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13 Sept 1972

Richard Nixon's six Or, how the media have

greatest deceptions on Vietnam: allowed him to get away with murder

By Edward S. Herman

"Any man who has once claimed violence as his method must inexorably choose falsehood as his principle." (Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture of 1970).

From the evidence of his first six months in the presidency it should have been obvious to anyone not overpowered by a nationalistic "will to believe" that Richard Nixon intended to continue the Johnson quest for military victory, with adjustments to be made solely in accord with the most compelling political necessities. It is one of the major tragedies of modern history that his tactical adjustments have enabled him to continue and even expand this murderous enterprise and to kill Indochinese more or less at his pleasure.

It was, in fact, a very safe forecast in 1968 and 1969 (made on several occasions by me, among others), that at the expiration of a four year term in office, Nixon would not have ended the Vietnam war. This really could have been inferred from Nixon's pre-presidential record, and from his character as well: his record was consistently one of total intransigence on Vietnam, a hawk in 1953-54 when he lined up with the extreme right in opposition to Eisenhower ("It is impossible to lay down arms until victory is completely won," said Vice-President Nixon in 1954); and at no point in opposition to Johnson on objectives, only on the inadequacy of means employed (in other

words, confining himself to a hawk-opportunist's attack on Johnson's failure to achieve military victory). Nixon's record here has always reflected his extreme right-wing principles, which he has made more acceptable and effective by an opportunistic willingness to sacrifice some of them in the interests of others, and in the interest of his political career.

Nixon's character also pointed to a continuation of the Johnson policy: weak, cold-blooded, amoral, self-righteous, capable of almost unlimited self-deception in rationalizing a preferred course of action in moral terms, and imbued with the gung-ho "win at all costs" spirit of professional athletics and the military. Great power in the hands of such a man is nightmarish; and given to him in the midst of a counter-revolutionary war, it has necessarily turned out to be disastrous and heart-rending in its human costs.

And we face the strong possibility that Nixon will have four more years to strive for "peace with honor." A re-elected Nixon, who has already committed crimes of staggering proportions (see deception six below). A Nixon with a "free hand" poses the threat of genocide in its simple and most literal sense.

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* See William V. Shannon, NYTimes 30 Aug 72, filed Nix Ad.
William Safire, NYTimes 12 Sep 72, filed Nix Ad. Date of statement given as 5 Mar 68, Nashua, N.H.

Richard Nixon's success in maintaining and even enhancing his political position while continuing (and in important respects, enlarging) a war which ended Lyndon Johnson's political career, is a large and important subject. In part this political achievement rests on the nature of his Vietnam policy, which has been carefully adjusted to reduce internal discontent. But it is also based on huge deceptions and manipulative tactics that are, I believe, unique in scale and scope in American history. The continuous creation and manipulation of events and pseudo-events (at huge public expense), and the use of bullying and news saturation tactics against the media (generally conservative and cautious in any case), have made it possible for the federal executive to define what is to be considered "news" and literally to institutionalize the Big Lie. New possibilities have been demonstrated for achieving results usually associated with totalitarianism, while maintaining gradually enfeebled democratic forms.

In this article I discuss the six biggest deceptions that have sustained the Nixon war policy. In a succeeding piece I will examine in more detail how Nixon has managed to get away with this—in particular, his policy of deliberate racial polarization, his techniques for the suppression of dissent, and his other diversionary tactics, especially the provision of "bread and circuses," with most of the bread going to the affluent, the lower orders getting circuses plus anti-busing, anti-criminal, anti-smut, and anti-long hair obfuscations. A third article will deal with Nixon's linguistic contributions in carrying us rapidly toward the 1984 world of Double-Speak.

Nixon's Six Greatest Deceptions

There is a problem of choice here, with a rich stock of possibilities. Two important deceptions have been left out: Nixon's "restraint" and his interest in "negotiations." Restraint is dealt with to some extent in the discussion of Nixon's deep concern over "bloodbaths" (deception six), and it is a word that will be featured in the third entry on Nixon's Double-Speak. "Negotiations" will also be included as an important contribution to Double-Speak.

1. That he had a "plan" for an "honorable settlement" of the Vietnam War *

During the 1968 campaign and thereafter Mr. Nixon claimed to have a "plan" to end the war. This plan has never been clearly spelled out to the public as regards methods or timetable, but from the beginning it was implied that the plan was something other than a scheme for winning a military victory in a manner that would be tolerated by the American public. There is not a trace of evidence that Nixon has ever considered anything else, and naturally the manipulative heart of the plan has not been made explicit. And the mass media have rarely attacked it as such — in fact they have served with only minor

deviations in helping Nixon to implement the public relations (hereafter, PR) aspects of this program.

While the timetable of the "plan" has been kept vague, there was never any public acknowledgement that it contemplated the war running on four or more years. There can be little doubt, however, that a long war was recognized as highly probable. There is a timetable implicit in Nixon's 1968 campaign statement that "Those who have had a chance for four years and could not produce peace should not be given another chance." He was asked about this in his press conference of Nov. 12, 1971, responding that "I would suggest that I be judged at the time of the campaign, rather than now, on that." On Aug. 29, 1972, with the campaign on, Nixon replied to the same questions with a complete evasion. He should be called on this daily.

The substantive core of the Nixon "plan" consisted of four elements: (1) "Vietnamization," which means investing in the training and supply of a huge Saigon army and police force, that could take over the ground fighting and "pacification" of South Vietnam;

(2) solid support for the Thieu military government, totally committed to a struggle for military victory; (3) a shift by the U.S. to a capital intensive war of support, attrition, and plain old killing; and (4) gradual withdrawal of U.S. combat forces located in Vietnam, but with a beefing up of those attacking Vietnam from "off-shore." The beauty of this scheme from the Nixon perspective was the reduced U.S. casualties, the lower cost of the war with expensive U.S. ground troops removed, the great

PR value of well-timed and gradual troop reductions, and the possibility of easing up on the draft and thus weakening the student anti-war movement — all consistent with the aggressive pursuit, even expansion, of the fighting and killing.

If the media were alert, carrying out their supposed function of helping the public see through clouds of rhetoric to the truth, and concerned with human values, they would be pointing out daily, insistently, and harshly, that Nixon's plan is: (a) Johnson's plan in essential purpose; (b) manipulative in its relation to the U.S. public; (c) crueler even than Johnson's in its resort to impersonal, more indiscriminate, push-button methods of killing; (d) dishonorable in its willingness to employ such vicious means for ends that are themselves wrong (supporting a series of corrupt Quisling governments) or trivial (saving an alleged American or Nixon's "face"); and (e) a form of applied racism in its attempt to placate the American public by substituting yellow corpses for white corpses. "Vietnamization" is the Asian counterpart of Nixon's "Southern Strategy" at home—in each case Nixon sacrifices the politically weak and voiceless to placate a larger more powerful constituency.

The media have not only failed to assail these racist policies, they have positively helped make them effective by featuring U.S. casualty rates in bold headlines, and ignoring or playing down Vietnamese military and civilian casualties. The media as well as the society at large really accepts deep down the "mere Gook rule"—and that great statesman Richard Nixon, with his unerring feel for the worst in us, leads us along a path defined by this racist premise.

2. That Richard Nixon has a deep and abiding concern for the welfare of U.S. prisoners of war (POW'S) in Indochina

Richard Nixon's "plan" and policies in Indochina have assured three consequences for U.S. POWs: (1) that their number would grow (and over 350 U.S. military personnel have been listed as missing or captured since Nixon took office); (2) that their term of incarceration would be extended indefinitely; and (3) that they would be threatened physically by Nixon's PR gambits (e.g., the prison raid) and by his increasingly massive bombing of North Vietnam. These points are obvious—what is really astonishing is that the media and the POW families should fail to see (and raise loud objections to) the fact that Nixon's policies are so uniformly contrary to the interests of the prisoners.

Equally astonishing is the inability or unwillingness of the media and POW families to perceive or call attention to the brazen hypocrisy of Nixon's POW rhetoric. Nixon has used, and in effect sacrificed, the POWs for his own political advantage to enable him to fight on for Thieu and military victory. With a well organized PR campaign beginning about March 1969, our POWs were featured heavily as abused victims of a "barbaric" enemy, etc. The point of this campaign was to dehumanize the enemy and to distract attention from the fact that Nixon was actually enlarging and intensifying the war. The media gave the administration full cooperation in this ugly, hypocritical brain-washing campaign.

Eventually the campaign came to an end, helped by the fact that the NLF took advantage of Nixon's pretended concern for the POWs and offered to return them in proportion to our withdrawal plus a promise of total U.S. withdrawal by a fixed date. In other words, all POWs would be released according to a schedule that would enable each side to check out the other's adherence to the arrangement. Nixon has never replied to that offer, but the media still let him pretend that there is a serious problem in getting the POWs back independent of Nixon's determination to win with Thieu.

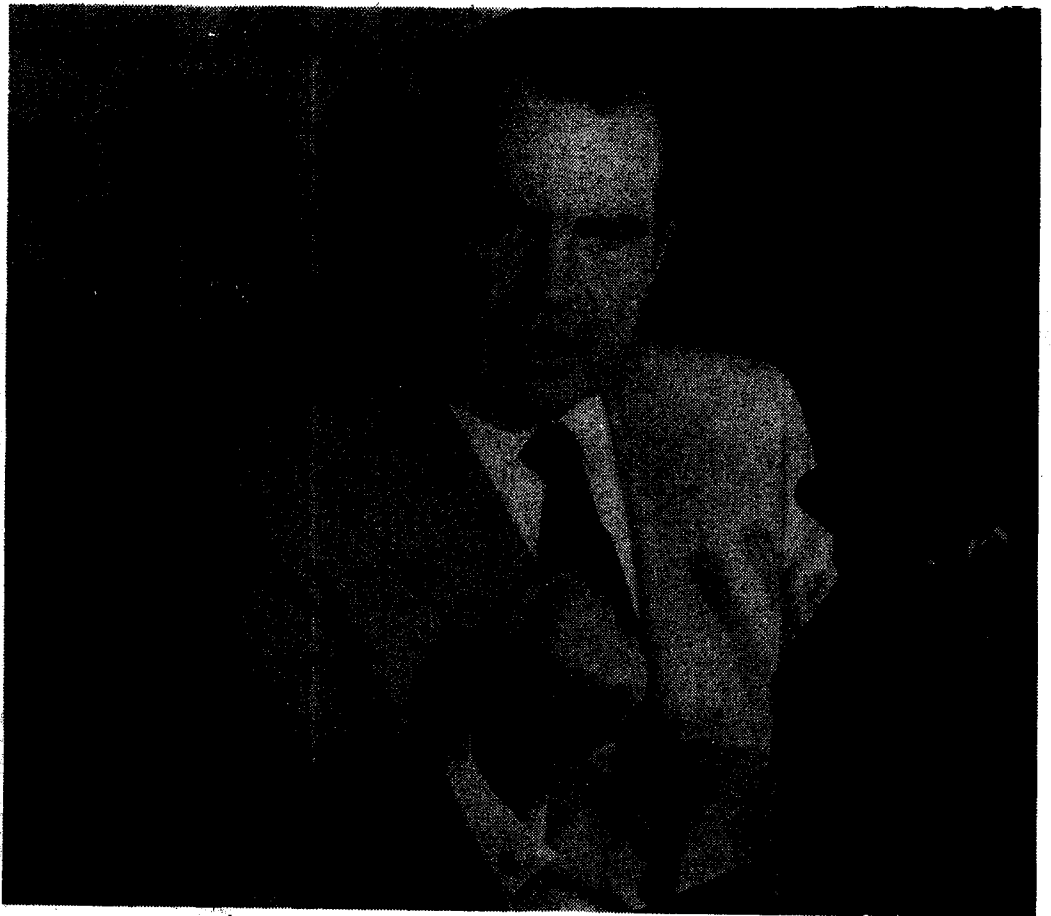
In his press conference of July 1, 1972 Nixon defended his bombing policy against North

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Richard Nixon has dropped more bombs than any other man in history . . . somewhat more than two tons per minute."

Vietnam on the ground that it is needed to ensure the release of all U.S. POWs—only by “doing something to them,” with bombing specifically mentioned, “will they have any incentive” to return our prisoners, who might otherwise never be released, “as was the case when the French got out of Viet Nam in 1954 and 15,000 French were never accounted for after that.” Just how “all” or any prisoners will be helped out of captivity by bombing is not explained by Nixon. The only possible logic that I can discern behind this apparent lunacy is as follows: Since Nixon is not prepared to settle for less than total victory in South Vietnam, he hopes that the war will just fade away in the South without a formal settlement. In that case our prisoners of war held by North Vietnam will be stranded unless we have a “bargaining lever,” like that we will stop bombing your country if you will give us back our POWs. The trouble is that this logic fails to explain bombing now, when we are not “bargaining” with a defeated enemy. The primary function of the current bombing is to facilitate the continued pursuit of military victory over the Vietnamese. This will be a long term and genocidal process, and as it unfolds and as Nixon attempts to reduce North Vietnam to the stone age for our “honor,” the POWs are going to suffer. Many or all of them will die if he uses nuclear weapons, which is not out of the question for a Nixon with a free hand;

and if they survive the Nixon onslaught, the growing population of American POWs have Nixon's guarantee of a long imprisonment.

The “factual” part of Nixon's statement on the unreleased French prisoners was recently checked out with the French Embassy in Washington, which replied as follows:

...the French authorities have, in the past, conducted intensive research on this matter. The conclusion of this research is that the last French prisoners have been returned by the North Vietnamese less than three months after the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements in 1954....To the best of our knowledge, there does not exist any member of the French Expeditionary Corps in the Far East unwillingly kept in North Vietnam.

In other words, Nixon's “fact” was a plain fabrication—and although this is a lie on a matter that the media have made into a serious issue, the media have neither pressed Nixon on it nor given the lie much attention.

Thus even today, with this record of unexcelled duplicity and hypocrisy, Richard Nixon is still allowed to get away with straight lies and imbecile rationalizations for contra-POW actions, explained in terms of his dedication to the POW interest!

3. That President Nixon wants to give the South Vietnamese a “free choice”

This is one of those huge, basic Orwellisms that is now almost a part of the American credo, and follows naturally from the patriotic premise that we are the good guys and therefore could hardly be trying to impose a minority clique on an unwilling population. Believing this, however, requires a very efficient set of blinders. One has to segregate in one's mind Nixon's warm support of General Khan and West Pakistan in a murderous suppression of “free choice” in East Pakistan; his complete support for the Greek fascist regime that came into existence for the specific purpose of preventing a majority middle-of the road party from taking electoral power, etc.

In Vietnam our alleged interest in “free choice” is incompatible with all the basic facts known regarding our long and consistent role—we (and the early Nixon) supported the return of French colonialism; and upon its failure we imposed an imported leader on South Vietnam in violation of the Geneva Accords. From 1954 to the present we have been intervening in South Vietnam to build up for our satellite government a friendly constituency which, by direct

mentality, is the incompatibility of any real free choice with our politico-military bureaucracy's taking it upon itself to decide what's best for others. This point is reinforced by the fact that in South Vietnam these bureaucrats have never supported an “open society”—they have steadily and consistently backed rightist totalitarians, with little or no indigenous support, whose only merit was their amenability to the desires of Washington.

4. That we are opposing a blatant “invasion” by North Vietnam

If we entered South Vietnam on a large scale in 1965 to prevent the assumption of power by the only “truly mass-based political party in South Vietnam,” that was an invasion and our parallel bombing of North Vietnam was a further act of aggression that served as a cover for an

admission or implication did not (and does not) yet exist. When we began to attack North Vietnam openly in 1965, the situation in South Vietnam was such that pacification officer John Paul Vann asserted that "A popular political base for the Government of South Vietnam does not now exist." The faction we were fighting to sustain was, according to Vann, "a continuation of the French colonial system of government with upper class Vietnamese replacing the French." The faction we were fighting to keep out of power, the NLF, was, according to the leading official expert on the subject, the only "truly mass-based political party in South Vietnam."

A variant of the "free choice" argument that appeals to sophisticated hawks runs as follows: we support "open societies," while the NLF and North Vietnam represent the "closed society." Consequently, if they win, South Vietnamese freedom is ended forever (before it ever began, in fact!); whereas if our side wins, there remains hope—in the long run. Mention is then usually made in this connection of our beneficent influence on postwar Germany and Japan. Neglected, however, is our increasing support and frequent clear preference for military juntas over democratic ("open") orders in the more relevant Third World countries (say, Greece, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala). Neglected also, in the arrogance of the imperialist

intention to pound the South Vietnamese into submission. Anything the North Vietnamese did to retaliate against our attacks, and against our now seven year long direct effort to forcibly impose a government of our choice on the South Vietnamese, could not be an invasion in any meaningful sense.

Even before that, our support of Diem's refusal to permit peaceful reunification of Vietnam irretrievably destroyed our legal and moral position there. If we and our imported "leader" completely refused to accept reunification by the lawful procedures designed by the Geneva Conference, we could hardly speak of an "invasion" if the Vietminh moved south in their own country. Once the unifying elections of 1956 were barred by us and our ally, the Vietminh had every right under international law to fight for reunification by any means. By the same token, it is a form of external aggression for a foreign power (namely, us) to establish and artificially prop up a minority government, knowing full well that it has a very small internal constituency, and knowing that this series of actions violates both the letter and spirit of the relevant international agreements (Geneva, 1954; the U.N. Charter).

Buying an internal mercenary army and calling it "Vietnamization" does not alter the fact that we are the invading and occupying power in South Vietnam, still trying to establish by force and money our preferred form of South Vietnamese polity (and that preferred form is damned well not "democracy"!). The old question asked by I.F. Stone in 1967 is still applicable:

If this is simple invasion from the North, why do we have to 'pacify' its victims in the South? Who ever heard of having to placate a people saved from aggression? Did we have to pacify Paris after driving the Germans out?

5. That under Nixon the United States has almost completed a military withdrawal from Vietnam

There are two main sub-deceptions involved here: First, there is the false suggestion that the reduction in U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam (a fact) has meant a reduction in our overall military presence. Nixon has moved to the "capital intensive" and automated war long sought by Curtis LeMay, Goldwater, and other primitives of the Republican extreme right. The result is that the nature, but not the magnitude, of our presence has been altered: less in Vietnam (where we let the Gooks fight it out among themselves, according to another long-standing Republican right formula), more around and over Vietnam. Nixon has greatly increased the number of B-52s and other attack planes, aircraft carriers, and other naval vessels participating in the war. The latest available figures indicate that from early 1972 to now, the number of B-52s in

action has risen from 40 to 200, attack planes from 350 to 900, aircraft carriers from 2 to 6, and other naval vessels from 10 to about 50.

While U.S. personnel in South Vietnam has declined to about 39,000, there are now 45,000 Americans in Thailand and 50,000 in the Gulf of Tonkin actively engaged in the fighting war, and over 100,000 more are directly involved in support and servicing operations from Okinawa (45,000), the Philippines (18,000), Taiwan (6,000), Guam (10,000) and Hawaii (25,000). In, around, and over, then, are still 238,000 members of the U.S. armed forces participating in the war. There are also another 35-40,000 outside mercenaries — mainly Koreans — located in South Vietnam. At a conservative estimate all of this is costing the American taxpayer \$25,000,000 *per day*; it may be twice that amount.

The second sub-deception in our alleged "withdrawal" stems from the fact that politically and financially Nixon has gotten us in deeper with the Saigon junta and has rendered them even more dependent on our military, political, and economic support. Nixon has put all of his money (or rather, our money) on supporting Thieu, a military hack with a minute popular base, who has completed the polarization of South Vietnam. His support is almost wholly military, although at this point there is a fairly large supporting "infra-structure" of grafters, war profiteers, petty bureaucrats, prostitutes and pimps temporarily attached in the normal manner of parasites to source of blood and money. The military and "infra-structure", in turn, are almost entirely dependent on U.S. "aid."

The media have completely neglected pointing out the way in which Vietnamization, instead of making the Saigon regime more independent, has actually converted it into a thorough-going satellite. Under Vietnamization its million-plus army and large police force are provided with sophisticated and very expensive equipment that requires huge outlays and continuous technical assistance by the dominant power. The cost of maintaining this force *assuming no fighting*, which would raise the ante sharply, is authoritatively estimated as in excess of \$1 billion per year. This is approximately one-third of the GNP of South Vietnam, and it is now met by large U.S. budget subventions, direct transfers of materiel, and a massive U.S. investment in military school and field training programs. Since the Saigon military and police apparatus would collapse over-night upon the withdrawal of this program of financial and technical aid, it is obvious that Nixon's most basic policy and plan are incompatible with either South Vietnamese independence or U.S. withdrawal. On the contrary, they imply a long-term client status for the Saigon regime based on a unique and built-in form of dependency.

6. That President Nixon is greatly concerned over a possible postwar "bloodbath"

President Nixon's concern over *real* bloodbaths has been demonstrably limited witness the huge bloodbath in East Pakistan, during which the Great Humanist actually "tilted" in favor of the administrators of the bath. Even more to the point — and something that makes his alleged concern over a postwar bloodbath in Vietnam such a marvel of hypocrisy — is the fact that he personally is the deliberate author and current manager of a going bloodbath in Indochina that dwarfs any reasonable probability of postwar killing no matter on what terms the war is ended.

Richard Nixon has dropped more bombs (about 3.7 million tons) than any other man in history — ever improving bombs that burn, penetrate, and shatter human beings; bombs dropped in an increasingly indiscriminate manner all over Indochina. He has been dropping bombs during his term of office at somewhat more than *two tons per minute* (this, of course, entirely excludes ground ordnance). He has produced 13 million bomb craters in Indochina. Under Nixon's kindly auspices and "restrain" some 4,600,000 civilians have been killed, wounded, or turned into refugees. Some 1.5 million combatants have been killed or wounded. And, according to a recent Saigon government report, from the time Nixon took office through July 1971, some 40,000 South Vietnamese civilians were executed without trial under the Phoenix program.

This huge bloodbath is real; Nixon's bogey is conjectural, implausible, and rests on a tissue of falsehoods. I have pointed out in detail elsewhere that Nixon's estimates of the numbers killed in North Vietnam after 1954 are completely comprised from the start by the fact that his figures vary week by week according to the PR needs of the moment; but all of his estimates are based on a more fundamental lie—he says or implies that the people killed in North Vietnam were victims of reprisals for collaboration with the French, but as George Kahin has pointed out,

It was in the fall of 1956, more than two years after the Geneva armistice, that violence occurred on a significant scale in the North. This was unconnected with the anti-French struggle and was not in reprisal against Vietnamese who had supported France against the Vietminh.

Furthermore, the evidence of the records of the International Control Commission indicate that following Geneva, Diem and the "Free World" forces were far more guilty of illegal reprisals and massacres than were the North Vietnamese. At Hue, also, the numbers killed by the U.S. and by the Saigon forces in recapturing the city, and in reprisals, appear to have exceeded the reprisal killings of the NLF and North Vietnamese by a large factor.

Given the nature of the Thieu regime, its openly admitted lack of popular support, the continued mercenary and plundering character of its huge military force, there is every reason to believe that a "victory" and uncontested power for this super-Quisling-client would bring with it a larger postwar bloodbath than would an NLF-North Vietnamese victory.

If there is anybody left to kill. There may not be by the time the Nixon bloodbath is over. His "plan" has made him the party chiefly responsible for one of the largest, cruelest, most calculated bloodbaths ever perpetrated, carried out by a spiritually and morally defective, but overpowerful and swaggering, bully. It is my considered judgment that, according to the principles laid down in the Nuremberg trials and in the Nuremberg Code, Richard Nixon is as guilty of major war crimes as any of the 24 Nazis executed following World War II.

Dr. Edward Herman, a professor of finance in the Wharton School, is the author of Atrocities in Vietnam: Myths and Realities and co-author of America's Vietnam Policy: The Strategy of Deception.

(See footnotes on page 5)

Footnotes

(Continued from page 4)

1. Since many NLF and North Vietnamese prisoners have been tortured and shot to death (the evidence on this point is very extensive), if their treatment of our prisoners is "barbaric" what are we and our "allies"?
2. Quoted from Vann's untitled memo on Pacification Requirements, circulated within the U.S. military in late 1965 and reprinted April 1, 1967.
3. Douglas Pike, *Vietcong*, MIT Press, 1966, p. 110. Pike was a U.S. information officer in Vietnam.
4. Most of these figures were provided to the author by Project Air War in Washington, D.C., an organization that depends almost entirely (and uses conservatively) official sources.
5. *Atrocities in Vietnam; Myths and Realities*, chap. 4, "The Threat of a Postwar Bloodbath."
6. George Kahin, "Topics: History and the Bloodbath Theory in Vietnam," *NYT* Dec. 6, 1969.
7. *Ibid.*
8. See *Atrocities in Vietnam: Myths and Realities*, pp. 37-40 and the literature cited there. More and more evidence is coming to light — ignored by the mass media—that large scale retaliatory killing took place in Hue by the Saigon army after the recapture of Hue. In a graphic description by Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci it is concluded that "Altogether, there have been 1,100 killed (after "liberation," by Saigon forces). Mostly students, university teachers, priests. Intellectuals and religious people at Hue have never hidden their sympathy for the NLF." ("Working Up to Killing," *The Washington Monthly*, Feb. 1972, p. 40.)

Memo on other comments
on bloodbath filed
Nix Ad 5 Nov 69.