In addition to domestic political constraints, VanDeMark identifies the discrepancy between America’s global vision and the political turmoil in South Vietnam. After the French defeat in 1954, Washington attempted to create a viable, non-Communist government south of the 17th parallel. Like their predecessors, Johnson and his advisors deluded themselves into thinking stability could be achieved through escalation—more American personnel, aircraft, and military supplies. VanDeMark blames those officials who ignored reports of corruption in Saigon to promote their mistaken idea that Washington could successfully challenge Ho Chi Minh’s nationalist independence movement.

By 1965, no doubts or concerns could dissuade administration officials from their course of self-destruction in Vietnam. Repeated and emphatic warnings from George Ball, Mike Mansfield, and Clark Clifford about a prolonged war in Asia were dismissed by Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Dean Rusk. VanDeMark cites White House meetings where these men supported plans to bomb the north and deploy American ground forces to the south. He shows how promises that a “limited escalation” of the war would promote stability in Saigon superseded questions about the dangerous new level of Washington’s entanglement in Vietnam.

According to VanDeMark, Johnson’s worst mistake was his unwillingness in 1965 to inform the American people of the magnitude or the costs of the expanded war in Vietnam. He challenges the president’s obsession with secrecy in the early stages of the war as a “tragic lapse of statesmanship” (p. xvi). Johnson repeatedly equivocated on details about troops levels and bombing runs in an attempt to avoid a national debate on Vietnam and protect his Great Society programs. Ironically, his secrecy ultimately hampered his cherished domestic agenda and embroiled his administration in controversy over the war.

VanDeMark presents a convincing analysis of Washington’s failure to assess the impact of escalating the Vietnam War in 1965. Johnson and his advisors were caught between pressures for reforms in America and a commitment to maintaining a non-Communist government in Saigon—whatever the cost. Despite warnings about the risks involved, they approved a costly escalation of the war to preserve national prestige and protect the Great Society from conservative opposition. Their mistaken assessment of Washington’s potential to direct events in Vietnam is evident in the nine-month deliberations before July 1965 that led to America’s long and painful quagmire in Vietnam.

Judith Munro-Leighton
Jefferson Community College


The dilemma of demonstrating the relevance of their chosen subject matter always confronts historians of peace movements. Tom Wells deals with
the issue forthrightly in *The War Within*, the central thesis of which is that the public and increasingly radical opposition of ordinary citizens "played a major role in constraining, deescalating, and ending" the Vietnam War (p. 4). Unfortunately, in his consistent attempt to demonstrate that even "few activists fully appreciated the considerable political power they possessed," Wells overstates his case (p. 2).

Using a combination of material from the Johnson and Nixon papers as well as an extraordinary base of interviews, he contends that a fear of how continued escalation would affect domestic political developments played the critical role in the approach which two successive defense secretaries, Clark Clifford and Melvin Laird, took to Vietnam policy. With a few exceptions, the book does a good job at capturing the strengths, weakness, and political power of the peace movement during the Nixon presidency. Yet too often, especially when dealing with the Johnson administration, Wells claims that the peace movement "must have" or "probably" had some effect on the mindsets of key officials without providing any real evidence to support such a claim. Perhaps the most egregious instance of this point comes when Wells quotes Paul Nitze, Dean Rusk, and William Bundy denying that the opposition to the war expressed by their children and other close relatives influenced their own opinions toward Vietnam. The author then concludes nonetheless that "it seems likely that antiwar relatives did have some influence on officials" (p. 111). The book also makes a number of claims which seem exaggerated, such as describing Watergate "in no small part" as an outgrowth of Richard Nixon's preoccupation with the antiwar movement (p. 549).

*The War Within* suffers from two other flaws. Wells paints his story as between "two political camps"—peace activists and the government (p. 1). He expertly guides the reader through the complicated internal politics of the peace movement, but he offers a considerably less nuanced view of the U.S. government. In particular, Wells fails to devote sufficient attention to the role played by Congress, especially the Senate, in stimulating antiwar activism. Instead, Wells portrays a Congress peopled by mostly timid politicians who came out against the war only when confident that such an action would not prove politically fatal. In the process, the book glosses over the profound effect of congressional actions, ranging from the Fulbright Hearings of 1966 to the Cooper-Church Amendment of 1970, in bringing the war to a close. Indeed, on several occasions, Wells seems to go out of his way to underestimate the power of Congress. Commenting on the Fulbright Hearings (which prompted the convening of a hastily scheduled U.S.-South Vietnamese summit conference in Honolulu), he concedes merely that having prominent senators "challenging U.S. policy on national television must have been disconcerting to the administration" (p. 69).

Perhaps most surprisingly, *The War Within* struggles as a work of peace history. Wells concludes his detailed analysis with the comment that "the American movement against the Vietnam War was perhaps the most successful antiwar movement in history" (p. 579). Perhaps this claim is valid, but the book provides no context to justify the assertion. Wells does not ad-