

Simon Hall. *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement.* American Social and Political Movements of the Twentieth Century Series. New York: Routledge, 2012. 208 pp. \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-80084-6.



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Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement is the first book in Routledge's new series American Social and Political Movements of the Twentieth Century. Written by Simon Hall, of the University of Leeds, the book provides the reader with a thorough education in the history of the American movement to end the war in Vietnam. More review than original research, it succeeds in giving the reader a detailed account of the major actors and events that defined the movement to end the American war in Vietnam. Students and readers interested in the 1960s will benefit greatly from this book.

Hall's study is valuable as a guide to the anti-Vietnam War movement, but it does raise some issues that could be more thoroughly addressed. For example, there is the question of whether the antiwar movement was able to reduce the length or intensity of the war. Hall admits that counterfactual arguments are very difficult questions to address. When examining a single movement, this is certainly the case. Each war emerges from a specific historical context that is difficult to repli-

cate. However, there are ways to address this question that rely on more general arguments. For example, some scholars have argued that it is difficult for movements to change public policy when voters are strongly committed to a position. [1] As long as public opinion supported the Vietnam War, which it did during much of the 1960s, it would have been difficult for any movement to effectively challenge the conflict.

This is not to say that the American state ignored the antiwar movement. Recent research has documented a correlation between antiwar protest and congressional hearings.[2] At the very least, the state pays attention to protest. *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* touches on this topic. Hall describes how President Richard Nixon's White House was affected by the protest that occurred during the invasion of Cambodia. Yet this does not imply that protest itself was a definitive factor behind the end of the Vietnam War. It is logically possible that the public simply tired of the length of the war and its horrendous cost in human lives. According to this view, protest is a

symptom of an underlying shift in attitudes toward the Vietnam War, not their cause. The White House only paid attention to the antiwar movement because the excesses of the war were trying the public's patience.

This leads to a major theme in research on antiwar movements. In an essay in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2005), Sam Marullo and David S. Meyer argue that peace movements face an uphill struggle.[3] There are many incentives for states to wage war, while there are few restraints. Once it is clear that a nation-state is moving toward war, it may be too late for a movement. Passions are strong and leaders do not wish to look weak. For these reasons, antiwar movements are reactionary and face massive obstacles.

Hall's discussion of the movement's consequences also deserves mention. He correctly brings attention to the antiwar movement's impact on elections and political parties. Hall is to be commended for drawing attention to the "spillover" of the antiwar movement into other political movements. One of the more interesting insights of research on postwar political movements is how much they are affected by the antiwar movement.[4] It is common to find out that the leaders of the feminist and environmentalist movements were also experienced antiwar activists. Hall also correctly notes that conservative movements sometimes had roots in the antiwar movement. Not only did the Vietnam War drastically affect American political culture, but it also became a focal point for movement activists for many decades.

The discussion of movement consequences could be further strengthened. For example, there is a body of literature suggesting that the antiwar movement had a generally liberalizing effect on American society. Research on antiwar movement participants in the 1980s found that they tended to be more politically liberal, delayed marriage, and were less likely to have children.[5] Political

scientists have also found that having a low draft lottery number was associated with heightened political liberalism. In other words, the lottery system randomly exposed some American men to more risk than others.[6] Men who were more likely to be drafted due to their lottery numbers were more likely to have liberal political views. These studies lend credence to the hypothesis that the way that the Vietnam War was waged may have contributed more to the public's turn against the war than any number of protests. A thousand rallies pale in comparison to being drafted for an increasingly unpopular war.

The preceding discussion raises a general issue of how historical and social scientific views of protest movements should be reconciled. There is an argument to be made that historical and social scientific approaches simply have different goals. Historians tend to produce thick description and interpretation. In contrast, social scientists are often happy to employ a positivist mode where they peel away detail and engage in a rather violent simplification of the available evidence in the search for a convincing correlation. It would be fitting to let each discipline go its own way were it not for the fact that social scientists and historians often make overlapping, often conflicting, claims. Historians are not merely content in describing past events; they wish to talk about outcomes and causes. Hall's account of the antiwar movement is a case in point. *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* does not merely describe the antiwar movement, but posits at some points that it may have directly affected the behavior of political leaders, which may have resulted in policy changes.

To fully assess this causal claim would require a great deal of evidence, more than this brief review can contain. Indeed, scholars in a wide range of disciplines have been debating the nature of the relationship between the antiwar movement, the American state, and the public for years. Some studies fully mine traditional histori-

cal materials, while others rely on quantitative methods to tease out cause and effect relationships, like the lottery study, which uses an idiosyncratic feature of public policy as a source of experimental data.

The outcome of this debate should influence how a book like *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* is written. If one believes that social movements are merely symptoms of broader cultural shifts, then one would not employ a “movement centric” approach. In that case, the antiwar movement would be seen as a symptom of a broader political process, the tendency for the American public to initially support wars and then turn against them once the war drags. In contrast, if research shows that the movement had a more direct effect, then it would be justified to frame the movement as a central actor in the story of the Vietnam War, not merely an indicator of social strife.

A careful consideration of cause and effect, and the incorporation of evidence coming from different fields, would greatly help bring historical and social scientific accounts of protest together. *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* is a fine book that deftly covers the major events of that movement. Future accounts should get beyond the “who, when, where and why?” Instead, we should ask “how do we know that it mattered?” Evidence should be drawn from multiple fields of study. Historical analyses of protest, like the 1960s antiwar movement, will surely be part of the answer.

Notes

[1]. Paul Burstein, “Social Movements and Public Policy,” in *How Social Movements Matter*, ed. Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3-21.

[2]. Doug McAdam and Yang Su, “The War at Home: Antiwar Protests and Congressional Voting,

1965-73,” *American Sociological Review* 67 (2002): 696-721.

[3]. Sam Marullo and David S. Meyer, “Anti-War and Peace Movements,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (London: Blackwell, 2004), 641-665.

[4]. David S. Meyer and Nancy Whittier, “Social Movement Spillover,” *Social Problems* 41, no. 2 (1994): 277-298.

[5]. Doug McAdam, “The Biographical Impact of Activism,” in *How Social Movements Matter*, 119-146.

[6]. Robert S. Erickson and Laura Stoker, “Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes,” *American Political Science Review* 105 (2011): 221-237.

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ed. Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1999),#160;

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