

American Myth And The Legacy Of Vietnam

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if there is an overall theme to this study it relates to the american response to the vietnamese communist revolution or more specifically to the august revolution which in 1945 brought ho chi minh and his movement to prominence and power throughout the several phases of u s involvement the support of the french war effort the fostering of an independent south vietnam the years of intense warfare and the postwar hostility the american opposition to the vietnamese revolution has been unrelenting how a communist

revolution in such a relatively obscure and economically backward county came to be perceived as a challenge to u s national security can be answered in part but enough uncertainty remains that it continues to be an intriguing question and one with long range implications for u s foreign policy preface

american myth and the legacy of vietnam

discusses how vietnam shapes america today and deals with such issues as the rights and obligations american citizenship entails the concept of race sex and ideology and the role of the press

fourteen essays documenting the vietnam war s impact and continuing influence on american life particularly on cinema literature the black community and the combat veteran booklist

isaacs talks to the veterans unable to forget the war no one wanted to talk about he explores the class divisions deepened by a conflict in which the privileged avoided service that an earlier generation had embraced as a duty and he shows how the vietnam syndrome continues to affect nearly every major u s foreign policy decision from the persian gulf to somalia bosnia and haiti

prominent american historian robert d schulzinger sheds light on how deeply etched memories of the devastating conflict in vietnam have altered america s political social and cultural landscape schulzinger examines the impact of the war from many angles he ranges from the heated controversy over soldiers who were missing in action to the influx of over a million vietnam refugees into the us to the many ways the war has continued to be fought in books and films and perhaps most important the power of the vietnam war as a metaphor influencing foreign policy in places like iraq

a survey examines american attitudes toward the vietnam war and the experiences and ideas that turned most people against the war

the lessons legacies and implications for future conflicts are the purpose of this collection of work on the american war in vietnam this is an assemblage of ten superb papers which outline why america failed in vietnam military readers will find the section on how the war was fought especially interesting in that the authors suggest that had we pursued a more exhaustive air campaign against the north early in the war then it could have been

won this book is for serious students of the vietnam war for historians looking for a complete picture it has a superb bibliography and the authors have outstanding credentials armor the essays in this collection were assembled to provide answers to the question of why the united states lost the war in vietnam they examine four major factors that affected u s policy how the war was perceived how it was fought the possible effect of alternative strategies and the war s legacy for future warfare the contributors include both military officers and scholars all but one of whom participated in the vietnam war all the authors reflect the more tempered nature of current vietnam war scholarship although their appraisals differ the overall effect is to offer insight and clarification into the failure of u s and south vietnamese policy backed by the grinter s and dunn s first hand experiences

efforts to understand the impact of the vietnam war on america began soon after it ended and they continue to the present day in after vietnam four distinguished scholars focus on different elements of the war s legacy while one of the major architects of the conflict former defense secretary robert s mcnamara contributes a final chapter pondering foreign policy issues of the twenty first century in the book s opening chapter charles e neu explains how the vietnam war changed americans sense of themselves challenging widely held national myths the war brought frustration disillusionment and a weakening of americans sense of their past and vision for the future brian balogh argues that vietnam became such a powerful metaphor for turmoil and decline that it obscured other forces that brought about fundamental changes in government and society george c herring examines the postwar american military which became nearly obsessed with preventing another vietnam robert k brigham explores the effects of the war on the vietnamese as aging revolutionary leaders relied on appeals to revolutionary heroism to justify the communist party s monopoly on political power finally robert s mcnamara aware of the magnitude of his errors and burdened by the war s destructiveness draws lessons from his experience with the aim of preventing wars in the future

not until the early 1980s did americans collectively redirect their attention to vietnam coincident with the dedication of the vietnam veterans memorial in washington d c came a return to emotions and issues that had been repressed since the end of the war these are manifested for example by the growing attention paid to the war by the mass media especially television and film each essay in this volume in some way examines how the past is organized and construed to give shape and meaning to the present and the future

each speaks to consequences of how vietnam is and is not remembered each also reports that the vietnam war did not end with the cessation of combat diverse forms of symbolic expressions speeches and argument prose and poetry films tv programs memorials private conversations all strive to give shape and significance to the war

american exceptionalism and the legacy of vietnam examines the influence of the belief in american exceptionalism on the history of u s foreign policy since the vietnam war trevor b mccricken analyzes attempts by each post vietnam u s administration to revive the popular belief in exceptionalism both rhetorically and by pursuing foreign policy supposedly grounded in traditional american principles he argues that exceptionalism consistently provided the framework for foreign policy discourse but that the conduct of foreign affairs was limited by the vietnam syndrome

41 papers from 70 authors from the 1994 national symposium on the aftermath of vietnam authorities and doctors of medicine and psychology speak out on the effects of vietnam on vets and their families topics include the children of vets with post traumatic stress disorder the potential for change in the delivery of services to vets rural vets traumas and transition building on the experiences of the agent orange class assistance program lingering consequences of the vietnam war vet families with children with disabilities or chronic illness etc

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philip d beidler who served as an armored cavalry platoon leader in vietnam sees less and less of the hard won perspective of the common soldier in what america has made of that war each passing year he says dulls our sense of immediacy about vietnam s costs opening wider the temptation to make it something more necessary neatly contained and justifiable

than it should ever become here beidler draws on deeply personal memories to reflect on the war's lingering aftereffects and the shallow evasive ways we deal with them beidler brings back the war he knew in chapters on its vocabulary music literature and film his catalog of soldier slang reveals how finely a tour of vietnam could hone one's sense of absurdity his survey of the war's pop hits looks for meaning in the soundtrack many veterans still hear in their heads beidler also explains how viet pulp literature about snipers tunnel rats and other hard core types has pushed aside masterpieces like *duong thu huong* novel without a name likewise we learn why the movie *the deer hunter* doesn't get it about vietnam but why *platoon* and we were soldiers sometimes nearly do as beidler takes measure of his own wartime politics and morals he ponders the divergent careers of such figures as william calley the army lieutenant whose name is synonymous with the civilian massacre at my lai and an old friend poet john balaban a conscientious objector who performed alternative duty in vietnam as a schoolteacher and hospital worker beidler also looks at vietnam alongside other conflicts including the war on international terrorism he once hoped he says that vietnam had fractured our sense of providential destiny and geopolitical invincibility but now realizes with dismay that those myths are still with us americans have always wanted their apocalypses writes beidler and they have always wanted them now

at the heart of the story of america's wars are our citizen soldiers those hometown heroes who fought and sacrificed from bunker hill at charlestown to *pointe du hoc* in normandy and beyond without expectation of recognition or recompense americans like to think that the service of its citizen volunteers is and always has been of momentous importance in our politics and society but though this has made for good storytelling the reality of america's relationship to its veterans is far more complex in those who have borne the battle historian and marine veteran james wright tells the story of the long often troubled relationship between america and those who have defended her from the revolutionary war to today shedding new light both on our history and on the issues our country and its armed forces face today from the beginning american gratitude to its warriors was not a given prior to world war ii the prevailing view was that as citizen soldiers the service of its young men was the price of citizenship in a free society even revolutionary war veterans were affectionately but only temporarily embraced as the new nation and its citizens had much else to do in time the celebration of the nation's heroes became an important part of our culture building to the response to world war ii where warriors were celebrated and new government programs provided support for veterans the greater

transformation came in the wars after world war ii as the way we mobilize for war fight our wars and honor those who serve has changed in drastic and troubling ways unclear and changing military objectives have made our actions harder for civilians to stand behind a situation compounded by the fact that the armed forces have become less representative of american society as a whole few citizens join in the sacrifice that war demands the support systems seem less and less capable of handling the increasing number of wounded warriors returning from our numerous and bewildering conflicts abroad a masterful work of history those who have borne the battle expertly relates the burdens carried by veterans dating back to the revolution as well as those fighting today s wars and it challenges americans to do better for those who serve and sacrifice today

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