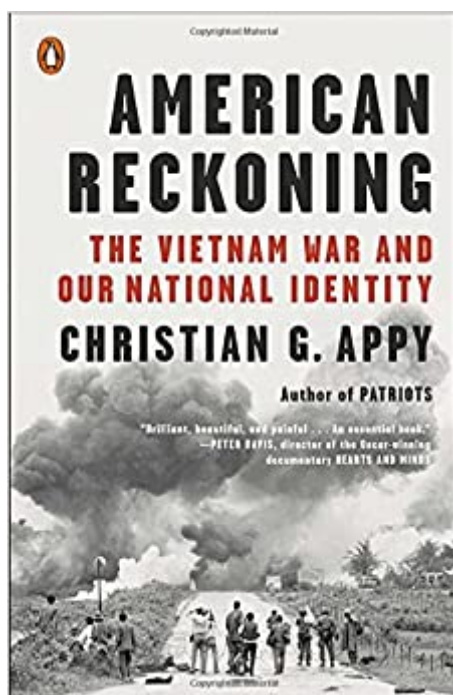


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# American Reckoning: The Vietnam War And Our National Identity



## Synopsis

The critically acclaimed author of *Patriots* offers profound insight into Vietnam's place in America's self-image. How did the Vietnam War change the way we think of ourselves as a people and a nation? In *American Reckoning*, Christian G. Appy, author of *Patriots*, the widely praised oral history of the Vietnam War, examines the war's realities and myths and its lasting impact on our national self-perception. Drawing on a vast variety of sources that range from movies, songs, and novels to official documents, media coverage, and contemporary commentary, Appy offers an original interpretation of the war and its far-reaching consequences for both our popular culture and our foreign policy. Authoritative, insightful, and controversial, urgently speaking to our role in the world today, *American Reckoning* invites us to grapple honestly with the conflicting lessons and legacies of the Vietnam War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for Chris Appy's *American Reckoning*: "Brilliant, beautiful, and painful, *American Reckoning* is an essential book, not just because it looks so incisively at the forces shaping our foreign policy in Vietnam and afterward, but because it so brightly illuminates the question we all need to ask ourselves: what is America's place in the world?" —Peter Davis, director of the Oscar-winning documentary *Hearts and Minds* "A triumph of originality. Appy weaves together a rich tapestry of sources into a completely innovative, eye-opening, and compulsively readable account of the Vietnam War and its far-reaching consequences. *American Reckoning* offers a fresh lens for understanding the

United States in the context of its most controversial conflict as well as its twenty-first-century wars. It's an impressive, valuable book.

•Nick Turse, author of the New York Times bestseller *Kill Anything That Moves*: "In the vast literature on the Vietnam War it's the question that has not received sustained and authoritative attention: How did the long and bitter struggle in Southeast Asia influence Americans' sense of themselves? Christian Appy's penetrating and lucid account helps us make sense as few books have of this difficult chapter in the nation's history.

•Fredrik Logevall, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Embers of War*: "Christian Appy has written a compelling reflection on the Vietnam War and its aftermath of endless war. He argues persuasively that we must remember the war and its consequences if we are to come to a full reckoning with the past and finally dispel the myth of American exceptionalism.

•Marilyn B. Young, author of *The Vietnam Wars: A History*: "Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides" Christian Appy's *Patriots* should do for the Vietnam War what Studs Terkel's *The Good War* did for World War II: remove it from the realm of mythology and ground it in the vivid memories of people who lived and fought in it and against it, who ran it and suffered from it. This remarkable book is a genuine oral history of the Vietnam War, true to its title, from all sides of the conflict. Until now, no single book on the war has included so many different American perspectives and so varied a group of Vietnamese voices. That not only makes the book unique, it also means you can follow the war from its true beginnings . . . all the way to Patty and Earl Hopper Sr., still convinced that Vietnam holds American POWs. By bringing Vietnamese voices and experiences to the story of what is known in Vietnam as the American War, Appy challenges us in unexpected ways. No review can do justice to the riches in *Patriots*.

•Chicago Tribune: "Inspired . . . *Patriots* is a gem of a book. Appy gives his participants ample room to tell their stories, but his own contribution to the success of the volume is considerable. [The] chapter introductions, which are crucial in lending cohesion to the overall enterprise, are authoritative and elegantly written.

•The Washington Post: "Appy allows each of his chosen voices to offer an unvarnished recollection--painful, conflicted, occasionally beautiful--of an extraordinary time.

•The New York Times Book Review: "Of all the works on the Vietnam War--fiction and nonfiction--this is the big one . . . the book that was waiting to be written.

•Studs Terkel: "As a Vietnam combat veteran who participated in most of the major historical battles of 1968, I'm understandably ambivalent about reading Vietnam books, fiction and nonfiction. Christian G. Appy's *Patriots* is a different and even-handed approach to a still controversial and divisive subject. The overall effect of

listening to different voices on the same sore subject is eye-opening and revealing. Each voice sounds fresh, as if the storyteller had been waiting for decades--and most of them had--to tell their story, to relieve themselves of something that had been bothering them for a long time, or just to set the record straight in their own minds. At the end, I for one felt more than satisfied because I had reached a greater understanding of the event that changed my life and the life of the nation.

• Nelson DeMille, author of *The General's Daughter*, *Word of Honor*, and *Plum Island*

Christian G. Appy is a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the author of two previous books on the Vietnam War. His oral history of the war, *Patriots*, was a main selection of Book of the Month Club and won the Massachusetts Book Award for nonfiction. He lives in Amherst.

Lately I've had the nagging feeling that today's younger generations of Americans have lost touch with some very important parts of our not-too-distant history, especially the Cold War and Vietnam. With this in mind, I picked up *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* by Christian G. Appy (@ChristianGAppy). Although highly readable while putting out a lot of information, it wasn't always an easy read for me. As one of the last wave of Baby Boomers, I was born and raised in an environment (small Midwestern farming town) where there was unquestioned belief in American Exceptionalism as defined by the author: "the broad faith that the United States is a unique force for good in the world, superior not only in its military and economic power, but in the quality of its government and institutions, the character and morality of its people, and its way of life." Although the concept of our "Exceptionalism" has remained a central theme of politicians from both major parties running for national office, the Cold War, Vietnam and, later, Watergate, did much to create a significant segment of the citizenry unwilling to put complete faith in such an idea. Although I agree with much of what he says, the author's strident tone while debunking our "Exceptionalism" rubbed hard at what my inner child still wants to believe to be true. Playing out nightly on the TV news at dinnertime, the Vietnam War was as much a part of my childhood as playing baseball in the summer or raking leaves in the fall. For many years I assumed armed conflict was just the normal state of being for nations of the world: surely every country had its own war (I recall thinking

England. I was in a place called Belfast. I saw and heard things that I didn't understand, but somehow have never forgotten Tet, Khe Sanh, Hamburger Hill, Route 9, the Mekong Delta, Danang, the DMZ, and My Lai, to name a few. I remember watching TV reports of anti-war protests, although I don't recall seeing any in my small town. Later in the war the draft lottery was also broadcast, and I was excited to see my birth date float across the screen. I had been a few years older, I'm not sure I was excited, it was how I'd feel. Although the author sketches the background of the war, our involvement and domestic reactions in fairly broad strokes, given my concern about the lack of basic knowledge held by those younger generations I believe this book would be quite useful as an introduction to the subject. Those interested in diving deeper into particular events will find the Notes section a great place to start. Although somewhat uneven, I found the third part, What Have We Become, the most interesting. The author postulates how our view of the Vietnam War changed in a surprisingly short period of time as we cast ourselves improbably, based on the facts as the true victims. From this well springs such theories as "the military wasn't allowed to win" espoused by Ronald Reagan while running for the presidency, easy explanations for events like the Iran Hostage Crisis, and also the central themes of classic 80s movies like "Rambo" and "Top Gun." Early on in my reading, I was struck by how many similarities there are between the Vietnam War and Iraq in 2003. So many, in fact, that I can only conclude many of the "smart folks" in government either didn't learn anything or they chose to ignore the facts. This is as good a point as any to say this book will likely not find a receptive audience among those whose political beliefs tend to the conservative. In fact, just tweeting that I was reading American Reckoning resulted in a series of negative and derogatory responses from a person whose Twitter bio made clear their political orientation as a staunch conservative -- and that they hadn't bothered to read the book before forming an opinion of it. For those with an open mind who want to learn more about the war, and how it helped change our view of ourselves, this is a fine place to start exploring. You may not agree with the author, but decide for yourself.

Even though I lived through the Vietnam War as a potential draftee, this book presented some interesting new information. There was a slant toward an anti-war angle, but it never felt totally one-sided. Good solid history.

Excellent history of the culture and morality of U.S. military adventures from 1954 to the present. Should be required reading for everyone in America.

The best single volume history of America's disaster in Vietnam. It fully and completely documents the mistakes made by the federal governments of the time. Especially important are the ways the truth about the war was hidden from the American people which resulted in the loss of trust the federal government that has continued to this day. Please note that this is not a military history but a history of federal government actions and their consequences.

One of the best books ever written on the Vietnam War and its legacy. Had to read it for an American foreign policy class - I really enjoyed it.

This book is brilliantly written. It discusses the realities of our involvement in Vietnam. It's highly recommended to anyone interested in this topic. I've read many books on Vietnam and this one is in my top 5

Appy's book is an excellent analysis of the Vietnam war. In addition, he deals with the many policy ramifications that have resulted. Ironically, instead of backing away from interventionism, the U.S. has opted for an even bigger war machine and aggressive global presence. Americans really need to be more aware of their government's foreign policy if they hope to understand why the world reacts to us so strongly.

Good read. It got a little biased in the last couple chapters but overall the book offered an important perspective.

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