

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Vietnam Reader* by Walter Capps; *Vietnam: A History* by Stanley Karnow

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began a process that would culminate in Caillaux' imprisonment for intelligence with the enemy is neither proven nor necessarily true. After 1924, Caillaux reemerged as Finance Minister and for a second term as Prime Minister. In 1937 Caillaux, now a Senator, was instrumental in giving a *coup de grace* to Blum's Popular Front government. About this, Berenson suggests that Caillaux "was no longer the man he had been a decade before." Perhaps the problem is that he *was* the same man.

Students will find illuminating the contrast between the scandalous behavior and hypocrisy of Third Republic politics and the more austere mores of contemporary American Democracy.

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The Vietnam Reader, edited by Walter Capps. New York: Routledge, 1991. 288 pages. \$45, cloth; \$14.95, paper.

Vietnam: A History, edited and updated by Stanley Karnow. New York: Penguin, 1991. 816 pages. \$30.00, cloth; \$15.95, paper.

Although neither Stanley Karnow's revised edition of his classic 1983 history of American involvement in Vietnam nor Walter Capps's collection of essays offer much new, they both add a great deal to the discussion of the war. While it would have been useful if Karnow had taken his updated work further in time—only his revised first chapter truly exploits the events after 1973, which is when both editions end—the bit of updating it does provide in both text and appendices is nice to have. As for Capps, the creator of the first college course on the Vietnam War, has brought together a fascinating and useful, if at times strangely dated, collection which brings home the complexity of the conflict.

As Capps makes clear in his thoughtful introduction, the Vietnam War is "an unfinished war" that cannot be reduced "to a single lesson, a single moral, or a single meaning." *The Vietnam Reader* is divided into four sections, each more moving and thought-provoking than the other. The essays, most of which have been previously published, focus on veterans' stories, policies, diverse experiences, and the healing process and are, with a few exceptions, valuable. They include such classics as William Broyles's "Why Men Love War" and James Fallows's "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?" They also include such useful new analyses as Thomas M. Hohn's "American Indian Veterans and the Vietnam War" and Robert Divine's "Historiography: Vietnam Reconsidered."

Because Capps finds truths in a war he calls "a compelling morality play," *The Vietnam Reader* is permeated with a deep, almost spiritual tone. That tone is there in gripping terms in Fallows's essay and in Paul Sgroi's "To Vietnam and Back," the painful cry of a Vietnam army veteran who took his life in 1987.

While Capps presents the standard first-person accounts, such as Rose Sandecki's "A Nurse's View," he includes rarer looks at the war's other sides as well, such as "The Story of a Vietnamese Refugee in America" by Hien Duc Do and Le Ly Hayslip's "A World Turned Upside Down." Both present the Vietnamese as both friend and foe rather than as symbols and stereotypes. Capps also provides interpretations from the religious perspective (William P. Mahedy's "It Don't Mean Nothin': The Vietnam Experience") and the

psychological (Peter Marin's "Living in Moral Pain"). Not neglected are the views of military leaders (Vo Nguyen Giap and William Westmoreland), political leaders (Clark Clifford), and the press (Paul Dean).

However, Capps's argument that the war has yet to be defined and understood is blunted by essays which were, especially those in the first three sections, written and first published over ten years ago. While the last ten years have not provided all or even many of the answers sought by these early writings, it would be easier for Capps to have established this argument had he supported his claim with more works from the mid and late 1980s. As Capps acknowledges in his brief postscript on the Gulf War, Vietnam is no longer "a bone stuck in our throats" (p. 318). Something has changed, and most of the selections do not make that clear because they are not part of the change, however much they have contributed to this process.

Karnow's volume, in like manner, does not carry the story as far forward in time as one would like, although his useful sixteen-page chronology reaches 1991. Still, Karnow's strength in both his original work and this edition is his decision to start the history of Vietnam's twentieth-century American conflict well before most other writers do—even such perceptive and skillful ones as George Herring and George Moss, whose concern, admittedly, is more with the American aspects of the Second Indochina War than with its Vietnamese roots. He begins not in 1945 or 1954 or the early 1960s but at the time of Vietnam's developing strength as a Southeast Asian nation. That critical survey of the 1400s-1800s is followed by a look at a second period neglected by other writers, the early twentieth century with its growing nationalist movements. As Karnow continually makes clear, it is impossible to understand what happened in Southeast Asia to draw the Americans in and to force them out if one does not understand Vietnam itself. Thus, the book's appropriate title.

Karnow does go beyond 1973 and even 1975 in his new edition, but discussions of his visit with Giap in 1990 (which he describes in a story originally published in the *New York Times* and reprinted in *The Vietnam Reader*), a new entry or two in his eighteen-page "Cast of Principle Characters," and his reworked introductory chapter cannot compensate for what is missing. They cannot do what an analysis of Vietnam's history and relationship with the United States from 1973 to 1991 could have done. Moreover, while Karnow's readable story is followed by equally readable notes on his sources, it is surprising to see how little digging into the post-1983 literature he has done. Missing are such important works as Larry Berman's *Lyndon Johnson's War* (1989), William Hammond's *The U.S. Army in Vietnam* (1988), and David Hackworth's *About Face* (1989). While Karnow does provide a useful bibliography (his list of veterans' first-person accounts is a good one but stops in 1981), it does not indicate the kind of updating that "revised and updated" leads one to expect.

Yet with their flaws—including an essay in Capps with superscript but no endnotes—*The Vietnam Reader* and *Vietnam: A History* are strong contributors to the vast literature on the Vietnam war and reminders, each in its own way, of how much more has to be done if that conflict is ever to slide down the national throat completely.

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