McNamara Should Be Crying for Us, Not for Himself

by Phyllis Schlafly *April 27, 1995*

Robert Strange McNamara belongs on the daytime soap operas. Better yet, his histrionics belong on Donahue or Geraldo or Sally Jesse Raphael. We are not impressed that he would "cry easily" about Vietnam, that he "sweated blood at night about it," or that he suffered from "anguish" and "stress."

What about the tears, blood and anguish he caused to others? They are the ones who deserve our sympathy. Even in this era of public confessions and self-deprecating autobiographies, McNamara's book "In Retrospect" comes across as shallow and self-serving.

In his prime years, McNamara said it was all right with him to call Vietnam "McNamara's War." We accept his invitation. He bears the number-one responsibility for the Vietnam tragedy and, as the (BF)New York Times(end BF) said so well, "McNamara must not escape the lasting moral condemnation of his countrymen."

McNamara says he wrote his book because he is "sick at heart" about the cynicism with which Americans view their political leaders. His book proves that our cynicism was and is justified.

McNamara tries to excuse himself and earn our sympathy by asserting that, even though he was "wrong, terribly wrong" about Vietnam, it was just an "honest mistake." But the old refrain "everybody makes mistakes" won't wash for McNama ra.

He set a new record of public immorality when he asserts that, although he knew that the Vietnam War was a mistake all those bloody years, knew he was sending thousands of men to a useless death, he did it anyway. This confession indicts not only himself but the man where the buck stops, President Lyndon B. Johnson. This revelation will promote even more cymc1sm.

McNamara tries to excuse himself on the ground that he lacked accurate information about Vietnam. "We had no senior group working exclusively on Vietnam, so the crisis there became just one of many items on each person's plate."

That argument makes him guiltier still because it was culpable ignorance; he had plenty of resources to get all the information he needed. Indeed, he was the one responsible for preventing accurate information from coming to light.

McNamara complains that our government "lacked experts" on Southeast Asia because the State Department's China experts "had been purged during the McCarthy hysteria of the 1950s." How farfetched can you get! McNamara cannot evade responsibility for the Vietnam disaster by blaming poor old Joe McCarthy, who died many years earlier.

The chief tactic that McNamara and Johnson used to prevent law-abiding Americans from attacking government policies was the fiction that the President and Secretary of Defense were privy to superior knowledge not available to the general public, and therefore we should trust them to prosecute the war as they saw fit. Now McNamara admits it was all a lie; they didn't have any inside information to justify their actions.

McNamara's explanations of "why" the wrong Vietnam decisions were made include the fact that LBJ was eager to safeguard political spending on the Great Society, "the weakness of his decision-making approach," and idiosyncrasies in his style.

In the 1964 presidential campaign, the Democrats' principal theme was that Barry Goldwater was a trigger-happy warmonger. It is now obvious that Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara were the trigger-happy warmongers who used the pitiful Gulf of Tonkin incident as an excuse to take America into a no-win war.

After President Johnson kicked McNamara upstairs to the World Bank, McNamara wrote a book in 1968 called "The Essence of Security." It was designed to camouflage his mistakes during his seven years as Secretary of Defense.

The book was full of worn-out liberal cliches such as "collective security," "accommodation with the Soviet Union," the end of "monolithic" Communism, "building bridges," "peaceful competition" with the Communists, and the hope for "agreements" with the Soviets. He expounded on his Whiz Kid theory that "The real threat to democracy comes not from overmanagement but from undermanagement."

He's got that 100 percent wrong. McNamara exercised more power and produced more disastrous results from his management decisions than any American in our history. He spent more than $400,000,000,000, yet managed to lose a war and reduce the strategic military power of the United States by 50 percent.

McNamara said he was "upset" when demonstrators shouted "murderer" at him. His book gives the American people the chance to shout all kinds of condemnations at him for being the mastermind of decisions that destroyed so many young people, not only those who lost their lives on the battlefields of Southeast Asia, but also those whose lives were shattered here at home.

These words of Joseph Addison can be appropriately applied to Robert McNamara:

"Is there not some chosen curse,
Some hidden thunder in the stores of heaven,
Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man
Who owes his greatness to his country's ruin?"