

# Good Citizens Don't Ask Why

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Yes, recriminations. Lots of them.

Lost and dying for 20 years in that jungle and now we're invited not to talk about it. "I ask all Americans to close ranks, to avoid recriminations about the past," the President says, "and to work together on the great tasks that remain to be accomplished." On the same day he asked us to quiet down in the name of higher purpose, the Seattle City Council rejected a resolution welcoming the Vietnamese fugitives by a vote of 7 to 1.

In Seattle they must know that the task to be accomplished is to inquire about why this came about. They also must understand that it's inquiry, not recrimination, that Dr. Kissinger and his associates fear.

In Washington they hope to pass the war off as an act of God, as a meteorological event as uncontrollable as an equinoctial hurricane coming out of the Gulf of Mexico to blow down houses across Texas and Mississippi. If they can't convince us those refugees weren't put on the roads by the winds, they warn us not to talk about it because "this is the most divisive conflict since the Civil War."

It was, years ago. Now there is new national unity in the resentment at the thousands of smarmy fugitives Ford and Kissinger have airfreighted in here—again the fait accompli without congressional permission—to be a tax on the public purse or to form another revanchist clique lobbying for a return to another China, another Cuba.

Give them each \$4,000 and, provided they spend the money on Chrysler products, grant them citizenship. Save the auto industry, make them into servants. We will get something out of this war yet. A field marshal mowing the lawn, a Red agent dusting the living room, a black marketeer in the houseboy's white jacket, a Saigon lady of the night for a baby-sitter and a keeper of tiger cages to walk the dog. Anyhow they're here, and whoever they may be and whatever deeds they may have done, we'd best show them such generosity as we're still capable of.

There aren't so many of them, and to yammer about their being dumped on us might sidetrack us from discovering whether the cause of the war really was a

See COMMENTARY, B8, Col. 1

COMMENTARY, From B1

virus infection of our top leaders' central nervous systems or something having more to do with foreign policy. The other night CBS took 2½ hours of primely expensive time to tell us.

"We embarked on this Vietnam journey with good intentions, I think, but once upon the path we found ourselves having been misguided. Perhaps that is our big lesson from Vietnam, the necessity for candor," Walter Cronkite told us in a context suggesting it was TV that finally got us properly reguided. No need to recriminate, television'll take care of it next time, but such nonsense. "The networks never stood up, at least for long . . . never gave their reporters honest, enterprising reportorial missions—except into direct combat which was mostly a false story," writes Michael Arlen in *The New Yorker* (May 5).

The war would still be going on with CBS covering it like an apolitical boxing match, had it not been for the protesting people in the streets, the same people television competed with the government to ignore and discredit, and who were again aced out of CBS' special the other night so that not one reasoned, critical Left analysis got on the network's air. NBC and ABC did much better with their end-of-the-war specials, but

CBS is more interesting for amplifying the official, institutional line, the one we'll teach the kiddies in school.

"We, the American people, the world's most admired democracy, cannot ever again allow ourselves to be misinformed, manipulated and misled," said Cronkite, skipping around who might have tried to do these bad things and why, so that he could crescendo with these words: "Again to quote the President, 'The time has come to look forward to an agenda for the future, to unify, to bind up the nation's wounds and to restore its health and optimistic self-confidence.'"

Back to Pocatello and give a whack on the drum for unity. A united people, marching together toward future agendas can never again be manipulated for we are a restored nation whose wounds have been bound and bandaged in Lincolnesque cliché.

Those weren't wounds anyway. Not in the saloons I drink in. That's cherry pie on the faces of those who carried this absurdity down to "Option 4"—do you dig that big boy war talk?—which was what they called sending in the rescue choppers to land on the roofs of Saigon office buildings. We don't need bandages. Paper napkins will do.

Let all leaders, commentators and consulting sages walk clean-faced into future agendas: another Agnes

De Mille diplomatic dance in Peking; a space walk through NATO; more ego tripping about the Middle East; Dick Helms and the CIA lads loose and free again in Portugal, and—but for unity's sake don't ask why—many, new, surprising, secret, sacred, honorable, moral, implied, vital, viable, human and humanitarian commitments.

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