

A Few of the Guilty

By Russell Baker

All this talk to the effect that we should not start pinning the blame on the people responsible for the Vietnam fiasco is nonsense. Pinning the blame is as American as a Saturday-night shooting, and anyone who expects us to forgo its pleasures in the Vietnam business is out of touch with the spirit of America.

Let us get on with the pinning and say exactly where the blame lies. Vietnam is President Truman's fault. If he had not recognized the French colonial puppet Government there in 1950, we would have started out on the side of the Vietnamese independence movement instead of driving it into the Communist camp.

It was the French who muscled him into that decision. They insisted on it as a *quid pro quo* for coming into NATO. And so the French are to blame for Vietnam.

Of course, President Truman would not have been so eager to create NATO if Josef Stalin had not behaved so menacingly toward Western Europe. Obviously then, Stalin is as much to blame for our Vietnam troubles as President Truman and France.

President Eisenhower is to blame because he refused to tolerate the elections which could have led to a united Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva peace treaty.

John Foster Dulles is to blame because he persuaded President Eisenhower to support a new Government in Saigon after Ho Chi Minh drove out the French in 1954.

Ho Chi Minh is to blame because he kept fighting for a united Vietnam instead of making peace with the Government we chose to support in Saigon.

President Kennedy is to blame because he was the man who committed American forces to combat in Vietnam.

Ngo Dinh Diem, our first client-ruler of Vietnam, is to blame because he made a mess of governing South Vietnam.

President Johnson is to blame because he turned the whole business into a large-scale American land war and staked our national reputation on the outcome.

President Nixon is to blame because he accepted President Johnson's view of Vietnam and extended the war into Cambodia.

Various Congresses are to blame, first for agreeably financing Presidents in an undeclared war in Vietnam, and then for refusing to finance them any more.

The Buddhists are to blame because

they resisted the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem.

General Nguyen Van Thieu is to blame because he couldn't govern any better than Ngo Dinh Diem.

The South Vietnamese Army is to blame because it did not want to fight and too often didn't.

The American Army is to blame because it acted on the assumption that in a nation of peasants success will go to the side that understands rich people and generals.

The American Air Force is to blame because it would not take Gen. Curtis LeMay's suggestion to bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age.

The American correspondents who were in Saigon in the mid-1960's are to blame because they refused to publish

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the lies about how successfully the war was going, which the American Embassy in Saigon and the American Government in Washington were releasing for the purpose of improving general morale in the United States.

Television is to blame because it presented daily pictures of the war in American living rooms.

The doves are to blame because they weakened the country's will to send another 206,000 American soldiers to Vietnam after the Army discovered that 550,000 were not enough to preserve General Thieu in peace.

Everybody who was unwilling to see America fight another twenty years for General Thieu is to blame because they lacked the will to wage the struggle through the long haul.

The leaders of Russia and China are to blame for backing Ho Chi Minh instead of coming in on our side.

Secretary of State Kissinger is to blame because he pursued friendlier relations with Russian and Chinese leaders instead of getting tough with them for not helping us support General Thieu.

The hawks are to blame because they kept us committed to a failing regime with little popular support and, so, made the ultimate fiasco inevitable.

Everybody who paid taxes is to blame, whether they supported the war, opposed the war or didn't care about the war one way or the other, because they were the people who financed the policy.

It is fun to pin the blame because it is so easy. The harder question is, Were we ever fighting there for anything more urgent than a desire to avoid being blamed for the inevitable defeat?