Why did Vietnam become the setting for one of the longest and bloodiest struggles of the entire post-1945 era, and why did two Western powers, first France and then the United States, lose their way there? In this lecture, Fredrik Logevall, John S. Knight Professor of International Studies and History at Cornell University and author of the just-published *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, considers these contentious questions anew. Logevall will explore the importance of World War II in laying the groundwork for the French Indo-china War that followed, and the major role played from an early point by the United States. American leaders, he will suggest, were never blind to the obstacles that stood in the way of victory against Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary forces, yet they failed to heed the lessons from France's disastrous defeat. Instead, they made the fateful decision to build up and defend South Vietnam, thereby putting the United States on its collision course with history.

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