



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

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A COUNTRY
STAYS ALIVE
WHEN ITS
CULTURE IS
ALIVE.

- SACEI Newsletter updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.
- It serves as a LINK between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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JFK and the Seeds of Disaster in Vietnam

A U.S.-backed coup marked the triumph of politics over policy.

By Mark Moyar

Fifty years ago Friday was the most important day of the Vietnam War, when South Vietnamese generals staged a coup against President Ngo Dinh Diem at the behest of the United States. By wrecking the South Vietnamese government, the coup—and Diem's assassination soon after—set in motion the events that brought U.S. combat forces into Vietnam in 1965 and kept them there for seven years.

Some of the mistakes and misdeeds that led to that day bear a disturbing similarity to current events.

On the morning of Nov. 1, rebel plotters arrested or killed the key loyalist commanders in the Saigon area. They blocked the routes by which other loyalist forces could enter the city. Diem still had armored forces that could have captured the rebel leaders after the fighting began, but he declined to authorize such a mission, hoping to



South Vietnamese President Diem, who was assassinated in 1963.
Associated Press

minimize bloodshed. The rebels showed less restraint, bringing tanks to bear on the palace. Bullets flew outside the palace in the afternoon and into the night.

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Hung Huynh, Chef

The winner of Food Network's third season of *Top Chef*, Hung Huynh is the executive chef for EMM Group's res-

taurants Catch and The General located in Manhattan and Catch Miami.

Born in Vietnam and raised in Pittsfield, MA, Huynh was immersed in cooking from a young age at his immigrant parent's Vietnamese restaurant. A 2002 graduate of The Culinary Institute of America trained in classic French and Asian cuisine, Huynh believes in cooking from the soul. He especially loves seafood because he says there are a million varieties and flavors to combine.

In 2008, Huynh was the guest executive chef at Solo restaurant and, in 2009, became the executive chef at Ajna Bar, both located in New York City.



By Rufus Phillips

San Diego *Union-Tribune*, Nov. 10, 2013

<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/nov/10/tp-we-must-not-forget-our-south-vietnamese-allies/all/?print>

We Must Not Forget Our South Vietnamese Allies

Unknown to many, 95 miles north of San Diego in the city of Westminster stands a memorial to the Vietnam War erected by the Vietnamese-American community. The centerpiece is a statue of two soldiers standing close to each other, South Vietnamese and American.

As we honor Veterans Day, we should remember that it was not just an American war but a non-communist Vietnamese one as well. They suffered many more casualties than we did and also lost their country.

Coincidentally, there is an ongoing Defense Department commemoration of the Vietnam War, which honors that war's veterans, highlights the service of our Armed Forces and civilian contributing agencies and recognizes the contributions and sacrifices made by our allies.

From our Iraq and Afghanistan experience, the public has realized that we should honor our soldiers who risk their lives, even though we may not agree with the particular war itself.

This was not the case during Vietnam, when many returning veterans were either ill-treated or ignored.

Speaking for the nation, President Barack Obama put respect for them into words during Memorial Day 2011. Standing at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington in the presence of hundreds of veterans, military, civilian and allied, he said:

"As we observe the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, we reflect with solemn reverence upon the valor of a generation that served with honor. While no words will ever be worthy of their service, nor any honor befitting their sacrifice, let us remember it is never too late to pay tribute to the men and women who answered the call of duty with courage and valor.

Throughout this commemoration, let us strive to live up to their example by showing our Vietnam veterans, their families, and all who have served the fullest respect and support of a grateful nation."

As I think about being there at that moment, I remember so many of my own Vietnamese friends who died after the communists took over, who suffered but survived in concentration camps or who were among the million who took to the seas to escape oppression. On this Veterans Day, they need to be honored, too.

If my 14-year involvement in the effort to keep South Vietnam free tells me anything, it is that what has become a narrative of the South Vietnamese unwilling to fight for their own country needs to be changed. This was popularized by such books as "A Bright Shining Lie," by Neil Sheehan. The non-communist Vietnamese were pictured as essentially cowardly and incompetent, with the Viet Cong shown to be 8 feet tall with the right cause on their side.

The fact is that after Tet in 1968, the South Vietnamese with our support managed to bring peace to almost all of the countryside, much of which had been controlled by the Viet Cong. Then in 1972, with our air support but no direct American troop involvement, they managed to defeat a massive North Vietnamese invasion, the Easter Offensive. Then in 1975, with our aid cut off and no effective air support, the country collapsed.

Was there too much corruption and too many incompetent leaders in South Vietnam? Absolutely. But this was also the case for many years in South Korea, where an all-out assault from the North was forestalled by a continuing American commitment.

Vietnam is worth revisiting because we need to extract the right lesson, not the wrong one. For too long in Vietnam, we thought we could defeat the North Vietnamese ourselves, then turn the country back to our Vietnamese allies.

This was never the case. Only the South Vietnamese could have prevailed. But to do so, they needed our understanding as well as steadfast support. By the time we realized how to fight the war in a supporting role, American public support had been lost.

As I told President John F. Kennedy at the White House in September 1963, the war was primarily a political, not a military struggle. This holds lessons for us from Iraq and from Afghanistan, as we scale back our involvement there.

One lesson is that helping other vulnerable countries with traditional societies develop a working democracy and overcome internal insurgencies is a lengthy process.

Another is that we have to start our involvement with the view that only the people of the country in question can win this kind of contest. We can't do it for them.

It is unlikely we will need to intervene massively in the future, but we will still need to lean forward with a smaller but steady footprint of assistance. This needs to be explained, because the challenge is not going away.

Why Vietnam Continues to Matter

Rufus Phillips is author of "Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned." He served in the military, the CIA, USAID and as a consultant to the State Department.

JFK...continued

The next morning Diem and his brother Nhu accepted a rebel offer of safe passage out of the country. The generals dispatched an armored personnel carrier ostensibly to take the brothers to the airport but had them executed en route. The coup leadership announced that Diem and Nhu had committed “accidental suicide.”

The U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, had pushed the generals into the coup in defiance of orders from President Kennedy, who declined to rein him in. Why did JFK demur? Because he put partisan politics ahead of the national interest. Kennedy had appointed Lodge, a Republican and likely contender for the 1964 GOP presidential nomination, to the Saigon post in the hope that he would be ensnared in a protracted conflict with no prospects of immediate victory, which could prevent him from campaigning or damage him as a candidate. When Lodge sought to foment the coup, the president shied from firing him because Lodge could then have accused Kennedy of playing politics with the ambassadorship.

Presidential subordination of U.S. foreign policy to partisan politics has occurred all too frequently in recent years. Journalists such as Bob Woodward and former Obama administration officials such as Vali Nasr have shown that partisan operatives within the current U.S. administration have dictated national security policy based on approval ratings rather than the national interest. The complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, the abbreviation of the Afghan surge and the rapid downsizing of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan rank among the most baleful consequences of this politicization.

Lodge and the journalists he relied on for information—particularly David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan—believed that replacing Diem with a more liberal regime would placate critics and bolster the war effort. Lodge dismissed the advice of knowledgeable Americans, such as his predecessor, Frederick Nolting, who emphasized Diem’s strengths and warned that liberalization would play into the enemy’s hands.

A nationalist respected even by his communist enemies, Diem had managed to hold together a fractious nation and had turned the war around in 1962 by empowering a rising generation of dynamic leaders. In South Vietnam as in most countries with an authoritarian political culture, liberalization signaled weakness and encouraged subversion.

After Diem’s death, anti-government protests intensified. Ultimately, the government used far more force to suppress these protesters than Diem ever had. The leaders of the 1963 coup proved much less competent than the man they replaced. They squabbled and purged many of the government’s best leaders because of past loyalties to Diem.

Vietnamese Communist leaders hailed the coup as a “gift,” telling the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett that “the Americans have done something that we haven’t been able to do for nine years and that was get rid of Diem.” The ineffectiveness of the government that replaced Diem led to the fall of successive South Vietnamese governments, stimulating the North Vietnamese offensive that compelled the U.S. to intervene on the ground.

During its remaining years, the Obama administration might have to decide whether to promote the removal of autocratic leaders in places like Syria, Egypt and perhaps even Afghanistan. Unfortunately, today’s policy makers may be led astray by most of what they have read on Vietnam. Gordon Goldstein’s book “Lessons in Disaster,” the favorite Vietnam book of this White House, recycles past caricatures of Diem as a corrupt and ineffective autocrat, and it ignores the difficulties of governing an authoritarian society at war.

Such renderings of history sustain a narrative of Vietnam as inherently unwinnable. The guardians of that narrative defend it at all costs, for it undergirds the aversion to military intervention that has predominated among American liberals since Vietnam. In truth, the U.S. stood on the right side in Vietnam. But individual Americans behaved badly and led the U.S. and South Vietnam to disaster.

In Vietnam, Hating Communism Anew

Seeing the Communist North induces outrage at the senseless deaths and historical lies.

By Dennis Prager

It was difficult to control my emotions — specifically my anger — during my visit to Vietnam last week. The more I came to admire the Vietnamese people — their intelligence, love of life, dignity, and hard work — the more rage I felt for the Communists who brought them (and, of course, us Americans) so much suffering in the second half of the 20th century. Unfortunately, Communists still rule the country. Yet Vietnam today has embraced the only way that exists to escape poverty, let alone to produce prosperity: capitalism and the free market. So what exactly did the 2 million Vietnamese who died in the Vietnam War die for? I would like to ask one of the Communist bosses who run Vietnam that question. "Comrade," I would say, "you have disowned everything your Communist party stood for: communal property, collectivized agriculture, central planning, and militarism, among other things. Looking back, then, for precisely what did your beloved Ho Chi Minh and your party sacrifice millions of your fellow Vietnamese?"

There is no good answer. There are only a lie and a truth, and the truth is not good.

The lie is the response offered by the Vietnamese Communists and which was repeated, like virtually all Communist lies, by the world's non-Communist Left. It was (and continues to be) taught in virtually every Western university, and was (and continues to be) spread by virtually every news medium on the planet: The Vietnam Communists (i.e., the North Vietnamese),

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Charles Phan, Chef

Charles Phan, following the fall of Saigon moved briefly to Guam and then settled in San Francisco. In 1995, Phan opened The Slanted Door, a high class restaurant. "No one was doing a high-design, high-service Asian restaurant," Phan recalls. Instead

of serving dozens of mediocre entrées at The Slanted Door, Phan concentrated on a small rotating menu of authentic home-style Vietnamese dishes. He highlighted fresh, seasonal ingredients from small local farms and paired his menus with a creative wine list.

The Slanted Door was an immediate success and has continued to garner praise from restaurant critics across the country. In 2004, Phan won the coveted James Beard Award for Best Chef: California. Driving all of Phan's culinary endeavors is his belief that it is the duty of those in the food business to preserve cultural traditions. "Food is history—you can tell a lot about a culture by looking at how and what they cook and eat," he says. "I would hate to see clay pots go out of fashion 50 years from now."



<http://www.epicurious.com/articlesguides/chefsexperts/interviews/charlesphan#ixzz2kp24ltBo>

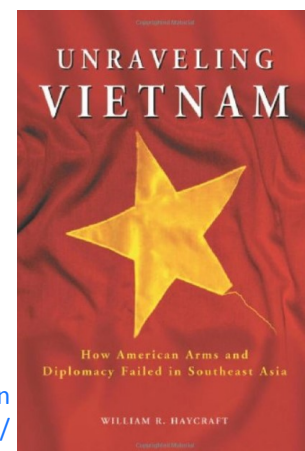
Unraveling Vietnam: William Haycraft

The Vietnam War coincided with, and in many ways caused, an enormous cultural schism in the United

States. Now, as then, scholarship is divided over the efficacy of American Cold War strategy, its ability to halt the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and the role the United States should have played in the struggle for a unified, socialist Vietnam. This book represents a new historical take on the Vietnam War. After a lengthy description of the war's historical backdrop, the book examines the origins of American involvement under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, Kennedy's advancement toward direct conflict between the U.S. and guerrilla and regular North Vietnamese forces, and the dramatic troop buildup under Johnson. Throughout, the work argues that the war was necessary and winnable under better circumstances and leadership.

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Unraveling-Vietnam-American-Diplomacy-Southeast/dp/0786423544/>



In Vietnam...continued

and the Viet Cong were merely fighting for national independence against foreign control of their country. First, they fought the French, then the Japanese, and then the Americans. American baby boomers will remember being told over and

over that Ho Chi Minh was Vietnam's George Washington, that he loved the American Constitution after which he modeled his own, and wanted nothing more than Vietnamese independence.

Here is the truth: Every Communist dictator in the world has been a megalomaniacal, cult-of-personality, power-hungry, bloodthirsty thug. Ho Chi Minh was no different. He murdered his opponents, tortured only-God-knows-how-many innocent Vietnamese, and threatened millions into fighting for him — yes, for him and his blood-soaked Vietnamese Communist party, backed by the greatest murderer of all time, Mao Tse-tung. But the moral idiots in America chanted “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh” at antiwar rallies and depicted America as the real murderers of Vietnamese — “Hey, Hey, LBJ, How many kids did you kill today?”

The Vietnamese Communists were not fighting America for Vietnamese independence. America was never interested in controlling the Vietnamese people, and there is a perfect parallel to prove this: the Korean War. Did America fight the Korean Communists in order to control Korea? Or did 37,000 Americans die in Korea so that Koreans could be free? Who was (and remains) a freer human being — a Korean living under Korean Communist rule in North Korea or a Korean living in that part of Korea where America defeated the Korean Communists?

And who was a freer human being in Vietnam — those who lived in non-Communist South Vietnam (with all its flaws) or those who lived under Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh's Communists in North Vietnam?

America fights to liberate countries, not to rule over them. The truth is, it was the Vietnamese Communist party, not America, that was interested in controlling the Vietnamese people. But the lie was spread so widely and so effectively that most of the world — except American supporters of the war and the Vietnamese boat people and other Vietnamese who yearned for liberty — believed that America was fighting for tin, tungsten, and the wholly fictitious “American empire” while the Vietnamese Communists were fighting for Vietnamese freedom.

I went to the “Vietnam War Remnants Museum” — the Communist party's three-floor exhibit of anti-American photos. Nothing surprised me — not the absence of a single word critical of the Communist North Vietnamese or of the Viet Cong, not a word about the widespread threats on the lives of anyone who did not fight for the Communists, not a word about those who risked their lives to escape by boat, preferring the danger of dying by drowning, getting eaten by sharks, or being tortured or gang-raped by pirates, to life under the Communists who “liberated” South Vietnam.

Equally unsurprising is that there is little difference between the history of the Vietnam War as told by the Communist party of Vietnam and what just about any college student will be told in just about any college by just about any professor in America, Europe, Asia, or Latin America.

I will end with the subject with which I began — the Vietnamese. It is impossible to visit Vietnam and not be impressed by this people. I hope I live to see the day when the people of Vietnam, freed from the Communist lies that still permeate their daily lives, understand that every Vietnamese death in the war against America was a wasted life, one more of the 140 million human sacrifices on the altar of the most bloodthirsty false god in history: Communism.

— *Dennis Prager is a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host and columnist.*

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