

3 March 1973

Senator George McGovern  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator McGovern:

As one of your supporters in your campaign for the Presidency I have been very disappointed by some of your recent public statements.

Your luke-warm attitude towards the proposal that the United States contribute to the repair of the destruction our forces caused in North Vietnam is not consistent with the point of view you so well expressed during the election campaign on the immorality of the war. You now say we have a more immediate responsibility to rebuild America; that our cities, our poor, our children, and our environment have first call on our resources and that money should not be diverted from these needs to those of Southeast Asia. These demands on our resources are not an either-or matter. They both must be met even if to do so requires an increase in taxes. We have acquired an equal moral responsibility for the predicament of the people of Southeast Asia as for the people of America by the fact of their common origin in the war. They are inextricably interconnected.

More recently you made some statements at Wounded Knee which seemed to me brushed aside in a most callous and superficial way the fundamental causes of the resurgent anger displayed by American Indians. This situation is part and parcel of the very same dereliction of responsibility that has been manifest more recently in our Vietnamese involvement. Both in America's relationships with the Indians and with the people of Southeast Asia our conduct has been characterized by deception, dishonesty, and cruelty. You said you could not condone Custer, the occupation of the B.I.A. office in Washington, and the present action at Wounded Knee. You did not say you disapproved of the slaughter at Wounded Knee in 1890 — the last of a long series of betrayals and uni-lateral treaty abrogations, of massacres and removals that have characterized official U.S. Government policy from before the time of President Andrew Jackson right up to the present. You said nothing about the bureaucratic mismanagement by the Bureau of Indian Affairs which exerts its custodial influence for the benefit of private interest — extractive industries and land developments — to the long-term disadvantage of the tribes involved.

There is little doubt that the Indians have justifiable complaints against the United States Government for the manner in which they have been cheated, impoverished, and ignored for years, with recourse of appeal only to the agency that has been consistently deaf to their allegations of mistreatment. Against this background your remarks at Wounded Knee had a hollow ring.

Yours sincerely,

*Eliot Porter*