

gressive ostracism and discrimination. My father lost the teaching job for which he had worked all his life; the friends of my parents' youth shunned them. I was forced to attend a segregated school. Every walk in the street turned into an adventure, for my German contemporaries were free to beat up Jewish children without interference by the police.

Through this period America acquired a wondrous quality for me. When I was a boy it was a dream, an incredible place where tolerance was natural and personal freedom unchallenged. Even when I learned later that America, too, had massive problems, I could never forget what an inspiration it had been to the victims of persecution, to my family, and to me during cruel and degrading years. I always remembered the thrill when I first walked the streets of New York City. Seeing a group of boys, I began to cross to the other side to avoid being beaten up. And then I remembered where I was.

I therefore have always had a special feeling for what America means, which native-born citizens perhaps take for granted. I could not accept the self-hatred that took every imperfection as an excuse to denigrate a precious experiment whose significance for the rest of the world had been part of my life. I was enormously gratified to have an opportunity to repay my debt to a society whose blemishes I recognized but also saw in a different perspective; they could not obscure for me its greatness, its idealism, its humanity, and its embodiment of mankind's hopes.

The domestic turmoil of the Vietnam debate therefore pained me deeply. I did not agree with many of the decisions that had brought about the impasse in Indochina; I felt, however, that my appointment to high office entailed a responsibility to help end the war in a way compatible with American self-respect and the stake that all men and women of goodwill had in America's strength and purpose. It seemed to me important for America not to be humiliated, not to be shattered, but to leave Vietnam in a manner that even the protesters might later see as reflecting an American choice made with dignity and self-respect. Ironically, in view of the later charges of "historical pessimism" leveled against me, it was precisely the issue of our self-confidence and faith in our future that I considered at stake in the outcome in Vietnam.

I believed in the moral significance of my adopted country. America, alone of the free countries, was strong enough to assure global security against the forces of tyranny. Only America had both the power and the decency to inspire other peoples who struggled for identity, for progress and dignity. In the Thirties, when the democracies faced the gravest danger, America was waiting in the wings to come to Europe's rescue. There was no one now to come to America's rescue if we abandoned our international responsibilities, or if we succumbed to self-hatred.

Unlike most of my contemporaries, I had experienced the fragility of the fabric of modern society. I had seen that the likely outcome of the dissolution of all social bonds and the undermining of all basic values is extremism, despair, and brutality. A people must not lose faith in itself; those who wallow in the imperfections of their society or turn them into