

THE CENTER MAGAZINE



A C.I.A. Trip by John Stockwell

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THE CENTER MAGAZINE

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REXFORD G. TUGWELL
July 10, 1891 — July 21, 1979

On July 25th, a memorial was held in the courtyard of the Center for Rexford Guy Tugwell, a Center Associate. Following are excerpts from the tributes paid by some of his friends and colleagues.

"His career here was the climax of a long and distinguished life. . . . He kept our attention on the basic issues." — HARRY S. ASHMORE

"Rex was a courageous dissenter from what needed to be disapproved, but he was not a rebel. He never affiliated himself with the undoable in order to satisfy his intellectual fancies. He wanted to get things done, and he got a great many things done." — LEON KEYSERLING

"It was not disrespect for the Constitution of 1787 that led him to write a new constitution. It was, rather, his respect for and his dedication to the basic constitutional idea of the law above all laws, the law whose purpose it is 'to remind citizens of their duties and to hold government to its prescribed course.'" — C. HERMAN PRITCHETT

"Rex had an almost inaudible chuckle and a just noticeable smile. They appeared in my presence when I was guilty of righteous indignation, or strong contempt, or unqualified enthusiasm. They constituted a kind of intelligent *caritas*, an urbane forbearance." — JOSEPH J. SCHWAB

"He came to Washington [in 1933] with a gallant sense of confidence that something should be done, could be done, and would be done. That seems to me to have been what his President needed and what the American people needed. He will always be honored by Americans for just that." — WILLIAM GORMAN

"All his life he felt that his job was to implement — constructively and sensibly — the good idea on which our Republic was founded."
— CLIFTON FADIMAN

"His most remarkable and dedicated commitment was to the belief that the public interest could be advanced only by enlightened men and women coming together for concerted work to change their institutions." — OTIS L. GRAHAM, JR.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1979

The Center and the University	2
The Center's New Director <i>A Talk with Brian Fagan</i>	4
At the Center <i>Walter A. Fogel, Fred Warner Neal, Gunnar Heckscher, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky</i>	13
A C.I.A. Trip — from Belief, to Doubt, to Despair <i>John Stockwell</i>	18
The Impact of Vietnam — Part Two	30
The Drawing of Conclusions	31
Comparing Notes on Television's Coverage of the War	42
Observations and Deductions	47
The Religious Context	49
Academic Tenure <i>James O'Toole</i>	53
Discussion	55
Letters	61
Cover <i>Susan Carson</i>	
Design <i>Barbara Smith</i>	

The Religious Context

A World of Broken Pieces

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No single narrative account quite captures the Vietnam experience. Nor is there any self-consistent reading of American history that can accommodate the experience, none so compelling and so confident that the chroniclers can say, "We could have told you so."

To call the Vietnam war a mistake is to capture something of the truth. But mistakes betoken strategy, program, planning, implementation to reach objectives, and it seems impossible to capture the sense of Vietnam in those terms alone. Vietnam is also a profound psychic disturbance.

It was a war. But those of us who remained at home sometimes believed that the military combat was secondary to the other arenas in which the conflict was being waged. As the war ground on, its purpose became less and less clear. Why were the soldiers fighting? What would it mean to win a war like this? Or lose it?

Some Americans viewed the Vietnam war as a kind of Christian morality play. But who was the victim? Who was the hero? What was the meaning of the sacrifice? Where could redemption be found?

Others, turning to Biblical motifs, linked the alleviation of oppression with the Exodus theme, and thus with freedom. We have done this before. We did it during the American Civil War. More recently, we did it in the civil-rights movement under Martin Luther King, Jr. *We shall overcome*. But in the case of Vietnam, who needed to be set free? Who were the oppressors? Who the oppressed? Where was the promised land?

Godfrey Hodgson has written that America has been both an enterprise and a frontier. But what was the enterprise in Vietnam? Where was the frontier?

In the absence of compelling ways of coming to terms with the event, we turned to private interpreta-

tions, most of which, I suspect, were derived from special interests. There were the interests of the military — in the Pentagon and on the scene. There were the interests of the Presidency, of the American people on the Left, and of those on the Right.

Vietnam stimulated profound soul-searching. But it did not give us the means to articulate the same. It was accompanied by a sense of corporate guilt, but that guilt, on the whole, still remains inarticulate and unspecified. We turn to the Vietnam veteran — perhaps a symbol of our shame — as an unwelcome reminder of our profound uncertainty, perhaps even as potential scapegoat of our wish to make amends. But the veteran says to us, "We are not your enemy, the enemy is the war."

In the aftermath of Vietnam, there has been a rise of privatism and the birth of small-is-beautiful. The former is illustrated in the photograph of the American soldier in Vietnam listening on his transistor radio to the Beatles' song, "Let It Be." The small-is-beautiful syndrome has less to do perhaps with our sense of diminished energy resources than it does with our awareness that we have reached limits of other kinds.

The American story, up to this point, cannot comprehend the new components of contemporary life. We have encountered too many elements that don't seem to fit into our story. The Asian and Third Worlds do not yield easily to American assimilation. And following Nagasaki and Hiroshima — with the prospect that human destruction may become total — warfare itself seems an affront to our deepest sensibilities.

Vietnam, therefore, is both event and symbol. We can trace some of the factors which led to its occurrence. But we are not sure whether those factors were causes or simply projections of our own psychic limits.

The war itself became the enemy. It quickly assumed monstrous proportions as well as the reality of the demonic. Appropriately, many of the portrayals by the Vietnam veterans are surrealistic. In psychoanalytic terms, it is as if the father has been killed, as if the realm of the superego has been shattered and in many cases eliminated. In the after-

math, we have turned to jingoists and mystics, to authoritarian religious teachers who prey upon the dark side of our psyches, upon what Erik Erikson calls the negative conscience. We have turned to easy answers, to simpleminded truths. I refer to the Jim Joneses and their like, a cultic phenomenon that continues to grow in our society.

I perceive Vietnam as a ritual. It was an event, a profound drama, a tragedy. But previous rituals in American history — even tragic events — have been accompanied by a myth, an explanatory story. In the Vietnam situation, the ritual becomes disconcerting, because it expresses the breaking of the American myth. What myth? The story of America's greatness, its largesse, its concern for others, the way it has exercised stewardship over the causes of freedom, human rights, the pursuit of happiness. The painful irony is that it was on behalf of this story that the leaders of our country sent troops to Vietnam in the first place.

Thus, Vietnam became the event by which the American story was shattered, as well as the event in which the broken story, the broken myth, is acted out. The result is an atomistic world, a world of broken pieces. We see the ramifications of that in the breakdowns of institutional structures in government, in education, in our corporate life, and in what has been happening to the American family.

The most difficult problem is that it is in this atomistic, fragmented world that the impact of Vietnam continues to be received and that our responses to that impact can, therefore, be enunciated in only disconnected and fragmented ways.

Destructiveness at Home

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It is an error to view Vietnam as an isolated event or, worse still, as an aberration in our nation's history. If we are to make any sense out of Vietnam and its impact upon our national life, we must view it as an organic part of our ongoing history, indeed, as an organic part of Western history. Denis de Rougemont, in his work, *Love in the Western World*, traces Western man's devotion to war, to our culture's long-ago and unrecognized adoption of a Manichaeic world view in which unrequited love, destruction, and death are ultimate values. Warfare in the West, according to Rougement, followed a pattern derived

from this "romantic" world view up until World War I. Participation in warfare produced a sense of fulfillment and power. But, according to Rougement, World War I changed all that and, by extension, so did World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Most soldiers returned feeling impotent. Fred Downs and Shad Meshad have told us in this meeting that Vietnam veterans feel that they were treated as tools in Vietnam. As a result, they experienced no sense of fulfillment, not to mention purpose. What they do experience is that profound sense of impotence described by Rougement.

With reference to American history, it is important to view Vietnam, in part, as did Erik Erikson in his 1973 Jefferson Lectures, published as *Dimensions of the New Identity*. Erikson holds that if the American Indian and the African were not so readily available to us, we would have had to invent them because of all the dimensions of our negative identity which we have had to repress in our forming of the character. Repressed elements of an identity often work themselves to the fore in neurotic, sometimes psychotic, behavior, and it is in this light that we must analyze our cruel treatment of the American Indian and the Africans, whom we made slaves, and their descendants. We adopted a similar stance toward those whom we label "Orientals." Much of our behavior in Vietnam must be seen in this light. We must deal openly and analytically with this negative dimension of our American identity.

The movie, *The Deer Hunter*, provides clues for understanding Vietnam as an organic part of our social history. I disagree with those who say that the film seeks to absolve us of our guilt. There is a great deal of social criticism in the film. Think of the way in which the bright wedding scenes are juxtaposed with the drab appearance of the town and the Pennsylvania mills, and the way in which the fiery furnaces of the mills are juxtaposed with fiery scenes in Vietnam. There is a link between the fiery furnaces of Pennsylvania and the fiery fields of Vietnam. There is a link between the way in which we have raped and desecrated the beautiful landscape of Pennsylvania and other parts of our nation and the way in which we defoliated Vietnam.

Whenever I walk through the neighborhood in which I grew up in Chicago, I am reminded of some of the battle-scarred towns of Normandy, through which I walked shortly after the Second World War. There is a link between the way in which we have destroyed whole sections of our major cities and the destruction we visited upon the cities and hamlets of