



Understanding Vietnam (Philip E. Lilienthal Book.)

Neil L. Jamieson

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The American experience in Vietnam divided us as a nation and eroded our confidence in both the morality and the effectiveness of our foreign policy. Yet our understanding of this tragic episode remains superficial because, then and now, we have never grasped the passionate commitment with which the Vietnamese clung to and fought over their own competing visions of what Vietnam was and what it might become. To understand the war, we must understand the Vietnamese, their culture, and their ways of looking at the world. Neil L. Jamieson, after many years of living and working in Vietnam, has written the book that provides this understanding.

Jamieson paints a portrait of twentieth-century Vietnam. Against the background of traditional Vietnamese culture, he takes us through the saga of modern Vietnamese history and Western involvement in the country, from the coming of the French in 1858 through the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Throughout his analysis, he allows the Vietnamese—both our friends and foes, and those who wished to be neither—to speak for themselves through poetry, fiction, essays, newspaper editorials and reports of interviews and personal experiences.

By putting our old and partial perceptions into this new and broader context, Jamieson provides positive insights that may perhaps ease the lingering pain and doubt resulting from our involvement in Vietnam. As the United States and Vietnam appear poised to embark on a new phase in their relationship, Jamieson's book is particularly timely.

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