

# Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged

By JACK VALENTI

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon Papers are in themselves quite deceptive. There is not one piece of paper from the President, nor one piece of proof of any of the so-called decisions the Pentagon analysts assert were made. There is only the flight of memos between various levels of State and Defense. Every working newsman in Washington knows about contingency planning and is aware that while a hundred consensus may be reached at lower levels, until the President decides, there is no decision. This is elementary in the structure of the Presidency. What the President thinks, says and does is the decisive piece of action.

I was present at most of the meetings on Vietnam in 1964 and 1965, and anyone closely involved with the President at that time knew with certainty there was no decision to bomb North Vietnam before the election and no decision, reached deliberately in advance, to pour large numbers of troops into Vietnam in April 1965, presumptions claimed by Pentagon analysts.

I was present at every meeting held in the White House between July 21 and July 27, 1965, at which time the debate went on as to whether Defense Department recommendations to inject large numbers of troops should or should not be approved. These meetings comprise the most important dialogue in all the Vietnam discussions.

The debate was long, serious, tormenting. It was the debate of honest, honorable men trying to do what they thought was right in the long-term best interests of the country they had sworn to serve. When the decision was reached by the President it was announced, quite visibly, in the East Room on July 28, 1965.

There is a biblical injunction which says judge not lest ye be judged. It tells us no man is perfect, and that pointing accusatory fingers is a risky business, for when one finger points to someone else, the other three fingers point at the accuser. What is more, every public man and every newspaper man knows that what he said or did or wrote in 1964 or 1965 may not be what he would write, or say or do in 1971. Presidents must make decisions on the information they have at the time the decision needs to be made.

And when a President, any President, makes a decision, he prays that what he has ordered will be beneficial to the people he leads. No President wants to make war and any analyst who would so presume is either stupid or deliberately deceptive.

If we choose to invoke a terrible recrimination and devour our leaders under the guise of anger over their so-called deceptions though in reality

we are eating them alive because they didn't "win"—then we are joining a dangerous journey.

President Johnson pursued Vietnam with continued reluctance. He inherited a commitment, and he tried, as hard as any man could try, to keep South Vietnam independent without a full-scale war. He knew better than anyone that the more the United States became bogged down in Asia, the more difficult it would be for him to win at home what he determined to achieve in education, health, human rights, in his desire to lift the quality of living for the poor, the dispossessed and the obscure. One enduring testament which will survive all the analyzing by unnamed Pentagon analysts is the triumph of the President which gave more than had ever been made available before in our history to the blacks, to the poor, to the sick, to the aged, to the unhoused and uncared-for in our national community. All that he

constructed is there, and as a nation, we can never go back to the indifference and neglect that he banished from the political arena.

A substantial number of Americans sense all this. They are plainly worried about this turn to jungle vengeance, this indictment of leaders and their motives for victories unachieved, for objectives unobtained.

We can objectively question whether or not our Vietnam decisions were right or wrong. That is a legitimate public debate. But it is clearly wrong to demean honorable men for vengeful reasons. This is not a part of the American political ethic, and it may be that Americans in larger numbers are becoming more aware of the unfairness of such an adventure.

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*Jack Valenti served as a special assistant to President Johnson, and is now president of the Motion Picture Association of America.*