

Moral Concerns

To the Editor:

The revelations of indiscriminate killing of civilians by U.S. troops are shocking. But the self-debasing expressions of feelings of shame in the press and in private conversation indicate a fantastic naïveté. In which war, especially a modern war, have innocent civilians been spared? [Editorial Nov. 30.]

Our erstwhile allies and friends in Europe and elsewhere, who now criticize the United States, can hardly claim to have clean hands in this regard. The wartime killing of innocents is no more a special fault of Americans than of the Germans, French, British, and Vietcong. Innocents get killed even by nations who fight in self-defense.

I do not by any means equate all the above cases. Obviously there is a difference when genocide or a deliberate national policy is at issue. Nor is it intended, necessarily, to excuse those against whom charges may now be brought. But these cases must be judged on their own merits (or demerits). Certainly, there should be a full investigation of the recent reports.

Nevertheless, objection must be taken to those—at home and abroad—who are quick to condemn when Americans are involved in such incidents, but show less moral concern when civilians are massacred in Hue or when rockets are indiscriminately fired at Saigon and other cities. Those who accuse the United States of applying special standards to itself should not judge it by special standards.

Finally, the shock occasioned by these incidents must not be allowed to confuse us on how best to extricate ourselves from Vietnam and on what our proper role is in other places around the world.

M. P. GOLDING
New York, Nov. 30, 1969

Racial Blindness

To the Editor:

Paul Medlo, who says he participated in the alleged Songmy massacre (news story Nov. 25), says that he and his buddies customarily called Vietnamese "gooks," a pejorative with the same dehumanizing force as "nigger." The generals indict a young officer for murdering "an unknown number of Oriental human beings." "Oriental" is similarly pejorative. It suggests "the characteristics of Orientals" (Webster's

Third New International, and thus evokes a cloud of alien images: Oriental cunning, Oriental politeness, Oriental torture, etc. It is easier to kill in cold blood "gooks" and "Orientals" than let us say daddies, mommies and little boys and girls. There is a pervasive racial blindness in evidence here which prevents our recognizing Asians as fellow humans. Those who bring the charges for the Songmy horror are no less guilty of this blindness than those they charge.

CHARLTON H. LEWIS, III
Brooklyn, Nov. 28, 1969

Violent Society

To the Editor:

I do not know the soldiers who allegedly killed innocent babies, women and men in Vietnam in March 1968, and only now revealed to us. All I know is that these American soldiers have been brutalized by an ungodly war and that they were brought up in our violent society.

We have reaped what we have planted. We are, and indeed we should be, horrified and sick about the assumed massacres. But what should we expect when our country has the highest murder rate of any civilized land in the world. In 1968 over 13,000 people were murdered in the United States. That same year rape and robbery reached a scale not heretofore experienced on our shores.

Under the pressure of our American culture filled with competitiveness, frustrations, status seeking and search for power, we have developed a climate of fear and hate which has driven many of us to violent acting out.

Because of our highly distorted collective values and the lure of our affluence, we have come to feel we are omnipotent, that consciously or unconsciously we can have everything we desire, and that regardless of other people, we believe we have the right to do what we please. Our life has become a thin disguise for our instinctual behavior which has given rise to our inclinations to violence. The alleged American massacres are one more aspect of our violent society.

It is high time we take stock of ourselves, and that we keep in mind that we were born not to kill or be killed, but to live and let live.

DAVID ABRAHAMSEN, M.D.
New York, Nov. 26, 1969

Judgment on Songmy

To the Editor:

This letter is written to register the belief, which I have always held, that people in our country are judged innocent until proved guilty.

The gruesome story of Songmy appears daily in all media, all over the world, with different accounts by so-called witnesses. Blame is put upon a few individuals whose names have been publicized, implying their guilt before they have had a chance for a fair trial. All this, from my point of view, is totally unjustified and utterly wrong.