

an excuse for a nihilistic orgy usually end up by eroding all social and moral restraints; eventually in their pitiless assault on all beliefs they multiply suffering.

I could never bring myself to think of the war in Vietnam as a monstrous criminal conspiracy, as was fashionable in some circles. In my view our entry into the war had been the product not of a militarist psychosis but of a naive idealism that wanted to set right all the world's ills and believed American goodwill supplied its own efficacy. I had visited Vietnam as a professor. I saw there not ugly Americans—though, as in all wars, these existed too—but dedicated young men facing death daily despite the divisions at home; my recollection was of many idealistic Americans working under impossible conditions to bring government and health and development to a terrified and bewildered people. I thought the country owed something to *their* sacrifice and not only to the vocal protesters. Some of the critics viewed Vietnam as a morality play in which the wicked must be punished before the final curtain and where any attempt to salvage self-respect from the outcome compounded the wrong. I viewed it as a genuine tragedy. No one had a monopoly on anguish.

I saw my role as helping my adopted country heal its wounds, preserve its faith, and thus enable it to rededicate itself to the great tasks of construction that were awaiting it.

The Limits of Credibility

ARNOLD ISAACS

It's time we recognized," declared Ronald Reagan, "that ours was, in truth, a noble cause." His campaign advisers had not wanted him to reawaken painful Vietnam memories. But the candidate personally penciled the phrase "noble cause" into his speech, it was said, to express his strong view that the nation should not reproach itself for the Vietnam conflict. "Let us tell those who fought in that war," he added, "that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war our government is afraid to win." The 5,000 delegates at the Veterans of Foreign Wars 1980 convention—who had earlier broken their organization's long-standing precedent to endorse the Reagan candidacy—responded, one reporter wrote, with "sustained and boisterous cheers."

At the start of a new decade, the perception that American actions in Vietnam were a worthy effort, and that they failed not because they were misconceived but only because they were not carried out resolutely enough, seemed to respond to powerful needs in American life and institutions. It was a view that protected the reputations of the political leaders who shaped and executed those actions. It soothed military professionals who could not easily contemplate their own failure to achieve more decisive results