

OUTLINE FOR TV SHOW ON "A GRAND DELUSION"

1. There have already been lengthy histories written about the Viet Nam war. Why, then, did you write "A Grand Delusion"?
2. In the very last paragraph of your book, you say "Whatever good may have come from the war, and no matter how honorable and brave the soldiers on both sides, the Vietnam War should be remembered as the kind of tragedy that can result when presidents—captivated by grand delusions—enforce their foreign and military policies without the informed support of Congress and the American people." As we shall again discuss at various points, are you worried that this kind of informed consent has not been given since Viet Nam? If so, what are examples?
3. The book focuses extensively on what was said on the Senate floor -- there would seem to be perhaps hundreds of pages that quote or describe remarks on the floor. Why do you focus so extensively on Senate speeches, especially since lots of people believe that what is said on the Senate (or House) floor is mainly hot air spoken to an empty chamber so that it will appear in the Congressional Record (where extensions of remarks add to a possibly false picture) and can be cited to people back home? Do you feel that this view is inaccurate generally or was not accurate here?
 - (a). Why is there comparatively so little about what was said on the House floor?
 - (b). Do you think what was said by Senators at hearings was more, less, or equally meaningful as what they said on the floor?
4. Time after time in your book one notices that legislative hearings were closed -- were held in executive session on the ground, I presume, that public hearings would help the enemy. Wasn't the closed nature of the hearings one of the main reasons why the Executive -- Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon -- was able to get away with incorrect -- even plain dumb -- views, lies, inept thinking, etc. The press and the public could not sufficiently know and criticize what was going on when hearings were closed, could they?
 - A. Senators themselves lacked needed information until there were open hearings in 1966 and afterwards, didn't they?
 - B. Have we really learned anything in this regard? Aren't lots of hearings closed today on the ground of national security? Does or did the press, the public or

even legislators know about Islamic fundamentalism, Bin Laden, Al Qaeda, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.?

(i) Do they have any idea about what we are doing in Afghanistan, about what is valid or not with regard to Iraq, etc?

5. Let's discuss how America first got involved in Viet Nam. Explain the bearing of the following points.

- A. Ho Chi Minh's efforts to have Vietnam escape from France's colonial control after WWII. (I understand he actually wrote to American presidents eight times and never got an answer.)
- B. France's desire to remain a colonial power.
- C. The desire to have the French help us contain Russia.
- D. The effect of the Russian expansionism in Europe, the Russian atomic bomb, the "loss" of China, the Korean War, and the feeling that the USSR and China were a joint monolith.
- E. The effect of the skewering criticism of Truman by people like Knowland, Jenner, Taft, Mundt, McCarthy, McArthur and other reactionaries.
- F. Truman's conduct in being the first American President to take us into a major war without a Congressional declaration (or authorization).
- G. The desire to use the French as proxies for us in Indo-China, and France's consequent ability to blackmail us as it were.
- H. The domino theory, in which Eisenhower believed.
- I. The disaster of Dien Bien Phu. When the French wanted help there, what were the reactions and positions of Eisenhower, Nixon, Radford, Russell, Johnson? Was the use of nuclear weapons a possibility?
- J. The Geneva conference -- in which the U.S. did not participate and whose results we did not much care for and did not "sign on to."
- K. The "discovery" of Ngo Dinh Diem by William Douglas, and his introduction to Mansfield and Kennedy?

- L. The scuttling of the 1956 election. (Robert Kennedy was aware at one point, wasn't he, that Ho would get 70 percent of the vote in a free election.)
 - M. The corrupt, repressive, election - fixing, grafting regime of Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu and Nhu's wife, and their conduct toward Buddhists and sects. (You did not mention it, but my understanding is that Diem had squads that went around the country with a portable guillotine to execute opponents.)
 - N. The war that was raging in Laos.
 - O. The Munich analogy.
 - P. The failure to understand -- or to believe -- that Ho was a nationalist, apparently even more of a nationalist than a Communist.
 - Q. Khushev's testing of Kennedy in Berlin and at the Bay of Pigs, and the need to enter a settlement for the neutralization of Laos.
 - R. The idea that if we don't fight the Communists in Indo China, we'll have to fight them in San Francisco.
 - S. The focus of a number of Republicans and others on Asia rather than on Europe.
 - T. The constant fear of presidents from Truman to Nixon that they don't want to be the next one to "lose" a country in Asia.
6. Explain the importance, in getting us on the path to war, of Kennedy having increased the number of Americans in South Viet Nam to 16,000. There were lies, weren't there, about whether, and the extent to which, Americans were participating in combat and in transporting South Viet Nameese into combat?
- A. Reporters -- Halberstam, Sheehan, Browne, Mohr, etc. -- were reporting back the truth as to how the war was going, weren't they (and early-on even the CIA and some State Department people and General J. Lawton Collins had a pretty good understanding of what was happening and likely to happen)? The vilification of the reporters was the beginning, wasn't it, of claiming that people who disagreed with the official line were traitors or disloyal? That kind of attack was, during the course of the war, launched by Johnson, Nixon, Agnew and others, and was directed against reporters, critics, protesters, legislators and others, wasn't it? The government only gave out "good news" and wanted reporters, legislators and others to toe the company line.
 - (i) Has anything really changed? Weren't those kinds of attacks against those who dissent or disagree, for instance, launched against people who disagreed

with the conventional view after 9/11? Shouldn't we, in fact, expect to see the same kind of attacks against dissenters if Bush invades Iraq?

(ii) Today we support the corrupt: Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan.

7. It is often said that the fundamental problem was (i) the corruption and lack of ability of one South Viet Nameese government after another, starting with Diem and (at least in your view) going downhill from there, and (ii) the failure of American political leaders to understand that, at bottom, Viet Nam presented a political rather than a military problem. Explain what it means, in concrete terms, to say that the problem was a political one, not a military one.

A. Again, has anything really changed? Do our leaders today view Al Qaeda or Iraq or Afghanistan as military problems or political problems, and which are they in fact, and why? How about Muslim fundamentalism, or the role of Pakistan?

(i) Have we thus far been any more successful in building a competent government in Afghanistan than we were in Viet Nam?

(ii) Wasn't our government almost as untruthful about the reasons for going to war with Iraq in 1990 as it was about Viet Nam -- wasn't oil the real reason in 1990 although the first Bush kept saying it was to protect freedom in Kuwait, which is an authoritarian country?

(iii) Have we really learned anything from Viet Nam in any of these regards? Has the Senate?

(iv) See 6(ii).

(v) You can't change a people's culture.

8. Briefly describe the roles of Nolting, Harkins, and then Lodge. Did Lodge really say that a victory by the Communists in Nam would be worse than a victory by the Kaiser or Hitler? Where? To whom? How is it possible that someone who could make a stupid remark like that would be such a highly placed figure? -- he once even ran for vice president, didn't he?

9. Explain how the assassination of Diem came about, and what the American role was.

10. When Johnson became President, he inherited Kennedy's men. Explain the role in the escalation of the war under Kennedy and Johnson of Rusk, Rostow, the two Bundys, and Taylor. These were arrogant, hubris-filled men, weren't they?

(i) George Ball had a different view, but they wouldn't listen to him, right?

(ii) Galbraith was pretty prescient, wasn't he, but nobody would listen to him either, right?

(iii) The meetings at the "decision time" in 1965 were in reality a charade, weren't they?

- 11(a). Describe the role of Robert McNamara in the escalation of the war, with his focus on numbers, his public certitude, etc.
- (b). McNamara constantly lied to Congress, the press and the American people, didn't he?
- (c). Yet McNamara, in a sense, knew from almost the beginning that the war was doomed, didn't he? That is, he understood early-on, didn't he, that the other side could match our escalation in numbers of men and that bombing was not hurting the other side to the point where the bombing would cause it to give up the war? Yet he kept on.
12. Describe the 1964 presidential election, and how Johnson constantly presented himself as the peace candidate.
- A. Even at that time the Administration was working on plans to expand American participation in the war, wasn't it? Johnson was lying, wasn't he?
- B. Johnson's fundamental concern, wasn't it, was to promote the Great Society? So over the years he snuck into a major war by stealth and deception, without telling Congress and the people what the war would cost, without raising taxes, and with lies as to intended troop levels, lest a preoccupation with war disrupt his Great Society, right?
- (i) Johnson was a guy who wanted no dissenters, wasn't he?
- C. Although at the time it might have seemed a patriotic act to preclude internal division, Barry Goldwater actually did the country a terrible disservice by not talking about Viet Nam much, or at all, during his 1964 campaign, didn't he? (This was no different, was it, from the fact that, as we shall discuss, Senators who later disagreed with Johnson would not come out publicly against him?)
13. Is it accurate that, because Johnson did not want the war in Viet Nam to overtake and destroy his efforts to create "the Great Society," he allowed himself to get sucked into a major war even though a major war was the last thing he wanted, he often feared that victory might not be attainable, and he feared that what we were doing would not succeed.
- 14(a). Explain what happened in the Bay of Tonkin, the American participation in South Viet Name operations, the probability that there was no second attack, the Government's lies about all this, especially McNamara's lies, and the theory that there were elements of our people in Viet Nam who *wanted* an incident to occur and created conditions ripe for an incident.
- (b). The Government had drafted and was, so to speak, "sitting around with the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in its hip pocket" waiting for an appropriate time to introduce it, right?

- (i) This resolution was a reprise of previous ones such as those relating to Lebanon and Formosa, wasn't it? It was, therefore, "only" another step in the surrender to the President of Congress' decisionmaking power on war, wasn't it?
 - (ii) Talk a lot about the need for Congress to enact resolutions that are far more specific -- that say who and why we are fighting, what our war aims are, with termination dates, etc.
 - (iii) Couldn't have got resolutions for huge war through Congress and courts won't act.
- (c). Explain why Johnson very much wanted the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. (He wanted Congress to appear to have been on board - - to have a resolution he could point to - - so that the criticism leveled at Truman could not be leveled at him.)
- (d). Explain that the wording of the Resolution was so broad that it authorized the President to do anything he wanted, although Congress didn't intend or contemplate that America would get into a broad war. Explain how and why the Resolution was "railroaded" through Congress in zip time. Explain why Fulbright later said that the Resolution had been obtained by fraud -- he was right, wasn't he?
- (e). Explain why Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening voted against the Resolution. More broadly, they were the only two legislators who, in retrospect, knew what was going on and had the courage of their convictions, weren't they? Both then and later?
- (i) Morse foresaw the deaths of tens of thousands, didn't he?
- (f). Have we really learned anything from the Tonkin Resolution? For example, the *wording* of the resolution enacted after 9/11 is so broad, isn't it, that it authorizes Bush to do anything he wants, including fighting a major war against Iraq if he finds (i.e., if he chooses to say, whether correctly or not) that Iraq was harboring terrorism? Yet, whether Congress *intended* that Resolution to be legal authority for a major war against Iraq is questionable, isn't it?
- A. Isn't the wording of the post 9/11 Resolution, like that of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, a predated declaration of war allowing Bush to fight a war against, in effect, almost anyone he wants (whom he says is harboring terrorists), as well as a complete delegation in advance, with no termination date, of Congress' power to decide whether and against whom we shall fight a war?
- 15(a). Briefly describe the backgrounds and views of, and explain the permissive roles played by, the following important Senators during the earlier stages of, or in at least one case throughout, the Viet Nam war:

- (i) Richard Russell
- (ii) Mike Mansfield
- (iii) J. William Fulbright
- (iv) George McGovern

- (b). What was the impact of the Dominican crisis and the Congo events on Fulbright and Mansfield?
 - (c). What was the impact of testimony by men like Gavin and Kennan?
 - (d). How did people like Mansfield and Fulbright come to think that the Senate was nothing but a debating society? Was this because they were academics, who love to talk but are not much on taking action or responsibility? Were there other reasons?
 - (e). Why did legislators get the idea that Congress has little role in foreign affairs, especially in matters of war and peace, where Congress was happy to abdicate its constitutional power over war? Was the view that Congress had little role over foreign affairs a result of the fact that Congress had so often messed up -- e.g., in regard to the Treaty of Versailles and isolationism before World War II? Was it because of a believed need for speedy actions in foreign affairs during the Cold War? Was it because Congress lacked information? -- if so, why didn't Congress go out and get the needed information via investigations and hearings, as it did in 1966 and 1967, when it was too late? Was it because legislators really cared most about being reelected, and put that above principle, duty, and the deaths of scores of thousands? Was it a desire not to harm the President of their party? Was it partly "just politics."
- 16(a). Explain the way in which the Joint Chiefs wanted to fight the war -- bombing Viet Nam back to the stone age, using a million men if we had to, etc. They had legislators who backed their views, and who helped put the squeeze on Johnson for escalation, didn't they? E.g. John Stennis, who was willing to have 700,000 Americans in Viet Nam and to use nuclear weapons.
- (b). In support of the Chiefs' position, it can be said, can't it, that bombing, if carried out to a sufficient extent, *would* work in regard to forcing the North Viet Nameese to back off or to meet our demands. Nixon proved this on a couple of occasions, didn't he (e.g., the Christmas bombing of 1972)? On the other hand, the morality of such bombing in the circumstances of Viet Nam was dubious wasn't it -- Viet Nam did not threaten America, as Germany and Japan had -- and at least until about 1972 there was always the major risk, wasn't there, which Johnson worried about a lot, of Russia and/or China entering the war on North Viet Nam's side?
 - A. Why did the Chiefs ignore the possibility of Russia or China entering the war -- China had done exactly this in Korea despite McArthur's erroneous contrary assurances, hadn't it? Did the Chiefs want war with China, as McArthur had?
 - (i) Why do you think that most Americans do not know to this day that China

had Migs fighting in Viet Nam? You yourself mention 53 Migs stationed in North Viet Nam, and by now there has occasionally been mention in books of dogfights with Chinese-piloted Migs.

- (ii) It's also questionable, isn't it, that Congress or the American public would have stood for one million men in Viet Nam?
- (iii) In a sense, people like Lemnitzer, Wheeler, et. al. were empty suits, weren't they? Kennedy came to consider the Chiefs incompetent, didn't he?
 - (a) What do you think the situation is today? Can it be argued that today the military is more cautious, more prudent, and smarter than the civilian leadership?
- (iv) William Westmoreland was essentially an empty suit, wasn't he? He kept following strategies that experience showed not to be working, didn't he (e.g., search and destroy, strategic hamlets, a war of attrition, etc.)?
- (v) Lyndon Johnson is usually described as an enormously capable and intelligent man, as a legislative genius, for example (albeit it is widely accepted that he was, in general, an unmitigated liar, a terrible bully, etc.). On the other hand, he kept following strategies -- e.g., "controlled" escalation -- which visibly did not work and which were causing havoc, especially domestically. Instead of being subjectively regarded as a genius, shouldn't a man who continues for years to follow strategies that demonstrably are not working be subjectively regarded as stupid?
 - (a) In the same vein, Johnson and Nixon took the position that American credibility would be harmed, and other nations would know they cannot depend on us, if we left Viet Nam expeditiously. Yet, at the same time, other nations were looking upon us as crazy for continuing in Viet Nam, and one had to be utterly foolish - - as many American leaders apparently were - - not to understand that never again would America let itself get caught up in another Viet Nam. ("No more Viet Nams," indeed, practically became an article of military and political faith in America.) In the circumstances, doesn't one have to say that the claims of Johnson and Nixon (and Bush and Kissinger) that they were protecting our credibility and our reliability in the minds of others were simply stupid?

17. In the thirty years since we left Viet Nam, we have built an ever larger economy, have obtained world hegemony -- to a point that may even be dangerous to us, have contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, etc., etc. Doesn't all of this show that the claim that we had to prevail in Viet Nam lest we lose power and credibility was simply nonsense?

- A. Is there or is there not, in your opinion, an analogy today with regard to claims that we have to get rid of Saddam by force?
- 18(a). Describe the continuous escalation in manpower in 1965-1968, the requests for yet more manpower, and the ever escalating bombing.
- (b). Describe the constant speechifying on the Senate floor by doves during the first few years of the war, Mansfield's constant private memos to Kennedy and Johnson, and private meetings and phone calls that Johnson had with Senate leaders like Russell and Manfield. None of this had much if any impact, did it?
- 19(a). Describe the bombing halts and other American efforts to get peace talks started. There was just constant to-ing and fro-ing on this score, wasn't there? And you think that some of the alleged American peace efforts were not genuine or sincere, right? What we were really interested in, weren't we, was a settlement under which the other side in effect surrendered.
- (b). Part of our problem, wasn't it, was a complete failure to understand the motivations and depth of feeling of the other side? Johnson simply did not grasp, did he, that these were not a bunch of Texas constituents, or fellow legislators, who could be bought off by money and roads and dams, but were instead people whose ancestors had fought for thousands of years, who wanted foreigners like us out of their country, who took the truly long view, and who were prepared to fight for as long as necessary? (Was it Pham or Ho who said something like "How long do you want to fight? Do you want war for ten years? We will accommodate you." And didn't Ho say to the French that he would lose 10 men to every one of theirs and he would still win?)
- (c). Isn't it true that most of our leaders were, in effect, befuddled, and did not know *what* to think or do?
20. Explain the impact of the Tet offensive -- a military victory for the U.S., but a political defeat? -- on the American people, and why it had that impact.
21. Describe the Council of "wise men" who advised Johnson, and what views they gave him on two separate occasions. Explain the role and importance of Clark Clifford. (Early on Clifford had been prescient on the war, hadn't he?)
22. Explain the impact that Walter Cronkite's views had.
- 23(a). Describe the revolution against Johnson when McCarthy got 42 percent of the vote in the New Hampshire primary, the entry into the campaign of Bobby Kennedy, the Chicago convention, and the candidacy and campaign of Hubert Humphrey.
- (b). One of the reasons Humphrey lost, wasn't it, was that he had debased himself with Johnson,

and then did not break with Johnson over Viet Nam until it was too late?

24(a). Describe Nixon's two-faced position regarding Viet Nam during the presidential campaign of 1968.

(b). Nixon had no plan to end the war, did he?

(c). You say that Nixon virtually committed treason during the 1968 campaign. Explain why you say that, and why Johnson and Humphrey didn't expose Nixon although they learned what he had done.

(i) Why is Nixon's action not more widely known to the public? Or is my assumption wrong, i.e., is it in fact widely known?

(ii) Explain why Nixon's virtually treasonous action and Thieu's response caused Nixon to feel indebted to Thieu, caused the war to be prolonged, and caused a failure to reach a peace agreement in both the autumn of 1968 and in 1972.

25(a). Explain how, after Nixon was elected, (i) he and Kissinger bought time by lying to Fulbright, (ii) he stalled off criticism by withdrawing men -- albeit as slowly as he could get away with, i.e., only when and because he was under pressure -- and later by going to China and Russia, while (iii) he greatly enlarged the air war during his years in office and entered secret air and ground wars, which his Administration lied about, in Laos and Cambodia.

(i) The response to his silent majority speech was an orchestrated put-up job, right?

(b). Explain that 20,000 Americans and untold numbers of Viet Nameese were killed while Nixon was in office, and that he carried on the war for approximately as long as Johnson had.

(c). Describe the marches and demonstrations during Nixon's presidency, especially with regard to Kent State, and how Nixon, for his own political purposes, sought confrontations in the streets with these people and sicced Agnew -- a criminal -- on them. (Why did Nixon pick Agnew for vice president, and is there any way this choice can be defended?)

(i) It was Nixon's hatred for dissenters, demonstrators, etc., wasn't it, that led him to order break-ins and other violations of law, and led to Watergate? Johnson too, however, had used the FBI and the IRS to snoop on and harass dissenters, right?

(d). Did Nixon really want to end the war with anything short of an American victory, in your opinion? (Explain how Kissinger preyed on him by telling him he would be perceived as a weakling.)

- 26(a). Describe the numerous efforts to stop the war by enactment of congressional resolutions and/or cut-offs of funds for fighting it.
- (b). In essence all these efforts failed, correct?
- (c). Even legislators who were against the war often refused to vote for these bills. Explain why, including unwillingness to take responsibility, moral and political cowardice, and the argument that funds could not be cut off for men in the field (although they would have received funds for and would have been able to defend themselves during a withdrawal). Also, the liberals always were split and didn't work together, right?
- (i) Describe George McGovern's "this chamber reeks of blood" speech, and explain why he gave it.
- (a) You believe McGovern missed his great chance in 1968, don't you? Even McGovern, didn't he, fell prey to political and moral cowardice at a time when action by him might have resulted in the war ending four to seven years and millions of lives earlier?
- (b) Ernest Gruening said early-on that what was being done would one day be regarded as a crime. Do you think of it as a crime, morally or legally? Are there people who do?
- (d). Why don't legislators today just say Bush does not presently have the power to fight in Iraq?
27. Describe the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal, i.e, the communists built up their strength and finally moved to take over the country, which a corrupt, ineffective South Viet Nameese government and army had no hope of preventing.
- A. Describe how Ford, apparently having learned nothing, wanted to provide extensive material help to the Thieu government.
28. Explain why the war had a dramatic adverse impact on Americans' view of their ability to influence their institutions.