



The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War (Columbia Guides to American History and Cultures)

By David L. Anderson

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More than a quarter of a century after the last Marine Corps Huey left the American embassy in Saigon, the lessons and legacies of the most divisive war in twentieth-century American history are as hotly debated as ever. Why did successive administrations choose little-known Vietnam as the "test case" of American commitment in the fight against communism? Why were the "best and brightest" apparently blind to the illegitimacy of the state of South Vietnam? Would Kennedy have pulled out had he lived? And what lessons regarding American foreign policy emerged from the war?

The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War helps readers understand this tragic and complex conflict. The book contains both interpretive information and a wealth of facts in easy-to-find form. Part I provides a lucid narrative overview of contested issues and interpretations in Vietnam scholarship. Part II is a mini-encyclopedia with descriptions and analysis of individuals, events, groups, and military operations. Arranged alphabetically, this section enables readers to look up isolated facts and specialized terms. Part III is a chronology of key events. Part IV is an annotated guide to resources, including films, documentaries, CD-ROMs, and reliable Web sites. Part V contains excerpts from historical documents and statistical data.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

University of Indianapolis history professor David L. Anderson (*Facing My Lai*) combines three different formats in his concise Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War: a historical summary of the conflict from French occupation through North Vietnam's victory, organized around key controversial questions ("Was Johnson a War Hawk or a Reluctant Warrior?"); an A-Z mini-encyclopedia of all things Vietnam War; and an extensive list of resources and documents, plus a detailed chronology that runs from 207 B.C. ("Kingdom of Nam Viet founded") through Clinton's extension of diplomatic recognition to socialist Vietnam in 1995.

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From Library Journal

A highly regarded Vietnam War scholar, Anderson (*Facing My Lai; Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961*) offers a thorough overview that will benefit students and scholars seeking resources about all aspects of the war and Vietnamese history. The guide consists of five parts, most notably Anderson's summary of the war, in which he posits many questions but, to his credit, does not present his conclusions as definitive answers. He concludes that the war resulted from a misapplication of American containment policies, but he cautions the researcher to investigate all conservative, liberal, and revisionist interpretations of the war's origin and ending. The overview is followed by a detailed glossary. The final three sections are a chronology; an extensive, briefly annotated bibliography, which includes print and electronic resources; and a selection of primary documents that includes decrees from Vietnamese and American officials, concluding with President Clinton's 1995 speech that declared normalized relations with Vietnam. This guide is not as strong as its companion, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*, because it lacks a section of shorter essays by noted contributors. But it is a fine resource for understanding the war and all its complexities. Recommended for academic and most public libraries. Karl Helicher, Upper Merion Twp. Lib., King of Prussia, PA

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From [Booklist](#)

This volume follows the same type of format as other titles in the Columbia Guides to American History and Cultures series. The first part of the book contains a historical narrative. The rest consists of a "mini-encyclopedia" listing events, individuals, and military operations; a brief chronology; an annotated bibliography of books, feature films, documentaries, and electronic resources; a collection of mostly excerpted documents; and an appendix of pertinent statistics.

Although it does not provide the depth of coverage found in the three-volume *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (ABC-CLIO, 1998) or as many entries as *Dictionary of the Vietnam War* (Greenwood, 1988), this volume is nevertheless an outstanding ready-reference source. For students and researchers, it offers an excellent starting point to find information, including some surprisingly specific material, such as the precise date when the *Domino theory* was first articulated and the names of the individuals who first suggested the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C. The editor, a scholar of the Vietnam War, should be commended for compiling such an informative, balanced, and unbiased reference source on the most contentious war in American history. Recommended for both public and academic libraries. *RBB*

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