



The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990

Marilyn B. Young

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The first book to give equal weight to the Vietnamese and American sides of the Vietnam war.

The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990 Details

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From Reader Review The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990 for online ebook

Chelsea Szendi says

Counter-insurgency: Providing justification for neo-colonial policy since colonialism went out of style.

Craig Werner says

Still the best single volume history of the American War in Vietnam, with extended attention to its origins in the French War in the years after World War II. In comparison with Prados's *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War*, which I read before re-reading this one, Young maintains a clearer sense of narrative flow and a sharper sense of which details need to be pursued at length. The outlines of the two books are similar, and for anyone with a deep interest in the topic, I recommend reading both.

The problems with Young stem primarily from two factors. First, she's profoundly angry about the lies that surrounded American policy and, even though I'm in basic agreement with her, there were times the rhetoric got in the way of the clarity--it never leads her to distort the facts, but I think it would have been sufficient to let the facts speak. Second, some important materials simply weren't available in the early 1990s, especially the "inside" view of North Vietnamese strategy detailed in Lien-Hang Nguyen's *Hanoi's War*; the diplomatic complexities explored in A.J. Languth's *Our Vietnam*; and the multi-faceted human dimensions of Chris Appy's *Patriots*, an oral history that lives up to its titles promise to look at the war from "all sides." Since I appear to be in bibliographical mode, I'd also recommend Michael Herr's classic *Dispatches* for a present tense look at the war; Gloria Emerson's *Winners and Losers*, which places the GI experience at the center; and Alfredo Vea's novel, *Gods Go Begging*, which ties the American failure to come to terms with Vietnam to the social problems of the late 20th and 21st centuries.

John Allen says

This gives a more human face (if it is possible to give war a human face) to a conflict that never had any basis in reality, and only occurred because of a few politicians who believed it was advantageous.

The consensus is that Young's narrative is anti-American; it is only anti-American insofar as it recounts the facts the way they actually occurred materially. The waste of life on both sides is beyond lamentable.

The atrocities committed by the US military in the Vietnam war are put on an ugly and full display and so are the atrocities committed by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese. One reads with a heavy head and one can see the exact mistakes repeated in the Iraq war. An excellent study; indeed, the most objective I've yet read concerning this subject.

Anthony says

When I first picked this book up, I'm not sure I could have told you why I was reading it. I wanted to learn

more about American involvement in the Vietnam War, clearly, but what exactly piqued my curiosity?

Now that I've finished, I think I better understand why this was important to me. I wanted to make sense of Nixon's role in ending the war (short answer: he did work to end it, but not before increasing bombing), Johnson's role in committing us (short answer: he kept getting us ever more deeply engaged, including extensive bombing of the North but especially the South), Kennedy's stance and what might have been (short answer: he was reluctant to start a ground war or approve bombing, but it's hard to imagine that he would have held out given that he shared the Cold War ideology underlying U.S. intervention). I've read too many other books where some understanding of how we got there and what made us stay for so long is taken for granted, that I felt I needed to look at this chapter of U.S. history (and this book's focus is on the war and its position in the world of U.S. politics, rather than giving much background on the history and culture of Vietnam and its role there). But more than that, it brings home the point that this is the same argument we keep having, over and over, whether it's bringing troops home from Afghanistan or whether to continue bombing raids on Libya. We're not going to bomb the way to freedom, for ourselves or for anyone else, no matter how smart our bombs get.

Robinson's a skilled writer, and she artfully sketches a narrative of the conflict (especially U.S. decision-making), from the end of World War II through the end of the war to the 1990s (when the book was written). I was a bit disappointed in the end notes, where on some occasions I would turn looking for more information and find it was unclear what exactly was supporting a certain statement in the text. As I indicated above, the U.S.-centric perspective of this book is intentional (and was appreciated in certain ways), but did lead me to want a more general history of Vietnam and Indochina, in which our invasion is just one amongst many foreign interruptions in their history.

Bill V says

This is an adequate treatment of the 2 parts of the Vietnam War, which are the French and the American. The French portion understandably gets much less coverage than the American. The book also goes into American conflicts well after the United States left Vietnam such as Grenada to show how Vietnam today impacts American thinking on military involvement in other nations. The book is more political and about the home fronts (Vietnam and the United States) than it is about the actual campaigns and battles.

The author definitely has a political slant which is readily discernible. There are a couple of misspellings but the book overall does a competent job of describing what happened. The author's writing style is not particularly interesting. There are various stretches that are a struggle to get through. This is a brief work and covers the key aspects, but not in great detail. It's a decent introductory read on the overall conflict.

Matt says

Just finished this book this evening. It was a great history of the Vietnam War.. at least a great introduction to the wars in that sad country. It is not the most amazing book ever about that war (A Bright Shining Lie), but it does a soldier's job of getting all the facts out. It is certainly weighted to highlight the stupidity of American leadership in this time, and it is way overstating it to say that it tells the story of the war from the Vietnamese perspective. But it was a good read. I paid a quarter for it at Goodwill.

James says

educate yourself.

Herb says

This is nostalgia/therapy reading for me. I lived in Viet Nam from '66 to '70. I have returned for several brief visits since and am always surprised at how functional my Vietnamese remains. I have the handicap of having lived much of what this book reports and find it an objective and genuinely informative historical assessment. The book stands by itself in this category of objective information on the topics that I have first hand experience.

j says

even to a hardened cynic as myself, the way in which young pulls together the entire picture of US conduct during the war, and really, as the title indicates, from the end of WWII onward, is breathtaking. I didn't think I could be shocked and appalled again by the Vietnam war because I thought I knew what it was, but really I only had a bare idea of how outrageous, cruel, brutal, and frankly genocidal our policies and practices there were. Eye-opening. a little hagiographic on the topic of Ho and the Communists, but still a welcome counterbalance in that regard to the standard racist dehumanized portraits given in even liberal critiques of the war.

James says

a detailed account of Vietnam from before our involvement and after. i would say i also learned that when America decides to back some other leader of a different country, they should stop and support the complete opposite guy...saddam, bin laden, and just from our time in vietnam Diem and Kahn! come on how stupid is the US anyways? lets put people into power who are just so inherently evil and self concerned with only themselves, and who will eventually go against the US so we have to take them out and then put in a different guy who will do the exact same thing in less then a year!

and for gods sakes lets stop training people to kill americans, we may live longer and not send our families and friends off to a country to get killed by the ones we trained and supplied!!!!

and yes i am still talking bout the vietnam war, even though after finishing this book i see it as if one were to switch some names and dates and places around, and holy shit we now have the same story as what is going on in the middle east right now!

so needless to say the boys in washington need to take a few history classes before they get put into power in the white house cause they will see just how many times the US repeats it own mistakes when it hasn't even been a country for very long at all!

and how many times do other countries get involved in outer countries civil wars? how many other countries got involved in our own civil war? why do we involve ourselves in ever other countries civil wars? (i.e. mid east countires and vietnam! at least those of the ones that i know of, and i am sure there are tons more

actually!)

so come on, how is it that these people that are in political positions get there, when they obviously have yet to take a history class?

Joseph says

Riveting!

Aleks Falcone says

Quanto di più completo si possa chiedere per comprendere le origini e gli eventi di quella che conosciamo come "Guerra in Vietnam" e che invece è qualcosa di assai più complesso di quanto la maggior parte delle persone immagini.

È un libro da leggere per capire anche le dinamiche della cosiddetta "esportazione della democrazia" americana, che spesso non è altro che imperialismo e neo-colonialismo.

David Steele, Jr. says

Well-written, fast paced, and emotionally resonant, Marilyn B Young's book goes a long way towards compensating for the jingoistic Cold War paradigmatic nonsense that usually plagues broad Vietnam War histories. She gets many of the most important and commonly misunderstood facts right (ie: the NLF forming in response to general Diem oppression and not the Buddhist crisis.) The vast majority of the book is accurate and insightful.

However, and this is coming from an avowed communist who has an NLF flag tattooed on his arm, she over romanticizes the communists and seriously underplays and deemphasizes the crucial role that selective terror played in the southern insurgency. In an apparent effort at making the NLF and NVA look even better than the record shows them to be, she leaves out inconvenient realities. This is obvious in her treatment of the Hue massacre too, and not always in the communist's favor (altho largely so.) For instance she leaves out a western journalist's accounts that bodies interred in the mass graves outside of town had bulldozer tracks on them (suggesting that the US pushed bomb victims into common graves with executed Party enemies.)

In the end this is all nitpicking what I consider one of the finest introductions to the wars I've ever read.

TL:DR

Almost perfect introduction to the Vietnam Wars.

Al Capwned says

It is better than I expected and really influential to me. I want to read a lot more on the subject.

Dan Gorman says

Eminently readable, this is probably the definitive Vietnam War history, or one of them. (I can't claim to be a Vietnam expert.) There's not a lot of historiography — that is, saying how Young's argument fits into the claims of other historians — but that's to be expected, since HarperCollins and not an academic press published the book. Young makes a strong case that the Vietnam War violated American principles and that America should not have been there at all. I suppose her argument is based on the assumption that non-intervention in foreign powers and democratic self-determination are innate American values, which the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations violated. Critics farther to the left would probably say that America lacked such altruistic innate values. No matter; we all have our biases, and Young is no different in that regard. The book is an educational, thought-provoking, and somber read. In short, it does exactly what it should as a history of such an atrocious war.
