**HUMANITIES CORE**

**Professor Linda Vo**

**WEEK 5a: Imperialism, Interventions & Vietnam**

**WEEK 5b: (De)Constructing Refugee Narratives**

**Spring 2019**

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS**

1. What are some of the similarities and differences between how the U.S. became involved in shaping the history of the Philippines and Vietnam?
2. Discuss the similarities between the ideologies and motivations for French colonialism and U.S. imperialism in Vietnam. How did racialization processes impact U.S. engagement in Vietnam? What is meant by the expression, “the Philippines was America’s first Vietnam”?
3. What factors shaped the historiography of the Vietnam War and its aftermath? Consider who gets to write history and who is the intended audience.
4. Critique the ideological, political, and economic reasons for U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. What are the justifications or rationale for these imperialist interventions? How do these policies impact colonized or decolonizing nations, such as Vietnam, seeking independence and self-determination?
5. How is the Cold War linked to the Vietnam War? How is this related to the domino theory and the policy of containment of communism and why is this important for U.S. justification of the war?
6. Beyond the basic statistics of the Vietnam War, what are some of the rippling effects for military personnel, civilians, and the environment that occurred during this civil war and long after this war ended? What role did technology and the military-industrial complex have in this war and what impact did guerilla warfare tactics have on military personnel and civilians?
7. What kind of geopolitical tensions can lead nations to engage in a proxy war and why do “superpower” nations use proxy wars as a military strategy? Who pays the price for these proxy wars, especially civil wars? What factors should be considered when we debate the question, “Who won and who lost this war?”
8. Discuss the concept of iconography and how the images produced during the Vietnam War by the U.S. media and military impacted the perceptions of the war? In what ways did photographs and photo journalists shape public and political perceptions about the Vietnam war? Media coverage of this war is often regarded as “uncensored,” but how is it also regarded as “censored”?
9. During the Vietnam War, how did television technology change how war was presented to the American public and what does the expression “living room war” mean?
10. In the context of the Vietnam War era, what power did photographs have in capturing or conveying the impact of warfare and what cautions should we consider when thinking about how photographs reflect the truth? How can photographs be manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally?
11. Why and how did the perspective on the Vietnam War change over time and why was the American public so divided about this war? What were some of the views of those who were anti-war and how might this contrast with those who were supportive of the war?
12. How did different U.S. racial groups perceive the war and how did some of these anti-war activist groups connect U.S. imperialism abroad with their own treatment in America?
13. What are the conditions that led to the displacement of the Vietnamese and how did this impact their internal migration within Vietnam and later their exodus out of the country? Consider the contradictions of the U.S. military contributing to the conditions of displacement and also presenting themselves as “rescuing” and resettling the refugees.
14. What is the difference between a displaced or stateless person seeking asylum and a person who is officially classified as a “refugee”? Why is this categorization significant and how can political factors shape these decisions?
15. What is “compassion fatigue” in regards to refugees and how did this impact the sponsorship or admissions of refugees? What are the political, ethical, and moral debates over who is responsible for resettling refugees? What are the humanitarian considerations involved in these policies?
16. Analyze the interconnections between U.S. perceptions of Vietnamese during the war and how this affected the reception of Vietnamese refugees in America. Why did Vietnamese refugees want to come to the U.S.? Critique the U.S. policy to disperse the refugees across the country during the resettlement process.
17. Evaluate the complexities of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting Vietnamese American life stories and histories? What are some of the challenges of collecting these oral histories or memories, especially if their lives are affected by war, violence, trauma, and displacement?
18. What are some of the internal differences within the refugee population that are often overlooked in documenting and representing their histories? Even when Vietnamese Americans present or archive their own histories, how can some stories be erased or overlooked, while other narratives are more prevalent?
19. Consider the role of the archives in inspiring playwright Qui Nguyen to write his play *Vietgone*, followed by *Poor Yella Rednecks*. Discuss how he combines historical aspects and fictionalized accounts to tell his family’s story in *Poor Yella Rednecks*. Analyze how he uses varying artistic genres to convey a contrasting or unconventional version of the refugee narrative and the complexities of incorporating challenging material in a play. How do some of the main themes as well as the characters in the play present a counternarrative to the dominant cultural or political images of the Vietnamese during the war? In his play, how does he contest “rescue” or “model minority” narratives of Vietnamese refugees?