



Vietnam Resources

Spring 2003

CURRICULA

Here are some of the curricula I've found most useful (Some of the best materials are out of print but you may still be able to locate them):

The Lessons of the Vietnam War, Center for Social Studies Education, [3857 Willow Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15234; 412-341-1967] 1988. The most extensive curricular treatment available of the war in Vietnam. Twelve units cover topics ranging from "Introduction to Vietnam: Land, History and Culture," to "How the War Was Reported." Some excellent materials. However, the bulk of it reads something like a college textbook. The curriculum ideas are uneven. Nonetheless, a worthwhile resource. Also available from the Center is a video which I have not seen: *Teaching the Vietnam War: Classroom Strategies*.

Teaching the Vietnam War, William Griffen and John Marciano, Allanheld, Osmun, Montclair, NJ, 1979. Actually, despite its title, this is not really a book about teaching the Vietnam War, but, as indicated in its subtitle is "a critical examination of school texts and an interpretive comparative history utilizing the Pentagon Papers and other documents." Sounds academic, but it's a very useful critique of the frameworks of U.S. history texts, and at the same time an engaging alternative history of the war.

The Vietnam Era: A Guide to Teaching Resources, Indochina Curriculum Group, Cambridge, MA, 1978. Filled with teaching ideas, suggested short stories and historical readings, as well as a detailed bibliography of media. I found this guide indispensable as I was assembling a curriculum on the Vietnam War. Although out of print, if you can find a copy, it is still tremendously useful.

Vietnam Curriculum (four volumes: "Introductory Units," "History and Issues of the War," "Impact of the War," "American Attitudes and Values"), Boston Area Teaching Project, New York Review of Books, 1968. Detailed lesson plans and student readings on all aspects of the war, in a loose-leaf format. Especially useful in prompting students to think about American attitudes and the war. Out of print.

"**Teaching the War**," Marilyn Young, in *Unwinding the Vietnam War: From War into Peace*, by Reese Williams, Real Comet Press, Seattle, 1987. A short, provocative essay describing a college teacher's thoughts on 25 years of teaching the Vietnam War.

VIDEOS

Vietnam: A Television History. PBS, 1983. Other than the first installment, mentioned in my article, I don't especially recommend this 13-part series. A seemingly disinterested narrator helps to hide the episodes' underlying perspective of a benevolent if misguided U.S. foreign policy. It fails to include those analysts who saw U.S. intervention as part of a pattern of global military, economic, and cultural domination. For an incisive critique, see: "Television Wars: Representations of the Vietnam War in Television Documentaries," by Stephen Vlastos, *Radical History Review* 36, 1986.

Remember My Lai (Sometimes distributed under the title, *Four Days in My Lai*) (60 min.) First aired as a PBS *Frontline*, this is perhaps the most powerful video I show on Vietnam. It tells the story of the My Lai massacre from the standpoint of Vietnamese witnesses and U.S. participants. Left out of the My Lai myth are the stories of the U.S. soldiers who refused to participate and even resisted the massacre. These stories are included here. My students don't generally respond very well to

documentaries. This one they can't take their eyes off of. Highly recommended.

Hearts and Minds (112 min.) An evocative, often startling, mix of interviews and newsreel footage makes this an enormously useful classroom resource. Also, because it includes images beginning with the end of World War II, it makes it a good video to build off some of the analysis students gain from the role play in the accompanying article. Despite numerous snippets of useful descriptions of the U.S. conduct in Vietnam, as historian Marilyn Young points out, the film fails to offer a "daylight explanation" for the origins of the war.

Platoon (120 min.) A gripping and grizzly U.S. soldier's-eye view of the ground war in Vietnam. Despite its unromantic portrayal of U.S. war aims and conduct, it may tend to reinforce the "inscrutable enemy" stereotype. It offers no insights into Vietnamese society, but then neither does any other Hollywood film that I'm aware of. Nonetheless, it is a powerful portrait of life in one fictional U.S. platoon in Vietnam in the late 1960s.

Breaker Morant (115 min.) This feature film about the Australian role in the turn of the century Boer War in South Africa raises relevant issues about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. It's a metaphor for Australia's little-known role in Vietnam, as well as the U.S. role. Three Australians are tried for war crimes against white Afrikaner civilians. The film poses questions about the culpability of individuals caught up in the evil enterprise of "empire building."

Teacher colleagues I respect have found several other videos useful: *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Coming Home*, and *Go Tell the Spartans*. Avoid *The Deer Hunter*, *Hamburger Hill*, and *Heaven and Earth*; excerpts of the *Rambo* films can be useful to critique the anti-communist premises of U.S. involvement.

Seeing Red (100 min.) (mentioned in the accompanying article.) Available from New Day Films - 22D Hollywood Ave., Hohokus, NJ 07423; 201-652-6590.

Until someone makes a comprehensive film on the anti-war movement in the United States, these will have to do:

Berkeley in the Sixties (117 min.) (Social Studies School Service - 800-421-4246) The film focuses on the Free Speech Movement, the anti-war/anti-draft movement, the Black Panther Party, and People's Park, in that order. The film is not nearly as strong once it moves on to the Black Panthers, but the segment on organizing against the Vietnam War could be easily excerpted for use in class. Participant interviews combined with newsreel footage reveal the commitment, bravery, and vision of anti-war protesters.

Vietnam: The War at Home (88 min.) (Also available from Social Studies School Service) A somewhat slow-moving but meticulous documentary about the anti-war movement at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I've had mixed success using the film in class. On the one hand, the slow pace allows an audience to appreciate the building rage and broadening critique of the anti-war protesters. However, the large number of interviews keeps students at a bit of an emotional distance from participants. Nonetheless, a very useful film.

Supplement either one of these films with pp. 474-492 in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (HarperCollins, 1980.) Zinn's account is a fine, readable overview of the breadth and imagination of the anti-war movement, both inside as well as outside the U.S. military.

— *Bill Bigelow*

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