

Vietnam Veterans of America
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ENDING THE MORAL CRISIS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

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U.S. Senate 1969-81

The 30th anniversary of the release of the Pentagon Papers is an appropriate time to reflect on what happened and to assess the legacy of the Vietnam War. Such reflections raise questions — questions that we've heard before — but the need to answer them remains a major moral imperative for those we look to as leaders and for ourselves. How could it all have happened? What does the War say about our democracy, our government, our leaders? What does it say about **us** — the citizens of this great country?

The recent emotionally-charged media coverage of Senator Bob Kerrey's revelations on the terrible events that occurred one dark night more than thirty years ago stirred me, as it did most Americans. It's yet another example of how close the trauma of the War is to the surface of our individual and collective psyches.

The historic significance of the Vietnam War has commanded an extensive literature and will continue to do so. The release of the Papers contributed a good deal to the accuracy of that literature by revealing government actions and documents that more than likely would otherwise have remained hidden from view for a generation or more. The hero of this drama, Daniel Ellsberg, sought to inform the American people by releasing a top-secret study that showed how the nation had been misled into an "unjust war." He did that gloriously, and the event he created greatly illuminated our Vietnam policy.

What lessons have we learned from the War? From Ellsberg's heroic act? Sadly, I see nothing that leads me to believe that actions comparable to Ellsberg's are now commonplace among technocrats or that the War has taught us anything that might ensure that a similar tragedy will not occur in the future. I can no longer sustain the view I held in 1971, when I wrote:

"The people must know the full story of their government's actions ... to ensure that never again will this great nation be led into waging a war through ignorance and deception."

The truth is that neither the forces motivating our leaders nor our leaders' responses to those forces have changed much in the past three decades. At the same time, the ordinary citizens of the United States — the people who suffer the consequences of their leaders' arrogance — have no mechanisms available

through which they can exercise their sovereign political power to avert or foreshorten such tragedies in the future. As a result, the people remain complicit in, and responsible for, the acts of their leaders.

Dealing with the individual and collective moral guilt resulting from our national policy, and acknowledging the shortcomings in the structure of our government that led to and perpetuated the War gives us the opportunity to improve our national character and correct deficiencies in the structure of our government. Whether our leadership and we, as individuals, take advantage of these opportunities rests with us who are, after all, ultimately responsible.

In my subsequent analysis, I have avoided references to individual decision-makers but have referred instead to "Presidential Administrations", "technocrats", "Congress" and "leaders", the latter of which includes scholars and media celebrities, because all share in the guilt for this nation's involvement in Vietnam. Besides, experience instructs us that human actions can rarely be characterized as all "black" or all "white"; and this is certainly true of our Vietnam experience. People within organizations in which conflicting powers are in constant confrontation naturally build congeniality, camaraderie and "clubby-ness" in order to function. Unfortunately, this sense of fraternity is terribly destructive of individual courage, initiative and creativity before the fact, and so protective of the conduct of its members after the fact. From personal observation, I conclude that the existence of the "club" in the Senate is what crippled the Senate's will to stop the War when it had the conscience and power to do so and what prevented its taking any palliative action in the generation following the War.

Our leaders are no less moral than the rest of us. But the corrupting effects of power, particularly in those at the highest levels of government, made it easy for them to detach political decisions from their moral consequences. The only safeguard against corruption by power is the strongest possible commitment by all the players in society, particularly the leadership, to fundamental moral norms and democratic principles. When commitments falter, as they did in the Vietnam experience, we all suffer. The suggestions that I offer herein to deal with the legacies of the Vietnam War rest on just such fundamental moral and democratic principles, and that is what ultimately recommends them for action. Before addressing our opportunities and my suggestions, I think it's important to put events into their proper historical context.

Looking Back

Let's examine two decisions in which a lack of faith in democratic principles and the absence of moral "ballast" in our leaders plunged the nation headlong into the morass of Indochina. Two separate and outstanding Presidential Administrations, one Democrat and one Republican, separated by ten years, made watershed decisions that had seminal effects on all that came after.

Just before the United States was brought into the Second World War, President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill met and jointly declared:

“...they [will] respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.”ⁱⁱ

This commitment to the democratic principle of self-determination, made in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, served as the moral underpinning of the United Nations Charter in 1945. The Allies fought to defeat Fascism in a “just war” and colonial peoples throughout the world, who had been induced by promises of self-determination to fight Fascism, had every right to expect that their rights of self-determination would be honored at War’s end by the leaders of the Allies who had made those solemn commitments.

Years of Decision 1945-46

It was within that context that the people of Indochina, whose quest for independence is comparable to our own, fought alongside the Allies against the Japanese and their Vichy French colonial collaborators. Our military representatives personally affirmed Roosevelt’s commitment to Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the largest faction in Indochina.

Imperial colonial interests, however, were not to be so easily undone. Before the ink was dry on the UN Charter, Britain, with concerns for its own colonial empire and in military control of Indochina in August 1945, cooperated, against American wishes, in the return of Free French forces intent on re-establishing colonial rule. The French democratic government in Paris reinstalled Bao Dai, the same imperial colonial puppet who had “ruled” under Vichy and Japanese occupation. In the fall and winter of 1945-46, Ho directed repeated appeals to Washington, asking for American intervention against this reimposition of colonial rule. All of his appeals went unanswered. By 1950, Washington had revealed that its official policy toward Indochina was one of all-out support of French colonial interests, in direct violation of its commitment to self-determination.

The Administration of Harry Truman not only failed to honor the moral commitment instigated by Roosevelt but also turned its back on democratic principles that the Administration had sought to protect in other parts of the world. The argument made in Congress to rationalize the appropriation of funds to support French colonialists was that Ho was a Communist. This position was somewhat specious inasmuch as the Administration and Congress were actively courting the Communist government of Yugoslavia at this same time. Unable to find intelligence that Ho received aid or consorted with Communists outside Indochina, the Administration and Congress branded Ho the “enemy” because the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China had quickly recognized Ho’s government when it declared independence. Our government was oblivious to the fact that the Russians and Chinese had just trumped our hand by playing the “Vietnam Card.”

Upon careful consideration, it is reasonable to speculate that Ho's Vietnam could have been one of our strongest allies in Southeast Asia had our conduct been more honorable. Instead, we reinforced the will of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese people to fight for independence at all costs.

Years of Decision 1954-56

Ho's armies fought the French to a stalemate; embarrassing for the French and for the U.S. as well, since we had been supplying the French. Though the Vietnamese won the war in the field, their full independence foundered on the temporary partition dictated by the major powers (all democracies) in the 1954 Geneva Accord, which promised a national election of self-determination in 1956.

When informed that Ho Chi Minh would carry 80% of the vote in a free, supervised election, President Eisenhower's Administration retreated from the promises made in Geneva. In blatant disregard of the Atlantic Charter, of the UN Charter and of the principles underlying our Declaration of Independence, the major democracies of the world conspired to deny the people of Vietnam the right to choose a government in a free election. As a result of these decisions by the leadership of two Presidential Administrations, and the complicity of four Congresses, the United States became the surrogate for the anti-Communist French colonialists in Indochina.

These policy decisions, the product of rampant anti-Communist paranoia among our elected representatives and a similarly-inspired media frenzy, were enabled by the inattention of our citizenry and the apparent unimportance of this backwater in Asia. Most Americans knew almost nothing of the area and could care less. Also, our success in containing Stalinism in Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean produced a euphoria that lulled our government into thinking that what worked in Europe would also work in Asia. Vietnam and most of the other Southeast Asian countries had no modern experience with true nationhood but had, instead, become the long-standing victims of Colonial capitalism, under which their natural resources were exploited for the benefit of Europe. Understandably, this resulted in nationalistic aspirations that manifested in socialistic and communistic movements of national liberation. The choice offered the people of Vietnam in the promised election of 1956 was a communist government or a colonial government. History has recorded their ultimate decision in blood rather than ballots.

Personal Experiences

In September 1969 I went to Vietnam. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, General Creighton Abrams and President Thieu personally and separately briefed me. I toured jungle outposts in an open-door Huey gunship. I met with grungy, sweating young boys in disheveled field attire just returning from a firefight. Later, flying away from the diminishing sound of gunfire, I vowed to do everything I

could to get America out of that civil war — a war the outcome of which posed not the slightest threat to U.S. or global security.

Having little clout as a new senator in 1970, I persuaded Senator William Fulbright to engage with me in a filibuster against all military authorizations and appropriations; we hoped to use Senate rules to force an end to the war. Our filibuster lasted less than six hours, as neither one of us had sufficient command of the rules to pull it off. Had we had the committed support of those opposed to the War, this strategy would have worked. The Congress used the same strategy in denying the Ford Administration the funds to prop up Saigon after U.S. troops left Vietnam.

The next year, Senator Mark Hatfield and I agreed in May to begin a filibuster to obstruct the legislative renewal of the Draft that was due to expire on June 30, 1971. By making extra manpower plentiful, the Draft had permitted the Johnson Administration to escalate the U.S. military presence in Vietnam without an official declaration of war by Congress. The Draft had also permitted the Administration to escape the political outcries that would most certainly have reverberated through the halls of Congress had the President called up reserve units. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, obviously sympathetic to the goal of the filibuster, did not force twenty-four-hour sessions to defeat it. Instead, he adopted a two-track legislative schedule, permitting the filibuster against the Draft to take up part of the legislative day, leaving normal Senate business to the balance of a longer-than-normal legislative day. As a result, I was able to wage the filibuster alone, well into September. This clear misuse of the peacetime Draft was just another example of leaders in government compromising the public interest in the service of their personal ambition. Absence of the Draft today is a source of great comfort to our young people and their families.

The Virtue of Courage

Like the general public, I first heard of the Pentagon Papers and Daniel Ellsberg on June 13th, 1971. I was awestruck by the courage he demonstrated in challenging the entire government establishment in order to share with the American people the information contained in that top-secret study, made by the Defense Department at the order of Secretary Robert McNamara in 1967, to discover why and how the U.S. had been ensnared in Vietnam. If that information was important to the technocrats in government, I submit it was a thousand times more important for the American people to learn why and how their nation had been secretly misled into war.

What manner of arrogance led the Defense Department and the Nixon Administration to classify the study “Top Secret” when it was completed in 1969? What possible reason, other than fear of the truth, could there have been to deny the American people the information needed to come to a public judgment on the War?

A core belief of our democratic republic is that all political power derives from the people. This belief presupposes an informed judgment by the people, based on complete and accurate information provided by their elected representatives. Taken a step further, I would argue that, in the case of our involvement in Vietnam, even if the people had been properly informed, they lacked any mechanism (e.g., lawmaking procedures) to do something about it. The people had delegated their political power to their leaders — leaders who controlled and manipulated the information they released to the people in order to selfishly maintain their own positions of authority.

Follow Me

It did not escape my attention that the Papers would be great fodder for the filibuster against the extension of the Draft that had been going on since mid-May. Also, I had my own sense of responsibility. What came to mind was that horror of horrors — a combat infantry platoon leader charging a fortification only to find no one following him. I graduated from the Infantry School at Fort Benning. The arm patch we wore in OCS had the words “Follow Me” above a blazing sword. That training instilled in me a sense of duty to follow Ellsberg’s courageous leadership. I made up my mind that if the opportunity arose I would not let Dan Ellsberg charge the colossus of government alone.

Several days later, around June 18, 1971, I received an anonymous phone call wherein the entire dialog consisted of two sentences, as follows:

Caller: “Senator Gravel, would you read the Pentagon Papers on the Senate floor as part of your filibuster?”

Me: “Yes.”

On the strength of that conversation, I received the Papers on Thursday night, June 24th. I kept them at my home until Tuesday morning, June 29th, and then took them to my Senate office. Fearful about what the government knew and what actions it might take to obstruct the Paper’s official release, I had to find some way to provide for the security of my office.

Special Credentials

I contacted the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Of all the anti-war organizations, the Vietnam Veterans had credentials in opposing the war that surpassed all others. I asked them if they would send the “most disabled” members they could muster to guard my office. They responded without question or hesitation. The sight of those veterans in wheelchairs at the end of the corridor in the Dirksen Office Building is seared in my memory.

The details of the Senate floor action and the subsequent Buildings and Grounds subcommittee hearing where the Pentagon Papers were officially released is reserved for another time.

Tears of Shame

The morning after my “official” release of the Papers, one political commentator characterized my actions in releasing the Papers as “bizarre” because of the late night hearing of the subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds and the fact that I had cried in the course of reading the Papers into the public record. On the contrary, I have always thought of that reporter's characterization of my actions as “bizarre.” I would like now to share with you what had moved me to tears.

An incident a few months before contributed to the context of that Tuesday night. I had visited a hospital of wounded Vietnam veterans, and was forced to break off my walk through the ward because it was so emotionally distressing to me.

On that Tuesday night, with very little sleep since getting the Papers on the previous Thursday at midnight, I was tired and stressed out with anxiety and fear. As I began reading the Papers, my mind conjured scenes of the war, of carnage and human suffering. Emotions welled up and took control. I felt shame for what my country was doing to make so many people suffer. I love my country; and I cried.

But these emotions did not prevent me from putting the Pentagon Papers properly into the official record of the subcommittee hearing and then adjourning the meeting. After returning to my office to the cheers of those disabled sentries, we released a copy of the Papers to a media pool.

What’s Really Bizarre

As for “bizarre” actions, consider the actions of the Nixon Administration and Congress. Asserting their prerogatives, the Congress requested the Papers. The Administration sent copies to both Houses with negotiated restrictions. The Congressional leadership sequestered the Papers in a private room, on a table in a booth. Only Congressional members, no staff, were authorized to read the Papers under the watchful eye of an armed guard. Members of Congress were not even permitted to make notes about what they read. Visualize that scene!

I had previously been an adjutant in the Communications Intelligence Service and a top-secret control officer with classification authority. As a 22-year-old Second Lieutenant, I had more power than was being accorded to, **and accepted by**, the entire Congress of the United States.

Now, that’s bizarre!

Equally “bizarre,” in view of the journalistic courage of newspapers like the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, was the refusal to publish the Pentagon Papers in their entirety by every major (and not-so-major) publishing house in the nation save one — Beacon Press, the publishing arm of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Fortunately, Beacon made a different decision, which opened a treasure trove of information to scholars, researchers and writers.

The details of the litigation that took Beacon Press, Dr. Leonard Rotberg, my editor, and me to the U.S. Supreme Court over the Speech and Debate Clause of the Constitution is another anecdote for another time.

What I find most “bizarre” of all is the total lack of understanding by our elected representatives of certain principles vital to the survival of democracy, and the total lack of moral “ballast” regarding the war in the entire leadership of the federal government. The statement — “*for evil to prevail, good men need but do nothing*” — comes to mind. In this instance it wasn’t just good men, but those called the “Wise Men”, followed a generation later by those called the “Best and the Brightest.”

Let me now turn to how I believe we should address what our “honorable” leaders bequeathed the nation.

The first legacy is the moral culpability for our nation’s actions in Southeast Asia.

A Just War

Addressing the morality of our actions raises the question: Was the War justified? An answer requires a definition of a “just war.” The criteria published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops are instructive in this regard. (Other religious groups, I am sure, have articulated similar criteria.) I paraphrase:

To be "just", a war must confront a real and present danger to innocent life or to decent human existence; and secure basic human rights. A just war must be joined for the common good and be declared by competent authority.

The war prosecuted in Vietnam by our political leadership not only failed to meet those criteria, but also served their opposite ends. Under our Constitution, the only authority competent to declare war is the Congress. Astonishingly, when I introduced a Declaration of War in the Senate, it was voted down. Failure to meet any of these criteria marks the Vietnam War as “unjust,” a morally wrong war, and that is first among the reasons that it haunts us to this day.

Our continued failure to acknowledge our individual and national moral responsibility for the harm and suffering to all of the aggrieved parties of the Vietnam War is a stain on our national character that will pass into history, much like the deliberate appropriation of Native American lands during the nation’s westward expansion, and the perpetuation of Negro enslavement written into the Constitution — a moral violation of its self-declared tenets of freedom.

Contrition

Americans have yet to come to grips with the moral wrong of the Vietnam War. What remorse we see expressed by some leaders is conspicuously devoid of moral content, with one exception: The pardons issued by President Jimmy Carter on his first day in office were not only an effort to set the moral tone of his

new administration but also an effort to begin to grapple with the moral dimensions of the Vietnam War. President Bill Clinton's trip to Vietnam last fall was a modest step in the right direction in that he addressed a shared pain; but he did not acknowledge guilt, ask for forgiveness or exhibit contrition.

Because of his ideological position, President George W. Bush could exercise moral and compassionate leadership in a fashion reminiscent of the "Nixon to China Policy." That political coup turned out to be the outstanding accomplishment of Nixon's Administration. President Bush now has the opportunity to truly raise the moral standing of the nation and ameliorate the damage to our national psyche.

The Pope's recent actions best exemplify what I suggest we do. As a moral leader, the Pope, like the heads of other religions, understands the cathartic effect of contrition on the development of moral growth and spiritual wisdom. He nurtures moral growth by leading Catholicism to acknowledge historic wrongs and to ask forgiveness from the progeny of those wronged. Can we as Americans do any less while so many of our victims still live?

Although I believe it is necessary for our leaders to acknowledge guilt and ask forgiveness, it is at least as important that we, the people, express our own contrition. Our predicament is that, as a nation, Americans have no procedures in law through which we can express our will or acknowledge a moral wrong and ask forgiveness of aggrieved parties. All of our legislative power is in the hands of the Congress, and the Presidential Administration holds the remainder of our political power.

We have no choice but to ask the leadership of these government institutions to act in our stead. In one sense it is altogether fitting that we levy this request on the President and the Congress, since these are the institutions that committed the moral wrongs in our name. But one all-important barrier remains. It will take unusual political courage and moral compassion for our leaders to fulfill this request on our behalf. If our leaders choose to do nothing, the damage to our nation will persist undiminished.

In pursuit of this goal, I have this day sent a letter to President George W. Bush requesting that he issue a Proclamation of Contrition. I also sent a letter to the leadership of the 107th Congress suggesting the enactment of a Joint Resolution of Contrition. I hope they will act in a manner that will make the entire world take note of our moral fiber. If the passage of the suggested Joint Resolution of Contrition in Congress is debated, it will be a healthy exercise for representative democracy.

Failure

Failure of these political institutions to have acted earlier has damaged the morale of our military for a generation, if not longer, and will continue to blight their moral ethic.

Failure to have acknowledged our moral wrong at War's end was an underlying cause of the vicious rancor unleashed by our government against the poor people of Vietnam. Our leaders prosecuted a secret war to destabilize Vietnamese society and inflict further punishment, compounding the immorality of our national policy for an additional generation. Unjustified boycotts denied Vietnam access to the political and economic benefits of the world community — so important to rebuilding a society physically and psychologically ravaged by fifty years of revolution and war. To the credit of many veterans, it was they who returned individually to Vietnam without rancor and in search of inner peace. The moral courage of American veterans visiting Vietnam eventually resulted in the termination of our government's unrelenting pursuit of retribution.

Continuing failure to acknowledge our moral wrong will prolong the pain and suffering of those harmed by the War. You Veterans whom I address today need no reminder of that suffering. When you came home from Nam, you were shunned rather than greeted with gratitude for service to country. The fact is, your presence was too raw a reminder, conscious or unconscious, of the nation's guilt.

Failure to act now continues to hide from national attention the unfathomable reasoning of government leaders and technocrats, particularly those in the military hierarchy, in refusing to give succor to the victims of Agent Orange and Gulf War Syndrome. The recently published book, *Home to War* by Gerald Nicosia, details this scandalous treatment of our veterans.

Expiation

It is past time for our nation to rise to its true greatness, by acknowledging the moral wrong we committed in fighting an "unjust war" and by seeking forgiveness from all of these aggrieved parties:

- The people of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and other areas of Southeast Asia who still suffer the wounds of an "unjust war." (Maybe we could even find it in our hearts to some day give them foreign aid as we have done to so many less-deserving regimes.)
- The families of Vietnamese service personnel and civilians, and the families of American service personnel who suffered the loss of loved ones in an "unjust war."
- The veteran patriots sent to fight by amoral leaders in an "unjust war."
- The moral patriots who agonized over decisions to suffer imprisonment or flee their country rather than fight an "unjust war."
- The sunshine patriots who are vilified by the media for their use of influence to secure educational deferment or service in the National Guard rather than fight an "unjust war."

- And the American people who, though lied to and misled by their leaders, still must suffer complicity in their nation's policy to prosecute an "unjust war."

The catharsis of this national act of American contrition and expiation will help heal the wounds of war and bring closure too-long-delayed to a chapter in our history in which none can find pride. The moral courage of our political leadership to act on our behalf will contribute to our country's moral growth and demonstrate to the world our re-commitment to the principles of democracy.

What Would The People Have Done?

Addressing the War's legacy also raises an obvious question: How could our nation, a democracy "based on law rather than men," wage an "unjust war" without the legal consent of the governed? Answering this question requires an understanding of how our representative democracy works.

The question may best be answered by considering a hypothetical situation. Assume that, during the Cold War, Americans had had lawmaking procedures, embodied in federal law that would have allowed them to exercise their inherent legislative powers.

In such a situation, would the people have voted to go into Vietnam? I would say yes, given the tenor of the times and the fact that the people are as capable as their leaders of making mistakes. However, I am convinced that the people would have voted to get out of Vietnam within two years after their initial decision rather than the ten terrible years that the war actually persisted. Why? Because, in the exercise of their legislative powers, the people, unlike their elected representatives, have no fundamental obstacle that prevents them from correcting public policy mistakes when those mistakes cause them pain.

Elected leaders do not customarily suffer the pain of public policy mistakes personally. However, these same leaders risk the loss of their position and power any time they disclose and acknowledge mistakes. It takes heroes like Dan Ellsberg and Tony Russo to put the common good above their self-interest. Such conduct by politicians is extremely unusual, and becomes increasingly rare the longer the politician has been in office.

Representative Structure of Government

The Framers of our Constitution created the only feasible structure for government in the late 18th Century — a representative structure. Delegating all of the people's lawmaking power to legislators each of whom has personal interests, compromises the primacy of the Constitution's intention: protecting the public interest. Elected legislators become the "chosen few," whose first concern is wielding the people's power to protect and expand their own self-interest and that of the financial and political backers who helped them secure and maintain their offices. This abuse of power in government is rooted in human nature and is

not correctable, least of all by those who profit from it. Lord Acton pointed out that “*Absolute power corrupts absolutely.*” I would add that power corrupts absolutely everyone who holds it. Our leaders are human, and our existing system of Checks and Balances is insufficient to properly manage the effects of their human nature on governance.

Our Leaders

Leaders in government, business, military and diplomatic organizations have always been ambivalent about public morality. Machiavelli’s denial of morality in public affairs articulates the obvious: leaders feel they have license to a morality of convenience or none at all — whatever works. The amoral treatment of public matters by leaders breeds an organizational and national ethic in which “the end justifies the means.” As we are all too well aware, the institutionalization of this ethic loosens the moral anchors of our laws and makes human conduct subject to the primacy of personal ambition and greed.

The Age of Speerⁱⁱⁱ

Our accelerating advance into an ever more complex and sophisticated society, demands unique management skills from leadership. Management of government and global corporations, many of which are larger than most governments, empowers technical bureaucrats who easily navigate the corridors of power in Congress, the White House, think tanks, academe, Wall Street, corporate executive suites and media. These technocrats pose a danger to democracy because the power their competence commands tends to dominate their moral sensibilities.

Civic Maturity

There is one shortcoming in our representative form of government that is not readily apparent in the example of the Vietnam War; however, in my mind, it is the most damaging to the peoples of all the democracies in the world, since all are representative democracies.

We know from personal experience that we mature individually as human beings by accepting responsibility for the consequences of our actions. That, of course, is also the moral basis of the law’s application to individuals. This maturation process is no different for groups or nations than it is for the individuals who populate these groups.

When we as individuals delegate our lawmaking power to elected representatives, many of us have, in our own minds, also conferred upon them the responsibility that goes with that power. Responsibility always rests with the ultimate authority — the people. By inferring responsibility to those to whom we delegated our power, we forgo the opportunity to experience responsibility and the maturing effect it produces. This lost opportunity condemns us to a perpetual

civic adolescence, which, of course, suits the interests of government leaders who wish to continue to monopolize the people's power.

If we wish to mature civically and politically, we must become lawmakers and accept responsibility for the consequences of the laws we enact rather than continuing to delegate all of our power to politicians who can run amuck, as they did in Vietnam.

Today, technology makes it possible for the people to share directly in the exercise of their lawmaking power in government at the national, as well as the state and local levels. Citizen lawmaking by initiative already exists in 24 states and hundreds of local jurisdictions. My experience in and out of government has convinced me that the people are better able to legislate public policies than their elected leaders. Unlike their representatives, the people have no obstacles to legislating for the public interest — theirs *is* the public interest. That conclusion has motivated me to devote my energies to the advancement of direct democracy, an initiative lawmaking process by which we, the people, can directly create and modify laws and constitutions.

I head up two nonprofit organizations, *Direct Democracy* and *Philadelphia II*, which have created, and now sponsor, the “National Initiative for Direct Democracy.” The National Initiative includes two concurrent legislative proposals:

- The **Direct Democracy Constitutional Amendment**, which formalizes the people's First Principles, i.e., the sovereign authority of the people to exercise their legislative power to create and alter governments, constitutions, and laws. These powers are implicit in the Constitution.
- The **Direct Democracy Act**, which establishes procedures, and an agency to administer those procedures, through which the people can exercise their First Principles independent of representative government officials.

The National Initiative brings the people into the operation of our government as lawmakers, legislating in a partnership with their elected representative legislators in every government jurisdiction of the United States — essentially creating a "Legislature of the People". The full participation of the people in the legislative arm of government strengthens our system of Checks and Balances by incorporating the ultimate Check — we, the people.

I invite all to investigate our organizations' plans at our web site: www.p2dd.org. Our vision of direct democracy is that of an improved structure for human governance. In the words of Alexander Meiklejohn, an acclaimed constitutional scholar in the last century:

“The citizens of this nation shall make and shall obey their own laws, shall be at once their own subjects and their own masters.”

If the legacies of the Vietnam War bring forth a national moral awakening and lead us to a paradigm shift in human governance to true democracy, then the human cost of the Vietnam War will not have been in vain.

ⁱ Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Volume 1, Introduction, Beacon Press in August 1971.

ⁱⁱ The Atlantic Charter, Third Paragraph, 1941.

ⁱⁱⁱ The London *Observer* on April 9, 1944. "The Age of Speer...[has produced]...the pure technician, the classless, bright young man, without background, with no other original aim than to make his way in the world, and no other means than his technical and managerial ability. It is the lack of psychological and spiritual ballast and the ease with which he handles the terrifying technical and organizational machinery of our age which makes this slight type go extremely far nowadays...This is their age: the Hitlers and Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers...will long be with us."