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Book Review - The Vietnam War in American Childhood

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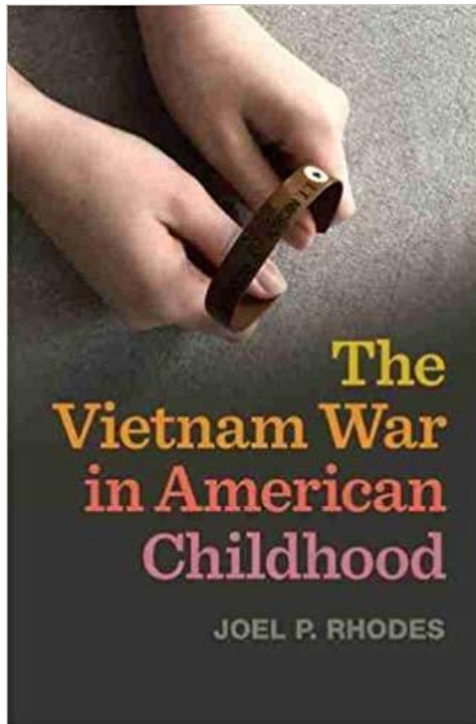
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Off the SHELF

The Vietnam War in American Childhood by Joel P. Rhodes (The University of Georgia Press, 2019: ISBN 9780820356297, \$29.95)

How children understand the world is often a mystery to adults; ironic, since all adults were themselves once children. Joel P. Rhodes's book, *The Vietnam War in American Childhood*, is the first in a new series—Children, Youth, and War—from the University of Georgia Press. The book explicitly examines children born between 1956 and 1970. Rhodes's father served in Vietnam near the end of the war, between 1970 and 1971, when Rhodes was just three years old. The book weaves together various sources that tell a story not often considered when studying the impact of the Vietnam War. He uses comic books, *Mad Magazine*, letters written to the president, toys, and interviews to help the reader understand how this conflict shaped children's lives. The author also uses child psychology to frame the reader's understanding of how and why children might have reacted the way they did. The book's eight chapters are each uniquely crafted to tell a standalone story that make it clear that this is a complex subject when presented in unison.



The book begins by looking at how children were socialized to understand the war, paying careful attention to the evening news, daily body counts, and *My Weekly Reader*. Rhodes also introduces the critical fact that the Vietnam War was extremely unpopular for many years, resulting in children also having to make sense of the anti-war movement. The second half of the book focuses on the people whose lives were directly impacted by the war: the children with family serving in the conflict, POW/MIA families, and Gold Star children. These chapters highlight the human toll of the war in ways the media often ignored. The final chapter tells the stories of Vietnamese adoptions and the Amerasian children, emphasizing that they, too, are vital to understanding the full picture.

Rhodes tells an intriguing story, demonstrating that perhaps when trying to understand the world we currently occupy, we should pay close attention to the events that influence children as they age. The complicated matters of the grown-up world are significant to the children living in the grown-up world. This book is recommended for general and academic audiences.

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