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The American War in Vietnam: Crime or Commemoration?

John Marciano

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On May 25, 2012, President Obama announced that the United States would spend the next thirteen years – through November 11, 2025 – commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War, and the American soldiers, "more than 58,000 patriots," who died in Vietnam. The fact that at least 2.1 million Vietnamese – soldiers, parents, grandparents, children – also died in that war will be largely unknown and entirely uncommemorated. And U.S. history barely stops to record the millions of Vietnamese who lived on after being displaced, tortured, maimed, raped, or born with birth defects, the result of devastating chemicals wreaked on the land by the U.S. military. The reason for this appalling disconnect of consciousness lies in an unremitting public relations campaign waged by top American politicians, military leaders, business people, and scholars who have spent the last sixty years justifying the U.S. presence in Vietnam. It is a campaign of patriotic conceit superbly chronicled by John Marciano in *The American War in Vietnam: Crime or Commemoration?*.

A devastating follow-up to Marciano's 1979 classic *Teaching the Vietnam War* (written with William L. Griffen), Marciano's book seeks not to commemorate the Vietnam War, but to stop the ongoing U.S. war on actual history. Marciano reveals the grandiose flag-waving that stems from the "Noble Cause principle," the notion that America is "chosen by God" to bring democracy to the world. Marciano writes of the Noble Cause being invoked unsparingly by presidents – from Jimmy Carter, in his observation that, regarding Vietnam, "the destruction was mutual," to Barack Obama, who continues the flow of romantic media propaganda: "The United States of America … will remain the greatest force for freedom the world has ever known."

The result is critical writing and teaching at its best. This book will find a home in classrooms where teachers seek to do more than repeat the trite glorifications of U.S. empire. It will provide students everywhere with insights that can prepare them to change the world.

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