

*The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience.* By Walter H. Capps. Beacon Press, Boston, Mass., 1982. 177 pages. \$13.50. *Friends Jnl.* 11/15/83

Eight years have passed since the Vietnam War ended. However, the effects of that war continue to be felt by both the Vietnamese and people in the United States. The deaths, injuries, and illnesses resulting from the war continue in 1983, with both suicides and maladies thought to be related to Agent Orange on the rise among Vietnam veterans.

In *The Unfinished War*, Walter Capps offers an insightful analysis of the political and philosophical beliefs that led up to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam—beliefs that continue to hold prominence even now among many in the United States. He also devotes several chapters to the men and women who participated in the fighting, chronicling their changed perceptions of why they were in Vietnam.

The final third of this book is devoted to considering the aftermath of the war and what it means today. In this section Capps discusses what he terms our "Armageddon mentality"—the religious/political beliefs of many that the United States personifies truth, goodness, and light—and that those who oppose us represent evil or even the devil. Through examples the author shows how this underlying belief led to the Vietnam War and continues to threaten us today.

The chapter titled "Right to Armageddon" addresses the growth of the Moral Majority since the Vietnam War. Capps sees this conservative religious movement as a threat to the healing process that is just starting to take place. The expectation of a biblical apocalypse works to discourage millions of Christians from working for compromises and peaceful solutions to world problems. This coupling of religious beliefs

and support for increased military spending is seen as a dangerous liaison.

The author does believe that the Vietnam War had the positive effect of forcing us to a better understanding of Asian people and their culture and that this understanding may yet lead the United States to a more peaceful future. Says Capps: "Significantly, growing nuclear sensitivity, war pathos, the birth of the counterculture, and a Western awakening to the power of Asian religious sensitivity happened together and at once." The combination of these factors over the past 20 years may indeed offer some reason for hope of spiritual and psychological growth in our country.

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