

# LETTERS

## Chomsky's lessons

The eminent historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (March 23) rules that, except for a few issues like Nazism and slavery, most secular questions should be handled "in other moralistic categories." Professor Schlesinger, who is openly annoyed by Professor Chomsky's sudden prominence in print, berates Chomsky for self-righteousness and moralism. . . .

No doubt Chomsky, who is not a professional historian, can learn a great deal from Schlesinger, who is one. I am certain from what I have observed of the career of Schlesinger that he, in turn, has something to learn from Chomsky: namely, a trace more integrity and, possibly, even courage. After all, Mr. Chomsky, like Dwight Macdonald, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Dr. Spock and others, has, so to speak, put his head on the block and put his money where his mouth is in protest against the genocidal Vietnam war. . . . Chomsky and others face prison sentences as "conspirators" . . . in aiding and abetting young men to evade and resist the draft.

By contrast, the career of Professor Schlesinger gives point to Chomsky's criticism of academicians who enter the corridors of power. Had Dr. Schlesinger not entered those corridors during the Kennedy Administration, he would not have felt it necessary to lie in a quite unscholarly way to the press at the time of the Bays of Pigs invasion. And he would not have had to make the embarrassing admission later that he had told the lie because "I wanted to stay with the Administration." Arthur Schlesinger in the White House gave some of us the impression, not of a dispassionate scholar, but of an apologist for such foolish and harmful policies as the race

to "close the missile gap." . . . "Pragmatism" has its place, to be sure. But Chomsky's organization RESIST, Rm. 4, 763 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. 02139, which helps young men who don't want to fight in Vietnam, strikes me as a somewhat more pragmatic way of trying to end this dreadful war. . . . The Schlesinger way of exclusively armchair opposition to the war permits him the luxury of published outbursts of personal spleen. . . .

Just as the resistance to Na-

zism was more in need of morally informed and brave men, like the Austrian farmer Franz Jägerstätter, who was beheaded for refusal to fight, than of pure academicians, so today's draft resisters are more in need of step-up-and-be-counted people like Chomsky, than they are of flighty, doubtfully committed intellectuals like Schlesinger.

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## Arthur Schlesinger Jr. replies:

Both Dr. Chomsky and I are beyond draft age. There has always seemed to me something a little dubious about men who are safe from the draft taking it on themselves to encourage men of draft age to break the law. . . . However, if Mr. Sisson considers this a noble moral act, he is welcome to his opinion.

However, I would like to make three brief comments on the statement that I had lied to a *Times* reporter — i.e., had relayed the official cover story to him — at the time of the Bay of Pigs affair.

1. The only reason anyone

knows I misinformed the *Times* is because I said so myself. Perhaps even Mr. Sisson would allow me a mild credit for candor.

2. When I said in April, 1961 that 300 rather than 1,200 men were landing on the Cuban coast — which was the extent of the lie — I had the choice either of repeating the official cover story or of resigning from the government. Since I had confidence in the basic purposes of President Kennedy, I did not choose to resign. In retrospect I believe that confidence to have been fully justified.

3. Neither Mr. Sisson nor Dr. Chomsky mentions the fact that I strongly opposed the Bay of Pigs expedition. Because of a deep conviction that such clandestine undertakings were incompatible with a democratic society, I thereafter urged the reconstruction of the C.I.A. in order to make a future Bay of Pigs impossible. That story has been accurately told by Roger Hilsman in *To Move a Nation*. He writes (page 79) that Schlesinger's "basic thesis was that secret activities are permissible so long as they do not affect the principles of our society, and that they cease to be permissible when their effect is to corrupt these principles and practices."

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