

(a very valued letter, but
not printed, needless to say)
O. Williams

May 6, 1977

Editor
The Washington Post
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sirs,

Your editorial of May 6 calling for improved U.S.-Vietnamese relations left out one important factor - the issue of human rights that the present Administration has emphasized in dealings with other countries. As has been widely reported, several hundred thousand South Vietnamese are being held in concentration camps at the present time, many of them dying off of neglect and disease, their fate made more tragic by their realization that no one knows or cares. No doubt many of these people are imprisoned precisely for the reason that they worked with, liked, or ~~even~~ believed in the United States.

Obviously it is desirable to normalize relations with the new Vietnam. Vietnam used to be one of the most beautiful and charming countries in the world, as those who served there in the 1950s can well remember. It is also a major power in Southeast Asia which could even, one day, become a valued ally of ours. But as we look to a new era of good relations, we simply cannot sweep under the rug what is happening to our former ~~firm~~ friends. To do so would be obscene in itself, and hypocritical in view of our professed concern for human rights elsewhere.

What to do ? It is easier to recognize what not to do. ~~W~~ Nothing would be gained if U.S. officials publicly attacked the new Vietnamese regime, causing loss of face and the predictable hardening of Hanoi's stance, but unless U.S. officials are quietly and informally pointing out to the Vietnamese that improved relations and other advantages are linked to a more humane treatment of the people of conquered South Vietnam, they are not doing their job. Nor should they like what they see in the shaving mirror every morning. As regards private Americans, there are less constraints. The new Vietnam will be sensitive to world opinion. It could be helpful if individuals and organizations could revive some of that high moral indignation with which they were so liberally endowed during the Vietnam war. This includes newspapers. Where are the Anthony Lewises when now, perhaps for the first time, we need them ?

Sincerely,

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