Fire In The Lake Essay, Research Paper

Fire in the Lake

By Gerard ChretienEnglish:Vietnam 2002 Prof:Morgan Shulz

Twenty-eight years after publication, and 25 after the war’s end, Fire in the Lake remains one of the very best books on the Viet Nam war. Sadly, Americans are woefully ignorant of the rest of the world. We have little real knowledge of our own history; but for the rest of the world’s history and culture, we have neither knowledge nor regard. We do not even do the Vietnamese people the courtesy of respecting the name of their country–Viet Nam, not Vietnam; Sai Gon, not Saigon. Fitzgerald helps to correct some of this ignorance and arrogance. She begins examining the U.S. in Viet Nam from the perspective of Vietnamese history and culture; and in the process, demonstrating the tenacity and courage of the Vietnamese people, as well as their determination to rid themselves of any foreign invaders, even if, as with the Chinese, it takes 1,000 years. Another great strength of Fitzgerald?s book is, with her attention to Viet Nam’s history and culture and their 20th century struggle against the French, she demonstrates, in an almost matter of fact way, a fundamental tenant of U.S. foreign policy which has been repeated numerous times in the post World War II era. That central tenant is to support thugs over patriots, to elevate to power those who will sell out their people for 30 pieces of silver rather than work with those committed to the well being of their people. Ho Chi Minh was our ally during WWII; his hero was Thomas Jefferson, not Karl Marx or Stalin. He was very pro-American; yet he was a nationalist and a patriot first, which meant, from the perspective of the U.S., he was not only unreliable, but someone who had to be destroyed. And though Fitzgerald does not carry her analysis beyond Viet Nam, an informed or a curious reader quickly can draw the parallels between U.S. policy in Viet Nam and U.S. policy in Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific rim (Indonesia specifically), South America, the Caribbean, and most obvious of all, Central America. Thus Fitzgerald gives us not only the means of understanding the war in Viet Nam, and why we were doomed to lose, but also a point of departure for understanding the travesty of U.S. foreign policy for the last 100 years. Simply stated, the United States is an (economic) empire which cares nothing about democracy, self determination in other countries, which sees other people’s patriotism and love of country as a threat to U.S. imperial interests. We can learn a lot from what Fitzgerald has to say, about the Vietnamese, and especially about ourselves.