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## CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS



Book Review by Colin Dueck

## Stuck in Vietnam

From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations bin & Herring. Oxford University Press, 1056 pages, \$35

eorge herring's from colony to
Superpowes the latest installment in
that excellent series, the Oxford his
tory of the United States. Best known for his
distinguished work on U.S. policy in Vietnam,
Herring sketches the history of American for
eign policy over more than two centuries.

In any book covering such a lengthy period, the author may take one of two approaches: of fer some bold reinterpretation of well-known events, or narrate with such an authoritative, grounded, and truly balanced tone as to estab lish the work as the standard account. Herring aimed for the latter, and has succeeded-in writing a lucid, comprehensive, but all-to-conventional history.

A central theme of the volume is American exceptionalism—that the United States has a special destiny in the world. Herring views this belief as bound up with attitudes of cultural and racial superiority, smug parochial ism, and unilateralism. He traces these attitudes through the history of U.S. diplomacy, and urges Americans to disenthrall themselves of them. e ride engages and sometimes in forms, but to describe this conclusion as either novel or unconventional would be seriously misleading. Indeed, it is already received wis dom among academics.

Herring's interpretation of America's Collehinist ideology is simply inaccurate. Similar War policies, which Ils almost half the book, Herring suggests that the U.S. missed some captures his argument. At the beginning and of opportunity for diplomatic settlement end of each chapter, he strikes a note that is Moscow in the 1950s. But what alterna even-handed, and his style is hardly polemical, acceptable to the USSR and preferable to but the moral is clear: the United States consist one that actually developed, does Herring tently exaggerated the Soviet threat, engagenthic existed at the time? He scolds Truman unnecessary and immoral interventions of Eisenhower for their lack of diplomatic ef seas, propped up brutal right-wing dictators with Moscow, but never spells out the real and paid a serious price at home in terminal consequences of such hypothetical ef civil liberties, debt, an imperial presidency, and For some reason it is usually the United an overly militarized foreign policy. In a states that errs, by failing to accommodate, been the dominant interpretation among Ushile the Soviets' willingness to compromise is diplomatic historians for many years now. taken for granted.

he mistakes made by americlaraders, in Herring's account, are invariably on the side of using too much force and too little diplomacy. He does not see that force and diplomacy must be coordinated in world politics to have any practical e ect. For example, Herring chides the Reagan Administration for using covert action in Central America and elsewhere, and for ratcheting up Cold War tensions in the early 1980s. He later praises Reagan for reaching an arms control agreement with the USSR in his second term. Yet it never seems to occur to Herring that perhaps the two were related.

e author insists that the U.S. constantly mistook ird World nationalists for Communists, and therefore engaged in wrongful, unnecessary interventions overseas. But Guate mala's Jacobo Arbenz, Chile's Salvador Allende, and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega were convinced Marxists as well as anti-American nationalists who received arms and inspiration from Communist countries. It is almost as if Herring

Claremont Review of Booksummer 2010 Page 40 Claremont Review of Book Summer 2010 Page 41 o cers cost, not twice, but four times as much to train as ROTC scholarship o cers. Defend ers of the academies like to say that the cost di erential washes out when you consider how much longer academy graduates serve after their ve-year active duty service obligation is over. (Scholarship-funded ROTC o cers commit to four years.) e evidence on this point is incon clusive. In the past, most generals and admirals were academy grads, but that hasn't been true for quite a while. e same Tench Francis study showed that ROTC began producing more ag and general o cers (that is, admirals in the Navy and generals in the Army. Air Force, 6(a)9(

and general o cers (that is, admirals in the Navy and generals in the Army, Air Force, 6(g)9(e)-8(n)1J ET E n <</M2(R)40(-16T12 631 Tf 1c)2(e)-duC( (A)-5(6(A)p)e)-8(Tm [(f)158ra)-22(l)tha158ral(o)-166(5-11(m)21(y)48(g)-24v)20(e)-15 5-1 [(e)-11(r)2(s)-167(o)11(f)-166(t)-12(h)11(5-1b3(m)F)22(ra)-16(n)12(c)-12(i)-5(s)(c)-16(c

answers to questions they've already seen won't be good o cers. Life is unpredictable; battle is very unpredictable." Forget the academies' top-20 rankings among national liberal arts colleges in the annual.S. News and World Report veys: West Point must be doing something right to be fourth among all institutions of higher ed ucation in Rhodes scholarships since 1923 and sixth in Marshalls since 1982.

What could Ricks have been thinking when he dismissed the academy experience as being equivalent to a community college education? Cadets and midshipmen are taught by a com bination of civilian faculty, nearly all of them with doctorates, and military o cers, mostly captains and majors with master's degrees, com pany command experience, and a full-aware ness of what Mullaney, a West Point grad who taught at the Naval Academy, describes as "the haunting imperative that what we fail to teach our students could kill them or those they lead." e mix is di erent depending on the academy: the Annapolis faculty is about 60% civilian, and the West Point and Air Force Academy facul ties are about 75% military. at's advantage Annapolis in some ways—more Ph.D.s in the classroom and more experience for the brigade of midshipmen in dealing with civilians as au thority gures—but advantage West Point and Colorado Springs in others: their teaching o cers tend to go to much better schools and have

much brighter futures in the Air Force and,(a)-164n7y] TJ ET EMC /Span <</MCID 765 >> BDC 471/T1\_0 1 Tf p1(r)2-96(w)-112(i)1-96(i)-8 292o656(i)-(r)15(e)-9(s)-31i5 [(m)2AreFires rs: 0 0 12 292 566.2352 0Annotebnd,(a)-164n7yo

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