

HST 195: History of the Vietnam War Sp14 (Escobar Meta 42384)

Home ► My courses ► Spring 2014 ► HST 195 Sp14 (Escobar Meta 42384) ► May 25 - May 31 ►

Forum 4 ► Fog of War

Search forums

Forum 4

Display replies in nested form Move this discussion to ...

< Previous (Vietnamization of the War)

(Fog of War) Next >



Fog of War

by Joe Escobar - Thursday, May 22, 2014, 8:35 AM

This forum thread is for the Fog of War discussion.

After studying the required materials, address the questions in your posts.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post.

To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

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

Sum of ratings: -

Edit | Delete | Reply



Re: Fog of War

by John Moran - Tuesday, May 27, 2014, 6:01 PM

There wasn't anything in this clip to help me to further understand the war in Vietnam, McNamara seems to be in denial mode when he claims not to remember whether or not he ordered the use of Agent Orange. I also found it amusing, when he states we all make mistakes and we learn from those mistakes and not to repeat them, yet we can see from all sources we've used in this course, that both our Presidents and our Military leaders continually underestimated the will of their enemy. We continued to assume we had enough force to make the North Vietnamese to, either surrender or seek peace, we made that mistake endlessly. How many times did we make the mistake and determine that bombing North Vietnam was the way to end the war? We surely did not learn from those mistakes.

As for Mr. McNamara's own fog, I found it amazing that in 1995, that he would tell the former Foreign Minister of North Vietnam, that they only got what we willing to give them at the beginning, that they could have had unification and independence if they would have just negotiated.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Fog of War

by Danielle Medina - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 3:10 PM

I completely agree with your post. It was pretty ironic that he said we learn from our mistakes and not to repeat them but at the same time he said you may make the same mistake 2 or 3 times but hopefully not 4 or 5. I'm pretty sure that our government in general during the Vietnam war and even after it during other wars made the same mistakes way more than 5 times thinking that the end result was going to be different but it wasn't.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Fog of War

by Ryan Ronning - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 10:34 PM

I agree with you, this video did not help me learn anything new and just spread a dim light over my opinion of McNamara. He does seem to be in a serious form of denial and I also find it hard to believe that if he was the one who ordered the agent orange then how can he not remember if he did or not? If he is starting to see signs of memory loss then maybe he is not the right guy to be interviewing for history documentaries.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Fog of War

by Dylan Ornas - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 11:08 PM

On the contrary I believe that this clip helps tremendously. This is not to say I am praising McNamara's performance, far from it in fact. I just believe that we can learn something when looking at interviews during the war and then one after. The denial mode was there the whole time, even continuing as far back as some of McNamara's first press releases regarding combat operations in Vietnam. (YouTube video of McNamara 1965. His interview starts at time 00:38.)



It somewhat represents the way most U.S. politicians and even generals (especially Westmoreland.) thought about the war and I believe its one of the very reasons it dragged on so long. Refusal to accept that things were turning south and new ways to deal with the situation needed to be developed fast.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: LBJ and Nixon

by John Moran - Tuesday, May 27, 2014, 6:30 PM

LBJ and Nixon

If Johnson or Nixon were to do a documentary about their Fog of War, I'm sure that we would hear the same stale rhetoric to justify their actions. I don't believe either of these men would be capable of being candid and as McNamara stated at the end of his documentary, He would rather be damned that he don't. I think that both these men would rather be damned, then to give out any true insight as to why they did anything.

Since, I doubt that I would hear any clarifying information, no I don't believe documentaries from Johnson or Nixon would be helpful in furthering my understanding of the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Re: LBJ and Nixon

by Chen Ling - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 2:17 PM



I agree. Neither documentaries from LBJ nor Nixon will here people understand the war because they did not. At that moment they did not even clearly know where they were standing in the war, they thought they were dominate, they were in advantage to North Vietnam, then they announced to end the war with honor, it was impossible and unbelievable.

Sum of ratings: (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Excuses or Remembering

by Katherine Frank - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 2:55 PM

None of Robert McNamara's statements help me to understand the Vietnam War. In fact, had we not studied the war in this class I might have been more confused than ever. His statement that the North Vietnamese thought we were trying to colonize them as the French had and that at the end of the war they got only what we were willing to give them in the beginning was not only "a little foggy" but seemed to me a lot like another lie to protect the egos and reputations of the promoters of the war. That sounded like another "misunderstanding" of words to place the total blame for the war on North Vietnam.

Mr. McNamara seems to say that maybe things done in a war are morally appropriate that would not be morally appropriate when not involved in a war as in Agent Orange, which he "can't remember" authorizing.

When he quotes TS Elliott "We shall not cease from exploring. At the end of exploring, we will return to the place we began and know the place for the first time", says to me hind sight is 20/20 and we should excuse him for his mistakes in the "fog of war". He knew the war was wrong and a tragic mistake according to the Appy book but did not speak out nor did he try to change President Johnsons mind about the war. For me, writing a book called "In Retrospect" and appearing in a video to try to explain himself is 58,000 men, countless wounded and millions of Vietnamese dead or missing, too late.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Excuses or Remembering

by Danielle Medina - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 3:31 PM

I agree that McNamara's book and video is too little too late to make up for his part in the war. It also seems that his conscience in regards to the war is getting to him because he knows that it was wrong but I think that his pride and the government would never allow him to tell the whole truth. I think that he partially wanted people to see the war from his point of view as a "well what else was I supposed to do" attitude and make it seem like he was just a pawn in the war but I believe that every person

has a choice and they know right from wrong and the choices he made assisted in the result of how the war ended and the amount of casualties it had.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



LBJ and Nixon fog of war

by Katherine Frank - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 2:58 PM

Nixon and LBJ

If Nixon were to have been filmed in a documentary called "Fog of War" he would have had to explain why he gave his speech in November, 1969 saying he would not give a fixed timetable for troop withdrawal and then did. Why he said he was doing his best at a negotiated settlement and then increased the bombing. Why he told us in his speech that he had faith in a negotiated settlement while he and Kissinger "had little faith that progress could be made at the peace talks, but did believe that it was possible to achieve their objectives through intensified warfare". (Appy, page 462)

LBJ would never have agreed to an interview where he was supposed to clear up any fogginess about the war. He conducted the war in secrecy as we have heard in the PBS video and read in the Herring book, so his information would continue to be "Foggy". His desire would not be for us to have a better understanding of the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: LBJ and Nixon fog of war

by Chen Ling - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 2:29 PM

I think why they still did bombing after the "peace talk" is because they still want to peacefully end the war, and they still think U.S. army would be respected by the world and when they want to end the war, their enemies, North Vietnam, would surrender with no excuse, maybe just some conditions. However, they cannot control North thoughts, then they have to continue bombing to reach their goals.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



McNamara, Johnson and Nixon

by Chen Ling - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 3:40 PM

General McNamara was always looking for excuses to conceal his mistakes. In the books I read and videos I watched, it's obvious to see that phenomenon from the event of Agent Orange and bombings.

Additionally, President Johnson and Nixon supposed to honorably withdraw troops from Vietnam, it was planned to reach an agreement with Vietnam in Paris. However, they took

several months to make an agreement about the shape of table. Then bombing again to North Vietnam. In that case, U.S. Army was underestimated the North Vietnam force, and at that moment, they even thought about U.S. and South Vietnam were still dominant in the war. Indeed, they were always looking for a method to end the war and minimize the injuries and deaths, however, the fog of war blind U.S. troops, they are not clearly knowing the real situation of themselves in the war. If they clearly know Vietnam Army was dominant at that moment, U.S. should concess in Paris, and probably the war will be ended. On the contrary, they did the wrong estimate and wrong decision, which caused much more injuries and deaths than they expected and lose the war still.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Fog of War

by Jessica Mitchell - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 7:29 PM

The only enlightenment I gleaned from watching the Fog of War is that Mr. McNamera seems to have some personal demons. We all know that hindsight is 20/20 but beyond stating that he doesn't say much about his own responsibilities or recollections of what happened or why it happened. He danced around the questions that were asked of him for the most part and gave philosophical responses in other cases. Quoting T.S. Elliot and talking about learning from our mistakes just generalizes things and doesn't offer any clarity.

I agree with him in one aspect completely, and that is that each side of the conflict saw it's opponent as something different than what the opponent was. The U.S, underestimated their adversary over and over again and placed too much weight in it's absolute power, and the Vietnamh saw the U.S. as a the new French invaders. That is an over simplified explanation, I know, but that is all I saw in this video that rang of some sort of truth.

That is not to say the rest rang false so much as it failed to take much of a stance on anything.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Angry Words

by Eryne Grant - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 9:09 PM

The statements made by McNamara seemed very passion filled and somewhat angry. Immediately off the bat I felt that McNamara was bitter about all situations attached to the war and was going to share his recollection of his experiences in the same manner. I also felt like he jumped around a lot in the video, therefore making it hard to try to understand what he was saying and really digest the information. Therefore, all of these major components made it really hard for me to try to get a different understanding of the war than I already had. The only part I thought was a little different and interesting on his part was where he was talking about Agent Orange and about what is morally wrong and right. He made it seem like he was totally unaware of the side effects of the substance, but it seems self explanatory that it is dangerous by the purpose of the chemical. This changed my viewpoint on how (generally) people don't fully look into actions made, both in war and

out of war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Foggy at best

by Ryan Ronning - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 9:31 PM

In my opinion this was not a good film and did not help me learn anything new about Vietnam, other than the fact that McNamara has a serious case of memory loss. I found it awful when McNamara made the comment about not being aware if h made the call to drop agent orange, that seems like a total lie. Agent orange was a huge part of that war and a top ranking official would have a influence on what was going on as far as chemical warfare, that just seems like he is trying to cover his own tail. The only thing I seemed to agree with in this film was when McNamara said everyone makes mistakes, because there were a lot of mistakes made. The bad part about that is it doesn't seem as though we have learned from many of our mistakes.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Foggy at best

by Chen Ling - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 2:21 PM

Yes, I had the same feeling as yours that McNamara was lying about he was not aware of operation of Agent Orange, he made a mistake and he was looking for a way to avoid the responsibility, however, he chosen the worst way, lying.

Sum of ratings: (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



McNamara is a little foggy

by Danielle Medina - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 11:52 PM

For me there wasn't too much of an effect on my understanding of the war due to the statements made by McNamara. The main thing that his statements showed me is that he is still loyal to the choices that he made while being the Secretary of Defense and that he wouldn't admit he was wrong even if the truth was staring at him right in his face. His statements also made me see that the government can have their own effect on former employees many years after they no longer work for them. McNamara said at the end of the video that in regards to talking about certain parts of the Vietnam war he was damned if he did, and damned if he don't and that he preferred to be damned if he don't. What he said that made me think his recollection of the war is "a little foggy" is when he said that he doesn't remember signing off on the use of Agent Orange, but that it was used while he was Secretary. That to me shows that he doesn't want to admit to signing off on the use of chemical that possibly killed people.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



LBJ and Nixon might be foggy too

by Danielle Medina - Thursday, May 29, 2014, 12:03 AM

I think that if LBJ and Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War they would have stood their ground on the positions that they took during the war and I don't think that they would admit any fault or take any responsibility to how long the war lasted and all of the casualties that occurred while they were in office. There is a possibility that they would be able to add to our understanding of the war even if it means that we have a better understanding of the evils of the government with all of the secretiveness, corruption, and selfishness. I definitely think that they would stick to the lies that they told to the people during the war in order to save face even if there were facts and truth confronting or questioning them. I also think that if questioned about it they would use the excuse of not remembering what happened if facts were presented that proved their decisions were wrong or to blame.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: LBJ and Nixon might be foggy too

by Katherine Frank - Thursday, May 29, 2014, 12:38 PM

I agree with you regarding LBJ and Nixon standing their ground and not adding any truth to their involvement in expanding or extending the war. Nixon starts his speech with a lie. Eisenhower did not send aid in response to a request from the South Vietnam government, he sent aid to help the French re-take their colony after WW2. Anything he says after that is questionable. It's a spin, if you will, and the war isn't over so after the war anything he might say would be self serving. LBJ would have been in the same frame of mind. He was so secretive during the war, how could he be expected to be more truthful 30 years later? Call it a "fog" or a lie, either way, no help in understanding the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: LBJ and Nixon might be foggy too

by Justyn Dockery - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 12:35 PM

Danielle,

I, too, agree that LBJ and Nixon would likely still tell the same stories and lies if they were alive today to make a documentary similar to Fog of War. I think that both of these men felt that they needed to hide something from the American public when they were in office. Therefore, and in order to try and save their own face for lack of better words, they would continue to tell the same lies in present day that they told during their presidencies. When looking at the statements made by McNamara in the video clip, we see him try to justify his actions during the war using the phrase "fog of war," but this seems to be extremely cowardly in my opinion. If McNamara had "remembered" the events and his actions during the Vietnam War or been truthful, I might think that LBJ or Nixon would have said something different in

present day than what they said during and shortly following the war. Lastly, I do not see how anyone, unless stricken with Alzheimer's or some other disease that deteriorates ones memory and perception, could blatantly forget the genocidal actions they signed off on such as the use of agent orange.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Saving Face

by Zoe Valentine - Friday, May 30, 2014, 11:57 AM

I honestly did not feel like I gleaned much newer understanding from watching McNamara's video, except that maybe he struggled with a lot of internal conflict about the Vietnam war. He pretty much reiterates most of what we've already learned and come to understand – I think most significant is his clear emphasis that one of the war's biggest failures was the fact that Americans did not understand the Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese didn't understand us and our intentions. "We saw Vietnam as an element of the Cold War, not what they saw it as: a Civil War," McNamara states in the video. I think this misunderstanding of intentions was a big problem with the war.

I think his recollections are indeed a little foggy. Not only because he is older and can't remember as much, but also because I think he had a hard time figuring out a way to justify his actions. It seems the best he can do is say that some things are only morally right when involved with war, and that "reason has its limits."

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Saving Face

by Eryne Grant - Friday, May 30, 2014, 9:34 PM

The quote you mentioned stood out for me in the video. I hadn't thought of the war in the sense that it was a civil war much, but it factually was. The misunderstanding was a complete problem for us as a country, and I'm also glad McNamara mentioned this. It's much easier to understand something once it has already happened, unfortunately, but it would have been beneficial to understand while the war was occurring.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Saving Face

by Zoe Valentine - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 9:21 PM

Yeah I think it pretty much summed up the biggest problem about our struggle against the North Vietnamese: the giant cultural barrier. Each side failed to understand the other. It always sets me back when reading accounts of North Vietnamese in the Appy book, referring to the war as "the American War." It's very eye-opening to see something from a different perspective. But like you said, it doesn't help much that we only realize this now... and not while the war

was going on.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Saving Face

by Danielle Medina - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 4:01 PM

I agree that when McNamara states "We saw Vietnam as an element of the Cold War, not what they saw it as: a Civil War," it shows that there was a misunderstanding of intentions during the war however I feel that we pushed them into a civil war rather than themselves engaging in a civil war to begin with. In the beginning it started out as Vietnam trying to get the French out of their country, that to me does not sound like a civil war even if some of the Vietnamese wanted the French there. Also even before the French the Vietnamese had to fight to get China out of their country. If no other country was to have stepped foot on Vietnamese land I highly doubt that they would have engaged in war with each other and fight to have a communist government. I also feel that it was very ironic when McNamara stated in 1995 to the former Foreign Minister of North Vietnam that Vietnam only got what we were willing to give them at the beginning and that they could have had unification and independence if they would have just negotiated yet if we were willing to give them what they wanted in the beginning we never would have stepped in and aided the French, we would have assisted Vietnam and fought for what they wanted.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Saving Face

by Zoe Valentine - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 9:28 PM

You are raising some really excellent points. I think that if there had never been a 17th parallel, and we had never forced them to split North and South, that there wouldn't have really been a reason for there to be a Civil War in Vietnam. Moreover, if we were truly willing to give them what we wanted, we wouldn't have even gotten involved in the first place. We could have just let them "fight it out," I suppose. Communism has not spread all over Southeast Asia, and it makes me wonder if there was really a need for us to go in there and "prevent the spread of Communism" after all.

Sum of ratings: (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



If LBJ and Nixon were alive...

by Zoe Valentine - Friday, May 30, 2014, 12:02 PM

If they were indeed still alive, and decided to explain the Vietnam war and their actions during it, I think perhaps they'd be even "foggier" than McNamara. Based on what I've read of LBJ and Nixon, and both of their feelings about the war, I think they would try to defend their actions much more than McNamara tried to do in this video. Moreover, I think

McNamara was pretty clear about his doubts that the war was good. However, LBJ and Nixon didn't want to lose Vietnam – both of them wanted to escalate even further at some point or another.

I think the only understanding we could possibly gain from their intimate insight would be about the stubbornness that lead them on. I can't say whether their opinions on the war would change with age and time, but my guess is that they would have an even harder time than McNamara of letting go, and saying that perhaps not everything they did was the right thing to do.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: If LBJ and Nixon were alive...



by Jessica Mitchell - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 6:17 PM

I think that there is always the possibility of learning something if they were to have taken part in a documentary like this, even if it is unlikely. I agree that little would likely be revealed by either man. But I also think that no man is an island, no one or even two or three people were responsible for all the decisions made by the U.S. during this conflict. I think we need to be careful not to vilify just one or two people. I think that anyone who was involved in the decision making that took place over the Vietnam years would likely come off in an interview like this as evasive. No one wants to take responsibility for a failed war. No one wants to take responsibility for the excessive collateral damage and all the lives lost. And no one person should. Multiple presidents led during the conflict, and whether it ended on one persons watch or began on another's watch, it falls at the feet of them all, and in essence to all of the voters who elected them as well.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: If LBJ and Nixon were alive...



by Justyn Dockery - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 12:47 PM

Zoe,
Before reading your post, I personally did not feel that I gained any further understanding of the Vietnam War from watching the video clip. If anything I felt the video just reaffirmed what I already believed. But, when you mention that we could gain some understanding regarding the degree of stubbornness that lead LBJ and Nixon on I feel like I did gain something from this video. I think that LBJ and Nixon were both extremely stubborn and likely believed that they truly knew what was best. Both of these men did not want to loose in Vietnam for any reason, and they were both eager to send more troops and increase US military efforts in Vietnam. Therefore, with the stubbornness possessed by both these men along with their willingness to increase the US attacks in Vietnam, I believe they would both relay the same rhetoric as they did during their presidencies if they were to make a film similar to Fog of War, because I never got the feeling that either of these men were stricken with shame or remorse for their actions; they both appear as though they feel justified for what they did.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



A Benefit

by Eryne Grant - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 10:04 PM

If LBJ or Nixon were still alive and able to film a documentary similar to Fog of War, it would have been extremely helpful in most aspects of trying to understand a war as dominate as Vietnam. As we all know, people's stories get mixed up and untrue facts get shoved into places where they don't belong as they are passed down the line of time, and I think that this idea applies to war. People in high power must undoubtedly have a different understanding and remembrance of something that they were known for until they died. I think their documentary's would also be a little bit hazy like Fog of War because of the time between the making of a documentary and the actual time frame they were talking about. A great benefit of understanding the Vietnam War is that we still are fortunate enough to have some of the original contributing powers alive today to help us further understand the motives, decisions, and thoughts revolving the war (like McNamara). Having LBJ and Nixon added to a similar type of retelling of the war would only benefit our understanding of the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



The Fog

by Dylan Ornas - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 11:23 PM

In my mind, and from our texts, I would have to say that LBJ would have a hard time being clear about the Vietnam war during his presidency in an interview like the Fog of War one assigned as this weeks forum. His presidency led the U.S. through the hardest part of the Vietnam war. With it came all those things such as Agent Orange and the My Lai massacre. Things that we saw McNamara struggling to be truthful about. The two were in power during the same era of the Vietnam war. I feel their stories would be somewhat similar to each other.

I wish I could say I think that Nixon would be less foggy. However I think he was part of the legacy of the Vietnam war. And had a, granted slightly softer view on the war and what could be expected from it. Still I think he would have had trouble being very candid (and this is Watergate aside, when considering his trustworthiness). I also believe it would have been hard even harder for him than McNamara, the problem compounded by being president, not just Secretary of Defense, during the tumultuous time in US history. "Americas Longest War".

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

[< Previous \(Vietnamization of the War\)](#)

[\(Fog of War\) Next >](#)

You are logged in as Joe Escobar (Logout)

Moodle Docs for this page



