

Mylai massacre

.....All war is murder

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So much has been said about the Vietnam War, so much has been written, that somehow the central point of that monstrous horror has been lost in all of the verbiage. All of the arguments in support of the war and most of the countering arguments have obscured the fact that as a result of continued American involvement in Vietnam the murder of people, singly and collectively, has become the accepted policy of the United States Government.

The Mylai massacre, for which Lt. William Calley is about to stand trial, is no isolated incident. The butchering of the population of one small hamlet differs only in style from the general slaughter of civilians that has been the daily practice of the American military machine for the past decade. Whether by random bullet, casual bomb, accidental shell, or incidental napalm, the United States has been murdering innocent Vietnamese men, women, children, and babies for years.

The actual number of dead and maimed Vietnamese civilians is not even known. It becomes indecent to even talk of numbers. To tally the dead like so much popcorn is to reduce human beings to a statistical quibble. If there were only one person murdered as a direct result of national policy, that in of itself would condemn this country throughout history. In Vietnam, the number of murdered runs into the thousands and all of them died because of American design.

Lt. William Calley may be tried, convicted and sentenced for his role in the Mylai massacre, but that proves nothing and absolves no one. Lt. Calley could only be found guilty of being the instrument of murder, he cannot be accused of sole responsibility. To convict one lieutenant of a crime and then assume that justice has been done is to evade the responsibility that all Americans share for tolerating this war. Lt. Calley can only serve as a substitute Jesus upon whom everyone places their sins to achieve a form of cheap absolution. The twentieth century has

already produced another Christ figure would be superfluous.

What the United States needs is not absolution but the recognition of the responsibility of people and the willingness to act upon that responsibility. Since the United States government is committed to a conscious policy of murder, the people must either actively work to overthrow the government or assume the consequences of being associated with it. During another American rampage against a different innocent people Henry David Thoreau wrote, "How does it become a man to behave toward this American Government today? I answer that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it." The proposition is true today as well. Those who do not actively oppose the present government as well as those who endorse it are willingly acceding to murder.

There are those who argue that all war is murder. It is an unsailable moral position and those who act upon it are saints. Most people, however, are not saints and therefore distinctions, however fine, are made between war and murder. Military struggles involving armed individuals who are agreed upon the nature and dimensions of the conflict have wracked human history. Given a true civilization, war would be unthinkable and those who sought a military career would be treated in appropriate institutions until they were capable of joining the rest of humanity. But we have not created such a social order and war still exists as a result of the limited imagination of the politicians.

Some men will argue for the inevitability of war, but no one will defend the necessity for murder. Insane though it is, men have conceived of "civilized warfare," but there is no comparable qualifying adjective for murder.

Murder is universally condemned as the wanton, barbarous killing of innocent people. Though it is of little consolation to those who die in either, the distinction between war and murder centers upon the nature of the victim.

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If a people exist and in no objective way threaten another people and if a people are destroyed as a result of the conscious act of another people, that is murder and that is what the Americans are doing to the Vietnamese.

By the very nature of the struggle in Vietnam, American policy led inevitably to murder. For its own purposes, the United States, since 1954, has attempted to impose a particular form of government upon the Vietnamese people. Since the people of Vietnam have consistently refused to accept American control over their lives, the United States has to choose between withdrawal from Vietnam or carrying through the logic of the policy, thereby committing murder. The commitment to maintain an American influence in Vietnam means that the United States is attacking the people of that country, defining the total population as the enemy and potential victims.

American racism, whatever its origins, further simplifies the act of murder. From Theodore Roosevelt's warnings about "the Yellow Peril" to "Sayonara," Americans in the modern era have become accustomed to viewing Orientals as exotic creatures at best and, more generally, as treacherous sub-humans who "think differently from us." Name-calling has further dehumanized Asians. During the Second World War the Japanese were constantly called "Japs," "Nips," "monkeys" or "bestial apes." The Germans, being white and Christian, were simply misled. Twenty years later, the Vietnamese are "gooks" or "dinks." As a U.S. civilian official pointed out, "Psychologically and morally it's much easier to kill a 'dink' than it is to shoot a Vietnamese."

The technological excellence of the United States further sanitizes the act of murder. Fragmentation bombs and napalm dropped from 20,000 feet not only provide an aesthetic distance on color television, they enable the murderers to avoid directly confronting the agonies of the victims. Murder is transformed into an abstract act in which the relationship between victim and executioner is reduced to a machine.

Physically, morally, technologically and psychologically, the United States crossed the fine

line between murder and warfare long ago. And that line was crossed with the full knowledge of the American people. For Americans to say that they are shocked or surprised by the accounts of the massacre at Mylai is as transparent a lie as that of the villagers in Dachau who claimed that they didn't know from where the smoke came. In both cases, the problem is not ignorance of the facts, but indifference to the reality.

The major newspapers have published reports of American abuses in Vietnam for years: Time Magazine ran pictures of American torture victims; the effects of defoliation and saturation bombing have been shown on television; the peace campaigns of 1966 distributed reams of material on the devastation of Vietnam; every drugstore in the country carries paperback books documenting American murder in Vietnam; NBC showed films of stacks of dead Vietnamese whose ears had been lopped off to be made into necklaces for American troops; the Committee of Responsibility brought maimed children to this country for treatment and the children were written about in local newspapers; Women's Strike for Peace exhibited photographs of the pitiful victims of American fragmentation and pellet bombs on local television; the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held national hearings exposing the nature of the "war." And in every instance, the American population anaesthetized itself against the shock of truth.

In 30 years, if there is anyone left to chronicle the history of the twentieth century, there is little doubt that the United States Government will rank with Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia as mass murderers. If the people of Stalin's Russia will be pitied and the people of Hitler's Germany are to be condemned, then this generation of Americans will be scorned. For not only have Americans condoned murder as a form of national policy, but they have remained indifferent to the crime of infanticide.

Of all the horrors that man is capable of, none is more terrible in its implications than the killing of children. For when an infant is killed, the murderer destroys pure innocence as well as the future of man. The willful

slaughter of children is the purest manifestation of evil and the clearest denial of man's humanity.

In the reports of the My Lai massacre viewed by millions of Americans, an ex-soldier calmly explained how he shot down "men, women, children, and babies." When asked how he could kill a baby he answered, "You just do it."

Last week, a report prepared for the National Cancer Institute pointed out that the defoliants being used by Americans in Vietnam are producing birth defects similar to those caused by thalidomide. Not content to murder this generation of Vietnamese, the United States is committing infanticide on generations as yet unborn.

Allen Ginsberg asked the question, "America, when will we end the human war?" But the general indifference of the American people to the murder of the Vietnamese raises even more serious questions about the nature of American society. It may well be that America cannot end the human war because this country has become like a mad dog. Or it may be that America can still be redeemed, but that only can come from those who presently repudiate her. One thing is certain, the necessary prerequisite for maintaining one's humanity is to oppose the values and institutions of American society. For as long as the unchecked murder of the Vietnamese continues, there are no institutions and no values in this country that are entitled to honor or respect.

