

HST 195: History of Vietnam War Sp17 (Escobar 42050)

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Fog of War

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 4:03 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Fog of War topic.

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. Use a title to describe which questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Fog of War

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Inside McNamara

by Mason Peckels St.onge - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 12:38 AM

After watching the "Fog of War" video, I was intrigued and shocked. More than anything else I was taken back by how McNamara looks back on the war. He seems truly bothered and troubled by the war. I thought back to the Appy book when the wife of Norman Morrison was interviewed. She described that she genuinely felt like McNamara was sorry. I have to agree.

However, I think Mcnamara still has some demons. Considering he wouldn't answer specific questions about the war because he felt like it would cause a disturbance with historians, because they don't concern themselves with "counter-facts". On top of that, to me, he

showed some sort of fear when contemplating answering the questions by rapidly responding with why he won't answer them.

When the parts of the truth have died off with past presidents, veterans and other witnesses of the war, I don't think McNamara should be holding up the pieces of evidence; that quite possibly could shed more light on a still debated war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Inside McNamara

by Jerrel Brown - Friday, May 26, 2017, 4:04 PM

I also felt taken aback with how McNamara appeared on "Fog of War". Ordinarily we have seen in these videos that when people directly involved in the higher processes of the war are posed with questions about their conduct or perhaps their handling of the war, they often distance themselves emotionally from the question as they answer it, giving a sort of poker face. McNamara seems to feel genuinely guilty about the whole endeavor and his part in it. This became all the more evident when he declined to answer further about the war, and when asked if he believed that this is a "Damned if I do, Damned if I don't" situation, he replied with; "I'd rather I be damned for not" (paraphrased).

Now Robert McNamara passed away in 2009, so we may never know exactly how he felt about some of the more sensitive issues during the Vietnam War, so I guess the question is, can we really blame him for keeping his private thoughts and feelings about these issues to himself? what do you think?

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Re: Inside McNamara

by Mason Peckels St.onge - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 12:53 PM

Jerrel

Thanks for the reply! Im glad we viewed it in similar ways. as to your question, I think Vietnam should be used as a model for future events. We should look at it as a learning tool on how to avoid future mistakes and catastrophes. When people who were closely tied to these events refuse to shed more light on situations like this, it prohibits our ability to make better choices in the future, because we might not fully understand, or know, that this mistake was already made and how to prevent them. I think if McNamara helped us understand the war better, by sharing the mistakes he made, it would be very productive for not only our understanding of the war, but also to help make better choices in the future. I don't think we should blame him or look down on him for not sharing more. He did write a book on the topic, which might have more information than the "Fog of War". I just wish he would of been more willing; it would have helped us all.

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Re: Inside McNamara

by William Wyatt - Monday, May 29, 2017, 12:00 AM

Hello Mason,

I Believe your presumption about Robert McNamara feeling truly troubled by the war to be true. In my opinion, he certainly showed signs of remorse while being interviewed. McNamara probably did have demons, a side effect of being pivotally involved in war for over a decade. To me, It was fascinating that the editors of the Fog of War video decided to leave in specific questions that McNamara did not answer. I Wonder why after so many years he still is withholding information from the public.

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1

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I was a fool to think Vietnam was just a frivolous war

by Tyler Ritter - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 10:55 AM

Tyler Ritter

Joe Escobar

May 23, 2017

To answer the first question, I agree with Mr. McNamara when he says war is outside our limitation of thinking. He insists that every military commander has made mistakes and I also agree with that. Every war is simply not “cut and dry”, but a series of complex aggressions and actions performed on a sort of stage. The Vietnam war, for me, was a very confusing one to understand because I always considered it to be a frivolous war. I foolishly had this presumption without having any working knowledge about said war. Vietnam was very complicated indeed.

Sources - Fog of War

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Re: I was a fool to think Vietnam was just a frivolous war

by Kyle Martinson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 5:49 PM

Your not the only one that thought that about the war. The video changed my prospective on the war as well.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

0

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A little foggy

by Tyler Ritter - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 10:56 AM

Joe Escobar

May 23, 2017

The most outstanding information I heard from Fog of War, was McNamara's forgetfulness about if he had ordered the use of agent orange in Operation Ranch Hand, which to my knowledge he did not and that was up to Kennedy and later on MAC. McNamara was key in the Gulf of Tonkin incident. He seemed to have misled Johnson about the attack, while some including Giap insisted it never even happened. I believe, if this is true, that was one of his largest blunders during the war.

Sources -

Fog of war

Patriots, Christian G. Appy

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Re: A little foggy, very, very foggy

by Mason Peckels St.onge - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 9:44 PM

Tyler

Good observation! I thought the same thing too. How could he forget, or even say he didn't know about the use of Agent Orange? In the war, to our knowledge, the main air attacks used were Napalm, many types of bombs, and Agent Orange. Agent Orange was a huge tactic in the war to destroy possible NVA and North Vietnamese crops along the Ho Chi Minh trail, in the country side of South Vietnam and even in Laos. It was vastly used and led to the deaths and deformations of many troops on both sides and even civilians. Not to

mention it destroyed much of the Vietnams agriculture. I cant see McNamara not knowing about, but it was a very sneaky war, so I guess there is always a possibility.



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Re: A little foggy, very, very foggy



by Tyler Ritter - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 10:50 AM

I agree. Like I said, to my knowledge I don't think he directly ordered the use of Agent Orange, but I have wondered ever since watching the video on whether or not he supported Operation Ranch Hand.

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Re: A little foggy

by Brandon Dibble - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 12:06 PM

I agree with you both, Mason and Tyler, and had similar thoughts about McNamara's forgetfulness about the use and authorization of Agent Orange. He did say he knew it was being used while he was secretary of defense, but could not recall who issued the order saying "I'm not really sure I authorized Agent Orange, I don't really remember it" (Fog of War, 5:56). This seems incredibly unprofessional on his part, especially considering how high up the chain of command McNamara was. He might not have personally issued the approval of the operation, but I am sure he knows more about it than he makes it seem in the excerpt from "Fog of War".

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Dealing with the "what if's"

by Tyler Ritter - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 11:04 AM

Tyler Ritter

Joe Escobar

May 23, 2017

It would be interesting to hear a presidential view of the Vietnam war. I would hope they would ask Johnson how he felt about the Gulf of Tonkin incident. I would also like to hear Kennedys input on the Vietnam war. Robert McNamara was quoted with saying, "Kennedy hadn't said before he died whether, faced with the loss of Vietnam, he would [completely] withdraw; but I believe today that had he faced that choice, he would have withdrawn."(1) Just like McNamara said in Fog of War however, historians don't like dealing with "what ifs". Is it worth it to think about the what ifs? Would it help us not to make the same mistakes over again? I think so.

Sources -

(1) Wikipedia, Robert McNamara -

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_McNamara#Vietnam_War

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Re: Dealing with the " what if's"

by Kyle Martinson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 5:51 PM

I like how you added the questions at the end. they made the reader think.

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0



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Re: Dealing with the " what if's"

by William Wyatt - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 10:42 PM

Hello Tyler,

I agree, It would be fascinating to hear Lyndon and Kennedy's recounts on the war. Like you, I would also like to hear Kennedy talk about facing defeat in Vietnam. I would also like to hear Kennedy talk about the assassination of Ngo dinh diem. It would be fascinating to hear Lyndon speak about inheriting the white house during time of war, I think understanding the "what ifs" when regarding history can be useful too. If you look at all the possible scenarios, it seems less likely that we would make the same mistakes.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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what effect do the statements made by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (from the 2003 documentary film Fog of War) have on your understanding of the war?

by Jerrel Brown - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 10:25 PM

After all the documentaries we have watched and reading the passages from our history books I felt like understand the Vietnam War pretty well, but McNamara said something at the beginning that definitely made me re-think just how much I understood. In the video he say's something to this effect " A man may kill 1,000, 10,000, or even 100,000 people, but that will not destroy a nation....you can mess up 2-3 times yes, but you can learn and thus avoid it in the future. With nuclear, there is no learning period, and you can destroy nations...." (Robert McNamara) of course I'm paraphrasing ,but that quote made me wonder just how hard it was to make those decisions that led to the loss of so many lives over the course of the war. It also shed some light on how people that were so involved in the war look back and examine their actions and the resulting outcome. In McNamara's mind, they weren't all necessarily mistakes, they were just doing what they thought was right with the information they had. His statements also made it abundantly clear that both side of the war were woefully unaware of the other sides true motives, and that was a giant proponent to both sides inability to end the war peacefully.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: what effect do the statements made by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (from the 2003 documentary film Fog of War) have on your understanding of the war?

by Tyler Ritter - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 11:10 AM

I believe it was Barry Goldwater that wanted to use tactical nukes in Vietnam, correct me if I am wrong. That always makes me wonder if it was completely supported and we did drop nukes in Vietnam? Although, just like the video stated, historians do not like "what ifs".

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: what effect do the statements made by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (from the 2003 documentary film Fog of War) have on your understanding of the war?

by William Wyatt - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 10:56 PM

Hello Tyler,

I Believe you are correct. I Cant recall exactly if I read about in one of our textbooks, or one of the many videos we have watched, but I do remember Senator Barry Goldwater suggesting the use of atomic bombs in North Vietnam. I Did a some research and found a link that stated Barry Goldwater discussed, "the use of low-yield atomic bombs in North Vietnam to defoliate forests and destroy bridges, roads, and railroad lines bringing supplies from communist China." History.com Staff (2009, May 29) Goldwater suggest using atomic weapons.

Here is the link to the website.

(<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/goldwater-suggests-using-atomic-weapons>)

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Does he say anything that would make you think his is "a little foggy" in his recollection of the war?

by Jerrel Brown - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 11:44 PM

The scene that comes to mind when I read this question is when he talks about Agent Orange and its use in the War. He admits that his memory is a little foggy and doesn't remember if he authorized it's use, but that it was definitely in use during his time working for the white house. This seems to me like either an attempt to avoid admitting that he had no

moral objections to the use of Agent Orange, or simply a senior moment caught on camera. After all, it's the president who issues those orders during war, not the Secretary of State. So unless he believes that he himself was the president, then it only seems logical to that one of those were the motivations for his word choice. Considering how removed he appears when asked about the claims of the horrible side effects caused by the defoliant, I wouldn't be surprised if he knew the risks of straying that stuff all over that country, but decided that it was necessary to win the war.

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What if LBJ or Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War? Would they be able to add to our understanding of the war?

by Jerrel Brown - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 12:35 PM

Yes I definitely think that If Nixon and LBJ were filmed on camera giving their point of view of the war that we could understand a great deal more. Considering LBJ's middle of the road approach of slow escalation of the War and his public televised announcement that he would not be running in the coming election, it's pretty safe to say that LBJ felt defeated by the war and would have a lot of hard opinions about the handling of the war in his administration which could really shed light what really drove him to make the decisions that he did, and how he would have approached the war if he could go back knowing how it would play out for him.

Although I don't feel that Nixon would be completely honest in his recounting of the war, I do feel that hearing his responses and measuring his answers to questions about the war could give so great insight to the mind of arguably the most controversial of presidents to hold office during the Vietnam War era, therefore possibly shedding light on what drove him to do the things he did during his presidency.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: What if LBJ or Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War? Would they be able to add to our understanding of the war?

by Emily Gibson - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 3:11 PM

I think hearing LBJ and Nixon's thoughts on the war would totally be beneficial to help our understanding. Like I said in my initial post, it's hard to understand what these politicians were thinking at this time and we often are quick to judge. Although the decisions they made were not always the best, I think they potentially did what they thought was best at the time. We have to put ourselves in their shoes to try to understand what they were

thinking at the time. The Vietnam War is so complex, like McNamara said, I don't think we will ever get the full story. Nixon is a very controversial president, never really knew what was a lie or not. I think he would be hard to understand. What two things do you think would be the best for clarification from the two presidents?

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Re: What if LBJ or Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War? Would they be able to add to our understanding of the war?

by William Wyatt - Friday, May 26, 2017, 10:46 PM

Hi Jarrel,

I see your point, in my opinion, if Lindon B. Johnson were still alive, and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War, he would certainly contribute to the overall understanding of the Vietnam war. LBJ inherited the war during political and military turning points, right after the assassination of Kennedy and Ngo Dinh Diem. Not only was Lindon B. Johnson responsible as Commander in Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces for escalating force deployment in Vietnam, he was also directly tied to the political and policy decisions the U.S. made in the war for almost a decade.

I think your assumption is probably correct with regards to Nixon not being completely honest if he were alive and could recount the war. Like Lindon B. Johnson, Nixon was directly tied to political decisions made during the Vietnam war. Nixon served as president of the United States during the end periods of war, which was still a massive engagement. In my opinion, even if his recounts weren't completely honest, he still could have provided a great deal of information regarding events and reasons for the decisions that led to the defeat of the U.S. in the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: What if LBJ or Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War? Would they be able to add to our understanding of the war?

by Brandon Dibble - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 12:07 PM

Jerrel,

I also feel that the point of views of American presidents during the Vietnam War could be very insightful and also shed light on how they felt about the war and why they made the decisions they did. I think that if they were able to look back on everything that happened and shared their thoughts, we could gain a lot of important information from all presidents that served our country during the Vietnam War. I say all presidents during this time periods because they would certainly have different opinions about various subjects and that could help us understand why they acted as they did during their terms. An old saying goes "we learn little from victory, much from defeat" and I think that this would be very relevant to how former presidents might look at the war in Vietnam if they had been filmed in a documentary setting.

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Clouded judgement

by Maxwell Ahrenkiel - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 5:13 PM

For me, Robert McNamara's statements reassured my thoughts on how complex of a situation the war was. When describing the fog of war, he says," war is so complex, it's beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all of the variables. Our judgment, our understanding are not adequate and we kill people unnecessarily."(8:05 into Fog of War) Throughout the reading, there are countless times where you can see how the 'fog' has clouded up judgment and affected the way people behave and make decisions. One example of that being the story and Steve Sherlock in the Appy book. Steve was writing talking about an altercation he had with the colonel, "A few days later I had just come in from a night ambush without any sleep and the colonel was waiting for me. He said, 'I'll give you one chance to retract your statements about the Vietnamese.' I said, 'You mean that they're people?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'I can't do that.' There was no discussion. He just said, 'You're relieved. Get in the jeep.' I asked if I could say my good-bye to the platoon and he said, 'No. You can't have any more contact with them. You're a disgrace and a bad influence.'"(p.426, Appy) This was shocking to me that he was asked to leave for something so small like this, but unfortunately due to the circumstances of war, it's necessary for some to dehumanize the enemy.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: Clouded judgement

by William Wyatt - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 11:13 PM

Hello Max,

I couldn't agree with you more, McNamara's statements only cemented the total complexity of the Vietnam war. It was powerful to hear McNamara speak about the meaning of fog of war, and how no matter what, we as humans just can't comprehend all of the variables. It's shocking to me too that the colonel called one of his men a disgrace and a bad influence after relieving him of duty for saying that the Vietnamese were people. Its also mind boggling to me that he didn't let him say goodbye to his platoon. When you're fighting in a war, the soldiers around you become a second family, you become willing to protect one another and fight for each other. It's sad to think Steve may have never gotten the chance to say goodbye, and it's very well possible that some of the men in his platoon could have died the next day.

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Robert McNamra's account

by Kyle Martinson - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 5:49 PM

The statements made by Robert McNamara in the video made a lot of sense to me and actually allowed me to gain a better understanding of the point of view of the federal government on the war. He had inside knowledge to what was actually happening not just what the common person knows or a soldier's view. McNamara was able to comment on why they did what they did even though he admits to making mistakes several times. One part where I think he is a little foggy on what happened is when he admits to not remembering if he authorized agent orange usage or not at about 5:45-6 minutes into the film. One action that he takes about that is the same in the book and PBS videos is the use of agent orange.

If LBJ or Nixon was still alive today and were filmed in a similar documentary I think they would be able to a further understanding to our knowledge of the Vietnam war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Put yourself in others shoes

by Emily Gibson - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 6:18 PM

The Fog of War video I think gives us an informational insight into what politicians were thinking at the time of the Vietnam War. From the sources I have read and the video's I've watched, I have come to the understanding that a lot of historians and other people who study the Vietnam War have negative opinions about politicians at this time, including McNamara, and tend to sway the readers/viewers knowledge of their thoughts. Since the anti-war movement was so huge, a lot of time people only have negative views of all the politicians involved in the war. McNamara's, Fog of War Video, I think proves that not all advisors at this time were "evil" and their way of thinking was what they thought was best at the time.

Like McNamara said, he's damned if he does and he's damned if he doesn't. With all the social change at this time, it's understandable that not many people were in favor of McNamara. For example, Norman Morrison, who I read about in the Patriots book, set himself on fire in front of McNamara's office as a way to protest the war. The hatred of McNamara did not end with Morrison. In his video he expresses how misunderstood he feels about his policies and his decisions in the war. Media then and historians now continue to persuade their audiences to believe that McNamara wanted to control Vietnam and committed many war crimes during the war. From the beginning of the video he says EVERY military advisor has made bad decisions or mistakes, and you would be lying to yourself if you said you hadn't. He recognizes not all his decisions were the best, but at the time he believed they were. There is no way to predict the future or realize the consequences beforehand. For example, he touches on the chemical "agent orange" used in the war. He says "I would have never in the world authorized an illegal action..." (Fog of War, 5:50) He expresses that none of the politicians realized the effects of agent orange, and in way would they have known. I think all of McNamara's points he continues to make all tie into the concept into the "fog of war." When you're in the moment, making very complex and risky decisions, it's easy to have your judgement being a little clouded.

After watching the video, I have decided that McNamara was a good guy and I think people tend to judge him before truly understanding his situation. I always say, put yourself in their shoes before being quick to judge. At the end of the film he mentions how truly complicated the Vietnam War was. Even one of the Viet Cong leaders misunderstood

America's reason for entering the war in the first place. I think McNamara did what he believed was right at the time, and he should not be continually ridiculed before extensive research is done.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Hidden Within

by Daine Taylor - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 8:58 PM

After watching the Fog of War video with former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara I can say that it did have an effect on my understanding of war. The effect that it had was that I see a bigger picture of the war. The picture I can see is that the United States really were pushy on trying to make Vietnam accept what they thought was right to them. At 2:40 in the video you can really see what I mean. When McNamara "You could have had the whole damn thing if you would have taken independence, unification" (3:00 Fog of War). The prime Minister then said you must have never read a history book of Vietnam. I agree with the prime minister and with McNamara because I can see where both sides are coming from. The prime minister is saying Vietnam has been fighting for independence from other countries for centuries and McNamara is saying that they were trying to just protect Vietnam but give the, their freedom without war. In conclusion my understanding of the war is changing every time I read another chapter or watch a new video. Are there things that McNamara is hiding and can't tell us? Of course there are things that can't be said but why not? What is there to hide from us and why is the truth so hard to find in the United States?

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2

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Re: Hidden Within

by Emily Gibson - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 3:32 PM

Daine,

I think you had some great points in your initial post. I believe the Vietnam War was sort of a misunderstanding between both sides. McNamara opens our eyes in Fog of War to understanding what the Americans believed vs the North Vietnamese. The funny thing is, they both wanted independence for Vietnam. I think it could have gone a lot differently if communism hadn't engulfed the North Vietnamese. I also think America could have gotten through to more of the Vietnamese if they would have approached it differently. The Vietnamese obviously felt controlled by the United States, and therefore didn't want to cooperate. Do you think this hatred stemmed from the disaster that was Diem? I think McNamara feels he can't say anything because of how much hatred people have towards him. There's obviously some things McNamara can't say from the war, but I think he feels no matter what he says it won't go over well with the public.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Hidden Within

by Daine Taylor - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 7:32 PM

Emily,

I see where you are coming from and I agree with you. The public was putting pressure on everyone who was tied to the war. How do you think the United States should have approached Vietnam? Why wouldn't McNamara be able to talk about the war more openly after over forty years? Even though McNamara was getting hatred for being part of the war he did try to make peace from his point of view.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Hidden Within

by William Wyatt - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 11:39 PM

Hello Diane,

Great Points! Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's statements in the fog of war will certainly have a lasting impression on my comprehension of the war. In my opinion, you couldn't be more correct with regards to the U.S. trying to push their ideals and perspectives onto the people Vietnam. I can certainly understand why McNamara thought the U.S. was just trying to protect the freedom of the Vietnamese people, but every step the U.S. took forward they had to take two steps back. On paper it seems like a noble effort, trying to show an oppressed nation democracy by instilling values the U.S. thought would eventually lead to national unity and freedom. I'm sure McNamara has a whole list of information he won't share with the public, the last minute or two of the Fog of War video was just McNamara refusing to answer questions. It also seems to me that every video/chapter we go over changes my perspective on the war.

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Is Freedom Foggy?

by Daine Taylor - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 9:18 PM

When McNamara talks about the Agent Orange I believe that his understanding of the war is a "little foggy" and the reason why is he says, "I would have never in the world have authorized an illegal action, I'm not sure if I authorized Agent Orange or not I don't remember"(5:55 Fog of War). If he can not remember authorizing Agent Orange how can we take his word for anything he says? Can what he be saying just be a made up version of what he wanted the war to be like? Agent Orange is a chemical that stripped leaves off trees and I believe you would have to remember that decision because it would give the United States an advantage because the Vietnamese were great at hiding in the jungle and that takes their hiding from them. Does anyone know if there is any specific laws that say what chemicals you can and can't use in war? If Nixon was still alive I believe he would be able to add to my understanding but he might say things that may contradict history in some way.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon... what would they say?

by Mason Peckels - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 9:30 PM

When analyzing history there seems to always be unanswered questions. These unanswered questions force us to make theories and hypothesis. Sometimes these questions can be answered by certain people, unfortunately when discussing history, the people that have the answers have past away. Referring to this class, we can ask the question "what if Kennedy, LBJ or Nixon were still alive? Would they be willing to shed more light on our questions? Or would they keep quiet like McNamara?". These questions are extremely difficult to answer, because we will truly never know. Like our theories on history, the best we can do is just that, provide our theories.

If our past presidents were still with us today, I think the level of willingness to share informations would go: Kennedy(most likely), LBJ(likely) and Nixon(least likely). I think Kennedy would want us to know what happened and how it happened. He had a close relationship with the American people, which makes me believe he would be more open, especially years after the war and his presidency. LBJ at the beginning of the war was extremely deceitful about the happenings in Vietnam, however I think since he lost most American support, he would want to mend the relationship later on by helping shed more light on why he did what he did. Now for Nixon. Since he has such a bad reputation in the government and people for being sneaky(Herring, pg. 278, paragraph 2) he would be the least likely to share with us his knowledge. I do also believe that there is a limit to what past Presidents can and can not say. So even if they were still with us, it is hard to say if they would be able to answer our many questions.



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2

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Re: Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon... what would they say?

by Emily Gibson - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 3:50 PM

Mason, I liked how you mapped out how you think each president would respond. I think learning about any event in history we do wish we had a little more insight to what everyone was thinking. I think your order in most likely to give information is correct. I think Kennedy did have a healthy relationship with the American people, and would express his concerns. We do realize that LBJ was given such a huge problem after Kennedy died, and it was hard to deal with. Do you think LBJ would regret not giving careful attention to Vietnam instead of letting his Great Society cloud his decision making process? Do you think LBJ would admit he made mistakes? I agree with what you said about Nixon. Nixon was sneaky. It makes me wonder if there is anything he was hiding from everyone about the war that could give us more answers....

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Re: Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon... what would they say?

by Mason Peckels St.onge - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 1:04 PM

Emily

I appreciate the reply!

I do think that if LBJ were here he would regret not paying closer attention to Vietnam. I found that in the Herring book there were many references to LBJ putting the Great Society first and Vietnam second. I don't know how the program worked out, there were tremendous strides in the civil rights movement during his presidency; however, I think these strides could have been made while putting a greater importance in Indochina. Possibly if it were, the war would have been over much sooner, and millions of lives could have been spared.

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Re: Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon... what would they say?

by Emily Gibson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 9:39 PM

I noticed that when reading the Herring book as well it sounded like LBJ put the Great Society first before Vietnam. Part of me thinks this wasn't the case, even though he made it look like it. I wonder if everything was so secretive, kind of like the Gulf of Tonkin, and everyone was just not aware. It's all very interesting to think about....

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Re: Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon... what would they say?

by Maxwell Ahrenkiel - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 2:44 PM

Mason, I like that you added we will truly never know. It's really all speculation. I feel the same way about the level of willingness to share information and the order in which you presented the Presidents. I believe each President if they were willing, would be able to add a whole lot to our understanding of the war and what went into their decision making. Since their in such a unique position of power that gets informed on pretty much all that is happening, their statements on the war could clear up a lot.

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Re: Kennedy, LBJ, and Nixon... what would they say?

by Wenxuan Nie - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 11:54 PM

Mason, that is a very interesting hypothesis. As to me, I wonder Nixon would share information, or all the presidents would share it. One thing I know about American policy is (maybe I'm wrong) that they will say what you want to hear to get the vote first, then they will do what they really want. For example, when Nixon went to the candidate, he showed an extremely hate to China as the ally with Russia. But when he became the president, he started Ping-pong diplomacy, refers to the exchange of table tennis (ping-pong) players between the United States and People's Republic of China (PRC) in the early 1970s. The event marked a thaw in Sino-American relations that paved the way to a visit to Beijing. (Wikipedia) It's like an ice-breaking diploma to rebuild the relationship between two nations.

So you see, President make their own will to the maximum interest of America, and share the information would lower public trust to the army and anti-war would be higher. I doubt they can share it.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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McNamara's State of Denial

by Sydney Zuelke - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 10:24 PM

In the video, McNamara claims he was “serving at the request of the president who was elected by the American people” and that it was his responsibility to follow those orders (4:00). This was when he was asked “To what extent do you feel you were an instrument of things outside of your control?” However, it is claimed that McNamara played a part in urging Kennedy to make an unequivocal commitment to prevent the fall of South Vietnam and then be prepared to introduce large-scale U.S. combat forces “if that should become necessary for success” (Appy 102). Additionally, it’s stated that McNamara played a *prominent* role in shaping Vietnam’s policy and had a “deep personal stake in upholding it” (Appy 141). It seems as though McNamara is avoiding any potential blame or part in mistake made in the war by equating it to simply taking orders from the President.

It seems he’s “foggy” perhaps, when he speaks of using Agent Orange. He asks, “Are those who approved using it, were they committing a crime? What laws? We don’t have clear definitions.” He says he never would have authorized an illegal. In fact, he doesn’t remember if he authorized it or not (6:00).

Finally, McNamara says he has hindsight now, that he’s proud of his accomplishments, and he admits that he made errors along the way. In his opinion, war is so complex, it’s beyond the human mind to comprehend the variables. Our judgement is not adequate and we kill people unnecessarily. This to me seems like an excuse or an easy way out, or a cop out for making bad calls, doing things you regret. There has to be judgement, there has to be limits, and some order in the chaos – especially as a leader. Or so you would like to believe. His claims make me believe that the war was handled with quite a bit of frivolity.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: McNamara's State of Denial

by Emily Gibson - Friday, May 26, 2017, 6:58 PM

Sydney,

I liked the points you made in your forum post this week. The truth of the matter is, even with information that McNamara gives, we are still unclear what his true thoughts were on the war at this time. I love how at the end you conclude that war is too complex for people to comprehend. One of my favorite thing I liked about what McNamara said is the point he made that we are not going to change human nature anytime soon. It's incredibly sad that humans do something so inhumane, but for centuries it has gone on. The Vietnam was a very brutal and horrible things did occur. After watching the POW video, I was in disbelief of the hatred of this war. I think this is the reason so many protests broke out. I think McNamara did feel some guilt for the war and of course it was not easily talked about. I

think he also said he would be damned if he did or didn't because of how many people hated him. Do you feel his defensiveness came from his guilt or his true belief his actions were good?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: McNamara's State of Denial

by Daine Taylor - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 8:45 PM

Sydney,

Your statements were very true in everything And I liked the evidence that you provided. After reading your statement you opened my mind to more information that was hidden between the lines. It does sound as if he is trying to sound innocent but in Appy's book it shows that he urged the President to do things in Vietnam. What kind of judgments or limits do you believe could have helped in any situation?

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Should be a hard one to forget, right?

by Brandon Dibble - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 11:42 PM

One instance in the excerpt from "Fog of War" that I found interesting was Robert McNamara's recollection of the chemical usage of Agent Orange during Vietnam. The former secretary of state stated in the excerpt that he did not remember who issued the approval of this chemical herbicide that did an immense amount of damage not only to the Vietnamese people, but our own soldiers. This is one of the things McNamara said throughout the short excerpt from "Fog of War" that made me think his recollection on the war might be "a little foggy" because as secretary of state during a time of war, McNamara would have been second in command of the military only to the president of the united states at the time. He would have known what was being used during the US involvement in Vietnam. Considering how volatile and destructive this chemical turned out to be for our troops and the Vietnamese, it should have made this a hard one to forget don't you think?

Might McNamara might be forgetting to remember the authorization of this chemical usage during our time in Vietnam because it possibly goes against laws of war previously set forth such as the Geneva Convention? To my understanding, this was sort of a grey area when considering the Geneva Conventions banning of chemical warfare such as poisonous gasses during international armed conflict. Only after the war had come to an end in the following years was there a convention to prohibit this type of chemical from being used, the 1977 Environmental Modification Convention that prohibited militarized use of environment modification techniques such as herbicides like Agent Orange.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Should be a hard one to forget, right?

by Brandon Dibble - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 1:17 PM

It seems that I mislabeled McNamara's position as secretary of state while in fact he was the secretary of defense. Not sure how I managed to mix up those titles, as they have very different jobs but I wanted to clear up this discrepancy in my post as I am unable to edit it.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

0

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Re: Should be a hard one to forget, right?

by Wenxuan Nie - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 11:39 PM

Brandon, I think it's a one hard to forget, too. In the video, McNamara mentioned, "I'm not really sure that I authorized agent Orange, I don't remember it" (Fog of War). Which ignore the pain and effects on both American and Vietnam. I don't feel familiar with this I.D very much, so I google the pictures and feel horrified. When something puts into war and nobody escape from it, it should be a history to remember. But McNamara doesn't want it to be public but bring them as the fog of war. I imagine it's unacceptable for veterans and their family.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: Fog of War

by Wenxuan Nie - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 11:44 PM

In the lesson 11, McNamara mentioned: "you can't change human nature." The war is complicated, and you can't totally understand. Human nature is a part that makes it unable to end war very soon, and "We make mistakes, we all make mistakes." (Fog of War) That's why he refuses to speak out to against war. Because the words lead to misunderstanding. As a person beyond the American nation, I understand his cautious about diploma and pubic voice. One lack I am feeling is he don't quite talk about his feelings about Vietnam war, like his opinion. But it still inspires people to see battles in different ways. The fog of war is also mean fog of human nature.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Fog of War

by Brandon Dibble - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 12:08 PM

You make some great points here Wenxuan, I feel that most any official in an interview related to war chooses their words very carefully because they would not want the audience to take what they say out of context, or say something that might not be common knowledge to the population. I feel that is why he shied away from the final questions from the interviewer, because they were personal questions that involved McNamara's feelings on the war. I do not blame him for not answering these types of questions because there will be people unhappy with his answers regardless of what it may be.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: Fog of War



by William Wyatt - Friday, May 26, 2017, 12:04 AM

Hello,

Early in the video Robert McNamara states that he “Never in the world would I have authorized an illegal action, I’m not really sure that I authorized agent Orange, I don’t remember it” (Robert McNamara 5:45 Fog of War) The negative impacts of Agent Orange can still be seen in the U.S. and Vietnam today. To me, it’s somewhat foggy that the former Secretary of Defense can’t recollect whether or not he authorized the completely immoral action of the use of a potentially deadly chemical in Vietnam. Agent Orange today still has negative impacts on Vietnam Veterans and the Vietnamese people. Although American soldiers are still suffering the effects of Agent Orange, the Vietnamese people have been scarred by the use of the poisonous chemical. I Was curious as to whether or not Vietnamese citizens ever filed a lawsuit against the U.S. companies that produced Agent Orange. So I did a little research and found an article that mentions that Vietnamese citizens did in fact file a class-action lawsuit against U.S. chemical companies. Here is the link and the quote if you are interested, “In 2004, a group of Vietnamese citizens filed a class-action lawsuit against more than 30 chemical companies, including the same ones that settled with the U.S. veterans in 1984. The suit, which sought billions of dollars worth of damages, claimed that Agent Orange and its poisonous effects left a legacy of health problems and that its use constituted a violation of international law. In March 2005, a federal judge in Brooklyn, New York, dismissed the suit; another U.S. court rejected a final appeal in 2008.” (<http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/agent-orange>)

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Fog of War

by Maxwell Ahrenkiel - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 4:48 PM

William,

I found it a little fishy that McNamara claimed he doesn’t remember authorizing agent orange. Although there is no way of actually knowing it just seems odd. Since it was such a terrible weapon that killed many people and continued to haunt the people of Vietnam, causing cancer and even deformities in future offspring. One can only assume he would remember whether or not he gave authorization for something this impactful. I’m not accusing him of lying, but it just seems weird.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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◀ Fog of War

