The book *America’s Longest War* is a stimulating and thought provoking book about the entirety of the Vietnam War. Herring explains in detail the causes and effects, the evolution of foreign and domestic policies, and the historical events leading into the Vietnam War and afterwards. Herring examines the nuance of the Vietnam war and offers in explicit detail the tensions that arose amid the war, and the nations that seemingly influenced the Vietnam War the most, whether that be in an undesirable or desirable manner. Throughout Herring’s book it becomes clear that the Vietnam War occurred due to the colonialism ideology of the French and the effort to keep communism contained by the United States.\(^1\) Herring’s narrative of the Vietnam War extensively and thoroughly expounds on the historical occurrences with respectable sources and nuance due to the declassification of materials from the era. Although Herring brings in nuance and provides historical sources, he does not always give enough information, and in some cases fails to take a stance one way or another. In all, *America’s Longest War* is an excellent book in giving a concise narrative of the Vietnam War, but it fails to analyze the era through a persuasive argument.

*America’s Longest War* is the fifth edition, and because of this Herring has updated his Introduction in the book.\(^2\) Due to the updates a clear thesis is difficult to identify. The thesis of a book is a vital and important structure; without an explicit objective there is little analysis that occurs. Herring’s elimination of a clear thesis subsequently produces a book that is more like a narrative of the history of the Vietnam War, rather than an analytical and persuasive perspective that could have deepened the understanding of *America’s Longest War*. Notably, Herring

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2 *America’s Longest War*, x.
addresses that the war was generated through time, but he could have explored with more nuance the ‘Opinion and Politics’ section. Herring uses a quote from Joseph Kraft, who was a columnist during the War; the quote shows disdain and disapproval on the part of Kraft towards the war.

While the source is good and useful, this is an example of what a thesis could have improved. If the thesis had been included in the book, Herring could have established whether or not the press was in fact influential in the war perception at home. Rather, he includes evidence showing that the media had produced a war that seemed as though the United States was losing, and then includes sources which indicate that the war was indeed being lost in the view of the congress and generals. Herring never indicates whether he approves of one side or the other.

Ultimately, Herring attempts to address several objectives, but is unclear about which is his most important or which he would pursue throughout the entirety of the book. It can be argued that, when Herring states he would like to place the United States’ intervention in the war into perspective, this could be the definitive intention of the book. Johnson’s own belief behind the war and the history of how the United States had been lured into war was explained in great detail. The entirety of the first two chapters refers to the beginnings of the Vietnam War. The United States is pictured as an onlooker during the early stages of the tension between French Colonialist ideals, and Herring later shows the historic economical effect it had on the Vietnamese people. The United States’ ultimate hope was to keep the “domino effect” from occurring, which would later be a deciding factor in going to war. With this evidence, Herring proves that the United States was at first reluctant to enter the war, but, with Ho Chi Minh’s

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3 America’s Longest War 248.
4 America’s Longest War 249.
5 America’s Longest War 242, 252.
6 America’s Longest War xi.
7 America’s Longest War 5, 7, 17.
leniency toward communism and the threat of an economic loss for major nations, they found that they must enter into war.\textsuperscript{8}

Herring states in his Introduction that he would address nuances that can now be applied to the historical record of the Vietnam War due to the declassification of various documents from the war.\textsuperscript{9} Often when historians address the Vietnam War, they look at the United States’ response at home to the war, the media, and Vietnam itself. Rarely is there an approach to look at the surrounding countries of the Vietnam War that had also been affected. Herring’s unambiguous detail of the effect the war had on Cambodia is intriguing. He indicates that, when the United States entered into Cambodia after staging a coup, it had created more protests at home, most notably at Kent State.\textsuperscript{10} Cambodia, however, was not the only country that Herring explains played a role in the war. Laos became a vital military operation in the U.S. against the Viet Kahn.\textsuperscript{11} By speaking to the surrounding areas of the Vietnam War zone, Herring proves that Vietnam and the United States were not the only countries deeply wounded and impacted by the war.

Herring also demonstrates that the presidents were impacted deeply and psychologically by the war decisions they had been faced with. Presidents can often be overlooked when analyzing the Vietnam War. The devastating and life altering choices they must make at the time of war is shown plainly when Herring includes facts such as Nixon having to watch the film “Patton” when making another difficult decision.\textsuperscript{12} Then later Herring includes a photograph of

\textsuperscript{8} America’s Longest War 22,43. 
\textsuperscript{9} America’s Longest War ix, x. 
\textsuperscript{10} America’s Longest War 296, 301. 
\textsuperscript{11} America’s Longest War 305. 
\textsuperscript{12} America’s Longest War 299.
Johnson slumped over a table, hand on his forehead, as he listened to the voice of his son-in-law describe the horrors he had seen in an “ambush”.\textsuperscript{13}

The Gulf of Tonkin incident is often referred to as the founding reason why the United States became involved in the Vietnam War, but, according to Herring, the factors were much more numerous than that. As noted previously, Herring states that the factors were to fight communism through containment and economics, but the Gulf of Tonkin incident was merely an attributing factor. Herring implies new evidence that challenges previously accepted beliefs behind the incident. The Gulf of Tonkin incident was much like the Pearl Harbor attack to enter World War II. Herring states that President Johnson used the attack to finally put American troops on the ground, and he did so successfully.\textsuperscript{14} Not only did it pass through congress, it passed “88 to 2.”\textsuperscript{15} Herring also speaks to the fact that the incident was never as severe as what had been reported and that Johnson “did not follow up... with additional attacks against North Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{16}

Regrettably Herring states that after The Gulf of Tonkin Incident, life was much more difficult in Vietnam than it was in the United States. The United States willingly went into the war, even though many of the U.S. allies were reluctant and doubted that the war was necessary.\textsuperscript{17} Such a unity would not be found in Vietnam between Buddhist and Catholic nor North and South.\textsuperscript{18} Contrary to what may be believed, the United States went into the war willingly; it would not be until later in the war that the U.S. citizens and the media would question the war.

\textsuperscript{13}America’s Longest War 176.
\textsuperscript{14}America’s Longest War 150.
\textsuperscript{15}America’s Longest War 150.
\textsuperscript{16}America’s Longest War 151.
\textsuperscript{17}America’s Longest War 153.
\textsuperscript{18}America’s Longest War 152.
The consequences are unavoidable with any war, but Herring proves the consequences with modern sources. Most of the sources in his chapter 8 section “The Agony of Defeat” are dated between the years 1975 and 2009; this is rare and is beneficial to the understanding of *America’s Longest War*. By implementing these sources and keeping the book up to date, the book can emphasize that the results of the Vietnam War can still be felt today. The war affected moviegoers in America, even into the 1980’s. Embargos that had been placed on Vietnam would not be lifted until the 1990’s under President Clinton’s administration. Clinton would later visit Vietnam in 2000, but the Vietnamese leaders still believed America to be “imperialist[ic].”

Herring points out that the U.S. relations with Vietnam have been a slow progress and they have gone unnoticed, until now with *America’s Longest War*.

Overall, it may be said that *America’s Longest War* provided an excellent and extensive nuanced look on the Vietnam War in American society. Herring’s neutral voice throughout the book was a downfall; however, the content and all-encompassing tone with supportive and notable sources enhanced the overall narrative. The Vietnam War was more than a war fought on foreign soil; it was a war fought at home between two different war-minded political perspectives. This compounded with President Lyndon Johnson’s longing to contain communism created an era which seems, to this day, a chaotic one.

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19 *America’s Longest War* 359-363.  
20 *America’s Longest War* 373.  
21 *America’s Longest War* 373.