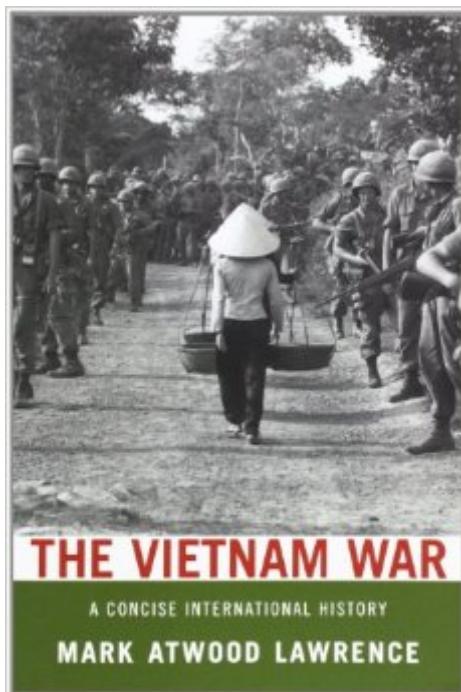


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The Vietnam War: A Concise International History (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

The Vietnam War remains a topic of extraordinary interest, not least because of striking parallels between that conflict and more recent fighting in the Middle East. In *The Vietnam War*, Mark Atwood Lawrence draws upon the latest research in archives around the world to offer readers a superb account of a key moment in U.S. as well as global history. While focusing on American involvement between 1965 and 1975, Lawrence offers an unprecedentedly complete picture of all sides of the war, notably by examining the motives that drove the Vietnamese communists and their foreign allies. Moreover, the book carefully considers both the long- and short-term origins of the war. Lawrence examines the rise of Vietnamese communism in the early twentieth century and reveals how Cold War anxieties of the 1940s and 1950s set the United States on the road to intervention. Of course, the heart of the book covers the "American war," ranging from the overthrow of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to the impact of the Tet Offensive on American public opinion, Lyndon Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 presidential race, Richard Nixon's expansion of the war into Cambodia and Laos, and the problematic peace agreement of 1973, which ended American military involvement. Finally, the book explores the complex aftermath of the war--its enduring legacy in American books, film, and political debate, as well as Vietnam's struggles with severe social and economic problems. A compact and authoritative primer on an intensely relevant topic, this well-researched and engaging volume offers an invaluable overview of the Vietnam War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Attempting to write a history of The Vietnam War in less than 200 pages of text (supported by good notes) is not an easy task. The keen student of Vietnam will find nothing new in this, but if you are looking for a generally well written concise history of this horrible conflict - read Lawrence's work. Vietnam is a story of broken promises by world powers - United States, France, Soviet Union and China. After a brief exploration of the early history of the country, the author shows how Vietnam was but a pawn for the major powers. He paints quite clearly an inexorable slow drive to inevitable war as the US / Soviet Union / China perceive a country virtually unknown to the West as a key geo-political battle ground. The tragedy for the United States is that Vietnam was also a domestic political football and US Presidents Kennedy and Johnson got deeper involved in the conflict "not because they were confident of victory but because they feared the consequences of defeat." The Vietnam War broke LBJ, a man who always seemed to only go half-way in implementing any advice from advisors. I can't agree with a previous reviewer who castigates the author for his profile of Nixon. It is well documented that Nixon interfered with Johnson's peace overtures prior to the 1968 election which is a much more cynical act than his Watergate escapades. An excellent picture of Nixon and Kissinger is painted in Robert Dallek's book *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* and does neither of them little credit. Very concise but good overviews of the Tet offensive and other key battles are provided. If you want a military history of Vietnam, this is not the book for you, but if you want a good general picture and understanding of how the most powerful nation got involved in one terrible mess, this is a short enjoyable read. One qualm - author Lawrence suggests that from "January 29 to March 31 (1968), the NLF and the North Vietnamese army suffered as many as fifty-eight thousand dead," but later suggests that in the full year 1968 "the communists lost an estimated sixty thousand killed." Better proof reading needed here I think.

This book will be of great service for laypeople interested in a concise and wide-ranging overview of the Vietnam War. In fact, it would also be a good, safe choice for college history instructors looking for a short text to use in undergraduate classes on the Vietnam War or U.S. foreign relations. A big plus of this book is that Lawrence frames his story widely, giving considerable room for discussion of French colonialism in Vietnam, World War II, and the origins of U.S. involvement, which make up about 1/3 of the book. A second plus is that he provides views from all sides of the conflict, not just the view from Washington. We learn quite a bit about power struggles and disagreements over strategy within the North Vietnamese communist party and with its allies in China and the Soviet Union. For example, it was the big communist powers who pushed Hanoi to accept the 1954

Geneva accord out of fear of provoking U.S. intervention at a time they felt they could not match U.S. power. In his judgment of U.S. policies, Lawrence is solidly in the orthodox camp, repeatedly pointing out that despite short-term successes of U.S. economic aid to the Diem regime, it was doomed due to its internal corruption. The same argument is used to evaluate U.S. military tactics: Successes on the battlefield petered out due to a fundamental flaw in strategic assumptions. Revisionists such as Mark Moyar will surely disagree, but Lawrence does represent the majority opinion among U.S. historians at the moment. The book has no major flaws, but Lawrence's prose isn't exactly lively. At times "The Vietnam War" reads like a textbook. Given its brevity, the book merely alludes to topics such as the experience of soldiers, the effects of chemical warfare, the war in American and Vietnamese memory, etc. But then again, that's when the "for further reading" essay comes in extremely handy. As a solid foundation for further exploration of this major conflict--whether in a classroom or at private leisure--this short text does the job well.

This book is a good choice for those seeking introductory information on the Vietnam War. It does a good job at presenting the political dynamics of the war, yet it is deficient in that it largely ignores the later repercussions of the war for the world as well as the huge importance (whether contrived or real) the war had on the Cold War. Furthermore, the book does not delve deeply into battles occurring during the war, largely confining itself to those political factors. However, I would recommend this book as a refresher, yet it's not for those already familiar with the conflict.

This book provides a good overview of the Vietnam War and a good jumping off point to other, more in-depth reads. The writer is clear and balanced in his writing, which is helpful when dealing with such a painful subject.

As a New Zealand soldier serving in this quagmire- this book put it all in perspective. After serving in a well run conflict in Malaysia and then a very clever campaign under British guidance in Borneo- Vietnam was American doctrine warfare gone mad. We were appalled at the callow ignorant mainly Black American grunts, the lack of overall objectives and it simply became do your time till wakey and goodbye. I still see the arrogance and ignorance that led America into Vietnam prevailed again in Iraq and now Afghanistan. I fear American leadership in this direction and wonder how it could happen when you meet so many erudite educated Americans who are proud of their country and reflect the ideals under which the USA was founded. Should be compulsory reading for all State dept employees, Senate aids and field grade officers of the US armed services.

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