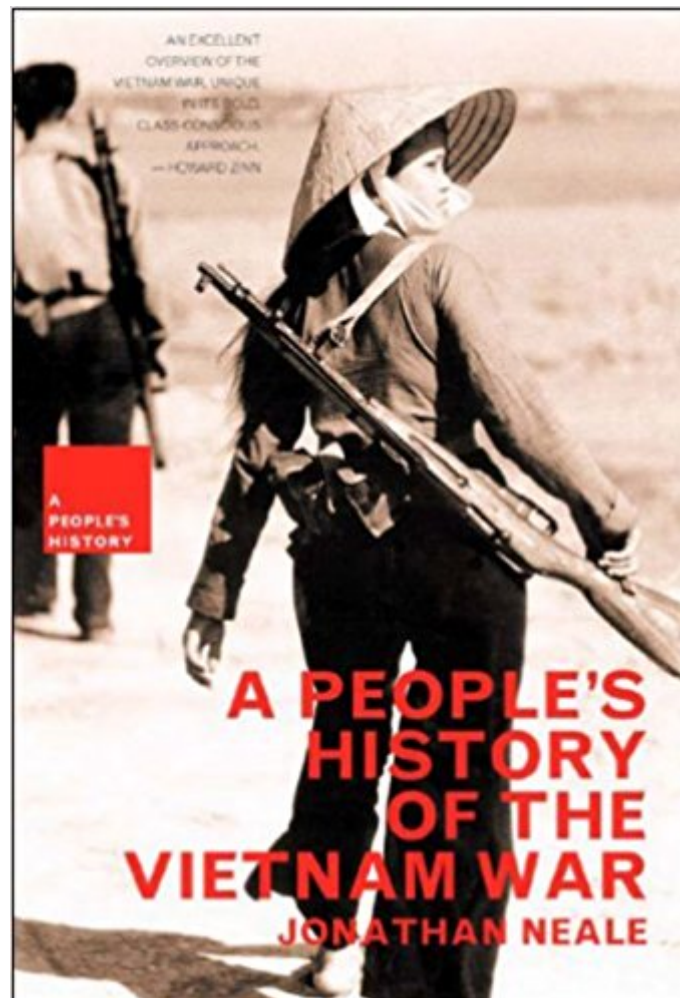




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# A People's History Of The Vietnam War (New Press People's History)



## Synopsis

This latest addition to The New Press's People's History series offers an incisive account of the war America lost, from the perspective of those who opposed it on both sides of the battlefield as well as on the homefront. The protagonists in Neale's history of the "American War" (as the Vietnamese refer to it) are common people struggling to shape the outcome of events unfolding on an international stage. American foot soldiers who increasingly opposed American military policy on the ground in Vietnam, local Vietnamese activists and guerrillas fighting to build a just society, and the American civilians who mobilized to bring the war to a halt. His narrative includes vivid, first-person commentary from the ordinary men and women whose collective actions resulted in the defeat of the world's most powerful military machine.

## Book Information

Series: New Press People's History

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: The New Press; Reprint edition (September 3, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1565849434

ISBN-13: 978-1565849433

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 18 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #94,630 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #87 in Books > History > Asia > Southeast Asia #128 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Asia #166 in Books > History > Military > United States > Vietnam War

## Customer Reviews

Explicitly addressing contemporary protesters aggrieved by World Bank meetings, the author reviews the war on which he cut his radical teeth, the conflict in Vietnam. With an inspirational purpose, Neale's work cannot technically be considered a "history," because its text largely synthesizes secondary sources; nevertheless, its point of view is extant if not widespread and, therefore, should be represented in library collections. Neale's is left of left, and he couches his version of the Vietnam War in the Marxist terms ruling class and class struggle. Thus the war originated in landlords' oppression of peasants in Vietnam (not from the North's relentless pressure

on the South), and the American ruling class intervened partly to uphold anti-communism at home--specifically, to keep unions down and socialism suffocated, according to Neale. He further credits the antiwar movement with ending the war, holding forth his example to encourage his readers' current causes. Though energetic in its outrage, Neale's work illustrates history as refracted through his own ideology. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Neale's interpretation of events is clear, bold, and confident. A radical and well-written interpretation of the Vietnam War." •Marilyn Young, author of *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* "Something remarkable and rare" •a survey of the American War in Vietnam that is lively, accessible, idiosyncratic, opinionated, and rangy." •Christian G. Appy, author of *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*

This book is part of the "People's History" series, conceived of by Howard Zinn. The most famous and well-read in the series is the one on the United States, and it is a shame that this one has not been more widely read, since, as Faulkner famously said, "The past is not dead; it is not even the past," and a significant aspect of this book is to relate the actions and events surrounding this war to contemporary ones. The "People's History" series is the antithesis of the "Big Man" theory of history, which attributes historical outcomes to a few; instead, it looks at how history is shaped by the broad actions of the many. Views of the Vietnam War are still a highly polarizing aspect of American society, hence the dispersion in the voting at , between the one and the five stars. The power elites in America can take some comfort in the fact that whenever someone wants to address the concentration in power and decision making, there are people willing to denounce the attempt as a "Trotskyite account." Communism may very much be dead, as it should be, but class divisions in American society have only grown. I spent a year in Vietnam, in the field, September '68 to August '69, as a Medic, in a tank unit with the 4th Infantry Division. Since then I have read some 50 books on the war. No one book tells the whole story, for sure, and I've always admired the accounts of both Sheehan and Karnow, and certainly Greene's prescient "The Quiet American." Neale's account is in the same category: an essential read, and a prime reason is some of the unique aspects of the account. Neale allocates an entire chapter to one of the "under covered" aspects of the war, entitled "The G.I.'s Revolt." It conforms largely to what I witnessed: a unit going from gung-ho to quiet mutiny within a year. Neale starts with Ron Kovic, who wrote "Born on the 4th of July," and who went from gung-ho to a wheelchair, from which he became one of the leaders of the veteran's

anti-war movement. Neale wisely defuses the "Trotskyite rant" charge by quoting an article written in the "Armed Forces Journal" in June, 1971 by Colonel Robert Heintz, a Marine Corps historian, who compared the morale of American troops with those of the Nivelle Mutinies in the French army during World War I, and the disintegration of the Russian Army in the same war (as graphically depicted in the movie, *Dr. Zhivago*). To the best of my knowledge his book is the only one to debunk one of the perennial "urban myths" spawned by the "spin doctors" of the war, that veterans were 'spit on' by anti-war demonstrators when they returned home, and points to the movie "Coming Home" as a prime source, based on the work of Jerry Lembcke. He also looks at the other Hollywood fare which promoted the image of a "troubled Vietnam War veteran," the polite phrase for a psychotic. Another haunting aspect which he recalls, a quintessential searing image of the war, is the "improvements" made to napalm, first by adding polystyrene (so it would stick to the skin), and then the addition of "Willie Pete," (white phosphorous). Overall though, it is a history of the war, starting with the French denouement, and he repeats aspects that are reported in other books, for example, the oft-quoted statement by Dwight D. Eisenhower that if elections were held, 80% of the Vietnamese would have voted for Ho Chi Minh. Thus elections had to be avoided, which they were, diminishing our purported advocacy of democracy. War deaths are placed at three million, and 20% of the G.I. war deaths are the result of "friendly fire." He quotes Halberstam on how a marine colonel spoofed McNamara, then the Secretary of Defense, with a routine involving "hard" numbers and percentages that was so comical that Jack Raymond, a NYT reporter started laughing and had to leave, but McNamara bought the whole thing, highly praising the colonel. (p 89) He also covers the war in Cambodia, starting with the murderous B-52 bombings which almost certainly gave rise to one of the cruelest and most fanatical regimes of all time, the rule by the Khmer Rouge. Less we forget, Neale reminds us that the US allied itself with China for numerous years, promoting this government as the "legitimate rulers" of Cambodia so as to punish the Vietnamese for winning the war. He brings the legacy of the Vietnam War forward through America's more recent wars in Yugoslavia and Iraq. An egregious mistake is made here, when he attributes the motivation behind the attacks of 9-11 to the "political situation in their own countries," and says: "Saudi Arabia... is one of the most brutal and reactionary dictatorships on earth." Ironical for someone trying to debunk so many of the myths of the Vietnam War that he is so willing to swallow the current "party line" by the promoters of the war on terror. Saudi Arabia is no Khmer Rouge, and even dictatorship does not apply to velvet-gloved authoritarianism. But when he sticks to his main subject, he has provided a valuable 5-star contribution to our understanding of that tragic mistake.

This book is a balanced approach to what happened in Southeast Asia. Many reasons for the war and it's failures. I like the peoples aspect as they fought the war.

Very interesting analysis of the class struggles both in Vietnam and the US, that as a consequence lead to the Vietnam war. Recommended.

Love it!

A lot of misspelling

Not what I expected. I served several tours in Vietnam in combat yet I observed very little of the emotions the author attributed to soldiers serving there. Most didn't want to be there but they did their duty honorably.

This book was a very good read. Most books on the Vietnam War portray the United States as a hero trying to knock some sense into the Asian people. This book tells it like it was. I missed getting drafted by two years. I already knew the real story by then and was headed to Canada. Fortunately, the war ended before my trip to Canada. This book should be Audible and even put on CD for those of us that don't have time to read.

Fantastic, honest, accurate history of the war in Vietnam. Definitely not the joke of a history that we learn about in US schools. A perfect adjunct to movies like The Fog of War. Both the book and the (unrelated) movie show clearly how the United States illegally imposed themselves into a conflict between the French colonialists and their Vietnamese colony--who--exactly like the United States did 200 years earlier against the British--went to war in order to gain their God given freedom from tyranny. (It's doubly ironic that it was the UNITED STATES--the so called (by the United States, naturally) "land of the free and home of the brave"--that came to the aid of the FRENCH instead of the VIETNAMESE in their war of independence.) The Vietnamese actually quoted large sections of our Declaration of Independence in their OWN freedom charter... but the near identical similarity of their situation seemed to be lost on the United States of America at the time... almost certainly due to the fact that the Vietnamese were "yellow" people... not whites. To the US Government (and people), Liberty and Justice and Freedom are lofty and worthy ideals... unless you're an American Indian... or a African American... or Japanese American... or a Southeast Asian. In all of those

cases... you're screwed.

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