

THE VIETNAM WAR AND MODERN SENSIBILITY

The purpose of the "Dialogue Sessions" series is to explore some of the ways in which the Vietnam War has affected American sensibilities, particularly in the area of religion and values.

While it is generally recognized that the War has had a profound catalytic and transformational influence in this respect, we do not yet have precise information on this subject.

The Center proposes a series of meetings of an interdisciplinary nature. These meetings will be directed toward exploring the theme "The Vietnam War and Modern Sensibility" in a deliberate, sequential manner. Each meeting will be devoted to a particular aspect of the theme and will draw upon resources from a particular subject-area.

The series will be co-sponsored by the Institute of Religious Studies of the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California, as a continuation of the Laucks Lectures program established several years ago. Co-sponsorship will enable the series to have multiple foci. While the burden of the series will be carried forward through the "dialogue sessions", there will be supporting events (such as occasional public lectures as well as participation in graduate seminars) on the University campus.

As envisioned now, the series will be devoted to the following sub-themes:

- (1) An exploratory analysis of the "meaning of Vietnam" as this subject is presented by Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, "The Meaning of Vietnam: Belief Systems of American Leaders" in Image and Reality, Vol. XXXII, No. 3 (Summer, 1977), pp. 452-474.

Invited resource person: Professor Rosenau (Director of the Institute for Transnational Studies and the School of International Relations, University of Southern California)

- (2) The War and the Nation's Literary Habits -- an analysis of shifts in subject-matter, literary style, uses of language, coining of words, etc., judged against the thesis of Paul Fussell's award-winning book, THE GREAT WAR AND MODERN MEMORY. Resource person: still to be determined -- possible candidate, Herbert Schneidau, Professor of English Literature, UCSB; most obvious resource person, Clifton Fadiman.

- (3) The War and Artistic and Musical Forms -- analyses of changes in musical and artistic expression; new styles in music and art; creation of distinctive gestures, senses of taste, styles of dress.
- (4) The War and "Civil Religion" -- analyses of the affect of the War upon American religious self-consciousness, particularly with reference to the distinctly American way of 'being religious' -- including: attitudes of religious leaders toward the war; the growth of fundamentalist religion; Hartford vs. Boston colloquies. Resource persons: Robert N. Bellah (Berkeley), Robert Michaelson (Santa Barbara), Harvey Cox (Harvard), Jerald Brauer (Chicago), William L. Miller (Indiana).
- (5) The War as Stimulant of Alternative Institutions -- affect upon existing institutions, changes in family structure, creation of new institutions, etc. Resource person: William May, Indiana University
- (6) The Affect of the War upon Participants
 - (a) affect upon veterans and prisoners-of-war. resource person: Robert Jay Lifton, Professor of Psychiatry, Yale University
 - (b) affect upon military leadership
hope: that we might have a presentation by a general or admiral, someone like General Gavin (or someone cited in Holsti and Rosenau's article)
- (7) Legal and Constitutional Redressings -- the affect of the war upon legal and constitutional issues; the development of "executive privilege", the growth of Congressional power in opposition to executive privilege; Watergate and the War, etc., etc.
- (8) Peace via Positive Disengagement -- the correlation between (a) the terms of disengagement from the war, and (b) the aspirations of Asian religious traditions, and the aftermath of this correlation in American cultural and religious life. The theme paraphrased: "The American War Experience and the Growth of Eastern Religions in North America."

- (9) The Vietnam War in Historical Perspective -- an evaluation of the "place" of the war in American history: its magnitude, formative effect, influence upon America's sense of destiny, purpose, role in the world, etc. This topic invites analyses from multiple perspectives, involving historians of various schools. Alongwith other necessary resource persons on this subject, I would like to invite Robert Coles and/or Erik Erikson to offer evaluations and analyses. Two sessions may be necessary.
- (10) The Vietnam War as an Event in World History -- Can it be done? It would take someone like George Steiner to approach it. But if done well, without excessive ideological overtones, it could be instructive.

These topics provide sufficient sub-foci for a series of at least ten, and possibly twelve meetings. The personnel involved will also be attractive candidates for public lectures on the campus.

It goes without saying that the contents of the series, when appropriate, will be included in THE CENTER MAGAZINE. It is also conceivable that the best essays can be collected to be published together as a book.

Please recognize that the list of suggested topics was compiled without conscious thought of the possible contributions of Center Associates. It would be my hope that Associates would take responsibility for presenting papers at various points in the series. But at this stage in the proposal-writing, I have not tried to make that contribution explicit.

Some research assistance will be necessary. And there are other details that need to be worked out more exactly. But this is the gist of the series, as I conceive it, prior to our fuller discussions and analyses of it. May I add that I recognize the topic to be in keeping with Center interests of considerable long-standing.

Walter H. Capps
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