

HST 195: History of Vietnam War Sp18 (Escobar 41945)

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Longest War & Video Documentaries

by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, April 7, 2018, 10:17 AM

This thread is for discussions on the Longest War & Video Documentaries 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.

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BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which one of the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Longest War & Video Documentaries

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The War of Ideals



by [Jonathan Haskell](#) - Monday, April 9, 2018, 1:52 PM

The final season of “the Americans” is about to be on FX, so I began rewatching the show from the beginning recently. What a great show. I grew up in the 80’s and remember the palpable fear felt during the last years of the cold war. I can only imagine that the fear during the years of the Vietnam war was substantially more so. When Stalin was still alive up into the 1950s, I have no doubt our understanding of their actions and hypothesis of their next actions were both nearly nil. It seems to me that prior to World War II wars were fought by armies led by men. During and after it seems wars were fought by men led by ideals. Ideals unlike armies can not be defeated by bombs and bullets, but that doesn’t stop us from continually trying.

The main connections that I had between the short films and the first couple chapters of the Herring book is the cause and reasons for war that both sides had. On one side the Vietnamese had been conquered or attempted to be conquered over and over. The Chinese Emperors again and again, the Muslim kingdom in the South which our book says took two centuries to complete, The Mongols invaded three times, The Japanese in their push for empire during the second world war, The French both prior and after the Japanese, and then us or course. Before anyone argues about us not conquering anyone, I am not arguing that we were and agree completely that we weren’t, but I don’t think it takes much effort and just the simplest knowledge of the geographical area to understand how a regular Vietnamese farmer would see things differently. Especially with the history of the country. I also think that having any knowledge of the country and fighting a guerilla war their anyway (similar to Afghanistan) is not a wise military strategy per say, but again at the time it wasn't about fighting a people or country. It was two contradicting ideals where coexistence seemed impossible. It was the next move on the global chess board. The formation of the Iron Curtain and NATO, the communists winning the civil war in China against the Nationalists and Chiang Kai-shek, the Turkey missile scare and the Cuban missile crisis, the Korean and of course the Vietnam war and it just continued on. War wasn’t about the acquisition of land as much as it was the attempt to win over the mind of the masses. Of course the Northern peoples were attempting to reunify their countries, but the larger war wasn’t about the conquering of land or the colonization of

land anymore. It was capitalism versus communism. It was labeled all sorts of ways. Red versus Green. The Party versus Democracy. Freedom versus stability.

Other connections seemed to be the Geneva Accords that dismantled French Indochina and the Munich Agreement which I found very interesting. The lessons of negotiating with men whose power surpassed that of which a man ego can handle is troublesome. These lessons learned at Munich and fighting Hitler and in Korea, brought the need to fight for freedom against those who suppressed it in favor of whatever, be it power or some sort of collective stability. I think no one could say it better than President Johnson in the second video "Why Vietnam?". "We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueller conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history." (29:20 in second Vietnam video)

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Re: The War of Ideals

by [Danielle Wardrip](#) - Monday, April 9, 2018, 6:06 PM

"I also think that having any knowledge of the country and fighting a guerilla war their anyway (similar to Afghanistan) is not a wise military strategy per say"

In the section of Patriots titled Commanders, General Trainor recalls, "In the Marine Corps we though Westmoreland's strategy of attrition was the dumbest thing to do. We felt the solution was to put marines or soldiers into the villages and stay there in small teams to protect the people and gain their trust, to respect their culture and generate a legitimate government that they could support." (Appy, General Bernard Trainor) So, you are not the only one who thinks so, Jonathan. As well as the marines fighting in the war, I agree with your statement. It was not a very smart idea to underestimate our opponents and to overestimate our own abilities. It was dumb.

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Re: The War of Ideals

by [Jonathan Haskell](#) - Friday, April 13, 2018, 8:41 PM

I am sure General Trainor did feel that way. A war of attrition against an enemy on his own home turf never goes well. I think of Napoleon fighting the Russians or the “100 years” war in France or The British trying to squash the American Revolution, there is such a thing as “home court advantage” in a conflict. That said though we have to remember about the Patriot book that it is a reflection of thought and memory after the fact. I love that book having a hard time putting it down. Anyway, so of course after the Vietnam war is over it is easy to reflect back and say “this was a poor strategy” if it already hasn’t worked. I am not saying he didn’t feel that way at the time I have no reason to think he didn’t, but I do know at least later like during the end of the Johnson beginning of Nixon era there was full confidence in victory. It was a classic systematic reflection of overconfidence. I always figured William Defoe said it best in Platoon when he is sitting with Charlie Sheen looking up at the stars he said “We are going to lose this war. We have been kicking other peoples @sses for so long I figure it is time we got ours kicked.” You can’t win them all and you are not going to win when you have a bureaucracy holding you back from achieving victory at all costs. If you are not going to fight to win at all costs then the battle isn’t worth fighting. If the battle isn’t worth fighting how in the world are you supposed to win a war?

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The Tiger and the Elephant

by [Danielle Wardrip](#) - Monday, April 9, 2018, 4:09 PM

In Chapter One of his book, George Herring quotes Ho Chi Minh, “‘If ever the tiger [Viet Minh] pauses,’ he said, ‘the elephant [France] will impale him on his mighty tusks. But the tiger will not pause, and the elephant will die of exhaustion and loss of blood.’” This is a quote from Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Viet Minh. This is related to The First War in Vietnam video because they tell almost the same story 45 seconds into it. They start “This will be a war between a tiger and an elephant” and end with “slowly, slowly, the elephant will be exhausted and will bleed to death.” In both, the tiger is Vietnam and

the elephant is France, and later America. This attitude is how the Vietnam were able to win the war. They were fighting for their freedom and for their very livelihood. It shows the nationalism and patriotism that fueled their fire. The fact that almost the same exact metaphor is told in both recollections of the war adds to its importance. This one metaphor shows how important victory was for Ho Chi Minh and how confident he was that he was right.

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France as the Elephant

by [Houston Schmutz](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:02 PM

I agree France was seen as the Elephant and I'm sure they would to. They were so beat up from WW2 that they were in no condition to being in another war. Although there efforts to containing communism was noted by the US, France had to fall back and leave IndoChina. The thing about communism is that the idea of it is the fuel to the fire. Although Ho Chi Minh is no Hitler, he did seek power and expansion. As it was important for his efforts to be contained and to not expand into South Vietnam, Frances efforts began the ability to bring communism in Vietnam to an end. Even though it happened many years later.

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French tried to return to power and Ho Chi Minh nationalism

by [Paul Geu](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 11:01 PM

When Japan took over Vietnam in World War II, they took away one of the crown jewels of Colonial France. After the war, the French wanted the resources back and took over the country once again. The United States supported France mainly because American decided they needed a strong France in Western Europe to help keep communism at bay in Europe and one way to have a strong France is to have the French be happy. The Domino Theory where if one country fell to communism would lead to more dominoes falling also had Americans supporting the French against the communist in Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh stated that he was more of a Nationalist than a Communist and because he had the popular support of the people, it ultimately led to victory over both the French and later the American armies (pg 10, Herring).

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Why the US Got Involved in Vietnam

by [Houston Schmutz](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 10:24 PM

The connections I found were to explain the beginnings of the tensions in Vietnam and why the United States took action in the Vietnam War. "America's Longest War" discusses how after World War 2, Asia was dominated by communism because of the Soviets and China. South Asia countries were thriving in industrialization and gaining resources, and the North was noticing this and had the power to take advantage of them.

At a conference in Geneva, Vietnam was split between the North and the South where the North was ran by communism. The hope was that the splitting of government would allow the two groups to go about their ways with peace, if the North was willing to do so. As the Vietnamese in the south were working to build new hopes and ways of life, Ho Chi Minh worked toward his reign of terror in the South. As the United States were brought aware to the terror brought upon by the North, Eisenhower began to give economic aid to the South to continue a strong state and limit military aggression. Because of American Economic aid, the south began to prosper in industrialization and manufacturing. By 1960 every area in the South was a combat zone as the North were reigning in their communist power. By 1961 South Vietnam looked to the US for urgent help, in which they were granted military assistance immediately. As the US feared the North Vietnam continuing communism in the Asianic state, they also felt sympathy for the lack of freedom to the people of South Vietnam. Unfortunately South Vietnam had lost more than 10x the amount of people that the US had lost, as they were taking a great hit from the war. As the US and other nations worked to gain peace through words instead of war, the leaders of the North had no interest in discussion. After the attempts of conversations, the US captured a North ship coming from China filled with ammo of all sorts. As it was clear the North did not want means of peace, the US geared up to dominate the war. The US was in Vietnam and did not leave Vietnam once they were there as they saw the state the South was in and as they kept a word of promise that they would be there for support. As Johnson says, "success only feeds the appetite of aggression" (Why Vietnam, 29:40). This shows the US fear and understanding of the power that is craved by the communist nations when it comes to war. He finishes with, "this then my fellow Americans is why we are in Vietnam" (Why Vietnam 31:00). He shows through pride and passion that leaving Vietnam would give no hope to the people of the South who had already lost thousands of men through the 11 years of fighting.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1) 2

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Why the US Got Involved in Vietnam**by [Jonathan Haskell](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 7:51 AM

Yeah World War II changed a lot of things, but especially the dated concept of colonization. The British Empire was over and the President that saw the war through until almost the end believed the concept was dated. If Roosevelt had lived and his policies remained then Vietnam most likely would not have been returned to the French which would have saved French lives, face for the democratic powers, and would not have given Ho Chi Minh army years of fighting experience that was used to great effect against the United States. It was a war of personal belief between two fundamentally different thoughts, but the Vietnamese villager on the ground wasn't consciously aware of that as much as he was defending his home against people who were not from there. You or I would do that same. That is why I think your comments "the North was noticing this and had the power to take advantage" and "Ho Chi Minh worked toward his reign of terror in the South" or "the north did not want peace" or "the north had no interest in discussion" is false and a little one sided. Ho Chi Minh was working for a peaceful resolution to his country long before World War II had ended. He sought to expel the Japanese which of course we were one hundred percent behind and helped him in every way we could. When his honor says he has to do it once again with the French, and when we sided with our historical ally we became blinded by our duty to our way of life, He could not allow a split and divided Vietnam it would've been the opposite of his life pursuit. By that time we could not let the red menace continue to expand into border areas as it felt like it was a fight to the death scenario. Once his mission was set upon him by the political world stage and our determination to achieve our goal of communist deterrent was ingrained into the American psyche than peace was no longer valid. That didn't stop Henry Kissinger and the North Vietnamese to continue to peacefully attempt resolution though. The North Vietnamese continued to talk peace even when it was causing chaos. Both sides wanted to end the conflict but both sides wish to do so with their honor intact. This is hard to do in war as there is always one side

who has achieved greater success than the other. By the time it did end we were losing the battle on the homefront so allowance of the continuation of the war wasn't optional as it would be political suicide. The North Vietnamese although they were tired of death and destruction were fighting for their home and would of been able to continue that fight indefinitely in some form or another. Once victory was had sure there was some actions that would not doubt be labeled as war crimes or a crime against humanity, but Vietnam quickly became a bastion of peace and communist fluidity to the world.

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2

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Why the US Got Involved personal correction on reflection

by [Houston Schmutz](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 7:56 PM

I completely agree with you on my initial post coming off one sided. I have trouble with history and dissecting this material. After the US go to WW2 and help win the war in Europe and Japan, they were hopeful this would be the war that ends all wars. As France was present in IndoChina and contributed to WW2, they had to leave in the 1940s as they had so little resources left to contribute in colonial influence. When the US noted this, we understood the containment of communism as it was seen as the evil of the world. When Guld of Tonkin off the coast of Vietnam incident occured it gave Johnson ability to engage in immediate action on North Vietnam. The main goal in the 60-70s was to contain communism where ever it fell, and I didnt mean to make Ho Chi Minh the bases of my post but Nixon and Kissinger tried to negotiate an end to the war while in Vietnam but it was too late. US was in Vietnam to fight the political ideology of communism, even though many Americans did not want us at war.

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1

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Re: The Dien Bien Fu crisis and French Military

by [Kaitlynn Linnell](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 11:50 PM

One event discussed by both the Herring book and the "Why Vietnam?" video, is the Dien Bien Fu crisis. In both the book and the video, it is agreed that the French troops were in a position in which they were losing their fight. This is specifically pointed out in the book with the line, "In fact, within six months, France's position in Vietnam was in peril." (Herring 34) In the video, it is discussed at 2:19, saying essentially the same

thing as the book, however the book goes more in depth about the Dien Bien Phu situation.

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French Military

by [Houston Schmutz](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:06 PM

Indeed, and as France was losing the fight, the US was right there to come in after them. Both the US and France saw the danger to communism and almost worked as over seas superheros to end it. As France struggled with resources and numbers after WW2, their efforts in Indochina still gave a purpose for South Vietnam and the US to finish things up. The crazy thing is, is that it took 30 years later for the US to end the war in Vietnam.

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The celebration of Vietnamese independence

by [Kishahn Fellows](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 7:35 PM

Chapter one of Americas longest war and the first episode of the Vietnam television documentary line up quite well, as episode one of the series focuses heavily of the first Indochina war, and Ho Chi Minh's rise to power, just as the first chapter of Herring's book does. Specifically mentioning the Vietnamese celebration of independence.

"When Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of Vietnam from French rule on September 2nd, 1945, he borrowed liberally from Thomas Jefferson..." "We hold these truths to be self evident. That all men are created equal." During the celebrations later on in the day, sleek U.S. fighter planes swooped down over the city, U.S. officers stood near the reviewing stand, and a Vietnamese band played the star spangled banner." (p.3 Herring)

"and on the same day throughout Vietnam, the Vietnamese celebrated their independence day and the formulation of a new country, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh read a speech that began " All men are created equal, they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights"... after uncle Ho was finished reading the declaration of independence a small airplane circled over us, we did not know who's plane it was, we thought it was a Vietnamese plane, but when it swooped down over us we recognized the American flag..." (24:15-26:10 Vietnam a television history episode 1)

Both sources agree on the events that took place although Herring's Book lists a few more details of the celebrations that were not touched upon in the documentary

episode, most likely due to their somewhat innocuous nature, rather than misleading information.

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Battle of Dien Bien Phu was significant at the end of one war and the foundation of another war

by [Paul Geu](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 10:18 PM

I believe that the most significant event that is shared in the First War in Vietnam and the Herring book deals with the defeat of the French army at Dien Bien Phu. The herring book goes into great detail about the battle itself but the main significance of the battle was that the French were defeat by a less technological foe and this victory gave confidence to the Vietnamese people that they could possibly have an independent nation going into the Geneva Conference. The conference did not leave either side with what they were wanting, but did leave the foundation for the Vietnam war to occur.

While the video did not go into major detail regarding the battle other than showing the aftermath and possible battle footage by the Viet Minh it did show a significate amount of how devastating the battle was for the morale of the French people (9:26 into The First War in Vietnam). The herring book did leave with several lessons on both sides that would tie in with the second war in Vietnam. First the victory for the Viet Minh reinforced their belief that they fought a "peoples' war" but also increase their record on expelling a superior force by exploiting human recourses (pg 45 Herring). The lessons that the Americans did not learn included what the war and the battle could teach them regarding Viet Minh tactics but only reinforced the American military confidence in their aggressive way to wage war (pg 45, Herring). Both sources agreed with each other that the outcome of the battle lead to significate chances in the country that would lead to the Vietnam War. The division of the country at the 17th parallel, the continued influence by the French, and the increased intervention by the Americans with social and military aid.

One thing that I have always heard was those that do not learn history are doomed to repeat it and the lessons taught during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu clearly showed how future wars in the area were going to won or lost.

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