
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience* by Walter H. Capps

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The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience. By Walter H. Capps. Beacon Press, 1982. 177 pages. \$6.95.

In *The Unfinished War*, Walter Capps suggests that the symbol of Vietnam has significantly shaped the character of contemporary American culture. The lack of consensus over our national mission has exacerbated the chasm between two ideologically opposed American communities.

Capps briefly traces the history of American involvement, pointing out that the tragic outcome was already evident in the early years, as policy-makers were sympathetic to the rise of Asian nationalisms, yet fearful of the inexorable spread of monolithic Communism. Hence, the war became only an instance of the larger conflict with Communist powers. For many, this linkage was not persuasive. Capps traces the chastening of the Camelot consciousness among those who fought in Asia, and among those who fought the war on the streets and campuses of America.

The most provocative chapters characterize the two communities engendered by the war. One camp, moved by the "impulses of Eden," has been considerably influenced by the contemplative insights of Asian religious traditions and seeks a resolution of tensions through the construction of the "global village." The other camp seeks the clarity and resolution of Armageddon. Represented ably by spokesmen of the New Right, members of this camp view Vietnam as a symbol of our failure to carry out our sacred national mission. Capps has persuasively rooted the powerful political and social impulses of the present in our memories and interpretations of the Vietnam conflict.

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America's Quest for the Ideal Self: Dissent and Fulfillment in the 60s and 70s. By Peter Clecak. Oxford University Press, 1983. 395 pages. \$27.50.

Peter Clecak's most recent effort in American Studies is a massive discussion of the cultural impact of the 1960s and 70s. He sees these two decades as "aspects of a single, uncompleted chapter in American civilization." For Clecak this period is unified by "a quest for personal fulfillment, a pursuit of a free, gratified, unalienated self within one or more communities of valued others." Unlike other critics of the 60s or 70s, Clecak takes the positive position that social and personal change during this period succeeded in enhancing cultural options, strengthening personal and political rights, and providing general economic well being for more Americans. Self fulfillment and social justice, as the two dimensions of the American quest for salvation, raised the quality of life not only for a privileged few, but "within each disadvantaged category, from blacks and women to gays and the handicapped." Although Reaganomics might succeed in harming the level of general social justice, Clecak is convinced that individuals will continue to strive for, and achieve, the "democratization of personhood."

Clecek supports his conclusions by marshalling a large force of statistics, popular culture, left and right wing rhetoric, academic appraisals, and recent historical