

Voices from Vietnam. Edited by Michael E. Stevens; assistant editors, A. Kristen Foster, Ellen D. Goldlust-Gingrich, Regan Rhea. (Madison: Center for Documentary History, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1996. Pp. xiv, 255. Map, illustrations, suggestions for further reading, index. Clothbound, \$24.95; paperbound, \$12.95.)

Michael E. Stevens and his editorial assistants have produced a book on Vietnam that is part of the series "Voices of the Wisconsin Past." Beginning in 1994 he and his staff appealed to Wisconsin's public to loan or donate letters or journals written by the state's 57,000 Vietnam veterans. About 230 veterans eventually donated more than 12,000 items, and their contributions form the documentary foundation of this book. The staff then divided the letters into chapters covering such topics as basic training, combat, Tet and Khe Sanh of 1968, American-Vietnamese relations, and the impact of the war on the individual.

The result is a superb book that should have an appeal not just to residents of Wisconsin but to the 2.5 million Americans who served, and to anyone interested, in the Vietnam War. The letters are full of emotion. "I'm actually getting nervous about this war," writes Steven Plue during basic training. "One keeps putting it off in his mind about going and then finally when you realize it's all for real, you get scared" (p. 11). John Abrams described leaving America for Vietnam, watching "wives and lovers holding onto their men until the last moment" (p. 16). Once in country, most men suffered in the tropical climate. "Your [*sic*] either are soaking wet from rain or broiling in the sun," wrote Mike Jeffords. "Your head cooks under the helmet" (pp. 18, 20). And then they became foot soldiers, long hours of "human torture," wrote George Godfrey, which had an immediate impact: "There are no boys here, all men, some quite young, but they're men now" (p. 29).

Like many other studies, this book also demonstrates that after the Tet offensive of 1968, and President Richard Nixon's 1969 policy of slow withdrawal called Vietnamization, morale plummeted in the United States Armed Forces in Southeast Asia. American soldiers had been fighting for years, with no prospects for victory, and no end in sight. Thomas Downs complained that Nixon's troop withdrawal "won't help me. . . . He'll leave us to rot over here, and then make excuses when we're wiped out, and what's worse, it will all be in vain because this country is doomed to defeat anyway. Without us, this country will fall" (p. 114). Draftee Dave Daley noted increased drug use and recorded a speech by his sergeant who told his soldiers: "I don't mind you smoking pot in here [on the base]. You can go into that hootch and blow the roof off if you want to, but don't let me catch you doing it in the field. If somebody gets zapped because you were smoking pot, you're not gonna make it back babe" (p. 35).

The Vietnam experience is all here, from the Bob Hope shows, "that Barbara McNair is really a beautiful Negro and she can really sing," to combat fatigue: "I'm so sick I really am," wrote Jeffrey Fields, "I'm tired physically and mentally—I've got 60 rotten, filthy days left" (p. 63). Also included is the diary of pilot and prisoner of war Fredric Flom, who wrote of his fear and torture while being imprisoned for over six years in Hanoi, and the thoughts of service personnel toward protesters back home, which are surprisingly mild.

Stevens and his assistant editors have produced an excellent volume, one full of emotion, courage, and frustration. *Voices from Vietnam* is a credit to all veterans and necessary reading for historians of America's longest war.

TERRY ANDERSON, a Vietnam veteran, is professor of history, Texas A & M University, College Station. His most recent book is about protesters, *The Movement and The Sixties* (1994), and he now is writing a survey of the 1960s.

The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education. By John K. Wilson. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995. Pp. xv, 205. Notes, index. Clothbound, \$44.95; paperbound, \$14.95.)

This is a book by a veteran of the culture wars. A senior at the University of Illinois when he first encountered the phrase "political correctness," John K. Wilson wondered why he had not experienced the leftist "thought police" that national magazines reported were controlling campuses across the nation. Assigned Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) as a freshman and Plato's *Republic* five times in his later undergraduate career, Wilson's experience told him the canon was still alive and well. Moving on to the University of Chicago, graduate work with the Committee on Social Thought there, and editorship of *Democratic Culture*, the newsletter of Teachers for a Democratic Culture, he found less political correctness than chilling evidence of racism, sexism, and homophobia on campus.

Wilson's thesis is that conservative critics of higher education in the early 1990s seized upon the phrase "political correctness" as a rallying cry "behind which all of their enemies—multiculturalism, affirmative action, speech codes, feminism, and tenured radicals—could be united into a single conspiracy" (p. 1). A network of conservative writers, their efforts nourished and underwritten by several conservative foundations, were able, he argues, to parlay anecdotes, half truths, and misleading reporting into a larger myth that found ready acceptance among reporters and a public already angry about rising college costs and a tight job market for new graduates.

The author is at his best in chronicling the way in which the notion of political correctness swept into the national consciousness. Borrowing from the old political left, who applied the term *politically*