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To Atone for Songmy

To the Editor:

The equanimity with which we have taken the news of the atrocities committed by our troops at Songmy is a measure of what this war has done to us. Our men in arms have turned into monsters, and the most we can do is to call for an investigation: the guilty parties, we say, must be found and punished.

Can we not see that even the most exemplary execution of justice will not reach to our own responsibility for this crime? We who are horrified at a distance have not been subject to the battle pressures that produced the action: but these were our troops, put there by our regularly elected Government and kept there until they have become capable of this. What they have done, however we may seek to disavow it, is a burden we shall all be bearing before the world and in our own hearts.

We have been urged to remain in Vietnam until we can leave with honor. Is it not clear that we can never leave with honor, that the only fruit of this war for the United States is shame?

After the Second World War some of us found it difficult to believe that the German people did not know what their leaders were doing to innocent men, women, and children at Dachau and Auschwitz. None of us can deny that we know what we are doing to innocent men, women, and children in Vietnam—and I do not count Vietcong troops among the innocent.

Thanksgiving Day was first celebrated in this country by men who thought it proper to give thanks when God had given them something to be thankful for. It is not always remembered that they also held days of humiliation and fasting when they thought their own conduct had been wrong and merited God's displeasure.

Do we have enough honesty left to set aside a day for national humiliation now? We cannot erase our guilt, but we might begin our moral rehabilitation by recognizing it.

EDMUND S. MORGAN
Sterling Professor of History
Yale University
New Haven, Nov. 22, 1969

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Another Lidice?

To the Editor:

It is vitally important that the events which occurred in the Vietnamese village of Songmy on March 16, 1968, be accurately established. The shocking and tragic story reported in The Times on Nov. 17, 1969, which may or may not be accurate, is reminiscent of events in the Second World War which Americans and most of the world overwhelmingly condemned.

The death toll in the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice in 1942, when Hitler's troops executed much of the population in reprisal for an assassination attempt, was considerably less than that reported in The Times in Songmy; when the news of this atrocity became known there was a worldwide protest, and several villages in other parts of the world, including one in Illinois, were renamed "Lidice."

We do not insist that there is a good analogy between Lidice and Songmy; indeed, we know very little about what

happened in Songmy. But as American citizens we want to know if it is true, as The Times indicated, that American soldiers without interpreters proceeded into this village, destroyed the homes, rounded up the inhabitants—between 400 and 600 men, women and children—and systematically shot them down at three different death sites.

We notice that the current investigation into the events at Songmy is being carried out by the United States Army, an organization which is inevitably involved in the case, even if it turns out that its own policies and orders were defied at Songmy.

Whatever the verdict of the Army proceedings—even if individual officers or soldiers are found guilty and punished—much of the world will doubt the completeness or credibility of the Army findings. We, therefore, call for an investigation of the events at Songmy by an external body, such as the International Red Cross.

Americans, whatever their opinions of the Vietnam war, must be ready to investigate any serious allegation that their military representatives abroad are guilty of crimes against civilian populations.

LOREN R. GRAHAM
Princeton, N. J., Nov. 17, 1969

The letter above was also signed by six other members of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N. J.

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'Majority' and Songmy

To the Editor:

The shocking disclosure of the massacre of Songmy should mark the end of the "great silent majority." As a simple matter of conscience, any American who remains silent in the face of such atrocities is as guilty as those who committed them.

It is not a question any more of supporting the President. It is a question of the survival of decency, honesty and sincerity in the United States.

The "great silent majority" of Nazi Germany claimed ignorance of the atrocities perpetrated by their Government. The silent citizens of the United States will not have this excuse. From this very moment they will have to face the judgment of the world, of their children and their children's children. Every individual should examine his con-

science and reassess what this war is doing to our country and to ourselves.

He should do that free of the prejudices, slogans and propaganda which have beclouded the issues. If this is done, I am confident that the great majority of the American people will press for a rapid ending of this tragic war.

ORLANDO CANIZARES, M.D.
New York, Nov. 22, 1969