

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

[Home](#) / [My courses](#) / [HST 195 Sp18 \(Escobar 41945\)](#) / [Week 8](#) / [Week 8 Forum](#)
/ [What the Article & Survey Reveal](#)



Week 8 Forum

What the Article & Survey Reveal

[Subscribe](#)

◀ [Fog of War](#)



What the Article & Survey Reveal

by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, May 19, 2018, 8:54 PM

This thread is for discussions on the What the Article & Survey Reveal 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, something that describes which one of the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: What the Article & Survey Reveal

Sum of ratings: -

[Permalink](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Big-picture: McNamara criticism



by [Emilee Russell](#) - Monday, May 21, 2018, 11:24 PM

We cannot know how much of the historical truth we are getting from McNamara in his book or in the video but to me, it seems that he is taking advantage of hindsight, of the big-picture perspective we can see now that Vietnam is decades in the past and we have had time to assess the repercussions on both sides. Perhaps McNamara was "in the thick of it" too much for us to ever be able to get the unbiased historical truth. He had a powerful and unique vantage point of the conflict, and the fact that his opinions and ideas about it continue to evolve is a good sign, but I don't know that we can ever expect the historical truth from him.

"Looking back, I clearly erred in not forcing... a knock-down drag-out debate over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam." To me, this boils down much of the error of our ways. He uses Agent Orange as an example-- he admits it wreaked unnecessary damage on people, but says they just didn't know. I feel that McNamara offers that line of reasoning several times-- admits that our approach was flawed, but blames a lack of information or research or cooperation.

What I've learned in this course influenced my answers to the questions about the US acting as world police. It has made me consider the tradeoffs, between moral duty and the toll it almost always takes on our resources and international relations.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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



Re: Big-picture: McNamara criticism

by [Miles Arnold](#) - Saturday, May 26, 2018, 10:29 AM

When he says' "Looking back, I clearly erred in not forcing... a knock-down drag-out debate over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam." he is clearly expressing a great deal of regret there. He understands that he was the face of the war for many people. So by saying he should have done more to debate the info, he completely breezes over the fact that he also had a great deal of input.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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



Opinions Change

by [Danielle Wardrip](#) - Tuesday, May 22, 2018, 3:20 PM

My responses to the survey questions would have been different before taking this

My responses to the survey questions would have been different before taking this class. I would not have been so concerned with our country's tendency to get involved in the business of other countries. This class has renewed my loathing for war. I chose the three most conflictual options for question #1 because of that. For question #2, I opposed to the statement that America must spread democracy. The whole reason that we got involved in the Vietnam War is that we felt obligated to destroy Communism. I also do not agree that trying to deeply change the world is "naive and dangerous." I believe that it is hard (America's failure in Vietnam shows that), but I also believe that changing the world for the good is a noble desire. America should have a good balance between military spending and domestic spending. Spending more on military support and less on "domestic spending, larger deficits, or higher taxes than we would like" would not provide a balance. Consequently, spending less on domestic policies and more on "financial aid to countries where poverty and despair are creating the breeding grounds of discontent" goes against two of my beliefs. One, we can't take more from domestic spending and, two, staying out of foreign countries' business.

Passing judgment on the previous leaders of our country is never good. I make it a policy to never bash a leader. They were given their position for a reason greater than we can understand. Also, they're not in office any longer so it doesn't do any good where they're concerned. Understanding what they may have done wrong (or right) just might help our current leaders make decisions that will benefit all involved.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1) 2

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



Re: Opinions Change

by [James Alewine](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 7:41 PM

You have a great point Danielle, it doesn't do any good down talking leaders, especially after the fact. My hope is that one day leaders would use history to learn from the past and not push personal agendas that might have the potential to repeat Vietnam.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1) 1

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



Re: Opinions Change

by [Emilee Russell](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 10:22 PM

I agree with your views on the cost of spreading democracy- it sometimes feels like a burden we carry because we think no one else will be the "world's police." This course has given me a much deeper and wider perspective on what our involvement in Vietnam really cost us as a country, and the effects that still feel recent to the American public. Additionally, I've gained a deeper understanding of President

Johnson and have come to see that there were so many moving parts in the escalation of our involvement, but that Johnson (and perhaps sometimes McNamara) took the brunt of the public's rage.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

1

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



Criticism

by [Tyler Cannon](#) - Tuesday, May 22, 2018, 10:09 PM

I think that the best criticism given by author Max Frankel is "Even more disappointing is Mr. McNamara's unwillingness to explore the human tragedies and political legacies of this longest American war. What was it like to send tens of thousands to their deaths in an increasingly dubious cause? How did the strain affect the men in charge? We get a glimpse of Jacqueline Kennedy beating him on the chest in protest against the war, and of angry insults hurled on the ski slopes, but no real introspection. Mr. McNamara says the war tore deeply at his own family, but quickly adds: "I am not comfortable speaking in such terms." (NYT, page 3). This was honestly my biggest issue with McNamara's clip and while yes I know it can be a sensitive topic to discuss, there are somethings that the American people need to know. I also know that it is hard for him to come out and give us all of this information because perhaps some of the cases are still classified in the government, but surely not everything is. The American people want to know what it was like to work during not only one but two administrations during one of the most difficult wars in U.S history. They know how it felt to send a loved one off or be sent off themselves and they want to know what the senders were thinking/feeling. I think that McNamara does not want to appear as the bad guy so that is why he is refusing to answer some of these questions rather than the fact that he legally can't disclose that information. I also agree with Frankel when he reminds everyone of the fact that the thought process behind U. S international affairs was that we were basically World police against communism and that "if South Vietnam was "lost" to Communism, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia would fall like dominoes, imperiling India, Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines, if not also Japan, and emboldening the Russians and Chinese to extend Communist conquests by military force or subversion in ways that would sooner or later provoke a nuclear World War III, the very destruction of civilization." (NYT, page 2). If the reader/viewer takes that in to account and puts themselves in McNamara's shoes his actions are much more understandable. However, McNamara nonetheless refuses to delve deeper into these questions in order to try and salvage his reputation and not seem like the bad guy. I'm sure there are things that he can't share, but I would say a majority he can but chooses not to. Overall, I do not believe we are getting the total historical truth from McNamara in order for him to cover his own skin.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Criticism**by [Haonan Bai](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 12:40 AM

I think your opinion is good, but I am not totally agreeing with you. So here is what I thought. As you said that can be a sensitive topic to discuss and it is hard for McNamara to give us all information. Because those kinds of question can get his in trouble and he knows how inflammatory his words can appear. He doesn't want to go any further with this discussion and it will open up more controversy (Fog of War, 11:10). He knows what he should do and what he should say. He tried to protect some people or some veterans. The information he gives to us can help us understand more about this war. If he answers all the question and discussion more about this war, it will bother lots of people also himself. I understand lots of American people wants to know more about this war, but it has already happened the long time ago. And he already recognized his mistakes and told us about the wrong decisions that government or president made at that time.

If taking me to consider the question of World War III, I don't believe it will happen during the Cold War. Because the United States just to suppress the Communist Party so that the Soviet Union cannot benefit from other countries. But actually, the domino effect did not happen around Vietnam. It only caused the American soldier who was in Vietnam to suffer a pain. Vietnam is just fighting for freedom and Ho Chi Minh is just a patriotism. If the U.S. government was able to see this fact during that time, there would not be such big loss and such a long war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Book Review**by [Miles Arnold](#) - Tuesday, May 22, 2018, 10:49 PM

I understand why Frankel is negative in his review. This could be seen as a plea for forgiveness and basically a big apology. But, I think it is important to have McNamara come out and say as much as he has in regards to his feelings on the Vietnam war. It is rare that someone from that time who was basically the face of the war for the people at home to come out and shed a little light on what was going through his mind at the time and what was going on behind the scenes. It feels like Frankel isn't allowing any room for hindsight or an admittance to wrong doing. saying, "Why should the rest of us relive his agony?" makes hi seem bored of the whole thing.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

1

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Free Trade**by [James Alewine](#) - Friday, May 25, 2018, 8:32 AM

I wouldn't say my views on United States policies have change at all because of this course. I'm 43 years old and I have been watching how the choices of our politicians have effected this country since the early 1990's—but I have been enlightened.

8 students disagreed with this statement, "We will always have to compete with the world's other nations for power", which I find interesting. If history proves anything, it is the fact that the ever-changing landscape of rule allows for a jockey in position. Cultures collide and war is inevitable, especially with leaders that potentially abuse their power and are not willing to solve problems through diplomacy. I think this is what makes communism so scary for lots of people, because of the dictatorship aspect—but is capitalism any better? A society of free trade allows anyone with money to push their own agenda. Just look at the Bush family, what was their ultimate agenda? Now we are dealing with the Trump agenda and North Korea. What is going on—have we not learned our lesson?

Now I'm not saying I would rather live in a communist society, America is the greatest country! It's just we have no right to enforce our system on anyone. The root of our international policies is business, if we can create free societies—then we will be able to make money from it—boosting our own economy.

That being said—in response to, "Free trade and open economies are the best way to foster economic growth at home and around the world", an overwhelmingly 11 supports, 2 oppose, and 4 were undecided. Then in response to, "As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world." 14 opposed this, 1 supports, and 2 were undecided. I was part of the majority in both questions—so now I'm torn.

And this is where it gets tricky—How can were foster free trade without spreading democracy through diplomacy or force if necessary? If we don't—How can we compete globally?

Free Trade Areas



There Are Many Different Types

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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



McNamara & the Times

by [Jonathan Haskell](#) - Friday, May 25, 2018, 9:03 AM

I think Max Frankel made the obvious criticisms that I as well as other in this class have made in regards to chosen forgetfulness. Are we getting the historical truth from Mr. McNamara? It has already been proven Mr. McNamara doesn't read history books! I actually find Mr. McNamara fascinating but I understand he is a human businessman. He is looking to sell it. He is looking to avoid blame while yes, giving the historical truth AS HE sees it. So yes I think his insight is historical and awesome. If he shows an ego or "doesn't remember" he is forgiven by me but guilt is probably assumed by me as well.

Sum of ratings: 0 (1)

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



Questionnaire Questions

by [Jonathan Haskell](#) - Friday, May 25, 2018, 9:23 AM

I do not think my answers to the questions were influenced by this class as my

opinions are pretty absolute, however; as I would expect to be I was more informed and my answers to the questions were as well as a result of. For example, I just want to pop every Michelin tire I see now.

Is it far or right to judge the decisions made by our leaders about Vietnam? OF COURSE IT IS! That is a part of what living in this free Republic is all about. Invest in knowledge of current or past events and develop an opinion not on assumption but relative facts, the commonly held belief, and a dash of personal feeling. Not guesses or a party held sanction.

Did my feeling match the rest of the class? Yes it seems they did at least to a high percentage. I opposed what most opposed and agreed with what most agreed with. This gives me high hopes for the future!

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

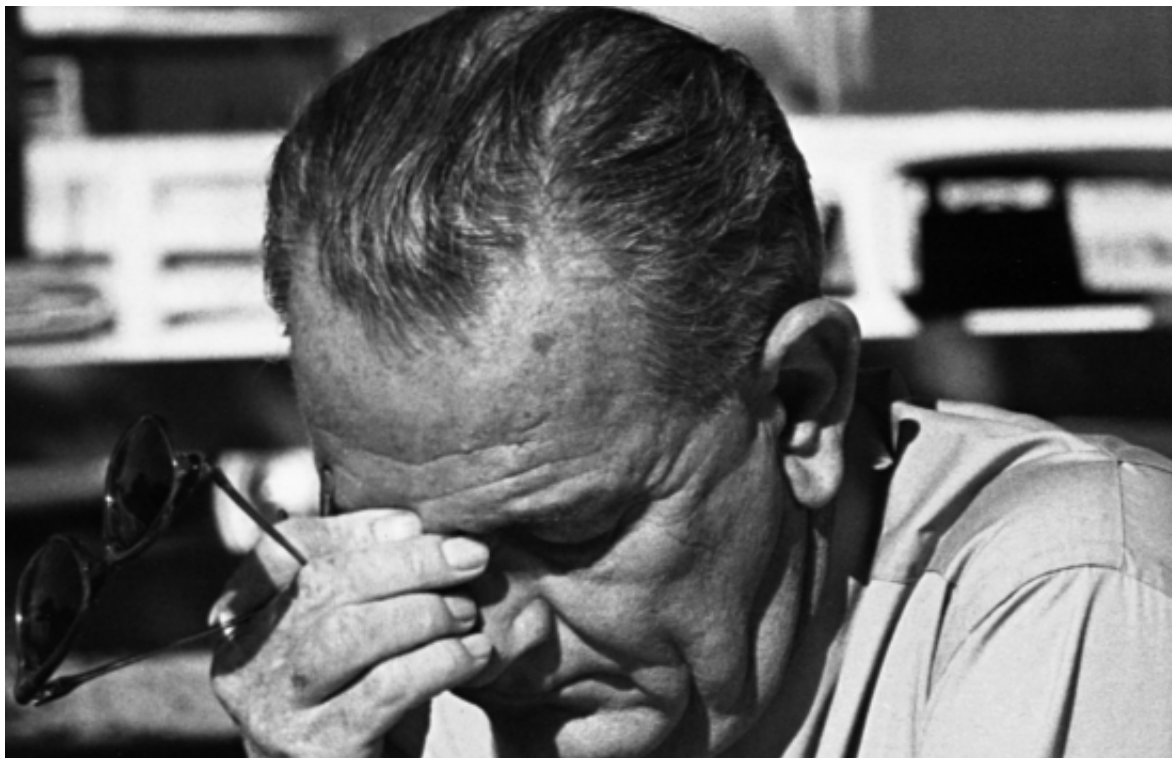
1

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



Personal opinion about this article

by [Haonan Bai](#) - Saturday, May 26, 2018, 12:41 AM





I really agree with the criticisms offered by the author, Max Frankel. Why McNamara publishes these documents and recordings right now? Only because he has "grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt" with which so many Americans view their institutions and leaders (New York Times, Max Frankel). What if he announced it at that time, would it be possible to avoid this war and they wouldn't kill so many innocent people? Personally, think that he just announced the part of the truth, it is not the whole truth.

The U.S. war in Vietnam was only intended to suppress communism and gain the advantages from the Cold War. The U.S. government has been emphasizing the domino effect. They fear that if Vietnam implements communism, it will certainly affect some neighboring countries to implement communism. In this way, they will lose their advantages in the Cold War and it will help the Soviet Union gain more support. Seriously, it might trigger the World War III (New York Time, Max Frankel). In my opinion, these are just the excuse for the United States in the Vietnam War. They just want to gain more benefits and have a favorable position in the world. Because the influence of the Cold War, the United States paid more attention to the Vietnam battlefield and prevent the Soviet Union gaining benefits from Vietnam and win the Cold War. But it was fatal mistake to use Ho Chi Minh as communism.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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



My Responses

by [Tyler Cannon](#) - Saturday, May 26, 2018, 10:46 PM

My response to these survey questions have been greatly influenced by this course. This course has made me rethink several positions I had on topics such as "As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world." Before this course I would have been all about America spreading democracy to every corner of the World. While I still believe that it is our duty to help those nations that are oppressed in a society that they do not want and to expose other countries to what it is like to live in a capitalistic and democratic society. After being in this course I have

changed my stance on this question from being strongly agreeing to undecided. After seeing all of the horrific effects the War had it really made me question whether or not our spreading of democracy was really always the best plan. Now I feel like countries that don't want to live the same life style as us Americans do, they should not be forced to do so. If the people of Vietnam were alright with the way they were living on their own after the French left we should have stopped pushing our American agenda on them just because we were afraid of communism. If a country wants to live in a socialist/communist way and the people of said country are ok with it what right do we have to stop them. Also, it is not fair for us to pass such strong judgements on the leaders for their past actions. Mainly because we don't know what the view was like in their eyes or what they were being told both lies and truth. While yes it is important to look back and learn from the mistakes of these leaders so that we do not repeat history, but it does not mean that we should condemn them for their actions as long as they were clearly to the best of the leaders judgment. For the most part I fell pretty much in line with the rest of the class on the survey questions with some differences in things such as strongly or only the standard feeling. We are probably very similar in answering because we have taken this course and have been exposed to similar topics. However, there were a few extreme differences in some of the response such as in question #1 I was the only student who listed one of their top three concerns as "The United States will lose access to oil and other key resources abroad." To me this is a real threat because America only has so many resources and we depend on the rest of the world for a major amount of resources that we need for daily life such as oil. If America continues to go around the world and acting like the "World Police" we may become outcast to other countries that we need. I don't want to see America become the bully of the world and the one that isn't invited to events or traded with. Lastly, the other extreme was with the question "Any nation acting alone has neither the moral authority nor the capacity to right the world's wrongs" in which I was the only student to say that I strongly oppose that. The main reason for that being that if we all believe that no one will do anything if they see something bad going on unless they have a crowd to back them up. Similar to a school bullying in which nobody says anything because they don't want to be that one kid. As educated adults we should stand up for what we believe is right even if we don't have others to back us up. Now I'm not saying go to war but a nation should not just sit back and be silent about the wrong doings of the world and they should do all that they can to correct it. I think these major differences come honestly from just how I am as a person. I am not the kind of person that can just sit back and watch as something bad goes wrong and not try everything in my power to stop/correct it even if I don't have help. Also with the oil and resources I have seen how other countries view all Americans and it is honestly scary. I don't want the land of the free to become the number one hated place that the rest of the world wants to see crumble.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: What the Article & Survey Reveal**by [Emilee Russell](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 10:33 PM

After answering the survey, I continued to consider whether the US has, as a leading world power, the responsibility to spread democracy and to intervene in the affairs of other countries, even if they are not posing a direct threat to us. I remembered a debate that my AP History class hosted in high school, arguing whether or not it is America's moral imperative to be the world's police. I remember that Vietnam was the single greatest point used to argue against it. There are several examples of instances that the US has intervened successfully and saved lives and ended escalating conflicts, but Vietnam is the one we point to because its consequences hit so close to home and affected the American public so deeply and directly. It divided us in many ways, even after the war was officially over and veterans were returning home. Without being the "world police," it's hard to watch injustice especially when we feel that we are powerful enough to do something about it, but hopefully the lessons we can take from it, and from McNamara's own reflections, is to consider all the ways intervening can cost us as a country, and the repercussions for years to come.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**McNamara's retreat**by [Kishahn Fellows](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 11:30 PM

I think the article and the excerpts from McNamara's book are the closest to the truth we could have ever gotten from him. The tone is very much the same as his comments in the Fog of war documentary, that being regretful yet still self preserving. I honestly feel as though the criticisms throughout the article were quite fair, if not a bit biting. For example " In this pew, Mr. McNamara himself was a prominent sinner. His can do spirit found no mission impossible, even as Saigon's governments and armies crumbled. His domineering intellect and predilection for systems analysis made him a pathetic victim of erroneous and deceptive military audits of bodies counted, weapons captured, sorties flown, supply lines ruptured. soon enough, as the press decided it became McNamara's war, and most certainly America's" (NY times, "McNamara's retreat" Max Frankel) This quote, to me, sums up McNamara's behavior during the war quite well. What perhaps started as misplaced or mismanaged enthusiasm got bogged down with too much analysis of combat and not enough understanding of the people we were supposed to be fighting for.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

**Changing perception of Vietnam**by [Kishahn Fellows](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 11:51 PM

I would say this class has had some impact on my answers to the survey, but more from an emotional aspect than one based on fact, as there is still a lot of confusion surrounding the war for me, almost more so than when we started. My understanding before the class was that it was a simple, U.S. Vs. Communism war of attrition in which we lost, but this class has shown me it was much more grey than someone ignorant to the conflict could ever hope to grasp. The more you learn, the less you know and all that.

I think it is fair, constructive, and right to look at our past actions with a greater knowledge of these events and deconstruct them to the best of our ability so we can do everything we can to avoid repeating mistakes. However I think it is nothing more than an expression of vanity and ignorance to look back on people making very hard choices in times of crisis and criticize them for those choices when we have a much greater understanding of the consequences those actions hold

Sum of ratings: 2 (1) 2

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)[◀ Fog of War](#)[i Moodle Docs for this page](#)You are logged in as [Joe Escobar](#) ([Log out](#))[HST 195 Sp18 \(Escobar 41945\)](#)