



Pete Hamill

THE LAST PRESS CONFERENCE

"If the French withdraw, Indochina would become Communist-dominated within a month. The U.S. as leader of the Free World cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped that the U.S. will not have to send troops there, but if this government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch forces . . . If to avoid Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina we must take the risk now by putting our boys in, I think the Executive has to take the politically unpopular decision to do it."—Vice President Nixon, April 16, 1954.

The country might indeed be gone. There are four dead Americans on the campus of Kent State University, gunned down by other Americans. Tear gas seeps through the air of a half-dozen campuses. Mass rallies are building. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee wants to go right after the Executive Branch and take back its Constitutional power; the fear among my friends is general about a possible military coup.

From Indochina, we hear news, as we have for so long, from Peter Arnett of the Associated Press. The forces of what is laughingly referred to as the Free World are moving into Cambodia, burning and shooting and destroying. Kids from Iowa are asked to distinguish between Cambodians and Vietnamese. Artillery is fired at moving human beings. The B-52s fly from our privileged sanctuaries in Thailand to churn up the earth. Here we come, Cambodia: Stick with us, and let us give you freedom. At 17 rounds a second.

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And in Washington, Richard Nixon stands on the same corrupt language that he gave us 16 years ago. The President, we are cautioned, Has Facts That We Don't Have. One wonders: What are the facts? Have the Viet Cong finally built an airplane? Has Vincent Price built them a Laser beam that will drill through the earth and destroy Palo

Alto? Or did we discover that those gooks, dinks and slopes were determined to fight on, and that they did not need Marx and Engels to provide them with reasons?

It is typical of a man whose closest friend is a bonds lawyer that he has no real care for language. If you can get young Americans to think of people as dinks and slopes, you can persuade them to kill those dinks and slopes. When you call campus dissenters "bums," as Nixon did the other day, you should not be surprised when they are shot through the head and the chest by National Guardsmen. Nixon is as responsible for the Kent State slaughter as he and the rest of his bloodless gang of corporation men were for the anti-integration violence in Lamar, and for the pillage and murder that is taking place in the name of democracy in Cambodia.

There was always this doubt about Nixon: He seemed a neuter, a man of no strong ideas or feelings, who had tried to fill his emptiness with glib anti-Communist rhetoric. His crusade against Alger Hiss always seemed to be not so much based on deep convictions as on the visibility it would give Nixon himself. He had come from obscurity, and Alger Hiss was a way to prove his own existence. Nixon lusted after power and when he got it there were still men who refused to give him proper respect.

Some of them were Asian peasants. Others were students. Others were newspapermen, elected officials, and even members of his own party.

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Now he is striking out at all of them, in the largest and grandest Last Press Conference of them all. Longhairs, Sen. Aiken, Sen. Fulbright, editorial writers: You won't have Richard Nixon to kick around any more, gentlemen, after he's through with this country. If those "bums" get out of hand on the campuses, then go along with Ronald Reagan. Only a couple of weeks ago, Reagan called for a "blood bath"

to solve campus disorder; well, now he has it, committed at the hands of the draft-dodgers in the Guard. Nixon and Reagan: A fine pair, a fine madness.

Perhaps it is now time to really find out why Nixon visited a doctor—a shrink—during the years he spent in New York recovering from the 1962 humiliation in California. Was it his manhood, as the rumors had it? His actions since the defeat of Harold Carswell make one wonder. Is he proving his masculinity at the expense of Asian peasants? Is he showing what a macho he can be by unleashing the ugliest barroom instincts in Agnew, Mitchell, National Guardsmen and the American populace? We should know, because we simply can't afford two-and-a-half years of a President who might have those problems. We don't need therapeutic foreign policies. Not with our sons, he can't. Not with our brothers.

There are several conventional political courses which can still be followed before we end up in a state of domestic barbarism. The Senate can take the money away from the Executive Branch by repealing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and by demolishing the defense budget. That won't do it all. But it might bring Nixon his senses.

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If it does not, then there is one further course. Nixon can be impeached. I realize that this might leave us with Agnew. Well, then do it again to Agnew. The Congress kept Carswell out of the Supreme Court, after first keeping out Clement Haynsworth. Why not make the same kind of parlay out of Nixon and Agnew? There is no way this country can live when it has two neuters commanding power, devoid of true compassion or true ideas, dedicated to the eradication of opposition, domestic and foreign.

This country was the creation of brave men. In the past few years, we have seen our soldiers machinegun girls and babies and old women. Some of us were insulated from that by distance, or because the dead were Asians. Now the dead are Americans. At Kent State, two boys and two girls were shot to death by men unleashed by a President's slovenly rhetoric. If that's the brave new America, to hell with it.

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