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Week 1 - Determining the truth

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, April 12, 2015, 9:55 AM

This is a history class. We are trying to determine what really happened in history. How do you/should we deal academically with conflicting information (such as is being presented in the PBS videos, web videos, and AIM video this week)? How can your two textbooks help you to approach this video information and be confident that you are learning accurate historical knowledge?

Be sure to use SPECIFIC examples from class materials to illustrate your point or to support your position. Cite your sources in your posts and replies. Use parentheses. Examples (PBS Episode 1), (AIM historian "Smith"), (Herring p.34), etc.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT: Change the subject line of your post to something more descriptive. DO NOT leave the subject line Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth

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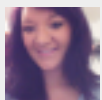
Finding the root of conflicting information

by Veronica Sandow - Monday, April 13, 2015, 7:28 PM

I think the best way to deal with conflicting information is to first acknowledge the information that is out there. After seeing the conflictions we can start to measure credibility. Mistakes in information gathering, such as using someone's opinion as a generalization for what happened, can be a factor in conflicting information. Once we see where the inconsistencies stem, we can try to determine what may be more credible and what may have been lost in translation.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1) 1

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Re: Finding the root of conflicting information

by Nikole Breedlove - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 9:49 PM

Veronica

It is so true that if we start to see the conflicts we can measure credibility, I think the only flaw with that may be that too many sources use generalizations instead of facts. It's important that we take the time to not only look beyond what is written in the pages of our text books, but to also see other sources that can support what we are reading. Without this, we take one or two sources for their value and can miss valid information. I agree that inconsistencies can help us determine what may have been lost in translation and credible resources.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1) 1

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Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth



by [Joseph Foley](#) - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 12:49 AM

How do you/should we deal academically with conflicting information (such as is being presented in the PBS videos, web videos, and AIM video this week)? How can your two textbooks help you to approach this video information and be confident that you are learning accurate historical knowledge?

These are questions that all historians and students deal with. Before I begin to compare conflicting data, I evaluate the source. If it's an author I read their reviews, research their schooling, funding sources and political affiliations. If it's a historian or professor (Professor Escobar encourages students to read his reviews), I want to know where they studied, what have they published, what they focused on and where they have taught. If it's a media outlet I research their history, including projects and funding.

Our current media climate is a great example of biased news. The average American deals with this on a daily basis. A majority of our news is filtered through one of two political options, liberal or conservative (MSNBC vs. Fox News). Despite much of the news being misinformation and or news about news, people take it as fact and argue about it. It is essential to read between the lines and seek outside sources if you hope to formulate a fair judgment. Personally, I tend to disagree with both extreme ends of the current political spectrum.

Historically, PBS is known as a fairly liberal outlet. Before watching their Vietnam Series, I would have guessed that they would convey an anti-war perspective. Before watching *Accuracy in Media (anti-PBS Vietnam Series)*, I researched who was involved with the project. As soon as I saw Charlton Heston's name, I theorized that the perspective would convey a more conservative anti-communist approach. I don't judge either source because of their philosophies, but I do consider them while listening to their pitch.

While researching Christian G Appy's book, *Patriots*, I continually found reviewers mentioning that Appy gave all sides of the war a voice (many of his reviews can easily be found online). That is exactly what I would hope to hear in a review. The interviews have been an extremely helpful way for me to compare eyewitness accounts of the conflict with data that has been compiled in our narrative Herring book, the PBS series and most recently the Accuracy in Media video (the second part is available on YouTube).

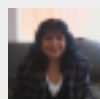
For obvious reasons, we can't take individual interviews as pure fact either. They are merely pieces of a puzzle. Ten different people will always observe the same incident in ten different ways. It is important to evaluate all of the available perspectives and identify where the data overlaps and aligns. These areas of cohesion allow us to formulate fair and balanced ideas of what actually took place.

When studying periods of history it is also helpful to research other well reviewed historians and authors with respected work on the subject. Finding a credible source that can consistently convey historical data in a bi-partisan manner can help you digest complex periods like Vietnam. Some of these experts have spent lifetimes attempting to explain the very same concepts we are learning. You can use this expert as a tool to gauge new perspectives. Still, always research the source.

The Vietnam War remains a hot-button issue for many people, and understandably so. To study this conflict you must navigate a complex web of history, politics, global alliances, philosophies and tragedy. It will require more years of research before I can gain a firm understanding of this complex period in history.

Sum of ratings: [3 \(1\)](#)

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Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth

by [Susan Santana](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 7:21 PM

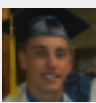
Joseph,

All of your suggestions on resources and how to learn the affiliation of who is presenting the information are good ideas. I never would have thought that PBS would tell conflicting stories from what actually happened. In reality we would never have known that PBS was biased, not telling correct facts in these documentaries if it wasn't for our instructor pointing it out. I usually look at who is providing the information I am looking at but like I said, never thought PBS would be biased. As students I guess we will have to become more aware of who is presenting the stories or documentaries and what are their political affiliations are.

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Steps to finding the truth



by [Marcus Farset](#) - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 1:36 PM

I think the most effective way to handle conflicting information is to first, get a good grasp of the information at hand. Second, make sure the info. is important and pertains to the subject matter in which you are looking at. Third, look more in depth in other similar areas to find if they can help determine where the conflict came from. After all of this information is gathered, see if you can analyze it to see if indeed the info. is credible, then determine which side of the conflict was false. In the Patriots book conflicting information could arise even from the first hand accounts, but I think it helps clarify these issues because it presents stories from all aspects of the war. That is another way a conflict could be prevented, by taking first hand accounts, even from the other side or the enemy.

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Different Perspectives

by [Paul Turner](#) - Tuesday, April 14, 2015, 11:32 PM

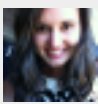
I think as students we need to approach every source of information with an open mind. We are the ones learning, so we cannot judge, on our own, what is accurate or not. We are currently studying the Vietnam War through three different sources: The PBS television series, the Appy book and the Herring book. We need to realize that each of these sources will be telling the same story but with different perspectives and biases. By utilizing our three sources we can find the similarities and differences in information. When we see information being presented the same way through three different perspectives that means the information must be accurate. If we see differences, then the information must be skewed in some way.

In Appy’s novel I read the Rufus Phillips story which mentioned how Edward Lansdale, a master of psychological warfare, was sent to Vietnam in 1954 to help avoid a communist takeover (p. 50). Lansdale was also mentioned in Herring’s book stating that he lead a CIA team in harassing the Hanoi government and carrying out “psywar” operations (p. 54). Reading about Edward Lansdale in both books gave me a more accurate idea of his role in the war. I like seeing different perspectives match together to give a better, and more true, understanding of information.

Like Professor Escobar said, we are trying to determine what really happened in history. I think the difficulty in finding accurate information lies in documenting, reporting and interpreting. If the only source of information is the spoken word of a single person, how can we know if it is really “true”? We can’t. We rely on the credibility of that person to determine if the information is accurate. Some things are simply accurate or not such as dates and number figures. Information may also be misleading when it is reported by biased sources. The same can be said for a biased person misinterpreting information.

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Re: Different Perspectives

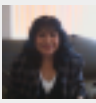
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 5:46 PM

We are all scientists. We form a theory based on repeated experiments, proving the hypothesis as true. However, theories are just ideas with repeated events backing them. The same could be said about historical records. Most of history is based off of peoples’ ideas of what happened or hypothesis of truth. Over time, the inaccuracies prove different theories to be false. However, not all are tested. This leaves some history undebated and untouched.

Three tests and successes does not mean a source is reliable. Information from credible sources is being disputed constantly due to peoples’ alternative motives and ability to recall. Yet, having three authorities on a subject does consistently prove to be a repeated pattern of resulting in accuracy. Still, everyone has a bias. Taking this into account, information will always be guided by a bias. It is the job of the learner to understand their current bias and attempt to separate themselves from it in order to understand the culture of the past and each side of the story.

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Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth

by [Susan Santana](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 9:32 AM

There is absolutely no way for an individual to know what is said in the videos or written in books to be accurate. However, we as a society rely on the person writing the book, or making the video to ensure the information they are sharing is true and accurate. Everyone's experiences are different therefore their perception of a situation is going to be based on that, their experience. I feel confident if I am reading or hearing the same information from all three sources then the information must be accurate.

Out of all the stories in Appy's book the one that I related to the most was Deidre English and that is because of her mindset at the time. That was the mindset of a lot of young people at the time, and people in general. "Most Americans don't even know that we're at war in a little Southeast Asian nation called Vietnam." "And I thought, yeah, I'm most Americans" (pg. 30). Deidre shared about her experience when Kent State occurred and the feelings of the public after that, the war became more of a reality after Kent State.

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Fact V fiction

by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 11:07 AM

It's hard in this context to know what really happened. A lot of things are either clouded by years in the case of the readings. George Watkins (Appy pg.21) Seems like he remembers thing very clearly, but what has 40 years done to his memory? Or Richard Olsen (Appy. 62) he seems to remember it in a very different almost full of bravado way. The accuracy I think is beside the point. The only people who will remember it accurately are the people who were actually there. Who experienced it, and even then they like George Watkins and Richard Olsen had very different things happen to them. So they will remember it very differently. The war itself spanned twenty years. So much happened during that time, so many lives were lost and people were born and died in that time frame that it makes the facts of the situation very hard to nail down.

This is just the United States side. I am sure the Vietnamese people also have a very different take on what actually happened such as Vo Nguyen Giap (appy pg41) he is going to have a very different view on the conflict then the first two Americans. This is in the same way that I am sure Afghanis have a VERY different take on what is going on over there then what our Marines or Naval men and women think.

Will we ever know what really happened? Probably not. We know the sweeping arch of it. We know the battles and who won, and some of the operations. I am sure there are many things that happened that the American people would never know completely.

Whoever, I don't think this changes what we can learn, and the stories about it. I find peoples experiences to be more interesting than what actually happened anyway. I'd rather here what people went through there then what the facts and figures on paper say.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Fact V fiction

by [Laura Stewart](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 5:48 PM

People like Watkins and Olsen's stories were recorded much later than the actual events. Yet, I believe their stories to be important, as with any account of the past. This may not mean their material is entirely accurate, but it is significant. If nothing else, their stories are able to inform us of the culture of a soldier's life.

History is relative. Every story is told from a unique perspective and received through the lens of the audience. Therefore, historical accounts will be continually disputed. By obtaining multiple sources, we are able to fine-tune the events of the past. Still, we will never be able to fully recreate the original events. As learners, we have to understand and accept this concept.

I would agree with your statement, "We know the sweeping arch of it." As a different generation, we will never experience the exact same circumstances as the Vietnam War. However, we are able to make conclusions from the past and better understand how to approach the future. This is one of the main reasons for history courses; to learn from the past in order to make better decisions.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Fact V fiction



by [Joseph Foley](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 11:24 PM

You bring up a great point in regard to the timing of interviews. It was interesting to see soldiers on the PBS series in wartime scenes, and then hear their stories years after the war. Obviously the time away from the conflict, politics, media influences and maturity drastically altered their perspectives. Battle wounds both physically and mentally can have a strong influence on ones perspective, and understandably so.

I have noticed a similar trend with many of my friends who have served in the military during our most recent non-friendly ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan. They tend to feel different about war today in comparison to while on tour, or in boot camp. Their accounts of the war have changed along with their outlook. Despite an evolving viewpoint, they remain a priceless source of information. Much like the participants from varying backgrounds in Appy's book.

This is just one of the many difficulties for historians, authors, teachers and students when researching history. Even primary source documents can come with personal biases. Personal journals can be written knowing that they will be eventually read, or statistics of the same war can vary wildly depending on which country you are accessing the information.

Point being, it is vital to research sources and find as many credible viewpoints as possible. The more I learn about the Vietnam War, the more I realize how complex the conflict really was. It could take a lifetime to study just one aspect of the conflict.

Thank you for the insightful comments.

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Re: Fact V fiction

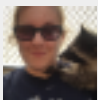
by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 3:20 PM

Precisely, I would never devalue someones story of being there, but I feel like some 50 years later what they remember about being there vs when they were there is going to be different. I am throughly enjoying all of the stories in the books. But I feel like a lot of it is not as fresh as it was when it happened. That had they been interviewed right after the war, or whenever they got back there would have been a different take on the situation.

As you said, I too have some friends who 10 years on now have a very different feeling about that they did over there versus now. However there are some that still fully believe and remember everything. I am sure there are things they would like to forget.

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Re: Fact V fiction

by [Veronica Sandow](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:54 PM

You bring up a point that has not been stressed enough. When we are looking for the truth in accounts, I believe it can often be mistaken for devaluing someone's story. As with anything else, it is good to first establish an appreciation that someone is willing to share this information and respect what they have, or believe to have, seen.

It is difficult to hear an account while trying to determine truth and show respect while asking “Yes, but is that actually what happened?” We can avoid this by accepting this is what someone experienced and not using it as a generalization, as we were warned of early on in this class. Stories from relatives and friends, and accounts from the Appy book are great perspective pieces to compliment what is shown as fact in an academic format.

This brings to mind what was taught to me in another history class: history is written by the victors. We have been seeing a mostly American account of what happened. While accounts from all sides are shown in the PBS series and Appy book, the Herring book is definitely an American book. I cannot help but wonder what the Vietnamese teach versus what our books show.



Re: Fact V fiction
by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 6:14 PM

Matthew,

While I agree that the individual accounts are far more interesting than the facts and figures of the situation, in our case the Vietnam War, I believe it is also important to know about these facts and figures. It is important to have supporting information to understand the whole picture. This way you can understand more about what kind of person the story-teller is. Having the facts will give you the context of the situation and the ability to better judge what information or stories are inaccurate.



Re: Week 1 - Determining the truth
by [Daniel Lopez](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 3:12 PM

When it comes to history I've always known that "history is written by the victor." I think that is what is being represented as I watch the PBS Series: Vietnam A Television History. The Vietnamese won the war and PBS is presenting their story as a noble one that came at the hands of nationalists not communists. As Douglas Pike pointed out, when he was assessing PBS Scoreboards third promise of this series (AIM 3:40), it did nothing to promote "pride in America." But I think it's notable that as PBS paints Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh as nationalists and not communists that it may of been their way of softening the blow of morale to Americans. Losing to nationalist's sounds a lot better than saying we lost to communists. Whether that is true or not is, of course, up for debate.

When I am presented with conflicting information, especially on a topic I know very little about like the Vietnam War, I try and piece things together and make my own assumptions of what really happened in a logical way. The thing that irks me the most in what we have learned is the level of communist Ho Chi Minh was. Watching the PBS series and reading stories in the Appy Book such as the one presented by Henry Prunier (p.38) I got the picture that this was a man who just wanted Vietnam to be Vietnam. No outside power dictating how the Vietnamese lived their life. Of course I put a lot of stock in first hand accounts and this may be my fault because the first hand accounts in the book can be very bias. I have to take the accounts and pit them against facts presented in the videos that I feel un-bias. The AIM video presents Ho Chi Minh as a hard core communist. A man that was very smart and had all intentions to make Vietnam a communist country at all costs. Dolf Droge's testimony in the AIM video (AIM 8:31) was extremely powerful in changing my view on Ho Chi Minh's stance. Ho's involvement in the French Communist Party and his education in Moscow with the addition of his Judas like betrayal (AIM 9:40) of his best friend convinced me that this man had only communists intentions, not nationalistic.



Question everything!
by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 5:46 PM

In an academic setting an individual is presented with many pieces of information or evidence and it is extremely important for him or her to question the information provided. He or she must ask what the source of this information is and ask whether the information is reliable. There are a number of ways a student can determine if the information that he or she is presented with is accurate and able to be assumed as true.

Personally, I like to go over the material first and seek out anything that strikes me as odd. For example I watched the first couple of episodes of *Vietnam: A Television History* and observed that it seemed to be told from a biased anti-American Government point of view, which in all honesty is a bias I tend to lean to. However, regardless of personal opinions, it is important to observe any biases in information and remember that it exists when considering the reliability of the source. I do not think PBS would spread misinformation but wouldn't be too surprised if they left something out to accentuate their point of view. I also like to have a little background information on the source. In Christian Appy's book I find it crucial that a little background information is given about the individual source. This again is to find tells of biases of a source but also to help understand the context in which the story was being told.

When dealing with conflicting information a student must recognize that there are multiple points of views and research the different points of view and ask themselves a number of questions. What is the author's purpose? What evidence do they provide? Are they biased towards the opposition? What makes the author an expert on the subject given?

Based on the answers to these, and many other, questions the student must make a decision on which source is the most accurate. But this also leads to the objectivity of the individual judging the source, which is a whole other bag of worms.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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The Whole Truth
by [Paul Turner](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 10:53 AM

Hello Samantha,

I like you views on this topic. I think it is smart for students (or anyone) to question the information that receiving. Rather than doubting the truth in everything or being skeptical, I think it's best to simply be aware that information may be inaccurate or skewed. When dealing with information about the Vietnam War it may be hard for students to determine if information is reliable because many of us are new to the subject. I would expect that a Vietnam War expert would be able to easily find inaccuracies in information. However, as we continue to study the war our knowledge will grow and we will become better at judging the truth.

I agree with you that the PBS series *Vietnam: A Television History* was told through a anti-American point of view. One of the main goals of the PBS series was to promote healing and national esteem in the post war era, however, Douglas Pike, a director of the Indochina archive and UC Berkely, said the series does not produce anything that an American can be proud of (AIM 3:45). I also strongly agree with you about PBS and their inaccuracy. I don't think PBS, or any other source, would openly promote inaccurate information, however they do leave important information in their Vietnam series. Reed Irvine, the chairman of Accuracy In Media, said that the PBS failed to portray Ho Chi Minh and Pol Pot as communist leaders, but more as nationalists (AIM 5:45). It was known that both leaders were indeed communists when the PBS series was created, however they wrote the series as if they had no knowledge of this. I compare this to someone telling the truth but not the whole truth. I think most all information will be affected in someway by bias; it is our job as consumers to determine what is accurate or not.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: The Whole Truth
by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 6:43 PM

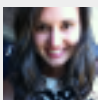
Paul,

Thank you for the positive feedback. I completely agree that an expert would be much better at spotting misinformation and look forward to gaining more knowledge on the Vietnam War. I would like to point out for clarifications that I am no expert on accuracy in the media either and do not completely know PBS’ operations.

I think you offer a good point of view as well of being more aware of the possibilities for misinformation. I think it’s difficult for me to be anything other than skeptical due to my personal experiences of being told misinformation on a regular basis. From parents to employers, I believe that we are being lied to frequently. I am trying to have a more positive outlook on things and will try to consider your words when judging something.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Question everything!
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Saturday, April 18, 2015, 10:22 PM

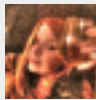
Although the Vietnam: A Television History may speak of America in a negative way, almost all history books reference American in this way. At least in my experience in high school history classes and the general atmosphere in college, these environments appear to have the same slant. It is easy for those of us who are not involved directly with the battlefield or government positions to focus on the things we would like to have changed rather than admiring how far we have come. This is not to say America does not have faults. In fact during the Vietnam War, fishermen were mistaken for Viet Cong boats and were fired on. Phan Xuan Sinh remembers this account, “When the flares went off I knew instantly that we had made an awful mistake. We had fired on a large group of fishermen. What we thought were rifles were only fishing poles”

(Appy 25-26).The war itself is complex and full of miscommunication.

Samantha, you postulated the statement that PBS would not give inaccurate information, but would instead withhold information. Following this idea with a question: Is skewed information more hindering than inaccurate information when recalling history? Meaning, is leaving out information worse than giving wrong information? Asking questions about the information is essential to test its reliability. All important documents need to be questioned. The Declaration of Independence was first drafted by Thomas Jefferson and was critiqued by representatives from all over the country. Even still, the wordage is questioned today. Phrases such as, “all men are created equal” poses the question of equality between men and women. Continuing to question is key. However, we need to refocus on the objective of recalling history. As long as we are learning from mistakes in the past, then we have accomplished our goal.

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Re: Question everything!
by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 5:56 PM

Laura Stewart

First for clarification, I do not know if PBS purposely withholds information. I would not be horribly surprised to find out that they, or any other media source for that matter, would do that. I do not have the facts to speak either for or against the issue, other than information from the Accuracy in Media clip.

To answer your question, I believe that skewed information and inaccurate information are equally hindering. Neither way offers the individual studying a topic the whole picture, leading potentially to mass ignorance and fear. While I know it’s not history related, look at the most recent Ebola scare. I heard individuals claiming that there were several confirmed cases in Oregon and were in a panic about it. Not that Ebola is to be taken lightly but these individuals had not done their research entirely and trusted inaccurate sources. They didn’t mention the only suspected cases in Portland, but claimed there were confirmed cases in Medford. The spread of misinformation only incited more panic in other individuals. When it comes to misinformation in any form, it is my belief that only negativity will result. For example, racial issues are fueled by misinformation and stereotypes.

On the other hand though, being aware of skewed information or misinformation provides insight on the source to a well-educated researcher who can easily see the misinformation for what it is. It can shed some light on the purpose of the source. Being aware of the misinformation and the purpose of the source for spreading misinformation can also provide other topics of research and possibly even give the researcher a more well-rounded view on the subject. But at this point in my career as a historian I am not proficient enough to be able to see such things easily, yet.

And I strongly agree about learning from the mistakes of the past and thank you for asking such an interesting question!

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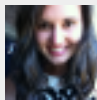


Finding the "real" truth
by [James McCray](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 7:18 PM

With any kind of History there is always someone stating something and five minutes later it is discredited by someone else. That’s why it is very important to research something with multiple sources. Having sources that are verified and respectable are extremely important as well. Books or articles with conflicting stories happens a lot as a well because each person can see a situation happen and effect each person entirely differently. Using the two textbooks to compare and contrast certain stories that seem to come up in each text or video. Being able to decipher the text and in the videos to make sure that a certain passage is correct and matches other respectable sources. There is always people discussing the things constantly wrong about history because one person could perceive a story the exact opposite as someone else.

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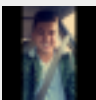
Re: Broken Glass
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 11:06 PM

Taking a situation within context should be emphasized more often. As with any written document, there is a right way

and a wrong way to interpret it. The correct way would include referencing the time frame, record keeper, social norms, significant events, leadership, economics, and region. Many historians have disputed these factors and how they relate to how an event actually took place. History could be compared to a broken glass. There are pieces scattered everywhere. People pick up the shards and attempt to remake the original glass. However, parts get lost and it takes time to put them in the right order. Reflecting on history not only requires this broad view but an open mind and an unbiased perspective. Removing personal bias in stories from Appy’s book is fairly difficult when attempting to determine the events. It is hard to tell who was “right” or “wrong”. In actuality, both sides of the war carried blame.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Fact from Fiction
by [John Goodman](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 7:43 PM

When receiving information it is important to acknowledge where this information is coming from, in what kind of context is this information being used in and how might the communicator be trying to relay the message to you, because we as the receiver can misinterpret what the person is trying to say. Next you need to look at who is saying the information and what gives them the credibility, or what are his or her sources(assuming they bring up a statistic or event that occurred). It is always good to come to a subject with an open mind and when in doubt fact check them, but always come to the conversation willing to not only hear but actually listen to what they have to say.

The books help make the videos more credible because they both have a lot of the same tendencies. Such as in episode one they talk about our involvement in Vietnam started as early as 1945 and we were paying for most of the french war in indochina. The book titled: America's Longest War also says that we were in Vietnam as early as 1945 and that we paid for 80% of the french war in Indochina near the end of it(xiv introduction). The personal accounts in the book titled Patriots brings a different perspective that I like but it can lead to some of the stories being "juiced up" with maybe a little bit of fiction. Wether intentional or not, a lot of people think that a certain moment happened a certain way when in fact it didn't but they trained there mind to believe what they are saying. Nevertheless, I take their stories to be mostly accurate, some more than others. I make sure to look at each name that is telling the story and read the little background info the author provides for us, it helps with the credibility of the story greatly.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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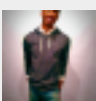
Re: Fact from Fiction
by [Nikole Breedlove](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:17 PM

John

I really like your view point on this. Coming to the topic with an open mind is one of the most important steps in determining the truth. There is no possible way to accurately get information if your mind is already set. Knowing the validity of the resource is a great point as well, but that can't always be accurate either. As we saw in the PBS video, the resource was thought to be credible, yet the omitted information that should have been relayed. A great point that you bring up is how the the two books both confirm that we were in Vietnam as early as 1945, yet the one only says we were paying for most of the war. They both say the same thing, yet one give a little more detail. To me, this confirms that we were in Vietnam in 1945 and paying for a portion. Not every fact can be verified, so we must take from it what we can.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Week 1 - The Search for Truth in Vietnam
by [Matthew Brooks](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 9:59 PM

The most difficult part about attempting to find truth in an event as complex as the Vietnam war, stems from one simple fact. It's safe to assume that none of the students in this class have first hand experience with it. As such we are forced to rely on retold accounts of people who did personally experience the war. However, as so much time has passed, it is difficult to discern between what is legitimate fact, and what is believed to be truth. Sadly, even in the modern day, it seems that most Americans know very little about the actual events of the Vietnam War. This lack of knowledge is hauntingly similar to that of the average American during the majority of the Vietnam war, and I can't claim to be different. The most effective rule of thumb, seems to be, that if you read about, or hear about it from three different sources, the information is more than likely accurate. We have three extremely effective, and highly in depth sources to draw information from, and from there we are

allowed to decide for ourselves whether the information presented is truly fact, or fiction. However, knowing this it would be easy for someone uneducated in the history of the war to be presented information, and to then accept that information as hard facts. If a television network wanted to pain the war in a certain light, then they could do so fairly easily, especially with new information on the conflict still being released to this day.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Week 1 - The Search for Truth in Vietnam

by [John Goodman](#) - Saturday, April 18, 2015, 6:59 PM

I agree with your statement about depicting the difference between legitimate fact and truth. People throughout there life may tell themselves that a certain situation happened a certain way when in fact it could have happened dramatically different. Which is why you have to take all personal account stories with a grain of salt. They may be telling fiction without ever realizing it. I also think that the absence of mind about the Vietnam war and wars in general is a major concern for the U.S population. We in fact are paying for these wars, with our money in theory. They use our taxes or increase the national debt(which we are supposed to pay off) and a lot of us don't even know why we are involved with these other countries. These are major concerns and I think they have been exposed during the Vietnam war and the war over in the middle east on "terror". I also agree with your statement about the television programs persuading a certain view point or bias that they may want to impose on the individuals that will be learning this information. We need to be able to notice that bias and make sure we are not falling into the bias thinking the video may promote.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Week 1 - The Search for Truth in Vietnam

by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 6:21 PM

Matthew,

I had never made the comparison before between the confusion and lack of knowledge over the Vietnam War between Americans in the time period and Americans today. I think it is a great comparison. Recently I found out a friend of mine was also taking this class and we both decided to take it due to our utter lack of knowledge about the Vietnam War. I think it is great that you made this connection and find it very interesting.

Where does the lack of knowledge in both cases stem from I wonder?

Thanks for the interesting thoughts!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Week 1 - The Search for Truth in Vietnam

by [Susan Santana](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 7:50 PM

Matthew,

I agree that most of us don't know much about the Vietnam War especially because most of the students in the class are probably too young to know many facts. However, as one that does remember the Vietnam War I still did not know a lot of facts, such as, how the war began, how the United States ended up going to war in Vietnam. I believe that it is important for a news media outlet as big as PBS to verify stories they are airing to assure the accuracy of what they are airing. I thought that was the number one rule for journalistic reporting. So now as students we are forced to decipher what is fact and what is fiction even from sources that we or at least I thought were reliable.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Two Sides

by [Laura Stewart](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 10:08 PM

Learning from multiple sources is key to finding accurate information. This is why having two texts and a video series is especially beneficial when learning history. School is not just about learning and memorizing information, it is about determining what information is relevant. Still, history becomes skewed over time and through the passing of multiple interpretations. Making sure the material is as close to the original event as possible is essential. Firsthand accounts, such

as those given in Appy’s book, give a more accurate portrayal of the war than of news broadcasts and accounts taken from a third person perspective.

People like Ngo Vinh Long can be seen as fairly reliable sources since he swayed his point of view based on the circumstances of war. He once believed “the United States was doing this for the good of Vietnam”, but turned away from his initial idea when he saw people being killed and treated harshly (Appy 56). Seeing him change his perspective makes his account more realistic and believable because he understood both sides of the war.

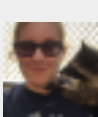
Learning about each side’s enemy brings to light the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. Vo Nguyen Giap and Henry Prunier supported the Vietnamese and pointed out the harsh treatment of Vietnamese people by American troops. Both the United States and Vietnam were responsible for the war. It became more apparent reading on that the war could have ended earlier and more lives could have been saved. Yet, there were mistakes made by both sides.

Mistakes or not, we still have to understand the strong bias of each party involved. The AIM video made reference to the PBS video stating, “Every myth has to have a villain. The villain in the PBS piece is south Vietnam and the United States...they do this by distorting the elections.” The first warning in this statement is its strong implications. The truth is only made known by doing more research. It is just like a scientific experiment: to prove something as a valid theory, one must first run multiple experiments in order to find the hypothesis to be true. Through multiple sources, the truth may be determined. Even then, history is continually being rewritten.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Two Sides
by [Veronica Sandow](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 8:56 PM

You bring up a good point about strong bias on both sides. I remember having doubts in episodes one and two of the PBS series when they discussed Ho Chi Minh. It seemed a little too goody-goody for a figurehead in the Vietnam War, given the little pre-conceptions I had going into the class about how ruthless each side was. The AIM video was able to set things straight in that department, but not without raising doubts about possible errors and bias on their side.

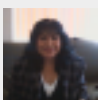
Douglas Pike of UC Berkley (AIM video) gave his evaluation of the PBS series’ production promises. His responses do not seem to be immediately backed up in any way. He appears to just state a production goal and say they didn’t meet it, without showing clear examples. Parts of the AIM video do point out specific things the PBS series has left out and areas in which they show blatant bias toward one side or another, such as the part you mentioned in which “Every myth has to have a villain.”

Determining credibility of anything stated as fact should definitely be considered, but statements without the backing of apparent “fact” should first be scrutinized. In determining personal bias we should check for any “facts” backing up a statement (ex. “They got this wrong.” Vs “They got this wrong because this is actually what happened...”), then we scrutinize based on the level of detail given.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Two Sides
by [Susan Santana](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 8:59 PM

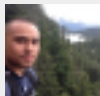
Laura,

I would have to disagree with you regarding Ngo Vinh Long being a reliable source just because he felt that the United States was doing this for the good of Vietnam. If you could talk to President Johnson, President Kennedy I am sure they would say they did it for the good of Vietnam and to fight communism from spreading. If anyone would have a bias it would be a Vietnamese that thought the United States did his country wrong. In the PBS series it shows clips of President Johnson giving speeches in regards to Vietnam and what the United States has to do to help them. Reading Appy's book a story by a gentleman name Chester Cooper (pg. 84) he shares that in 1954 there were secret meetings going on. "There was very little public interest in negotiations because virtually all of them were secret and nothing ever happened (pg. 84, C. Cooper). So will we never really know the whole truth of what occurred in Vietnam if secret meetings occurred and nobody knew they were going on so what really happened in those secret meetings. Only the people present would know just like other parts of history, only the people that were present at the time know what really happened all else is pure speculation on our part in regards to history.

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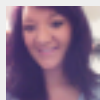


Re: Two Sides
by [Daniel Lopez](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 9:05 PM

Having multiple sources is indeed the key to finding accurate information but so much information can at the same time be confusing because of the many biases. Which is what I found a problem with when trying to figure out the truth. Firsthand accounts are indeed, I feel, the best source of information because they were at ground zero. But firsthand accounts also contain the most amount of bias because an U.S/Viet Minh soldier is a lot less likely to speak ill of their time spent in the Vietnam War. Scientific experiments are tested over and over again and all these different views are a form of testing and eventually one truth will be the standard.

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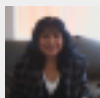
Determining what really happened
by [Nikole Breedlove](#) - Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 10:11 PM

Academically, it is our job to compare sources and determine what to believe. Often we take history at face value and believe the small amount we see on TV or read in a book. To truly understand what happened, it is important that more than one source be taken into account. The PBS episodes are prime example of how dangerous it can be to only believe one source of information. When conflicting information is presented, doing some research may help you determine what truly happened.

That being said, history is just that, history. There is no way to know what exactly happened and how it happened. As students, it's important we keep an open mind and open ourselves up to learning new information. Both of our books allow us to compare and contrast situations and find potential flaws in the authors work. It's not easy to know if the information given is true. We have amazing resources to allow us to determine what is real and what is information that could have been tweaked.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Determining what really happened
by [Susan Santana](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 12:07 PM

Nikole,

What is really disturbing to me is I always felt PBS was a reliable source. When I hear something new that I am not sure is fact or fiction I usually go to factcheck.org and snopes but that is only for current events, there is really no way like you said to check the accuracy of history facts. Most of the people involved in these events are no longer living so who is around to dispute what is being shared on these television channels, in books and what you hear on the radio in regards to history. Like you mentioned the best we can do as students is to compare stories from multiple sources and hope that what we are learning and reading is true and accurate.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Determining what really happened
by [Nikole Breedlove](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 9:39 PM

Susan,

You're right, it is very disturbing that a network such as PBS can change facts without our knowledge. Often we take the news at face value and never really think that there could be more than what meets the eye. After watching the video, I felt that more than ever we should be researching topics and checking for errors.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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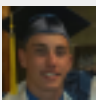


Re: Determining what really happened
by [Daniel Lopez](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:10 PM

I think a lot of people felt betrayed by PBS after watching the AIM video. Like you, I've always thought PBS was an unbiased news outlet that always presented the facts on either side. In their series, Vietnam: A Television History,

they didn't lie, they just left out facts that are relevant to the understanding of who was who and what was what. Unfortunately, we may never realize the true story of Vietnam but at least we have the written first hand accounts of some of the players.

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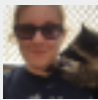


Steps to finding the truth
by [Marcus Farset](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 5:15 PM

I think we need to look at the sources of where the information is coming from and analyze them to see if they seem credible. I like the fact that at the bottom of each page in my Herring book that it lists the sources and where the info. came from. This reassures that the information in the book did come from multiple sources and if I come across something that sounds iffy to me I can look the person up to indeed see if they and their info. seems reliable.

I also would much rather read first hand accounts from the people who actually experienced the war, even if they saw the events a little different than the way they really happened, I find this much more interesting than reading cold hard facts. I know I found it very interesting sitting down with my grandpa listening to his stories, and looking at the things he had collected from the war over the years.

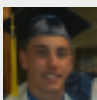
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Re: Steps to finding the truth
by [Veronica Sandow](#) - Thursday, April 16, 2015, 8:09 PM

The combination of books using cited sources and books using personal stories is a nice balance. To just use first-hand accounts would be far too unreliable because any claims would not be backed up. The pairing of books like Herring, as you mentioned, is quite good for establishing the factual background. First-hand accounts bring the emotion and life to what cold, hard facts set up. We are able to learn more accurate historical knowledge with such balance.

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Re: Steps to finding the truth
by [Marcus Farset](#) - Friday, April 17, 2015, 8:14 PM

I totally agree with you! The two books give a great balance of facts and emotion. The Patriots book makes you feel like you are there in person. The herring book gives very good, strong facts. Also the videos give some good facts. Overall the three sources give pretty good insight, and an accurate description of the Vietnam War.

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Re: Steps to finding the truth
by [Paul Turner](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 4:58 PM

Marcus,

Those are some really interesting points you brought up. I never considered checking out the sources that Appy cites. I may have to check some of them out to see how reliable they really are. I totally agree with you that it is more interesting hearing about personal stories (like in the Appy book) compared to cold hard facts (Herring book). I think people who experienced the war are great sources of information. From their perspectives we can learn a lot. Imagine hearing a story about a game-winning touchdown told from the perspective of a fan and the quarterback. The stories would be similar yet different in many ways.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2 Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Steps to finding the truth
by [Daniel Lopez](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:01 PM

I also like that the Herring book lists the sources the information came from because, like you said, it makes it more credible. But I also think that having so many different sources can be evidence of how the writer may of selectively chose to present certain facts while withholding others. First hand accounts are indeed my preferred source when it comes to events like the Vietnam War. But I think cold hard facts are just as important. An example of why this is important is presented in the AIM video. It talks about how Ho Chi Minh was heavily indoctrinated with the communist movement which is something that goes completely missed in first hand accounts.

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Re: Steps to finding the truth

by [Marcus Farset](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:44 PM

That's a really good point that I never thought of that the multiple sources could be a sign that the author could have picked and chose what information they wanted to use to make their point. That is exactly why we need to consider all of the sources no matter what.

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T.V War

by [Joseph Foley](#) - Saturday, April 18, 2015, 9:15 PM

The Vietnam War was the first time that the American people had the opportunity to keep up with the war regularly via their TV sets. The technology was still in its infancy during the Korea conflict. Having battles reach living rooms around the country brought citizens a new perspective of war. Seeing the faces of terrified locals and injured American soldiers had a big impact on how people viewed the conflict.

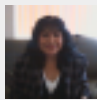
Major media outlets obviously had their own biases when dispensing information. The Tet Offensive drew lots of media attention and conflicting battle accounts. It was portrayed to American's by the media as a huge loss in all areas, a devastating surprise. Yet, many American troops reported that they routed North Vietnamese troops the days following the surprise attack. Claiming that the Tet Offensive left many of the North Vietnamese soldiers open for fire (a rarity in the war) ending in a significant defeat. Two conflicting accounts with many more perspectives to choose from.

The intense media coverage effected citizens, soldiers and veterans. In fact, due to the profound impact battlefield news coverage had during Vietnam, it has been drastically scaled back. Current wars offer insightful documentaries after the fact, but no live coverage that compares to what was displayed during Vietnam. As technology and media outlets have advanced, the way war is covered and sold to the masses has evolved. The evolution has created more information sources, although it is not necessarily easier to find credible sources.

The Vietnam conflict provides a truly unique atmosphere in regard to media and politics.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: T.V War

by [Susan Santana](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 7:05 PM

Joseph,

I feel that media today is still biased. Look at Fox news as opposed to MSNBC. Fox is more conservative and MSNBC is more liberal and you can see that whenever they comment on any issues from the current conflicts we are in. I am not so sure that we will receive the true facts in regards to any wars that are currently happening let alone a war that occurred 45 years ago. As it has been mentioned in several posts, it is all about perspective. How each and everyone that was in the war saw things and experienced the events that occurred. Fortunately, for us that do not know how some of the events in Vietnam really happened can glean the truth from several different resources that hopefully are reliable. I always felt that PBS was a reliable source but now I will not believe all that they say when watching a documentary.

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Re: T.V War



by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:12 PM

Susan,

I completely agree. I commented on the current media, specifically Fox and MSNBC in my first post. A vast majority of American press leans either right or left. Financial and political biases are found in nearly all media outlets. It is vital to research sources before studying the material. It is helpful to find a media outlet or historian that tends to align with your own personal beliefs, but cross-referencing the data is still wise.

I also follow the money trail in order to gain a better understanding of how the perspective is being influenced. This is a helpful tool when evaluating politicians, media outlets, companies, periods of history and wars. Historically, PBS has had a liberal donor/funding base. Hence, they have a more liberal pitch. This does not make the information that they dispense right or wrong, but it is important to know the philosophies of the people creating the information you digest.

Thank you for the response. I completely agree with your stance on the current state of media. It is always important to fact check.

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Re: T.V War

by [Paul Turner](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:34 PM

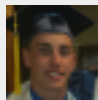
Joseph and Susan,

Today's news is definitely biased. Fox News, MSNBC and CNN are all known for being bias news channels. It's common for these news channels to have polar opposite viewpoints on politics, issues, etc. I can only imagine how the mixed opinions about the Vietnam War being broadcasted live. The more liberal news channels probably were promoting an anti-war message and the more conservative news channels were probably promoting a pro-war message.

I also viewed PBS as very fair news source until I watched the AIM video. In my opinion, PBS is still a "reliable" source, however it did present the Vietnam War inaccurately at times. Like all sources, PBS needs to be considered biased or we will end up being surprised when their information isn't spot on. All this talk about perspective and bias sources makes me think that, at times, there may not be a "true" story, just one that is accepted as a standard. I think many people view PBS as a channel that falls in the center of the political spectrum and provides unbiased news. As we are starting to realize, all sources will have some form of bias.

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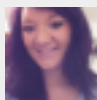
Evaluate Everything

by [Marcus Farset](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 3:13 PM

The accuracy in media video points out many flaws and the very important information that the PBS series left out. This is why we have to evaluate any information we receive because even a trustworthy source can be lacking some info. and credibility. Also it says that the PBS producer chose to leave some things out. This is another reason why all info. needs to be evaluated because who knows what could be left out of the story. I think between all of the sources we have to use, we can determine a true vision of what really happened in the war.

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Re: Evaluate Everything

by [Nikole Breedlove](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 9:45 PM

Marcus,

It's completely insane to me that PBS can choose to leave out information and twist he facts in whatever way they desire. I feel that information on history should be all the facts, regardless of what the outcome may have been. I agree that we should be checking our sources and facts to make sure that they are truly credible as well as reading other sources to compare. Seeing what PBS can do with a history show also makes me question the relativity of the news we

see today. Again, relying on one source may not be the best option.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Evaluate Everything
by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:45 PM

Nicole,

I agree that studying history can be a frustrating process. Whether it’s PBS, textbooks, memoirs, or even interviews, you will always find a level of bias. I would argue that both the PBS Series on Vietnam and the Accuracy in Media piece were filled with political and financial biases. That does not mean that they don’t both offer valuable and truthful information. It is a matter of finding overlapping truths or fallacies.

Even something as seemingly black and white as death counts can vary wildly depending on the source. The Holocaust and Native American death tolls are two notable examples of where data can be drastically different from source to source (The Congo is great current example=wide variances in death toll reports). Finding a fair average amongst varying accounts is sometime the best you can do to form a balanced hypothesis.

The political, cultural and economic complexities of the Vietnam conflict make the process of finding historical truths even more difficult. The Vietnam War had a big impact on American popular culture (press), which in turn has motivated the creation of a large number of books, movies and coverage on the subject. This popularity has created a wide range of philosophies and perspectives, which can shed light or further complicate the puzzle.

I’m glad that Professor Escobar is providing us with varying viewpoints. The diversity is essential when formulating a fair understanding of the topic. Thanks for the post.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Evaluate Everything
by [Marcus Farset](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 10:50 PM

I totally agree. When flipping between news channels, it is apparent that they have different views on things depending on when the reporters got to the scene, and how they interpret the situation.

Sum of ratings: (1) 0

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Historicity
by [Paul Turner](#) - Sunday, April 19, 2015, 11:03 PM

I started to think about the concept of historical accuracy and what that really means. I searched the internet found a lot of good articles on historical accuracy. *Wikipedia* has a page on historicity which means historical authenticity. Questions regarding historicity concern not just the issue of "what really happened," but also the issue of how modern observers can come to know "what really happened"(wikipedia.org/wiki/historicity). This is very interesting to me. This makes me curious about not only the accuracy of sources such as PBS but the accuracy of PBS's sources. There has to be an initial stem of information and whether that is "what really happened" will be the unanswerable question.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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