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Frank Cain, *America's Vietnam War and Its French Connection*. New York and London: Routledge, 2017. 243 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$125.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-1382-0846-9; \$30.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-3154-5917-2.

Review by Kathryn C. Statler, University of San Diego.

Frank Cain's *America's Vietnam War and Its French Connection* provides a detailed account of American and French policies toward Vietnam from 1945 to 1963. Relying on extensive research in the American National Archives and Records Administration and British National Archives, Cain provides a step-by-step recounting of events that complicated the Franco-American relationship and ultimately led to a much greater American commitment to Vietnam by 1963. In particular, much of the book focuses on the economic and military aid that the United States provided first to France and then to Ngo Dinh Diem's South Vietnam as various American administrations struggled to keep all of Vietnam from falling to communism.

The book can essentially be broken down into three general sections. The first part includes chapters one to five, which illuminate the French retaking of Indochina at the end of the Second World War, including the return of the French army there, the failure of negotiations between French officials and Vietnamese nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the outbreak of major hostilities at the port city of Haiphong in 1946, and the DRV's initial evacuation from Hanoi to the mountains to regroup. Cain also traces American reactions to these events, especially the hesitation expressed by many officials as to whether to support the French in the reconquest of a formal colony, something most Americans opposed. The second part of the book (chapters six to nine) examines worsening military and political conditions for the French in Vietnam as the DRV started to inflict significant military losses and as the newly formed People's Republic of China formally recognized the DRV. These chapters also trace the establishment and expansion of various small-scale American economic and military programs to help the French war effort. Chapters six and seven detail French efforts to find a suitable candidate to install in South Vietnam as a challenger to Ho Chi Minh, ultimately settling on the less than ideal Emperor Bao Dai, who had spent the postwar years enjoying the good life on the French Riviera. Chapters eight and nine examine growing American aid to France's efforts in Vietnam through various programs including the Economic Cooperation Administration, Special Technical and Economic Mission, Military Defense Assistance Program, and Off-Shore Procurement program, to name a few. The third part of the book (chapters ten to fifteen) tackles the Eisenhower administration's increasing involvement with various French governments and the newly formed South Vietnamese government under Ngo Dinh Diem. Chapters ten and eleven examine the Eisenhower administration's early efforts at developing a

policy toward Vietnam and the effects of the Korean War armistice as well as the increasing American financial commitment to France and the political potential of Ngo Dinh Diem as a leader in the South who could challenge Ho Chi Minh. Chapters twelve and thirteen focus specifically on the French defeat at the military garrison at Dien Bien Phu and the consequences of this loss at the 1954 Geneva Conference that was supposed to settle the Vietnam question at the meeting table instead of on the battlefield. Chapters fourteen and fifteen follow American support of Diem and Diem's significant challenges and ultimate consolidation of control in South Vietnam. Finally, chapter sixteen provides an overview of American intervention in Vietnam during the Kennedy years but comprises only about ten pages of text and thus offers more of a coda to the rest of the book rather than an in-depth treatment of the Kennedy administration's decision-making in Vietnam. The last chapter, which serves as the conclusion, recaps the events discussed in the book.

In terms of the book's strengths, anyone seeking to understand the struggle of successive French administrations to hold on to their colony and Vietnamese resistance to these efforts will find Cain's detailed narrative useful. Also helpful is his densely packed account of American thinking about Vietnam, especially by Americans on the ground there, and how the Truman and Eisenhower administrations' policies vis-à-vis Vietnam gradually evolved, which Cain buttresses with extensive primary research culled from American and British sources. Cain also provides specific descriptions of the types of American programs providing aid to the French and the quantities of that aid. Indeed, perhaps the greatest contribution of the book is the extraordinary detail Cain includes on exactly how much economic and material aid the United States offered first to France and then to South Vietnam in the 1945-1963 period. Concise footnotes list most of the relevant additional secondary sources and many archival documents readers might want to consult. Cain is also very good at highlighting the observations, and often exasperation, of various American ambassadors in Vietnam and officials in Washington, including Charles Reed, J. Lawton Collins, and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

Despite these strengths, three major weaknesses of the book must be addressed. First and foremost, there is little information in the book that can be considered new scholarship. In the abstract Cain writes: "That America was drawn into the Vietnam War by the French has been recognized, but rarely explored." In fact, many scholars have looked closely at the Franco-American relationship during this time period.<sup>[1]</sup> To Cain's credit, he does reference the pioneering works by David Maar (*Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*) and Stein Tonnesson (*The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945*) to support the first section of the book, though he does less justice to Mark Lawrence's *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to Vietnam*, the first book to provide a comprehensive treatment of the 1945-1950 period.<sup>[2]</sup> Other books that have covered the same ground Cain treads, but that Cain fails to engage in a meaningful way, include David Anderson's *Trapped by Success*, which remains the best account of the Eisenhower administration's increasing intervention in Vietnam; my own book, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (which covers the 1950-1960 period and relies on American, French, and British archives to explain how the United States ultimately replaced France in Vietnam as the dominant western power); and Jessica Elkind's *Aid Under Fire* that details the massive American economic assistance at both the official and unofficial levels in Vietnam during this period. Even when he does cite some of the literature, Cain rarely addresses how his own work either enhances or challenges it. Thus, for the most part, Cain's narrative about the Franco-American relationship offers a modest contribution to the scholarship.

Second, there is very little analysis throughout the book. Indeed, there is virtually no introduction as Cain launches into a detailed narrative of the French loss of Indochina to Japan at the beginning of World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt's desire for international trusteeship of Vietnam under United Nations supervision, President Harry Truman's reluctance to either support or deny French plans to retake their colony, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's independence at the end of the war. Nowhere in this first chapter does Cain state the overall argument of the book and how this argument will be demonstrated. Each chapter that follows continues to be long on narrative but short on analysis. The chapters are broken into so many sections (a section break on almost every page) that they read more as encyclopedia entries rather than as connecting parts of a chapter. Ultimately, the only clue the reader has about the overall argument of the book is in the abstract, where Cain states that "This book analyzes the years from 1945, with the French military reconquest of Vietnam, until 1963, with the execution of the French-endorsed dictator, Ngo Dinh Diem, demonstrating how the US should not have followed the French into Vietnam. It shows how the Korean War triggered the flow of American hardware and finances to underpin France's war against the Marxist-oriented Vietnam republic led by Ho Chi Minh." Tantalizing passages do appear periodically. For example, at the beginning of chapter three Cain's mention of how the United States helped transport the French Expeditionary Corps to Vietnam and the assistance it gave to help France purchase surplus military equipment hints at how the two countries became gradually more entwined in Vietnam. Cain writes that the "new alliance grew silently, leaving little trace in official files and even less in public debate" (p. 28). Cain also underscores the importance of the Korean War in his abstract, but his sections on the actual impact of Korea (pp. 98-100, 136-137) were quite sparse, and he does not make use of Steven Hugh Lee's excellent study, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954*. In his discussion of Diem's rise to power, Cain notes that Diem would become an "important figure in the French process of drawing the US into the Vietnam War" (p. 147). But then Cain goes on to give a narrative of the events that led to Diem's consolidation of power rather than an analysis of them. Cain also fails to engage the literature on this subject, specifically Edward Miller's *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of Vietnam*, Seth Jacobs' *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, and Philip Catton's *Diem's Final Failure*, which would have led to a more analytical look at the events Cain describes.

Third, there are virtually no French sources in the book. There is nothing on the French perspective in terms of secondary sources except for a few translated works by Bernard Fall, and no primary sources from the French Foreign Ministry archives, the *Château de Vincennes* army archives that house much of the French military intelligence on Vietnam, the French Colonial Archives or the French National Archives. Granted, the book is focused on the American perspective, and Cain certainly does include detail about French decision-making from various secondary sources in English and from many primary documents written by American officials who were observing and commenting on their meetings with French counterparts. Still, incorporating the French perspective of events would make for a less lopsided story. Perhaps Cain did rely on some of these works but it is difficult to tell given the extremely short selected bibliography provided.

In sum, *America's Vietnam War and Its French Connection* is a solid reference for scholars, graduate students, and upper division students looking for the most up-to-date account (with most of the relevant secondary literature and useful American and British primary sources cited in the footnotes) of the early years of American involvement in Vietnam. Those looking for new interpretations of these years will be disappointed. Finally, more acknowledgement of and

engagement with the extensive secondary literature out there devoted to the Franco-American connection to Vietnam would have helped distinguish Cain's account from the many others on the subject.

## NOTES

[1] Cain does list some, though not all, of the following works in his footnotes and bibliography, but he downplays how much attention has already been devoted to the impact of the Franco-American relationship on US policy toward Vietnam. For a sampling of the extensive literature on this subject, see George Allen, *None So Blind: A Personal Account of Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001); David Anderson, *Trapped By Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Philip Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Douglas Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-54* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990); Arthur Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Brian Duchin, "'The Agonizing Reappraisal': Eisenhower Dulles, and the European Defense Community," *Diplomatic History* 16 (1992): 201-221; William Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994); Jessica Elkind, *Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016); Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un Etat né de la Guerre, 1945-1954* (Paris: Hachette, 2011); Daniel O'C Greene, "John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina," *Diplomatic History* 16 (1992): 511-49; Ronald Irving, *The First Indochina War: French and American Policy, 1945-1954* (London: Croom-Helm, 1975); Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); Pierre Journoud and Hugues Tertrais, *1954-2004: la bataille de Dien Bien Phu entre histoire et mémoire* (Paris: 2004); George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor, 1986); Lawrence Kaplan, Denise Artaud, and Mark Rubin, eds., *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1990); Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1995); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); John Prados, *The History of an Unwinnable War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Ronald Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the United States Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1985); and Kathryn Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

[2] David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Stein Tonnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and De Gaulle in a World at War* (Oslo: Sage, 1991); and Mark Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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