

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

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Week 8 Forum

What the Article & Survey Reveal

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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

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Ol' McNamara did no Harm? e-i-e-i no



by [Jonathen Gray](#) - Wednesday, May 23, 2018, 2:51 PM

Max Frankel in his article *McNamara's Retreat* reviewed one thing I did not see in the edited *Fog of War* Video that really stood out. That being that "Cabinet officers... should have a constituency of one: the President -- from whom they derive all authority and through whom alone they can be held accountable." This is one of the most dangerous types of thinking and is a good indicator of the mindset of McNamara. [The Oath of Office](#) (taken by, among others, US cabinet members) states "I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." Domestic enemies can in fact include the president. Fellow Cabinet members, Congress, and (to a lesser degree) the American public are justified in hearing the concerns of the Secretary of State. Anything less is on the level of violating the oath of the office he was sworn to protect. This "constituency of one" is one of his greatest weaknesses and seems to have led to an echo chamber filled with bad ideas.

Frankel criticizes the timing of the release of the book saying "by delaying his war memoir so long, Mr. McNamara has greatly compounded the difficulty of his mission." That mission being clearing the fog of the Vietnam War. However, the timing and the statement about cabinet officers seem to connect a trend about McNamara: He cared about politicking and job security. Why release a book 23 years past its most impactful time? He had 23 years of international job security he had to worry about.

That being said, the information and lessons included aren't without their merit and contain plenty of revelations that can help in future escalations of war. In recent years Russia has expanded its expansionist efforts to be met with the comparison of Nazis in World War 2. How many times has extremist right wing media outlets compared Islamic terror and an ISIS caliphate to the threat of the Nazis? Many times. The war on terror itself has been painfully analogous to Vietnam. In 2003 the thought of an "I have no idea where Afghanistan is but I'm glad we're deploying troops there to protect America" was a common one. A personal account told by McNamara is bound to bias history in his favor but as America repeats the same flaws of previous wars it's important to have it as an important reference point.

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Frankel's Criticisms Mirror My Own

by [Daisy Burge](#) - Thursday, May 24, 2018, 9:35 PM

Frankel's review is a combination of a summary of McNamara's book and a set of criticisms of the book itself. McNamara expands upon what he believes are three central tenets of failure of American policy in Vietnam in his book: First and most importantly, the Americans mistaking Ho Chi Minh and his supporters as mainly Communist and ignoring their nationalist struggle; Secondly, the Americans failing to win the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese and the peasantry due to their over-involvement combat zones; Lastly, McNamara identifies patterns of escalating military misjudgements based on decisions made from the JCS and ultimately ineffective bombing campaigns.

Frankel's criticisms of McNamara's book are quite similar to my own criticisms of McNamara's interview in Fog of War. Frankel's main criticism of McNamara's book is that it fails to adequately address the lasting ramifications of the war, and McNamara's unwillingness to discuss the tragedy and human cost that were caused by his actions in the war. McNamara claims within his book that the war caused deep divisions within his own family, within the Kennedy administration, and among his other colleagues. However, as Frankel points out, he does not explain how this affected him psychologically or how it impacted his moral decisions. This was also the problem I had with McNamara's testimony in Fog of War. Though McNamara admits to mistakes in his interview, they are admittances of tactical rather than moral error. He is mostly truthful in what he does choose to recount, but what he does talk about is so heavily self-censored that it loses much of its impact.





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**Too little too late from memoir**by [Paul Geu](#) - Friday, May 25, 2018, 11:55 AM

The main criticism of the McNamara book by Max Frankel that really jumped out at me was the author's statement that McNamara has waited so long that his mission or objectives of a book "I never planned to write" have become more difficult (Frankel, pg 1-2). Frankel continues, with the destruction of the Soviet Union and both China and Vietnam are major markets for businesses in the United States, no one under the age of 50 can fathom let alone understand the fears that were brought with the Cold War and the development of the domino theory that we have learned in class (Frankel, 2).

Another criticism that was featured in the Frankel article is that McNamara did not follow his own advice that he now states that he did as a manager at the world bank, by identifying problems and forcing oneself into thinking deeply and realistically of alternative course of action and their possible consequences (Frankel, 5). However, Frankel states that McNamara only truly meant that this was only for the few advisors to the President and not the rest of the policy makers such as the President. McNamara blames President Johnson for going headlong into the war but refused to resign in protest or share this objections with the public. Frankel does mention that McNamara felt that is loyalty was to the President but as Frankel points out, that is the right ethic for normal times not during a time such as the Vietnam war (Frankel,5).

I believe that we are getting some historical truths as McNamara sees them, but with the book coming out so late in his life and so far from the historical events that he is telling in this memoir it is difficult for us to understand his thoughts and makes it feel like it is a too little too late situation. I do not believe that we will ever get the full historical truth because even with a "tell all" memoir, there is always something that is left out. Frankel even mentions this that McNamara and Johnson "Loved and respected" each other to the point that the public looks upon his memoir with

skepticism (Frankel, 5).

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The Questionnaire

by [Kate Adkisson](#) - Friday, May 25, 2018, 1:54 PM

From the outcome of the survey, I found most of my answers matched up with the majority of the class, on issues such as foreign intervention and world problems. When confronted with the question, “What concerns you the most?” I answered

1. A class of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world
2. The gulf between the developed and developing worlds will widen, making it increasingly difficult to address common problems.
3. Damage to the global environment will become irreparable.

Looking at the responses of the class to those questions, I found that 20% chose #1, 8% chose #2, and 18% chose #3. Those answers seemed to be the most highly chosen, besides #2. The next most-voted for option was “Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate and end up in the hands of terrorists”, which ranked at 16% of the vote. When taking this questionnaire, I was looking for the option around nuclear war, and thought about picking it. If I hadn’t answered the option between differences in ideology, I would have chose this option. However, I’m not as concerned as I am with nukes in the hands of terrorists as I am with them in the hands of powerful countries, such as our own. I would rather see the elimination of nuclear weapons. Fortunately, this question was posed later in the questionnaire. On the 3rd part of the questionnaire, we are asked “What should we do?” concerning whether or not the United States should commit itself to the elimination of nuclear weapons. Our class seems to be somewhat split on this idea. 5 people strongly support this, 4 people support this, 4 people oppose this, and 1 person strongly opposes this. 3 are undecided. I can see the opposite side of the argument, because nuclear war is the most defining of them all. It helps keep others in check. It helps us show our power, and maybe “protect” our country and interests. But to me, nuclear war will be the end of humanity. The power we possess even without nukes is incredible, add nuclear weapons and we have the capacity to destroy planets. Humans should never have that much power. We are already destroying this planet by polluting and exploiting it, if we add the destruction of entire areas of land we will certainly be doomed. I am happy to see 5 people strongly agree we should commit yourself to the elimination of nukes, and I am also happy to see that some are undecided. For the people who are undecided, I hope that they see the evils and absolute chaos and destruction nuclear weapons can inflict and perhaps try to put themselves in the shoes of someone watching a mushroom cloud form over and obliterate everything you’ve ever known.

The question I am most happy about is the one concerning immigrants. The statement “The United States should accept fewer immigrants. in addition to cracking down on illegal immigration. even if this

deprives the American workforce of the talent and ambitions of newcomers and fuels anti-American sentiments abroad” was answered overwhelmingly strongly opposed, with 9 people voting for that option. Only 1 person strongly supported this statement, 1 person supported it, 2 people opposed it, and 4 were undecided. I am happy to see this class mostly believes in open borders and supports our fellow human beings.

Here is a video I think is interesting if you are undecided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wxWNAM8Cso>

One question was answered in a way that directly correlates with what we have learned throughout this class. On part 2 of the questionnaire, we are asked how we feel about the statement “As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world”.

9 people opposed this, while 5 people strongly opposed this, while no one strongly supported it and 1 person supported it. I think the outcome of this question has to do with what we have read, watched, and explored throughout this term. We know that when America tries to get involved in the governments of other countries, it usually doesn’t end up amazing for us or the governments we try to sway to democratic political systems. In the case of Vietnam, we tried to stop a communist/socialist government from taking form in the name of spreading Democracy, because if other countries practice democracy we believe there is a smaller chance of that country harming us in the future. We believed if we didn’t bring about democracy to Indochina, our democracy would somehow be overrun. I am happy to see the class understands that putting our nose in the governments of other countries is not always wise, and we do not have a responsibility to Americanize the world.

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The nation building experient was a failure.

by [Paul Geu](#) - Saturday, May 26, 2018, 11:34 AM

On the question of whether it is the job of the United States to spread democracy I also chose the opposed option. In Vietnam we saw the result of our experiment in nation building. While we feel strongly that democracy is a great way to spread freedom, it has proven time and again that it is difficult to have in countries that have never had such forms of government. On recent example is Iraq going from a Kingdom, to a dictatorship to finally a free election democracy. There is also the influence of Tribe and religious sects that make democracy a difficult concept to have.

One thing that I disagreed with the rest of the class is the removal of nuclear arms. While I completely agree with you that nuclear weapons are a terrible things and

should hopefully never be used again, I feel that serve a necessary purpose. At the time of their creation they were needed to insure that our enemies, aka the Soviets, would never use them since we could retaliate against them. This use of nuclear weapons was the exact policy under President Eisenhower and some believe that the threat of nuclear option helped stop the Korean war.

One story that I want to share is that my grandfather was at a couple of nuclear tests during his service in the military. He was only a couple of miles from the blast and his description of what happened to him will make anyone not want to experience it. He also served in Greenland in one of the many early warning stations just in case the Soviets decided to attack us. The fear that he dealt with daily is crazy to think today. While I do not believe that we will have any nation using nuclear weapons, I do think that if any nation or group got a hold of them and had nothing to lose they might decide to use them. As a stable nation, I have nothing to fear regarding our arsenal but those in the former Soviet Union are not as safe.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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Re: The Questionnaire

by [Jonathen Gray](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 8:33 PM

Some of the questions I felt were hard to answer such as the "bringing democracy" question.

"Bringing Democracy" is the age old excuse for everything America does. A form of government not even practiced in America. We're closer to a republic. Republic with the caveat of the electoral college decreasing democratic ideals. I certainly believe America needs to spread some democracy. Start with the United States presidential elections. See if that takes hold.

It's important to note because during the fifties and sixties the US government was infamous in overthrowing democracies in favor of "democracies" who favored the US. The most well known being Iran.

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1

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Not fair to give judgement when we have hindsight at our disposal

by [Paul Geu](#) - Saturday, May 26, 2018, 11:19 AM

When I answered the fog of war questions on Monday night, I felt that I drew my answers mostly on my personal experiences and beliefs rather than being influenced

answers mostly on my personal experiences and beliefs rather than being influenced by my participation in this class. While it is always good to experience and learn new things such as taking this class, I think that these kind of questions are mainly influenced by how we were raised morally and politically than what we learn in our class.

With that being said I have always felt that it is neither fair or constructive to pass judgement on those in the past mainly because we have hindsight that influences our judgement. We were not there or did they have hindsight to influence what they would do at that time. I think that it is more important for us to learn from what happened and also why it happened that way so that if we are faced with the same situation we can learn from any mistakes they made and make the right decisions.

After reviewing the class's answers to the fog of war, I had similar responses to those of the rest of the class. There were some differences in a minor way but that should be expected because everyone has different experience or beliefs. Age is also a possible reason for difference in answers. While most students are of the traditional age, there is a chance for non-traditional students such as myself that have different belief system. One answer that I was different on when compared to a majority of the class was what our relationship to the United Nations was. However, as I saw in the graphs of the final answers the majority of the group answers were in the middle ground.

Overall, each one of these questions are far more complex to answer with a simple agree or disagree answer format. That is why I think it is difficult for anyone to make a right choice on such complex problems that we face but also those that were made by the leaders in Vietnam.

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Dominoes and McNamara's mindset

by [Kate Adkisson](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 12:21 PM

Max Frankel's article McNamara's Retreat offers background, context, and criticisms to the release of Robert McNamara's book In Retrospect. Frankel questions why McNamara waited for such a long time to release his thoughts in this manner, as his understanding and explanation of what happened would have been appreciated a long time ago. According to the article, McNamara had " 'grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt' with which so many Americans view their institutions and leaders. He knows how much Vietnam contributed to that disaffection; he would never deny the war's terrible damage. But he hopes to prove that the mistakes were 'mostly honest,' even if traceable to a ghastly ignorance of the Vietnamese people, culture and terrain, and the historical forces of that time" (McNamara's Retreat). McNamara tries to justify his mistakes by calling them "mostly honest" in an attempt to make people

justify his mistakes by calling them mostly honest in an attempt to make people empathize with him instead of having hatred toward him and other institutions such as the military or the government.

Frankel brings up an interesting point which I hadn't really pieced together before, which is the U.S' comparison of the "dominoes" of Europe falling to Nazi Germany and the "dominoes" of Indochina falling to Communism. Explaining the mindset of Mr. McNamara and others who grew up in that particular generation, Frankel writes, "Mr. McNamara and his generation came to power convinced that the "appeasement" of Nazi Germany -- the failure to block its early grasp for Europe's dominoes -- had led inevitably to a catastrophic World War II. Averting another such disaster, they were sure, required punishing anything resembling Communist aggression in its earliest stages, when the cost would be tolerable" (McNamara's Retreat). Mr. McNamara was a child when World War I ended. Out of my own interest, I watched the rest of the Fog of War documentary, which provides more background on the character of Mr. McNamara and his thought process. (here is the link for anyone interested <https://vimeo.com/149799416>). In it, somehow he remembers a memory from when he was 2 years old (but he can't remember if he authorized Agent Orange or not.. hmm..) in the year 1918. "My earliest memory is of the city exploding with joy. I remember the tops of the streetcars being crowded with human beings cheering and kissing and screaming. End of World War I, we'd won. But also celebrating the belief of many Americans... we had fought war to end all wars" (Fog of War, 21:00). His generation, as well as the generations after him, believed that the only way to stop violence was with violence. He and others believed in order to stop another World War, the dominoes must be protected. We cannot be mad at these people for their mindset, but we can hold them accountable for their actions, especially if they were war crimes. Humanity makes mistakes, this is a central part of McNamara's 11th lesson., which is you can't change human nature. To be human is to error. We learn from our errors by approaching them with hindsight and criticism. This is what McNamara believes he is doing with his book, with him speaking out, is getting out his truths.

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"...skepticism is essential..."

by [Alysia Knapp](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 7:52 PM

The author of the NYT article, Max Frankel, seems to be pretty sympathetic with McNamara. He says "So why speak now? The main reason, he (McNamara) says, is that he has "grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt" with which so many Americans view their institutions and leaders." Frankel mentions that McNamara "drowned in his sorrow" with his new job at World Bank and also uses words like "guilt" and "agony" but these words are not from quotes by McNamara. The

words like "guilt" and "agency", but these words are not from quotes by McNamara. The article mostly offers the author's own reflections on McNamara's emotions, without confirmation from McNamara. However, Frankel does offer some negative criticism: "Even more disappointing is McNamara's unwillingness to explore the human tragedies and political legacies of this longest American war."

Since Frankel felt this way, I wish he would have not assumed the state of McNamara's emotional turmoil so much. He respects McNamara's view of skepticism, so I think he should have followed it more when writing this article. I feel like we have established in this class that hesitation is necessary when studying history, especially when opinions and biases are involved. So, ironically, we must use McNamara's view of skepticism, even if it is against him. I am not convinced that McNamara reveal all history facts he knew.

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Frankel v McNamara stance...

by [Parker Mann](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 9:43 PM

I think the criticisms of McNamara are valid and he actual brings up similar points to what I wrote in the Fog of War forum. The author points to his dry unforgiving tone and him still trying to defend his actions a quarter century after they occurred, I agree with this and I think Frankel really went in on this near the end of the article. "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?(Frankel, Max)". McNamara seems to try to shift the blame on Presidents he served under as well, and make it seem like he gave correct advice that they did not follow, and he is just trying to clear his name. "he has "grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt" with which so many Americans view their institutions and leaders. He knows how much Vietnam contributed to that disaffection; he would never deny the war's terrible damage. But he hopes to prove that the mistakes were "mostly honest," even if traceable to a ghastly ignorance of the Vietnamese people, culture and terrain, and the historical forces of that time." Here Frankel again picks up on an unapologetic stance of McNamara's. I agree with this and is why I don't think we can count of getting the historical proof from McNamara, and I think he is just too Bias, and untrustworthy.

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Previous historical knowledge affecting understanding of this course..

by [Parker Mann](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 10:10 PM

I would say that these responses have been decently heavily influenced by my participation in this course. I would also say though, that they were influenced as a whole by my taking of AP US History and AP Government in high school. I see the material in this class as a continuation of a pattern that I have seen in the taking of these 3 history courses. It is a pattern of a power struggle in the US of politicians vs the people, and very little of the time the elected politicians seem to-do what is best for those who voted for them. So based on what I have learned while taking this class and other US history classes, I do say it is fair to pass judgement on those who made decisions that came before us. First of all it is fair because, the decisions they made affected the world we live in today, and second of all it is fair because what I have learned about the war and the USA's involvement in it follows the pattern of the USA being a false prophet. I think the survey results paint a similar picture, in that a lot of my peers feel USA political problems concern everyone the most, and that the problems we face today are rooted in history such as the Vietnam War, and are showing themselves today, and you can see the popular results in the surveys connection to the War.

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Re: Previous historical knowledge affecting understanding of this course..

by [Alysia Knapp](#) - Sunday, May 27, 2018, 10:38 PM

This class also an affect on my answers, although not a major one. i definitely thought of all the bombings that occured in Vietnam and Cambodia when I saw the "damage to the global environment will become irreparable" option for question #1. This class probably also had an impact for my response to the United States interfering with other nations' behavior for question #2. Based on the survey results, it seems like my answers were mostly similar to the majority of the class.

I also think it is fair to judge and criticize the leaders of the Vietnam war. While it is good to understand we were not in their shoes and we were not there, their decisions impacted millions of lives then, and now. Based on the belief that we shouldn't judge their decisions at all, then the leaders shouldn't have any criticism of the drafted men or innocent civilians affected by the war. These people could also easily say to the leaders "You weren't there and you don't know what we went through." By judging and analyzing the major decisions of the war, it is possible for us to learn for their mistakes as well as their achievements. I think that's an important part of this class. We study and learn about the circumstances of the decisions of the war, and then we analyze and "judge" them, to possibly learn from them. If we did not judge the leaders in any way, we wouldn't learn from them, therefore making this class, and all history classes, pointless. If we didn't judge

anything, that would mean the world is perfect and has no faults.

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