

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

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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: -

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Re: Fog of War

by Name Withheld-3161 - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 2:13 AM

It increases my understanding of the war. As early as 1964, the war in Vietnam came to be called "McNamara's War," an association he said at the time he was, quote, "pleased to be identified with." Over half-a-million Americans went to war on his watch, a war that ultimately killed over 58,000 American soldiers, at least three million Vietnamese. But in 1995, twenty years after the end of the Vietnam War, Robert McNamara published a mea culpa, a memoir that admitted he and his colleagues had been, quote, "wrong, terribly wrong," in perpetuating and justifying the war as they did.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Fog of War



by Name Withheld-3161 - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 6:58 PM

As McNamara said in the film "I'm not so naive or simplistic to believe we can eliminate war", "We're not going to change human nature anytime soon." But he was not at all realistic, because he was not blind at all. He could see through what he was doing and at the same time analyzing if he was doing the right and useful thing. So as Kennedy thought that he was a pragmatist.

Realism can be problematic for pragmatists where realists fear pragmatism's relativism, pragmatists fear realism's authoritarianism. This combination of realism and pragmatism basically represented the Guiding Ideology of the Kennedy Government and the Military Doctrine of the Cold War. In this way it increases my understanding of the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Questioning the Anger

by Lauren Grant - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 10:07 PM

I don't necessarily believe that the statements made by McNamara affected my understanding of the war in too many ways. He seemed extremely defensive and angry when speaking about the war. I understand that he was trying to admit to his mistakes but there weren't really any that he talked about specifically because he felt that his words would cause a negative affect. Some of his remarks did make me think about how war is something that we as humans have a hard time avoiding and will continue to do in the future, but I felt that he generalized the war at times. He seemed to gloss over the subjects that he felt would cause too much controversy which made me question him at times. He admitted to his wrong doings but he still sounded defensive of the war and what he did. It left me confused at times about what he truly felt and of what actually happened.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Questioning the Anger

by Keeler McJunkin - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 10:20 PM

I agree with you. McNamara seemed very defensive and angry regarding the war. The intention of admitting mistakes didn't really happen. It was more sidestepping the real issues at hand and trying to change the conversation it seemed like. While trying to clear some things up, In my opinion he just made things cloudier and didn't try to accept any responsibility for things that happened.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Questioning the Anger



by Kyle Poirier - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 7:46 PM

He did seem like he didn't really want to address the question. There's some things I don't remember after time has passed, and that consequently makes it so I can't talk about it. But things that are a big deal I remember more. Things like where exactly I was at when I heard about 911. I was in my living room, I just woke and was about to go to school. I remember the emotions I felt and how my family were reacting also. I feel like the Vietnam war could fall in this category of things you just remember and can talk about it I (if you want). So I feel he didn't want to talk about it, where he tries to induce memory loss.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Looking at his presentation

by Bryan Sanders - Thursday, May 29, 2014, 6:41 PM

It seems to me that he was using the Vietnam War as one of many examples to highlight lessons, like his lesson #11 that you can't change human nature. He also mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis, so I can understand why he glossed over certain topics if he felt they wouldn't help teach the lessons he had in mind. Despite his refusal to comment on Vietnam, it's still possible to get some truth even if certain info is omitted. Examining both the PBS series and AIM documentary taught us this. We just have to be sure to examine multiple sources.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Looking at his presentation

by Lauren Grant - Friday, May 30, 2014, 10:42 PM

I can understand that he was trying to get across a message or as you referred to it, a lesson. When looking at the video through the eyes of the lessons that he is trying to teach I can see why he omitted information. At the same time I personally felt that he left me wanting to ask more questions and at times confused. I think that he did a good job of getting his lessons, especially lesson 11, across but I was left wanting a bit more. There are truths in what he is saying and he did make some comments regarding the war so I would have to agree with you that it is possible to get some truth out of the video.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Looking at his presentation

by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 8:45 PM

It's definitely important to look at all the available sources of information out there. Skipping certain issues isn't a great idea as the best thing for him to have

done would be to try and explain the decisions that were made. The refusal to do so was really telling in my opinion.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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Damned if I don't



by Debra Moran - Wednesday, May 28, 2014, 11:01 PM

I think former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's final statement "I would rather be damned if I don't" tells it all, I don't know if his remembrance of the war is a "little foggy", but I do get the feeling that he just isn't going to say. When he spoke about the Agent Orange and I am paraphrasing I don't know if I signed it, then went on to say he must have because he was Secretary of Defense. He also generalized his apology for any errors made.

As to this video furthering my understanding of the war it just confirmed that the people in government during the war turned cover up into an art form with the ability to use a lot of words and not say anything.

I think LBJ and Nixon could add a lot to the understanding of the war if they were honest and forthright, but I don't feel that they would have been.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Damned if I don't



by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 8:49 PM

This is a great point. The fact he used those words specifically was very telling. The generalization of his statements were a complete sidestep from what people really wanted to hear. People deserved to find out why things happened as they did. The fact he was the secretary of defense at the time makes it even worse. He should have stood up and explained what happened.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Reflections on McNamara's Fog of War



by Bryan Sanders - Thursday, May 29, 2014, 6:29 PM

McNamara in this video seems to use the 'fog of war' idea to rationalize 'mistakes' he made during his time as Secretary of Defense. He says that in the war it wasn't easy to make rational decisions, and that even they have limits. When talking about Agent Orange, he memory is 'foggy' on whether he authorized its use personally. During wartime we don't always have all the details, and to an extent he's right.

The Appy book, *Patriots*, states at page 35 at the third paragraph that, "History is a product of human agency, not blind fate." In the previous paragraph, the book says each subsequent Vietnam-era president acted as if they were trapped by what they inherited. The implication is that nothing that happened was inevitable. McNamara was a part of

some of these administrations, but he does still accept his past decisions while regretting mistakes made.

Overall, this experience adds to the understanding of the war. It complements *Patriots* well because McNamara refused to do an interview with Appy.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Reflections on McNamara's Fog of War



by Name Withheld-3161 - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 6:54 PM

I agree with you. Even though he made a mistake, when he talked about it he seemed not felt that guilty. So we are going into the most contradictory part, and here is when McNamara began to doubt about himself. Even at that time when he talked about the mistake which was the blasting fuse of Vietnam War he still didn't think that he should be sorry for that. He said "everyone makes mistakes" with his shoulder shrugging a little bit like it was something normal. When 85-year-old McNamara was talking to 45-year-old McNamara, it seems that he was the backbone force in restricting the Military. McNamara still believes that if Kennedy had not been assassinated in 1963, the government of United States would in most cases withdraw troops from Vietnam in 1965, there wouldn't be a 10 year long cruel Vietnam War.

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Re: Reflections on McNamara's Fog of War



by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 8:53 PM

It definitely helped explain the war somewhat. I really agree with you on the point about agent orange. It's interesting why some of the things are "foggy" while he remembers other things so well. It makes you think he's just trying to tell us what we want to hear and not exactly what happened. Clearly he should be able to remember whether he authorized the use of agent orange or not.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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the two viewpoints of the war



by Kye Ruddell - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 4:34 PM

The interview with McNamara gave a more refined point of view regarding the reasons that relations between the US and Vietnam weren't more optimal. Much of what he said is highlighted by Herring in the chapters on the early part of the war, but McNamara is clear in that there area few specific things he finds important. In our readings and videos, it is stated that the Vietnam people-on both sides- didn't really understand what we were doing there, but the idea that "we

didn't know them well enough to empathize" with them adds another level to our onus of the problem. Also, McNamara hit on one of the fundamental differences which is a huge reason for the communication issues found throughout the war- that we never saw the war as the people in Vietnam saw it. If we had seen it as a civil war which had been fought for 1,000 years, this may have had an impact on our strategies going into the situation. This, in hindsight, is a very telling piece of information for me with respect to the way we went into this situation. This also serves to show why the Americanization of the war was on one level completely inappropriate, and on another deeper level, doomed to fail.

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"fog" or denial?

by Kye Ruddell - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 4:41 PM

McNamara at one point in the interview says he is unclear whether he actually authorized the use of Agent Orange, but this can be looked at less as being old and confused by past events he dealt with and more an example of the "fog of war" he spoke of. Given the magnitude of the war and the events which were dealt with on a daily basis in Washington (and more specifically in McNamara's office) at the time, it stands to reason that some of the details may have become part of this "fog." While he is noncommittal as to whether he authorized its use, he is very clear that it was being used while he was Secretary of Defense. He also made sure to draw the distinction that there were no clear cut laws allowing or forbidding the use of such an agent, and that he would not have approved if the long-term human effects were known at the time.

It appears that McNamara's refusal to talk about some of the aspects of the war (especially regarding his culpability), may not be part of the "fog" as much as an unwillingness to face some of the decisions that he lived to regret and attempted to reverse later in Johnson's presidency. His reasons for not addressing these questions, however, lend to an intrigue that may or may not have something behind it. This was an interesting and telling part of the interview- is McNamara a man who is simply haunted by his past decisions and has over time convinced himself of some paranoid thinking, or is there something legitimate behind his paranoia?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: "fog" or denial?

by Name Withheld-3161 - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 6:46 PM

I agree with your points about McNamara's refusal to talk about some of the aspects of the war. His educational background made him a rational analyst in data and strategy of war. His job made him a realist. Even though he admitted that the war brought too much misery for the civilians, he insisted that in a great measure it was because of the president. He said that the war was too complex for people to understand. And as for the responsibility and the guilty, he didn't say a word. Because from the point of realism, he didn't do anything wrong. His only fault was that he

realized too late that the Vietnam War was meaningless. He resigned not because of the death number. If the Vietnam War would lead to a meaningful result, he wouldn't resign no matter how many people would sacrifice.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "fog" or denial?



by Kyle Poirier - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 7:17 PM

I agree with what you guys are saying, part of me feels like he is having trouble remember after all these years. Yet I feel like it is hard for him to talk about it and maybe doesn't really want to because he feels terrible about everything that happened.

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Re: "fog" or denial?



by Lauren Grant - Saturday, May 31, 2014, 11:34 PM

I had the same question after the video about whether or not McNamara is haunted by his decisions or if there was something legitimate for him to be paranoid about. I agree that his foggiess on subjects such as Agent Orange could be as much attributed to almost denial as it could to his age. I think that the "fog of war" not only includes the details that get lost in daily discussions of important matters but of the denial that one would feel with these decisions that are being made as well. The ending caused me to feel like he there was a lot that he wasn't saying and I found that interesting also.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: "fog" or denial?



by Kye Ruddell - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 10:23 AM

I saw the talk about Agent Orange to be more denial, especially given his use of the laws (or lack thereof) to justify its use. It is intriguing that he appears to exhibit such a high level of paranoia- it made me wonder how much is real and made me think of that old saying, "just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they're not out to get you" (or something like that). I would have liked to see more of an interview regarding his feelings about the possible ramifications if he were to talk more about the war.

On the other hand, when he said that there was already so much information about the war that he didn't want to add in to it, it felt a bit to me like either an excuse to not have to talk further about his culpability, or a bit like he was being kind of condescending... he could talk about it, but he didn't want to confuse anyone by adding more information into the facts that are already out there. I tend to believe that it was the first one, but the idea that he was talking down a bit did cross my mind. Did anyone else get that feeling?

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Re: "fog" or denial?

by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 8:59 PM

This is a great post. I agree with everything said. When you look at the statements made and the facts presented to us, Things just stand out as being fishy. While McNamara tries to explain it to us as a "fog", It very clearly seems to me like denial and trying not to take responsibility. There are too many things that he remembers to not remember some other things that happened around the same time. You made a great point that he seems haunted by some of his decisions that were made. It seems as though he's almost tried to just change his thoughts in his mind because he doesn't want to believe he would have done what he did. There are just too many contradictions for this not to be the case.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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If Johnson had lived longer...

by Kye Ruddell - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 10:32 AM

If President Johnson had lived longer and had chosen to participate in a documentary as did McNamara, I believe that the information it would have added to our understanding of the war would have been pertaining to his psychological state during that time. Herring has pointed out several times in several chapters the deficits in thought with which Johnson made many decisions during the war. These deficits included his inability to "back down", his rigid thinking and arrogance, as well as his fear to be thought of as weak. They are thought to be driving forces for Johnson and his decision-making. It would stand to reason that these were personality traits would have followed Johnson throughout his life, and would have showed up in his conversations about the war, even with several decades behind him.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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LBJ and Nixon

by Lauren Grant - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 5:08 PM

If LBJ or Nixon had been alive and had been filmed in a documentary like Fog of War I think that it would add a new level of understanding of the war. Their individual experiences and viewpoints of what they believe took place or how they felt that they handled things would increase our knowledge of the war even if not everything that they would have said would be true. They would most likely also be a bit foggy like McNamara and seeing whether or not they would have focused on the same topics as McNamara would have been interesting to see. Like some people have mentioned in this forum I think that there can be some truth that can be discovered in any interview, whether or not everything that they are saying is the truth.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: LBJ and Nixon



by Bryan Sanders - Sunday, June 1, 2014, 8:10 PM

There are some good sources involving LBJ and Nixon that would be helpful. Nixon wrote some memoirs after his presidency that shed some light into his thinking and views, and LBJ did offer some insight into the situation in Vietnam after leaving office. He thought Nixon was being pressured into withdrawing troops from Vietnam too fast before South Vietnam could defend itself, and said there would be backlash in the U.S. if the South fell. He also spent some time defending his own Vietnam policies. Just as McNamara's appearance in the film helps us to learn some historical truth, so too do these sources.

Here is a link to the article on LBJ:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/73jul/janos.htm>

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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