



# Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora

By Andrew Lam

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"When Americans say Vietnam, they don't mean Vietnam."

In his long-overdue first collection of essays, noted journalist and NPR commentator Andrew Lam explores his lifelong struggle for identity as a Viet Kieu, or a Vietnamese national living abroad. At age eleven, Lam, the son of a South Vietnamese general, came to California on the eve of the fall of Saigon to communist forces. He traded his Vietnamese name for a more American one and immersed himself in the allure of the American dream: something not clearly defined for him or his family.

Reflecting on the meanings of the Vietnam War to the Vietnamese people themselves--particularly to those in exile--Lam picks with searing honesty at the roots of his doubleness and his parents' longing for a homeland that no longer exists.

Winner of the 2006 PEN/Beyond Margins Award

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Lam shatters the assumptions of readers who have encountered the Vietnam experience only through American pop culture....He writes with the delicacy and intensity of a poet."--*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"Andrew Lam writes with the honesty of a true journalist and the feeling of a born storyteller. On his many journeys between Vietnam and the U.S., he sees first-hand the global consequences of war. *Perfume Dreams* is a meaningful book for our times."--Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *The Fifth Book of Peace* and *Woman Warrior*

"Much will be made--and rightly so--of the eloquent commentary Andrew Lam's essays provide on Vietnam and the Vietnamese. But his collected essays have a far deeper reach. Lam brilliantly illuminates the universal issues of self and home and human striving. Andrew Lam speaks to each of us quite individually and personally, with wit and compassion, about the things that connect us all at the deepest level. *Perfume Dreams* is a fascinating and important book by a truly gifted writer."--Robert Olen Butler, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

"Lam paints unforgettable portraits of the horror of refugee camps, a father who was once a three-star general, and a rebellious son who finally finds his own home, not in Vietnam or United States, but in the country of story."--Maria Hummel, author of *Wilderness Run*

"As a first-generation Vietnamese American, Lam is able to write about the full spectrum of the Vietnamese immigrant experience, ranging from memories of idyllic childhood in Saigon to his family's painful post-war exile in America. Lam's insights into Asian American life are reflected in candid, witty anecdotes that reveal much about the difficulties of living in two cultures." --*Audrey Magazine*

In this powerful collection of essays, Lam, a syndicated columnist and National Public Radio commentator, explores his identity as a Viet Kieu (a Vietnamese national living abroad) residing in the United States. On April 28, 1975, 11-year-old Lam and his family fled Saigon aboard a crowded C130 cargo plane just two days before the fall of Saigon to Communist forces (a day Lam would come to know as an "American rebirth"). His father, a respected South Vietnamese general, followed soon after, reuniting with the family in California, where they would begin at the bottom rung as they struggled to fulfill the American Dream. Looking deep within himself and his fellow Viet Kieu, Lam seeks to "marry two otherwise dissimilar and often conflicting narratives." He cites cultural critic Edward Said as he shows that to transcend one's national limits one must not reject attachments to the past but work through them. Lam, who grows to realize that home is "portable if one is in commune with one's soul," embraces the journey of self-discovery and concludes that one's identity is not fixed but "open-ended." What results is a cohesive presentation with broad appeal, allowing non-Viet Kieu to understand Lam's experiences. --*Library Journal*

#### About the Author

Andrew Lam is an editor and cofounder of New America Media, an association of over two thousand ethnic media outlets in America. His essays have appeared in dozens of newspapers and magazines across the country, and his short stories are anthologized widely. Followed by a film crew back to his homeland, Vietnam, he was featured in the documentary *My Journey Home*, which aired nationwide on PBS in 2004.

His book *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora* won a PEN American Beyond Margins award in 2006. Lam currently lives in San Francisco.

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