

**Anderson, David L. *The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War*.
New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.**

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and Britain's lack of sufficient forces for defence of the Far East was one consequence of that. Had Britain been able to retain a much larger Gurkha force, he says, the Malayan Communist Party might have been deterred from launching its insurgency in the first place. That may be a debatable assertion, but even if deterrence had failed, Britain would have been better prepared to contain the insurgency at the outset. Furthermore, Britain would have had greater flexibility in balancing the Malayan campaign and the defence of Hong Kong, and it would have precluded the need to extend the period of National Service in the UK.

The thoroughness with which Gregorian probes his subject means that his book is not an easy read. It also suffers from the common quirk of dissertations-become-books: over-zealous documentation. The endnotes could have been condensed to reduce repetition. Those minor problems aside, Raffi Gregorian has made a major contribution to the historiography of the Malayan Emergency by situating that campaign within the complex of Britain's strategic aims, dilemmas, and achievements in the post-war Far East.

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Three decades after the fall of Saigon the lessons and legacies of the Vietnam War remain a source of fascination and curiosity to some, contention and debate to many more. As a result, the literature on the Vietnam War continues to grow almost exponentially as scholars take advantage of newly opened archives, new methodological and interpretive approaches, and newly declassified documents to explore original questions and revisit traditional ones. For those unfamiliar with the war, this wealth of scholarship can be daunting. It is fortunate, then, that leading Vietnam War expert David L. Anderson (*Trapped By Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* [1991]; *Facing My Lai: Moving Beyond the Massacre* [1998]) has compiled a wonderfully concise and exceedingly useful (and usable) resource designed to help readers understand the essential facts and interpretations of this long and tragic conflict.

The book is divided into five parts, covering both factual and critical information in an easy-to-use format. The first section provides a general narrative overview organized around the main issues, arguments, and controversies surrounding the Vietnam War from early Vietnamese history through the postwar

period. The second section, “The Vietnam War from A to Z,” contains short descriptive and analytical encyclopedia entries covering key individuals and events. The third section is an extensive chronology of events related to Vietnamese history since 207 BC, the wars in Indochina, and the postwar period through President Bill Clinton’s diplomatic recognition of Vietnam in 1995. The fourth section, which will be of particular interest to those teaching about the Vietnam experience, is an annotated guide to the major films, documentaries, internet sites, and other resources related to the conflict, including a chronological bibliography of the major primary and secondary sources, bibliographies, and reference works on the conflict. The fifth and final section contains excerpts from primary source documents and statistical data (e.g. troop levels, casualties, expenditures, bombing tonnage) relating to the war.

Given the complexities of the conflict and the controversy surrounding it, Anderson has done a remarkable job in distilling the voluminous literature and resources on the war. To his credit, Anderson carefully stays objective throughout the narrative section, examining the various facets of the main questions – e.g. why successive administrations chose Vietnam as the test case of American commitment in the fight against communism; whether Kennedy would have withdrawn from Vietnam had he lived; what lessons emerged from the war – and avoiding the temptation of providing definitive answers. Indeed, while he does argue that the war resulted from a misapplication of the US policy of containment, he urges the reader to examine all of the interpretations on the origins and climax of the war before reaching a conclusion. Given the nature of the book, it is difficult to argue with the choices Anderson makes in terms of what to include in and leave out of the volume. The only significant point on which one might find fault with the book is the lack of excerpts from the major interpretive works on the war; their inclusion would have fit in nicely with the scope and purpose of the volume.

Anderson has clearly achieved his goal of providing the reader with “a versatile, objective, and reliable way to understand the intense and significant debate over the war.” (p. xii) Although neither as detailed in its narrative as George Herring’s standard synthesis, *America’s Longest War*, nor as comprehensive in its depth of coverage as reference works like Stanley Kutler’s *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, *The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War* is an outstanding primer to the conflict and the scholarship it has inspired. Scholars will find it useful as a quick and practical reference guide, and it is highly recommended to both advanced secondary and university level students seeking an introduction to the conflict in Indochina.

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