

Vietnam War

Author: [Sam Mittelsteadt](#)

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Vietnam Falls: It Is Time To Establish Responsibility

by Susan L.M. Huck

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NO RECRIMINATIONS. That's the current Establishment line. No Recriminations about Vietnam. The idea is that no recriminations should be directed toward the deliberate architects of America's first clear-cut military defeat in history—a defeat in which the enemy has literally driven us flying into the sea and captured four billion dollars' worth of American war matériel.

Always watch a "Liberal" when he says "we." It means you will either be given orders or blamed for something. "We must" is a "Liberal" giving orders, and "we are responsible" is a "Liberal" blaming you for something he has done. In relation to Vietnam, it is "we" who are responsible, or else it is no one who is responsible, but above all "we must" not seek to find the actual culprits.

Agreed, there is plenty of blame to be spread around—but it does not cover 210 million Americans, and certainly not the fifty-six thousand killed, the hundreds of thousands who were wounded, the thousands who endured senseless, endless years of the misery Communists specialize in inflicting, and those Americans who may still be there. They were sacrificed by our leaders just as indifferently as Ho chi Minh condemned millions of his people to a generation of terror and death.

It was a no-win war. Planned that way. And recriminations are in order because they are the only means of helping the victimized American people to realize that our own policy-makers created the monster and then made certain that we fell before it.

The story of our betrayal of Vietnam to Communism begins toward the end of World War II. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt rather enjoyed sitting down with good old Joe Stalin and settling the affairs of the world. Among the points agreed upon virtually without discussion was that the French should not return to Indochina. Neither the French nor the Indochinese were consulted, of course. Roosevelt claimed to deplore "colonialism" while failing to recognize the harsh Communist variation on the theme; Stalin, for his part, must have smiled and rubbed his hands at the prospect of more lands to conquer, more people to Communize.

Josef Stalin's man in that part of the world (a broad term indeed) was by then a twenty-three-year veteran member of the Communist Party who had adopted the name of Ho chi Minh. One of the founding members of the French Communist Party in 1920, Ho had gone to Moscow for training, and was then detailed to serve under top Communist agent Michael Borodin in Shanghai in 1925, when it had seemed that China was ripe for plucking.

In 1927, however, Chiang Kai-shek became fed up with the Communists, and Comrade Ho moved while the moving was good. He was expelled by the British from Hong Kong in 1931, and apparently rattled around North Vietnam and South China for years without making much progress. As the Japanese took over effective power in Indochina from the Vichy French, Ho gained brief respectability as the head of a "Government-in-Exile" which impressed some Chinese leaders as potentially useful. But he was probably too diligent in undermining his hosts, because when the Spirit of Tehran came to smile upon him, Ho chi Minh was in a Chinese jail.

Comrade Ho was not sprung by Stalin, who had no power in those parts in 1944, but by Americans, who did.

To young people, perhaps coming in very late to the Vietnam story, it will seem amazing that the United States Government was responsible for dusting off Ho chi Minh, after twenty years of failure, and unleashing him upon Vietnam! But that is exactly what happened.

Vietnam War

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Ho's anti-Japanese activities were minimal, but the Japanese turned over their weapons to his Viet Minh in August of 1945, which soon gave the French something with which to contend. In March, 1946, a Leftist French Government was ready to let Ho have the North, but he wanted everything, and made his bid with a surprise attack on Hanoi on the night of December 19, 1946. Thus began the eight-year war with France.

The recently retired General Edward Lansdale, one of our C.I.A. generals and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, won his spurs by helping Ho chi Minh. The Emperor of Indochina, Bao Dai, had been captured by the Communists in 1946, and once recalled that this was when he first met Lansdale. "The difference between his presence and mine is that he was there by choice," the Emperor remarked. For the next thirty years, we were to hear of Lansdale as the hero of *The Ugly American* (a "sponsored" book by a fellow spook), and as the great expert on guerrilla warfare. The great expert was also a chronic loser to his old friend Ho chi Minh.

In those immediate postwar years, support for Ho also took the form of a "Vietnamese-American Friendship Association," supported by "respectable" Communist Fronters like Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas, who willingly fronted also for the C.I.A. Newsweek's Harold Isaacs, a former editor of a Communist newspaper in Shanghai who ended up comfortably ensconced in the Agency's M.I.T. branch in Cambridge, provided them with public relations handouts.

Official American support for Communist agent Ho chi Minh lasted from 1944 to some indefinite time around the Korean War — possibly as late as 1951. During that period, American officers were advising Ho's irregulars even as they tortured captive French officers.

When the policy change came, it was reluctant and lukewarm. The same people who had spent years supporting Ho chi Minh were now supposed to help the French against him. However, getting the French out of Indochina still seemed to be our overriding goal. The real battle became one of whose Vietnamese puppets would rule that country. It is interesting to note that in 1952 we were trying to palm off Ngo dinh Diem on the French. This effort was made by Wesley Fishel (C.F.R.), another of our spooks. Fishel once claimed to have been operating in Asia since 1939. He may be lying, but if not, then where he operated, and doing what for whom, remains the big mystery. But it was Fishel who turned an eagerly corruptible Michigan State University into a C.I.A.-run training camp. We shall see what they trained, and for whose benefit, in a moment.

In the period between the alleged Korean War policy reversal and the final French exit in 1956, it is said that the United States picked up an ever-larger portion of the tab for the war against the Communists (then known as Viet Minh). French forces were French-led, but they were mainly Vietnamese, Moroccan, Algerian, and Foreign Legion troops; the eventual toll was 177,000 killed or missing.

By paying the bills, we also had a say in things. Since our team consisted of former Ho chi Minh enthusiasts, they were regarded as security risks at best. However, the French forces had even more of a problem with their own government, which was fatally penetrated by Communists. Indochina was just another chapter in the story of the French Army's betrayal from Paris. The final chapter was to be written in Algeria.

The end for the French in Indochina came at Dienbienphu, a flat-bottomed valley along the road between Hanoi and northern Laos. By 1953, it lay two hundred miles deep in Viet Minh territory. It was accessible only by air, but in November 1953 someone in the French high command thought that occupying it was a great idea. It was promptly surrounded, yet an eventual total of sixteen thousand French-led troops were airlifted or parachuted into this slaughter pen. Ho threw everything he had, including his reserves, at the French fortifications. A strike from a single American aircraft carrier would have finished Ho's exposed forces, but French requests for the strike were refused by John Foster Dulles.

More than half the French defenders were killed before Dienbienphu was overrun in May of 1954. Most of the remainder died after capture. And in Paris, Communist legislators stood up and cheered when the news arrived.

The debacle sent a Socialist French Premier, Pierre Mendes-France, to Geneva, where he found no difficulty in surrendering the northern half of Vietnam to the Communists. French forces, although demoralized, were at

Vietnam War

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least able to cover the southern flight of some three million refugees from “liberation.”

After that, the transfer of power in Vietnam from France to the United States became more evident (although it was not made so in the United States). With endless amounts of American tax money available, our C.I.A. men could do pretty much as they pleased. And it pleased them to install Ngo dinh Diem as Our Man in South Vietnam.

He had been “helping out” since at least 1947, when he was performing political missions out of the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong. In 1951, he was domiciled in the Maryknoll seminary in New Jersey, but traveling frequently to Washington, where Senator Mike Mansfield and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas did all they could for him.

Diem had something else going for him, too. The C.I.A. had been actively establishing “trade unions” abroad, long manufactured by the international socialists then running Big Labor; quite naturally, their purpose was to provide a power base for socialism — as a means of “fighting Communism.” (If they had told us the purpose was to establish socialism, we might not have wanted to pay for it.) So it happened that Diem’s brother, Ngo dinh Nhu, was the proprietor of a labor front in Saigon called the “Humanist Revolutionary Workers’ Party.”

The late 1950s are the period when South Vietnam was aptly described as “a playground” for American hustlers and ideologues. Every agency, every foundation, every think-tank, every company living on government contracts was out to make the scene in Vietnam. The country was flooded with naive do-gooders anxious to uplift the natives, power-hungry professors of political science and social planners, journalists for hire, assorted ripoff artists—and at the top, the old Ho chi Minh team, including Lansdale and Fishel. Enter “nation-building.”

In the North, Ho chi Minh settled undisturbed into his “period of consolidation.” Dienbienphu was, for him, a classic Pyrrhic victory—his Army was in shreds, and had to be rebuilt. Then, too, there was the matter of Communist “land reform.” This is always a bloody process; it is nothing less than the complete subjugation of the rural population, so that they are nothing but serfs thereafter. What Leftist scholar A. Doak Barnett refers to as a “peasant revolt” in the North in 1956 was an expression of the total desperation of the people under Communism - clubs against machine guns. Though inured to the routine sufferings of being Asian peasants, the people were in the clutches of a government which forced them to allow the children of executed “class enemies” to starve to death in the open fields. The horrors of a Communist “period of consolidation” have been amply recorded in Congressional Hearings, but they are not a favorite topic of our Leftist mass media.

Needless to say, our team in Saigon made no effort to help the victims. Their first targets, in fact, were three indigenous anti-Communist “private armies” in the South. Life magazine raved over Diem’s “masterly” combination of “force, cajolery, and bribery” which destroyed or drove out the anti-Communist forces between March and October of 1955. The bribes, amounting to about ten million American tax dollars, bought off as many supporters of these private armies as possible. Wesley Fishel was reportedly in charge of that, while Lansdale handled the military end.

Edward Lansdale’s protégé during this period was a Vietnamese officer named Duong van Minh. Yes, the same one who has just presided over the surrender of his country to the Communists — smiling into the cameras all the way! Duong van Minh was made a general for his fight against the anti-Communists in 1955. Another non-surprise is that General Minh’s brother, Duong van Nhut, is a Communist and a general in the Army of North Vietnam. We shall meet Minh again shortly.

Back with his team of “scholars” at Michigan State, Fishel was soon busy training the leadership for the seventy thousand secret police whose job was not to fight the Reds but to keep Diem in power. We have been left with the impression that the force was under Diem’s brother, Ngo dinh Nhu, the “humanist revolutionary” labor leader. However, when the chips were down, it responded not to Nhu but to its operational head, Albert Pham ngoc Thao. This fellow, working for “our” C.I.A., and patronized in print by “Liberal” columnist Joseph Alsop, had come to the job after being Ho chi Minh’s intelligence chief.

Vietnam War

Author: [Sam Mittelsteadt](#)

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The boys of our O.S.S.-turned-C.I.A. had been hanging around Ho chi Minh's headquarters too long. When they were through teaching the South Vietnamese "democracy," Ngo dinh Diem, the candidate from New Jersey, got ninety-eight percent of the vote in the "referendum" of October 23, 1955!

On the home front, the Diem lobby, which eventually flooded Time, Life, Collier's, Newsweek, the Saturday Evening Post, and Reader's Digest with propaganda for "middle American" taxpayers, was run by a European socialist named Joseph Buttinger. He, too, is on record as an admirer of Ho chi Minh. From 1954 until about 1961, the C.I.A. supported New Leader, a strictly socialist magazine, joined with Reporter magazine, a Left-"Liberal" journal run by Max Ascoli (C.F.R.), to inform America's radicals that all was well in Vietnam. There were no protests in those days.

With our old Ho chi Minh team teaching 'em how to fight Communism in South Vietnam, things began going downhill in the playground of Liberalism just as soon as Uncle Ho had the North "consolidated." The toll of village chiefs assassinated by the Communists, in the South, rose from about five hundred in 1957 to about thirteen thousand in 1961, a year after Ho's "National Liberation Front" was founded.

We were meanwhile busy with Vietnamese "land reform" (under Wolf Ladejinsky, C.F.R.), with "advisors" reorganizing and retraining an armed force purged of French influence; anyway, we were teaching "democracy" like mad, and financing "social movements" for our social-movement enthusiasts to play with. Then came Camelot.

As a Senator, John Kennedy had been part of the Diem clique. After his election as President, a fresh wave of New Frontiersmen was added to the hubbub in Saigon Earnest Peace Corpsmen, fresh from liberal-arts colleges, contributed their ignorance to the scene. On the other hand, the Kennedys were enthused about the Green Berets idea — small units of American specialists in irregular warfare who would get out there and rally the local freedom fighters. It was a good idea, and it attracted thousands of brave men who wanted to do exactly that. But unfortunately the Green Berets ended up patsies of the Central Intelligence Agency, doing the dirty work for "Liberal" intellectuals who thought nothing of betraying them to hideous torture and death whenever they wanted to cultivate some double agent.*

Why it was that in 1961 some of Diem's American support started flaking off, we may never know. But it began to happen. The "bad press" crept in from left field, and by the time the word went out from Washington to get rid of Diem, honest "Liberals" were caught flat-footed and outraged. Among them was Marguerite Higgins, author of *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York, Harper & Row, 1965).

By 1963, Americans were shocked to see ghastly photos of Buddhist monks burning themselves alive to protest Diem's "persecution" of the Buddhists in South Vietnam. The campaign was frankly run as a political operation by Thich tri Quang, one of the many double agents to lead a charmed life while the Communist "long war" chewed up all around them. † Quang had undeniable connections to the North, and reporters who knew well enough that he was to be presented as a hero were also able to see that he was deliberately setting Buddhists and the Government at each other's throats.

The benefit thereby accruing to the Communists was clear enough. But why was Quang presented as a brave hero to the American public? With the advantage of hindsight, it is perfectly apparent that he was doing a job for Washington, too. Small wonder that one reporter said he had never seen a man "so sure of himself" in what appeared to be a dangerous situation.

The Buddhist uproar was designed to cut down Diem's image, preparatory to eliminating him from the scene. At the height of the Buddhist campaign, Henry Cabot Lodge took over as U.S. Ambassador. ‡ Thich tri Quang found "asylum" in the Embassy for about two months while "Henry Sabotage" cobbled together the coup against Diem.

My, how the same names keep cropping up! General Minh, who spent his time playing tennis with Lodge instead of fighting the Communists, was chosen to run the coup and take control. Diem and one of his brothers were killed, but you can't make an omelet

Vietnam War

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According to Marguerite Higgins, the “go” order to Lodge came from Undersecretary of State Averell Harriman and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman. Both men, one need hardly say, are dike Lodge members of the Council on Foreign Relations. Hilsman is a C.I.A. veteran, while Harriman’s most recent conspicuous service to the Communists had been his “settlement” of the Laos problem in 1962, which gave the Comrades control of the vital Ho chi Minh Trail. §

The fall of Diem left South Vietnam’s Army with a greater interest in playing mini-coup than in fighting the Communists; either eight or ten “Governments” followed, and the more durable leaders since 1965, Marshal Nguyen cao Ky and General Nguyen van Thieu, were both a part of Minh’s original crew. Ky was deposed because he wanted to break the rules—go north, and win! Thieu did as he was told right up to the end.

On the home front, only three weeks after Diem was disposed of, President Kennedy met a similar fate. Then, despite the carte blanche given him by a “Liberal” Senate after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, President Lyndon Johnson retained all the losers and ran for election in 1964 as a peacenik – knowing full well that the American “advisors” and Green Berets were getting killed in order to make the White House safe for L.B.J.

That accomplished, President Johnson, along with his crew of “hawks” like Dean Rusk, Walt Rostow, and Robert McNamara (C.F.R. all), and politician-general Maxwell Taylor (C.F.R.), proceeded to pour in the American troops. But the war was not to be run by the military. It was to be run by civilian “whiz kids” of the sort who helped McNamara to begin the gigantic program of disarming America from 1961 onward. Among those civilians was Daniel Ellsberg (C.F.R.).

American troops disembarked, American bombers flew – but never was there a better example of the old French saying, “The more it changes, the more it is the same thing.” General Ira Eaker commented that, in our wars prior to Korea, we had professional (military) leaders and amateur soldiers, but that we now had professional soldiers and amateur leaders. That was not the real problem, however. Amateurs would at least be capable of learning, eager to do so, and ready to seek professional advice. But the Council on Foreign Relations clique knew what it wanted—a “better” no-win war than Korea—and that is what they got.

There is really no point in attempting to sketch the American military campaigns in Vietnam, because they were militarily irrational. President Johnson, reports General Curtis LeMay, repeatedly told the military men that they were in Vietnam “to prevent aggression from succeeding [sic!] without attempting either to conquer or invade or destroy North Vietnam.”

As ever, “measured response” meant guaranteed insufficient response. It was a war in which the paper jungle of the “Rules of Engagement” was worse than the real jungle; it was an undeclared war in which the only home-front mobilization was on behalf of the enemy! The United States Government wouldn’t even move against the authors of poison-pen letters and phone-calls tormenting the families of killed and missing men. We would not even accept the offer of the great anti-Communist leader Le van Vien to lead a private force to liberate our men being tortured in enemy concentration camps.

It was a war in which the enemy’s most vulnerable points were out-of-bounds. Hundreds of ships belonging to our alleged allies joined the procession of Soviet and Red Chinese vessels bringing supplies to Haiphong. The ships were safe, the harbor was safe, and for long periods all of North Vietnam was safe. To the south, in Sihanouk’s “neutralist” Cambodia, the American-built port of Sihanoukville, and its American-built links to Phnom Penh and the Mekong River, were used freely by the Communists for at least five years.

It was a war of “sanctuary” for the enemy, of readily identifiable, uniformed Americans fighting non-uniformed guerrillas as well as North Vietnamese regulars we could never even get the Hanoi Government to acknowledge! It was a war in which for years nearly all of the bombings, and all of the village-burning “search and destroy” operations, were deliberately confined to South Vietnam, the territory of our ally! Ho chi Minh, all his life, had been totally indifferent to the misery and death his effort to Communize his people caused. Our own leaders seem to have caught the disease; between them, millions of peasants and hundreds of thousands of American

Vietnam War

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soldiers were run through the meat-grinder—when every American military man knew that, within four to six weeks, North Vietnam could be bombed to the point where it simply could not sustain the war in the South. Whatever the casualties, they would have been infinitely less than they became in the Communist game of “protracted war.”

Our leaders from the Council on Foreign Relations kept saying that we “could not” do this or that, because it would inevitably mean “widening of the war,” bringing in Red China, World War III, nuclear holocaust, and the end of the world. One by one, they eventually got around to doing almost all of the things they said would “provoke” the Red Chinese, the Russians, or both, but nothing of the kind happened. We eventually did bomb the North. We eventually even bombed Hanoi, and the Russian-manned missile sites. At the very end, when Henry Kissinger was angry, we mined Haiphong harbor, which we had been told throughout the war would bring absolute disaster. So the “restraints” had been lies; there had been no reason to tip-toe around North Vietnam—except that the no-win strategy of our C.F.R. leaders demanded it!

All the while, the Russians, their satellites, the Red Chinese, and our own alleged allies were merrily hauling supplies to Haiphong with perfect immunity – the great U.S. Navy simply logged them in and out of Haiphong, and mourned its pilots who were killed, or who suffered the hellish years as POWs brought down by missiles the Navy had to let through because Washington said so.

Throughout the Johnson and Nixon years, meanwhile, disarmament and detente and “aid and trade” flourished. During all those years of war, we could not do enough for our Red friends. We gave them credit and shipped them computer hardware and software, airborne radar, even rifle-cleaning compounds! We fed them and buckled to them, and the C.F.R. boys who were making buckets of money through “aid and trade,” such as the Watsons of I.B.M., could not have cared less about the American “peasants” getting killed in consequence.

And let us not forget the “peace talks”! The Vietnam “peace talks” went on for years, just as in Korea. That’s another game we always play by the Communist rules.

There was no urgency about it, heaven knows, since the “peace talks” would be conducted in Paris, and our wealthy C.F.R. men would take turns spending a year in Paris at taxpayer expense. Good old Ave Harriman, the chronic loser, was sent to spend a year chatting with his Red friends. He was followed by the equally ineffective “Henry Sabotage.” As the years dragged on for our tortured prisoners of war, David K.E. Bruce took his turn lolling around Paris. In Asia in 1971, I recall being moved to the suggestion that since all of our “peace negotiators” are men of leisure and substance, perhaps we could exchange them for our prisoners of war, and then let them negotiate their own release.

There is no question but that Henry Kissinger arm-twisted President Thieu into signing his phony “peace with honor” paper. There is no question that Kissinger, President Nixon – and even President Ford — promised both economic and military help to South Vietnam should the Communists crank up another offensive. That was all eyewash. Kissinger was buying his infamous “decent interval” between buyout and collapse, as everyone should have known.**

We dried up the supplies while feeding Saigon promises, promises. It was all planned. Kissinger has been blaming Congress, yet consider this. Last June, when Henry Kissinger was irked by questions about his part in “bugging” people’s telephone lines, he threatened to resign should his honor continue to be impugned in such a manner. If he sincerely believed that the pledges he made, on the honor of the United States, were being broken, he should have raised a great ruckus and, if necessary, resigned in protest to defend said national honor.

It would never have crossed his mind. Things were going exactly as planned.

In re-reading American Opinion’s coverage of the Vietnam War, I am struck by the fact that it was identified, from the first, as another no-win war, doomed from the start. From the first, it was recognized that this was the wrong war, wrong place, wrong methods, and wrong purpose. It was not the work of some nameless “they,” but

Vietnam War

Author: [Sam Mittelsteadt](#)

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of individuals we have been told all along were great Americans—yet they intended from the beginning that Vietnam would be an American defeat. There is no other outcome for a no-win war.

One could fill this entire issue with “we-told-you-so” quotations from nearly every author who has discussed the subject in these pages since the 1950s, but most especially and most consistently from Hilaire du Berrier, who has intimate knowledge of who’s who and of the labyrinth of Oriental (and American “Liberal”) politics. Hilaire warned and remonstrated and pleaded and reported. His *Background To Betrayal*, published in 1965 by our sister publishing house, Western Islands, is a masterpiece of timely warning proved accurate in every detail. Du Berrier was ignored; Robert Welch was ignored; Alan Stang was ignored; Gary Allen was ignored; Medford Evans was ignored – we were all ignored. That we have now been proved right is bitter solace.

We see the results. Not merely military defeat by a country whose military capability could have been reduced to zero in weeks by air power, but psychological defeat—Americans grateful for surrender, supinely looking upon their own mass media brimming over with enemy propaganda. Ten years of “protracted war,” of “no-win war,” have succeeded in their prime objective—not the capture of South Vietnam, which could have been arranged by these same people at any time—but the defeat of the American people, who seem to have been convinced that they cannot defeat the Communists. This is the lesson that our leaders wanted to teach us.

If we let them get away with this, we are in for nothing but more of the same, with the Communists coming closer day by day.

- In 1969, when Colonel Robert Rheault, commander of the Green Berets in Vietnam, was thrown into a sweatbox at Long Binh stockade, charged with murder because one of the Agency’s pet double-agents had been killed, it was only the culmination of a once-elite unit’s engineered decline.

⌘ In *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, Marguerite Higgins writes (page thirty-one) that Major General Do cao Tri of the ARVN First Division captured documents in September 1963, naming Quang as a Vietcong agent, but that a C.I.A. man suppressed them because “they would have proved embarrassing” to the Americans.

‡ A French general who knew Lodge in France at the end of World War II told correspondent Hilaire du Berrier that Lodge had then expressed a desire to get in on the Ho chi Minh operation in Indochina. It was the “in” thing at the time.

§ Harriman’s career began, in fact, when he arranged the credits which shored up a shaky Soviet Government in Moscow after the death of Lenin in 1924. As U.S. Ambassador to Moscow during World War II, he supervised the transfer of eleven billion dollars’ worth of goods to the Soviets. Harriman has been a friend of the Communists for the past fifty years!

** Henry does not confide in me, but in August of 1969, I wrote in *The Review Of The News* that the real objective of the interminable “peace talks” was a “decent interval” between when we got out and when Saigon fell. How did I know? I didn’t know, I was just trying to think like Henry Kissinger, which is a revolting experience.

Susan L.M. Huck is a graduate of Syracuse University, with advanced degrees from the University of Michigan and Clark University. Dr. Huck has taught as a university professor of both geography and sociology, lectured before academic audiences on four continents, acted as advisor to one of the world’s leading encyclopedias, and is a Contributing Editor to *The Review Of The News*.