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978-0-521-00876-1 - America, the Vietnam War, and the World: comparative and international perspectives

Edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach

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[More information](#)

## *Introduction*

### *America's War and the World*

ANDREAS W. DAUM, LLOYD C. GARDNER,  
AND WILFRIED MAUSBACH

#### I

Wars are undeniable events in history, and – as constantly reported in the daily news – they still occur all over the world, even in an age that has produced more legal and political mechanisms to avoid war and has drafted more manifestos to decry violent conflict than any other epoch in history. As soon as we embark on scrutinizing the meaning of wars more closely, questions arise that trigger heated disputes: Why are wars fought? What reasons justify the conduct of war? In which military, political, and ideological categories do belligerents couch their strategies and experiences? What impact does war have on the politics, societies, and cultures of combatants and noncombatants? How do wars affect the international community and international relations beyond the immediate events on the battlefields? Why do we label some military conflicts wars but not others?

The answers to these questions are highly contested; this holds especially true for one of the most dramatic conflicts in modern history: the American war in Vietnam, as it took shape with the deployment of U.S. combat troops to South Vietnam and the bombing of North Vietnam in the mid-1960s, and concluded with the Paris agreements between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1973. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the shelves of libraries and bookstores groan under the weight of a burgeoning literature on the topic. There can be no doubt that the Vietnam War is one of the most widely discussed, researched, and documented events in recent history.<sup>1</sup> Why then yet another book on this subject?

1 The most comprehensive, partly annotated, and continuously updated compilation of primary and secondary sources – although it lists primarily books and only a few articles – is Edwin E. Moïse, *Vietnam War Bibliography* (<http://hubcap.clemson.edu/~eemoise/bibliography.html>). See also Anton Legler and Kurt Hubinek, *Der Krieg in Vietnam: Bericht und Bibliographie*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1969–79); Ronald Spector, *Researching the Vietnam Experience* (Washington, D.C., 1983); Richard Dean

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Excerpt

[More information](#)2      *Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, Wilfried Mausbach*

Although both popular imagination and academic research on the Vietnam War continue to flourish, there is no consensus in sight. Only the U.S. Civil War rivals the power of the Vietnam War to divide and inflame generation upon generation of Americans. The still-growing body of research on the Vietnam War nearly forms an independent subdiscipline within the historiography of American foreign relations. But it still mirrors a seemingly “unending debate”<sup>2</sup> that constantly produces new cycles of orthodoxy, revisionism, and postrevisionism. At the same time, the Vietnam War and its legacies have elicited new questions that provoke unexpected answers and allow new perspectives. This book attempts to present such perspectives. Its fundamental concern is to link together three dimensions of the Vietnam War – the war as America’s war, as an international event, and as a starting point for historical comparisons – and to analyze the interconnectedness of these dimensions. With this approach we attempt to shed light not only on the history of the Vietnam conflict, but also on the meaning of wars in modern history in general and on the relevance of strategies to cope with war beyond what we know about the case of Vietnam.

The Vietnam War as America’s war serves as the book’s crucial point of reference. The United States undoubtedly dominated the course of events in Vietnam from the late 1950s and until the South Vietnamese defeat in 1975. By contrast, and given the universality of the American–Soviet confrontation during the Cold War, no other external conflict besides Vietnam had such an unprecedented and profound effect on the conduct of American foreign policy and on American domestic affairs. This small, curved country at the edge of Southeast Asia and the events that took place in the region greatly

Burns and Milton Leitenberg, *The Wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, 1945–1982: A Bibliographic Guide* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 1984); Lester H. Brune and Richard Dean Burns, *America and the Indochina Wars, 1945–1990: A Bibliographical Guide* (Claremont, Calif., 1992); and James S. Olson, ed., *The Vietnam War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (Westport, Conn., 1993).

- 2 Gary R. Hess, “The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War,” in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941* (New York, 1995), 358–94. See also Joe P. Dunn, “In Search of Lessons: The Development of a Vietnam Historiography,” *Parameters* 9 (1979): 28–40; John M. Gates, “Vietnam: The Debate Goes On,” *Parameters* 14 (1984): 15–24; George C. Herring, “America and Vietnam: The Debate Continues,” *American Historical Review* 92 (1987): 350–62; David L. Anderson, “Why Vietnam? Postrevisionist Answers and a Neorealist Suggestion,” *Diplomatic History* 13 (1989): 419–29; Herbert Shapiro, “The Vietnam War and the American Historical Profession,” in John Drumbell, ed., *Vietnam and the Antiwar Movement: An International Perspective* (Aldershot, U.K., 1989), 7–33; Robert K. Brigham and Martin J. Murray, “Conflicting Interpretations of the Vietnam War, 1945–1975,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 26 (1994): 111–18; David W. Levy, *The Debate over Vietnam*, 2d ed. (Baltimore, 1995); Marc Frey, “Der Vietnam-Krieg im Spiegel der neueren amerikanischen Forschung,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 42 (1997): 29–47; and Jonathan Mirsky, “The Never-Ending War,” *New York Review of Books*, May 25, 2000, 54–63.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

influenced and, in many ways, fundamentally changed American politics and culture.

America's war, however, was not just an issue of and for the United States. As much as Vietnam reverberated in American society and embodied "many wars" for the United States,<sup>3</sup> it also radiated into world politics and permeated the domestic political settings and cultural discourses in many countries to a surprising degree. Several chapters in this book trace these reverberations in Europe, Asia, and the South Pacific. They look at the multiple cultural and political conflicts that Vietnam triggered in the domestic arenas of several of America's key allies.<sup>4</sup> Other contributors analyze the impact of the Vietnam conflict on international organizations and structures, and on the dynamics of alliance politics and bilateral relations.<sup>5</sup> A comparative approach, seldom utilized with regard to Vietnam, complements this approach by setting America's war and the world in relation to each other. Some of the chapters use Vietnam as the starting point to compare problems that seem to be specific to post-World War II America with those that the United States and other countries have encountered at different times in history. This way of looking at the Vietnam War produces exciting diachronic analogies that discuss aspects of warfare, ideological war preparation, war termination, and war's domestic effects.<sup>6</sup>

In pursuing this agenda, the editors seek to do justice to the fundamental ambiguity that characterized the Vietnam War: Vietnam was undoubtedly America's war, but at the same time the struggle for Vietnam had a deep impact on many other areas of the world and on the domestic settings of many noncombatants. The interconnections among the United States, the Vietnam War, and the wider world are therefore the focus of this undertaking, which is an attempt to internationalize the interpretation of one of the most dramatic and tragic events in contemporary history.

## II

Not surprisingly, most of the literature on the Vietnam War has been written by Americans and has been devoted to the American experience, its origins and aftermath. From the mid-1960s to this day, debate – both public and scholarly – has revolved around a core set of questions: Why did the United

3 See Lloyd C. Gardner's chapter in this book and Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York, 1991).

4 See the chapters by Arne Kislenko, Peter Edwards, Leopoldo Nuti, and Wilfried Mausbach in this book.

5 See the chapters in Part Two and Günter Wernicke's chapter in this book.

6 See the chapters in Part One of this book.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)4      *Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, Wilfried Mausbach*

States get involved? Was the American commitment politically and morally necessary?<sup>7</sup> What were the crucial factors for the eventual outcome, and was defeat indeed inevitable? The latter question in particular provoked a lively debate on military strategy, the supposed failure of the civilian leadership to understand the conflict, and the impact of ever-worsening public sentiment on policy makers and combatants alike, culminating in a sort of stab-in-the-back theory not unlike the one Germany experienced after World War I.<sup>8</sup>

But diplomatic and military historians were far from the only ones to grapple with America's involvement in Southeast Asia and its enduring legacy. Political scientists, sociologists, and scholars in the fields of cultural and literary studies have examined almost every facet of America's entanglement with Vietnam, from its digestion in film and fictional literature to the plight of returning veterans, from its impact on gender roles to its treatment in comic books.<sup>9</sup>

7 The most powerful recent addition to this literature and the first to place American decision-making in a wider international context on the basis of extensive research in U.S. and overseas archives is Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999). For an opposing view, see the essayistic account by Michael Lind, *Vietnam, the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York, 1999). Other important studies with different answers to these questions include David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam During the Kennedy Era* (New York, 1964); George McT. Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York, 1967); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy*, rev. ed. (Greenwich, Conn., 1968); Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, 1978); Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were in Vietnam* (New York, 1982); and George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986). For a useful compilation of diverse perspectives, see Jeffrey P. Kimball, ed., *To Reason Why: The Debate About the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War* (Philadelphia, 1990).

8 Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C., 1978); Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Calif., 1982); Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1986); Gary R. Hess, "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 10 (1986): 91–106; Warren I. Cohen, "Vietnam: New Light on the Nature of the War?" *International History Review* 9 (1987): 108–16; Jeffrey P. Kimball, "The Stab-in-the-Back Legend and the Vietnam War," *Armed Forces and Society* 14 (1988): 433–58; William Colby with James McCargar, *Lost Victory* (Chicago, 1989); David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face* (New York, 1989); and Jeffrey Record, *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam* (Annapolis, Md., 1998). For the German case, see Heide Barmeyer, "Geschichte als Überlieferung und Konstruktion – Das Beispiel der Dolchstoßlegende," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 28 (1977): 257–71; and Gerd Krumeich, "Die Dolchstoß-Legende," in Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds., *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, vol. 1 (Munich, 2001), 585–99.

9 Robert Buzzanco, *Vietnam and the Transformation of American Life* (Malden, Mass., 1999); Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy* (Baltimore, 1997); Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1990); Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *The Vietnam Experience: A Concise Encyclopedia of American Literature, Songs, and Films* (Westport, Conn., 1998); Philip D. Beidler, *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam* (Athens, Ga., 1982); Sandra M. Wittman, *Writing About Vietnam: A Bibliography of the Literature of the Vietnam Conflict* (Boston, 1989); Philip H. Melling, *Vietnam in American Literature* (Boston, 1990); John Newman et al., *Vietnam War Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works About Americans Fighting in Vietnam*, 3d ed. (Lanham, Md., 1996); Arthur Egendorf, *Healing from the War: Trauma and Transformation After Vietnam* (Boston, 1985); Wilbur J. Scott, *The Politics of Readjustment: Vietnam Veterans Since the War* (New York, 1993); Chuck Lawrence, *Tears of*

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

5

The various interpretations have been marked by a peculiar homogeneity in a focus on, if not an obsession with, the American role in this conflict and its resonance in the United States. If the political-military decisions of the Johnson administration in the spring and summer of 1965 transformed the conflict in Indochina into America's war,<sup>10</sup> then the vitality and fertility of scholarship in the United States has also, and inevitably, led to the Americanization of the historiography of the Vietnam War. There can be no doubt that this process has been fueled by a democratic system that allows early and comparatively broad access to archival material, and by the thriving publishing sector of a capitalist consumer society. All this has helped to make the Vietnam War a remarkable, rare, and perhaps the most striking exception to Winston Churchill's observation that history is written by the victors.

The intensity of public debate arising from America's twentieth-century trauma has almost turned the Vietnam War into an example of what could be called negative exceptionalism. The uniqueness of the American national experience as an escape from European corruption and the seizure of a pristine continent through the relentless pushing of spatial and human frontiers by the American "Adam" has been irretrievably besmirched by the dirty war in Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> Vietnam balks at figuring as merely one of a very few missing pieces in the otherwise heroic jigsaw puzzle of American history. Unable to explain Vietnam as an aberration, some have seen it instead as the culmination of an American exceptionalism inherently problematic from its inception.<sup>12</sup> Probably more common, though, have been the righteous anger and helpless despair produced by the feeling that American actions in Indochina were especially loathsome precisely because they deviated so starkly from earlier innocence.<sup>13</sup> Whatever shape this

*Blood: The Betrayal of America's Veterans* (Auburn, Wash., 1998); Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989); and Bradford Wright, "The Vietnam War and Comic Books," in Olson, ed., *Vietnam War*, 427–54.

10 Logevall, *Choosing War*, 333–75; Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York, 1991); and Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York, 1982).

11 On the founding of the United States as an escape from Europe, see John Higham, "The Future of American History," *Journal of American History* 80 (1994): 1289–309, esp. 1292. For a good recent survey of American exceptionalist thinking, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, 1996). A good deal of the scholarly work on the phenomenon is reviewed by Michael Kammen, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration," *American Quarterly* 45 (1993): 1–43.

12 John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York, 1986); Milton J. Bates, *The Wars We Took to Vietnam: Cultural Conflict and Storytelling* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), 9–47.

13 The present inattention to the nation-state in many quarters of the American scholarly community and the predilection of social and cultural historians for the inarticulate and marginalized perhaps also represent the yearning for a cast that has not yet lost its innocence. This is suggested by

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Excerpt

[More information](#)6      *Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, Wilfried Mausbach*

negative exceptionalism takes on, however, it remains mired in a peculiar self-referentiality.

To be sure, the Americanization of the conflict's historiography did not result in a single grand narrative. This war has always meant and still means different things to different Americans. There are, indeed, at least two major narratives within the American public discourse. The first puts the conflict squarely into a Cold War framework in which the South Vietnamese national liberation movement, abetted by Moscow, Beijing, and Hanoi, appears as part of a global pattern of communist expansion. Here, any distinction between communism and anticolonialism is lost, and the struggle in Indochina becomes "a communist 'war of liberation.'"<sup>14</sup> The Cold War narrative was predominant until the mid-1960s, and it survived the American defeat in Vietnam, propagated most prominently by former policy makers and their successors. Thus, former president Richard M. Nixon maintained in 1980 that the real war facing the United States was the war against Soviet expansionism and that Vietnam was just one battle in this third world war.<sup>15</sup> With the end of the East-West conflict, then, Vietnam became merely a lost battle in an ultimately victorious war. The battle was not even a futile sacrifice because, as Walt Rostow, President Lyndon B. Johnson's national security adviser from 1966 to 1969, tells us, it bought time for the rest of Asia to prosper behind a barrier that held aggression at bay.<sup>16</sup>

The second major narrative began to seriously challenge the standard interpretation of American involvement in Vietnam by the mid-1960s and eventually replaced it – at least in academic and intellectual circles – by the early 1970s. Its framework was not the Cold War but the hot wars of decolonization fought in the Third World. In this other epic struggle of the twentieth century, America ended up on the losing side because it had decided to follow in the footsteps of the European colonial powers. The last U.S. chopper that left Saigon in 1975 did not, therefore, signal defeat in a single battle but in the war itself. In contrast to the Cold War narrative, the decolonization narrative stresses the distinction between communism and anticolonialism. In this view, North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh was more of a nationalist than a communist, and the struggle in Vietnam

Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 651–77.

14 Memorandum from the secretary of defense (McNamara) to the president, Mar. 16, 1964, in U.S. Department of State, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS) 1964–1968, 1:153–67, here 154.

15 Richard M. Nixon, *The Real War* (New York, 1980).

16 Walt W. Rostow, "The Case for the War: How American Resistance in Vietnam Helped Southeast Asia to Prosper in Independence," *Times Literary Supplement*, June 9, 1995, 3–5.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

appeared as a civil war rather than an externally masterminded communist insurgency.<sup>17</sup> Thus, when it comes to the Vietnam conflict, America alone knows at least two histories.<sup>18</sup>

This should come as no surprise. Wars have always stood at the center of a multiplicity of narratives. Even the seemingly simple and neutral act of naming a war turns out to be highly prejudiced. Naming reflects how different people – be they participants in a war or neutrals – perceive the same war in many different ways. The military campaigns between 1756 and 1763, for example, stretching from Europe to America and from Western Africa to India, were known in Prussia as the Seven Years' War, whereas colonists overseas experienced them as the French and Indian War or the British-French War. The American Civil War is still remembered in some southern U.S. states as the War of Northern Aggression. The British think of World War I as the Great War, a term more or less unknown in Germany. Many Russians still subscribe to the official Soviet term "Great Patriotic War," whereas most of the rest of the world speaks of World War II. And finally, of course, the Vietnam War remains the "American War" in Vietnamese memory, the successor to the French War of the 1940s and 1950s, and it is therefore dubbed by others as the Second Indochina War.

The Vietnam conflict in fact encompasses numerous wars, some of which involved the United States only indirectly and most of which have so far been neglected.<sup>19</sup> First and foremost among these are, of course, the wars within Vietnamese society. One of the first Vietnamese memoirs written in English reminded Americans that the overarching struggle for independence and the conflict between Buddhists and Catholics – only sporadically acknowledged by the West – were merely the tip of the iceberg.

Behind the religious war came the battle between city people and country people – the rich against the poor – a war fought by those who wanted to change Vietnam and those who wanted to leave it as it had been for a thousand years. Beneath all that, too, we had vendettas: between native Vietnamese and immigrants (mostly

17 See, e.g., Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945–1968* (New York, 1996). A classic in this respect is Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam* (Boston, 1972). For a comprehensive biography of the North Vietnamese leader, see now William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York, 2000).

18 It has been suggested that the real Vietnam syndrome was the realization that there are alternatives to the heroic metanarrative of U.S. history. See Marilyn B. Young, "Dangerous History: Vietnam and the 'Good War,'" in Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York, 1996), 199–209. More generally, see also Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 807–31.

19 This is also acknowledged by the standard account of America's experience in Vietnam; see George C. Herring, *America's Longest War, 1950–1975*, 3d ed. (New York, 1996), 335.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)8      *Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, Wilfried Mausbach*

Chinese and Khmer) who had fought for centuries over the land. Many of these wars go on today. How could you hope to end them by fighting a battle so different from our own?<sup>20</sup>

Although historians have finally begun to explore the war stories of America's counterparts in Vietnam,<sup>21</sup> the experiences of Washington's South Vietnamese ally are still getting short shrift.<sup>22</sup> There is considerable merit to Shawn McHale's recent proposition that "the full history of the Vietnam War, one which combines the U.S. view of the war with a nuanced appreciation of the Vietnamese social, political, and cultural context, is yet to be written."<sup>23</sup>

However, this book contends that even a synthesis of American and Vietnamese narratives would still not constitute "a full history" of the Vietnam War. As necessary as it is to proceed on this path, and as much as the reverberations of Vietnam in American culture and society deserve further analysis, the time is also ripe to acknowledge that America's war had even wider geographical, political, and cultural ramifications.<sup>24</sup> Moreover,

20 Le Ly Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (New York, 1989), xv.

21 See, e.g., David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *Portrait of the Enemy* (New York, 1986); Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (New York, 1992); Hy V. Luong with Nguyen Dac-Bang, *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925–1988* (Honolulu, 1992); Mark Bradley and Robert K. Brigham, *Vietnamese Archives and Scholarship on the Cold War Period: Two Reports*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper no. 7 (Washington, D.C., 1993) ([cwihp.si.edu/publications.htm](http://cwihp.si.edu/publications.htm)); Mark Bradley et al., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds. (Armonk, N.Y., 1993); William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 2d ed. (Boulder, Colo., 1996); Kevin Ruane, *War and Revolution in Vietnam, 1930–75* (London, 1998); and Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1998). Even some former policy makers have started to listen – at least perfunctorily – to North Vietnamese perspectives. See Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York, 1999).

22 Almost an exception is Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York, 1985). See also Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955–1975* (New York, 1986); George C. Herring, "Peoples Quite Apart: Americans, South Vietnamese, and the War in Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 14 (1990): 1–23; and David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *Vietnam: A Portrait of Its People at War* (London, 1996).

23 Shawn McHale, "'Colonial' Scholarship On the Vietnam War," *Washington Post*, July 31, 1999, A20.

24 Scattered attempts to portray the relationship of such countries to the war have been confined mostly to diplomatic and military matters. See Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station, Tex., 2000); R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 3 vols. (New York, 1983–91); Daniel S. Papp, *Vietnam: The View from Moscow, Peking, Washington* (Jefferson, N.C., 1981); Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder, Colo., 1987); Keith L. Nelson, *The Making of Détente: Soviet-American Relations in the Shadow of Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1995); Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996); Jian Chen, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964–1969," *China Quarterly* 142 (1995): 356–89; Qiang Zhai, "Opposing Negotiations: China and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965–1968," *Pacific Historical Review* 68 (1999): 21–49; Odd Arne Westad et al., *77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1977*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper no. 22 (Washington, D.C., 1998); Thomas R. Havens, *Fire Across the Sea: The Vietnam War and*

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

9

we must acknowledge Akira Iriye's insight that international history is much more than the sum total of national histories.<sup>25</sup> The international dimension of this book therefore is complemented by transnational and comparative approaches.

To be sure, the chapters in this book, which are concerned with differences and commonalities between the American entanglement with Vietnam and earlier events in American history as well as experiences in other countries, do not aspire to be an attempt at comparative history in any systematic way. Rather, they employ – in George Fredrickson's words – “exotic analogy as a way of shedding additional light on some phenomenon in a single nation or society.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Seth Koven rightly remarked that although “transnational and transchronological comparative history is enormously difficult, especially for historians trained to pay close attention to the contingent, local, and peculiar nature of their subject, . . . nonetheless, one reward of this kind of inquiry is the opportunity to discover patterns and structures which are invisible when viewed from the perspective of parochial, national histories.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, several chapters embark on comparisons rather pragmatically, either to suggest general models or to highlight and bring into focus specific aspects by throwing them against the backdrop of some other time and/or place. To internationalize the history of the Vietnam War and put it into comparative perspective dovetails with recent calls to test the paradigm and the ideological premises not only of American exceptionalism but of a nation-centered historiography per se.<sup>28</sup> In this vein,

*Japan* (Princeton, N.J., 1987); Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags": The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Jefferson, N.C., 1994); Kil J. Yi, “Alliance in the Quagmire: The United States, South Korea, and the Vietnam War, 1964–1968,” Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1997; Glen St. J. Barclay, *A Very Small Insurance Policy: The Politics of Australian Involvement in Vietnam, 1954–1967* (St. Lucia, 1988); Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy During the Vietnam War, 1965–75* (Sydney, 1997); Douglas A. Ross, *In the Interest of Peace: Canada and Vietnam, 1954–1973* (Toronto, 1984); Victor Levant, *Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in the Vietnam War* (Toronto, 1986); John Dumbrell, “The Johnson Administration and the British Labour Government: Vietnam, the Pound and East of Suez,” *Journal of American Studies* 30 (1996): 211–31; Rolf Steininger, “Grossbritannien und der Vietnamkrieg 1964/65,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 45 (1997): 589–628; Joachim Arenth, *Johnson, Vietnam und der Westen: Transatlantische Belastungen 1963–1969* (Munich, 1994); Fredrik Logevall, “De Gaulle, Neutralization, and American Involvement in Vietnam,” *Pacific Historical Review* 61 (1992): 69–102; and Fredrik Logevall, “The Swedish-American Conflict over Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History* 17 (1993): 421–45.

25 Akira Iriye, “The Internationalization of History,” *American Historical Review* 94, no. 2 (1989): 1–10.

26 George M. Fredrickson, “Comparative History,” in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 457.

27 Seth Koven, “Revisioning Reconstructions,” in Norbert Finzsch and Jürgen Martschukat, eds., *Different Restorations: Reconstruction and "Wiederaufbau" in Germany and the United States: 1865, 1945, and 1989* (Providence, R.I., 1996), 230.

28 Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1031–55. More generally, Jürgen Osterhammel has argued for looking beyond national histories: “Transnationale Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Erweiterung oder Alternative?” *Geschichte*

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Excerpt

[More information](#)10      *Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, Wilfried Mausbach*

our endeavor can be understood as part of an effort – in Michael Geyer's and Charles Bright's words – "to historicize the United States, robbing this nation of its sublime presence as history entirely of and for itself."<sup>29</sup>

In so doing, the following chapters travel along several avenues that sometimes intersect. They represent an exercise in international history in that they respond to the fact that after World War II "the amount of attention to and concern about the United States on the part of governments, elite groups, and mass populations in other parts of the world" increased dramatically.<sup>30</sup> There is no single event to illustrate this more forcefully than the history of the Vietnam War. On a geopolitical level, this war can serve as an illuminating example of the relationships between hegemonic centers and less powerful regions; it can explore patterns of support and delimitation; and it can demonstrate how the repercussions of hegemonic action began to affect the world as a whole in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> However, there is more to this than only a geopolitical story.

In fact, the chapters of this book also show that Vietnam readily lends itself to inquiries that transcend national boundaries. Scholars of race, class, gender, immigration, and social movements increasingly stress the transnational characteristics of their subjects.<sup>32</sup> The worldwide political, social,

*und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 464–79, and *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen, 2001). See also Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, 1995).

29 Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1039.

30 Ernest R. May, "Writing Contemporary International History," *Diplomatic History* 8 (1984): 106.

31 See the essays by Fredrik Logevall, Christopher Jespersen, John Prados, Arne Kislenko, Peter Edwards, and Leopoldo Nuti in this book. For an analysis of the nature of such strategic repercussions a decade before Vietnam took center stage, see William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, N.J., 1995).

32 To name just a few: Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1998); Michelle A. Stephens, "Black Transnationalism and the Politics of National Identity: West Indian Intellectuals in Harlem in the Age of War and Revolution," *American Quarterly* 50 (1998): 592–608; Sean Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790–1920," *International Labor and Working Class History* 26 (1984): 1–24; Frederick Cooper et al., eds., *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison, Wis., 1993); Donald Meyer, *Sex and Power: The Rise of Women in America, Russia, Sweden, and Italy*, 2d ed. (Middletown, Conn., 1989); Ian Tyrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare States* (New York, 1993); Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, N.J., 1997); Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989); Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870–1914* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992); Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Blasch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York, 1992); Mark Wymann, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993); Donna R. Gabaccia, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Immigration Historians," *Journal of American History* 84 (1997): 570–5; David G. Gutiérrez, "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the 'Third Space': The