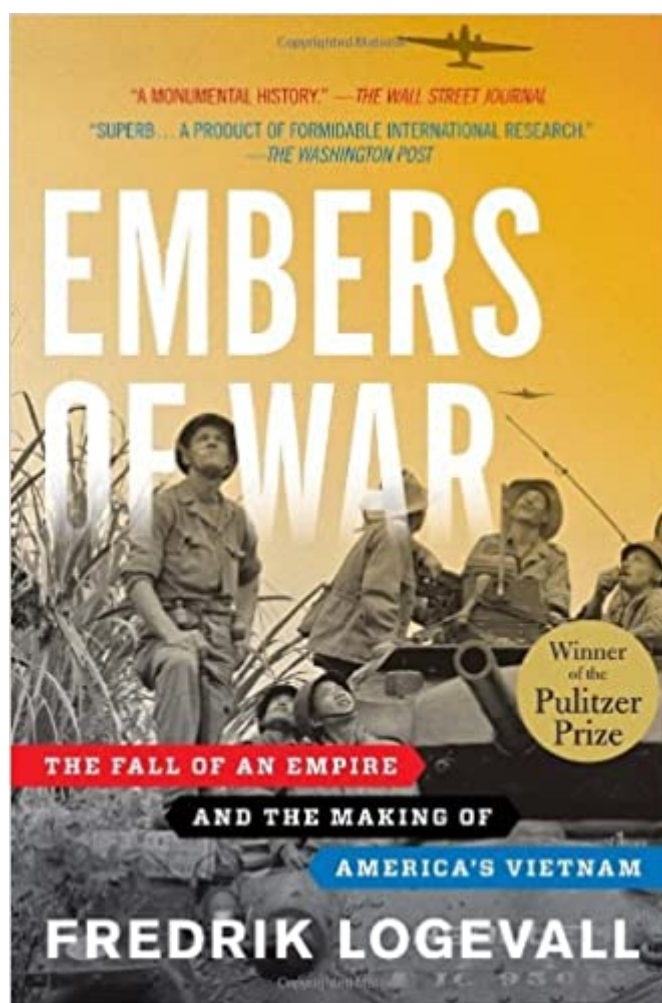


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# Embers Of War: The Fall Of An Empire And The Making Of America's Vietnam



## Synopsis

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE — Written with the style of a great novelist and the intrigue of a Cold War thriller, *Embers of War* is a landmark work that will forever change your understanding of how and why America went to war in Vietnam. Tapping newly accessible diplomatic archives in several nations, Fredrik Logevall traces the path that led two Western nations to tragically lose their way in the jungles of Southeast Asia. He brings to life the bloodiest battles of France's final years in Indochina—and shows how, from an early point, a succession of American leaders made disastrous policy choices that put America on its own collision course with history. An epic story of wasted opportunities and deadly miscalculations, *Embers of War* delves deep into the historical record to provide hard answers to the unanswered questions surrounding the demise of one Western power in Vietnam and the arrival of another. Eye-opening and compulsively readable, *Embers of War* is a gripping, heralded work that illuminates the hidden history of the French and American experiences in Vietnam.

— ONE OF THE MOST ACCLAIMED WORKS OF HISTORY IN RECENT YEARS

Winner of the Francis Parkman Prize from the Society of American Historians — Winner of the American Library in Paris Book Award — Winner of the Council on Foreign Relations Arthur Ross Book Award — Finalist for the Cundill Prize in Historical Literature — NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The Washington Post — The Christian Science Monitor — The Globe and Mail — “A balanced, deeply researched history of how, as French colonial rule faltered, a succession of American leaders moved step by step down a road toward full-blown war.” — Pulitzer Prize citation — “This extraordinary work of modern history combines powerful narrative thrust, deep scholarly authority, and quiet interpretive confidence.” — Francis Parkman Prize citation — “A monumental history . . . a widely researched and eloquently written account of how the U.S. came to be involved in Vietnam . . . certainly the most comprehensive review of this period to date.” — The Wall Street Journal — “Superb . . . a product of formidable international research.” — The Washington Post — “Lucid and vivid . . . [a] definitive history.” — San Francisco Chronicle — “An essential work for those seeking to understand the worst foreign-policy adventure in American history . . . Even though readers know how the story ends—as with *The Iliad*—they will be as riveted by the tale as if they were hearing it for the first time.” — The Christian Science Monitor — “A remarkable new history . . . Logevall skillfully explains everything that led up to Vietnam's fatal partition in 1954 [and] peppers the grand sweep of his book with vignettes of remarkable

characters, wise and foolish. *The Economist* "Fascinating, beautifully written . . . Logevall's account provides much new detail and important new insights. . . . It is impossible to read the book without being struck by contemporary parallels. *Foreign Policy* "[A] brilliant history of how the French colonial war to hang on to its colonies in Indochina became what the Vietnamese now call the American war. *Esquire* "An excellent, valuable book. *The Dallas Morning News*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This extraordinary work of modern history combines powerful narrative thrust, deep scholarly authority, and quiet interpretive confidence. *Francis Parkman Prize* citation "A balanced, deeply researched history of how, as French colonial rule faltered, a succession of American leaders moved step by step down a road toward full-blown war. *Pulitzer Prize* citation "Fredrik Logevall's excellent book *Choosing War* (1999) chronicled the American escalation of the Vietnam War in the early 1960s. *With Embers of War*, he has written an even more impressive book about the French conflict in Vietnam and the beginning of the American one. . . . It is the most comprehensive history of that time. Logevall, a professor of history at Cornell University, has drawn from many years of previous scholarship as well as his own. And he has produced a powerful portrait of the terrible and futile French war from which Americans learned little as they moved toward their own engagement in Vietnam. *Alan Brinkley, The New York Times Book Review* \*Editor's

Choice\* – “Superb . . . penetrating . . . Embers of War is a product of formidable international research. It is lucidly and comprehensively composed. And it leverages a consistently potent analytical perspective. . . . Outstanding.” – Gordon Goldstein, *The Washington Post*

– “A monumental history . . . a widely researched and eloquently written account of how the U.S. came to be involved in Vietnam . . . certainly the most comprehensive review of this period to date.” – *Wall Street Journal*

– “The most comprehensive account available of the French Vietnamese war, America’s involvement, and the beginning of the US-directed struggle. . . . [Embers of War tells] the deeply immoral story of the Vietnam wars convincingly and more fully than any others. Since many of the others, some written over fifty years ago, are excellent, this is a considerable achievement.” – Jonathan Mirsky, *New York Review of Books*

– “Magisterial.” – *Foreign Affairs*

– “The definitive history of the critical formative period from 1940 to 1960 [in Vietnam]. . . . lucid and vivid . . . As American involvement escalated, Bernard Fall, the highly respected scholar-journalist of Vietnam’s wars, wrote that Americans were – “dreaming different dreams than the French but walking in the same footsteps.” Fredrik Logevall brilliantly explains that

– “Embers of War is simply an essential work for those seeking to understand the worst foreign-policy adventure in American history. . . . Even though readers know how the story ends – “as with – “The Iliad – “they will be as riveted by the tale as if they were hearing it for the first time.” – *The Christian Science Monitor*

– “A remarkable new history . . . Logevall skillfully explains everything that led up to Vietnam’s fatal partition in 1954 . . . [and] peppers the grand sweep of his book with vignettes of remarkable characters, wise and foolish.” – *The Economist*

– “Fascinating, beautifully-written . . . Logevall’s account provides much new detail and important new insights. . . . It is impossible not to read the book without being struck by contemporary parallels.” – *Foreign Policy*

– “[A] brilliant history of how the French colonial war to hang onto its colonies in Indochina became what the Vietnamese now call – “the American war.” – Charles Pierce, *Esquire*

– “Huge and engrossing . . . [Logevall] writes with an ambitious sweep and an instinct for pertinent detail. . . . If Logevall’s earlier work stood up well in a crowded field, *Embers of War* stands alone. . . . What if [Embers] had been mandatory reading for Kennedy and his policy makers?” – *The National Interest*

– “Very much worth the read, both for the story and the writing. . . . *Embers of War* has the balance and heft to hold hindsight’s swift

verdicts at bay. . . An excellent, valuable book. •The Dallas Morning News •“An encompassing, lucid account of the 40-year arc in which America’s Southeast Asian adventure became inevitable . . . Logevall’s prose is clean, his logic relentless, his tone unsparing, his vision broad and deep, his empathy expansive. •Vietnam Magazine •“How easy it is to forget how it all started. The events pile on one another, new battles begin each day, demands for decisions encroach and soon enough everything is incremental. Cornell historian Fredrik Logevall steps back from the edge and parting from most Vietnam War studies that focus on the Kennedy and Johnson administrations reaches back to World War II to give a fresh picture of America imagining itself into the Vietnam War. . . . [Embers of War puts] flesh on barebones assertions that occupy a few sentences or paragraphs in many Vietnam accounts. . . . startling. •The VVA Veteran •“A superbly written and well-argued reinterpretation of our tragic experience in Vietnam. •Booklist • “[Logevall] masterfully presents the war’s roots in the U.S. reaction to the French colonial experience. •Publishers Weekly (starred review) •“Fredrik Logevall has gleaned from American, French, and Vietnamese sources a splendid account of France’s nine-year war in Indochina and the story of how the American statesmen of the period allowed this country to be drawn into the quagmire. •Neil Sheehan, author of A Bright Shining Lie, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award •“Fredrik Logevall is a wonderful writer and historian. In his new book on the origins of the American war in Vietnam, he gives a fascinating and dramatic account of the French war and its aftermath, from the perspectives of the French, the Vietnamese, and the Americans. Using previously untapped sources and a deep knowledge of diplomatic history, Logevall shows to devastating effect how America found itself on the road to Vietnam. •Frances FitzGerald, author of Fire in the Lake, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award •“In a world full of nascent, potentially protracted wars, Fredrik Logevall’s Embers of War is manifestly an important book, illuminating the long, small-step path we followed into the quagmire of Vietnam. But I was also struck by the quality of Logevall’s writing. He has the eye of a novelist, the cadence of a splendid prose stylist, and a filmmaker’s instinct for story. Embers of War is not just an important book of history, it is an utterly compelling read. •Robert Olen Butler, author of A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain, winner of the Pulitzer Prize •“Embers of War is a truly monumental achievement. With elegant prose, deft portraits of the many fascinating characters, and remarkable sensitivity to the aspirations and strategies of the various nations involved, Logevall skillfully guides

us through the complexities of the First Indochina War and demonstrates how that conflict laid the basis for America's war in Vietnam. — George C. Herring, author of *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* — "In this vividly written, richly textured history, — Fredrik Logevall demolishes the fiction, too long indulged by too many Americans, that the Vietnam War appeared out of nowhere to besmirch the 1960s. — Here we have the full backstory — the uneasy collaboration between France and the United States that paved the way for epic tragedy. *Embers of War* — is a magisterial achievement. — Andrew J. Bacevich, author of *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War* and Professor of International Relations and History, Boston University — "For too long, Americans have debated the Vietnam War as though it started in the 1960s. — As Fredrik Logevall masterfully demonstrates in *Embers of War*, the American imbroglio has deep roots in the 1940s and 1950s. — This is a deeply researched, elegantly written account that will instantly become the standard book on a poorly understood and decisively important event in world history. — Mark Lawrence, author of *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*, and Associate Professor of History and Senior Fellow at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law at The University of Texas at Austin

Fredrik Logevall is John S. Knight Professor of International Studies and professor of history at Cornell University, where he serves as director of the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies.

This work is a thorough account of France's involvement with Vietnam through the 20th century, and how the US became involved in that nation. The book is very detailed, and gives an excellent account of the perspective of the French, Americans, and Vietnamese. The book is thorough, detailed, and well researched. The only issue I had as reading a book cover to cover is the level of detail made reading frequently slow. Politics, personalities, and battles are covered in great detail. The details are valuable for anyone conducting research, but reading straight through at times was tedious. The main focus takes place between post WWII and transfer of the war from France to the US. After WWII Europe was dissolving involvement with colonies, with the exception of France in Vietnam. This decision proved to be fatal for both countries and the US. Numerous personalities and positions, such as Ho Chi Minh, deGaulle, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and many others are presented providing flavor and thinking of all participants. There are numerous subcharacters discussed throughout the book. My issue is the level of detail regardless of whether the discussion involves a key point or a minor issue. Events are covered in great detail to a level that does not contribute to

the theme or storyline. The Highlight of the book is leading up to the battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 leading to France's exit from Vietnam and entrance by the US. Once the US becomes involved the storyline is with broad brush strokes. It is an important relevant work, just not certain about the level of detail throughout the work. At times it works and other chapters it doesn't. Regardless it is a story needs to be told to understand foreign involvement and how policy decisions need to be made with caution and not blinded with myopic thinking.

There are some terrific reviews of this book here, so I won't add to what's already been said. Yet, here are my impressions: 1. This is very well written and reads easily, almost as a work of political intrigue. I guess it is. 2. There is virtually nothing out there on the French-Indochina War available in English. There are a few books on Dienbienphu, and most books on the U.S. conflict discuss the French experience in the first chapter. An entire book on the French War is incredibly rare, and that alone makes this worthwhile. 3. If you look at the endnotes, Logevall mostly cites previously published works. Many are in French -- which I cannot read, so I appreciate him using these sources -- but none are in Vietnamese. There is almost no archival work. He spent some time at the British National Archives, so there are a few British sources cited. I saw one footnote citing the U.S. National Archives, and none from Vietnamese archives. 4. Lastly, his treatment of both sides strikes me as very reasonable. There are a few reviews here that criticize Logevall for not painting Ho Chi Minh as a Stalinist, but that's largely because he wasn't. If anything, Logevall seems hesitant to fully flesh out Ho's understanding of communism, which was very sincere. All in all, this is a terrific book, well-written and packed with things that I didn't know before. Just be aware that the research is almost entirely from English and French secondary sources. The resulting viewpoint describes a conflict with "US going over THERE," rather than "THEM coming HERE."

This is quite simply the best book ever written on the French Indochina War and one of the best books ever written on Vietnam, period. Logevall does a magnificent job of marshaling massive research into a highly readable narrative. "Embers of War" is authoritative and entertaining at the same time--a rare combination. This is one book that deserves all of the honors heaped on it. It will remain the standard work on the subject for a long long time. Anyone seeking to understand the Vietnam War must start here.

The value of this book is that the reader comes away with a solid foundational knowledge of the events that led up to America's involvement in Vietnam. It is a tragic story of missed chances and

human folly like practically every other war history. I admit that I found the going kind of a slog because it doesn't really have much of a narrative quality. But it is not a novel it is serious historical reporting based on solid research and well worth the effort to get through it. I think Logevall underplays the brutality of the Ho regime and the Viet Minh (and later the Viet Cong) while not sparing the French or various South Vietnamese actors. You do find reports of how the Vietnamese terrorized those under their control but they appear almost morally neutral. I don't think we need to handle Ho and the Viet Minh with kid gloves any more than anyone else. One thing I teach my students is that in terms of political presence there were not good guys in the Vietnam conflict. In the end they were all bad guys. (That does not extend to those who ended up fighting the war, often against their will, and ended up being vilified for the failures of our leaders). I'm not sure what three chapters about Graham Greene and literary analysis of his work adds to the overall narrative. Probably something, but not three chapters worth. Anyway I found the experience enlightening if not altogether enjoyable. Definitely worth your while if you're a student of the era.

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