History 3254: The Vietnam War

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Spring 2022	M,W, F: 1:25–2:15 pm

Spring 2022
Course description and expectations

History 3254 will trace the legacies, record the effects, and make sense of the Vietnam War. In American memory, the Vietnam War has become sanitized and white-washed; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream, we all remember, but most schools don't teach you that it was "broken and eviscerated . . . [by] a society gone mad on war." In this class, students will disentangle the connections between the expansion of the U.S. military power abroad and the restrictions on civil liberties at home. We will explore the roots of U.S. involvement in Vietnam; foreign policy and the Cold War context; experiences of soldiers, veterans, and civilians on all sides of the conflict; class, race, and gender; the relationship between the antiwar movement and Civil Rights Movement; collective memory and American national identity; and the war's legacies and lasting consequences. Content warning: Histories of violence can elicit vastly different responses from students and the public today. The consequences of this history have very *real* impacts on many people who are still alive, some you may know personally. Some of you may be veterans, ROTC, or military members. Others may be the grandchildren of refugees, victims, and survivors. Our lives are inherently shaped by the history of war, sometimes without realizing it.

Despite our differences, at least a few commonalities will bond us in this course: tolerance, collegiality, and professionalism. As the instructor, it is my responsibility to guide our conversations, to foster a sense of civic duty, and to inspire you to question the rhetoric of policy makers and uphold the founding principles of representative democracy. Ideally, this class will become a community formed by critical thought, historical empathy, and acts of kindness and mutual respect. Approach every section as a conversation, one you enter by reading carefully, engaging thoughtfully, and working collaboratively. Given the controversial nature of most of the topics in this class, disagreements and constructive debate is not only expected but it's encouraged—however, all students will be tolerant and respectful of peers and the instructor. Be mindful of how conversations in the abstract have real world implications.

Required Texts

Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides* (New York: Viking, 2003).

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1990). Any edition is fine. E-book available at VT Libraries.

Waging Peace in Vietnam: U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War, edited by Ron Carver, David Cortright, and Barbara Doherty (New York: New Village Press, 2019). E-book available at VT Libraries and chapters available on Canvas.

Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, *The Mountains Sing* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2020).

Major Assignments and Grading

Major assignments will include further details, instructions, and grading criteria. All work should be completed on time. Late work will be subject to a possible penalty. In cases of emergency or unavoidable situations, please contact me—the sooner the better. Reasonable extensions, accommodations, or revisions may be considered upon the student's request. *During health emergencies or other pandemic-related crises, students will be forgiven of penalties, but please email me as soon as it's convenient. Be sure to check Canvas for further details. All major assignments will be uploaded to Canvas and will be run through Turnitin. Excessive late assignments may result in an automatic deduction of grade.

Note: Minor assignments and readings are subject to change. In such case, the instructor will give a timely notice of changes.

The Semester at a Glance

Major Assignments	Total points	Due Date
Discussion (journals, reading quizzes, and group work)	150	
Essay 1	100	Feb. 18
Mid Term Exam	150	Mar 4
Essay 2	150	Apr. 15
Final Project (oral history or un-essay)	200	May 6

Note: Be sure to read all the comments and feedback provided. Please respect a 48-hour moratorium before contacting me regarding a graded assignment. Although I will not discuss individual grades via email or in class during lecture, I will meet with you during office hours or a scheduled appointment via Zoom.

This course is a 3000-level history course. As such, you should plan to spend approximately 8 hours outside of class each week engaged with course materials. This

may consist of reading texts, writing assignments, working on group projects, listening to podcasts, or watching assigned films. (See the Course Schedule below for details).

Requirements
To earn a passing grade for the class:

1. Complete all major assignments.
2. Attend and actively participate in class.
3. Read all assignments before class, and be prepared to discuss readings.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability, inform the instructor as soon as possible to arrange for accommodations, as needed. Maintain communication both with VT Services for Students with Disabilities Services and with the instructor to help ensure academic success in the classroom. For more information on students' rights and responsibilities, see the following: https://ssd.vt.edu/

Attendance

While some of the work in this course will be completed on your own time (asynchronously), I encourage students to participate in the synchronous components as much as possible. Students are expected to be available during the scheduled course hours and must actively contribute during group activities. Some of these class hours will be spent watching documentaries, collaborating, and/or completing assignments.

Your participation grade requires your attendance and active involvement. Excessive absences will result in a reduction of grades. Absences may be automatically excused if mandatory, verified, and documented (*e.g*. athletes, military service, and activities required for classes or scholarships.) Other extenuating circumstances involving health-related or other personal issues will be considered on an individual basis.

On a personal note, as a parent of two young children, I understand that emergencies arise, especially during a time of uncertainty, such as during a pandemic. Communicating with me is key. As soon as possible, please let me know if any situations arise that may affect your participation.

Contacting the Instructor

My contact information is on the first page of the syllabus: jasonhiggins@vt.edu. Feel free to email and schedule an appointment if my regular "office hours" conflict with your schedule. I prefer to meet via Zoom for office hours or requested individual meetings. Please allow me 24 hours to respond during the weekdays. I typically don't answer email in the evenings or during weekends, so plan accordingly. If an emergency situation arises, indicate that in the subject line. Emails should include appropriate content and a professional tone, as well as a subject line, greeting, clear message, and closing.

Expectations of Work and Behavior

Attend class meetings. Be prepared to participate in discussions, to take notes, to ask questions, and to share ideas. Please listen attentively while others are speaking and respond courteously. In order to maintain an environment in which all students feel safe and comfortable expressing their opinions, rude or derogatory comments will not be tolerated. Discussion and debate are encouraged, so long as the participants understand that differing viewpoints are not necessarily wrong viewpoints. *Discussions and critical commentary should be supported with evidence from the readings, texts, or other credible sources*. If any students become disruptive to the learning environment, they may be asked to leave groups or class.

Language and terminology

The main goals of this course are to teach you how to think critically about history and historical memory, to analyze primary sources, and to interpret the past. As such, you will be reading documents created during the era we are studying. Some of these documents use antiquated terms such as "negro," "colored," or worse, including dehumanizing language of Vietnamese people. With the exception of directly quoting a document in your written work, offensive terms should not be used in common discourse. Keep in mind the power of language and be mindful of how it can affect others.

Helpful Tips for Your Success:

- Plan the details of your calendar carefully and schedule major projects accordingly. Readings must be completed before discussions.
- Journals can be an effective way for students to form their thoughts on a topic before the class; (pro-tip: during class, written journals can be an efficient way to engage in class activities, groupwork, and get early feedback on major assignments).
- This class, at times, will be a collaborative in nature, but do not rely on the rest of the group to do the work.
- Be sure to check your email and Canvas regularly. This is the easiest way for me to contact students.
- Make use of the many incredible resources available to you as a student at Virginia Tech, including the Library and the Writing Center.
- Ask questions and communicate clearly.
- Be professional and make good impressions on instructors and peers. Students rely on letters of recommendation for scholarships, internships, and grad school and job applications. I am always willing to support deserving students.
- Be teachable and open to new ideas, especially when historical evidence contradicts your previous understanding of the past and the present. Much of the Vietnam War is misremembered or forgotten altogether.

Calendar of Assignments

Date	Activity	Assignments Due
Week 1: Introductions		
Wed. Jan. 19	Topics: First, a message from Snoop Dogg. Assigned reading: The Syllabus	Quiz 1: the syllabus
Friday, Jan. 21	Topic: Beginning the Search for Answers Assigned readings: 1. Christian G. Appy, "What was the Vietnam War All About?" *New York Times*. 2. "Vietnam by the Numbers Infographic and Timeline" *Oklahoma Humanities Magazine* (31-35) by Jason Higgins[JH1] Further recommendations: Explore photo essay in "The Vietnam War, Part 1: Early Years and Escalation, *The Atlantic* (2015) (Photographs and images) Journal 1: Topic: Who are you? Why are you interested in the Vietnam War? Do you have any personal or family connections to the war? What do you hope to gain from this class? Is there anything else that I should know about you as a student?	Journal 1 Due:
Week 2: From Allies to Enemies: Roots of US involvement in Vietnam		
Monday, Jan. 24	Lecture 3: from Allies to Enemies Assigned readings: 1. Introduction from Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (ix-xvii)	
Wed. Jan. 26	Lecture 4: The Embers of the American War in Vietnam Assigned readings: 1. Christian G. Appy, "Preface," *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides,* (xv-xxvii). Recommended readings: Appy, Ch. 1 "Saving Vietnam," *American Reckoning,* 3-32). Fredrick Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).	
Friday, Jan. 28	Assigned readings: 1. Ho Chi Minh, "Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," (Sept. 2, 1945)	Journal 2:

	2. Christian G. Appy, "History Is Not Made with Ifs"; Henry Prunier, "These were not ragtag farmers."; Vo Nguyen Giap, "The most atrocious conflict in human history." From *Patriots* (35-43)	
Week 3: War Stories		
Mon. Jan. 31	Lecture 5: Creating South Vietnam Assigned reading: 1. "Not the Preferred Way to Commit Suicide," from Stephen Kinzer's *Overthrow* (148-169) Recommended archival sources on the overthrow of Diem; assassination of JFK (JFK Archives):	Give Essay 1 Prompt Reading Quiz Ch 2
Wed. Feb. 2	Lecture 6: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Assigned readings: 1. Appy, Ch. 2 "Aggression," *American Reckoning* (33-63) 2. Begin reading Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried,* chapters: "The Things They Carried," "Love," "Spin," (1-38).	
Friday, Feb. 4	Assigned readings: 1. "You want me to start World War III?" from *Patriots* (112-21) 2. O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, chapters: "On the Rainy River," "Enemies," "Friends," "How to Tell a True War Story," "The Dentist," "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," "Stockings," "Church," "The Man I Killed," "Ambush," "Style," (39-136).	Journal 3
Week 4: Escalation		
Mon. Feb. 7	Lecture 7: Why Are We In Vietnam? Assigned readings: 1. "Dennis Deal, "Man, if we're up against this, it's gonna be a long ass year," *Patriots,* (130-35) 2. O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, "Speaking of Courage," "Notes," "In the Field," "Good Form," "Field Trip," "The Ghost Soldiers," "Night Life," "The Lives of the Dead," (137-246).	Reading Quiz 3
Wed. Feb. 9	Lecture 8: The Terms of Battle Assigned reading: 1. Appy, Ch. 3 "Paper Tigers" from *American Reckoning* (64-90)	
Fri. Feb. 11	Assigned readings:	Lesson on Writing Essays,

	1. "It was questions of manhood, giving up everything you knew" Mike Wong from *Waging Peace in Vietnam* (88-91); 2. Ch 1: Early Resisters, from *Waging Peace in Vietnam*	incorporating primary sources and secondary.
Week 5: LBJ's War		
Mon. Feb. 14 (Valentine's Day)	Lecture 9: The Draft Assigned reading: 1. Appy, Ch. 5 "Our Boys," *American Reckoning* (119-50) 2. Find out: Would your draft number have been called? Recommended reading: Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1993). Amy J. Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Press, 2019). Recommended Music: Creedence Clearwater Revival, "Fortunate Son," Creedence Clearwater Revival, "Run Through the Jungle" John Lee Hooker, "I don't wanna go to Vietnam," Recommended film: "The Draft" in Stories of Service *PBS*	Schedule a tour of the Color of Freedom Exhibit
Wed. Feb. 16	Lecture 10: The Air War Assigned readings: 1. Appy, "The American Way of War" from *American Reckoning* (151-182)	Reading Quiz 4
Fri. Feb. 18	Assigned reading: 1. "Air War," from *Patriots,* selected oral histories of Harlan S. Pinkerton Jr; Luu Huy Chao; and Nguyen Quang Sang; Fred Branfon (pgs. 210-220) 2. Read the selected oral histories of Skip Delano, "Since I had been in Vietnam, I had every right to comment on it"; Terry Irvin, "They hauled me off singing 'America the Beautiful," and Lamont Steptoe, "Writing helped turn me from that violence" in Ch. 2 "Writing for Peace," in *Waging Peace in Vietnam* Recommended sources: Explore the digital collections of GI Presses with over 900 periodicals:	First Draft of Essay 1 due for Peer-review Turn in as a Journal

	https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll8	
Week 6: Breaking the Silence		
Mon. Feb. 21	Watch documentary in class: Watch documentary in class: "Sir, No Sir" Assigned readings: 1. Ch 5: "Marching for Peace" from *Waging Peace in Vietnam* Recommended reading: "Anne Simon Auger" oral history from *Piece of My Heart* (1985)	Essay 1 Due
Wed. Feb. 23	Lecture 11: African Americans in the Vietnam War Assigned reading: 1. "Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break Silence," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., April 4, 1967 2. "From Civil Rights to Antiwar," in *Patriots* (142-45)s Recommended readings: James Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (NYU Press, 1997). Kimberley Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012).	
Fri. Feb. 25	Assigned reading: 1. Ch. 8, "Uprisings and Rebellions" from *Waging Peace in Vietnam* (99-116) Assigned media: 1. Marvin Gaye, "What's Going On?" and Jimi Hendrix, "Machine Gun" 2. Watch clip: Muhammad Ali Draft Refusal	**Prepare for Mid-Term (Jeopardy Activity** **Journal Due**
Week 7: The Turning Point		

Mon. Feb. 28 Last day to opt for pass/fail	*Sir, No Sir!* continued. **Listen:** "Conflict in Vietnam and at Home" speech by Robert F. Kennedy, March 18, 1968. Further Reading: *Washington Post article on Walter Cronkite and Vietnam War* CBS: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/remembering-1968-the-tet-offensive-photographer-john-olson/	
Wed. Mar. 2		Mid-Term Exam
Fri. Mar. 4	Prepare for class while watching concerts: Monterrey Music Festival, 1967 Music: Country Joe & the Fish, "Vietnam Song" The Mamas and the Papas, "California Dreamin'" Jimi Hendrix, National Anthem, Woodstock 1969	Music analysis activity
Spring Break		
Mon. Mar. 7		
Wed. Mar. 9		
Fri. Mar. 11		
Week 8: The War at Home		
Mon. Mar. 14	Lecture 12: Tet, the Assassination of King, and the 1968 elections 1. *The Nation, "Martin Luther King Jr.: 50 Years Later"* 2. Watch "The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr," *AP: https://youtu.be/FZm56WUXe9E* Recommended:	Reading Quiz

	"The Promised Land, (1967-68)" *PBS* (2006): https://fod-infobase-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=58641 "Exceptional Victims" by Christian Appy, *Boston Review*	
Wed. Mar. 16	Lecture 13: Antiwar Movement Assigned reading: 1. Appy, Ch. 7 "The War at Home" from *American Reckoning* (183-217)	
Fri. Mar. 18	Coalition of Antiwar Protesters Watch in Class: Berkeley in the Sixties Assigned Reading 1. "Antiwar Escalations" from *Patriots* Recommendations: Explore archive collections: Free Speech Movement Digital Archive, Bancroft Library, Berkeley University of Washington, "Mapping American Social Movements Project," SDS Chapters, 1962-69	Journal: how are student protests portrayed in national memory of the war? How are students depicted in popular films, for example? What were the goals and motivations of students? Are there any connections between social protests in the 1960s and protests today?
Week 9: Gender in the 1960s Start reading Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, *The Mountains Sing* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2020). Helpful resources: **Discover Characters' Names** * **Family Tree** * **Historical Timeline** * **Author Essay** *		
Mon. Mar. 21	Lecture 14: The Roots of Revolutionary Nationalism in Vietnam Assigned reading: 1. Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai *The Mountains Sing* (1-40)	Give Essay 2 Prompt
Wed. Mar. 23	Lecture 15: "Even the Women Must Fight" 1. *The Mountains Sing*, (41-96) Recommended readings: Heather M. Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* Kara Dixon Vuic, *The Girls Next Door: Bringing the Home Front to the Front Lines*	
Fri. Mar. 25	Assigned readings:	Journal: if you could ask the

	1. The oral histories of Vu Thi Vinh, "The Truong Son Jungle Gave Us Life," and Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy, "We came home hairless with ghostly white eyes," drom Christian Appy's *Patriots* (103-106) 2. "Sylvia Lutz Holland oral history ("We saved their lives, but what life?") and Nancy Smoyer oral history ("I can't believe the Donut Dollies got us to do that.") from Christian Appy, *Patriots*	author of *The Mountains Sing* one question what would it be?
Week 10: Nixon's Vietnam War		
Mon. Mar. 28	Lecture 15: Nixon's War Assigned readings: 1. *The Mountains Sing*, (99-148) 2. Oral history of Tran Luong "I never got there in time to capture an American Pilot," from *Patriots* (520-21)	
Wed. Mar. 30	Lecture 16: My Lai Assigned readings: 1. *The Mountains Sing*, (149-198)	
Fri. Apr. 1 (April Fool's Day)	Assigned readings: 1. Ch 6 "Exposing War Crimes" from *Waging Peace in Vietnam*" (59-84) 2. Oral histories of Larry Colburn and Michael Bernhardt, from *Patriots*	
Week 11: From Cambodia to Kent State		
Mon. Apr. 4	Discussion of the Mountains Sing Assigned readings: 1. *The Mountains Sing*, (199-253)	Journal: Imagine you are a historical actor and discuss your perspective and life during the Vietnam War-era. Who are you? What are your views? What are your experiences?
Wed. Apr. 6	Watch in class the documentary: *Hearts and Minds* (1974) Assigned readings: 1. *The Mountains Sing*, (255-343)	

Fri. Apr. 8	Assigned readings: 1. From Christian G. Appy's *Patriots:* "From Cambodia to Kent State"; "Tom Grace" (384-89); 2. "Ohio" written by Neil Young, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young Recommended reading: Thomas M. Grace, *Kent State: Death and Dissent in the Long Sixties*	Peer-Review: first draft Essay 2
Week 12: The 1970s		
Mon. Apr. 11	Watch in class: *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers:* https://vt.kanopy.com/video/most-dangerous-man-america Assigned readings: 1. "Watergate" from *Patriots* (393-412) 2. Listen to Episode 1 "The Lying Machine" from the Daniel Ellsberg Podcast, "The Ground Truth Project"	Oral History Questions Due
Wed. Apr. 13	Lecture 18: "Peace with Honor" (from Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*) Explore the history of campus protest at Virginia Tech *Over 100 students at Virginia Tech protested in response to the May 4th killings of students at Kent State. This was the largest antiwar protest at VT. President Hahn had state police arrest 100 students and temporarily suspended them. There were a few oral history interviews recorded on this event. There is a digital history reader on the protests, including some newspaper articles from the *The Collegiate Times*. Paul Quigley and Jenni Gallagher created a digital exhibit of protests during the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War.	
Fri. Apr. 15	Assigned readings: 1. "The Merriment was Short-Lived" from *Patriots* (508-11) 2. Tran Ngoc Chau "The curriculum was designed to intoxicate us," *Patriots* (475-80) Discussion Activity: Interviewing Survivors of Trauma	Essay 2 Due
Week 13: The End is Near		
Mon. Apr. 18	Lecture 19: The Fall of Saigon Assigned readings: 1. "Collapse" from *Patriots* (493-507)	Give Final Unessay Assignment Prompt

	Recommended reading: Amanda Demmer's *After Saigon's Fall* (23-58)	
Wed. Apr. 20 Tentative grades due	Lecture 20: After the Fall Assigned reading: 1. Loung Ung: "People just disappeared and you didn't say anything" *Patriots* (526-28) Recommended reading: Amanda Demmer, Chapter 2, in *After Saigon's Fall*	
Fri. Apr. 22	Assigned reading: 1. Tran Ngoc Chau "The curriculum was designed to detoxicate us," *Patriots* (475-80)	Research Day for Unessay Assignment
Week 14: Legacies, Refugees, and Lessons		
Mon. Apr. 25	Lecture 21: The Vietnam War in American Memory Assigned reading: 1. Appy, *American Reckoning*, Ch. 8 (221-50). Recommended readings: Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, Ed Martini, *Agent Orange: History, Science, and the Politics of Uncertainty,* Ch. 5 "All Those Others So Unfortunate: Vietnam and the Global Legacies of the Chemical War.	Journal: Brainstorm Un-Essay idea
Wed. Apr. 27	Lecture 22: Vietnam Veterans Movement and Memorialization Recommended Reading: "The Discourse of Healing and the 'Black Gash of Shame': The Design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," from Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*	Work on Un-essay
Fri. Apr. 29		No class: work on Un-essay
Week 15: The End		
Mon. May 2	Lecture 23: No More Vietnams: the Powell Doctrine and the Global War on Terror Assigned reading: 1. Appy, Ch. 10 "No More Vietnams," *American Reckoning* (275-304) Recommended reading: Patrick Hagopian, "Ch 1: Never Again: The Vietnam Syndrome and American Foreign Policy" in *the Vietnam War in American Memory*	

Wed. May 4	Classes End (a day for reflection) Assigned reading: 1. "Confronting the Legacies of War," from *Waging Peace in Vietnam* Recommended: Appy, Ch. 11, “Who We Are” from *American Reckoning* (305-335)	Journal Due
Fri. May 6		Unessay Due 1:05-3:05
Final Grades May 13 by 5:00 p.m		