

Anderson's critique of British intellectual culture, and so on. But it foreshortens the treatment of the 1970s departures (the largest portion of the book) very misleadingly, whether in the perfunctory and question-begging treatment of feminism, or in other ways. It also removes the New Left's intellectual history from its wider contexts even of intellectual-political work, producing a gratuitously "elitist" picture of its efficacy and interests. But the New Left, as I've argued, was always connected to broader goals and constituencies. It always had a relationship to popular culture, and the post-1956 generations (i.e. *not* the dissident Communists) have the distinction of validating mass culture as a necessary site of politics. Anyone politicized between the mid-1950s and the later 1970s had to be moved by the relationship of politics and pleasure, one might also say, and this is ultimately the biggest blindspot of this book. To write the history of the New Left without sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll is a peculiarly funless trip.

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Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1994).

Vietnam remains too close. It is not just that students of the war have as yet only touched on the largest issues — why escalation, why defeat — it is also that so many of them remain uncertain as to what is important and what trivial. In the hands of its historians, the Vietnam War continues to be fought through an accu-

mulation of details and anecdotes in the service of the obvious. As Norman Graebner commented glumly, "the new scholarship has corrected the record on matters of fact, but to the extent that much of it has failed to examine the war's political and intellectual context it runs the risk of burying whatever lessons the war has to offer." The need then exists for a major reinterpretation of the war's history, and in particular of support for, and opposition to, American involvement. Given that *The War Within* is one of the first comprehensive treatments of the anti-war movement by someone too young to have joined it, it is not therefore unreasonable to approach the book with raised expectations. Unfortunately, the work disappoints. Yes, it offers a massively detailed chronology, packed with information, heavy with acronyms, overwhelming in its attention to actions and emotions. But Wells, like so many Vietnam historians, cannot resist the temptation to display his subject as one might arrange sea shells: lovingly — turning them now and then to catch the light, scrutinizing them for any weakness or blemish. Shimmering relics, but used for what purpose?

Wells' basic argument is relatively commonplace: the anti-war movement constrained U.S. policymakers and eventually helped force a withdrawal, but the peace activists remained uncertain of their strength. To express this central irony, Wells counterpoints the actions of politicians and protesters and pairs the twice-told recollections of the activists with the electroplated memories of the government officials. It is not, however, a juxtaposing that produces any subtleties of insight: Wells' policymakers are duplicitous autocrats who refused for too long to acknowledge publicly the constraints they privately experienced.

Even now their insistence that they cared about public opinion rings strangely false. The activists' failure to exploit their power is explained with almost equal ease. Wells trots out the movement's daemonic familiars — the Trotskyists, Black Panthers and Weathermen — to explain why its honest protesters became so divided and confused. This is, in short, a traditional "movement history" from the non-Marxist left. Wells believes ardently in the power of a politicized "people" and he sees in anti-war protest one of history's great democratic experiences. Like many advocates of direct democracy, he plays down the importance of institutional intermediaries and paints American politics in simple black (the government) and white (the people). Not surprisingly, much is made of the familial threads which linked the politicians to those "on the other side of the barricade," and Wells lingers over such instances of direct confrontation as the "siege" of the Pentagon and the May Day protest. Equally unsurprisingly, the role of the media is all but ignored.

The seriousness of purpose with which the author approaches his material shields the book's heroes from analysis. There is no real need to explain why ordinary people opposed the war: the war was evil and the protesters justified. This is less an interpretation than a call to arms: an assertion of our power as citizens to correct a moral wrong through the exercise of our collective will. Nor is Wells sensitive to the way protest altered people, and in particular women. His subjects only change by becoming good (realizing the war was wrong) or deluded (deciding the country needed a revolution). Vietnam does here what it did not do in reality: it creates clear (if painful) choices and obliterates conflicting identi-

ties. Such is the result of Wells' decision to praise those for whom opposition to the War was not so much a beginning as an end in itself.

And while Wells' basic argument is uncontentious, his Manichean view of the subject does lead him to certain exaggerated judgements. This is especially the case with his treatment of the early days. Because the anti-war movement is seen to be synonymous with goodness, patriotism and true understanding, Wells ends up attributing every questioning of the war to the influence of the popular opposition. Even those like William Fulbright, who were led by their own reason to condemn the intervention, are diminished in this process. But how could it be otherwise? When the force of righteousness is idolized, every just act becomes an exercise in idolatry.

Still, *The War Within* will probably remain a standard reference work for many years to come. Its contribution lies in its details, in its intimate portraits and needlepoint narration. It is the first study to bring together the various strands of organized protest and it is the first to correlate specific incidents of dissent with particular political decisions. And it does represent a major research achievement. Moreover, like so many works on Vietnam, it glows with the willingness of people to talk and with the richness of their stories. Those wanting information need look no further; those wanting inspiration might well find it here; those wanting provocation will have to wait.

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