NORMALIZING MILITARISM AND PERMANENT WAR
By Dick Bennett, August 31, 2008.

I always read the "Our Town" section of The Morning News Sundays, for the understanding it adds to how the corporate warfare state sustains itself at the grassroots. Whether intentionally or not, "Our Town" functions effectively to decontextualize events and to normalize militarism and empire in two ways, by 1) publicizing mainstream fundraisers and 2) supporting the troops.

All of the fundraisers are for worthy causes--Polo in the Ozarks, Savor the Flavor, Starry Starry Night, Dancing with the NWA Stars, Pink Trash Ball, Charity Challenge of Champions, Chefs in the Garden, Black Ties and Toolbelts, and many more--and all are noncontroversially, impeccably, complicitly isolated from the wrongdoing of our government. Sunday after Sunday you would never know our government was squandering five or six trillion dollars and slaughtering perhaps a million Iraqis and Afghans and over 4000 of our own warriors on an illegal war for oil and empire, when that money could have been spent for the human needs for which our good citizens perform fundraisers (for cancer victims, ill children, battered women, and on and on), and the lives of our soldiers, of Iraqis and Afghans, and of our own sick, injured, and dying saved.

And on Sunday after Sunday, year after year, our warriors are singled out for special recognition and sympathy-- in the "Military News" section, stories
accompanied by photos of individuals. *The Morning News* also presented a special profile each Sunday about Bravo Company National Guard men and women (headquarters Rogers), and the newspaper makes the series available on their web site. These practices are reinforced Sunday after Sunday, by the "Local Notes" reporting local military events—one day, for example, the Rogers Ladies Auxiliary Veterans of Foreign Wars vigil, the Patriotic Scholarship competition offered by the National Veterans of Foreign Wars locally sponsored by the Bella Vista VFW Auxiliary Ladies and Post, and the Purple Heart Chapter meeting.

By suppression and avoidance of the contexts of aggressive US foreign wars, on the one hand by our generous, hardworking fundraisers, and on the other hand by media reporting our warriors and foreign wars also devoid of context, our citizens and media help to ensure the continuation of the US warfare state. And it is all considered normal.

So we must speak up. Indirect or direct acceptance of wars is not natural but constructed by people. Through our great power of nonviolent resistance, we must examine and try to impede whatever leads to wars and preparations for wars. And by doing so we become a peace movement.

**OZARK MILITARY MUSEUM**

**All We Are Saying Is Give War a Chance**

*By Jonah Tebbetts, Friday, January 25, 2008*

Remember a couple of years ago when OMNI wanted to have school children decorate Peace Poles and place them on public property? City Attorney Kit Williams went off on how these monuments to peace could be read as opposition to the debacle in Iraq and could create a public forum in our city parks. Don Michaels of the *Northwest Arkansas Times* editorialized against the idea, so OMNI backed off and dropped their gentle idea to praise peace in our parks.

Well, glorifying war is a different matter altogether. Down at Ray Boudreaux's corporate jetport on South School Street, we have allowed the Ozark Military Museum to set up shop on city property and display military weapons and other totems that sanctify war. The museum just received city
approval of a building permit for a 6,000-square foot prefabricated metal addition on public property.

This is being done in the name of economic development and the claim that 10,000 visitors toured the shrine in 2007. That's about five paying customers an hour, if you believe that. We must be competing for tourist dollars with the Air and Military Museum of the Ozarks (AMMO) in Springfield. We are also shaping the views of future generations of children by aggrandizing the weapons of war. Lauding an armored military vehicle, Leonard McCandless, president of the museum’s board of directors, said, “Every little kid would like to have that to drive to Wal-Mart, make their own parking place... It's a neat little thing. Every kid and big kids, adults, would like to have that to play with.”

I would argue that those military artifacts might make good plowshares, but our city's leaders and editorial writers would think that a dangerous political statement.

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS COMMEMORATES WWI
Dick Bennett May 15, 2003
The Mullins Library on May 14, 2003, held a Memorial Day Commemoration on “World War I: The Home Front Here and Abroad.” Here is the total project:

1. Attractive, expensive, large postcard invitations, with a picture of a soldier climbing out of a trench and upwards toward a stairs of books leading to a city, entitled “Knowledge Wins: Public Library Books Are Free.” The Program of four pages, with a dramatic poster on the front.
   a. The Poster cover: The US Eagle is dropping a laurel wreath onto the head of the British Lion, accompanied by the words: “America’s Tribute to Britain.” Explanation of the contribution of the Liberty Memorial Museum of Kansas City.
   b. Music Program Notes (two compositions played by one of the university’s best pianists).
   c. Description of three exhibits, summarized by the title “Over Here? The American Home Front.”
   d. “Remarks on the Main Exhibit.”
   e. Lecture by a professor of English on “Gender and Paradox in Great War Britain.”
   f. Bio of the pianist.

ANALYSIS
   Picture Postcard: The picture and message apparently affirm the superiority of learning over armed violence.
   Program Cover: This poster seems neutrally historical, until one recalls that just a few weeks prior to the event the U. S. and Britain invaded Iraq in violation of international law/the U.N. Charter, against the Security Council, and against overwhelming world opinion, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Iraqi civilians and soldiers, the widespread destruction of Iraqi infrastructure, including priceless cultural collections (the National Museum, etc. destroyed), and ensuing human misery and social chaos.
   Lecture: This excellent account of the response of women to the war, of their struggle to be active
participants, and of men’s ambivalent attitudes toward women’s participation, is entirely appropriate to a program on WWI British Home Front. However, in the context of the second brutal invasion of Iraq just ended (and the ten years of embargo and bombing) in which so many women and children were killed, and the context of the slaughter that was WWI--practically a genocide of an entire generation of young men on both sides of the war--the lecture seems to sanitize the war, to deflect the audience from the horror. Let me give a detail: “On one day in World War I, the British army lost 19,240 men. That was July 1, 1916, a Saturday. A single regiment, the storied 1st New Foundland, was virtually annihilated. Maj. Gen. Sir Beauvoir de Lisle, reporting on what had happened, wrote, ‘It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valor, and its assault only failed of success because dead men can advance no further.’” I am not blaming the speaker, who was asked to speak on the “home front.” But the program committee should be asked why they avoided the charnel context, the carnage, the bits and pieces of the 400,000 soldiers never identified.

Music: The escapist element of the lecture was then enlarged and emphasized by the first of the two musical presentations, Rachmaninoff’s “Variations on Theme of Corelli, Op. 42,” which has nothing to do with WWI, the home front, or war. The second composition, however, Prokofiev’s “Sonata No. 7,” according to the program notes “belongs to the trio of ‘war sonatas’” composed by Prokofiev. Yet of course even this composition, with its “thrilling” ending, does not evoke, does not even begin to draw attention to, the terrible realities of WWI trench warfare.

The Exhibits: One displays materials “relating to the American and Arkansas home front during WWI” from the Liberty Memorial Museum of Kansas City. The Museum was created soon after the end of WWI to memorialize “the men and women who served, and to those who died during World War I.” That is, it is a war memorial. The problem is, contrary to popular patriotism, the war was not fought for liberty but over empires; it was a colonial conflict in which the U.S. took one side; and a recent scholarly study has made the case that Britain was the main cause of the inexpressible, five-year holocaust. The program notes describe the Museum: “Its enormous tower, temple-like buildings, enormous carved stone sphinxes, and massive courtyards are truly a national landmark.” A landmark promulgating war, yes.

The second exhibit displays U.S. WWI posters “that reflect national sentiments of the period, and that encouraged social actions and attitudes relating to the home front.” What this euphemistically deceptive description does not reveal is the jingoism of the posters. The third exhibit contains two parts: sheet music of U.S. popular songs during WWI, and the research of Prof. James H. Hudson “on the history of the American aviators who fought in the war.” The songs are patriotic pro-war songs, and the research promotes air war, which became Guernica, Rotterdam, Hamburg and Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and continues today.

But was the program planned to so much support war? Clearly not, I think: the mixed messages suggest something else, and the reply from a library official to my query regarding the creation of the program makes its randomness clear. One official had a brother-in-law who was curator of the Liberty Memorial Museum. Another official knew the English professor and that she had just written a book on the home front during WWI. The Dean of the library was a friend of the pianist, who “agreed to play a couple of pieces by two composers who lived in exile in between the wars after the Russian Revolution”; that is, pieces not connected with WWI or its home front. And the official who told me about this process, wrote, “We wanted to stress the ‘home front,’ rather than the war itself,” without explaining why.

No one librarian, no group of librarians, set out to promote war in this program; no conspiracy occurred. Rather each and all reflected the group think of the US National Security State. Most of the content is either for war or (the music) is neutral. How could this happen, in a university with a college named for J. William Fulbright, and when all involved are so intelligent and well-informed? Perhaps the culture in which they live, with its militarism everywhere exerting support and pressure for violence and war, decreased their ordinarily critical alertness. The Mullins Library Memorial Day

MEMORIALIZING CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS AND BATTLES
Dick Bennett June 10, 2012
“Memorial Group Celebrates Anniversary” by Kate Ward. Northwest Arkansas Times (June 3, 2012). A celebration of the founding of the Confederate Cemetery in Fayetteville, Ar, 139 years ago, and of the founding women. Reenactors dressed as Confederate soldiers and fired weapons from those times.

The event and explanations raise questions.

"‘The mission of these women was to find a final resting place for the men who died for a cause,’” said Linda Doede, historian for the Southern Memorial Association. A member of the Sons of Confederate Soldiers was present, who said: “…these men are not honored enough. There’s no greater honor than to die for a cause.”” [But it’s not just a cause, any cause: the slavery cause is affirmed by the celebration. And they don’t really mean all causes; I suspect they would not celebrate Islamic suicide bombers, dead for their cause. And more generally, these people are celebrating war and warriors. Let honeysuckle cover up that cemetery.]

Sixty-three new headstones identify previously unknown or unmarked graves of soldiers (of the possibly 900 soldiers buried in the graveyard). Said the man who paid for them: “’It’s our duty to remember to never forget these men or the sacrifices they made.’” [Why must we remember them? Their cause was not just. Rather we should celebrate the Southern whites who fought for black rights continuing to the present. Or let us build monuments to the opponents of wars. The US has thousands of war cemeteries, and not one for the anti-war dead. Or why not devote time and money to gravestones for the countless paupers who have died in our country unmarked?]

Why does this matter? Monuments become a force imprisoning in the past the minds of the generations that follow, conditioning and reinforcing wars instead of peace. The Son of Confederate Soldiers brought his son with him to the celebration: “I think it’s really important he learn about the history.” To the contrary, let us teach our children to celebrate the struggle to bring into being the United States of the future in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence.

Dick Bennett, Grassroots Militarism: A Model for Community Research. Eureka Springs, AR. Center on War and the Child, 1989. 30pp. Available at UA’s Mullins Library. Not notably a part of the US military-industrial complex, yet this analysis shows the pervasiveness of violence and military presence in the county, which goes either unnoticed and unremarked or is celebrated. It’s the USA, Washington County, AR, Washington, DC.