

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

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Week 2 Forum

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Patriots & PBS

by Joe Escobar - Friday, April 7, 2017, 10:00 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Patriots & PBS 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 story or historical event you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Patriots & PBS

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RE: The disenfranchisement of the Vietnamese people, and the failed perspective of the United States

by John Anderson - Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 1:45 PM

The most startling connections that I found between the PBS videos, which I found fantastic for their level of depth, and the Patriots book chapters 1 and 2, were related to the perspective of the Vietnamese people. What I mean specifically is that the Vietnamese people were largely portrayed as the victims of the communist beast. As I read the text and watched the films I became more aware that this conflicts origins were largely a culmination of years of misunderstanding, and misinterpretation of cultural norms in the hearts of the Vietnamese people.

For a long time, the Vietnamese people were subjugated by one foreign power or another. During the years leading up to the conflict in Vietnam, the French were such a power. General Trainor draws a connection between the state of Vietnam and the state of the occupied United States during the period leading up to the American Revolution. The disenfranchisement suffered by both peoples led them to rebel and establish a form of government most congruent with the foreign power willing to aid them. Democracy, in the state that the US established it, was heavily influenced by the French. In Vietnam, Communism, was heavily influenced by the aid and example of China.

The problem, as Trainor describes, with the influence of the United States on Vietnam, was that we were heavy handed. Instead of trying to win the hearts of the Vietnamese people, and establish a government free from corruption we treated the conflict the same way we had treated WW2 and Korea. We aggressively went on a campaign of search and destroy. What we accomplished in destroying was not the enemy, but our own credibility.

Trainor uses an anecdote that sums up the involvement of the US in this conflict. He tells a story of working with S Vietnamese militants in 1965 with the CIA. In this story much of the operation was very timid, the operatives didn't want to die for the cause, and much of the culture involved clemency for the enemy. When they were ordered to shoot up a hospital that supposedly housed N Vietnamese they were shocked. It was a hospital for lepers according to them. After the US insisted on the operation, and the victims did turn out to be lepers, all credibility with that group was lost.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: RE: The disenfranchisement of the Vietnamese people, and the failed perspective of the United States

by William Barker - Sunday, April 16, 2017, 12:13 PM

"In this story much of the operation was very timid, the operatives didn't want to die for the cause..."

This is a fantastic sentence which really encompasses why we eventually lost in Vietnam. Like I've been hearing for the past two weeks, no one really knew what we were fighting for, so in turn no one wanted to die for an unknown cause. Unlike in WWII, which had the goal of defeating the Nazis, Japanese, and the fascist Italians, Vietnam was a cluttered mess of objectives. Yes we were fighting the spread of communism, but there was so much to learn historically about the situation, I don't think the American public or the soldiers themselves really cared to learn more about it. It truly is a shame that 60,000 soldiers died for something they didn't know much about. But again hindsight is 20/20, so all we can do now is learn from their past mistakes.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Underestimating the Viet Minh

by William Barker - Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 8:48 PM

This weeks readings and videos have cast a light on the ignorance both the French and Americans held in regards to the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese have had a long history of fighting off invaders and conquerors, which lead to their ultimate victories over the two

world powers.

At the end of the WWII in the Pacific theatre, a small seven man team parachuted into northern Indochina to help train the Viet Minh in order to battle the Japanese. Included within that seven man team was twenty three year old Henry Prunier, a private, who only had one year of Vietnamese language instruction. Though at first he was incredibly terrified when he came into contact with the Viet Minh, he was quick to highly respect them. Henry, after training the Viet Minh, is quoted as saying these soldiers were, "... an elite group that we trained." (pg. 39 Appy) Prunier had learned not to underestimate the Vietnamese people and their tactical prowess, "Whatever the Viet Minh learned about guerrilla war, they learned on their own." (pg. 39 Appy)

During week one's video, *Roots of War*, we learned of a major French military loss at Dien Bien Phu, which was supposed to be a great French success. The French used Dien Bien Phu to draw out the Viet Minh and destroy them once and for all with their superior weapons and military might. Unfortunately for the French, the Viet Minh obliterated their base in approximately a month and a half. This embarrassing defeat was a clear indication of the Vietnamese people's perseverance and fortitude. Even in ancient times, the Tru'ng Sisters lead a rebellion against the Chinese and are held as national heroines. Though there are many more examples of this, the folks of the time (The French and the Americans) should not have underestimated the Vietnamese. Henry Prunier even said himself, "... it would be ridiculous to assume that our training and weapons had anything to do with their eventual victories over the French and then the United States." (pg. 39 Appy)

The connection between this first hand account and the video is clear: underestimating the Vietnamese was an incredible failure on the parts of the Japanese, French, and United States. As Joe (our instructor) said, it is easy to ridicule the people who were involved in the Vietnam war because we have all the information from a "bird's eye view." You always look at the past with 20/20 vision, so though the Americans and French should have taken more time to research and learn about their enemy, (the Viet Minh) they did their best to deal with the situation in the heat of the moment.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Underestimating the Viet Minh

by Jerrel Brown - Saturday, April 15, 2017, 8:25 PM

This is a great connection. Before starting the reading for this class I myself didn't have a very good idea what it was that happened during the Vietnam War. Why we were there, how we were received, or even how we lost. This connection between western arrogance and our failure to control Vietnam is crucial to understanding this war. We walked into someone else's country like a bunch of over confident toddlers and tried to convince them that they didn't know how to live. Our way of living seemed so swell to us that we didn't even consider that maybe other people might not be so stoked on it. So we went in and got our big American butts handed to us in 15 year long war by people we didn't deem competent enough to run their own country. But we shouldn't judge them for doing what they thought was right at the time. Instead we should learn from their mistakes so that maybe in the future we can handle these things better as a grown nation.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Re: Underestimating the Viet Minh

by William Barker - Sunday, April 16, 2017, 12:30 PM

"We walked into someone else's country like a bunch of over confident toddlers and tried to convince them that they didn't know how to live."

In some ways the above sentence is true but I'd ultimately say it is wrong. We were really there to tell them communism was bad and that they needed to set up a democratic government. Yes, we did introduce western ideals into their country and tried to have them follow our cultural norms, (which had an impact on how they viewed us as colonialists) but overall it was truly to tell them how to run their government.

"So we went in and got our big American butts handed to us in 15 year long war by people we didn't deem competent enough to run their own country."

Again, we really didn't get our butts handed to us. The Viet Minh were incredibly outgunned and out matched, but they learned how to fight us and used what resources they had to keep us on our toes. America didn't keep count on how much land we had control of in Vietnam, we counted how many of us were dead compared to them. Overall we lost 60,000 soldiers to their roughly 600,000 - 1,000,000 dead. The Vietnamese fought a defensive war like the Confederates did against American forces in the Civil War. They knew they couldn't win outright, but they figured if they could hold out and inflict enough wounds towards America, they'd eventually give up and say enough was enough. The Viet Minh did the same thing, they knew if they met us in a pitched battle we'd obliterate them off the face of the planet, so they fought a guerrilla war which eventually inflicted enough damage to make us give up. So, did we get beat up? Yes. Did we get our ass kicked? No, we just realized the costs were too high to achieve victory.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Tran Thi Gung (Appy Book) Relation To Nguyen Thi Dinh (Vietnam A Television History Episode 1)

by Jerrel Brown - Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 10:56 PM

Jerrel Brown

History 195

April 12th, 2017

Professor Escobar

Tran Thi Gung (Appy Book) Relation To Nguyen Thi Dinh (Vietnam A Television History Episode 1)

There are many connections between Patriots: The Vietnam War and Vietnam a Television History, which is convenient for me considering the purpose of these forums. The connection that stuck out the most to me is that between two female Vietnamese warriors, Tran Thi Gung (Appy book P.36) and Nguyen Thi Dinh (Vietnam a Television History (35:13)).

Tran Thi Gung was a member of the guerrilla force of Trung Lap Ha Hamlet near Cu Chi, In her passage in the Appy book she recounts her time fighting for the north, and her journey from a regular Vietnamese girl to a hardened bush warrior. She talks about over coming her initial fear of the large American soldiers stomping through the jungle brush, realizing that their size and lack of experience fighting in the dense jungles put them at a huge disadvantage, giving her and her compatriots that upper hand. She also speaks of over coming the defecate created by their lack of equipment/ weapons by picking up any and all supplies left by their fallen enemies, running around collecting guns and ammo from the corpses scattered around. Nguyen Thi Dinh make a similar statement n regards the guerrilla forces lack of weapons to combat the enemy. She recounts Ho Chi Mien informing her that they did not have the weapons to provide for them, but instructed her to make use of what they had, and to collect any weaponry that they could get their hands on from fallen enemy soldiers.

The most significant part of this connection between the Appy book and the Television history episode is the fact that these two petite woman were fighting on the front lines of a war against large brawny American men, with next to zero proper equipment or training, learning on the fly in one of the most hostile environments on earth; the battle ground. And not only did these women live to tell the tale, in the long run their efforts to preserve their culture and respect their heritage paid off.

Works Cited

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014. Print.

ThatsRealNeato. "Vietnam a Television History Episode 1." *YouTube*. YouTube, 30 Sept. 2011. Web. 13 Apr. 2017.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3



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Re: Tran Thi Gung (Appy Book) Relation To Nguyen Thi Dinh (Vietnam A Television History Episode 1)

by John Anderson - Saturday, April 15, 2017, 4:12 PM

I think that your connection was rather nuanced. I don't think I agree with it fully. I wouldn't say that they had much more than "zero proper equipment or training." That, in my opinion is not a clear or concise statement. They instead, had no standardized military training. In

both the video and the book the contributors made it quite clear that the people of Vietnam were not used to a peaceful life. On a daily basis they were besieged by one army or another. They were forced to adapt. Like you said earlier, and I agree completely with this, they were up against enemies who were unfamiliar with the terrain and how to fight in these quarters. This was a war much like the US revolution, where an army unfamiliar with the environment was destroyed by a native population that intimately knew the terrain and could use this to flank the opponent.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Compare and Contrast between Patriots and Why Vietnam

by Aaron Rocha - Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 11:53 PM

I chose to use 'The Emperor Has No Clothes'(pg79-89) because it takes off from where 'Why Vietnam' ends with a bit of time lapse mixing.

The film introduces Vietnam as a land where non-communists(south Vietnam) were fighting communists(north Vietnam) as well as the french army in 1954. I mention this because Robert McNamera states in his memoir rewritten in Appy's book, Patriots, that much of the defeat was do to lack of knowledge and intelligence about Vietnam(Appy pg.79). This was later highlighted by Appy while writing Chester Cooper's story about how up until the late 1950's, the only way to gain any knowledge about Vietnam was to go to the French desk at the State Department(Appy pg84). During that time Cooper wasn't even sure about the existence of Ho Chi Mihn.

In the film, Ho Chi Mihn is introduced as a man of tyranny but portrays himself as a loving man through propaganda. However, in the book, Chester Cooper was sent out on an assignment to find out if Mihn was even still alive(pg84, Appy) in 1954. Turns out he lived till 1969.

During his time as leader he fought against the south to influence communism which was not directly related to China and the Soviet Union because they had their own ideas. However that did not stop the communist Vietnam from receiving aide from either of the nations.

While receiving aide from both nations, China And Soviet Union, Sergei Khrushchev says that the Soviets thought Hanoi was being controlled by Chinese forces, while USA thought Hanoi was being controlled by the Soviets(Appy pg86). In fact Communist Vietnam had their own ideas and plans on how they were going to attempt to overthrow forces in the south in which the United States found very difficult to defend against.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Compare and Contrast between Patriots and Why Vietnam

by John Anderson - Saturday, April 15, 2017, 4:05 PM

I feel that your perspective was quite interesting. If I understand you correctly you're inferring that confusion, mainly the confusion as to who was actually the 'real' enemy was a major factor in the difficulty of waging war in Vietnam. If this is what you meant then I would

certainly agree that it was influential, if not directly, it forced the US to have a perceived need to take action, especially after Korea.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Re: Patriots & PBS

by Alexandria Villa - Sunday, April 16, 2017, 1:12 AM

When it comes to a specific story from the Appy book, I have to say that the one that seemed to connect best with the documentary was the story on page 12, the story of Roger Donlon. I think that this story really connects well with the mindset of the Vietnamese. The documentaries take a quick, in-depth glance at the mindset of the Vietnamese, and how they pretty much disliked any countries that intervened with their own quest for independence. In the story, Donlon says: "I'd say that a third of our Vietnamese forces on the outer perimeter fought for the other side" (Appy, pg 14). I feel that this shows a form of dedication to a concept, a group of people, or some other thing. I think that if the United States could have tapped into this connection the Vietnamese had with their land and their people, it could have been different.

I am not saying that the folks in charge did everything wrong. All I am saying is, based on the testimonies of some of the folks involved and how Vietnamese culture has been shaped by Confucianism, as well as how important land, home, and other intense but 'simple' attributes, along with how long that country had been at war in their long history... I just feel that a deeper look into the way the Vietnamese were before The United States got involved, there could maybe have been a way to work around the amount of sheer violence.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Re: Patriots & PBS US underestimated Viet Minh

by Kelsey Gilseth - Sunday, April 16, 2017, 11:10 PM

One of the topics that I noticed was reoccurring in Part 1 of the Appy book and Episode 1 of the documentary was not so much why we chose to go to war, but why we thought we would succeed in doing so. It's no secret that our involvement in Vietnam stemmed from our need to stop the domino theory, or the spread of communism. The United States felt that their success in World War II left them with an elite fighting force and superb weaponry. It was common knowledge that the Viet Minh lacked those same resources. The United States severely underestimated the Viet Minh. Despite their lack of firearms and heavily trained troops, the Viet Minh realized that the only way to maintain their independence was to fight until the bitter end. In the Appy book, Tran Thi Gung, a member of the North Vietnamese guerilla force, provides an interesting outlook regarding the American tactics. "I think the Americans lost many people because they were applying conventional tactics against our ambushes and tunnels." (Appy, pg, 15, Tran Thi Gung speaker.) She states that although the bombs and shells didn't lack force, they never fully grasped the success of the tunnel system. This is just one instance in which the United States didn't realize the full potential of the Viet Minh. Vo Nguyen Giap noted a similar opinion in his story. "The Vietnamese people won because we know how to use our intelligence against power of steel. Well that's right, but intelligence alone is not enough. We won the war because we would rather die than live in slavery." (Appy, pg 41, Vo Nguyen Giap).

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