

## THE IMPACT OF VIETNAM

The purpose of this statement is to outline a comprehensive project which the Associates of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions--soon to be renamed The Robert M. Hutchins Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions--wish to initiate.

The project focuses on changes and transformations of values, beliefs, attitudes, and senses of individual identity and corporate self-awareness that have occurred in contemporary America by virtue of "Vietnam" and its impact. The purpose of the project is to make the event, as well as the experience, more intelligible, perhaps more useful, and, conceivably, a place from which to start in the necessary reconstruction of ideals and values that must take place within the society following the anguish and trauma that occurred.

### Background Factors

The Center's interest in this topic possesses a long and durable history. The Center was established in 1959 as a response to the social, political, and cultural upheavals that had come to characterize post World War II America. There was general recognition that the human condition had become dramatically altered by the war, and, most specifically, by the enormous power that had been unleashed in the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Before the nuclear capability was developed, warfare could be kept within some manageable bounds; though dreaded and terror-filled, its catastrophies were always of finite proportions. But the nuclear explosions changed the meaning of war. And, as Yale psychiatrist, Robert Jay Lifton, has pointed out, it also altered comprehensive perceptions of the meaning of life.

Attention to the ramifications of the war was placed within a more comprehensive framework of purposes. As stated in the charter, the specific focus of the Center's work lay in analyzing and reconceiving the role of the constituent institutions within the free society. In the post-war climate, there was concern that the basic freedoms of the democratic state be firmly secured outside the regulative power of political whim, expediency, and ideological turnings. These aspirations were supported by some tested convictions and cultivated methodological perspectives. Mr. Hutchins believed that every aspect of "the democratic state" (as he referred to it) should be examined against the philosophical wisdom and moral judgment that had been nurtured in the classical age, and transmitted forward to the present era. In short, the implications of the new nuclear age were to be discerned by means of some shared perceptions regarding the nature of the good society and the requirements of authentic human life. The spirit of the undertaking is captured in the frequently-quoted statement of Mr. Hutchins:

Justice and freedom; discussion and criticism; intelligence and character-- these are the indispensable ingredients of the democratic state. We can be rich and powerful without them. But not for long.

Thus, the existence of the Center is witness to a long-term investment in correlating "the indispensable ingredients of the democratic state" with the perennial human virtues, tested legacies of values, and some cultivated forms of inquiry and modes of addressing issues, and in resilient restatement.

Out of these convictions, the Center has tried to serve as "an early warning system" within the society. From this posture, it has desired to anticipate needs, problems,

and opportunities before they become more generally perceptible, prior to becoming fully formed. From time to time, the Center has been able to discern new and emerging patterns of intellectual coherence and societal organization. All such activity is undergirded by a proscribed attentiveness to the quality of contemporary American life. We cite these background factors to place the present project in its proper working context.

### Specific Focus

"The Impact of Vietnam" is a topic most appropriate to the exercising of the Center's convictions, capacities, and interests. Indeed, in some respects, "Vietnam" stands at the crucial point of rejuvenation as World War II stands to the founding of the Center. Both events can be defined as large-scale military interventions which carry profound capacities for social, cultural, political, economic, psychological, and "spiritual" readjustment. Both events seem to be seminal and formative events, carriers and symbols of a new ordering of the nation's common life.

Once again, three decades after the ending of World War II, it has become necessary to reassess the place, function, and statue of the institutions which comprise the society in light of the alterations that have been set in motion. For Vietnam, like World War II, was indeed a military and political event, but so also was it a mental, psychological, emotional, and ideological occurrence--an event of such major proportions that our established ways of life have been altered through its impact and by its influence. We wish to assess the event in light of its impact, hoping to decide whether it is cause, effect, catalyst, symbol, symptom, or expression of the socio-cultural change with which it is ineluctably tied.

The project has two sides. We wish, first, to learn something more about the war itself, primarily, the dominant

ways in which it was conceived, portrayed, projected, and assimilated into American social, political, and cultural life. Secondly, we want to be able to begin placing the event within a larger context. And this involves analyzing its effects and impact upon our common life.

To do the first, we shall try to identify the specific intentions under which the war was fought, the strategic and military interpretations of the way in which it was conducted, the categories, terms, and analogs by which it qualifies as a war. To do this, we shall examine the speeches, addresses, and correspondence of those most directly involved, the military strategists, the presidents and members of Congress within whose terms of office the event occurred, the eyewitness accounts of participants (media correspondents and military combatants, in the main), the veterans writing in retrospect. We shall consult tested models--reflections of the war as analyzed via psychological and psychiatric analyses of the experiences of participants. And we shall study the insights provided in tutored analyses of war, such as Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory. In this regard, we shall entertain the possibility that Vietnam symbolizes some reversals of Sigmund Freud's thesis in Civilization and its Discontents. We shall trace the movement from "hero to anti-hero" in American literary development, and will test the thesis that the war symbolizes the dissolution of "the American myth" (the myth about the meaning of America). We recognize that there are various kinds of war, within which assortment "Vietnam" owns an eloquent distinctiveness.

And, while focusing on the war itself, we shall be intent on identifying its linkages with other large changes in the nation's cultural habits. We shall examine coincidences between the anguish of the war and the larger fragmentation of American society that occurred during the same period. We shall focus on occurrences in music and the arts during the same period of time, paying particular attention

to the means and forms by which attitudes to the war (as well as depictions and portrayals of it) were expressed. We wish to identify learned chronicles of recent American history (Morris Dickstein's Gates of Eden, Godfrey Hodgson's America in our Time: From World War II to Nixon--What Happened and Why, the writings of Daniel Boorstin, John Gardner, Arthur Schlesinger, and a host of others who have tried to create perspective on "Vietnam"). In so doing, we wish to determine how the events might be fitted to a more extensive sequence of current history, or whether it is obliged to remain anomalous. We will attempt to trace whatever chains of events seem to have preceded it, whether these be in the area of political ideology, shifts in attitudes of citizens toward government, transformations of liberalist inclinations, rises of the powers of important sub-cultures and sub-groups, et al. And we shall probe new ways in which American self-consciousness is being determined: the dawning of the global perspective (as Barbara Ward refers to it); the "power of Asia" and its new registration upon American planning and senses of identity; the linkage between "Vietnam" and the lessons of the civil-rights experience of the 60's and early 70's; the fashioning of non-violence as an effective instrument of social and political change.

From both vantage points, we shall search for mirrors of "Vietnam" in the arts, in religious attitudes, in changed senses of value, in literary form, political ideology, wherever its influence can be found. And we shall pay particular attention to the products of the experience, its constructive and positive contributions to technology, medicine, the communications arts, et al. In all of these ways, we shall seek to place the event, then come to terms with it, assessing its larger significance. We shall do all of this, if possible, by correlating the incidence of "Vietnam" with the emergence of new ways of making life intelligible. And we shall try to decide whether "Vietnam" is symbol, product,

or significant contrast to the dominant patterns of intelligence that have emerged in the United States in the past decade and a half.

#### Methods of Approach

Though we are seeking funding as though envisioning the project for the first time, the clarity of our intentions, and our deep resolves, are due to the fact that we have conducted exploratory inquiries in this area of inquiry for nearly a year and a half. During the course of this time, we have had a number of "dialogue sessions" on the subject. In addition, still under "pilot-stage" auspices (as befits preliminary investigation), we organized a conference on the general theme, "The Impact of Vietnam," April 5-7, 1979 (See Program. Appendix A). The conference was devoted to an identification and preliminary exploration of the major issues and interests implicit in the subject. Its emphasis lay upon bringing such topics to the surface of inquiry, rather than attempting total coverage or satisfactory comprehension. Even so, despite its preliminary character, and provisional nature, the conference elicited a number of thoughtful presentations and some provocative discussion. The former are being made the basis for a book of essays on The Impact of Vietnam, to be published, we believe, by Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., in San Francisco. The papers and presentations will also provide materials to be published in future issues of THE CENTER MAGAZINE. And, not least, the same papers and chapters will serve to mark out a stated starting point or initial reference point for the subsequent work on the subject which we intend to carry out. Perhaps it should be pointed out that the "dialogue format" is no mere means of creating discussion opportunities, but, rather, belongs intrinsically to the Center's sense of purpose. The formative conviction is that the problems that confront the society are always open to interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary,

and multi-disciplinary scrutiny. This disposition agrees with the conviction that the most reliable clarification of large social issues derives from the translation of interdisciplinary cooperation into effective single-minded instruments of analysis and interpretation. This conviction is responsible for the requirement that those who participate in the Center's dialogues exhibit two indispensable capacities simultaneously. Each one must bring competence in a specific subject area to the dialogue table. He/she thus participates in research and discussion via the insights, wisdom, and propensities that are possible only through specific accomplishment. At the same time, no one is allowed to abide in the safe harbor of a particular field or discipline, nor can any persist within the safe conduct of communication-jargon and/or a rarified expertise. Rather, each, with the others, must seek for a common language and sharable means of expression. Such are the ideals (and frequent occurrences) of the Center's "dialogue sessions," which have become its most consistent mechanism for approaching and clarifying the issues of the day. It is this disciplined, carefully-crafted and tested approach that will be drawn upon in the Center's work on "the impact of Vietnam."

For the most part, participants in the Center's dialogues have not come to their subjects of inquiry as legislators or as persons under strong and direct pressure of having to formulate policy or make governmental decisions. At the same time, they have not been content simply to engage in intellectual deliberation, nor have they been satisfied with an accurate tracing of the progression, flow, or power of ideas. Instead, the Associates of the Center have characteristically approached the issues of the day as being complex intellectual matters with intrinsic programmatic and practical bases. Theoretical and practical dimensions and components exist side-by-side and interdependently (just as humanities resources and public-policy issues belong to one

another intrinsically). The task always is to discern, illumine, and define the multiple interdependencies. In its methods of approaching things, the Center is committed to the task of finding and then enunciating a grammar of integrated intelligence.

We shall utilize the "dialogues" as a reservoir to assist us in developing and classifying materials on the war. We want to create a Vietnam Studies archive, a collection of documents and essays which we can use and which others can consult. We shall gather these materials independently of our dialogue sessions too, while anticipating that some of the richest items in the collection will come from the contributions of persons invited to participate and/or to make presentations at the seminar table. Though we have not developed our system of classification in sufficient detail, we anticipate organizing both the materials and the dialogues and conferences according to the following subject headings:

I. Veterans' Perspectives on the War

This sub-topic includes treatment of how Vietnam veterans perceive themselves and the war in which they fought; the dynamics of re-entry, readjustment, and resocialization; the society's perception and treatment (including mistreatment) of the Vietnam veteran; the development of a national policy for veteran benefits.

II. How Did Vietnam Alter American Life?

What institutions within the society felt its impact most? Should Vietnam be viewed as cause or consequence of the most definitive changes within the society in the 60's and 70's, or, indeed, in the post World War II era? What sorts of narrative portrayals are most useful in delineating the changes Vietnam symbolizes?



III. Beliefs and Attitudes about the War

Capitalizing upon the research of Professors James Rosenau and Ole Holsti, this segment of the project pertains to the ways in which an "American leadership" interpreted and responded to the war. It focuses, too, on changes in attitudes, and correlates opinion with social stratification as well as with vocational, occupational, and professional differentiations.

IV. Vietnam and the Nation's Cultural Habits

This portion of the project deals specifically with the impact of Vietnam upon literary, artistic, and other forms of humanistic expression. Within its interests, questions are raised about the changes that may have been effected in musical style, linguistic patterns, forms and modes of communication, artistic sensitivities, and the like. Attention will be directed toward developments in the areas of fiction, poetry, artistic form, musical composition, concepts of design, etc. But there will also be concern for ways in which interpretations of history have been altered, senses of purpose and destiny. The entire sub-topic will be illumined by the insights in such books as Leonard Meyer's Theory and Emotion in Music, Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory, and Stephen Toulmin's Human Understanding.

V. The Task After Vietnam: The Quest for a Sense of National Purpose

Here emphasis lies upon assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the country

and its dominant needs in the aftermath of the Vietnam experience. If "Vietnam" spells dissolutionment and decomposition, how might the pieces be put back together again? What is the process of re-composition? What resources can be tapped or constructed to stimulate a new sense of national unity? John Gardner, among others, calls for the need to replenish "moral courage." Others testify that, following Vietnam (and Water-gate, and a variety of interrelated disappointments), the nation appears to have become dispirited. Thus, if "Vietnam" stands as symbol of the dissolution of the American dream, and the decomposition of the network by which the society enjoys its coherence, what recuperative steps are in order?

It goes without saying that we intend to pursue these issues, sub-topic by sub-topic, over the next three years, beginning in July, 1979. We shall utilize the "dialogue session" format in accordance with the Center's custom. On occasion, we shall also schedule a conference--three or four of them over the three-year span, at least two of which will be or include public meetings. And we intend to disseminate the results of our work via the publication means at our disposal. Reference has already been made to the archive collection. We also anticipate publishing articles, monographs, books, and special issues of THE CENTER MAGAZINE. When such publication prospects are available to us, we wish to invite scholars and writers to visit the Center for brief periods of time to share ideas, carry out their research, work out their hypotheses in this supportive intellectual environment. We also intend to "commission" specific papers and/or research projects, by offering modest financial supplementation

to persons with other means who have demonstrated the capacity to lend significance to the project.

We anticipate that each of the sub-sections of the project will produce at least one volume (Daedalus-like in format and orientation). There will be several studies of "the impact of Vietnam" in more comprehensive terms. And, as noted, we shall commission research and publication projects within the contexts that have been identified. While producing our own publications, we will also collect the relevant materials on Vietnam and make them available to others.

#### Administration

The project will be directed by a Principal Investigator, with the guidance of the Director of the Center. Guidelines of interest and inquiry will be marked out by the project's Steering Committee consisting of persons of large and trusted reputation who have dedicated themselves to this responsibility. Members of the Steering Committee consist of the following:

Harry Ashmore, Associate, Center for the Study of  
Democratic Institutions

Barton J. Bernstein, Professor of History, Stanford  
University

Max Cleland, Head, Veterans Administration

Erik H. Erikson, Psychiatrist and Author

Clifton Fadiman, Associate, Center for the Study of  
Democratic Institutions

Richard Flacks, Professor of Sociology, University  
of California, Santa Barbara

Cynthia W. Frey, Program Officer, Division of  
Education, National Endowment for the Humanities

Murray Fromsen, Television Correspondent, Consultant

Otis L. Graham, Jr., Program Chairman, Center for the  
Study of Democratic Institutions

Eulah Laucks, Member, Board of Directors, Center  
for the Study of Democratic Institutions

Michael Lewis, Associate Director, California  
Council for the Humanities in Public Policy

Lawrence Lichty, Professor of Communications Theory,  
University of Wisconsin, Visiting Fellow, The  
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Donald McDonald, Editor, The Center Magazine,  
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Robert S. Michaelsen, Vice Chancellor, University  
of California, Santa Barbara

Maurice Mitchell, President, Center for the Study  
of Democratic Institutions

Jacob Needleman, Director, Program for the Study  
of New Religious Movements in America, Graduate  
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Paul Newman, Actor, Member, Board of Directors,  
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Stanley Sheinbaum, Member, Board of Regents,  
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Jonathan Z. Smith, Benton Professor of the Human  
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Walter H. Capps  
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