

THE IMPACT OF VIETNAM

TRANSCRIPT TAPE X-50
Tracks I and II
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PARTICIPANTS:

See page 1, first meeting

CAPPS: Ready once again to begin. There are some people who have joined us this morning for the first time, I believe. Dale Bengston, who is sitting over here on the observer bench, and, let's see, Professor, Mrs. Kreyche is here, Mary Burk, Cheryl Montoika, Ron Burk, and David Chidester has been here before. We are missing quite a few people from around the table. I think some have taken the opportunity to leave to go home. We have two responsibilities this morning, or two sections of the program that are, we need to deal with. The first of these has to do with the value and moral questions, the moral issues, associated with the Vietnam experience. And the second one is a kind of summary section, where I will be asking those of you who have participated to offer some remarks about findings of the conference, or conclusions to which we might come after spending nearly three days talking about the Vietnam experience. And I have, would invite anyone who wants to speak at that point, or I guess at any other point, to say what is on his or her mind. But in order to prompt that a little bit, we have

Mike Lewis, of, who can do that if we get it done in time, he has to leave early, and Harry Ashmore, and Fred Downs, who are prepared to make some statements. I find myself in a little bit of an awkward position here. I have not made a statement to the conference as yet. I have asked some questions, and have tried to direct traffic. And moderating the discussion. And I think I would like to take a few moments at the beginning of this session. I think substituting for Jacob Needleman, to offer some remarks that belong both to the value and moral issues section of the program, also to the findings of the conference, if my colleagues on the panel will permit me to do that. And I suppose what this means is that we will probably, we'll take a break at some mid-point this morning, we only have two and a half hours to go, though, before the conference ends. And it could well be that these two sections of the program will collapse or coalesce, and we will be talking about the moral issues, the religious values, and the findings of the conference sort of all at once, if this is permissible.

On the panel, sitting to my immediate left is Nick Piediscalzi, who is a professor of religion, chairman of the

Department of Religion Studies at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. He is out here this year on an N.E.H. fellowship. He has been involved through the years in the Christian-Marxist dialogue, both in this country and in Europe, and is a student, I would say sort of on the side, of the writings and teachings of Erik Erikson.

And next to him is Dick Comstock, who is, has been here during the conference, now the chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, works in the area of religious studies in the humanities, religion and literature, philosophy of religion, nineteenth-century studies.

And sitting next to Dick is Phil Hammond, who has just recently joined the Santa Barbara faculty in religious studies, a sociologist of religion who has done extensive work in the area of civil religion. And civil religion, not simply in America, but also in Mexico, Italy, and elsewhere.

So we'll try to formulate some questions, and as we do that, try to pull some pieces together. But I want to take the liberty to read a little bit, not, it won't be a long paper, but

a few remarks that I have written out, so that I can make them with some care.

After the session that we had yesterday, I was reminded of the, one of the dramatic scenes in the movie, Coming Home, the final scenes, when Bob, the Marine, comes home and is faced with the very complicated situation of learning that his wife, Sally, has been associating with a Vietnam veteran paraplegic, Luke Martin. And through his experience in the war he has also become disillusioned about what it means to be a Marine. And this scene is set by music. And I suggest that music may be the best medium for portraying both the agony and the ecstasy of the war. Earlier the background music had been "Deep waters inside, let the wind caress you, close your eyes, try to look at what I've told you. The things you see aren't what they seem. I've had a dream, and you can follow, you can follow."

And along the way in the film, we heard many times "Hey, Jude, don't be afraid, make a sad song, make it better." Then there was Bob Dylan's "Please don't let on you knew me when." And also, "Stop, children, what's that sound, everybody look at

what's going down."

But this time in the final confrontation between Luke and Bob, both veterans and thus both victims of the war, the text was supplied by the Rolling Stones, "You don't know what's been going on, you're out of touch, baby, you're out of time." And in that situation from the wheelchair, Luke says to the returning Marine, who is now so thoroughly confused and disillusioned and angry, that is prepared to kill once again, Luke says to him, "I'm not the enemy. The enemy is the war." The war had become the enemy.

I thought about this scene as I tried to respond to the insights, the information that has come my way during the course of the conference. For it has become very clear to me as we proceeded that the Vietnam war is an exceedingly difficult war to map and to make intelligible. I think we do the latter, that is, make things intelligible, by placing things in context and/or by drawing analogies. Both forms of intelligibility-making have occurred during this conference. We have witnessed noble attempts at context-setting, and these have been enormously helpful, in many respects, noble. We have followed reconstructions of American

political history from the time of the Second World War into the present era. There have been helpful comparisons of Vietnam with Korea, with World War II, and one among us has even suggested that the most apt analogue might be the battle of Wounded Knee. Reference has been made to the interdependence of Vietnam with the rise of the student protest movement, and we have been given eloquent testimony regarding the ways in which Vietnam affected the American intellectual community, as well as attitudes toward the university.

Bart Bernstein traced several good, refreshing, resourceful scenarios for you. Stanley Rothman did some others. In a different way, Guenther Lewy did the same. And Fred Downs and Shad Meshad and others from time to time, contributed personal autobiographical chronicles to the other narrative accounts.

If we had gone further in our attempts to place Vietnam in some other chronicle, we might have consulted Morris Dickstein's Gates of Eden, or Godfrey Hodson's America in Our Time, or perhaps even John Gardner's new book, Morale. In addition to chronicle-weaving, we also made some attempts to identify and define. Vietnam was referred to as "a mistake," "a reality," "an event," "a publicity

event," even a "blunder." And yet when we come to the final day in the conference, I, for one, find the enigma of Vietnam to be even greater than before. For it seems to me that no single narrative account quite captures it. It bursts the bounds of all self-consistent chronicles, leaving a large and significant remainder, for there seems to me to be no self-consistent reading of American history that can accommodate Vietnam, and there is no reading of that history that is both so compelling and confident as to enable the chroniclers to say, we could have told you so. And neither do the analogues work very well. For if Vietnam is reality, so too is it unreality. Or perhaps it is more accurate to refer to it as reality that has become unreality, and through that process became challenge to shared senses of reality.

To call it a mistake is to capture something of the truth, but mistake betokens strategy, program, planning, implementation of objectives, et cetera, and it seems impossible to capture the sense of the event in terms of strategy alone. It is also a profound psychic disturbance. It is either symbol or catalyst of the fragmentation that characterizes our corporate life, as well as

the sorts of mental and psychological disorientations that have invaded our connectedness with all that sustains us. The agony became intense and great because in the words of Robert Lifton, "the underlying symbolic matrix had been shattered. The network of compelling interpretation had come apart. The paradigms of meaning had been broken."

It was a war. Fred Downs, Shad Meshad, Murray Fromson, Larry Lichty, Harry Ashmore, I suppose others who have been there, have reminded us of this. Strangely, those of us who remained at home sometimes believed that the military combat was quite secondary to the other arenas in which the conflict was being waged. For it was the sort of war that defies many of the usual descriptions of war. And as it ground on and on, it became less clear what its purpose was. It became increasingly more difficult to rally the cause of patriotism. What was its ultimate objective? Why were the soldiers fighting, and what would it mean to win a war like this? What would it mean to lose?

Some within our society wished to view it as a kind of Christian morality play. What was the cause? Who was the victim?

Who was the hero? What was the meaning of the sacrifice? Where could any redemption be found? Others turned to Biblical motifs, linking the alleviation of oppression with the Exodus theme, and thus with freedom. We have done this before, in the time of the American Civil War, and more recently the civil rights movement under Martin Luther King in the sixties, we shall overcome. But in this instance who needed to be liberated or set free? Who were the oppressors?

Who or what was being oppressed? And where was the promised land?

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Hodgson has written that American has been both an enterprise and a frontier. But what was the enterprise this time, and what constituted the frontier? In the absence of compelling, overarching ways of coming to terms with the event, we turn to private interpretations, most of which, I suspect, derive 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 on the Right. Rosenau and Holsti have told us much more about this spectra of opinion. But no single version explained all of it. And what the combination of

interpretation seemed most to exhibit is that divisiveness, in Rosenau's and Holsti's words, the divisiveness, the lack of coherence, that the event spells, that's also a word that's taken from the cover of Guenther Lewy's book, An Inside Look at America's Most Divisive War.

Because there had been no previous American story that was able to include Vietnam as one of its chapters, there was no easy way to make it intelligible. After Vietnam, it is extremely difficult to even discern the plot, or to know who the primary cast of characters is. The event stimulated profound soul-searching without providing evident means of articulating the same. It was accompanied by some sense of corporate guilt, but guilt on the whole remains inarticulate and unspecified. We turn to the 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, and the veteran responds, "But we are not your enemy, the enemy is the war." Strangely, in the aftermath, the tendencies have gone in two clear directions. We witnessed the rise of privatism, as we have called it, and we have seen the birth

of the small is beautiful syndrome. The former is illustrated in the picture of the American soldier in Vietnam, listening, via transistor, to the tape of the Beatle song, "Let It Be". The latter, 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 other limits. The American story to this point cannot comprehend the new components of contemporary life. We have encountered too many elements that can't easily be fitted in.

Neither Asian nor Third Worlds yield easily to American assimilation.

And following Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and 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 without being quite sure whether it has causes, or whether it is rather a projection of our own corporate, psychic limits. The war itself became the enemy, and quickly assumed monstrous proportions, and also the reality of the demonic. Appropriately, many of the portrayals that returning veterans have supplied are surrealistic in temper and

orientation. In psychoanalytic terms, it is as if the father has been killed, the realm of the super-ego has been severely shattered, and in many cases, eliminated. And in the aftermath, as a recent editorial in the Los Angeles Times has put it, 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, to easy answers, simple-minded truths, and I am referring to the Jim Joneses and their like, a phenomenon that is becoming larger in our society.

I perceive Vietnam as a ritual. It was an event, an act, a profound drama, a tragedy, but previous rituals in American history, even tragic events, have been accompanied by a myth, that is, by an explanatory story. In the Vietnam situation, the ritual becomes extremely disconcerting, because it gives expression to a broken myth. Indeed, to 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, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. The painful irony is that it was on behalf of this story that the

leadership of our country sent troops to Vietnam in the first place. But in the midst of that experience, while the aspirations remained, the story became a fiction. Thus Vietnam becomes the event by which the 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, and we see its ramifications in the breakdowns of institutional structures in government, in education, throughout our corporate life, and perhaps, most eloquently, in what has been happening to the American family.

And the most difficult problem by far is that it is in this atomistic, fragmented world that the impact of Vietnam is being received. It is within the world of discrete and competing particles that the responses are being enunciated. This is difficult because atomistic, fragmented worlds have only atomistic and fragmented means of response. The mood to which I refer is captured in the last sentence of Fred Downs' eloquent paper, "We went towar in a jet, returned in a jet, and were spread across the nation as individuals, with no sense of unity. Because that individualism is all we had, we kept it."

But my own last line is borrowed from Michael Heer's book, Dispatches. As he is getting ready to leave Vietnam, after the military hostilities have ceased, he looks back, and he sees some North Vietnamese soldiers sitting by the Da Nang river, and he recognizes that someday there will be other people sitting there, and they will be talking about the war days. And then Michael Heer adds, "Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam. We've all been there."

That's the end of that. And I think we'll just take these comments in order here, and discuss matters among ourselves. Do you want to go now?

PIEDISCALZI: I almost feel we should stop and discuss your comments, Walter, this, make it awfully disconnected.

Like you, I have felt it necessary to combine reactions to what has been transpiring here and also some thoughts I had on the religious situation. One thing that has become very evident to me from participating in this conference, in which Vietnam is still so divisive, and how we have been able to often dialogue because of that divisiveness. And at the risk of being terribly oversimple, I'd like to say, I'd say that I've seen two factions here. One centering

around Professor Lewy, and the rest of us who, out of our moral indignation and our participation in protest against our involvement in Vietnam, constantly coming out with our anger again and attacking him for his conclusions. And often I have had to bite my tongue because I have not wanted to yell out that whitewashing guilt does not solve the problem. On the other hand, a great deal of our moral indignation does not solve the problem either. And I feel that somehow we must find a bridge, a way of communicating with each other, so that we hear each other, and understand each other. I find it difficult to put this into words, but it's the experience out of our time together here which leads me to feel that we still need a great deal of healing. And with all due respect to you, Professor Lewy, I just don't see that healing coming from whitewashing our involvement or our actions, nor does it come from our on the other hand yelling at you, or trying to relive all of the moral indignation that we experienced a few years back.

I feel that, at the risk of being awfully preachery, that pulling a few lines out of Bhagavad Gita, and using them just partially out of context might be of help to us. These are some

words that Krishna addressed to Arjuna, and his task was to confront with non-attachment, and to be brave and firm without hatred. And these words have come back to me over and over again as we have talked, and tried to express our views with each other here.

My second reaction, personal, is the profound gratitude I have for the contribution which Fred and Meshad have made. Like most Americans, I have participated in the great repression, and have gone my merry way of trying to reconstitute my own life, and have been ignorant of and indifferent to the plight of the Vietnam vet. And here I kept thinking of a Biblical image, and that is the image that comes from second Isaiah, of the bruised reed being our Messiah. I think that in the Biblical context of that word, the way in which second Isaiah used it, and I think the way in which probably the material in first Isaiah might be interpreted, you have served as our anointed one here, to bring us back to reality, and to provide for us a spirit, and probably the foundation for the bridge I was talking about. For out of your hurts and out of all that you have tried to reconstruct, you have expressed the least anger here. You have confronted us, but ^{with,} I think, the bravery and

the non-attachment that I find in Krishna's words to Arjuna. And I am very grateful for that, and I, I kept thinking last evening of your remarks at the cocktail hour, and I wish you had said them to us, when in that very, very heated debate about whether there were bunkers or not, and the meaning of those bunkers, your comment was, "Well, anybody who had been there in combat knew that after all those years of war in Vietnam, even long before we ever appeared, people had to build bunkers, just to defend themselves, and to survive." And this kind of knowledge, which we needed and deal with, in interpreting what we argue about, and here again, we are projecting in the heat of our argument, if you'll, again, a lot of unresolved conflict, rather than dealing with some of the concrete information that you have provided us.

The next point I would like to make is I feel it is important to view Vietnam systemically and organically as a part of our history. I look at it more as a symptomatic event, as something that's been going on for a long time, and that represents a transition and some dramatic changes in the civic, civil religion of our nation, our whole value system, and that to lift it out as something unique

is to remove ourselves from reality. But this is something that's been going on for a long time, and we must look at our total history. And again, after listening to Fred and Meshad, my mind went wandering, not only just to American history, but to Western history, very much brought to mind De Rougemont's book on love in the Western world, and where De Rougemont traces our love of war to what he calls an eighth-century heresy, which we adopted when we somehow took on a Manichaeian approach to life, in where unrequited love and death and destruction become our ultimate values. And it's very interesting, the reason why this came to mind is because what I heard you and Meshad describe with such vividness, yet which brought such pain to myself, was the way in which the Vietnam veteran feels so helpless and so powerless. And how De Rougemont in his book on love in the Western world begins to trace this for us. And he says the way in which we changed warfare in World War I and followed through in World War II, it seems to have come to a culmination now, to Vietnam conflict, is the way in which the military personnel were reduced more and more to, to use your word, tools, and tools who did not experience any sense of fulfillment, but came

back feeling completely impotent. And I certainly get that message, and maybe you can correct it, but the sense of impotence. And this is the reason why I began thinking again about De Rougemont's book in our, I mean, if we are going to look at this historically, one could say within the context of American history, but then also within Western history, and to test again De Rougemont's thesis that we have made a covenant, or a pact, with the Manichaeian heresy, which worships unrequited love and death.

One other set of comments. I'd like to say that Deerhunter has helped me, also dramatically, see some of the historical context in which we must look at Vietnam. And I think particularly of the opening scene of the firing furnace, and the eventual linking of that fiery furnace with the flamethrowers in Vietnam, and unlike other members here, it seems to me that I see this as a social criticism and an attempt to link what happened in Vietnam with what is happening right here, and which is a culmination of something that we've been building up to for a long time. Also I would link the way in which the scenes of the steel mills, and how they have raped the beauty of the mountains of Pennsylvania, with our raping of the

land in Vietnam. This was not in the film, but I would also link Ford putting the Pinto on the market with a fiery gas tank. And some of the explosions I would link then also with what happened in Vietnam.

Whenever I walk through the neighborhood in which I grew up in Chicago, in the Lawndale district, which looks to me now like some of the areas of Normandy, I walked through shortly after the Second World War. I link that also with what we have done, or did in Vietnam. That we have, many of these things we have done to ourselves here, and we have then projected them out on the larger world. We need to come to understand this destructiveness which is within our corporate life and is seen best, or probably most dramatically, in a scene from a movie where you see the mills and then the flame-throwers in Vietnam.

I can, just for a moment, refer also to Erik Ericson, who in his book, Dimensions of a New Identity, which was the 1973 Jefferson lectures, in talking about our identity, points out that it, and says that if we did not have the American Indian, and if we did not have the Negro, we would have had to invent them, because

of the negative elements in our identity, which in forming the new American character, there were many negativities which we had to repress. But in repressing them we still had to find a way of dealing with them. And the way we did it was making the Indians and the Negro scapegoats. And I think, in light, Erikson is not going to say this, but in light of what he says in the latter part of the book, that we have now extended this to the Orient. And here I come back to Murray Fromson's point, underscored. I feel that our anti-Asiatic hostility may be linked to this negative identity in what we are trying to work out as we now find out that we no longer have a West Coast to conquer, or there is no longer the rising sun here, or the setting sun, but we have to find a new way of defining our identity now. And it's in this context I would relate it.

Now, finally, I see three areas in which religious, the religious communities and the Vietnam event interacted. And I'd just like to point them out. First, the traditional and mainline religious communities, which I felt did not have much of an impact, and were not touched very deeply by the Vietnam events. And they

too participate greatly in the great, I would call repression, or a return to the privatization that we have talked about, and impetus on individual salvation and escaping the corporate issues of our day, corporate religious and moral issues of our day. However, within these traditional communities, I would like to point out, the rebellious, prophetic minorities. If I could just lift out three people, the late Rabbi Heschel, the Berrigan brothers, and William Sloane Coffin. These are just three of, we could just multiply these, are the minority who within the traditional religious community tried to point out our involvement in the evil of the Vietnam situation, tried to call us to a new approach to the whole problem. And then the other group are the, what I call the prophetic minority outside the traditional religions, who come out of our new, called humanist, youth, who have rejected traditional religious institutions, but have re-incorporated the prophetic movement within their protest in their experiments to build a new life. And I feel that this is where we are today, is with these two groups still in tension, and we are still in the point, we still find a point at which we can dialogue and communicate and seek

some sort of reformation and change.

And finally, one other point is to, and there I will end now. I have been involved in public education, religious studies, for several years, and one thing that struck me is that shortly after the Second World War we had the great crusade to re-introduce spiritual values into American education. And if you remember the, this was also the period when we put "In God We Trust" on our coins, and several other pious acts. And after Vietnam, we've had a tremendous emphasis now on what's called moral education and values clarification. And at the risk of being terribly oversimple, I'd like to say that both of these are the adult, both these movements, these calls for this re-introduction of spiritual values, and now moral education and values clarification, at one level, is an attempt for the adult community to cop out. Somehow the dream there and the wish is that somehow^{if}/we provide proper education for our young people, they will straighten out this screwed-up world when they become adults. And this is a way of avoiding responsibility for saying the only way we are going to solve these problems is, first of all, to come to grips with ourselves and learn how we

create these problems, and then seek to solve them. And in this sense I, it may be an impact or a result of Vietnam in this country is a, once again the adult community turning to a school system as cop-out, rather than an attempt to face squarely our problems.

This is all. *End of Predicament*

COMSTOCK: I want to react further, and I think in the same vein as Nicholas, to the theme, impact of Vietnam. So my main point is not anything unusual, because I don't think there is anything really new to say about this. But I would suggest that through the Vietnam experience, we are witnessing and indeed participating in, a serious dissolution of the synthesis of religious and political values that has characterized America. I think all great civilizations have such a synthesis, having by religion, I mean pointing at something transcendent, something more than our ordinary experience. But usually this is combined and connected with the political order, and the religious gives force to the political order, but also hopes to transform it and keep it in a moral direction. Well, I am suggesting that that synthesis is disintegrating, and that Vietnam was the kind of event ^{through?} to which it became evident. I don't believe that

Vietnam caused it, but I believe that Vietnam brought it to the surface, so that we can no longer doubt it. Another way of saying this point, is that America's civil religion has been seriously weakened through the Vietnam experience. Now, this American synthesis, I think, had its own peculiar aspects to it, which I approve of. And I see the dissolution of it with sadness. On the one hand, the American ideology supported a humanistic individualism. Perhaps never before has a great civilization encouraged of its members the fact that they had an individual worth, self-contained and in themselves. I think this is a heritage of the Enlightenment, of the self-sufficient individual, but it's practically an axiom, an a priori assumption of every American, he breathes it with his, in his family and in his school, that he is important as an individual. But then what is so intriguing is that this individualistic value system was somehow to be connected to a political commonwealth, that we were not only individuals, but also citizens. In religious terms, we sought private salvation and also the kingdom of God on earth. And these two were not to be contradictory, but somehow each would reinforce the other. Now, through the Vietnam experience, we have

seen a growing lack of confidence in the value and integrity of the commonwealth ideal. Something happened there at Vietnam. I was greatly moved by Thursday night, and Shad Meshad and Frederick Downs, as they shared their experiences, and I couldn't help thinking of the line in King Lear, where King Lear has looked at various kinds of suffering and then suddenly he says, "This is the thing itself." And I think Vietnam is the thing itself. It's hard to put it into words, because all words get in the way, but I felt a little bit on Thursday that I, I don't think I actually experienced it in fullness, and the speakers didn't suggest that. But I felt I had a touch of it.

Now, out of Vietnam thing we have this lack of confidence in government. We know the points the government lied. And we are, always felt that while there might be some duplicity in government, that on fundamental issues we all participated in the decision-making process. But now we were being led and lied to in order that the elite that knew better than the people could guide the people in this difficult way. And I think that's carrying over now, if I might just throw in a, you know, these things exacerbate,

the atomic energy thing, we were absolutely assured there were no danger, now, as danger has emerged, we are being told well, we misunderstood. Of course there is some minor danger, but that's part of being alive. If you take an airplane ride, of course you might crash, so if you live near an atomic plant, it's just part of being alive, to take these risks. But we all have the feeling that we are, that some of us are being made into sacrificial goats for the rest of us. And it leads to a lack of confidence, and that's all I'm saying, a lack of faith, a lack of trust any longer in the government. And that's the disintegration, then, of the commonwealth ideal.

The war was cruel and ruthless. In Professor Lewy's presentation on Thursday, my own reaction to it is this. I was greatly impressed by the intelligence and organization of the material, but to my thinking it is irrelevant, because it isn't an issue of checking in a book whether the Vietnam war corresponded to some international ideal of what a just war should be. I am quite ready, you know, to entertain the hypothesis that there were other wars that perhaps were more unjust, and that in many ways the

American Army in Vietnam conformed to international law in the main. To me it doesn't matter. It isn't a matter of legalistically knowing whether I can defend myself with an argument of that type. The devastated land, the deaths, and so on, it's a feeling against war. And I suppose that the Vietnam experience simply, you know, brought that to a head. And so that I don't think it's actually a rational statement, judgment. It's, to me values have an emotional or a deeper layer. And if you see an atrocity like an ax murder, you don't want someone to mitigate it and explain all the details of why it's not as bad as it seems. Your indignation is there, and I think that's what happened to many Americans.

The draft also was unjust, as was brought out, and thus giving a sense of cynicism when one knows that some go and others don't, and how easy it was to not go if you had the right influence. So all of this has diminished the commonwealth ideal. And I think we're falling back more fully, then, on the individualistic norm. And this can have two forms. Either it's an ideal, that is, you still mean by the individual some person of integrity and so on, but perhaps more commonly what's happening is that this falls into

a hedonistic and narcissistic repudiation of all values.

And various words have been used. Walter used the word surrealistic, and I'd like to introduce the word nihilism. We are seeing the emergence of a kind of nihilism, which I define to mean the retrenchment and finally the dissolution of any values at all. We could, you know, trace it, the transcendent, that is, faith in religion diminishes, that has been going on before Vietnam. But the reason it didn't seem to be a crisis is because we still had this sense of value in the American ideal, God and country. And now this goes. So we fall back on ethnic values. And familial kinship systems. And if those go, then of course we fall back on the individual himself, but who or what is he? A nihilistic nothing, or some kind of source of new values.

Two interesting movies have, of recent times on the Vietnam experience are Who Will Stop the Rain and The Deer Hunter. Now, Who Will Stop the Rain used the metaphor of heroin. The hero, a Vietnam soldier about to come back to the States, becomes obsessed with a sense of nihilism, the surrealism comes in, he had heard, and I don't know if this ever happened or not, the government was ordered

to strafe elephants, because they are considered to have some value in transportation. And it suddenly came to him that a world in which you were supposed to strafe elephants is a world without meaning. And so the heroin, then he decides to become a heroin carrier, a symbol of the loss and dissolution of values. And The Deer Hunter has an even more powerful metaphor, of course, in Russian roulette. Whereby life is reduced to this level, and there seems to be no way out, that the war itself has produced this sense. So we are experiencing these absurdist, nihilistic elements, although, by the way I'd also in passing say that in The Deer Hunter, the first hour, stressing an ethnic community, and I think it's important that it's an ethnic community, that if there is any value left, it is in those ethnic values. But what you don't see is anything about the, what I call the political order. I mean, the American values that transcend the ethnic, the melting pot idea. You are put back into either ethnic values or the nihilism of Russian roulette.

So Vietnam has caused us to lose confidence in the integrity of our way of life. It's hard to predict the future.

We may proceed further into nihilism, we do see many evidences of the growth of individualistic religion, that is to say, religion that no longer connects with the political order, but simply seeks to give the individual private salvation. And this is becoming a source of meaning to a great many.

On the other hand, there could be a renaissance of the commonwealth or kingdom ideal. I have, one of the things I have lost in recent years is my belief in irresistible trends. So I no longer believe that we are either moving toward utopia or necessarily moving toward the final holocaust. Things can be reversed. The darkest hours, even in the past, the people in the Renaissance complained of nihilism. Luther thought it was the end of the world. He couldn't imagine the world being more corrupt than it was during his day, and he expected the end of the world in a few years. But there are always reversals and new opportunities for optimistic activity, and I think it is a possibility now, although at the moment the outside explicit trends do seem to be moving in a negative direction.

What is certain to me is that Vietnam was a crucial moral

event in our culture, a symptom of an impending crisis. Now, a crisis may either point to death, but it also is the point at which a patient may return to health. So I am not therefore necessarily announcing doom. But I am saying that a significant readjustment in the American synthesis of individual and political values is in process, the results of which are not yet clear. *end of Comstock*

HAMMOND: In one sense I guess I am last on the program, and I could claim that everything had been said that I had intended to say.

Comstock's comments, in fact, do permit me the luxury of skipping through my notes and not duplicate some of the points that he made. To a lesser extent that's true also of Nick's comments. But let me start with an analogue, if I may. There is a remarkable finding in the survey data about religious attitudes, which makes it very clear that World War II was a kind of watershed, so that if you asked churchgoers -- this has been done most often with Christians, if you ask churchgoers questions like do they believe in the divinity of Christ, do they believe in the Trinity, do they believe that God exists, and any orthodox standard items that are associated with Christian theology, you will find that people who became adults

before World War II share an agreement about these items, of about three out of four, seventy-five per cent. It doesn't matter how much, excuse me, it doesn't matter how old they are, as long as they were adults before World War II, whereas people who became adult after World War II are about three out of four in disagreement, or in agreement with themselves against these particular items. That is to say, in simple one-sentence, the matter of orthodoxy in Christianity became a non-issue with World War II. I think that it's probably going to be the case that surveys five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five and fifty years down the road will show that the Vietnam period is a comparable kind of watershed, spilling over not into something like Christian orthodoxy. It won't have very much in the way of cognitive or intellectual elements about it at all, but will be more on the order that Comstock has talked about here as the loss of faith in American institutions.

What I want to say next is that this watershed period did not burst forth on a clean slate. There were several signs of volatility. And as one of my friends quips, the decade of the sixties began in 1958. In 1958 was the peaking of church attendance

in this country. It's gone downhill ever since. It is the peaking of the birthrate in this country. People began having fewer children in 1958. The civil-rights movement had formed by this time, and within a three or four or five-year period, not only had it formed, but it had developed a remarkable leadership, a remarkable agenda, a remarkable strategy, and a notorious record of successes.

The silent decade of the fifties, so-called then, I am suggesting might be thought of as a kind of period of exhaustion, of quietude, of no momentous events, but the decade of the sixties, with all due respect to how hard it is to date it, bursts forth on the scene filled with a possible optimism beyond compare. And Vietnam sets in, and demolishes that optimism. So whatever else might be said about the moral and spiritual consequences of Vietnam must be said in this context, that it occurred when it did.

For one aphorism I can offer the fact that Catch 22, a novel of enormous impact and popularity, was written about World War II during the Korean war, but was popular in Vietnam, during the Vietnam period. This sense of nihilism, as we have heard it said.

Let me point out, however, that if we talk about a drop in the birthrate, starting in 1958, we are not talking about the fact that everybody cuts down five per cent in the number of children he has. We are talking about decisions that are being made by a very age-specific cohort of people. When we talk about the decline in church attendance, we are not talking about the fact that everybody stops going at a five or ten-per-cent rate less than he used to go. We are talking about the fact that everybody in a certain age cohort no longer goes to church, or never affiliates. Or steps over the threshold of a church. That is to say, what in statistical terms always appears to be a partial movement, is in fact a much greater movement among specific cohorts of people. And so it is in Vietnam. That there were some people for whom that was a totally different experience from what it could ever have been for people certainly older than they, and to a certain extent people much younger than they.

I am trying to piece together, then, the idea that here was a period of time with reasons for optimism about civil rights, reasons for optimism about the Peace Corps, reasons for optimism

about the democratization of higher education. Young people in each of these events, each of these movements, young people were the agents, and it is their responses to those events which we need to pay attention to especially. People coming of age during the late fifties, early sixties, and on through the next ten or twelve years. Those people, incidentally, are now in their early thirties. And I think that one can still see the age-specific or cohort effect here. At least these people in that age cohort had an intensified reaction to the events going on around them.

I want to identify two ways that it seems to me this intensified reaction shows up in the area of religion and moral values, both of which have been touched on. One of these, it seems to me, is that all religions became suspect to this cohort. And by making all religions suspect, any religion becomes plausible. And so we had the most amazing bursting forth of esoteric religious movements as a response, I am suggesting, to Vietnam. Not having much to do at all with the substance or content or theology of these movements, but owing, perhaps, to their very diversity, their very esoteric quality. Moreover, the features about them that strike me,

at least, as most significant, is the fact that they tend to have not just a bizarre theology, perhaps, and an off-beat doctrine, but they include a kind of communalism, a kind of community, a kind of emotional quality. The rediscoverance of ethnicity is another expression of this. But both, not both, all of them seem to me essentially to downplay theology. They are anti-intellectual in that sense in, even as they are anti-establishment. The second impact that I would point to flowing from this intensified reaction of people of a certain age, as a result of Vietnam, is the idea of a loss in, a loss of faith in the American civil religion. People debate whether there is a civil religion, if so, what in the world it is. But if it's anything, it seems to me one can operationalize it as follows. It is a kind of religion which allows a person to be a good citizen and a good believer at the same time. That there is no contradiction between what one believes to be true about the transcendent realm and what one is encouraged to believe about one's nation or country. Like the proverbial goldfish, who is believed to have water as the very last thing he is likely to think about, our civil religion was almost the last thing we were prepared to

think about until it was exposed by the events of Vietnam. We had been immersed in it to such a degree, as American citizens, yesterday the discussion came up about the notion of innocence. Well, part of what is meant by being civilly religious in America is to be innocent about what America does. We were innocent about the Manifest Destiny. We were innocent about the idea of policing the world. We were innocent about the idea that we could fight Godless Communism, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And so one of the striking religio-moral consequences, it seems to me, of the Vietnam war, is the identification and now remarkable interest in civil religion.

Related to that, seems to me to be the continued, remarkably continued dropoff of voters at the polls. Last week in Los Angeles, fourteen per cent of the electorate went to vote in the city elections, at the very first time they had to respond after post-Prop 13. The election, fourteen per cent. I mean, America has always gone to the polls at a lesser rate than most other industrial countries, but it seems to be continuing to decline. I might also point out that the fascination that American showed with Watergate seems to me to

be understandable in these terms. Who was going to claim that the events of Watergate were all that serious? Why all the attention paid to it, then, unless it is a kind of a morality play, being played out, a way to try and cleanse the soul. For whatever else it might have been worth, it also just, in case somebody wants to argue this point, it seems to me that the return of interest to a Marxian analysis is partly a reflection of this loss of innocence as we have lost the faith in American civil religion.

That concludes my comments, and I hope that--

End of Summary

CAPPS: I think Harry had his hand up first.

ASHMORE: Well, I think that it might be more appropriate for me to say whatever I am going to say here, than as a part of the summary. I don't want to disrupt your schedule. I had some observations that relate not only to what I have heard here, but to the prior investigation that's been going on at the Center in this area, with Walter's original paper. Some of you may have seen a rebuttal that I wrote in which I took issue with him, some of his fundamental propositions.

Basically, I think the difference between Walter and me is my skepticism that it's possible to treat with Vietnam as a separate

phenomenon, with an almost apocalyptic cast to it. I think it's a mistake to try to treat it that way, because it seems to me it then distorts the meaning of Vietnam in the context in which it certainly has had a profound impact on American society that these gentlemen have been citing here today in terms of the civil religion.

Perhaps I ought to state my own position first, and I will do it by quoting Frances Fitzgerald, who wrote a notable book on Vietnam called Fire in the Lake. This quotation is from a current writing of hers which is an analysis of the influence on secondary school history texts over a long period of time. It's not exclusively about Vietnam. And in it, she comes to this conclusion:

"The real divisions in American society, lie not between Republicans and Democrats, or conservatives and liberals, but among those groups one might call progressives, fundamentalists, and mandarins. These groups are not just political entities, but whole cultures, as different from each other as the Zuni and the Kwakiutl. The progressives are children of Rousseau, who believe in the egalitarian society, in the perfection of quote, "nature," and in the perfectibility of man through education or a change of consciousness.

The fundamentalists believe in God, not in man. They believe that man and society can survive only by the strictest obedience to a single, permanent set of truths, laws, and values. The mandarins are temperamental agnostics who believe nonetheless in meritocracy and the power of the intellect and in the value of science and the cultural tradition."

I find it sort of hard to identify anybody who comes out of the South, as I do, as a mandarin, but I think my view is that of the mandarin as described here. And in that context, it seems to me, to take up in order the questions we've dealt with here, sometimes at the expense of the purpose of the convocation, meeting, first of all the question of over-all policy that brought us into Vietnam. It seems to me that you cannot see our entry there without taking into account the fact that at the end of World War II, we created a policy of containment against the Soviet Union and China. We drew a line, and bolstered by NATO in Europe, brought it round all through the Middle East, finally into Korea, Taiwan, and the bastion of this in the south was in Southeast Asia. The French held that line for awhile, then collapsed and the decision was faced in Washington as

to whether or not the United States should intervene. I think it's perfectly clear to everyone in retrospect that there was some basically mistaken judgments in creating that policy. The great one that we now know was the assumption that there was a Communist monolith that included China, and the Soviet Union. We now know that the, that was not the case, the monolith has disintegrated. But in the context at that time, which was the only time and only way in which I think we fairly can make a moral judgment, I find it very difficult to condemn the policy-makers who reached the conclusion that this was a necessary policy. Certainly I would agree that many of them were motivated by what has been called the new Romanism, the notion that the United States had to take advantage of the opportunity to impose its own culture everywhere in the world. I am sure there were also people involved in that decision-making process who thought in the highest moral terms that the United States, having the only power left in a shattered world, at the end of World War II, had an obligation to play policeman, had an obligation to protect the people against invasion, and subversion, and that, it seems to me, was the moral judgment.

Now, I wouldn't sort these motives out. I don't think it's possible to do it. By the time of our actual intervention in Vietnam, if I may be personal about this, because I was involved as time went on, I wasn't paying much attention to it. I think that my view was that of most Americans, liberal or otherwise. We, by that time, had become accustomed to having various kinds of interventions around that perimeter, not necessarily with troops, but with military advisers, with arming people that were holding the line. We had depended on the French. The French were defeated. The French pulled out. Then what do we do? Well, we went in with a small group of advisers, and we all know, tried to prop up the regime in the South, even tried to create a regime there, as we now know, looking at it. I didn't pay much attention to that, and I think my experience was about like everybody else's. When the war became forcibly to my attention, as it escalated, I began to believe from the very outset that it was the wrong war being fought in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. That was not a moral judgment. Within the strategic concept as I saw it, it seemed to me to be a mistake. I also, having come to that point of view, felt some obligation on my own, if I had

an opportunity, to try to do whatever I could to get it stopped. The Center by that time was engaged in putting together an international convocation in Geneva, an opportunity opened for somebody to go to Hanoi. I went, along with Bill Baggs, the editor of the Miami News, who was a fellow board member of mine. The Soviet Union and the French arranged for us to get an audience with Ho Chi Minh. We went to the State Department and explained that we had this opportunity, that we were going there, not with any notion that we could negotiate, but that we were reporters, and we could come back and tell them what kind of proposition, if any, might be forthcoming from the North. So with the full approval of the State Department, and we assumed their support, we made the journey out there secretly, we did see Ho Chi Minh. I suppose we were the last establishmentarian Americans to see him alive, and the first he'd seen in a long time. And I think he was talking to Lyndon Johnson and Dean Rusk through us. That's the assumption we had. We came back to Washington and delivered the message that he was willing to make important concessions in the terms on which he would agree to begin negotiating. He was backing off from some of the public

positions he had taken before. He was accepting some of the conditions that had been set by our people for negotiation. In the State Department, we wrote, it was cleared by everybody there, a reply to Ho Chi Minh, and sent it back through a channel which was open, which was a very conciliatory reply. And left Washington believing that the government was moving toward negotiations, fairly confident that it would follow that the official negotiation could begin.

We found out later that at the same time we were doing this in the State Department, Johnson in the White House was sending a message to Moscow, hard-line message, which canceled out this conciliatory reply that we were making. We found this out some time later, when the Johnson reply was released in Hanoi. And at that point we decided that this was an act of duplicity, and that we should blow the whistle, and we did. We published an account in Center Magazine which led all the newspapers in the country, the next morning. This resulted in our being denounced by a white paper from the State Department, and a complete denial that this channel that we had had any significance. Nevertheless, the channel remained open, and as the war came to a boil with protest in this country, we

went back a second time to Hanoi. And this time again with the blessing and support of the State Department. We were in Hanoi at the time Johnson made the surprise announcement that he was not going to run for re-election, and pulled back the bomb line. And we actually brought back this time the first response from Hanoi that led to the meeting in Paris. But by the time we got back to the State Department, we became convinced that this again was an act of duplicity, because what was happening was, they were using the beginning of the negotiation in Paris to deflate the protest movement in the United States, but they were putting so many conditions on it, that they were rejecting really any possibility of making any forward movement. It confirmed the belief that we had that Johnson privately was committed to a military resolution, with the support of about everybody in the government. That's about the time McNamara went out. But that he was committed to a military resolution, wouldn't come off of it, and therefore this remark we heard on tape yesterday quoting Isaiah about coming to the table and let us reason together, was an act of deliberate duplicity. And so we wrote a book, which was called Mission to Hanoi, and the

subtitle was, "A Chronicle of Doubledealing in High Places,"
in which we spell all this out. The book was rushed into print,
published the day before the Democratic National Convention,
assembled in Chicago, the children's crusade ran into Mayor Daley's
troopers, the book was never heard of, and the issues were all lost
in the great turmoil that followed during that election. My judgment
in that case is a moral one, and I think the position of the government
was indefensible. The duplicity that was being practiced, it seemed
to me, were, as some of these gentlemen here have said, destructive of
the civil religion. I think democracy, any kind of functioning
democracy, is basically an act of mutual faith between the governors
and the governed. And once that faith is betrayed, as it was in
this case, then certainly damage is going to result and has resulted.
Now that's the policy level.

The second question that we've talked about here and
devoted a lot of time to, is the internal character of the war in
Vietnam. Here I have a basic difference with everybody except the
two veterans. I, first of all, think there was a nother moral
judgment to be made in that connection, and I share their feeling

which they eloquently expressed. I think the fact that the United States in this instance, for the first time in its history, relegated all of the fighting, all of the combat, all of the killing, to the poor, to the blacks and the redneck whites, the people who were without influence, while at the same time the children of the middle class were able to sit the war out, anybody who was relatively affluent could stay out of the war, one way or the other, by staying in college or going to Canada, and that the middle-class parents of these young people, who were directly involved, whatever their view of the merit of the case, supported them in it. So that seems to me to be a treatment that finally resulted in the combat being confined almost exclusively to these veterans that we heard from. Then the neglect, if not the hostility, that they have encountered since the war seem to me to be morally indefensible.

Aside from that, I do not believe that the combat experience in Vietnam was in any significant way different from that I had in World War II. My enemies weren't gooks or dinks, they were krauts, they had blue eyes and blond hair, but we didn't think well of them. They were shooting at us. There were numerous atrocities on both

sides, as there would be in any war. To make a moral judgment that somehow the prosecution of the war by the Americans in Vietnam was morally indefensible, while the prosecution of the war by their enemy was morally defensible is beyond any rational means I can handle. For example, just take the one thing that shocks everybody here, that created so much attention, firing the hooches and burning out the civilians. How do you make a moral judgment? A guerrilla war, which is the war that was waged by the North, and properly so, because it was the only kind they could wage, based on the strategic principle that your soldier is like fish swimming in the sea, the sea is a people. Well, there is no way then for anybody to fight that soldier and avoid the sea. So who, how do you make the moral judgment? Is it morally wrong for civilians to get killed in the process of trying to get these guerrillas? Or is it morally wrong for the guerrillas to use the people as a shield? Particularly when we know that in all, not in all cases, but in many cases, the people being used as a shield were not there because they sympathized with the guerrillas, but because they were being coerced into being there. So it seems to me this whole area of moral judgment is beyond

anybody's rational capacity. I don't think the war was different in that sense.

What was different is what's been said here, and that's the impact, which is what we were trying to talk about. On the American society as a whole. I agree with the statements that have been made here about the raveling of the civil religion, The civil religion, whatever we may disagree about the exact definition of it, was certainly a set of shared values that ordered the community. And that has been badly shattered.

We heard a lot about the result, as to whether it be good or bad, as to whether it is some kind of a awakening, striking the scales from the eyes of the people. I don't see that. I think we make a mistake when we talk about American public opinion as though American public opinion in general reflects the controversy that goes on almost exclusively within the intellectual community. As indeed the Vietnam war protest, in my judgment, was confined almost primarily until the very end, when it became general, to the intellectual community. And the moral elements of the protest were,

I think, almost exclusively in the intellectual community, and not outside. And those people on the outside and the general population who came to oppose the war did so for entirely different set of reasons, mainly the belief that we couldn't win it, and it was costing too much, and was too destructive. So theirs was a kind, that opposition was essentially non-ideological.

Now, finally, there has been a good deal of talk about privatism as a result of this, which seems to me to be the most conspicuous manifestation of the altered values coming in the wake of the disintegration, decline, of the civil religion. I was struck by Dick Flacks' statement that he can see admitting that there were negative qualities to this narcissistic aspect of this, but the positive result, in his judgment, which would be supported by others here, I think, would be that at least this kind of withdrawal militates against any further military venturing. Privatism, turning inward, people not going to make a sacrifice, not going to go to war, they're not going to let their sons go, they are not going to, they are going to protest taxes to support the military establishment. It falls down at that point. I don't see

any protest against the continuing escalating cost of maintaining the military establishment. What there does turn out to be is a turning away from any demand by government which is uncomfortable, whether it be taxes or whether it be, for example, in the terms of humanitarian reform, which most people here would support, most notably the desegregation of the public school systems in the cities outside the South. The anti-busing movement in a place like Los Angeles, is a rejection of any kind of responsibility to do anything that requires any kind of sacrifice, including putting your own child on a bus. That seems to me to be a manifestation of privatism, which is, I think, unhealthy, and inescapably linked to the resistance to service in any kind of military capacity. So what I have heard here, it seems to me, in summary, Walter, if this is a summary, demonstrates the validity of Frances Fitzgerald's diagnosis. The reason we haven't had much communication is because these three general classifications are fairly well fixed, and people do respond with a deep emotional, deep emotion to Vietnam. It's misphrased that, it's become a thing by itself. Vietnam as a symbol, I think was tremendously important in these

developments. I agree with what you said here. It revealed what was happening and had been going on for a long time. I think the decline, for example, you talk about the family, the decline of the family. Well, that became evident in my own generation, when divorce for the first time became accepted. Up till that time, it was permitted but generally condemned. By the time my generation came along and, different from the generation that preceded it, it became a kind of a standard and accepted practice. So today I am sure that a considerable majority of my contemporaries have been divorced at least once. This is sort of the common practice at least in the middle class.

So there you are. I don 't know that this is a summary. I think this has been a useful exchange. I'd be curious to know if anybody would say that his own moral judgment that he came here with has been altered in any, in any real respect, as a result of the exchange here.

CAPPS: I am in a quandary at the moment. There are about five people who would like to speak, but we haven't had a break, and I am not sure we can all go till twelve-thirty without taking about five

minutes to stand up and stretch. Can we do that?

BREAK

Continuation of meeting
April 7, 1979 am

CAPPS: We have about five or six folks now who, probably more, who have asked to speak. So what we're doing at this point is whatever else we need to do before we can conclude before twelve-thirty.

We have not yet had responses to the presentations that were made this morning, and we are also sort of midway into the last session of the conference, which is called findings. Mike Lewis has to leave, probably should have left by now. We'll ask him to make the first statement, then I have a list of others on whom I'll call.

LEWIS: Fine. Thank you. First of all, I should say these are my own personal reactions to the conference. I don't presume that they represent any kind of a group consensus.

Before I talk about the four or five findings or opinions that I do have, I think I'd like to explain a little bit where I'm coming from. I am not a researcher of the Vietnam war, I'm not a writer of the Vietnam war--

GRAHAM: Mike, I think you have to wait until we have some quiet. I can't hear at this end, anyway.

CAPPS: Maybe we, could we hold off on the conversation over there till--O.K., Mike.

LEWIS: O.K. I am not a writer about the war, or a researcher about the war, I wasn't a correspondent during the war, and unlike Fred Downs and Shad Meshad, I didn't fight in the war. However, I was and am a Vietnam era veteran, who, through no design of his own, escaped actual combat. When I was in advanced training, in the Army, everyone in our company in 1967 received orders to go to Vietnam. Several days before everybody was due to leave, there were three of us who had our orders changed, and three of us went to Frankfort, Germany. And that's where I spent my time. My first reaction was one of undeniably ecstatic relief. I felt very lucky to have been spared having to go to that particular war. Once I got to Germany, though, another reaction set in, and that was one of guilt, of a personal feeling of guilt, especially as I would walk the Kaiserstrasse, a nice street in Frankfort, or when I was partying in Munich, or taking my leaves and traveling around Europe, I would often think of where many of those that I trained with in Georgia were at that particular time, what streets or trails were they walking. And I

kept asking, why me? I guess maybe it's the reaction that people have when they have suffered some sort of a terrible accident and they are the ones that are spared, they constantly ask, why me? Why was I spared? So I had that reaction. And a third reaction was one of self-doubt. I kept wondering what indeed, what kind of a soldier would I have been, would I have been able to have made it in the Vietnam war. And that's something that has bothered me, puzzled me, and interested me ever since I got out of the Army. And so what I've done is what a lot of other people have done, and that is, I have done a lot of reading, particularly of personal accounts about the war, by writers such as Fred Downs. I have read his book. By Phil Caputo, by Ron Kovick, by Michael Heer, by Tim O'Brian and others who have written very personal accounts of the war. I just wanted to say that by way of preface, because though I work for the California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy, I am not here in that capacity.

In terms of the findings, I came up with what seemed to me to be four findings. They are not the only ones for sure, and one opinion. The first finding is that there seemed to me to be

obviously a basic rejection of Guenther Lewy's viewpoint, that America's sense of guilt over Vietnam is unfounded. This rejection didn't appear to bother Mr. Lewy, in fact, I think he expected it, and was very open about it. Though I, too, reject the viewpoint, and think that America and Americans ought to indeed feel guilt about the war, I'd be willing to bet that there is more support for Mr. Lewy's thesis out there in American society than many of us at this table may want to believe. At least, many of the conversations that I participate in at the kinds of places that I like to frequent, like bars and so on, after a few drinks, in particular, when people open up, they don't seem to feel much guilt. They seem to feel a lot of anger that we got into something and we didn't win it. Americans, I think, like to win. They don't like to lose. And when you get beyond the surface, I don't think that there is much guilt. It kind of scares me, but this has been my experience and I think it's, to a certain extent, true.

A second finding seemed to me that Frederick Downs and Shad Meshad's thesis that Americans should feel guilty about first, their treatment of the Vietnam soldier, and second, their treatment

of the Vietnam veteran, did seem to be accepted by the group.

However, having made their point, and gaining its acceptance, I think that they failed to provide adequate answers to what should now be done to improve or rectify the situation. I think there does need to be a bridge built between the individual ideosyncratic experience of the veterans and the kinds of generalizations and lessons that we all want to ultimately make about the war.

Somebody mentioned that this morning, that there needs to be a bridge built. I agree that perhaps the foundations of that bridge have been built at this meeting, but there is a long way to go. I think that the social sciences, myself included, need to have better ways of tapping the individualistic experiences of the Vietnam veterans in order to come up with the kinds of meaningful generalizations about the war that we all seem to be searching for.

A third finding, at least to me, was that though there appears to be some consensus that guilt, cynicism, and crisis of legitimation were three effects of Vietnam, there was no consensus as to whether these effects were good or bad, or good and bad, and in what combination, for the future of America. Though I really want

to see the positive side, I want to be optimistic with respect to these effects. They were articulated by Mr. Flacks, somewhat by David Krieger, perhaps more guardedly by Mr. Comstock this morning. I do have very serious doubts and very serious fears that we will ever again be a united, with an underline under the united, states. A nation, it seems to me, must be more than the mere sum of its private parts, and I really worry about our ability to ever pull together and act as a united nation again. That's just a fear I have, and I think it was expressed also by those here at this conference that particularly were my age.

The fourth finding was that it kept striking me in the discussion of how did Vietnam change things that it was very difficult to isolate the impact of Vietnam from the impacts of other events in the sixties and in these other events that were taking place from World War II, in the fifties, and some even going back and talking about changing conditions in Western culture, Western civilization. I appreciated very much the focus that Bart Bernstein and Stanley Rothman took, and Mr. Piediscalzi, and Mr. Hammond. That is, trying to put this war in a historical perspective, the

focus being more on American society and culture and the changes it was undergoing, that allowed Vietnam in the first place, and provided a context within which it was fought. And the fact that the cynicism, the doubt, the lack of trust, crisis of legitimation, and so on, those kernels are already there, prior to the war, though the war undoubtedly hastened their full development. And what this says to me, what I take from this, is that were we to have another session like this one, I am not sure that the emphasis should be on the impact of Vietnam but should be wider in its scope. The impact of the sixties, or the impact of the decade since World War II, or whatever. I think it's very difficult to isolate the war from the context within which it was fought.

And the fifth finding, is really not a finding but it is my own personal opinion. And that is, I think, I know I, I know this is true for me, and I am making an assumption that it is true for you, I think that perhaps we are all still too close to the Vietnam war to be able to reach meaningful generalizations about its impact on the country. I think each of us has had very personal reactions to the war. Some supported it, some fought it, some

fought against it. We seem to be on safe ground when we address the war from our own personal feelings. It's hard to find fault with presentations like Mr. Downs', because they come from the heart, they come from the soul, they are his own personal reactions to the war. And I think if we had all spent the time talking about that, at least at first, I think it may have broken some of the ice, in terms of trying to see what we had in common.

But perhaps it's precisely because I felt, and continue to feel, so personally involved with the war, although I never fought in it, that my own feeling is a reaction against these attempts to generalize about it, and I am leaving somewhat dissatisfied with what we have accomplished these past several days. And I think that, I went back and read the issue of The Center Magazine in July and August, 1978, that had the original article by Walter Capps, the response by Harry Ashmore, and then a discussion here. And I found it interesting that the way I'm feel, I'm leaving is sort of the feeling that it seemed to me that Maurice Mitchell left with, at least taking his quote, I'm going to use it. And I'll just end with that. "The Vietnam war is still happening to us.

There are the people who are in it, and there are the people to whom it is becoming mythology, because they are growing up and hearing about it. There are those of us whose children were affected by it. For Walter Capps' approach to be useful, there must be more conversation and more time. History must continue to be made and understood."

Well, I think that we have had more conversation in these past several days, but my own person feeling is that we still need more time before we are going to be able to make very meaningful generalizations about the war. And I have to run.

CAPPS: Thanks very much. Murray, did you want to jump in at this point and--O.K.

FROMSON: I can. I was very taken by what Mr. Lewis said. I suppose what troubles me is that, in the couple of sessions that I've sat in on, that we've examined what's happened to intellectuals, what's happened to us as human beings, what's happened to us as journalists, as veterans, people who have examined the war, and we'll leave here without really examining what happened to the real victims of the war,

the Vietnamese themselves. And I think this is a real troubling problem for me. Perhaps it really is the basis for another conference. Somebody remarked this morning, and alluded to it yesterday, about The Deer Hunter. And to me The Deer Hunter, perhaps, capsulates part of the problem. Because it is but the latest example of Americans trying to excruciate their guilt or responsibility with a false metaphor. I was repulsed by the film, I must tell you. I found the whole centerpiece of the Russian roulette a cheap excuse for trying to rationalize away what had taken place in Vietnam. Such a game doesn't exist in Vietnamese or Chinese culture, and merely tends to heighten the belief that the Asians have a low regard for life.

Having said that, I think it suggests to me that perhaps we haven't really understood just how a culture and a people were shattered. And having left Vietnam in 1972, the body of the American forces that were there, and having put behind us what happened in 1975, conveniently or innocently, or however, we simply put that chapter behind us. And I can't help but live personally with the images, I am sure as some of the others who have been in Vietnam

will, the images of a, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who have been killed, wounded, left homeless, orphaned, widowed, blinded, who will not have the benefit of conversation and analysis like this, will not understand it, will not have the benefit of good medical care. They were released, a lot of them, to rebuild parts of their shattered lives. And I think I go back to what I was talking about yesterday, because I know this came under some rather heated conversations in our coffee and lunch breaks, about my suggestion that there was a racist motivation or tendency or impetus for what happened in Vietnam. And I think, although I understand where Professor Lewy is coming from in this particular situation, and I have heard the analogy about World War II, and how can I suggest that there was racism, when, after all, we fire-bombed Dresden and Berlin and so forth, I think the motivations were different. We had an enemy in Adolf Hitler who made it easy to bomb Dresden and Berlin and places like that, in trying to achieve the ultimate objective, victory in World War II. I think what made it easy for us to bomb in Vietnam, and for that matter to shell in Korea, was the fact that they were Asians, Orientals, we didn't understand

them, their culture, their language, their tradition, their religion, anything like that. So I am persuaded that perhaps, although I may be guilty somewhat of an exaggeration, I think that there is more of a kernel of truth there than perhaps we have allowed for. And I am particularly appalled by my own experience in Cambodia, which I first visited in 1956, if you will permit a short anecdote. I visited in 1956 at the time Sihanouk had abdicated as king in favor of his father, so that he might enter politics. And I went over there to do the first Western interview with him. Cambodia, a tranquil, serene country, people seemed to be at peace with themselves, and I just find now the total irony of what happened over these twenty years. That now we are talking about bringing Sihanouk back, having once thrown him out, who engineered his demise, and brought that small country to the ruin that it has been brought to. In my judgment, I think Henry Kissinger and those people who engineered Cambodia and put in Nixon will have to live with that kind of guilt for the rest of their lives.

I also think that perhaps in talking about the failure of religion in this country, that we ought to examine what happened

to the religious zealots who must also share some of the responsibility for having taken us down the road in Asia. A legacy, perhaps, that began in China in the nineteenth century, with the great missionary zeal of those who would proselytize on behalf of Christianity. And those who went on to Indochina and were responsible perhaps for setting in our own minds some images that were perhaps false, beginning with 1954 and the evacuation of several hundred thousand Catholics from North Vietnam, and with those religious organizations who grew as organizations, and with some genuine motive, but also some self-perpetuation, as relief organizations and so forth. And who were among the greatest hawks, if you will permit me to use the reference to the aviary again, who were among some of the greatest hawks on Vietnam and on Cambodia, because to them it was a kind of an existence. They didn't see it that way, it wasn't, I don't necessarily attend evilness to them, but I think, nevertheless it was there. And finally, I think that my own views, repeating, I'm sure, what many of us feel, is that we are paying the price for Vietnam because it has become a catalyst for disruption of our political system and our lack of self-confidence, our distrust between

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people and government, between government and presidency, a priori belief that government is somehow trying to deceive us at every turn. And I suppose that is the legacy we will have to finally come to grips with at some point, if we are to ever maintain some ultimate stability in our society.

And finally, for me, personally, as a reporter, I confess to an inadequacy because of having been part of the medium that is, after all, episodic in its approach to historical events. I confess to an inadequacy because I don't think that early enough in this terrible tragedy which we've all recognized, early enough we were able to bring to the attention of the American people and government the enormity of what we were engaging in. And whether Fred is right in saying, I think, that we just screwed up, or whether we should never have been there in the first place, I think is something we all have to reflect on.

DOWNNS: That's part of the screwing up--

FROMSON: Well, O.K. I wonder if television, the media had been present in all its full force, in the Spanish-American war or the Civil War, whether we might not have seen those conflicts with

the same seeming clarity that we have this time. In any case, I hope that while I make a special case for the ultimate victims, in Indochina, I hope we will not forget them.

CAPPS: Fred, it's your turn.

DOWNS: O.K. I have some ideas that may be repeating a little bit what I have said, but to specifically answer this question right here, what do we have to offer? One thing that you have to think about it this. I mentioned it yesterday. When you teach your classes or you teach people to be teaching people, and they have divergent ideas, and they will be teaching these divergent ideas, make sure that they stress, or that you stress, to always separate out the individual from the idea they may be espousing. And of course that relates back to the soldiers coming back. They were not part of the idea, they weren't the idea itself, but they were part of it, the idea, and when they came back, people weren't able to separate them out. So you've got to do that. And it's something you can start doing today, because I pick^{up} the Washington Post, or any of those big newspapers, find something about crime, and they are going to call the individual there a Vietnam veteran. That's entirely un-

unnecessary. You don't read any more about World War II veterans robbing banks or liquor stores. And so this just perpetuates the myth of a maladjusted veteran. They are maladjusted to a certain extent, because as I mentioned earlier, a lot of them were not able to cope and do this self-analysis. So something we can do for the future is think about this idea. Soldiers returning from war must go through psychological debriefing to help them readjust to society. I have put a man on a helicopter about an hour after he killed someone, and twenty-four hours after that, he was in the United States, and in a few hours after that, he was home. And there was no come-down. He just, he had to make it himself, he had to hack it out, so he must have psychological debriefing. They don't do that. And society must be ready now to accept the Vietnam veterans as they start coming down. Some of them haven't adjusted, and they will be going through a lot of problems. If we can get the money through Congress, the V.A. has this psychological readjustment program that Shad mentioned and that I mentioned. And if we can make that available, there are a lot of guys out there that still need help. Some of them are personal friends of mine

who, even though they are struggling, they wouldn't, it wouldn't hurt to have them talk to somebody.

And talk about teaching, and about the truth. Just as a point here, Vietnam was not one truth, it was many truths, as we all know. And depending where you were, and what you were doing at the time. And that's something we should always remember.

And I mentioned it before, I think it is very important. I think something we ought to direct ourself toward is developing a comprehensive training program for all our representatives in the foreign countries. This needs to be looked into, and it, there needs to be a lot more study done on it, and see how viable it is. But I think it's a very good idea, to send someone to a country that understands the country and the people and the history, and the dynamics of the rising, you know, socialism of the country. Forgive me if I semantically make errors here, but I'll try to overcome those.

There is another important item here, in that we must remember about the media. Media coverage must be taken into account for any future planning of any battle. And we are not,

you are not going to be able to have censorship any longer. So the media is a part of any crisis. And so I think the media people, and other related people, must start developing ideas as to how to cope with it. How are we going to handle media coverage when we have a crisis, whether it's a riot in downtown Detroit or whether it's a war going on in South America. If we do have a war, then what the military must do is provide an interpreter with each group, each combat group, I mean small group, the platoon level, so that when they go into an area they will be able to converse with the people. You've got to have a sci-ops officer with each unit. And these are not esoteric ideas, these are very real ideas. Because you take a platoon of men, and you dump them over in Nam, if we'd had an officer there, or an enlisted man, I say officer, but a person who psychologically could talk to us about the people, about what we are getting ready to do, and prepare us to treat the people at least as individuals, then it would have done us a lot of good. I never thought of it, and my men didn't think of it. We only thought of survival. But if we had had someone there reminding us of it, and I don't mean setting in staff, I mean down

on the field with us, going with us through the different villages, and we'd had an interpreter at the same time, it would have helped our position as soldiers a lot. So if we're going to do a war like that, we've got to think like that.

And I still stick with the contention that if you send a special forces groups into a country to help them, and if you make that decision, and they can't hold the line, that's because the people don't want to support their own government enough to help the special forces people preserve their own whatever it is. So therefore I feel that special forces groups or groups like that can't hold it, then don't send in mass armies.

I think, let me finish, please. And I also think that we ought to reevaluate basing our foreign policy on the people we work with in these countries, if they are a member of the elite upper class who have been educated out of the country. Are they really reflecting the values of the people of that country? And, let me see. I think, don't want to get going here too much. But there are a few items I just wanted to bring out.

About the impact of Vietnam being an awareness of the

rest of the world's capacity to wage war and win, one thing we ought to remember about these Vietnam veterans is, that a lot of people should remember, is that although the Vietnam soldiers won their battles in Vietnam, the war was ultimately lost, so they are in the unique position of individually winning, but collectively losing, which has given a bitter taste to everyone. And this should cause us to look at our soldiers and their staffs as veterans, and we've got to evaluate ourselves as to what we are doing now, because we are faced with the problem of what, if we should get into another unpopular war, how shall we treat the, those returning soldiers? And I think this thing of psychologically debriefing them as they come back from war is something we should look at. And just a few more items.

I feel that Vietnam soldiers, if you would take the time, the thinking Vietnam soldier, if you could talk to him enough, what we have here is the unique situation, as I tried to mention earlier, and I hope I did it well enough, is that the World War I, World War II veterans, and the people in power, are used to the powers who waxed strong at the end of the nineteenth century and the

beginning of the twentieth century. Vietnam veterans, we fought, we have probably a clearer picture of what's happening in the future because we fought the soldiers who represent the type of countries which are emerging as the powers at the end of this century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. And I think the Korean war was a, let me use a little poetic license here, the Korean war was the stepchild of the new era, but the Vietnam war was the first bastard in the family of the new era. And that has caused many problems in America, because America is caught in the middle of these changing philosophies. And these changing philosophies, of course, to which you have to take into account a different religious values, the industrial complex, the small middle classes in those countries compared to here, which has a large middle class, lower educational level, and all the other factors that go into the dynamism of an emerging society. So I only, that's some of my feelings and findings about what has come out and what we should direct our selves toward in the future if we're going to face reality. And afterward, I'd like to mention just one or two things to the religious people. I don't know if I should say it now or not.

One thing that you ought to do, if you are going to fight a war and you are going to have chaplains over there, you might as well send people over who know what they're doing. Shad and I spent about an hour talking about it. He was in charge, as you heard earlier, of seventy thousand people, as sci-ops officer. He had over time, three chaplains. One was an alcoholic, one was a homosexual, and one was a playboy. And with my experience, the chaplain we had was scared to death. He wouldn't come out in the field for love or money, or God or anyone else. And we had, we came in off an operation once, and were at a fire base, and I had lost some guys and some of the other platoon leaders had lost some guys, who were our friends. And so we were told that they were going to have a little religious ceremony, you know. And we're in the middle of a fire base in the jungle, you got the picture, got our 105's encircling us, and we've got an outer perimeter like this, and the guys who had not lost any friends, you know, we left them on the perimeter and we had our little religious meeting in the middle there, sort of a tribute to those guys who got zapped. And set up some C rations

and put the little purple cloth out, and the cross, and the chaplain wouldn't come out, but he sent out his religious aide, who was, I think, twenty, twenty-one years old, and the chaplain, you know, he tried to do his best, but he couldn't do it. So we didn't have much faith in that turkey.

And then, but the important point you want to remember is this. The people, I was brought up in the country, and Evan, United Brethren Church, and all of that, and Shad was a Catholic, a very strong Catholic. Neither one of us now have any respect for religion as the hypocrites lay it on us. We feel that you need someone to talk to when you are in a stressful situation. And you people are used to psychologists, and all of that kind of thing. We are used to only talking to people as we were growing up, because we never had the money for psychologists when we got older and we never got any when we were in the service and needed them. All we really had was a chaplain that you could go to. And the chaplain failed miserably. And so a lot of people who had religion when they went into the service didn't lose it because of war and the conflict of war. They lost it because the people who were trying to convince

them, that they needed to talk to just to console their own feelings, because after you killed someone, and your friend next to you got blown up, or you were wounded, you were shaken. You needed to do something. And you would go to, I would go to my chaplain and I couldn't find him. Shad would go to his chaplain and the guy said, "Well, wait a minute, I've got to go to Hong Kong. Come back in two weeks." Well, that's probably indicative of a lot of things wrong in Vietnam and the military and perhaps our government, is that if you are going to send people out, if you believe in your religion and you have people out there, then you either have to set up some kind of counsel, to take care of those people who aren't able to properly, you know, I think psychologists probably have some kind of board where they can get rid of someone who is malpracticing. Well, maybe religious leaders should do the same kind of thing. If you're going to have people in the military as chaplains, you draft them, put them in for a year, take them out, whatever, but you should evaluate them all the time, because they are responsible for literally millions of men. And you wonder why your religion is declining. I know why it's declining. I have, I was brought up

very religiously, and I have lost my faith because the people I talked to don't have faith themselves. They aren't able to convince me of anything. So, and I feel that I'm strong mentally about the whole subject. I realize the value of religion. But I know of all the people who were around me in the war, and their faith utterly shaken, and I don't know if many of them have ever come back from it. So that's something that you should think about as religious leaders, and what you're teaching, and about setting up, perhaps, panels to get rid of the people who aren't panning out, and maybe you should meet with the military and figure out what to do about the chaplain situation. That's all I've got to say.

CAPPS: Jim Rosenau?

ROSENAU: Yes, I just want the record to record what I think is one finding that seems clear to me. I think, from the very moment when Guenther started his presentation, one of the most salient impressions which I would assert is the finding that I had, is that some of our most vigorous arguments have been over evidence. And I suppose it says something about Vietnam, and its continued existence in American culture, and among American intellectuals, that we have vigorous

arguments over whether something happened, and if it happened, what did it mean. That is to say, I differ with Mr. Lewis when he talked about some consensus coming out of this conference. I think that basically we have had some, we are still divided on what the evidence is. And when you are divided on what the evidence is, it's hard to come to any larger agreement.

CAPPS: Guenther Lewy.

LEWY: Piediscalzi, this morning, and Fred Downs, Thursday night, have talked about the importance of healing wounds. And I agree that this is a very important issue to be faced. But I am rather sure that the prescription for healing guilt, that we have heard, each different way, will not do the trick. Philip [sic]Piediscalzi, in response to my position, has said that whitewashing will not heal. And I agree. But I hope you will consent that the term whitewashing guilt really assumes that which is yet to be proven, namely, that there is guilt, and wrongdoing, that needs to be eliminated. The term, whitewashing, it seems to me, begs all the important questions which yet have to be clarified. And I agree with Jim, they have to be clarified by careful attention to detail,

evidence, what the facts are, or were, and what they mean. And pace Professor Comstock, I would like to stress that it involves more than legalisms. It involves important legal and moral issues, and I did my level best to indicate that in my view the issue is not merely absolving the United States, the American military, of legal wrongdoing, but of moral wrongdoing as well.

Now Fred's approach, in my view, also will not bring about healing. And I want to be very frank here. I admire the charity which you are extending to those who have vilified you and those who have condemned you. And you say to us, well, they were entitled to their point of view, just as I was entitled to mine. But I'd like to suggest to you, and to all of you here, that if indeed someone thought, in the sixties and early seventies, that the United States was guilty of genocide in Vietnam, that the entire enterprise was legally and morally to be condemned, that indeed Fred and Meshad share some of the guilt, because they participated in this criminal and immoral enterprise. So that from the point of view of those who took this position, it was perfectly logical for them to poke fun of you, to tease you, to vilify you, to condemn you for what you had

done. Therefore I am saying to you, Fred, that if you want to rehabilitate the Vietnam veterans' standing in American society, you and the other Vietnam veterans will have to help rehabilitate the cause which you served. Let me repeat that. If you want to rehabilitate the standing of the Vietnam veteran in American society, you will have to help rehabilitate the cause which you served. And that means you have to make common cause with the likes of me. And be quite clear where you stand and what your values are. And you can do this in the way that you have started doing it. You can give testimony in your own way, in your own writing, in a way that people like James Webb and Philip Caputo have done, and I am inclined to think that the cumulative effect of these kinds of writings, in the long run, may be more decisive than the impact of various scholarly books like mine. And I am reminded here of the impact which the quasi-literary writings of Solzhenitsyn have had in Europe, to some extent even in this country. We all knew about slave labor in the Soviet Union, about the terror from the Soviet specialists, the conquerers? ? the conquest and Alexander Dahlen and so forth.

That did not convince any of the intellectuals in France, in the rest of Europe. What seems to have done the trick was the literary and human quality of Solzhenitsyn's writings. And I am inclined to think that the same may eventually happen here with regard to Vietnam.

Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. We can acknowledge mistakes. And we can acknowledge, and indeed condemn, the rigidities of the military institutions and their shortcomings, and their stupidities. And anyone who has read my book will know that at least half of it is devoted to just that. But I think what we must reject, you and I, is the charge of legal and moral guilt. Both in terms of intent and both in terms of conduct, it seems to me, the American role in Vietnam is quite defensible.

And that leads to another related point. It was said here this morning that the cause of anti-Communism involves political innocence. I do not share that view. It seems to me that the cause of anti-Communism always was morally respectable, and it is even more morally respectable in view of what has been done in the name of Communism in Indochina in recent years, and one really did not

need, it seems to me, the experience of Indochina to become convinced of the basic immorality and inhumanity of that system. I am not comforted by the fact that, of which Mike Lewis reminded us, that the man in the street and the man in the bar shares, out of his unsophisticated patriotism, perhaps, shares my position, and shares my anti-Communism. I am addressing my remarks and my appeals, not to the man in the street, I would like to talk to all of you here. And I would like to ask you, on a far more sophisticated level than the man in the street can ever do, to re-examine the American experience, do it openly, do it honestly, try to overcome the vested positions and the vested emotions that we all have had, and made, and start, if that is possible at all, from scratch. Now, no one can start from scratch, of course, but I think what is possible is the kind of honest re-thinking that some Frenchmen have begun, and I made reference to this the other night, men like Jean Lacouture, who had a very heavy investment in his own position during the war years, and as I indicated, also on Thursday, he, for years was the Bible of the antiwar movement. If Jean Lacouture can do it, it seems to me anyone can do it.

CAPPS: Cynthia Frey.

FREY: I, too, was not particularly comforted with Mike Lewis's assertion that large numbers of people are likely to agree with you, but for different reasons than yours. But it seems to me that what we've come to over the last few days, and it's becoming more and more evident as we talk this morning, is to a sense of our own uncertainty about what in fact the impact of the war has been, and I was brought up really to that realization with Mr. Comstock's assertion that in fact things can happen that we can't predict, that there can be reversals and that there can be changes. And I really think, I don't know, coming out of a social science discipline, it's taken me a long time to come to that sort of notion, but having been brainwashed by the humanists for the last five years, I am coming more and more to really accept the notion that life is full of surprises. And I really don't think that we have, as Jim Rosenau just said, that we have all the facts, that we know what they are, and that furthermore, once we have them, that's going to help us.

Another thing that I am persuaded of after three years

of listening, three days of listening to what's going on, is that we were very right, those of us who were active in the antiwar movement, in our despair over the infinitely absorptive capacity of American culture. I remember in 1965, New Year's Eve, 1965, getting together with a group of friends and sending Lyndon Johnson a telegram, congratulating him for the bombing halt. And our reasoning was that Lyndon Johnson was a simple man, and he liked people to like him, if we told him he'd done good, maybe he'd keep on doing good, and the war would end. We really believed that. After a few years, we stopped believing that that sort of a tactic would be extremely helpful.

I think the notion that Americans, or American young people, have abandoned this civic religion, as you defined it, perhaps rests on a definition of a civic religion, that I would find too narrow. It seems to me that it's much broader, that the American value consensus is much broader than your definition would have us believe. That the very fact that individual acts of civil disobedience really did not make much difference during the war because the culture was so broad, the web of relationships in American culture

so absorptive, that almost anything anyone could do could be tolerated within the American political system, would seem to me to give credence to the notion that even though the war movement was very, the antiwar movement was very large and very disruptive and even though there's a lot of guilt and a lot of chaos in American society now, that in fact the essential value consensus remains.

Kenneth Boulding had a nice essay in a recently published symposium held by the Rockefeller Foundation, in which he says just that, that the basic value consensus remains. I think that's true.

I was also impressed by what Harry Ashmore said this morning about the fact that the military establishment really is pretty much as it was. That we have not seen any major efforts to cut it back. The most recent budget message by the President is very clear on that score. And when I said what I said yesterday about institutions, about the fact that we have to examine whether institutions have changed before we can really make a judgment whether there has been a substantial impact of the war, I think that's perhaps the best example we have before us. The military institution, the institution that waged the war, is still as strong as it was ten years ago.

CAPPS: David Krieger.

KRIEGER: I've been waiting for a while to talk, and I have a lot of things built up inside me by this point. And I am not particularly organized, but I'll try to get out as best I can a variety of different feelings and emotions and reactions to different things that have gone on.

The first thing, I guess, and sort of a focal point for what I feel is that in looking at the reactions of, or the impact of the war, and particularly the way it was viewed this morning.

I was very appreciative of the comments that were made by the three principal speakers. The word conscience never emerged, and for me that is kind of a bottom line of what came out of the war. And I think it was alluded to, but it never came out. And I'd like to underscore it with first, a brief personal note, and then some broader comments.

I am also a Vietnam era veteran, although I didn't go to Vietnam and serve there. I chose not to. I was, in 1968, I was finishing up my Ph.D., I was a member of the Army Reserve at the time. And I was never particularly fond of the Army. I never found

it desirable experience, and in part referring to Harry, because it wasn't a shared experience. Most of my cohorts escaped it altogether. Nevertheless, I was in the reserve, and in 1968, just after I finished getting my degree, I was called to active duty. In active duty I became an infantry platoon leader. In my platoon were primarily the people that Fred has been talking about, the eighteen and nineteen-year-old kids from Hawaii, which is where I was at the time, who were not particularly overjoyed at being called up, but they weren't sorry about it, either. It was kind of a chance to do something, in their lives. And I was very disturbed by that time, because I had been on a college campus, I had evaluated for myself what I thought was going on in Vietnam, and I found it reprehensible, morally. So personally my conviction was that I wasn't inclined to go over there and kill people, risk my life, and particularly I was opposed to the responsibility of leading other people to do something that I felt was morally reprehensible. So I, it came down to, for me, to a choice of going or not going, and because I was given orders to go, and I said, no, I won't do that. And because of my education, because of my financial situation,

I could oppose it, because of a lot of support that I got at the time, I could say no to that directive and be prepared to either go to jail for my conviction or to leave the country, which at the time I was prepared to do. And it's something that I've questioned many times since, what I've done. But I felt ultimately that it came down to me as an individual, having to make a stand on my own convictions. And I didn't feel it was the right thing to do. And I, at that point that I said no to doing it, I went and I talked to my platoon, or to the people that I was associated with in the infantry, and I explained to them what I was doing, why I was doing it, and why I thought they had a choice as well. It takes me back to something Fred said about the farm boy in Indiana, who didn't have that perception, who had a different perception than I did. I don't think that what Fred did is reprehensible. I don't think it was wrong, what he did. He acted out of his own belief and conscience at the time, because that's how he felt. I am concerned that in going around now, and I am, and Fred talking to people, and Meshad also doing the same thing, I am a little bit concerned about what you have to say. I think your point about the veterans

being, need to be respected, for themselves, is a very important one. And I think your almost evangelistic desire to find a place and respect for the Vietnam veterans is important, deeply important. But I am concerned even more deeply in a sense for that farm boy still in Indiana, that may be growing up also feeling, my country, right or wrong. And I don't think the answer is, as Professor Lewy suggests, in going back and somehow finding the whole exercise of the war defensible, because maybe an argument can be made as Professor Lewy has done that it is in some way defensible. But I don't think that's the issue, and I don't think, and I think that in a sense it perverts morality and justice, from my point of view. And it seems to me that part of what you should be doing in going around and talking to people about the plight of the veterans, is making people aware of a sort of simple axiom that I acted on at the time, and I feel remains, that there wouldn't be a war if nobody came. And everybody does, at the bottom line, have that choice of saying no to going. I don't, it was necessary at the time, and being a conscientious objector to justifying it in terms of conscientious objection to all war. And I think that's a tremendous

mistake. I think you should be able to selectively judge whether or not you choose to object to a war. Others will disagree. But I think in the case of Vietnam, it was a case where there was, as we've talked about, clear manipulation, lying on the part of the Administration, and in fact constitutionally never a war. So many, some of us came to that war with a completely different set of beliefs. And it left, although I didn't go to Vietnam, it left a very deep impression, my experience in military left a deep scar, and it took a number of years to, and perhaps not completely done, that there is still a working through of the entire experience. I too felt some guilt about not being over there, about seeing others go. But, you know, for me it was not, it was a question of not contributing my body to an effort that I felt was unjustified.

It seems to me that the, Mr. Fromson referred to the way we treated the Asians, a kind, a racism toward the Asians. There is a dehumanizing quality to the way we looked at Asians, to the expressions of gooks and dinks and so forth which was part of the Army experience that I had. But the dehumanization went far beyond how we looked at the Asians. It was how we looked at each other. And

it seems to me that the dehumanization was very evident in the way the government treated the people, the way it lied, the way the duplicity was carried on constantly, day after day. And the, it was the, in a sense it was the dehumanization, I think, that made the war happen, or that made the war what it was. And that in a sense continues to be pervasive in our society. Right now we have changed the draft situation, in a dangerous way. It's an amazing thing to me that after this many years I have finally 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 happen to be exposed to the Army and found it so awful an experience for myself, but I wouldn't change that situation, I wouldn't have changed what I went through and experienced personally, for the good of the country. And I feel like what you, Fred, and Meshad are doing is one of the most hopeful signs that I see in the country right now, going around and I think it's very healing thing to talk about the lack of respect that you've had personally. And you have a need for respect, and everybody, individual in this country shares that need of respect. Because although you were a tool, as you alluded to, in Vietnam,

all of us were equally treated as tools, not only me, as a member of the military for a time, but the citizens were treated as a tool. It's a symptom, I think, of the broader culture, that we treat each other in a sense as tools. And that's largely why I think that people have withdrawn into the little groups of privatism and narcissism, that have been alluded to so often. It's an attempt to find a peer, some kind of a peer group where there can be some support. And I think it's a misguided and sort of an, obviously in many cases, a sad attempt to find that. But the broader culture doesn't seem to any longer offer that. And there are some very sad ramifications to the whole thing.

I don't think we're going to experience in the future the need for manpower in war very much. Because war is being conducted in a mechanized electronic fashion that eliminates the need for men as tools. So if there's, so while the draft may be somewhat a way to cope with that, and some, putting men in those positions, it's not really going to fully satisfy it. And the whole mechanized structure of our society in a sense is breaking us down as individuals, and it's creating a set of machines to

replace us and to do the bidding of what the system seems to find necessary to accomplish in activities like Vietnam.

CAPPS: --better come back to that. Other people want to speak and we have only a few minutes. Dick Comstock, and then Bart Bernstein and then Jim Rosenau.

COMSTOCK: I would like very briefly to make a remark about method that to me is important. And it's about the difference between fact and image, that I think should be clarified as further discussion on this topic proceeds. And if you know where I am coming from, I desire to make this remark, was elicited by Mr. Fromson's statement that the Russian roulette thing never happened in The Deer Park, or Deer Hunter. And I would like to suggest that it's very important on the one hand to have a scholarly attempt to get the facts as accurately as possible, and I commend those present who have done work in that area, including Mr. Lewy, for example, in his book when he shows that some of the charges of atrocities have been manufactured. This should be known. And on the factual level this is important. But I personally am convinced that we also, that we are symbolic animals, and that we live in an element of image, and that we

constantly pick up what we might call expressive images which are symptoms or indexes of the profoundly felt experiences that we are going through. Now, both movies that I cited, Who Will Stop the Rain and The Deerhunter, I personally did not like either of them. My aesthetic criteria are otherwise, and I found them crude and faulty on a lot of areas. But at the level I am talking about, they are extremely important. Artists, producers, directors, have put together all of this talent to bring forth what they did. And I would submit that are expressive images of the feeling of Vietnam, not of what actually happened in Vietnam, but of the feeling. Remember, our topic here is the impact of Vietnam on us, it's not Vietnam in itself. It's how we felt about it. Now, in Who Will Stop the Rain, I wanted to throw in , for example, to me it's important that after the first ten minutes about Vietnam, it descends into an American individualism, tough-guy story, Nick Nolte becomes a paragon, he stands off the evil American agencies, the Mafia, everybody, single-handedly, just as cowboys have done down through the ages. That in itself, though, is revelatory of something I think that is going on in our culture. And The Deer Hunter, although

my aesthetic criteria find the symptoms too obvious, this metaphor of the Russian roulette, I prefer Nabokov or someone, nevertheless I say on the level it was meant it's a marvelous image. I was talking to my friend David Chidester the other night, he liked the movie better than I, but he pointed out that all young men in the draft during Vietnam, felt the Russian roulette lottery. If you will recall, the last part of it they even had a lottery, by which they were going. So the thing fits beautifully, the feeling of the experience. And I think that this is important, that we study these things not only factually and rationally, but on this level of image.

] My last remark connected to this, I know that Mr. Lewy distinguishes legal and moral issues very carefully. But I keep hearing them collapsing together, that if it's legally correct, it's morally correct and if it's morally correct, it's legally correct. So that they seem to become almost synonyms. I'm sure that's a misrepresentation, but I'm only saying what I seem to hear. And so I conclude with this image. The man in the automobile who has killed a child. He could be legally exonerated in court, because

he didn't do anything wrong. And he might be convinced that he is morally blameless, because he did not intend to kill the child.

But I would still suggest that he would have what we might call a deep existential regret that he had been involved in it. It might change his whole way of life. He might become more interested in children. He might change his driving habits. And it is not sufficient to simply say, I, or he, is guiltless. He has been involved in a profound experience to which he must react, and I would submit that that is what this conference is about.

CAPPS: Mr. Bernstein?

BERNSTEIN: I would like to actually make seven points. I'll try to hold that to seven minutes. The first point in response to Mr. Comstock's contention. I think that if one more parsimoniously reads the last images of The Deerhunter, what should strike you is that most of the participants of the Russian roulette are not Caucasian, but Vietnamese. If the point of the imagery were simply to indicate what the war has done to Americans, it should be constituted exclusively by Caucasians. The fact that it's not is an indication that the quality of Russian roulette is attributed largely to those

who were the victims of the war. And I think as a result your reading is too charitable. I think you must ask yourself why there was not a more parsimonious phrasing of that image. I think that's precisely the area of disagreement between the two of you. I think it's quite true, as Jim mentioned earlier, that we don't have a consensus here. I suspect if we were to persist into the afternoon we would not have a consensus, and spirit, and even civility might break down. I am not as persuaded, by the way, as many, that civility is often the ally of intellectual discourse. I suspect that the dictates of civility too often are used, we allow them to coerce us into suppressing differences. I would go so far as to argue that without civility we would have had a civil rights crusade earlier. Without civility, American universities would have been compelled to be morally responsible earlier. Without civility, many of us would have opposed the war earlier. I think that there is a very dangerous liberal notion that communication is abetted by civility. I think that politeness, as I say, often distorts.

On the matter of the consensus, though, or the lack of consensus on fact, it's probably the case, if we brought together

a group of people who were deeply on the early cold war, we would have at least as many disputes about the facts. It is true that we still lack that really big book that seeks to lay out even the causes and early policy on Vietnam. We have lots of spatterings, we have the recent Leslie Gelb book, but we don't yet have a tradition, or as I would suggest, we have big books on other major wars, and then people begin responding to the book. That has not happened for various reasons in the case of Vietnam.

But I want to move from that kind of parochial and professional comment to some larger issues that I think merit consideration.

Fred, I confess I was disturbed at why you keep calling the war a mistake. At least one-third of your comments told us how to improve future wars.

DOWNS: I was just being real.

BERNSTEIN: No, I realize you were being real, I think you are being dangerous, too. I think that unless you want still to see yourself as a tool, I think that you are being a tool. I think that's the kind of, C. Wright Mills had the term crackpot reality. I think

that was an ideologically charged notion. But I think there is merit in it. And I think it's very dangerous to tell us how to make the next wars more efficient in the way you are humane.

Murray, however, it seems to me, raised a point which I would hope later you would have an opportunity to respond to. And I would like to make the point which was lurking in some of the things that he generously said. Like to make that point more forceful. He argued the real victims, the primary victims, were the Vietnamese. And you have in a sense been arguing that among the major victims were the vets. And let me take his statement and put it to you as a question. And that is, would you be prepared to lobby as hard for as many services to the Vietnamese whose lives were disrupted by American service people, as the service people who returned? I mean that seems to me is a real question of morality.

DOWNNS: Let me answer that right now, if I can. All right. What you say is something I have thought about for a long time, that we could, when I talk about these things, about what we can do for the future, one of the things that has been in my mind is that in the rebuilding of North Vietnam, instead of pouring billions of

dollars in there, what we could do is like the things that I am familiar with, personally, is prosthesis and rehabilitation. I know a lot, I saw a lot of Vietnamese over there who had lost their limbs, and they don't have the facilities to, one, either go through the rehabilitation, or two, know how to build prostheses. And one of the rebuilding programs we could do is send our prosthetic experts over there to help them, work with these people. Now, that's what's in the realm I know. And as you mentioned, there are a lot of other things we could help them with, with the veterans' programs, for instance, like one idea I've had, which I would really like to see done, is we have, I work for the Veterans Administration, and we have facilities set up so we have our Department of Medicine and Surgery, and benefits, and counseling, and a lot of improvement needs to be made on the program, but if we go over like to North Vietnam, and they've got all those veterans over there, got all those problems, the same kinds of problems we have, but they don't have the background, they don't have the thing set up so that we could really help them out a lot in organizing how to help the veterans, set up the compensation, and pension for them, and we could really

help them, and I feel that that's very important, and one thing I thought about a lot of times and I wanted to say here but it never did come out at the right time that I could say it, is that for instance, I have a lot of ideas, and if I could convince somebody in government to let me work with ideas with the State Department with this, we could really do a lot for America's image with these people. You know, I don't hate Vietnamese and, because, you know, I got to know them in the country level. They were country people, and had their chickens and cats and all that kind of stuff, and you just have to identify with them, like I did. But the, you have to separate out the fact that, first thing, I don't feel guilty about what I did, because American spent about a billion dollars a day keeping me over there to do what I was supposed to do. So how can I feel guilty about it? I don't accept it. I just did what I was supposed to do. But it didn't make me any less cognizant of the fact that I can think later. I have had eleven years to think, you know, what can I do to improve? And one of the things is helping people like that. But, you know, I'm a voice crying in the wilderness.

Who do I write to? Until I got this book published, nobody ever wrote any of my ideas. And so now slowly I am starting to be able to publish my ideas, and one of these days somebody is going to start paying attention to me, and say well, maybe that's a good thing. If we had the facilities to go over there and really do some good, really, Bart. And like I could go over there and we could talk to those veterans and help them get organized. You could talk and help them with their education programs. This is sort of what I was alluding to earlier in my presentation Thursday. American has the facility to help them. And when I talk about the emerging countries in the Orient, you know, I'm not leaving out North Vietnam. I personally am looking forward to talking to Mr. Ashmore later, because I'd like to know what Ho Chi Minh was like in person. When you read the guy's history and everything he did, you've got to admire the guy, you know, he had tenacity. He hung in there and he actually won something for his people. And I think if people have misunderstood me here today, and during this session, the thing that I, you know, I must not have communicated properly, is that when the, Guenther says that I must take a hard line toward things

I support, and David says that, what can I, you know, when I'm talking to people I should, you know, do something about that Indiana farm boy. Well, that's exactly what I'm trying to do. I'm not a conservative, and I'm not a liberal. I have all kinds of ideas. I don't like to be put in classifications. That's the reason I don't identify myself with Right Wing or the Left Wing or any association, because I want my ideas to be read by everyone and then they can evaluate them and, I can't come out with all the things I have on my mind, that I want to talk about. Everybody's got something they want to talk about, and I feel to myself, well, I want, want to interrupt here. But I can't do it. I want to talk, we are past our time right now, and other people want to talk. But this may be the only opportunity in my life I get a chance to say things which I feel are positive. And so I'm going to take a couple of seconds and tell you about that. So yes, I do think about that question. And I would love the opportunity to write more on it and study more on it, and have the government or private organization give me money and say, O.K. What can we do there? And I'd love to meet with people and talk to them, and say hey,

you know, we can offer you things. But, you know--

FROMSON: Fred, if I could just interrupt, one thing, and I think Bart should finish what he is saying.

DOWNS: Yeah--

FROMSON: The question really is in this, intent and commitment-- The question is really one of intent versus commitment. You may think in theory this is good, that you would like to be concerned about them, but the fact is that this war has been over now for all intents and purposes since 1973. And there is no evidence at all that we either intend to either follow through with the commitment to do something about the victims of the war who were left behind largely because of our participation.

DOWNS: But I thought he was directing it toward me as a person, you know, what have I--

FROMSON: I understand, but you are powerless as one individual. I think the idea is--

CAPPS: --let Mr. Bernstein finish--and then that's it. Several people here who have a very close travel connections to make this afternoon, and they need to finish up here.

BERNSTEIN: Three more minutes.

CAPPS: Two more minutes.

BERNSTEIN: The next point is an effort to tie together something that Cynthia and David, and Fred, have all alluded to in different ways. And I want to take as my text, at least a reference to an essay by Dwight McDonald in 1944, entitled "The Responsibility of Peoples." It was an attack upon the nation-state at war, and he argued ultimately the only meaningful responsibility, or basis for morality, was individual, that we should never be depersonalized, we should never be defined by the acts of the nation-state, that often the only resolution is what he called then, negativism, which in the nineteen-sixties was to be translated into a term, resistance. As he, one of the great dangers of social science, especially the way social science often makes bolder claims that can be justified older?? epistemologically. He said, it not simply, it explains, but in certain ways it almost suggests that it's predictive, that there is a web which has predictable ends. The danger of that is it erodes a sense of responsibility and in turn the danger of that is that people, when speaking of themselves as tools, fall into a metaphor

which is not perfectly appropriate. That while social science has tried to liberate us from the notion of simply individual responsibility amid institutional forces, it has sometimes been too successful and told us that individuals have no responsibility. The fact that David was asserting was that individuals also, he is another, is an example from an alternative mode during the war, chose to express a responsibility.

Just one more set of notions, and I'll advance this in a brief paragraph. And that is one of the things that troubled me about the discussion of civil religion, and has troubled me, much of the literature on civil religion, I find it very hard to determine precisely what content is being ascribed initially to that civil religion, and therefore I find it very difficult to determine whether it is lapsing, flourishing, or remaining constant. That is, whether things are being focused upon as changes are accompanying and perhaps not defining characteristics. At various junctures in the discourses today, the civil religion was referred to primarily in terms of its symbols. I would suggest that symbols have not changed. Aspects of the content of American beliefs among some

have changed, but it is not clear that those changes represent a shift in the defining content of a civil religion, but perhaps only in the accompanying content. I simply want to raise that as both a methodological and a substantive critique of much of what underlay part of the discourse. Thank you.

CAPPS: I think that's a subject for another conference. We have come to the end of the time here. There are a great number of people need to be thanked. I won't take your time to thank them all, except that I know that all of us would like to thank Eulah Laucks for making this even possible. And thanks to all of you who have participated, particularly those of you who have come here from out of town.

GRAHAM: And we'd like to thank you, Walter, for an adroit chairmanship.

CAPPS: Thank you. I think that's, we're dismissed.

END OF MEETING