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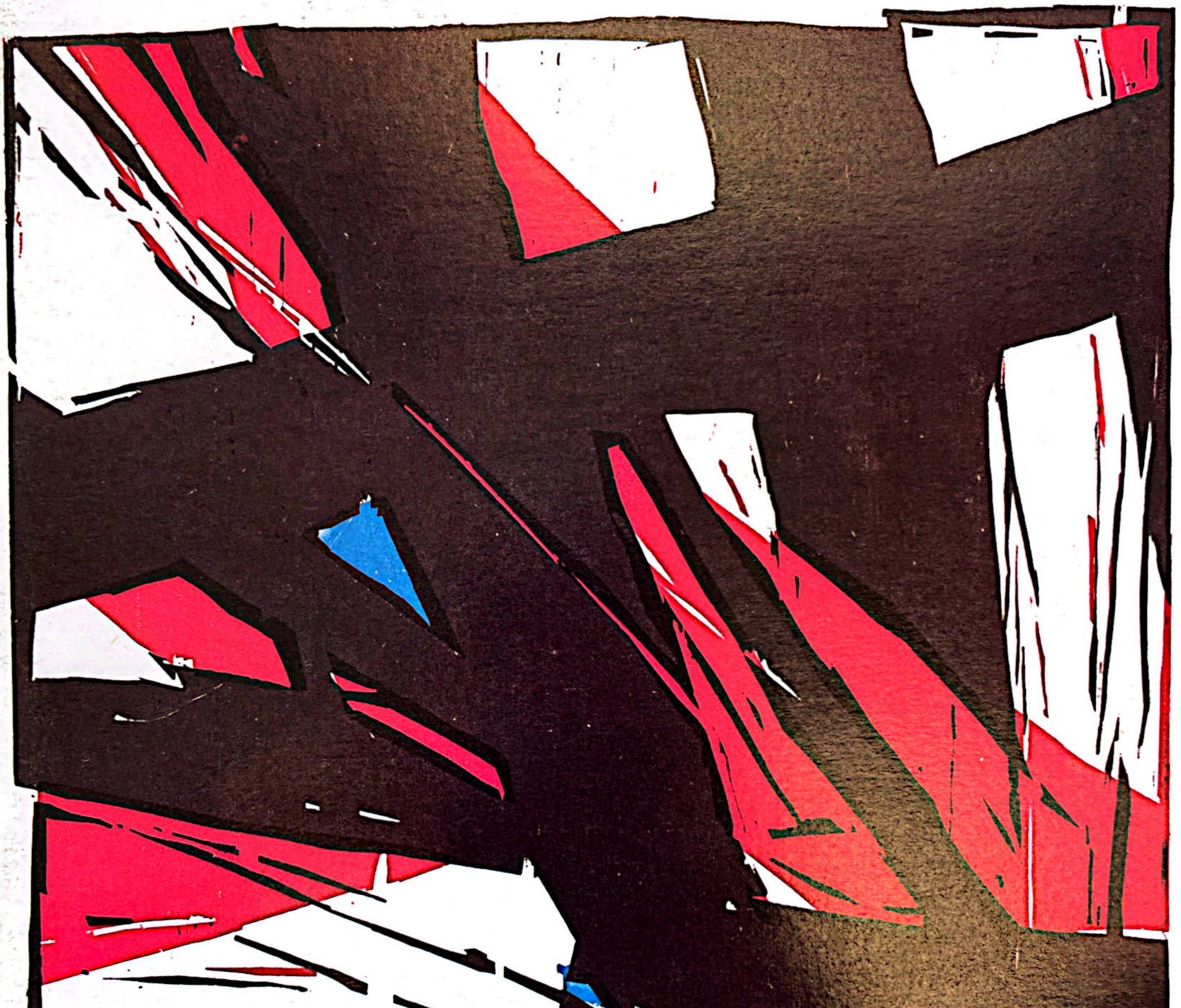
# THE CENTER MAGAZINE



## *The Impact of Vietnam — I*

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# THE CENTER MAGAZINE

A Publication of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions

*Editor* — Donald McDonald *Editorial Associate* — Patricia Garvin Cathcart

## To All Members of the Center

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions begins this month a new chapter in its history with its formal affiliation with the University of California at Santa Barbara. The Center will be known as the Robert M. Hutchins Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, in honor of its founder. And it will move to the University of California campus here.

University Chancellor Robert Huttenback has assured directors of the Fund for the Republic that the Center will continue to be what it has been in its twenty years of existence — a center of independent thought and criticism dealing with the basic issues confronting a democratic society.

*The Center Magazine* and the Center's audiotape program will continue to publish and record Center dialogues, seminars, and conferences.

The present Center board members will be invited to serve as advisers to the University of California Santa Barbara Foundation, parent organization for the Center. We are delighted that Brian Fagan, the noted anthropologist, will be the new director of the Center. Walter H. Capps will be the program director, and Otis L. Graham, Jr., will be the chairman of the Center's steering committee.

This merger promises to be beneficial to both the Center and the University of California. The Center, which off and on has endured financial pressures through the years, will achieve fiscal stability and will have access to the intellectual resources of one of the world's great universities. For its part, the University of California will now have a truly interdisciplinary dialogue center with an enviable reputation for intellectual integrity and independent critical thought on the most complicated and controversial issues of our time. It will also acquire *The Center Magazine*, whose more than fifty thousand readers include influential leaders in government, the press, the universities, the courts, and the professions.

For some time, it has been apparent to the Center's directors that if the Center were to maintain the depth, range, and vigor of its dialogue program on the basic issues, it might well have to affiliate with another compatible institution. Discussions have been held from time to time with the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, St. John's College of Annapolis and Santa Fe, and the University of California. It was the University of California, under its dynamic new chancellor, Robert Huttenback, which presented the most attractive alternative.

I am confident that Center members will continue to support the Center's work which is so essential in a free society. I know that the Center will do its utmost to continue to merit that support.

— MAURICE MITCHELL

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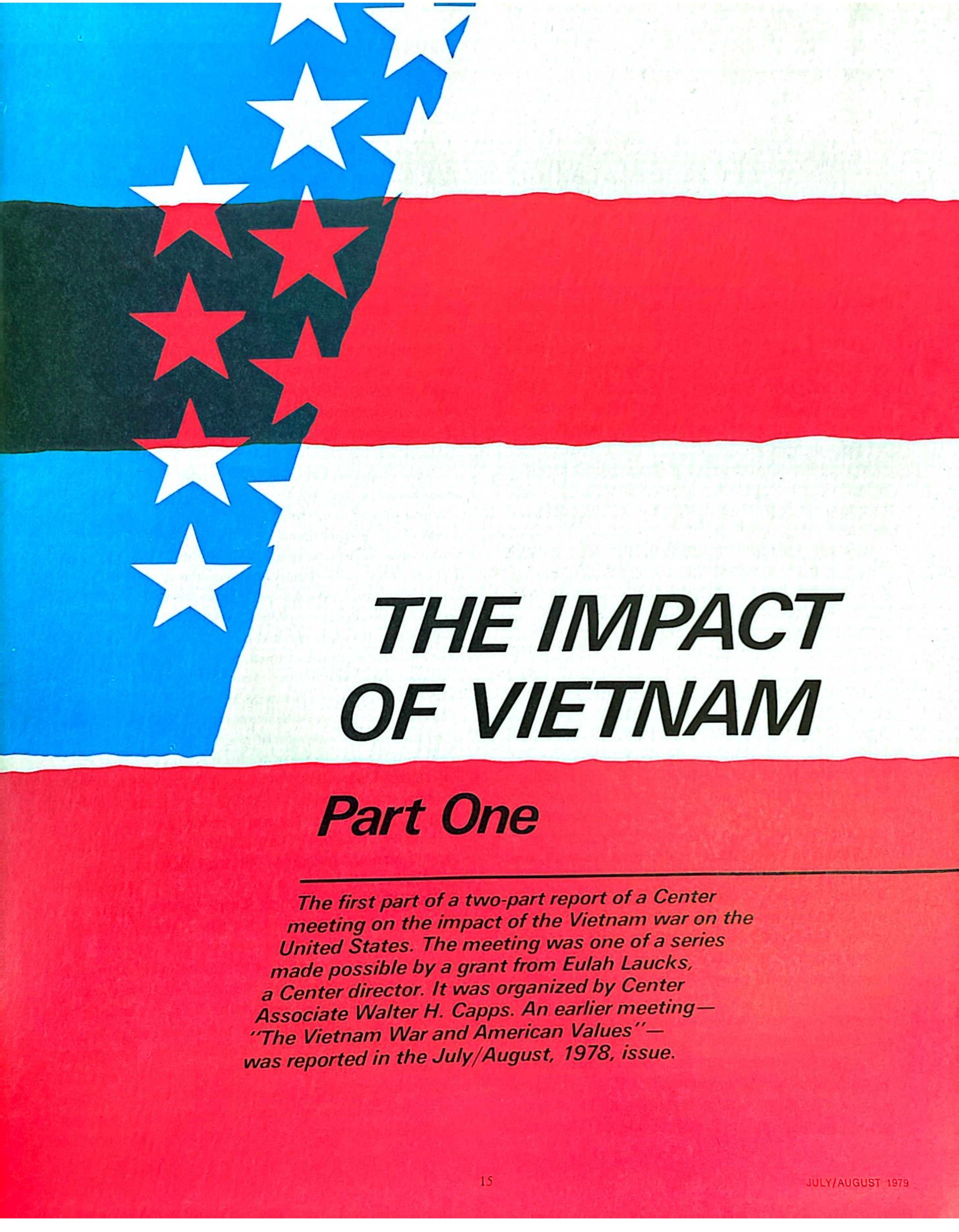


# THE IMPACT OF VIETNAM

## Part One

*The first part of a two-part report of a Center meeting on the impact of the Vietnam war on the United States. The meeting was one of a series made possible by a grant from Eulah Laucks, a Center director. It was organized by Center Associate Walter H. Capps. An earlier meeting—"The Vietnam War and American Values"—was reported in the July/August, 1978, issue.*

# Is American Guilt Justified?

**GUENTER LEWY** *(Professor of Political Science, University of Massachusetts; author of* America in Vietnam): The Vietnam war was perhaps the most divisive and most difficult war that this country has experienced. The impact of the war on American society was highly damaging. Among other things, it has resulted in an attitude of cynicism and distrust of government. Perhaps still more damaging, it has left the country with a tremendous sense of guilt, not only because the war was lost, but because, in the eyes of many, the entire enterprise was flawed, the war was criminal and immoral.

It is my position that the wounds suffered were largely self-inflicted, and that the American sense of guilt is not warranted by the facts about the war which we know today. What follows is a summary account of my argument, which is developed and substantiated in my book.

I hope that the passion of the public debate over Vietnam has subsided and cooled sufficiently by now so that my argument can be considered on its merits. Some of my critics have painted me as a kind of moral leper, comparing me to those who deny that the Jewish Holocaust happened, that six million Jews were murdered during that Holocaust. Others say my work is a revisionist job, useful, perhaps, in stimulating debate, but otherwise too extreme to be considered reliable. Of course, I disagree with both those appraisals.

Peter Berger, an opponent of the American involvement in Vietnam, has said my book is disturbing because it calls into question many of the moral judgments which he had made and which he had considered settled once and for all. I hope that, like Peter Berger, you, too, may be willing to rethink some of your assumptions and some of the conventional wisdom on the war.

I will touch briefly on three issues that bear on the question of American guilt. First, American military tactics and their legality and/or morality; second, the over-all impact of the war on Vietnamese society; and, third, individual atrocities and war crimes.

Regarding American military tactics in Vietnam, critics have said that such actions as the bombardment of fortified villages, the creation of free-fire zones, the destruction of crops, and the defoliation of forests were illegal and/or immoral. Now, it is rather clear to me — and in this I do not adopt a position that is unusual — that reliance on these tactics, accompanied by the lavish use of fire power, ignored the political and social dynamics of a revolutionary war and the need to win the proverbial hearts and minds of the people in Vietnam. American reliance upon such heavy-handed tactics may, and probably does, help explain why we lost this war. But these tactics were not illegal under the international law of war. I will go further and say that for the most part, neither were they immoral.

The international law of war consists of treaties and conventions; it also includes certain customs and principles that govern the conduct of war, that seek to minimize the ravages of war. Because it codifies certain minimum rules of human decency in war, the international law of war has a moral dimension. Therefore, to abide by the law of war means to abide by certain elementary moral standards. Much of the vehement criticism of my book probably derives from the critics' acceptance of this link between legality and morality. Because I show that American military tactics were legal, I clearly also undermine their assertion that the American conduct in Vietnam was immoral.

Immoral conduct must involve immoral intentions. The context and the purpose of an action must be taken into account in evaluating it. For example, a motorist who, because he is a bad driver, accidentally kills a child has not committed the same moral evil as someone who abducts, rapes, and kills a child to satisfy his aggressive and sadistic impulses. The law recognizes this distinction. It distinguishes between homicide and murder.

Moral judgment, too, recognizes the crucial importance of intent. So moral judgment of military actions must consider intent. The terror bombing of civilian populations in World War II in order to break the morale of people was immoral. On the other hand, American military commanders in Vietnam who created free-fire zones and destroyed crops did not intend thereby to terrorize the civilian population. For the most part, they believed — however mistakenly — that these actions were essential to win the war, and indeed that they would speed up its successful conclusion. It is rather clear now that these tactics were shortsighted, if not downright stupid. They lose wars. But they did not constitute either illegal or grossly immoral conduct.

The Nuremberg tribunal in 1946 ruled on the legal aspect of this issue in the so-called hostages case. "It is our considered opinion," said the court, "that the conditions as they appeared to the defendant at the time were sufficient upon which he could honestly conclude that urgent military necessity warranted the decision made. This being true, the defendant may have erred in the exercise of his judgment, but he was guilty of no criminal act." And, in my view, such a person was also not guilty of immoral conduct.

With regard to the over-all impact of the war, it has been argued that America committed genocide in Vietnam. However, it is not difficult to make the case that neither in terms of intent nor in terms of results did American actions constitute the crime of genocide. Again, intent is essential in the definition of the genocide code, as adopted by the United Nations. And, of course, results are similarly crucial. According to statistics developed by the United Nations, the population of South and North Vietnam, during the course of the war, increased at a rate roughly double that of the United States in a comparable period. That alone makes the charge of genocide — i.e., intentional destruction of a whole people — rather grotesque.

It can be shown — and I try to do this with some care in an appendix of my book — that noncombatants were not killed in Vietnam in anything like the proportions that they were in Korea; and the proportion killed was probably even somewhat lower than the proportion in World War II. Civilian deaths were drastically lower in absolute numbers, despite the fact that the Vietnam war lasted such a long time. The proportion, in absolute numbers, between noncombatants and military deaths in Vietnam is roughly half what it was in the Korean war, and slightly lower than it was in World War II.

All of this casts doubt on the charge that was often heard during the course of the Vietnam war — that America was destroying a whole society. That charge remains unproven and must be rejected.

With regard to the third point — individual atrocities and war crimes — atrocities did occur in Vietnam. Every war has its atrocities. Atrocities happened in World War II also. They were largely ignored then because that war was seen as a crusade against evil, a crusade in which the Allies could do no wrong. But, after a careful examination of the record, I am convinced that atrocities in Vietnam were far less frequent than was alleged during the course of the war. Critics of the American war effort, like Telford Taylor and Daniel Ellsberg, agree with me that the My Lai atrocity was not typical. It was quite unusual.

We also know now that many alleged atrocities, which received considerable publicity in the media, did not occur, but were staged for a variety of reasons. We know of at least one instance where a dead body was thrown out of a helicopter, a soldier took a picture and forwarded that picture, with a suitable story, to his friend, who submitted it to the Washington *Post*. That became the proof of a practice that we all heard a lot about — although not a single case has been confirmed — namely, the practice of taking Vietcong captives up in a helicopter and throwing one of them out in order to scare the others into talking.

We know of at least one case where a C.B.S. cameraman provided a knife to an American soldier and asked him to cut off the ear of a dead Vietcong. That was filmed and was a big sensation on the Walter Cronkite evening news.

At the so-called winter soldier investigation of war crimes, held in Detroit early in 1971, alleged American atrocities were reported by alleged veterans. It turned out, upon examination and investigation, that these veterans had never been to Detroit. Some of them were able to submit sworn affidavits by their employers that they had never left their places of employment. What had happened was that someone had used their names and serial numbers in order to read charges of crimes into the record.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, at one of the sessions of the Bertrand Russell war crimes tribunal, heard a North Vietnamese investigator testify that American fliers who had been shot down had in their possession maps on which hospitals were marked. Now, that, of course, could be given a quite innocuous interpretation. Hospitals could be marked on aviators' maps so that the aviators would not bomb these hospitals. The Concerned Asian Scholars reported this testimony, slightly changed, namely, American aviators who were shot down had maps with hospitals marked as targets.

There *was* American laxity in enforcing the rules of engagement governing combat, and I make some rather severe charges against General William Westmoreland on that count. But violations of the law of war were known, and they were vigorously prosecuted by the Judge Advocate General's Corps. Between January, 1965, and March, 1973, 201 Army personnel were convicted by court-martial of serious offenses against Vietnamese civilians. During that same period, seventy-seven Marines were similarly convicted. The United States is the first country in history which tried its own military offenders while a war was still going on.

The seriousness with which the Judge Advocate General's Corps pursued the enforcement of the law of war is reflected in the following incident. In August, 1966, a Marine lance corporal had killed an unarmed villager, allegedly for revenge. The accused was charged with premeditated murder. He took the stand and testified that he had been in heavy combat for several months, that he had seen many of his buddies get killed and wounded, and that finally he decided, "I had to kill a VC for those guys; I just had to kill one."

A psychiatrist had examined the accused, and he testified that as a result of stress experience, the defendant's ability to adhere to morally licit behavior was significantly impaired. Another psychiatrist testified that his ability was impaired to some degree. The prosecutor, backed up by the law officer of the court-martial, argued that the accused had known what he was doing, and that there was not enough impairment of his ability to exculpate criminal responsibility. "Gentlemen," he told the court, "life is not so cheap, even in Vietnam, that indiscriminate killing of a defenseless Vietnamese can be tolerated or condoned." The court found the Marine guilty as charged, and sentenced him to dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, reduction to the rank of private, and confinement at hard labor for life.

The terror tactics of the Vietcong were morally more reprehensible because, unlike American atrocities, they were officially condoned. That included such things as what the Vietcong called the extermination of traitors; the best-known example of that is the massacre at Hue. It included the mining of roads used by the villagers taking their wares to the market. It included attacks on refugee camps, several of these attacks being with flamethrowers. It included the indiscriminate shelling of cities with rockets. And it included the torture of American prisoners, both in the North and in the jungle cages of South Vietnam.

Some French intellectuals, who earlier had been in the forefront of the worldwide opposition to the American actions in Vietnam, have since acknowledged that they were less than fair or objective in their defense of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. One such is Jean Lacouture, who had an important influence not only in France, but on the American antiwar movement as well. In a recent interview with a Milan newspaper, Lacouture acknowledged that "with regard to Vietnam, my behavior was sometimes more that of a militant than a journalist. I dissimulated certain defects of North Vietnam at war against the Americans, because I believed that the cause of the North Vietnamese was good and just enough so that I should not expose their errors. I believed it was not opportune to expose the Stalinist nature of the North Vietnamese regime in 1972, right at the time when Nixon was bombing Hanoi. If we re-examine the dossier, it is true that I did not tell all that I knew about Vietnam."

Lacouture goes on to call people like himself "vehicles and intermediaries for a lying and criminal propaganda, ingenious spokesmen for tyranny in the name of liberty." He admits "my shame for having contributed to the installation of one of the most oppressive regimes history has ever known." The last reference is to the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. But in Lacouture's review — and I agree with him — the Communist regime in North Vietnam is a close second.

I hope that American intellectuals may be willing to undertake the same kind of soul-searching demonstrated by Jean Lacouture. I hope that this re-examination will also include the conduct of the Americans.

**BARTON J. BERNSTEIN** *(Professor of History, Stanford University):* Your analysis, Professor Lewy, strips the historical context of the Vietnam war by not asking how and why it was that the United States got into that war in the first place. Your analysis talks of North Vietnam, but presumably there were those other people in the South. Was South Vietnam's government legitimate? What was the National Liberation Front? Who invited America to Vietnam? Was that invitation legitimate in any way, or was it fundamentally illegitimate?

***Professor Lewy strips the historical context by not asking how and why we got into the war in the first place***
***—BARTON BERNSTEIN***

What does one do with the 1954 settlement, the Geneva accords? What does one do with the systematic violation of that settlement? What does one do with the systematic dissembling by the American government — first under John F. Kennedy, and then under Lyndon Johnson — as to the nature of the war and the American commitments in that war? What about the secret war in Laos, a war that American leaders denied was being conducted all the while it was being conducted? What about the American bombing that was being done when American leaders were denying it was being done?

Your analysis can be faulted on at least three grounds. First, it eliminates history; and yet the basic questions I have asked are historical and their relevance is essential. Second, it looks only at the conduct of the war and eschews all questions about proclamations by U.S. leaders describing that war. Third, even in analyzing the American conduct of the war, you rely, for your evidence of intent, on highly selected material from some military people when there is good reason to believe that they dissimulated, often upon at least implicit directives from above. By the criteria you use today, what would you do with, say, the Central Intelligence Agency's technique of plausible denial? People are instructed to deny what they are doing. How can you use, as genuine evidence, the documents of people who are told not to admit what they are really doing?

You use the example of the motorist killing a child to illustrate the importance of intent. It is true that if a motorist accidentally kills a child, society does not usually impute immorality. But let me offer you this scenario: a motorist is speeding across town at eighty miles an hour because he hankers for a lollypop. He races through two school zones, and kills a child. He did not intend to kill anyone, but we would make a particular moral judgment of that motorist based upon our sense of what constitutes reasonable and prudent driving conduct.

But going beyond that, you contend that bombing which to us in America looked very much like terror bombing, was not really terror bombing because it was designed to win the war. Indeed, the legitimation for terror bombing during World War II was that that war was total, that it was waged not simply against armies, but against the political economy of the German homeland; and so in order for the Allies to win, it was necessary, it was argued, to destroy the Germans' industrial base and the people's morale, which was essential both to that industrial base and to the Army. I contend that the same underlying conception is what accounted for the American activity in Vietnam and which led to the very acts you say are not illegal, and thus not immoral.

I say those acts in Vietnam were fundamentally immoral. Also, we will be able scrupulously to investigate each particular case, but only when complete documentation is available, not on the present basis of selective documentation through the Freedom of Information Act, which can deny as many things as it can grant. Only then will we be able to conduct a meaningful dialogue. To make a full judgment of American activity in Vietnam on the basis of selective documents provided by the government about its own conduct is to engage in an illusory, self-deceptive, fundamentally flawed pursuit.

Under the Freedom of Information Act and the mandatory declassification review — the two procedures under which most of these documents have become available — material which is said to be pertinent to national security can continue to be kept secret. One must expect, then, that a certain skewed evidential pattern will be made available by the government.

Having got some Vietnam material declassified, and having got a good deal of that declassified for the period from 1944 through the nineteen-sixties, having written more than five hundred letters to the American government over the last eight years, and having secured close to ten thousand documents, I am prepared to say, on the basis of watching the selective quality of that trickle and its relationship to politics, that one is not getting simply a random selection of documents bearing upon the Vietnam war, but documents made available according to political criteria for a particular purpose. That must be taken into account in judging the evidence on which Professor Lewy relies.

**DAVID KRIEGER** *(Political scientist and author)*: Professor Lewy suggested that the war was damaging to American society because it generated cynicism toward the political system and guilt because the war was perceived to be criminal and immoral. But rather than seeing those as damaging outcomes of the war, I see them as positive outcomes. I do not think it is inappropriate to be cynical toward a political system which has demonstrated rather conclusively that government officials had little difficulty in lying to the American people about why we were in Vietnam and what we were doing there.

Professor Lewy talked about immorality and illegality in the context of the war, but he did not deal with some of the things that Mr. Bernstein talks about, i.e., the constitutionality of our presence in Vietnam. Also, he did not talk about the fact that the United States supported rather corrupt regimes in South Vietnam, and a case can be made rather well that supporting an immoral regime is immoral.

**JAMES ROSENAU** *(Director of the School of International Studies, University of Southern California)*: Professor Lewy, if indeed there is a pervasive sense of guilt in the American people, what do you mean by guilt? Maybe it is a pervasive sense of something else, chastisement perhaps. Also, what kind of evidence demonstrates a pervasive sense of guilt, irrespective of whether its consequences are positive or negative?

**LEWY:** The sense of guilt is very pervasive in the intellectual community. The issues which gave rise to this sense of guilt should not be swept under the rug. We need the kind of re-examination which at least some French intellectuals are beginning to undertake.

How do we establish that there is this pervasive sense of guilt? I arrived at it largely on an impressionistic basis, simply having lived in the intellectual community for the last ten or fifteen years. I may be all wrong in my impressions, and you may have contrary data. If so, it would be interesting to get this data. But it is my sense, which seems to be shared by many others, that this feeling of guilt is indeed pervasive in the intellectual community. Of course, the intellectual community dictates, at least to some extent, the over-all *Zeitgeist*, as it were, of society at large. So if it is true that society feels guilty, then this is an important issue and it ought to be addressed in very substantive terms. Is the guilt warranted?

**ROSENAU:** We do not have data on that. We haven't even wrestled with what is meant by guilt. But at one point in your response, you sounded as though you equated guilt with a feeling of having engaged in immoral actions in Vietnam.

**LEWY:** Yes.

**ROSENAU:** Now, David Krieger is saying that guilt with respect to Vietnam is a positive thing. Do you interpret his remark as an expression of unwarranted guilt? In your view, is his judgment that Americans engaged in immoral actions in Vietnam the equivalent of a sense of guilt? If guilt is an appropriate judgment about this, I agree with you that it then has important consequences.

**LEWY:** There are two issues here. First, is there a sense of guilt in the American intellectual community today, because of past criminal and immoral conduct by this country? Second, how do we interpret and evaluate that? Is it something positive or negative?

A number of German Protestant theologians, to take a different example, looked with a sense of guilt upon the attempted assassination of Hitler in July, 1944. For them, the attempt was something almost positive; they felt that the assassination attempt, had it succeeded, might have been justifiable. Yet it still left them with a sense of guilt. They could condone the deed morally, and yet they felt somewhat guilty about it. So, the dimension of guilt and the sense of guilt are complex. I used only a shorthand expression for it here.

In reply to Professor Bernstein, I did not address the issue of how the United States became involved in Vietnam and whether it was legal to become involved in what many regard as a civil war, because it seems to me there is a clear distinction in the tradition of international law between what we call *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The *jus ad bellum* does involve the question, was it right, was it legal, to intervene in a particular conflict? Having intervened, *jus in bello* addresses the question, what was the conduct of the armed forces in that conflict?

Conceptually the two are completely separate; they do not overlap. It is possible to engage in a just war under *jus ad bellum*, but to conduct the war unjustly and illegally under *jus in bello*. And vice versa. For example, we regard the German war effort in World War II as an illegal and immoral war of ag-

***One cannot welcome government evidence when it is damaging, and reject it when it is exculpating***
***— GUENTHER LEWY***

gression; yet we also know that some German generals, including General Erwin Rommel, had clean hands. Their conduct of the war easily passes muster by the criteria of *jus in bello*.

So it is possible to evaluate how a country conducts its military operations — that is, whether it does or does not violate canons of *jus in bello* — without getting involved in the still more difficult questions of why did the country become involved in the war. Was it justified? Was it a civil war? What about the status of the Geneva accords? Is it significant that South Vietnam was recognized by forty other countries in the world? Is it significant that at one time the Soviet Union tried to get both Vietnams admitted to the United Nations? Does that make South Vietnam legitimate, or does it not? The issues get quite complex. But it seems to me there is no need to get into these in order to discuss the issue of *jus in bello*, which is what I addressed myself to.

Now, what is the nature of my evidence? I must tell Professor Bernstein that hardly any of my documentation was acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. Some was, but little of any significance. Most of my documentation was obtained on the basis of a blanket clearance to examine military documents in possession of the various offices of military history in the Army, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps. This clearance was made possible on the basis of an executive order, first issued by President Dwight Eisenhower, later confirmed by, of all people, President Richard Nixon in 1972, and recently somewhat watered down in a new executive order by President Jimmy Carter.

This executive order grants to the Secretaries of the military services the discretionary authority to admit scholars to classified defense documentation. Once you get this clearance — and I received it not as a special favor, but simply because no one else had applied for it — you can see anything, and I mean anything, up to your level of clearance. My clearance included Confidential, For Official Use Only, and Secret. The only thing that I could not see immediately was Top Secret, and that was no more than perhaps four per cent of the total documentation. Even there, in some cases, I was able to ask for downgrading of the classification, and that was possible. So, for all practical purposes, I was able to work with the complete files that no one had sorted, and from which nothing had been removed.

I can tell you that the evidence that comes out of these files is sometimes devastating. This is not self-serving evidence; these are raw data. We do know that even raw data can be falsified. The most notorious instance is that of the body count in Vietnam. But in that case, I could check evidence from different elements involved in Vietnam. For example, there was an organization called the Pacification Studies Group, troubleshooters who had their own transportation and could go anyplace in Vietnam without asking anyone's permission. They could snoop around and report back to the head of the Pacification Program in Southeast Villages, who was, at one point, William Colby. The reports of these people have to be read to be believed. Much of my most devastating criticism of American military tactics — and there is plenty of that in my book — comes from that source.

It seems to me that one cannot, on the one hand, welcome internal evidence when it is damaging, and, on the other hand, reject the evidence that may be exculpating. That, of course, is what happened with the Pentagon Papers. Many critics accepted the veracity of the Pentagon Papers when it suited their political purposes, but rejected those same Pentagon Papers as "unreliable," when what they found there did not support their position.

**BERNSTEIN:** There are three issues. First, the Pentagon Papers were classified as Top Secret, and only a little more than a handful of copies was available. Second, the notion that you have seen almost everything because only four per cent was withheld from you strikes me, as a historian who has worked through archives for years, as naive. That is like going into a civilian agency, or a business corporation, and getting to see the files of all the secretaries in the outer offices who keep the blue copies of the marginal material, but not the files of the president and the chairman of the board. When you say that you have seen all but four per cent of the evidence, you beg a fundamental analytical question. If you have not seen four per cent of the evidence, then — unless you think that the security system is totally random in the most statistical sense — there is every reason to think that you have not seen the vital material.

Third, let us take one of the empirical conclusions upon which you have built an argument about both morality and legality. You say that the bombing was not designed to terrorize, but to win. But that kind of judgment is based upon material you have seen in the province of the office of chief of military history and the counterpart agencies for the other services. There is good indirect evidence to suggest that the most interesting material does not even reach those offices. So, what you have seen is only that part of the material which they are able to gather, or permitted to hold. Now, how can one make a judgment about the intentions behind our bombing if one cannot have access to the most classified material on bombing?

On the face of it, to reach the comfortable conclusion that you did — i.e., that this was bombing designed to win, but not to terrorize — runs contrary to common sense. It also relies upon a dubious distinction between winning and terrorizing.

And your conclusion runs contrary to earlier American military practices, about which we have more evidence. For example, we probably have more evidence on the Korean war in the public domain than we do on the Vietnam war. We certainly have more evidence on World War II than we do on the Vietnam war. Indeed, scholars having paid attention, as citizens, to the American adventures in Vietnam, have gone back and looked at earlier wars and discovered things which, at the time, scholars passed by because they seemed either uninteresting or irrelevant.

So let me ask you to stipulate, if you will, the kind of evidence that permits you to determine that our bombing in Vietnam was militarily essential and not part of terrorizing, that our free-fire zones were militarily essential, but not a part of terror tactics. Tell me about the nature of that evidence.

**LEWY:** Let me correct one misunderstanding. A lot has been said here about military documentation. I would not be worth anything if I were to build an analytical judgment on simply one type of document. I think I have used everything that anyone else has been able to use; but, in addition, I have been able to use military documentation, which I think is highly interesting and valuable. With regard to the bombing of both North Vietnam and South Vietnam, I have read my way through congressional reports, reports of journalists, and diaries of soldiers who have written about it. The military documentation is simply an added dimension; it is certainly not the only one.

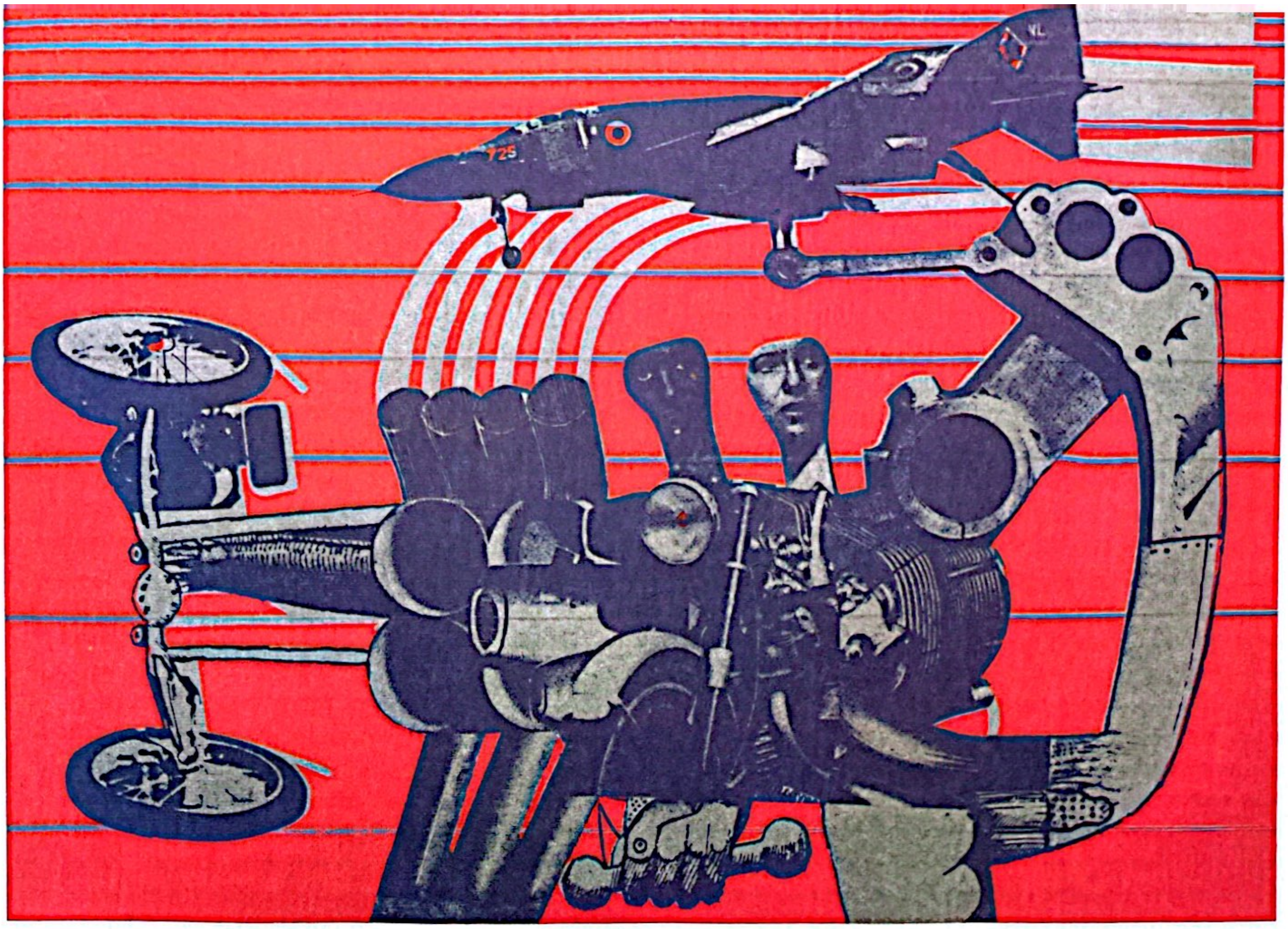
Second, it is probably correct to say that the four per cent of the military documents that remain classified as Top Secret involve, for the most part, diplomatic issues; that is to say, our relationship with the Cambodian government, issues touching on relations with China, and the like. They have hardly any bearing at all on the issues that we are concerned with here.

You ask me how can I judge intent? Well, how do you judge intent? First of all, you examine what people themselves say; and that always has to be taken with a grain of salt. Then you check this against the account of others who have observed what was going on. And you look at consequences. In some way you arrive at a judgment.

As regards free-fire zones, the intent was to negate what Mao Tse-tung had called the secret of guerrilla warfare. Mao said guerrillas had to be like fish in the water; they derived their sustenance from the people among whom they lived. The American intent in establishing the free-fire zones was to isolate the guerrillas, to drive a wedge between them and the people. The tactic was to remove the civilian population from these areas, so that all that would be left in these zones would be combatants who could then be attacked.

Now, we know that in practice the free-fire-zone tactic did not work out that way. We know it was counterproductive. But the fact remains that the American intent was not to terrorize the civilian population. Quite the contrary; it was to remove the civilians from battle so that when, indeed, guerrilla forces were attacked, civilians would not be hurt. There is very little mystery about all that.

**WALTER H. CAPPS** *(Center Associate; Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Institute of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara)*: Perhaps the reason for American guilt feelings is that the Vietnam war was unlike other wars; therefore, it does not help us very much to draw upon traditional categories of warfare to alleviate or eliminate those guilt feelings. In your book, you said, "A decisive reason for this growing disaffection of American people was



ILLUSTRATIONS: YUVAL GOLAN

a conviction that the war was not being won, and apparently showed little prospect of coming to a successful conclusion."

I am not sure that that is the case. Other literature suggests that the people involved in the war thought there was no way that the war could be won, because winning and losing did not mean what they once did. Since there were no analogues for the Vietnam war, traditional categories of warfare could not be tapped to explain what was happening. Therefore, the guilt probably cannot be dismissed in this way.

**ALEXANDER DE CONDE** *(Professor of History, University of California at Santa Barbara):* I find this discussion intellectually disturbing. Professor Lewy did not answer Professor Bernstein's questions about discerning the difference between terrorism and winning. Also, I have heard the fuzziest of generalizations. Professor Lewy has cited as evidence the opinion of one French journalist. Opinion is not evidence. Further, we hear that the American people felt this way or that way. That is utter nonsense. We do not know what the American people felt. We have an idea of what it might be, but no firm documentation on that. Regarding guilt, I don't know how one can analyze that, except in the context of an entire society, or within at least a segment of a society, and its philosophy.

As to Professor Capps' comment, I think there are numerous analogues to the Vietnam war in America's pre-Vietnam past. You can find one in the Mexican War. You can find one in the War of 1812. And all you have to do is read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee;* that is one "My Lai" after another. Guilt over the Vietnam war is one of the healthiest things that ever happened in the American society. It moved a number of scholars, as Professor Bernstein indicated, to look into our past and find black records that had been buried by earlier American scholars and intellectuals.

So, I don't see the Vietnam war as something unique in our history. Much of what happened in the Vietnam war is about as American as apple pie.

**RICHARD FLACKS** *(Professor of Sociology and Chairperson of the Department of Sociology at the University of California at Santa Barbara; founding member of Students for a Democratic Society):* One piece of data on American intellectuals is in the book *The American Intellectual Elite* by Charles Kadushin, an interview study of people identified by the author as leading figures in the American intellectual community. Much of Kadushin's study is focused on Vietnam. One of his conclusions is that there is relatively little basis for thinking that the intellectuals who strongly opposed the war did so on moral grounds. Their opposition was much more in terms of the cost of the war and the policy implications of the war, and the fact that we couldn't win it.

Professor Lewy, you said the word guilt was shorthand for something complex. I am wondering what it is shorthand for. From what I heard underneath your statement, I think it is shorthand for your distress that there is so much resistance among intellectuals and other Americans to repeating the Vietnam type of experience. I take it that you wish there was less public resistance to American involvement in foreign conflict. There is indeed resistance throughout society — a resistance based on guilt or some other emotion or consideration — to this country's moving in a direction that would lead to "another Vietnam." I take it that, either before you started the book or after you finished it, one of your intents — since you are interested in intention — was to try to overcome that resistance. So, it is not just a question of guilt, but also a question of the policy results of what you call guilt, namely, that it seems to reduce the flexibility in foreign affairs of some people in the American government, and you do not like that.

Some of us like that. We might like it on three distinct grounds. First, some of us are opposed to the institution of war, and we wish that the human race would make some progress in abandoning it. Therefore, a resistance by a population that previously had mixed feelings about its country's military posture seems like a healthy sign.

Second, some of us feel that the American empire ought to be dismantled, that we are past the stage when empires can guarantee anything decent for humanity. On that score, we find it healthy that there is resistance to further military adventures that seem to preserve the boundaries of the empire.

Third, there are people who react more particularly to the Vietnam war itself. They want to make sure that people do not forget it. It did happen, it was at least a thirteen-year involvement of the American people in an adventure which they regard, in one sense or another, as immoral.

Regarding the immorality question, during the war period I must have made several hundred speeches against the war. So I am one of your young intellectuals who was trying to shape public opinion on it. I never tried to rest my argument about the immorality of the war primarily on what the United States was doing in Vietnam. What we were doing in Vietnam was a by-product, a symptom, a necessary consequence, if you will, of the fact that we were in Vietnam. Therefore, the immorality issue, as well as the practicality issue, had to do with whether we ought to be in Vietnam in the first place. To try to define the immorality issue primarily in terms of America's conduct of the war itself bypasses the central and basic point of the debate during that period. It also bypasses what most people probably think was the lesson of Vietnam.

With regard to genocide, I am willing to grant that a cold analysis of the word does not lead to the conclusion that the United States destroyed a whole people. Samuel P. Huntington, in a quote often cited, spoke of America's policy of "forced urbanization" in Vietnam as being the real intent, or purpose, of our bombing. Forced urbanization means the movement of a whole people from the countryside to the cities. I think that when many people used the word genocide, they meant not just the physical destruction of human beings, but the total disruption of the Vietnamese people's way of life, which we carried out because we felt that that was in our policy interests.

In reading the Pentagon Papers, one of the people I always rely on to define American intent is the late John McNaughton, assistant to Robert McNamara in the Department of Defense. McNaughton was clear, perhaps for good reason; that is, he wanted to make some other American policy-makers see what their intent actually was. At one point, McNaughton, in listing the reasons why we were in Vietnam, said that it was primarily to preserve American power. It was not to save the people of Vietnam. Now, was it not at least bordering on the genocidal to uproot a whole people from the countryside and to use bombing to induce them to move, all for the purpose of preserving America's credibility as a world power?

**LEWY:** The crime of genocide, as defined in the unanimously adopted resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, on December 9, 1948, is committing acts with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a "national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such." Included are acts such as "killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about a physical destruction in whole or in part." So what is crucial is physical destruction, in whole or in part, and done with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a group for being what it is. Of course, the prototype of genocide is the "final solution," the destruction of European

***Deciding that a peasant society which harbors guerrillas should no longer exist...raises a serious moral question —RICHARD FLACKS***

Jewry for no other reason than that they were Jews.

**FLACKS:** Deciding that a peasant society which harbors guerrillas should no longer exist, is that genocidal? This kind of debate does not make me particularly comfortable. Unfortunately, it is somewhat semantical. Maybe what we did is not genocide as defined under existing statutes. But it seems to me to be a very questionable moral posture for a great power to be in, that is, to decide that this present Vietnamese society is untenable for our purposes, and, therefore, we will force the urbanization of that society. That raises a serious moral question.

**LEWY:** I did not set out to write my book in order to prepare Americans for new Vietnams, even though some of my critics have suggested this to be the case. I do not want more Vietnams, any more than you do; nor do I like wars any more than you do. Nor do I have any desire to resurrect the American empire.

But that is not the issue. The slogan, "No More Vietnams," strikes me as inane and empty. It does not provide guidance for American foreign policy. That slogan is symptomatic of a mood of neo-isolationism, which is why it has spread in this country because of Vietnam. I do not consider this a healthy phenomenon. I do not think that the world is a better place if the United States is weak.

Perhaps, Mr. Flacks, you may agree with me that, for example, American influence and strength are displayed rarely these days, but they were displayed in the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations. So, in the long run, our leverage may have some beneficial results. And there may be other areas of the world where American strength could lead to consequences that you and I would be willing to consider beneficial.

It strikes me, given the suffering of the people of Indochina today, that it is not completely stupid to think that the American intervention — even though it was based not only on that, of course — may have had some moral justification. It was always said, if only the United States would get out of Indochina, peace would be restored and the suffering of the people of Indochina would come to an end. You and I know — and this is, in part, what I think has led to the reassessment by Jean Lacouture — that the suffering of the people of Indochina today is in many ways infinitely worse than it was before. Peace has not come to Indochina.

**BERNSTEIN:** Let us compare, for a moment, the U.S. war experiences in Korea and Vietnam. Given the fact that each, it can be argued, was a civil war; that each involved massive American intervention; that in both wars many concluded that America could not win, at least not without violating alliances and ultimately escalating the danger — given those three salient similarities, we should ask, if we want to assess the impact of Vietnam, why did Korea produce in American society such a different impact, such a different set of values than did Vietnam?

Why didn't the Korean war raise questions about legitimacy in America and about the morality of authority? Why didn't it raise questions about the nature of the war? When Americans argued about the Korean war, they argued about whether to escalate or pull out, and whether the United States could conduct a limited war. There was almost no argument in the American body politic from 1950 to 1953 about whether this was a moral war and whether we were conducting it in the right way. Why does the massive intervention in Korea from 1950 to 1953 have one set of impacts upon American society, and the prolonged and seemingly more enervating intervention in Vietnam, roughly from 1961 to 1975, produce such a different set of responses?

One could say that the length of both interventions had something to do with it. But that is not terribly useful.

Was moral and legal and governmental authority questioned in the case of Vietnam because our intervention there occurred in a markedly different American culture, one prepared to receive and translate the evidence differently? Is it that the evidence, correct or not, was distinctive in the case of Vietnam? Did the media play a different role in the Vietnam era? Is it both of these, plus something else?

Going one step further, what has happened to the former consensus on anti-Communism, and to the narrowing of intellectual dialogue in the academies? If one compares 1950-1953 with 1961-1967, could it be that a major difference is the already various openings to a broader theory, to a Left, or radical, theory, as the Vietnam war heated up? Think back to the McCarthyite period; the whole construction of ideology had been precluded from American dialogue in that period. By 1950, there was no Left in America. By 1950, there was only a truncated dialogue in the academy, the sole issue being, who is a better anti-Communist? — a question which had everybody scurrying for his credentials. But Vietnam occurred in a very different climate. People were prepared to read evidence differently; also they received rather different evidence.

During the Korean war, even major American newspapers accepted the official military and political versions of our bombing. Twice in July and twice in August of 1952, we bombed Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea. Three of those attacks were, until then, the largest bomber attacks in the war. Nevertheless, *The New York Times* reported that only military objects were targeted. The clear implication was that civilians did not get killed. But we know at least two things now: one, that surgical bombing has never been precise, the only question being the degree of imprecision; two, official military history documents the fact that we practiced terror bombing, we waged psychological warfare in Korea through bombing. But *The New York Times* did not tell us that at the time.

In contrast, when the bombing of cities and villages occurred in Vietnam at an early stage — certainly by 1965 — the reporting in American news media included the fact that civilians were being killed. And there was at least the subtle, lurking attribution of intent in those dispatches; it was somehow made implicit that our bombing was designed to kill civilians. I suggest that that tells us something very critical about the differences in the American people's reception of the two wars.

**OLE HOLSTI** *(Professor of Political Science, Duke University; Visiting Professor of Political Science, University of California at Davis):* In its origins, Korea looked in some respects like World War II, something Americans were familiar with. Massive infantry and armored divisions crossed what was at least intended to be a temporary frontier.

Further, whatever one might think of the United Nations, the fact is that there was considerable international support for the American intervention in Korea. Sixteen nations became involved on behalf of South Korea. Whether that makes the intervention legitimate or not, it does lend something to the enterprise that was clearly missing in the Vietnam war. In Korea we had some client states providing some assistance.

Also, the world in 1950 was viewed rather differently by a whole lot of publics. What looked like a legitimate enterprise in 1950 looked less so by 1961. Why? One of the reasons is the international context. In 1950, the world was seen as bipolar: Communist and non-Communist, and there was a fair degree of solidarity within the members of the so-called Communist bloc. By 1965, when the U.S. bombing started in Vietnam, that assumption of bipolarity was clearly open to serious question. In other words, some of the assumptions about the nature of the international system had changed.

I am not arguing here against Professor Bernstein's view that American society had changed. I think it had. But other things had changed, too. We can go too far in seeing parallels between Vietnam and Korea. The world between 1950 and 1965 had really changed, and the perception of the world had changed. That was crucial.

**LEWY:** I think that in due time there will be the kind of reassessment I am asking for. When that is done, the sense of guilt and self-flagellation that has occurred will pass, or at least weaken, and that will be all to the good. I do not relish the idea of feeling guilty for something I have not done or my society has not done. I do not see anything positive in feeling guilty unless I am convinced that I have done wrong.

I will add two points with regard to the question, how different was Korea? Korea was different in the sense that it resulted in a stalemate, not a lost war. The old borders were reaffirmed, and South Korea remained a going concern. Today, South Vietnam no longer is a going concern. In that sense, the end of the war in Vietnam was a smashing defeat for the United States, which had tried to protect South Vietnam.

Also, the Vietnam war was the first war seen on television screens, and in living color, to boot. Blood is red, it doesn't look good, and when you see it every night, a cumulative effect develops. If World War II had been shown on the television screens every night, and if the Korean war had been seen on the screens every night, I think Americans might have felt somewhat different about those two wars as well.

# The Anguish of the Veterans

**FREDERICK DOWNS, JR.** *(Assistant Director, Veterans Administration in New Mexico; author of* The Killing Zone*):* I was only an infantry soldier who went to war because my country happened to be at war at the time. I was brought up on a farm in Indiana, and I had had it hammered into me from my first awareness that fighting for one's country was a good thing. So I led men in combat, killed people, and generally did just what all soldiers do in combat, I tried to stay alive.

In any of America's previous wars, the other soldiers and I would have returned home to our country's accolades. We would have picked up our lives and got on with our futures, secure in the knowledge that we had done the right thing.

Vietnam was different. No one could explain exactly why we were there, but people kept asking the soldier who was there, "Why were you there?" They hoped that the soldier had an answer. And, of course, he didn't — certainly no more than did Congress or the executive branch. But unfortunately for him, a historical paradox was occurring. America had begun to hate war, and Americans did not know how to separate the strong feelings they had against war from the folks who went. There was no common denominator for patriotism. The "Nam" soldier got caught in the cross fire. If war was wrong, and if that war in particular was wrong, then the soldier was wrong for fighting. That may have been the way some people sequenced it in their minds. And that grew in strength until a soldier was no longer just a soldier, but a Vietnam soldier. Where is that Vietnam soldier today? Who is he? How did he get there?

From January 1, 1961, through September 30, 1977, there were 46,616 American deaths in Vietnam as a result of actions by hostile forces, and 10,386 deaths not the result of actions by hostile forces, for a total of 57,002 deaths. There were 8,734,000 American veterans during the Vietnam era: 2,769,000 (31.8 per cent) actually served in Vietnam. Of those 2,769,000, 57,002 (2.06 per cent) were killed and 303,704 (10.9 per cent) were wounded.

The Veterans Administration hospitals now treat one hundred thousand alcoholics, thirty thousand of whom are Vietnam era veterans. The V.A. hospitals treat twelve thousand Vietnam era veterans for addiction to hard drugs. A V.A. survey of half the disabled Vietnam veterans being treated showed that "almost thirty per cent of them experienced problems with drugs and alcohol," and that alcohol was the most abused drug among returning veterans.

The V.A. has reported to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee that "there is an extensive need for counseling and outpatient mental health services among veterans of the Vietnam period." Dr. James Crutcher, the V.A.'s chief medical director, says that more than seven hundred thousand Vietnam veterans are known to need help; he believes that actually twice that number may need help.

Max Cleland, chief of the Veterans Administration, has testified that 45.4 per cent of the Vietnam era veterans surveyed in its vocational rehabilitation training program for disabled veterans have experienced readjustment problems. Half of those characterized their problems as being with family or friends. Ability to work with fellow employees was a problem for 25.1 per cent; making plans for the future frustrated 57.9 per cent; coping with alcohol or drug abuse problems, 29.4 per cent; and severe depression had been experienced by 56.5 per cent.

The V.A. has reported to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee that the problems are "severe." From 1970 to 1975, the number of veterans in the V.A.'s alcoholism program doubled. And in veterans' hospitals, the suicide rate is reportedly twenty-three per cent higher among patients from the Vietnam era than among all other patients.

Why is this? What caused it? Vietnam veterans are often accused of being unable to adjust or to cope with everyday life. For an indeterminate number, this is true, because non-Vietnam people have failed to try to understand this veteran. They did not understand Vietnam and they do not understand Vietnam veterans. But the veteran who has made the adjustment while learning to cope with America and world society (I remember an Englishman at the Boston airport in January, 1979, who started arguing points on Vietnam when I mentioned that I had been a soldier there) is becoming the strongest mentally of any returning veteran of any war in America's history. He is stronger because he has had to adjust on his own. He has had to evaluate, philosophize, and rationalize the war, his place in it, and America's reaction to him. And he has had to bring all of this together in his mind so that he could come to terms with himself. Self-analysis is a difficult task, and many Vietnam veterans have not been able to conduct self-analysis.

The incidence of alcohol and drug abuse among Vietnam veterans encourages the belief that there really is something wrong with them. But was the Vietnam veteran warped by his experience in the war? Or was he warped by American society's reaction to him when he returned? Was he a victim of America's losing sight of him as an individual? Was the veteran scapegoated and labeled crazy because of America's own fears?

The real tragedy is that America's soldiers did not arrive on the Vietnam scene as crazies or leave as crazies, but rather that they were treated as crazies when they got home. Instead of helping them to readjust and come down from the experience of war — which was no better or worse than the experience of other soldiers in other wars — the returning Vietnam soldiers were put upon by the American public and faced with a barrage of unending criticism from the very people who should have welcomed them back. From students with their vicious "Lord of the Flies" mentality to the old veterans who stoically ignored our presence, each in his own way made the returning soldier feel unwelcome in his own country.

While I was crossing the University of Denver campus in the fall of 1968, a young man came up to me, pointed to my hook, and asked me if I had lost my arm in Vietnam. I said that I had. He said, "It serves you right!" I was stunned that anyone would say something so cruel.

A few months later, I went to a downtown photography studio in Denver to have a picture taken of me in my uniform. The owner of the shop was a veteran of World War II, and he had been in business in Denver for many years. He asked me a lot of questions about Vietnam. I was more interested in getting my picture taken than in answering questions about Vietnam. He persisted. Finally, he started berating me because of my involvement in Vietnam, and he actually got angry with me. I was very proud of my uniform, my service, and the men I had been with in Vietnam; but I left his shop feeling humiliated, ashamed, and thoroughly confused as to why a World War II veteran would treat me that way.

Another personal experience wasn't as devastating, but it shows how people felt about Vietnam veterans. At a party, I was talking about how exciting the moon landing was, and one individual who knew I had been in Vietnam asked me if I would take a gun to the moon. I asked why he would ask such a question. He said that since I had been to Vietnam, I would need a gun to kill anyone I disagreed with up there.

Jim Webb, the author of *Fields of Fire,* and I were on a panel before a group of two hundred or so people who support theater arts in Baltimore. A play about Vietnam, *G.R. Point* (graves registration point), had just ended, and the panel was on stage to critique the play and answer questions from the audience. One man about my age stood up in the audience and proudly told the group how he had gone AWOL at the Oakland Processing Center so he could avoid going to Vietnam. I was struck by the fact that he was obviously proud of what he had done and that the audience seemed to side with him.

On the other hand, the audience argued with me and disputed my points against the play because I was, as someone in the audience said, "just a soldier over there." They said that I did not understand the play because I wanted reality in the play and "Vietnam was not reality."

Most of the audience were older, upper-middle-class people, and I wondered what impact Vietnam had had on them. If they thought Vietnam was not reality, then they must think of me in the same light.

A nineteen- or twenty-year-old man returning from the traumatic experience of war needs moral support to readjust his thinking to a normal life so that he can enter the mainstream of his society. If he does not receive that support, the readjustment process will take much longer and a larger percentage of these veterans will fail to re-enter their society. But if that veteran is also shunned or attacked, then the assimilation process will take much longer, and a much larger percentage will never make it at all.

The magnitude of this "Vietnam fallout" is only beginning to be realized.

We Vietnam veterans cannot get ourselves organized as a group. Our ideas on Vietnam and on America's reaction to us have never come from one

> ***We look at history books, archives, old film footage... but we refuse to look at the veterans***
> ***— SHAD MESHAD***

strong voice. If there is one thing Vietnam veterans have in common, it is our inability to band together in one large single group. We have been so busy coping with our individual problems as Vietnam veterans that we have shied away from each other. That in itself is unusual. Anyone who has shared an experience with someone else should not have any trouble joining with that person. But it is almost as if we have spent so much of ourselves trying to regain our dignity, our lives, and our personhood that we do not want to join any group for fear we will lose what we have worked so hard to attain.

We went to war in a jet, returned in a jet, and were scattered across the country as individuals without any sense of unity. Because that individualism was all we had, we kept it.

**SHAD MESHAD** *(Chief, Vietnam Veterans Resocialization Unit, Brentwood V.A. Psychiatric Hospital):* I have been a counselor, therapist, and vocational rehabilitation specialist and psychiatric social worker, for the last eight years, dealing only with Vietnam veterans. I have dealt with more than eight thousand Vietnam veterans in deep trouble.

Vietnam is still a thorn in everybody's side, regardless of one's approach or viewpoint. I wish I could have one hour individually with everybody in this conference to talk about Vietnam and post-Vietnam. I do not think that sharing a few things or touching on a few points in a few minutes will accomplish anything in depth. But I will give it a shot.

Vietnam, particularly for the person who was over there, was definitely a reality. In my sessions with any new Vietnam veteran patient, I usually start with Vietnam and his awareness of the reality of his Vietnam experience. I may be wrong, but I think the awareness of what Vietnam really is, and where it is taking us, is beginning to develop. I put on a workshop recently at the University of North Dakota; it was a Vietnam veteran awareness seminar. And now we are holding this conference at the Center to deal with the impact of Vietnam.

I think it is important that we look — and, God! please do — at the living by-product of the Vietnam war. We look at history books. We look at journals. We look at the archives in Washington. We look at old film footage. And we try to talk about those inanimate objects. But the main thing that America refuses to look at is the Vietnam veteran. He is living. He can talk about it. He can show his scars. I can remove the top of my head if I want to.

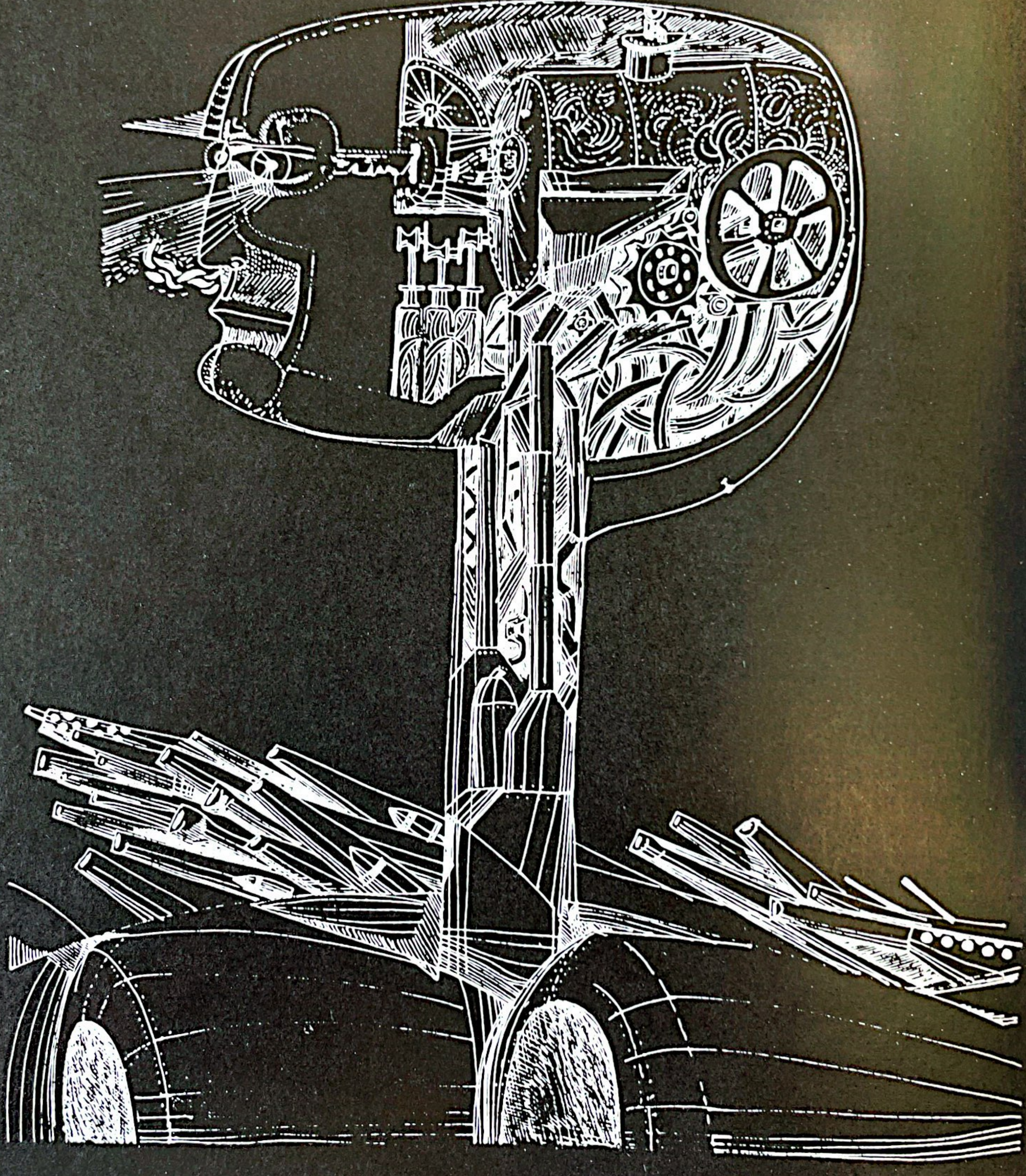
I don't think I can, to this day, intellectualize and tell you exactly what happened to me, to Fred Downs, or to a million and a half physically or mentally disabled Vietnam veterans who are walking around in this country. But I think that is where one should start. I think I am as good as any archive or any book that has ever come out.

I was a psychology officer in Vietnam. I, along with the psychiatrists, had the task of counseling seventy thousand American troops in the DMZ. That was my responsibility. And not only did that sound absurd then, it sounds absurd now. But for a lot of people, even to talk about Vietnam or its impact sounds absurd.

I am damned tired of America philosophizing about and burying Vietnam, because in the process they are burying me and the people that I work with. Vietnam is different in so many ways. If you do not understand the difference, then you do not understand why we are here, and why the Vietnam veterans are suffering so many readjustment problems. You will not understand why, for five years, at least in the Senate, we have been pushing for special psychological readjustment legislation. Critics cannot understand the need for such legislation. They say we never needed it after any previous war.

I have been involved with the White House for the last year and a half, designing what psychological-readjustment legislation should look like. The Administration proposes to allocate ten million dollars for the first year, and additional funds to establish a three-year pilot program.

But few people, and that includes therapists, know the problems of Vietnam veterans — or the impact of the war on them. They do not attend conferences like this one at the Center. So a handful of people like me have been asked to design such a program, get the



community involved, and reach the physically handicapped and mentally maladjusted Vietnam veterans.

My question to President Jimmy Carter and to Max Cleland — he's a triple amputee, more disabled than Fred Downs and I put together — was, "What do you want us to do?" They said, "How do we do it?"

I said, "Do you really understand what we are up against, what we have to do? We have to set up treatment for up to 1.7 million Vietnam veterans who are having some type of mental readjustment problem, whether it is drugs, alcohol, depression, suicidal inclinations, whatever."

I can count on both of my hands the people who are somewhat aware of this problem.

But how do you propose, design, and deliver a program like this when so many people do not understand, even to any degree, the impact of Vietnam on the veteran? To me, that is where it's at. I call this proposed legislation the "last-hurrah legislation." This is America's last chance to say to the Vietnam veterans, "Hey, we didn't let you down. We are going to help you. We may be six or seven years late, but you will get it. And we have a few good people who will put it together nationwide. You will get help."

You know, six years ago, I was in a meeting with the clinical directors of V.A. hospitals in Los Angeles. My clinical director, a psychiatrist, got up after I had talked about the same things we are talking about here. He was a well-educated man, about five years from retirement. He said, "Shad, God damn it, when are these Vietnam vets just going to become regular vets? How long is this going to go on?"

I couldn't respond. I couldn't believe he had said that. This is a person who is clinical director of a V.A. psychiatric hospital. He wanted to know when it will happen. Well, it's not going to just "happen." The problems are not going to go away. Vietnam will never leave us.

But we can learn a lot of good things from Vietnam. I feel completely different, I feel I am twice the person I was after coming out of Vietnam. I understand the reality of myself, of my country, of my peers, of Vietnam veterans. But I also feel very isolated, very alone, because so many Americans do not even want to talk about it.

Certainly, such public issues as inflation, the ecology, and unemployment are important. But we must put in perspective the psychological impact of the traumatic things that have happened to our country. I think we are in a lot of trouble. I am concerned about where our country is going.

I think Vietnam plays a big part in whether we will again be one of the greatest countries that ever existed. I don't mean "greatest" in the sense of power. I mean it in the sense of freedom, of the greatest liberties of any country that has ever existed. It is the perspective of the whole country on the Vietnam war that will determine what we do about our situation in America.

**ROSENAU:** I am impressed with both your presentations. I would like to ask you both, if you could program me, so that I would have an appropriate attitude, from your point of view, toward the Vietnam veteran. What would you like me to think?

**DOWNS:** What I would like you to do is put yourself into the Vietnam veteran's shoes. That may be difficult for you to do, because the people who did the actual fighting in Vietnam had no power at all. They were just regular people. The men in my platoon were blacks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, a couple of Irish Catholics, an Indian, and that was it. There weren't any rich people in my platoon, no kids who had any power at all, because my platoon was an infantry platoon, and we were in the fighting all the time. Well, look at that person, and ask yourself, "What would I do if I were in his shoes?" That is what you can do as an intellectual.

The one gripe I have always had against intellectuals is not their ideas. I admire ideas and philosophies. I like to think I have some myself. I am just not as articulate as some of you. But what I do not like about intellectuals is that, while they may have good ideas, they do not temper those ideas with reality. Instead of being able to do some good with their ideas, they live in a dream world.

**ROSENAU:** Could you be a little more specific? Here I am ready to do your bidding. Suppose I were to write an article, or go on a radio program. What would you like me to talk about?

**DOWNS:** Instead of talking about Vietnam as something that we did which was wrong morally, talk about our future direction. You could develop a philosophy to help people understand how to treat soldiers in the future. You must develop the conviction that a man, because he is a soldier, is not less than you are.

**ROSENAU:** I teach political science —

**DOWNS:** In your teaching, do you explain the role of a soldier?

**ROSENAU:** No, we talk about the citizen.

**DOWNS:** Well, a soldier is a citizen. You probably have never approached your students with the idea that they could be soldiers, and that if they are, they are not subhuman when they put on a uniform. So in your class you could start talking about how a person can serve his country, even though you do not agree with what the country is doing. At least the soldiers are doing something that is admirable. Students should leave your class feeling that the soldier is a part of our society. They should have a good feeling about that individual, and understand that if he does go off to war and comes back, he will need help in reentering the society.

**ROSENAU:** Something remains unclear to me. This is not a loaded question. It is a naive question. Would you want me to so conduct myself as a teacher that those who were critics of the Vietnam war are criticized, and those who fought the war are praised?

**DOWNS:** Of course not, because everyone had a point of view which was legitimate. At one time I was very angry with the people who were against the war. But as I thought more about it, and learned more about it, I understood their point of view. What I am saying is that the soldier was only the tool. He was sent over, and when the tool came back, people directed their venom toward the tool instead of the device that sent him over there in the first place.

When I was at the University of Denver, I debated all the time with the Students for a Democratic Society, the Weathermen, the Clergy and Layman Concerned About Vietnam, and what they never seemed to be able to understand was that I was just an individual like them, someone who had his point of view. I tried to see their point of view, but they never tried to see my point of view.

I was not for the war. I was just trying to get across the idea that the soldiers on the campus were not animals, that they were just people who wanted to get on with living. But they would not leave us alone. They kept harassing us. We could not understand why they would not look at us as people, as human beings, and so we were forced to take a defensive posture.

**MESHAD:** I would like to do a sensitivity workshop and let *you* decide what you want to do. All I want you to do is to be able to look at both sides and make your decision. I respect your opinion. I couldn't tell you what to teach your class. I just want them to know both sides. I would like them to be sensitive to what the seventeen-, eighteen-, and nineteen-year-olds who fought the war went through and what the war's impact was on them.

Most of the time that I have spent outside the hospital has been devoted to speaking to nonveteran groups. The responses are, "I never knew it was like that," "I wish I had known," "I have alienated my own son," "I am not afraid to talk about this now and to deal with it." So the responses have always been positive.

I don't tell them what to think. I just let them know this side. I sensitize them to the Vietnam veteran, this living being who is here now, whom they have refused to look at. They look at everything else. They look at ecology, they look at "save the animals." We put billions of dollars into other things, but we do not start with the human being. That is what I am saying.

I did a National Broadcasting Company show recently, and I received a number of calls from nonveterans, saying, "I want to do something. I have really been ashamed to talk about Vietnam."

**HOLSTI:** Can you, either as an individual or possibly as a spokesman for those 1.7 million veterans needing help, say what the lesson of Vietnam ought to be? What should this nation learn? What should we learn about the broader questions of America's external relations with the world? Can you make any generalizations on the basis of your contact with veterans? Is there any consensus among the veterans that you have been dealing with about what those lessons are? There has been a lot of discussion about the "lessons of Vietnam." Perhaps this is an interesting group to hear from.

**MESHAD:** One of the most traumatic things I have ever had to deal with was the completely different culture that Asia presented to me, never mind the war, the guns, the blood, sweat, and tears. I knew nothing about Asians. The only thing I knew about Asians was the names that we gave them. We debated about which was the most popular. One was "gook," the other was "dink." Every Asian is a gook or a dink. And the only good dink is a dead dink. Now that was my orientation to the culture of Asia, a culture which I was going to protect from Communism. I went over as a health-care person, but that whole approach to the Asians was negative.

A lot of the guilt the Vietnam veteran feels is due

***If we need a military draft again, it has to be straight across the board—no deferments***
***—FREDERICK DOWNS***

to the fact that he went in, and used, manipulated, sometimes abused the Asian people and their culture in order to stay alive. He has come back, and he now mourns the fact that he never even understood the Asian culture. We thought, well, if it is Communist, then we fight it. It doesn't matter whether we understand their language or their culture. We just go in there. We are the superstars. We are red, white, and blue. We are John Wayne. We do it!

**DOWNS:** For me, Vietnam was a realization that America, as the world's leader, was not always right. I wondered about this. I got to thinking about it. I realize that the Western powers are fading, and that the Orientals are dynamic people. We have been used to supporting countries whose leaders were educated outside of their country, and who were only a small minority at the top, the minority that had all the money and power. The lower classes did not identify with their own leaders, but we never realized that. We continued to support people in Vietnam who were educated outside the country, who were not connected to the masses, so to speak. These masses will be the power at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

America, because of our Vietnam experience, is in a position to think about this and assist not only those countries, but ourselves if we realize that these countries are the emerging powers and that Europe is old. If we play our cards right, if we start helping those people instead of supporting the wrong kinds of governments, the United States can actually be a leader for those countries as they emerge. They can draw intellectual strength from us. We can send people to help them in their factories, help them develop energy, and all the rest of it. We can be their partner, instead of their adversary. We can no longer think about this in old-world terms. The old world has faded. The new world is the Orient. That is how I feel about Vietnam and the future.

**BERNSTEIN:** I want to begin by sincerely thanking Fred Downs and Shad Meshad for teaching me something very important, and that is making me aware, in both a human and a cognitive way, of things that, at best, I was only dimly aware of.

But I am also a little confused. They are saying there has been a shunning, a treating of Vietnam veterans as if they are not there. But what struck me as Fred Downs spoke is not that people were shunning, but that they were condemning the veteran. There is a tremendous difference between shunning, which is to treat another as a nonperson, and condemning, which is to acknowledge personhood, and then revile the values that are attributed to the other.

In part, the question then becomes, are the values that have been attributed to veterans correct or incorrect?

Fred Downs spoke about veterans being simply tools. I want him to dilate some more and tell me what is his understanding of America, and how kids from Indiana are treated by the government, and why kids who grow up on farms, or kids who grow up in city ghettos are more likely to get sent to Vietnam than kids who were on college campuses. Has that led to anything other than an anomaly? Is he now prepared to say that democracy does not work, or simply that it is imperfect?

When you talked about the war itself, Mr. Downs, at one point you remarked — and this troubled me; I don't think you really meant to say it — everyone had a point of view that was legitimate. One could be for the war or against it, one could think the war was nifty, or think it was terrible, it's all legitimate. My suspicion is that some of the people who responded hostilely — and probably unfairly — to you, saw you as a representative of one particular viewpoint. And one's views on the Vietnam war are still rather strongly felt.

How would both of you answer this question: Why did America go to war in Vietnam? How would you answer it now, in terms of your understanding? Do you think that going to war was morally legitimate? Do you think that it was simply that the United States supported the wrong people, and that if we had handled matters a little differently that would have rendered our actions morally legitimate? From your understanding of having been sent to war, and upon returning, having been reviled and/or shunned, what are you prepared to say about American class structure, and even about American society?

A lot of what you have said makes an implicit contrast with World War II, which was the last noble and just war in which America triumphed. It may well be that if one were to go back and look at earlier wars, one would find better analogies to your own experience.

**DOWNS:** The reason we screwed up in Vietnam is the same reason we almost screwed up on the Panama Canal, the Philippines, and other current hot-world situations. American ambassadors to foreign countries get their jobs because they pay somebody some money. They do not know how to speak the language of those countries. They know nothing about the history of those countries, and their staffs are likely to be just as ignorant.

**BERNSTEIN:** Are you aware that one can establish on firm evidence that most of America's Asian specialists — and especially its famous Vietnam specialists — who are generally second-rate intellectuals, ardently supported the war, at least through 1966? But if one uses the measure of the ambassadors lacking expertise, one can find in the academy John King Fairbank, Edmund Clubb, Wesley Fishel. Then if one moves from the academy to the administration, no administration before or after John F. Kennedy's had quite the lustrous intellectual talent his had. Rhodes scholars were tripping over one another; and all of them ardently supported the Vietnam war. Then if one looks at the leading scholars in American history, especially the modern segment, and in political science, especially those areas that deal, not with theory, but with foreign policy and international studies, one can count on the fingers of the hands in this room the number of people who were dissenting substantially from the Vietnam war before 1966.

**DOWNS:** When I used the term ambassador, I only used it as an example. I do not know all the other intellectuals, the people that we send over to involve themselves in a country. Do we adequately train them? I feel we do not. That is a lesson from Vietnam.

Also instead of thinking always on a war basis, we should be thinking of our relations with other countries on a food basis, on an energy basis. We have been ignoring Mexico for years and years. If we had planned ahead, we would be in Mexico, in Central America, and in South America. Instead we are quibbling over the Panama Canal, which gave us a lot of bad press down in South America. And instead of fighting Cuba — which we have been doing all these years — we should have worked with the Cubans. Fidel Castro has done good things for his country, from what I can see, although there were some things that went wrong at first.

In Vietnam the people did not have enough belief in themselves. The government was too corrupt. Most of our special forces teams were doing well in the areas they were in, but the Vietnamese government was so corrupt, we could not keep it shored up.

I stomped across people's rice paddies in Vietnam. I was concerned with only one thing, keeping all of my men alive. If I received a round of fire out of a village, I didn't think of those people as anything but the enemy. If a squad of Vietnamese had come through my farm in Indiana and stomped through my garden the way I did in Vietnam, and had gone through and searched my house the way I did their houses, and killed all my chickens and cows, well, that wouldn't do anything to win my heart and mind. However, I was a young man then. I didn't think like that then. I hadn't been trained that way. I had been trained to kill. And that's what I did, and I was very good at it. Luckily I survived, and now I am able to think back to what I did, and I want to see what we can do to improve in the future.

**BERNSTEIN:** You referred to yourself as a tool. That raises a question of how you think the American system works, and why it is that yours was a platoon that had blacks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, no rich kids, and presumably very few college kids.

**DOWNS:** I feel that the original ideals of America have gone astray. The people who were in my platoon were not able to get out of the draft. How were all these other people able to get out of the draft? It is because they had money, power, influence. I think America is drifting into old-world values in which money and power give you special privileges. If we need a military draft again, then it has to be straight across the board with no draft deferments. We have a great nation and I have a lot of patriotism, but if I am asked to go to war again, then I will ask a lot more questions.

**KRIEGER:** For me personally, conscience is the bottom line of what came out of the war. I am also a Vietnam era veteran, but I did not go to Vietnam. I chose not to. In 1968, I was finishing work on my Ph.D., and I was a member of the Army Reserve in Hawaii. I was

***I am concerned for the farm boy in Indiana who may still feel "my country right or wrong"* — *DAVID KRIEGER***

never particularly fond of the Army. I never found it a desirable experience. Most of my cohorts escaped military service altogether. But I was in the reserve, and in 1968, just after I had got my degree, I was called to active duty.

I became an infantry platoon leader. I had in my platoon pretty much the same kind of people that Fred Downs had in his platoon. I had eighteen- and nineteen-year-old kids who were not much overjoyed at being called up. But they were not sorry about it, either. For them, it seemed to be a chance to do something with their lives.

By that time, I was disturbed about the war. I had been on a college campus, I had evaluated for myself what I thought was going on in Vietnam, and I found it morally reprehensible. I was not inclined to go over there and kill people and risk my life. I was especially opposed to the idea that I should lead other people to do something that I was convinced was morally reprehensible.

So, for me, it came down to a choice of going or not going. I was given orders to go, and I said, no. Because of my education, my financial situation, and a lot of support that I got at the time, I could say no to that directive. I was prepared either to go to jail for my conviction or leave the country. My decision is something that I have questioned many times since. But I felt that ultimately I, as an individual, had to take a stand based on my own convictions.

After I made my decision, I talked to the people I was associated with in the infantry. I explained what I was doing, and why I was doing it. I also told them why I thought they had a choice as well.

Fred Downs talked about the farm boy in Indiana who had a different perception than I did. I do not think that what Fred did is wrong or reprehensible. He acted out of his own belief and conscience at the time, because that is how he felt. I think his and Shad Meshad's point about the veterans needing to be respected as persons is very important. I think their almost evangelistic desire to find a place and respect for the Vietnam veterans is deeply important.

But I am concerned even more deeply for the farm boy who is still in Indiana, who may be growing up also feeling "my country right or wrong," that whatever his country asks him to do, he will do.

It seems to me that part of what you should be doing when you talk to people about the plight of the Vietnam veterans is make people aware of the simple axiom that I acted on at the time, one which I feel remains: it is that there would not be a war if nobody came. In the end everybody must consciously and conscientiously choose whether to say no or yes to fighting in a war.

That does not mean one must be a conscientious objector against all wars. That is a tremendous mistake. One must judge whether or not a particular war is justifiable. Pacifists, of course, disagree with me on that. But for me Vietnam was a case in which there was manipulation and lying on the part of the executive branch of the American government. Indeed, our intervention was never, on constitutional grounds, a war.

Although I did not go to Vietnam, my experience in the military left a deep scar. It has taken me years to work through that experience. Maybe it isn't completely worked through yet. I, too, felt some guilt about not being over there and seeing others go. But for me, it was a question of my not contributing my body to an effort that I felt was unjustified.

There was a dehumanization in the way our government treated us, in the way it lied to us, in the way it carried on its duplicity day after day. In a sense it was that kind of dehumanization that made the war what it is. In a sense that dehumanization continues to pervade our society. We have dangerously changed the military draft situation. After many years, I have come to the point where I am opposed to a volunteer Army. I think we should have a draft again, for precisely the reason that I happened to be exposed to the Army and found it such an awful experience. What I went through and how I reacted to it was, I think, good for me and for my country.

What Fred Downs and Shad Meshad are doing is one of the most hopeful signs that I see in the country today. It is a healing thing to talk about the lack of respect that they have had. They have a need for respect. Every individual in this country needs respect. Although they were tools in Vietnam, as Fred Downs said, all our citizens were treated as tools.

It is a symptom of our culture that we treat each other as tools. That is largely why people have withdrawn into narcissism and privatism. That is why people try to find some kind of a peer group for the support that our broader culture no longer seems to offer. That is one of the sad ramifications of the Vietnam war experience.

**DOWNS:** A very good book has been written recently by Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval*. The government has sued Snepp, claiming he revealed a lot of Central Intelligence Agency secrets about the downfall of Vietnam. I read the book. What Snepp actually wrote was how stupid a lot of our people were who represented us in Vietnam. You have to think, if those people did that in Vietnam, what are they doing right now in other parts of the world? Snepp did not reveal any national security secrets. He revealed the stupidity of our people. So our government is wrong. When a government covers up for itself, through lawsuits like this, it is doing the citizenry a disservice.

**LEWY:** I hate to contradict you, because I have found many of the things you have said impressive, eloquent, and moving. But it would be wrong to leave your last remarks uncorrected. Mr. Snepp is not being sued for having revealed secrets or for having exposed mismanagement. There may well have been mismanagement. He is being charged with having violated the agreement he made when he took the job in the C.I.A., which was not to publish anything — secret or nonsecret — without permission from and screening by the C.I.A.

**DOWNS:** The key point is that we are suing him, and we shouldn't be. We should be studying his book.

**LEWY:** My point is a different one. A government cannot function if everyone decides for himself which obligations he will honor and which he will not. How are you going to get people to work for the C.I.A. in the future?

**BERNSTEIN:** Can you cite any American policy-maker in the last thirty years who, while in office, leaked classified secrets to the press and was prosecuted for so doing? Aren't you struck by the anomalous fact that only certain kinds of people leaking certain kinds of secrets — those which are invidious to certain positions — are the ones who get prosecuted?

**LEWY:** I don't think there are any secrets in Frank Snepp's book. I agree with Mr. Downs on that. But that is not the issue.

**BERNSTEIN:** But secrecy can be violated at will when it serves certain interests of those in government.

**LEWY:** I don't want to argue that either. Two wrongs do not make a right. This issue is not secrets. I say that when you take a job with an agency like the C.I.A., you undertake certain obligations. One of them is that you will not publish anything about your work without permission. That seems to me to be a perfectly reasonable request, just as, for example, it struck me at the time as being perfectly reasonable that much of the material in the Pentagon Papers would be classified. Of course, there is information there which is not meant for public consumption, not in the sense that you mean it, but in the sense that delicate negotiations which are discussed in the Pentagon Papers require protection.

Now, we may well benefit from having had the Pentagon Papers leaked. We now know a lot more about that period. But, again, that is not the point. The point is that government cannot function and negotiations cannot take place in a fishbowl.

**BERNSTEIN:** You are missing a point. There has probably been no official, in or near the Department of Defense or the Department of State who, in the last thirty years, has not — for reasons which may or may not be in the national interest in his perception — leaked secrets to journalists in order to achieve certain effects. One of the reasons why Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon were so interested in tapping phones — following the practice of Lyndon Johnson, who followed the practice of John F. Kennedy — was to find out who in their Administrations were leaking things regarded as indelicate. What follows is that when there is a pattern of people leaking secrets, and when only one or two people are singled out for prosecution, one must ask, why have those one or two been singled out? What is there about their particular action that distinguishes them? It may well be that what they have leaked are not secrets that violate national security, but rather facts that are embarrassing to some people in power. ☐