



VIETNAM IN POP CULTURE

Unfortunately, many young people today base their knowledge of the Vietnam War on what they see in movies and other media from that period and during the ambivalent post-war years, according to USD professor Steve Bucklin. There were films such as 1978's "The Deer Hunter" (above) that depicted Vietnam War veterans as troubled psychological casualties unable to cope with life in a post-war world. In the 1980s, some politicians made an effort to "rehabilitate" the Vietnam legacy, resulting in such pop culture movies as the popular but cartoonish Rambo series (below) starring Sylvester Stallone.



Taking Vietnam To The Classroom

College And High School Educators Work To Make The Vietnam War Relevant To 21st Century Students

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A difficult a subject like the Vietnam War is to explain, it's important to educate today's youth on it and the different ways there is to view it. Two local college history professors and a high school teacher spoke to the *Press & Dakotan* about their teaching methods on the war and what the students learn.

RICH LOFTHUS, MOUNT MARTY COLLEGE HISTORY PROFESSOR

Every other year, Lofthus teaches the class "Korean and Vietnam Wars."

"There isn't a lot of pre-knowledge about Vietnam since, from the students' perspective, it happened a long time ago," he said.

The class begins by Lofthus discussing three ways the war can be interpreted: American involvement in Vietnam being 1) a noble cause, 2) a mistake or 3) a shameful venture. Throughout the semester, the students read various books, listen to several speakers and watch many films to help determine their viewpoint on the war. The final essay for the Vietnam portion requires students to pick one of the three interpretations and explain why they believe it's the most accurate view of the war.

Lofthus uses a textbook by George Herring titled "America's Longest War," which focuses more on the political history of the Vietnam War. The students then choose another war-related book to read on their own that is linked to research that they want to do for their final paper. Lofthus shows Vietnam documentaries in class, including CNN's most recent "Decade" documentaries that include episodes related to Vietnam. He also uses an episode titled "The Last Days in Vietnam" from the PBS series "The American Experience" that chronicles the events of American withdrawal from the war.

A major feature of the course is the students having to interview a veteran of the Vietnam or Korean wars. The person doesn't have to be a soldier, but has to be someone of that time period that was involved in some way, from being a wartime nurse to participating in an anti-war protest.

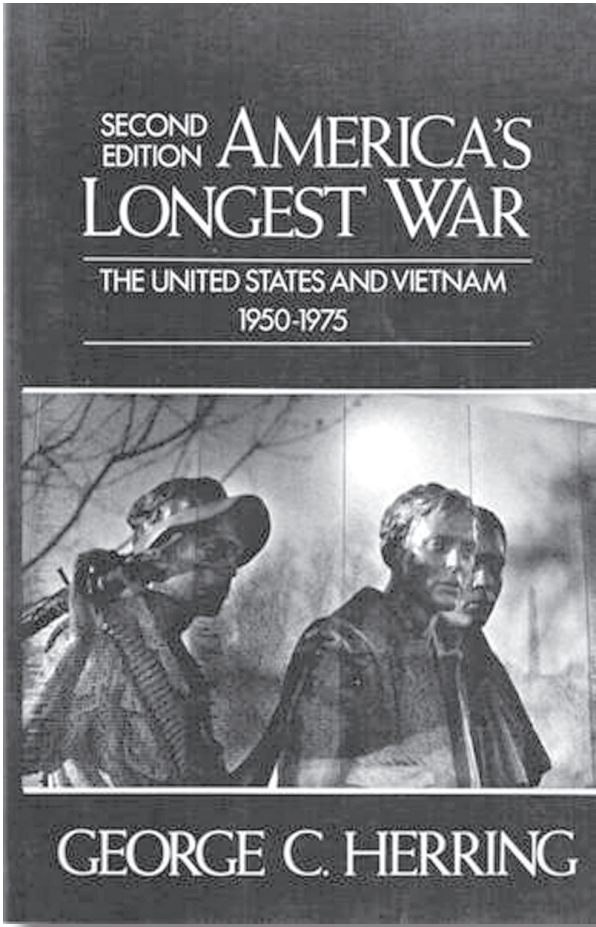
"For most people, it's a real eye-opener," said Lofthus. "I think students gain an appreciation for how complex an event like that is, and how there's different ways of looking at it. Hopefully, one of the lessons they take from the course is humility in that it's not easy to know what the right view is."

Interviewing the war veterans is also beneficial to the students' learning experience.

"They're often going to discover that someone's personal experience with the war might seem very different from what they've been reading about in textbooks," Lofthus said. "They have to compare and contrast people's personal experiences with the ways scholars have about the war."

STEVEN BUCKLIN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA HISTORY PROFESSOR

Bucklin has two classes that focus on Vietnam: one is a traditional lecture class called "The Vietnam War" and the other



COURTESY IMAGE

Both Rich Lofthus of Mount Marty College and Steve Bucklin of the University of South Dakota use George C. Herring's "America's Longest War" as their primary textbook in their Vietnam history classes. There is also supplemental reading as part of the courses.

a film-based class called "The Vietnam War in Film." The film-focused class "attempts to deconstruct the stereotypes that are forwarded by Hollywood with regard to Vietnam, the war, veterans, Vietnamese people, etc."

From Bucklin's experience, most students' knowledge of Vietnam comes from popular war movies.

"Most of them have a basic understanding of the war that's based on movies, whether it's the awful Rambo series or something like 'Full Metal Jacket,'" he said.

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Back row, left to right: Chad Gordon, Roger Smith,
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