

A Time for Amnesty

In reiterating the theme that "the war in Vietnam is over," President Ford has taken the sensible and politically constructive view that this is the time not to look back in anger but to move forward to a better understanding of America's role at home and abroad. Mr. Ford is clearly right to insist that the Vietnamese refugees offer an immediate opportunity for Americans to reaffirm their principles as a responsible and humane people—as those Congressional liberals who have temporarily forgotten their liberalism need to be reminded.

Another unfinished chapter of the war remains also to be closed. The President's inadequate approach to amnesty means that many thousand young Americans must wonder why Mr. Ford does not include them in his admirable proclamation that the war is over and that recriminations are not in the nation's interests. The United States has wisely refrained from trying to determine whether any of the young Vietnamese who seek to make a new life in America chose to obey or to avoid their country's draft. Should this Government be less magnanimous in dealing with its own sons?

It is understandable that some Americans oppose full amnesty on the grounds that such forbearance would not be fair toward those who served, suffered and even died. But the brutal truth is that there was little fairness in the distribution of the Vietnam war's burden. Many prospered, while, as usual, a few sacrificed. The administration of the draft itself, with all its loopholes, was far from fair.

The President has asked all Americans now "to close ranks." Such a national regrouping must inevitably include those who disagreed both about the war itself and about the personal steps they took, in and out of Government, to support or oppose it. The danger that full amnesty may absolve some whose motives were surely questionable is a far lesser risk than saddling the nation's conscience with this singular exception to the spirit of a new beginning.