

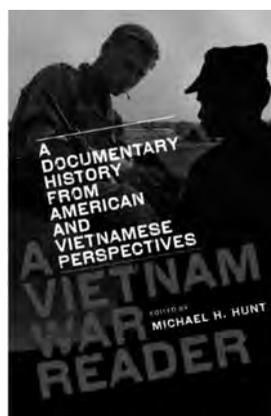
A Vietnam War Reader *A Documentary History from American and Vietnamese Perspectives*

EDITED BY MICHAEL H. HUNT

CHAPEL HILL: UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS, 2010

223 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0807859919, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Shelton Woods



Divided into seven chapters, the compact *A Vietnam War Reader* is a brilliant guide to one of history's most analyzed conflicts. This volume's excellence is rooted in the editor's choice of documents and his narrative introductions to each chapter; every chapter introduction concludes with questions for discussion. Professor Michael H. Hunt brings a lifetime of knowledge and scholarship to this edited book. Very few, if any, scholars have the gift for succinct, engaging narrative combined with an encyclopedic knowledge of this subject. And while the author may have strongly-held opinions on his topic, he asserts at the outset that, "Throughout I have tried to keep my own views on a leash so that readers will feel free to grapple on their own with the important questions still surrounding the Việt Nam War" (xiv).

What makes Hunt's volume stand out from similar studies is his scalpel—he knows how to discriminately choose the heart of a long document and make it compelling to various types of readers.

Chapter one, "Setting: Colonialism and the Cold War (to 1954)" opens with Nguyen Dinh Chieu's 1861 funeral oration honoring peasants who fought the French and closes with President Eisenhower's correspondence with Winston Churchill regarding the ongoing Battle of Dienbienphu. In between these two documents, Hunt puts in other sources that help explain Việt Nam's French colonial history. One such document is Hồ Chí Minh's September 2, 1945, declaration of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Việt Nam. Hunt's inclusion of this speech is not surprising, and it often appears in other such books on the war. What makes Hunt's volume stand out from similar studies is his scalpel—he knows how to discriminately choose the heart of a long document and make it compelling to various types of readers. All the while, one never feels short-changed by reading the edited documents, because their main topics are always highlighted. In fact, the rather pithy presentation engages the reader.

Professor Hunt states that in this reader he gives the Vietnamese and Americans equal time. He also provides a balanced perspective to the differing opinions in each camp. For example, in one document Under Secretary of State George Ball notes in 1965 that America's involvement in

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Việt Nam is akin to “giving cobalt treatment to a terminal cancer case” (81). In another record from 1967, Hồ Chí Minh is overtly skeptical of what eventually became the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Two things to note about the balance of documents: first, chapter six “The War Comes Home, 1965–1971” is exclusively devoted to the American side of the war; second, the book is focused on the American/Việt Nam aspect of the war. While there are occasional references to other players in the war, Cambodia and Laos, for example, they are given no real hearing in these documents.

Sprinkled throughout Hunt’s narrative and the documents are notable statistics and statements that are often overlooked by those who study the war. Hunt asserts, for example, that there were seven American support personnel in Việt Nam for every American combatant. Another important fact Hunt provides for those who say no one knew why America was in Việt Nam is President Johnson’s April 7, 1965, speech at Johns Hopkins University where he clearly answers his rhetorical question, “Why are we in South Việt Nam?” (70).

One final sample of Hunt’s captivating narrative is found in the last chapter, “Outcomes and Verdicts.” The author clearly captures the post-war mood: “In both countries, anxious nationalists went to work either to preserve the memory of a glorious victory or to redeem the shame of defeat” (185). This kind of analytical, objective insight makes *A Vietnam War Reader* perfect for a high school class or a lower division collegiate course. ■

SHELTON WOODS was born in the Philippines and lived there until he was eighteen. He received his PhD in Southeast Asian History from UCLA in 1993. He is currently Professor of History and Associate Dean at Boise State University. He is the author of four books and numerous articles.

This Is China *The First 5,000 Years*

HAIWANG YUAN, RONALD G. KNAPP, MARGOT E. LANDMAN,
AND GREGORY VEECK, EDs.

BERKSHIRE PUBLISHING, 2010

126 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1933782201, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Terrae Fogarty



This *This Is China: The First 5,000 Years* is a useful addition to many AP World History classrooms. The book effectively introduces five thousand years of history in only 192 pages. The abridged narrative smartly creates a detailed overview of China that teachers can use as a supplement or as a summer reading topic. The book provides material to build both a basic and thorough understanding of Chinese history, and it certainly can be used in high school world history classes of any level as well as the college classroom. In the AP classroom, *This Is China: The First 5,000 Years* becomes a centerpiece for historical understanding.

Teachers often find that their students lack the “big picture” for any given civilization much less being able to understand the interconnectedness of the world over time. An advantage for this book is that it covers China chronologically and details *how* one era began as the other ended. The editors use pictures, dynasty charts, and dates to reinforce the notion of where the reader is in time. The chapters are short, yet subdivided to help readers know the focus of the discussion. Sidebars provide additional information for a more focused look at important historical personalities as well as “topics for further study.”

In each chapter, the editors provide two very helpful resources for both educators and students in the form of web-based materials and a “thought experiment.” The “thought experiments” enrich classroom discussion and debate and give both the educator and students provocative questions to ponder individually or as a group.

This Is China: The First 5,000 Years is an easy-to-read overview that serves as a platform upon which teachers can build. While it offers the fundamentals on Chinese geography, dynasties, the republic, and contemporary history from Mao to the present, instructors may want to supplement this book with other sources on Chinese history, especially for upper level history courses. *This Is China* could serve as a powerful summer reading assignment for an Advanced Placement course in high school. *This Is China: The First 5,000 Years* provides a manageable and stimulating approach to a subject that has long frustrated some students. Students may now wrestle with Chinese history, feel a sense of accomplishment, and win the struggle to understand China. ■

TERRAE FOGARTY, PHD, has taught in Gwinnett County Public Schools in Suwanee, Georgia for twenty-four years. She currently teaches AP World History and participated in the 2010 National Consortium for Teaching About Asia (NCTA) China Study Tour.

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