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### Instructor Bios



**Cody J. Billock** is a doctoral candidate at Ohio University specializing in the history of the Vietnam War. His dissertation, "Cold War Citadel: Huế & the Global Vietnamese Civil War," employs the Vietnamese city of Huế to argue that the 3 decades of war between 1945-1975 was one defined by continuous conflict between communist and anti-communist groups. Billock has proficiency in French, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

**Gary Kappel** is a Professor of History, Emeritus, at Bethany College. He holds a BA in English from Bethany College and a MA and PhD in European History from WVU. During his time at Bethany he taught a wide range of courses in European, military, and social and intellectual history. In 2003 he accompanied a group of students to Vietnam. He recently completed work on a documentary film about inboard hydroplanes.



**Chester Pach** is a Professor of History at Ohio Univ. He has an A.B. from Brown and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Northwestern. Pach specializes in the history of U.S. involvement in world affairs, especially TV coverage. He is completing a book, *The Presidency of Ronald Reagan* for the U. Press of Kansas. His articles on the Vietnam War have appeared in *The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War* and the *NY Times*.

**James Siekmeier** received his PhD in History from Cornell, specializing in the history of U.S. foreign relations in Latin America. He has taught at colleges and universities from Washington, D.C., to Bolivia, on two Fulbright Grants. He compiled the *American Republics* volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the US Series*, the official documentary history of US foreign policy put out by the US State Department. Currently, he is a Professor of History at WVU.



**Daniel Weimer** is an attorney who received his Juris Doctor (J.D.) from the Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne Univ., with a concentration in environmental law. Prior to working in the legal field, he was a professor of history at then Wheeling Jesuit University, where he taught courses on the Vietnam War. He earned his Ph.D. from Kent State University and is the author of multiple publications on U.S. foreign policy, environmental history, and drug control.



**Hal Gorby** is Teaching Associate Prof. of History and Dir. of Undergrad Studies at WVU. He teaches courses on WV, Appalachian, and American Immigration History, and is the 2020-21 recipient of the Eberly College's Outstanding Teacher award and the University's Nicholas Evans Excellence in Advising Award. His book, *Wheeling's Polonia: Reconstructing Polish Community in a West Virginia Steel Town* was published by WVU Press, winning the Oskar Halecki Prize in 2022, for the best book on the Polish American experience.



For more info about the People's Univ. *The Vietnam War* please email the library at [lunchwithbooks@yahoo.com](mailto:lunchwithbooks@yahoo.com), or call us at 304-232-0244.

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# THE VIETNAM WAR

## Spring 2025

PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY  
THE VIETNAM WAR  
APRIL 3 - MAY 22  
OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

April 30, 2025 will mark 50 years since the Fall of Saigon. In remembrance of that fateful date, we will explore the history of the Vietnam War from French colonization through American involvement and withdrawal. Around 36,578 West Virginians served in the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1958 to 1975.



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# The People's University

## THE VIETNAM WAR

Thursdays at 7 PM in the Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium ~ Full Schedule:

### **APRIL 3: CLASS 1 REVOLUTION—FRENCH COLONIALISM AND THE INDOCHINA WAR (1946-1954)**

In this introductory prologue, we will examine the history and geography of Vietnam prior to French colonization; the process of French colonization through World War II, including the rise of Ho Chi Minh; the First Indochina War 1946-54, including increasing US involvement, Cold War complications, etc.; and the Geneva Conference and Partition.

**Instructor: Dr. Gary Kappel, Bethany Emeritus**

### **APRIL 10: CLASS 2 THE US GETS INVOLVED — (1955-1964)**

With the first U.S. military assistance to the French in 1950, a generation-long commitment to anti-communist nation-building project in South Vietnam began. After the French defeat at Dienbienphu in 1954, the US engaged in an authoritarian modernization program, pumping millions of dollars of aid into S. Vietnam, supporting the unpopular and autocratic, S. Vietnamese leader Ngô Đình Diệm. After S. Vietnamese generals deposed, and killed, Diem in a 1963 coup, South Vietnamese national politics devolved into instability. The U.S. then militarily escalated the War in S. Vietnam. The U.S. escalation simultaneously attempted to prevent the infiltration of N. Vietnamese communist forces from the North; contain a pro-communist insurgency in the South; and prevent the implosion of the S. Vietnamese government.

**Instructor: Dr. Dr. Gary Kappel**

### **APRIL 17: CLASS 3 THE GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT (1964)**

Starting in 1964, U.S. and anticommunist S. Vietnamese military entered into N. Vietnam, attempting to prevent the infiltration of the communist N. Vietnamese into S. Vietnam. These efforts attempted to destabilize the N. Vietnamese military effort to absorb S. Vietnam. The secret S. Vietnamese and U.S. deployment was named Operation Plan 34A, (OPLAN-34A). As part of the Plan, U.S. ships were stationed off the coast of N. Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tonkin, monitoring N. Vietnamese military action. Even though LBJ and his top military officials knew that the evidence for attacks on U.S. ships was sketchy, they used a N. Vietnamese attack on a U.S. ship in the Gulf in early Aug. 1964 to ask the U.S. Congress for a “blank check” to escalate the U.S. war effort in S. Vietnam. Congress agreed. Abetted by a perceived mandate from a landslide Presidential victory in Nov. 1964, Johnson embarked on massive U.S. military escalation, thought necessary to contain communism. Over the course of nine years, Johnson and Richard M. Nixon ordered about 8.7 million U.S. military and civilian personnel to S. Vietnam.

**Instructor: Dr. James F. Siekmeier, WVU**

### **APRIL 24: CLASS 4 BODY COUNT — MAJOR US INVOLVEMENT AND THE TẾT OFFENSIVE (1965-1968)**

In March 1965, President LBJ ordered the first U.S. combat troops to Vietnam. Three years later, there were more than a half million Americans fighting in Southeast Asia. This presentation will examine how and why LBJ escalated the war and the difficulties U.S. forces encountered. It will also examine how reporters covered America's first television war—the first time that TV coverage had a critical effect on public understanding of a mili-

tary conflict and on a president's ability to build popular support for a war. The Johnson administration's effort to “sell” progress in Vietnam collapsed in early 1968 with the Tết Offensive, leading to the president's stunning announcement that he would not seek reelection. This presentation will explain how Johnson's presidency became a casualty of the Vietnam War.

**Instructor: Dr. Chester Pach, Ohio University**

### **MAY 1: CLASS 5 BACKLASH—THE US ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT (1964-1973)**

The typical image of the anti-war movement is of student and hippie protestors. But the antiwar movement included not just students, but also labor unions, church groups, civil rights activists, suburban housewives, and Vietnam veterans. This class will explore the various forms of protests, the growth of the antiwar movement as the war escalated, and whether the antiwar movement helped end the war.

**Instructor: Dr. Dan Weimer**

### **MAY 8: CLASS 6 VIETNAMIZATION — PLANNED US WITHDRAWAL (1969-1972)**

In the aftermath of the 1968 Tết Offensive, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) launched a comprehensive mobilization of South Vietnamese society to counter North Vietnamese incursions. Known as “Vietnamization”, this “General Mobilization,” expanded the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to over one million soldiers. The lecture will explore the military strategies employed by the ARVN and the United States to disrupt North Vietnamese supply lines, including the invasions of Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971 and their controversial “Phoenix program” to eradicate the Communist Party infrastructure in South Vietnam. The discussion will also focus on the diplomatic landscape during this pivotal period, including President Richard Nixon's so-called “Nixon Doctrine.” Unlike older scholarship that centers on the US and heavily relies on English-language sources, this lecture adopts a “Vietnam-centric” approach.

**Instructor: Cody J. Billock, PHD Candidate at Ohio University**

### **MAY 15: CLASS 7 THE SPRING OFFENSIVE TO THE FALL OF SAIGON & RISE OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (1972-1976)**

This lecture will examine the final episode of the Vietnamese Civil War, focusing on the period from the Spring Offensive to the reunification of Vietnam and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). Often overlooked by American historians due to the diminished role of the US after its military disengagement, this episode is crucial to understanding the nature and conclusion of the war.

**Instructor: Cody J. Billock, PHD Candidate at Ohio University**

### **MAY 22: LEGACY: WHEELING AND WEST VIRGINIA IN THE VIETNAM WAR**

Our final class will focus on the war years here in West Virginia and Wheeling, which came during a period of key transition for the Friendly City and the Mountain State. The state's coal industry saw an uptick in production and over 30,000 West Virginians joined or were drafted during the conflict. At the same time, the war years witnessed tensions statewide, as West Virginians organized a variety of social causes, driven by the activism of the War on Poverty at home. Wheeling serves as an instructive microcosm of the war years, as many locals served in Southeast Asia, and others from local colleges and various social classes protested the war.

**Instructor: Dr. William Hal Gorby, WVU**