vietnamese soldiers, I would have preferred silence rather than the slow saxophone music intended to appeal to my emotion.

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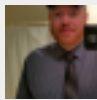


Re: McCain credible
by [Leah Boysen](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 2:39 PM

I totally agree with you Thomas, throughout the AIM video there is a lot of misguided information, and this is totally one of them. You here today about John McCain fighting in Vietnam and being a prisoner and that it was a horrible thing to go through. However the AIM video doesn't do a good job at showing the emotion of John McCain, which I have to say seems pretty disrespectful.

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McCain interview
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 3:19 PM

I also noticed the seductive music playing in the back ground during Jane Fonda’s montage in the AIM video. This was used by Accuracy in Media Inc to appeal to our emotions and view her as a seductive harlot to the North Vietnamese. It also showed the North’s soldiers clapping wildly and smiling enthusiastically at her, showing a strong connection of the two. This is powerful propaganda that opens the heart and appeals to the emotional core of any human being that does not have the capacity to look at both sides of the story. In the same video John McCain attacks the PBS series regarding their insufficient coverage on the harsh treatment of American POW’s in Vietnam. After examining it, I might have to agree with him a little bit, but also in a series or movie, there are time constraints. Was this just a result of time constraint? This would have been a good question by Mr. McCain to ask the producers of the series and not assume they left it out because of their liberal views.

In the AIM video John McCain also states that American soldiers treatment of the Viet Cong were justified and were isolated incidents and are part of war. He seems to wash over the U.S. treatment but goes into detail about the Viet Cong’s harsh, biological and psychological torture on U.S. G.I’s. I agree that John McCain’s interview was powerful in the AIM video and served their purpose well. Academically we need to take his words and testimony and use that as a catalyst to execute more research on the subject.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Hanoi Jane (Jane Fonda) background music

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 10:36 PM

Today, Jane Fonda, or Hanoi Jane as she was called following her 1972 visit to Vietnam, admits she used poor judgement in going to Vietnam. She called it a "huge, huge mistake," The 1972 video footage spoke for itself and didn't need exaggerated music and visual effects. By overdoing it, the AIM video loses credibility.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/jane-fonda-calls-vietnam-photo-huge-huge-mistake/story?id=28348096>

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Re: McCain

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 11:00 PM

Your observations regarding John McCain's washing over the US treatment while at the same time going into detail regarding the North Vietnamese Army's treatment of prisoners sounds like the stuff that would come from a politician.

When McCain was making his case for the importance of examining the POW issue, he was speaking as a 6-year POW. Although McCain's opinion was understandable, I don't fault PBS for not wanting to open every issue of the Vietnam war.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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Re: McCain

by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 7:51 AM

Thomas,

I agree that PBS shouldn't be faulted for their lack of examination of the treatment of POWs. I do wish they had touched on the issue more than what they did. When creating a series there are time constraints and, especially with the Vietnam War, a lot of information to cover so some things don't get as much attention as they deserve. I don't believe that McCain was wrong in his opinion; however, as a 6 year POW his opinion is most definitely biased.

In truth, I doubt any nation would want to discuss treatments of POWs. Although I luckily have no personal experience in regards to the things that can occur in POW camps, things happen that are not moral. Perhaps PBS didn't go as in depth to the issue of POW treatment because they didn't want to examine the US treatment of POWs? Just a thought

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Re: McCain

by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 6:15 PM

I'm afraid I have to disagree. I think the PBS videos should have included information about how the POWs were treated, on both sides. Prisoners are a fundamental part of war. And I think the reason they didn't mention anything wasn't necessarily because they didn't want to discuss how both sides treated prisoners. I think it was more because leaving that information out helped support the way they were portraying the North as righteous and the U.S. as invaders.

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Motives and Media

by [Leah Boysen](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 2:35 PM

First I have to agree with you Joseph F to a point, LBJ would have been one of the most successful presidents if he didnt have to deal with Vietnam. LBJ didnt want the Vietnam war to keep going on he wanted it to end, and besides that their were a lot more issues going on, that I believe LBJ was more passionate about. I dont think there is a easy way to deal with war, especially inheriting it as a president. However I do think there could have been better solutions either done by LBJ or by other political leaders around him, there were many one sided stories giving to the American public, I believe there could have been better facts given. Some of the facts that are conflicting are the North being shown as Saints and the South as puppets as said by Nguyen in the (AIM part 2 Video), however John McCain states that he doesn’t agree with PBS, the North were using the American prisoners for propaganda, and the south didnt do this, (AIM video). Also something that’s really conflicting is when stating in the video (AIM) that Vietnam was the worst genocide and we wanted to help prevent that, however this is kinda confusing because as the end of the video (AIM) Charles I believe talked about how the soldiers of Vietnam were noble but we failed and that America lost its will, but wait werent we trying to prevent a mass genocide, and help protect Vietnam, like President Kennedy said “It is our offspring, we cant abandon it” (Herring). So this I find really conflicting because you have one group of people saying we need to help and protect them, then on the other side you have people saying we failed. So I don’t get why you could put something like that in the video (AIM), it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me. Now to state I know, a big reason why America went to Vietnam was about preventing communism, as stated in the book (Herring), and the PBS videos, however I think this brings up more conflict with why we went to Vietnam, was it about protecting the people, or was it about saving ourselves and looking out for our best interest? I think both are good motives, however the line becomes blurred throughout the AIM video, the PBS series, and parts of Herring book, you have many different opinions, and false facts being giving. How are suppose to find the truth in all of this? I think this is the most conflicting part. To bring it together, there is a lot of conflict with facts being giving because there wasnt one clear motive for everyone, and the information being giving was blurred. (Stated in the NYC article page 1), “ the rebuttal is being presented by AIM, the conservative group that monitors the press. Clearly, there is controversy in that.” and also stated in that article “Their expressing their opinion on what are essentially political questions.” These two statements I feel explain where misinformation was given to the public, its not about someones opinion, its about politics, and what's best for America and Vietnam. So to end, the most conflicting information I have come across so far, has been the motives stated in the AIM video, and how information was given to the public.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Continuing the discussion
by [Jessica Seiler](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 8:34 PM

“Nonetheless, during the two-hour program - both in the rebuttal produced by AIM and in the segments done by "Inside Story" - intelligent criticisms are offered: The series makes Ho Chi Minh into a nationalist rather than a Communist; it ignores the role of the South Vietnamese Army; it minimizes the brutal treatment of American prisoners of war; it slights the actual conduct of military operations. At no point, however, do the producers of "Vietnam: A Television History" give an inch. They confuse their series with Holy Writ” (New York Times, 'TELEVISION'S VIETNAM: THE REAL STORY,' ON PBS). As stated by The New York Times, this is one of the most conflicting information told by PBS in regards to the Vietnam War which was “corrected” by AIM’s “inside Story.” I say this because I find AIM to be the most reliable and accurate interpretation of the Vietnam War. Yes, one can say that AIM is biased because they are conservative, “Thus it tells us that communism is wicked, which, considering 20th century history, ought not to be a terribly controversial position. On the other hand, the rebuttal is being presented by Accuracy in Media, or AIM, the conservative group that monitors the press. Clearly, there is controversy in that.” I believe that the controversy among every span of news or programs such as PBS has some type of biased in regard to politics. “"It does seem to me," Miss Fitzgerald replies slowly, "that the disasters perpetrated by the Vietnamese regime have disappointed many people on the left."” (New York Times, 'TELEVISION'S VIETNAM: THE REAL STORY,' ON PBS). In my eyes, the biggest reoccurring problem is the different labels put on Ho Chi Minh and altering the labels of the different armies involved in the war.

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Re: Ho a Nationalist 'rather' than Communist?
by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Saturday, April 25, 2015, 12:01 AM

You say, “The series makes Ho Chi Minh into a nationalist rather than a Communist,” based on rebuttal and intelligent criticisms by AIM and Inside Story. I didn’t remember the PBS video that way so I went back to see where this was coming from and it is found in PBS Episode 1, at 21:10, where Abbot Low Moffat gave an on-camera interview.

Abbot Moffat, a Republican politician from New York was head of the State Department's Division of South-East Asia Affairs from 1944 to 1947.Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/23/nyregion/abbot-moffat-94-lawmaker-and-then-a-diplomat-in-asia.html>

Moffat says in the PBS interview, “We knew he was a Communist, but we also felt as they did and the way anybody who has known or met Ho Chi Minh that I’ve ever talked with had the same feeling, he was first a Nationalist and second a Communist, that is, he was interested in getting the independence of his people, then he thought probably the best thing for them was a Communist type of government. But he was first and foremost a Nationalist.”

The AIM video showed silent film footage of Ho Chi Minh sitting with others at what appears to be an important Communist political gathering. The narrator is telling you what you are looking at, and what they are thinking. Abbot Moffat, on the other hand, was assigned to the area by the State Department and had met Ho Chi Minh. From the words spoken by Moffat in the PBS video I do not see how the PBS “series makes Ho Chi Minh into a nationalist rather than a Communist.”

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Re: Ho a Nationalist 'rather' than Communist?

by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 6:51 PM

Maybe “rather” is not the correct word, but I think they say that not just because of what Moffat says. It’s more a compilation of things, including things that PBS left out. For example, the whole he betrayed other nationalists to the French thing (AIM). If that’s true, it was conveniently left out and by doing things like that and having people say things like Moffat did, it looks like they’re trying to say that the only important thing here is his nationalism.

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Re: Continuing the discussion

by [Jeffrey Moat](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 8:50 PM

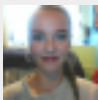
My apologies for joining the conversation a week late everyone. My very old cat had to be put to sleep and despite my best efforts it did put me a bit behind in my class work. I did, however, spend a great deal last night and today getting caught up and reading the posts in Forum 1.

There are many examples of conflicting narratives between our source materials. Some are much more pronounced such as the framing of Ho Chi Minh as a Nationalist or a Communist first. And each of those seems to resonate further into the interpretations of events and socio-political opinions. While 'Vietnam: A Television History' depicts the NVA as ideologically striving for unification of Vietnam, the AIM program cites the protracted violence after American troops left as proof of aggression and oppression, even claiming a type of cognitive dissonance in the north Vietnamese perceiving their southern countrymen as less than human.

These are good examples, but more than anything I find the attitudes towards Ngo Dinh Diem to be the most contrasting between our sources. In my consumption of the class materials I tend to read the Herring book first, so it leaves me with the initial impressions. On page 78 there is a line starting the second paragraph that reads, “The government might have survived its authoritarianism had it pursued enlightened policies, but its inability to meet the needs of the people and its ruthless suppression of dissent stirred a rising discontent that eventually brought its downfall.” That sentence, along with the PBS portrayal of Diem seemed to ring the most 'true' to me. More over, the Herring book gets my 'vote' as it elaborates on the various conflicts and mishandling of them by the Diem regime. But more than anything, I cannot follow the AIM framing of Diem given how it completely glosses over the callousness with which they treated the citizenry from his brother Nhu's secret police and mass incarcerations to how viciously they treated the matter of monks burning themselves to death in protest.

I like to think that I can remove myself objectively enough to analyze these materials on their own merits, but I recognize within myself the conflict of some matters that evoke such strong emotional responses such as ritual self martyrdom.

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Re: Continuing the discussion

by [Leah Boysen](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 11:19 AM

Your statement of being able to remove yourself from material that your learning to analyze it, is something I think people need to be able to do to find the truth and/or the false hood in any information because thats how your going to be able to form well educated opinions about topics, unlike what we've seen in the AIM videos and some of the PBS videos. Being able to take a step back and think about it and then analyze what they were really trying to say and get across, and were the facts that were presented solid and are they showing up in other areas? You bring up a great point.

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Re: Continuing the discussion

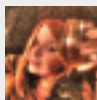
by [Jeffrey Moat](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 12:00 PM

Absolutely. I find that I can more easily define where the source is coming from and the lens that they use (political affiliation, dogmatic principles and sometimes even a religious perspective) to help me understand their point of view, than I can disassociate myself from my emotional reactions.

I had a conversation yesterday about reacting emotionally to war and history. And while I expressed my belief that we should be objective since our emotions do not change what did or did not happen, enacting that principle isn't the easiest thing in the world when it touches your triggers.

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Re: Continuing the discussion

by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 8:20 AM

Jeff-

Being able to remove yourself from the issue presented is of the utmost importance. It is a very difficult thing to do though. Knowing you personally, I think you do a great job of being objective even when your emotional buttons are being pushed. It’s actually something I’ve admired about you, I get a little too emotional but am trying to be better.

The main thing that has been going through my mind in the last two weeks, is how reliable is Accuracy in Media? A conservative watchdog group is bound to have biases, especially with the majority of board members being conservatives. The same would be true with a board made up of primarily liberal members.

My initial emotional response was that this AIM video is simply Pro-Government/ Pro-War propaganda. It appears to me that AIM is trying to convince viewers that the war wasn’t as bad as PBS made it out to be, and that the United States involvement should not be looked down upon. When discussing PBS goals for making the series *America’s Longest War*, Douglas Pike states that PBS did not make anything an American could be proud of. That is where my emotional response really gets going. I don’t think there is a lot to be proud of in times of any war. I strongly believe that if you want to hear about something to be proud of you have to actually look at individual cases of valor.

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Who's Opinion is More Accurate..

by [Adam Mellott](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 10:13 PM

The biggest conflicting information that I encountered between these three sources in the recent readings was the way the American soldiers and the South Vietnamese were described. The PBS video took the route of describing how the American soldiers would search villages for guerrillas and during the encounters, while searching for land-mines, firing weapons, bombing etc., the South Vietnamese would have little to no reaction or care to what was going on around them. It talks about how the American soldiers began to nervously feel like everyone around them were Viet Cong and after a while started to treat everyone like they were the enemy because they could not tell the difference. This caused the South Vietnamese to portray the Americans as brutal strangers.

The AIM video states that the PBS series portrays the American soldiers as drug attics and racial bigots (Craig) and according to Kenneth Mansfield misrepresents them “due to the stresses of the war” as not being equal to their adversaries (AIM). AIM spins the description of the fighting that occurred on the PBS series and tries to characterize it as a description of American brutality towards the South Vietnamese when, to me, it was just describing the trials the American soldiers

encountered while trying to protect the South.

The Herring book, by far my most favorite and informative resource, obviously has more time than a 1 hour video to touch on a subject. The Herring book is more accurate and is able to take the time to explain each scenario that the American soldiers were faced with and show that there were times where American soldiers were right and wrong in the way they encountered the Vietnamese (both North and South). The American soldiers were placed into a political war trying to fight their way out. Both Kennedy and LBJ had advisors going to Vietnam and coming back with bits of information, all different, and then would have to decide the best way for our soldiers to fight.

The NYT article does a great job in separating the AIM video and the PBS video and stating how the AIM video is trying to rebut their side of what happened during the war according to how the PBS series describes it. Everyone has their opinion and I am just glad that we are fortunate enough to have all of these sources to fall back on to gather information and piece it all together for a bigger and more accurate picture.

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Re: Who's Opinion is More Accurate..
by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 8:57 AM

I think *America's Longest War* is also the most accurate resource we have. It doesn't seem to have either conservative or liberal biases like the AIM video and PBS series does. When reading, it also just in general reads as informative, whereas both AIM and the PBS series come across as heavily persuasive pieces. The author George C. Herring, PhD, based on the biographical information given seems to be respected on the topic of the Vietnam War and I believe would be less open to ulterior motifs(viii).

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Communist or Nationalist?
by [Christina Bergman](#) - Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 10:26 PM

On the issue of whether Ho Chi Minh was mainly communist or nationalist, after watching the entirety of the AIM video and reading the NYT article, I’ve come to the decision that neither the AIM video or the PBS series has my “vote”. They’re both so one sided, and I find either argument to be unlikely. Regarding this matter, I put my faith in the Herring book because, so far, it has provided the most balanced and believable description of Ho Chi Minh. In the first chapter, it describes him as, “a gentle man who radiated warmth and serenity, [but] he was also willing to sanction the most coldblooded methods to achieve his aims” (Herring, pg. 6). This, I think, best represents him because it shows the duality of his personality, which makes me believe that he was strongly both communist and nationalist and that it would really be kind of weird to omit one or the other from his agenda.

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Re: Communist or Nationalist?
by [Adam Mellott](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 9:10 PM

I agree with your decision. Although both AIM and PBS has a specific analogy, the PBS video stating that Ho Chi Minh “was a Nationalist first, a Communist second and wanted independence for hie people,” while the AIM video states that Ho Chi Minh “led and betrayed his so-called Nationalist allies to the French security police” his political views and his tactics are definitely one sided at best. The best part about each of them is that we get to see both sides of Minh and his true colors. The Herring book paints a broader picture but having both of the videos as reference helps. One great example of this is in the Herring book when they describe how “After years of trying to play all sides, Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh officially joined the emerging Communist “bloc” (16).

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Re: Communist or Nationalist?
by [Joseph Foley](#) - Saturday, April 25, 2015, 2:42 PM

Christina, very well said. Both videos offer perspectives from opposite ends of the political spectrum. Ho Chi Minh

seemed to be willing to work with whom-ever could aid him in gaining independence for all of Vietnam. His relationship with the U.S. after the Korean conflict was quite different in comparison to where it ended up. The U.S. and Minh worked closely together, the North Vietnamese aided the Americans with valuable intelligence on the Chinese, and the U.S. was able to help train and arm the North Vietnamese soldiers.

Minh’s relationship with communist powers became a problem as the Cold War heightened and France was put on the ropes. Minh’s determination to create an independent Vietnam was the one thing that never waived. Many from each major power seemed to have different ideas in regard to his communist ties and partnerships.

In Appy’s (Patriots) interview with Sergie Khrushchev (Nikita Krushchev’s son), Krushchev offers a good glimpse into the confusion behind the scenes. Krushchev says, “ In reality, the Vietnamese had their own ideas. They played their own game. The winner would not be the Soviet Union or China or the United States, it would be the Vietnamese (Appy, pg. 87).” Obviously, this is only one perspective of many, but it helped summarize some of the confusion for me.

Minh appeared to be a communist and nationalist with the ultimate goal of freeing Vietnam from foreign powers. I like how you said, “...he was strongly both communist and nationalist and that it would really be kind of weird to omit one or the other from his agenda.” I have come up with a similar hypothesis. Herring’s book seems to offer a fair cross-section of the facts. It would not be accurate to peg Minh as just one or the other. The complexities of Vietnam’s politics at the time require a great deal of research just to conceptualize the basics.

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Re: Communist or Nationalist?

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) - Saturday, April 25, 2015, 4:52 PM

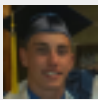
At the heart of the issue of whether Ho Chi Minh was a Nationalist or Communist ends in one of two places: If Ho Chi Minh was more a Nationalist, his goal is independence for his country and believes Communism is the best system in which to govern his country. And if true would call into question US involvement in Vietnam?

On the other hand, if Ho was Communist – through and through, as the AIM video suggests, he is controlled by Moscow and the war was against North Vietnam, China, and controlled from Moscow in the USSR.

Forty years after the war and Vietnam seems to be doing better and we didn’t see the domino effect take place. My vote for accuracy goes to the PBS documentary over the AIM video.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Communist or Nationalist?

by [Marcus Farset](#) - Saturday, April 25, 2015, 11:29 PM

Ho Chi Minh was known for pursuing his goal of Vietnamese independence since he was young. He strived to be free from the French and then from the North. He mixed communism and nationalism, so I think he was both a nationalist and a communist. He believed in his country more than anything, but also wanted to be the leader. The PBS series stated that he was a first a nationalist, then a communist. I think this is true because when he rose to power, he wanted to be in charge and control everything. Between all of the sources we have to evaluate, they all show different sides of Ho Chi Minh. I would have to choose to use all of the sources in this instance to see the most clear picture of Ho.

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Many Conflicts

by [Marcus Farset](#) - Thursday, April 23, 2015, 4:27 PM

In the AIM video John McCain was upset on how the PBS series downplayed the treatment of American prisoners of war by the North, and how the treatment was falsely portrayed by Jane Fonda. My dad helped receive 10 medic planes over the course of a few days full of American POWs into the United States from the war and he said they were in really bad shape, suffered from malnutrition, and some even had to be moved on hospital beds. McCain talked a lot about how the North used the American POWs as propaganda, he touched on the fact that the South and U.S. did not do use their POWs.

The NY times article says “Richard Ellison, the executive producer of "Vietnam: A Television History," and Peter McGhee of

WGBH in Boston, the station that originated it, tell us how conscientious they were in preparing the series.” This seems like an odd statement with all of the conflicts and flaws that the AIM video points out. One of the biggest flaws AIM brings up is that PBS portrays Ho Chi Minh as a nationalist rather than a Communist.

One more conflict that stood out to me in the AIM video was when Kenneth Moorefield was saying how PBS misrepresented the American soldiers performance in the war, and were not equal of they adversaries. He said from his position of a commander he couldn't have received more support from his men, he said they were fantastic, brave, showed initiative, and courage. They showed every quality you could possibly want from a soldier in combat. I think PBS portraying the American soldier this way, as being weak is very disrespectful to the countless number of men who went to this war and risked their lives and to all of those who were killed.

I side with the AIM video in this case because it shed light on the flaws of the PBS series, and highlights important things they left out.

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Re: South Vietnamese Frustration
by [Adam Mellott](#) - Saturday, April 25, 2015, 11:44 AM

The disruption and lack of government or control in South Vietnam was frustrating and took a toll on their people. AIM takes the PBS story line and then talks about how the series is depicting the South Vietnamese as passive, puppets, corrupted, non-people and virtually America’s enemy, yet the US played a big part in that. You gain a bigger picture when reading the Herring book as it discusses how the American came into South Vietnam and basically took it over wanting to control the war virtually pushing the South Vietnamese away. It states that “Americanization of the war had a debilitating effect on the South Vietnamese Army” and that the “ARVN was largely shunted aside” (198).

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a mountain out of a mole hill?
by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 8:50 AM

In regards to the Geneva Accord, the Accuracy in Media video states that PBS omits information about the United States involvement in the elections that were going to take place. America’s Longest War also does not mention specific U.S. involvement in such elections just that they were to take place following the division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel (47). In the AIM video Bruce Loeb calls attention to the “distortions” PBS commits throughout the series, he states that PBS omitted the information that the United States was not bound to agreements made at Geneva and did not support elections without an United Nations presence to oversee the freedom of the potential election.

It doesn’t make sense that PBS would not discuss this in their series. I am not sure I agree with Bruce Loeb that this was done as a way to paint Ho Chi Minh as a hero, but would have no other explanation as to why the information was omitted. In America’s Longest War little attention is given to the elections. Which leaves me to wonder if AIM made a mountain out of a mole hill?

With two sources having such a similar amount of coverage on the issue, my vote would have to be for PBS and *America’s Longest War*.

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New York Times Article
by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 10:04 PM

I enjoyed the *New York Times* article written by John Corry (1985.) He makes it clear that the AIM rebuttal project certainly had its flaws, while also pointing out credible points. Corry wrote, “Say right off, meanwhile, that it is not a particularly effective rebuttal, even if it is narrated by Charlton Heston. It is a polemic, interested mostly in its own point of view.”

Later in the article Corry wrote, “...- intelligent criticisms are offered: The series makes Ho Chi Minh into a nationalist rather than a Communist; it ignores the role of the South Vietnamese Army; ... ” Corry is careful to point out the very obvious bias in perspective from AIM, while also recognizing some of the relevant issues with the PBS video.

Corry mentioned his own positive review of the PBS series in the New York Times in 1983. I accessed the 1983 review to get a better glimpse. It was fun to read his initial review (found@<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/10/04/movies/tv-13-part-history-of-vietnam-war-on-pbs.html>). Corry wrote,” In nearly all of this, the series is determinedly even-handed. Vietnam produced a war for polemicists of all persuasions, but the series, delicately balanced, tries hard not to reach conclusions. On the other hand, some conclusions are simply implicit in the reporting. The foremost one is that virtually all the American assumptions about Vietnam were wrong.” Overall, it was a very positive review from Corry.

After reading both Corry’s articles I was able to balance a fair understanding of where he is coming from. He brings up valuable points on both sides of the spectrum. The PBS Series is a wonderful piece of data, while also representing a particular viewpoint. The AIM series is understandably questionable from a liberal standpoint, but it also brings about relevant holes or perspective differences in regard to the PBS series.

I appreciate how Corry was able to alter his perspective of the project over time. He was open to discover other truths, while maintaining an appreciation for the positive points the series makes.

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Considering the times..
by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, April 26, 2015, 10:07 PM

It is important to consider the political climate in the early 1980’s America when both the AIM and PBS Vietnam pieces were released. There had been a conservative backlash for well over a decade. From 1932 to 1968 Democrats ruled the roost, controlling seven of nine presidencies.

The Vietnam War played a role in dividing the democratic ticket. Hence, when Nixon won the presidency in 1968, we began a political trend towards conservatism. President Ronald Reagan’s influence in the 1980’s continued the trend. The Vietnam War, social issues and economics launched the country toward a new conservative political philosophy.

At the time of the release of PBS’s Vietnam Series (1983), the average citizen was not as liberal in comparison to today’s norms. The political climate was relatively similar in 1985 when the AIM launched their counter-attack.

It is natural to compare things to our current situation, but it is vital to consider the political norm during the time period we are studying. The contrasting perspectives in both projects derived from wildly different political groups/funding. They both have holes and biases, but they offer valid points. Understanding the climate from which they were produced is essential.

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