OMNI NEWSLETTER ON PATRIOTISM
BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE,
Compiled by Dick Bennett, MAY 21, 2009

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BOOK FORUM NEWS RELEASE
MAY 18, 2009
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Sponsor: OMNI Center for Peace, Justice, and Ecology

OMNI BOOK FORUM ON PATRIOTISM
Subject: The books discussed by the panelists range widely over such subjects as patriotism, superpatriotism, nationalism, Americanism, US exceptionalism, loyalty, justice. What is patriotism, and what is the proper behavior of a patriotic citizen?

Date: Friday, May 22, 2009
Place: Nightbird Books
Time: 6:00

Some of the questions to be raised during the Forum:
What is patriotism. What does it mean to love one’s country? To be anti-patriotic is to be anti-American? Is love of nation natural? Is there a difference between country and nation and government? Are love of nation and love of country identical? What is the role of the flag? Of loyalty? Is love of country geographical, demographic, cultural, ideological (freedom?), for economic opportunity and prosperity? What is the relationship between patriotism and nationalism? Are they responsible for good or harm mainly? Is patriotism equally laudable in all countries—Nazi, Soviet, British, USA? How many US wars have been justifiable? What has been their purpose—freedom? Should a citizen support an unjust war? Should we recite the/a Pledge of Allegiance? Sign a
loyalty oath? Would we be better off with matriotism?

Panelists:
Edrene McKay, Superpatriotism.
Lisa Corrigan, Asst. Prof. UA, The Curious Feminist
Larry Woodall, Businessman, American Exceptionalism and Human Rights
Nancy Saunders, Writer, Combat by Trial

Edrene McKay: NWACC History Instructor, Edrene McKay teaches United States history, Western Civilization, and contemporary history at NorthWest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) and DeVry University Online. Her special interests include globalization, religious fundamentalism, and United States foreign policy. She is a member of the faculty senate at NWACC and helped to organize OMNI-NWACC, a student chapter of the OMNI Center, and is a faculty advisor to that group.

Coordinator: Dick Bennett
Moderator: Tom Kennedy
News Release: Dick
Video: Marion and Bill Orton
Photos: Aubrey Shepherd
Peace Poles and OMNI Shirts: Dick
Greeter: Ted Swedenburg
Refreshments: Dick
Flyer and Poster: Nancy Goliff
Distribution of Flyer: Dick
Follow-up: Dick
(OJNI is trying to integrate our events into other OMNI activities—publicity, tv, archive, fundraising, and so on. Contact Gladys Tiffany to help).

And a special question not discussed by any of the panel books. Does patriotism sometimes (usually?) derive from and feed on ignorance or denial of a nation’s history? For example, US/UK sanctions during the 1990s killed more Iraqis, mainly children, than all other people killed by WMD (and the US did most of that killing). William Blum writes in Rogue State: “From 1945 to the end of the century, the United States attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments, and to crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements struggling against intolerable regimes. In the process, the US caused the end of life for several million people, and condemned many millions more to a life of agony and despair” (p. 2). And don’t forget the almost complete eradication of Native Americans. Weighed against the good the USA has done, ought the
nation inspire patriotism in its citizens? How might these questions be answered?

ILLUSIONS OF THE “AMERICAN CENTURY”

Here is an excerpt of an op-ed by Andrew J. Bacevich, professor of history and international relations at Boston University:

In its classic formulation, the central theme of the American Century has been one of righteousness overcoming evil. The United States (above all the US military) made that triumph possible. When, having been given a final nudge on December 7, 1941, Americans finally accepted their duty to lead, they saved the world from successive diabolical totalitarianisms. In doing so, the US not only preserved the possibility of human freedom but modeled what freedom ought to look like.

Thank you, comrades
So goes the preferred narrative of the American Century, as recounted by its celebrants.

The problems with this account are two-fold. First, it claims for the US excessive credit. Second, it excludes, ignores, or trivializes matters at odds with the triumphal story-line.

The net effect is to perpetuate an array of illusions that, whatever their value in prior decades, have long since outlived their usefulness. In short, the persistence of this self-congratulatory account deprives Americans of self-awareness, hindering our efforts to navigate the treacherous waters in which the country finds itself at present. Bluntly, we are perpetuating a mythic version of the past that never even approximated reality and today has become downright malignant. Although Richard Cohen may be right in declaring the American Century over, the American people - and especially the American political class - still remain in its thrall........"

For the complete essay go to:
http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/KD30Ak02.html

A NEW PURPOSE FOR THE 4TH OF JULY, VE and VJ DAYS, MEMORIAL DAY

Let these days commemorate the tragedies, let us be with the rest of the world on these days. On these days let us grasp their universal dimensions. We will not think only of ourselves, but of humanity as a whole. These days we will stand in solemn sympathy with the others, grieving with their suffering, as partners in the new human international obligation. These will be days of “No More”: no more national hubris, no more violence, no more xenophobia, no more discrimination, no more racism, no more bombings, no more torture. Our schools will study other people’s catastrophes, the origins of violence and aggression, and the ways to eradicate them in our own country. We will resolve to fight tyranny, by committing ourselves
to justice, equality, compassion, and peace. (Adapted from The Holocaust Is Over).

Norman Mailer’s Why Are We at War? Finds the cause of our democracy’s decline in the drive for empire.

42 of 51 people found the following review helpful:
Brief and sharp examination by America’s greatest writer, April 10, 2003
By Ted Burke "Ted Burke" (San Diego) - See all my reviews

In a sharp examination of American mood and motive in the post 9/11 world, Mailer uncovers the alarming drift in the Bush Administration’s global response to terrorist dangers. With the failure to either kill or capture bin Ladin, he argues, the White House has expanded the perimeters of its moral imperative without clear or credible reasoning. These are the folks Mailer refers to as "flag conservatives, neoconservatives by another name, for whom the achieving of an intractable agenda by any method of deceit, duplicity or force is acceptable, even at the sacrifice of rights and the destruction of democratic processes.

Mailer sees empire building as the be-all in an undisclosed agenda behind the Iraqi war. The erosion of our cherished democracy and rights is the biggest risk of our current crisis. Mailer writes surely and without a wasted word or metaphor, inspecting the roots of American need to have a Great Struggle of any kind in order to have some measure of surety and direction in an era that’s become improbably complex, and punctures the sentimentalized ideas that we can establish democratic institutions in a region and amongst a culture that resists such fantasies. This is the Mailer we expect: provocative, original, morally rigorous.

THE PATRIOT ACT
The President and Congress panicked and rushed to shoot ourselves in the foot by severely curtailing the Bill of Rights. It took only 45 days after 9/11 for Pres. Bush to sign the USA Patriot Act into law. Only one senator originally voted against the Act. However, only 2,000 people died annually worldwide on average from terrorist attacks in the last 30 years.

While 869,724 US citizens died in 2004 alone from coronary heart disease, the major cause of death in the US. What was the real reason for the USA Patriot Act?
(Data from In These Times Oct. 2008 p. 5).


(In memory of George Carlin.)
It’s July 4th again [2008], a day of near-compulsory flag-waving and nation-worshipping. Count me out.
Spare me the puerile parades.
Don’t play that martial music, white boy.
And don’t befoul nature’s sky with your F-16s.
You see, I don’t believe in patriotism.
It’s not that I’m anti-American, but I am anti-patriotic.
Love of country isn’t natural. It’s not something you’re born with.
It’s an inculcated kind of love, something that is foisted upon you in the home, in the school, on TV, at church, during the football game.
Yet most people accept it without inspection.
Why?
For when you stop to think about it, patriotism (especially in its malignant morph, nationalism) has done more to stack the corpses millions high in the last 300 years than any other factor, including the prodigious slayer, religion.
The victims of colonialism, from the Congo to the Philippines, fell at nationalism’s bayonet point.
World War I filled the graves with the most foolish nationalism. And Hitler and Mussolini and Imperial Japan brought nationalism to new nadirs. The flags next to the tombstones are but signed confessions—notes left by the killer after the fact.
The millions of victims of Stalin and Mao and Pol Pot have on their death certificates a dual diagnosis: yes communism, but also that other ism, nationalism.
The whole world almost got destroyed because of nationalism during the Cuban Missile Crisis.
The bloody battles in Serbia and Bosnia and Croatia in the 1990s fed off the injured pride of competing patriotisms and all their nourished grievances.

In the last five years in Iraq, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians have died because the United States, the patriarch of patriotism, saw fit to impose itself, without just cause, on another country. But the excuse was patriotism, wrapped in Bush’s brand of messianic militarism: that we, the great Americans, have a duty to deliver “God’s gift of freedom” to every corner of the world..........It is time, it is long past time, to get over the American superiority complex.
It is time, it is long past time, to put patriotism back on the shelf—out of the reach of children and madmen.”
For the full essay go to: http://www.progressive.org/node/6603

Dick’s Letter to TMN Reporter 2-14-09
Mr. Huggins I was glad to have the information you provided about the hospitalized veterans. One comment, however, you might want to investigate further. “...honor the sacrifice veterans made to protect this country.” What about the wars that had nothing to do
with protecting the US? What did the invasions of Grenada and Panama have to do with our security? And what if some or many or most of the veterans served in US wars that were in fact illegal and were wars of aggression? The bombings of Laos during the Vietnam War, for example. Should we honor veterans who willingly participated in such wars? I urge you to read William Blum's books as starters among a large library of books that examine the necessity of US wars, their relation to US security, and therefore by implication the "sacrifice" the DVA honors: Killing Hope and Rogue State.

PATRIOTISM: WORLD.-WIDE COMMENTS

The love of one’s country is a splendid thing. But why should love stop at the border?

Pablo Casals

Our country is not the only thing to which we owe our allegiance. It is also owed to justice and to humanity. Patriotism consists not in waving the flag, but in striving that our country shall be righteous as well as strong.

James Bryce

Heroism on command, senseless violence, and all the loathsome nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism—how passionately I hate them!

Albert Einstein

To me, it seems a dreadful indignity to have a soul controlled by geography.

George Santanyana

Patriotism is the willingness to kill and be killed for trivial reasons.

Bertrand Russell

Patriotic societies seem to think that the way to educate school children in a democracy is to stage bigger and better flag-saluting.

S.I. Hayakawa

Patriotism is often an arbitrary veneration of real estate above principles.

George Jean Nathan

Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it.

George Bernard Shaw
Each man must for himself alone decide what is right and what is wrong, which course is patriotic and which isn’t. You cannot shirk this and be a man. To decide against your conviction is to be an unqualified and excusable traitor, both to yourself and to your country, let me label you as they may. 

Mark Twain

You’ll never have a quiet world ‘til you knock the patriotism out of the human race.

George Bernard Shaw

If I knew something that would serve my country but would harm mankind, I would never reveal it; for I am a citizen of humanity first and by necessity, and a citizen of France second, and only by accident.

Montesquieu

I am not an Athenian or a Greek. I am a citizen of the world. 

Socrates

Borders are scratched across the hearts of men

- By strangers with a calm, judicial pen,

And when the borders bleed we watch with dread

- The lines of ink across the map turn red.

Marya Mannes

Nationalism is a silly cock crowing on his own dunghill. 

Richard Aldington

“I do not expect the country will change the war because of my standing here. I stand here to make sure the country doesn’t change me.” Rev. Robert Cromey, St. Luke’s Episcopal church, San Francisco. paraphrasing A. J. Muste.

I have no country to fight for; my country is the earth, and I am a citizen of the world.

Eugene V. Debs

Our country is the world, our countrymen are all mankind. We love the land of our nativity, only as we love all other lands. The interests, rights, and liberties of American citizens are no more dear to us than are those of the whole human race. Hence we can allow no appeal to patriotism, to revenge any national insult or injury.

William Lloyd Garrison
Patriotism is a kind of religion; it is the egg from which wars are hatched.

Guy de Maupassant

Can anything be stupider than that a man has the right to kill me because he lives on the other side of a river and his ruler has a quarrel with mine, though I have not quarreled with him?

Tolstoy

It is lamentable, that to be a good patriot one must become the enemy of the rest of mankind.

Voltaire

Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the president or any other public official, save exactly to the degree in which he himself stands by the country. It is patriotic to support him insofar as he efficiently serves the country. It is unpatriotic not to oppose him to the exact extent that by inefficiency or otherwise he fails in his duty to stand by the country. In either event, it is unpatriotic not to tell the truth, whether about the president or anyone else.

Theodore Roosevelt

I suggest that a patriotic American who cares for his country might act on behalf of a different vision. Instead of being feared for our military prowess, we should want to be respected for our dedication to human rights."

Howard Zinn

Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country. Hermann Goering (Hitler’s Reichs-Marshall, 1939)
Our country is greatly polarized and much of the emotion revolves about the question, “What is true patriotism?” Anti-war protesters are accused of being unpatriotic, that their demonstrations aid the enemy and are contrary to the interests of the troops. The protesters, though, claim that the way to support the troops is to demand that they be brought home. The divide extends even to military families. In Augusta a weekly vigil is led by parents of an American soldier serving in Iraq. Does the time for dissent cease the days the troops are sent in?

How does the sentiment of former President General Dwight D. Eisenhower fit into this discussion? “I think that people want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of their way and let them have it.

When people speak to you about a preventive war, you tell them to go and fight it. After my experience, I have come to hate war. War settles nothing.

I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity.”

Patriotism
By Dud Hendrick
I don’t purport to have any exceptional qualifications to speak out about patriotism. My qualifications, such as they are, would be:
1) I was involved marginally, in the planning of this discussion series and volunteered that I had some thoughts regarding patriotism and would welcome the opportunity to share them.
2) I grew up in the 40’s and 50’s in a Midwest Republican household where flag-waving, 4th of July celebrating was as universally embraced as was church on Sunday and backyard barbecues.
3) I am a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a Vietnam war veteran.
4) In short, I’m a product of mainstream America and the
pervasive influence of a militaristic culture.

That reference, “a militaristic culture”, is a hint of my sentiments about “patriotism” today. I know that for the most part, I’m among like-minded friends where my observations are unlikely to offend so strongly. But, I’m acutely aware, not to mention, grateful that we dwell in a corner of the country where progressive thinking is not unusual, not extraordinary. We dwell for the most part in a sort of refuge in this respect.

However, I do enter arenas where these views aren’t warmly received. Specifically, as a member of Veterans for Peace, I’m often engaged in countering military recruiting. My colleagues and I go into high schools where a conventional definition of patriotism is embraced.

Tonight I want to very briefly share some of my sentiments with you regarding the subject of patriotism in hopes 1) that the ensuing discussion might help me to hone or develop a message that would serve my purpose better or more effectively.

I consider patriotism to be as fundamental a problem as I do fundamentalist religiosity, the military-industrial complex, the concentration of media ownership, corporate law, and of course they are all linked. They are all relevant to the corruption of our democracy to create a plutocracy, an oligarchy.

It’s that background that explains my volunteering to go to Vietnam. The more immediate inspiration or provocation for that decision was the death of my best friend, a naval aviator, in Vietnam. That and the powerful macho culture within which I lived and worked as a bomb disposal expert. Vietnam, we said, wasn’t much of a war, but it was the only one we had.

The words of Brian Willson in 2000: “So when I see the flag and think of the Declaration of Independence, instead of the United States of America, I see the United Corporations of America; I see the blood and bones of people all over the globe who have been dehumanized, then
exterminated by its imperialism; and I see a symbol that
represents a monstrous lie maintained by excessive, deadly
force. It makes me feel sick and ashamed. And I know that
my opinions being expressed here will not be popular, even
among some of my closest friends. But I cannot ignore the
reality, as I now understand it. I believe we are living
one of the most incredible lies in history, covered over by
one of the most successful campaigns of public rhetoric,
ignoring empirical reality. It is truly amazing! I hope
that one day we will end our willful ignorance and be able
to see our transgressions, and beg, on our knees, for
forgiveness, and then wail as we begin to feel the
incredible pain and anguish we have caused the world as
well as our own bodies, minds, souls, and culture.”

Dick Hendrick: “I have taken as one of the few firm
lessons of history that nationalism has caused nothing but
trouble in the world. And lots of it. All the convoluted
efforts to separate patriotism from nationalism do not
persuade me. It is all based on a false pride in something
for which none of us can take an ounce of credit. It is
not possible to engage in such beliefs without implicitly
denigrating other nations (and therefore other peoples),
other ideas, other ideals, other histories, other
cultures. It leads almost inexorably to a dismissal of
others and therefore saps important motivation for learning
about others. This undoubtedly has much to do with the
regrettable level of ignorance in our country about
anything beyond our borders.”

Leo Tolstoy had much to say about patriotism. He defines
it as the principle that will justify the training of
wholesale murderers; a trade that requires better equipment
for the exercise of man-killing than the making of such
necessities of life as shoes, clothing, and houses; a trade
that guarantees better returns and greater glory than that
of the average workingman.

Emma Goldman had lots to say about patriotism. “Indeed,
conceit, arrogance, and egotism are the essentials of
patriotism. Let me illustrate. Patriotism assumes that
our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded
by an iron gate. Those who have had the fortune of being
on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all others.

The awful waste that patriotism necessitates ought to be sufficient to cure the man of even average intelligence from this disease. Yet patriotism demands still more. The people are urged to be patriotic and for that luxury they pay, not only by supporting their “defenders,” but even by sacrificing their own children. Patriotism requires allegiance to the flag, which means obedience and readiness to kill father, mother, brother, sister.

Considering the evil results that patriotism is fraught with for the average man, it is nothing compared with the insult and injury that patriotism heaps upon the soldier himself, that poor, deluded victim of superstition and ignorance. He the savior of his country, the protector of his nation. What has patriotism in store for him? A life of slavish submission, vice, and perversion, during peace; a life of danger, exposure, and death, during war.

Finally, Goldman says, “What we need is a propaganda of education for the soldier; antipatriotic literature that will enlighten him as to the real horrors of his trade, and that will awaken his consciousness to his true relation to the man to whose labor he owes his very existence.

Like to offer a few questions that might provide some structure:
1) What is patriotism?
2) Can patriotism be a positive force?
3) If we agree that patriotism is a force that works against peace how can we frame our message in terms not so offensive to those who embrace it?

I consider this challenge—the challenge of developing a dialogue with the mainstream population to be of fundamental importance. People must come to terms with the reality that America is not what it purports to be, what it once might have been and that blind slavish devotion to the
dictates of the administration, blind patriotism, if you will, does not serve us well.

Another observation—I see Patriotism, at best to be nothing more than taking pride in your country. But, I don’t really understand that. I don’t really get the concept of taking pride in something the creation of which I had absolutely nothing to do. It is like pride in one’s race or in one’s blue eyes or in one’s favorite team. I see it as false pride leading only to mischief and trouble, inviting vicious, impossible-to-resolve arguments between fans, rivals, racial groups and patriots from other lands. I believe that just as one should never be ashamed of those things over which one has no control, likewise should we take no pride in where you were born—you didn’t even exist when the decision was made.

A couple other observations that might induce discussion. It is timely that we currently have this anti-Kerry campaign raging. I have some sentiments or opinions regarding the attacks on his service in Vietnam; but more to the point I want to speak briefly about the attack on his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1971. As most people are now aware, Kerry played a prominent role in the creation of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and was the only representative of that organization to testify. His remarks were hard-hitting and eloquent in their denunciation of the war and the manner in which it was conducted. He spoke of the so-called Winter Soldier Investigation, held in Detroit several months earlier where over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia. Kerry said, “They told the stories at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.”
It was also on this occasion that Kerry famously asked, “— how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?

And for these remarks, Kerry is now being castigated. My believe is that these were among the most patriotic words ever spoken by Kerry. He should be celebrated for this stand. He was exposing the lies of the war.

This is exactly why I have said at various rallies and before student and other audiences, in reference to today’s foreign policy, that dissent is not only a right, but a responsibility, and, in time of war, when innocent lives are being taken, when soldiers are dying for causes that will not bear up under scrutiny, the responsibility becomes a moral imperative.

Make reference to the timeliness of this discussion given the salvos being fired at Kerry for his testimony in 1975. His remarks being used in attack ads. His patriotism being challenged when he was trying to stop an immoral war.

Also the “Off to War” documentary following Arkansas reservists preparing for and heading off to war, Wrapping their killing, their service, in the flag and patriotism.