

The Vietnam War

A History in Documents

EDITED BY MARILYN B. YOUNG, JOHN J. FITZGERALD,
AND A. TOM GRUNFELD

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We owe a great debt to Marilyn Young, John Fitzgerald, and Tom Grunfeld, who, in *The Vietnam War: A History in Documents*, have intelligently compiled and introduced a comprehensive collection of primary sources on one of the most contentious events in twentieth-century international history. Covering the period from the First Indochina War to the bitter aftermath of the American conflict, the documents provide a well-rounded overview of Vietnam's modern nationalist struggle, although one perhaps most useful to educators of United States history rather than Asian history.

Readers will find both the expected and the unexpected. Among the former documents are such standards as the "Final Declaration" of the 1954 Geneva Conference, correspondence from Hô Chi Minh to Harry Truman, and transcripts of televised speeches by Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. It is the more unusual documents that make this particular collection so valuable. In a chapter devoted to American and Vietnamese experiences of the war, for instance, readers discover not only the official citation of the Bronze Star received by one of the editors (Fitzgerald, a former infantryman in the US Army), but also his quite different recollection of the circumstances that led to the award. There is, moreover, excellent coverage of popular culture—song lyrics from both Country Joe and the Fish and Merle Haggard, for example—as well as an enlightening picture essay on "selling patriotism."

The collection was published with high school or undergraduate students clearly in mind. The editors provide a useful introduction to what primary documents are and how one should "read" them, as well as a brief history of Vietnamese nationalism that helps to contextualize the remainder of the book. Apart from a few minor errors, the editors' introductions to the documents are outstanding. Distinguishing the collection from a number of other documentary histories—such as Gareth Porter's *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, or an earlier volume of Young's *Vietnam and America: A Documented History*, co-edited with Marvin Gettleman, Jane Franklin, and H. Bruce Franklin—the volume contains wonderful illustrations, from photographs to bumper stickers to postage stamps, that will undoubtedly be appreciated by students.

In sum, Young, Fitzgerald, and Grunfeld's richly informed, beautifully illustrated documentary collection, with its multiple Vietnamese and American perspectives, is ideal for classroom use. ■

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