*INTRODUCTION TO*

HISTORY 412 SEMINAR (R)

**“THE VIETNAM WAR: ISSUES AND INTERPRETATIONS”**

PROFESSOR ARTHUR WALDRON

Fall 2017 Tuesdays 1:30-4:30

**Summary***: The Vietnam war was a great watershed in twentieth century history that rearranged geo-politics while changing the United States through dissent and social unrest. Frankly, things have never quite recovered. It was a catastrophic and humiliating defeat, but that is all the more reason to study it, for failure often has more to teach us than success. This course provides a framework of free discussion and basic readings—ranging from battlefield memoirs to Graham Greene’s great novel* ***The Quiet American****—in which to pursue research on whatever aspect of the war they choose, from strategy to cinema and the arts.*

For every Tuesday meeting we will have some reading, to provide a common time line and set of issues. As the semester progresses, students will make informal presentations about their work. This is a “Research Seminar” which means a 15-20 page paper on a topic you choose yourself. This can be the most enjoyable and interesting part of the course.

**Requirements:**  Participation, a presentation, and a paper.

**Staff:** Arthur Waldron. Professor Waldron is an Asian specialist who for more than thirty years has been knocking around the region. His specialty is China. To Vietnam, however, he has made two long visits, one in 1974 during the “ceasefire” to Saigon and environ, and another, more than thirty years later to Hanoi, capital of a united country, where he spent several weeks with his first PhD, then the colonel who was serving as Washington’s highest militaryliaison with the Vietnamese government, an expert who fought in the war, then became a military attaché He has been to every province, is a good man in a fire-fight, and also an accomplished scholar, professor at the Marine Corps University, who has written one book with another forthcoming.

**Readings**: These are not fixed as of now.

We will start with a look at the Empire of Vietnam that lasted a millennium, producing a uniquely refined and pure culture. Then we turn to the century of French colonialism and its end in 1954, which was followed by an invasion of South Vietnam from the north, through Laos. American policy was both arrogant and uninformed, converting a protracted loss (1955-1975) into what could easily have been a relatively bloodless success. That process we trace in its many strands. Finally we spend some time on contemporary Vietnam, on how the war is now understood, remembered, and memorialized, as well as how the country seeks to advance. And not least, without removing our focus from Vietnam, we assess how the United States has been changed.

*Since 1975 when the War ended, the Vietnamese have released massive amounts of hitherto secret material.* ***This has led to a fundamental shift in our entire understanding of the war. What some of us were certain was true in 1975 now turns out to be utterly false.***

Readings will not be a burden. Here is a bibliography—NOT A READING LIST-from which many will be drawn.

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