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**FOLLOWUP OF THE FORUM PUBLISHED IN OMNI’S EVENTS NEWSLETTER**

**BY EDRENE MCKAY**

In *Superpatriotism* (2004), Michael Parenti defines superpatriotism as “the readiness to follow national leaders unquestionably in their dealings with other countries, especially in confrontations involving military force.” It assumes that the United States is endowed with superior virtue and has a unique history and special place in the world. A key component of superpatriotism is an uncritical dedication to military glory and nation-state aggrandizement. United States leaders repeatedly interweave piety and patriotism. Superpatriots believe that the United States was intended by God, history, or destiny to play a unique and superior role in the world. Politico-economic elites promote flag reverence, loyalty oaths, and nationalistic anniversaries. They urge the teaching of a sanitized version of US history in the public schools. They establish national shrines and monuments. They inaugurate propaganda campaigns that depict others as national security threats and incite alarm at home.

What does it means to be a real patriot? **Real patriots** educate themselves about the real history of their country. Real patriots find different things in our past to be proud of: the struggle for enfranchisement, the abolitionist movement, the peace movement, the elimination of child labor, the struggle for collective bargaining, the eight-hour day, occupational safety, racial justice, gender equity. Real patriots note things that they really should fear: global warming, the overpowering influence of money on political life, electoral fraud, the power of corporations, corporate crime, underfunding of public services, a profit-driven military budget, the runaway national debt, repressive laws that steal away our civil liberties, and an oil-driven foreign policy. Real patriots struggle for social change: taxes for the rich, renewable non-polluting energy, safe mass transit systems, freedom of speech, non-profit production, new political parties, democratization of the political process and the economy.

(354 words)

**MURDER IN DEFENSE OF PATRIOTISM**  By Dick Bennett

Anders Behring Breivik murdered 77 people in Norway on July 22, 2011. Why? He thought they were Muslims; he thought Muslims were taking over his country. “I acted in self-defense on behalf of my people, my city, my country.” “I am a member of the Norwegian resistance movement….We demand that our ethnic rights not be taken away from us.” It was a “suicide attack,” he said; he had not expected “to survive that day.”

He sounds like bin Laden: he too was defending his faith and people. And like the followers of bin Laden, who murdered thousands of people, Breivik was willing to give up his
In court Breivik argued that “he had acted in his country’s defense” and compared himself to U.S. commanders who authorized the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.” On this basis he asked the court “that I be acquitted.” “As long as you call me evil, you should call the U.S. commanders during World War II evil as well when they decided to drop the bomb on Japan.” But the U.S. was not evil because “they tried to have noble motives to try to save people’s lives.” just as he did. He was protesting “the ‘Islamic’ ‘colonization’ of Norway.” “I did this out of goodness, not evil.” Nor were the murders psychopathic but were a “preventive strike.”


Formerly a high value, the idea of “defense” has been so outrageously sullied and abused by extremist nationalistic and ethnic fanatics and xenophobes, let us banish the word until the idea loses its power to motivate mass murder. A major beginning would be accurately naming the Pentagon the Department of War.

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REPRESSION AND FEAR USA


THURSDAY, MAY 20,
Mohamed Ghorab had no hint one late spring morning that when he dropped his daughter off at school, his life would change forever. Federal agents and police surrounded him in front of terrified parents, teachers and school children. They hustled him off to jail and eventually deported him. His wife was detained at the same time. Agents raided the obscure Philadelphia mosque where Ghorab was imam, ransacking its simple interior and his house next door.
This was a fearful time in the life of America following 9/11, as prize-winning reporter Stephan Salisbury well knew. But he did not anticipate the extremity of fear that emerged as he explored the aftermath of that virtually forgotten raid. Over time, the members of the mosque and the imam’s family opened up to him, giving Salisbury a unique opportunity to chronicle the demolition of lives and families, the spread of anti-immigrant hysteria and its manipulation by the government.
As he explored these events, Salisbury was constantly reminded of similar incidents in his own past—the paranoia and police activity that surrounded his political involvement in the 1960s and the surveillance and informing that dogged his father, Harrison Salisbury, a well-known New York Times
reporter and editor, for half a century. Salisbury weaves these strands together into a personal portrait of an America fracturing under the intense pressure of the war on terror—the homeland in the time of Osama.

“Stephan Salisbury tells a dark and important story that has not been told before and that vividly conveys the texture of the lives of men and women caught up in a web of hostility and government interference.” Gay Talese

“Drawing on his own history as an antiwar dissident, Salisbury writes compassionately of the families destroyed and the lives ruined by government-orchestrated repression. This is a vital document for our times, lyrical to an extent unexpected in a political book, yet imbued with a fervor that at every turn is made just by dogged, scrupulous reporting.” Ken Kalfus, author of The Commissariat of Enlightenment

“Stephan Salisbury has written a deeply reported, thoughtful meditation on what happens when a society decides it needs to spy on its own. Salisbury’s immersive account of the real-life consequences that happen when an entire community is placed under suspicion makes it clear that covert government surveillance comes with costs that can’t be measured on any balance sheet. Everyone agrees that abuses of power are bad, but Salisbury pushes readers to ponder the consequences—for individuals and for our open, democratic society—that accompany even the legal variety of permanent surveillance.” Michael Schaffer, author of One Nation Under Dog

Stephan Salisbury is the senior cultural writer for The Philadelphia Inquirer, where he has been a reporter for three decades. He has covered everything from the Pennsylvania prison system, unrest in Ireland and Eastern Europe and the coup in Turkey to the culture wars in the United States and the disruptions of American life in the wake of 9/11. He has received numerous awards and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize as part of an Inquirer team investigating local election fraud in 1995. He is married to the painter Jennifer Baker; they have a daughter and a son.

Posted on Tuesday, April 27th, 2010.

RESISTANCE TO PATRIOT ACT

Democracy Now (8-11-10)

Harms of the Patriot Act include the thousands of National Security Letters demanding information without warrant and including a gag order. At least 192,500 between 2002 and 2006.

Two heroes of free speech interviewed: Nicholas Merrill, internet service provider who sued the government with the ACLU. Librarian George Christian and 3 other librarians refused to comply and challenged FBI’s request for records. Both argue the Security Letters violated the First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments.

STEPHEN NATHANSON. Patriotism, Morality, and Peace. Roman and Littlefield, 1993. Is patriotism a worthy ideal, one that we ought to promote and support? Or is it a dangerous and destructive notion that leads to war and hostility? "Patriotism, Morality, and Peace" provides the first sustained philosophical treatment of these questions, distinguishes different forms of patriotism, and shows why some forms are indeed dangerous, while others can be valuable and constructive. Nathanson has written several books on patriotism.

Nathanson distinguishes between extreme patriotism (chauvinism, jingoism, and xenophobia) and extreme universalism (all nations and people are of equal
concern) as advocated by Tolstoy. Instead, Nathanson recommends a “moderate patriotism” that embodies the following values:

1. Special affection for one’s own country
2. A desire that one’s country prosper and flourish
3. Special but not exclusive concern for one’s own country
4. Support of morally constrained pursuit of national goals
5. Conditional support of one’s country’s policies

These features avoid the extreme patriotism of believing one’s country is best and of feeling hostility toward others; love of one’s country does not exclude the humanity of people in other countries. “Having excised the belief in superiority, the desire for dominance, exclusiveness of concern, and non-recognition of moral constraints on national actions, moderate patriotism permits the pursuit of legitimate national goals by morally legitimate means.”

Moderate patriotism also avoids Tolstoy’s extreme universalism of complete equality of all countries and peoples. Because for Tolstoy patriotism meant an exclusive concern for one’s own country, a belief in the superiority of one’s country, a desire for dominance over other countries, no constraints on the pursuit of one’s country’s goals, and automatic support of one’s country’s military policies, he rejected patriotism. But he was rejecting extreme patriotism. Moderate patriotism avoids these liabilities so rightly abhorrent to Tolstoy.

Conclusion to chapter 3: “Finally, for all these reasons, moderate patriotism is not warlike or belligerent.” Dick

--Woehrle, Lynne, et al. *Contesting Patriotism: Culture, Power, and Strategy in the Peace Movement*. Roman & Littlefield, 2009. Rev. *Fellowship* (Spring 2010). A deep grounding of the peace movement is its effort to reclaim the attribution of “patriotic” for criticism of the nation-state when it wages war. The book traces the many ways “in which major groups in the peace movement have advanced this cause in their publications over the past 20 years.”

KERRY MUELLER’S MARIOTISM SERVICE, UUFF, JUNE 21, 2009

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Fayetteville
A patriot is one who wrestles for the soul of her country as she wrestles for her own being
Homily on Matriotism

Let me say right off the bat, that I’m in favor of love of country, and in favor of men and fathers, so you might ask “What’s with this matriotism business?” Anti male? Anti patriotism? Anti flag? No, it’s just that over the course of my adult life I’ve too often seen the symbols of patriotism misused to promote actions and values which are antithetical to a deeper love of country and love of humanity. During Viet Nam many people – I among them – conceded the flag to the far right, leaving me without a symbol of those values and hopes and aspirations which are the bedrock of this great nation. So I thought that since we too often get patriotism wrong, and allow it to calcify into superficial or dangerous or oppressive flag waving, and or corrode the values of free speech by forbidding flag burning, in the name of patriotism. let’s try again, with a slightly different name, and look to our mother values to express our love of country. Maybe we can get it right.

A word of caution. Just as those old patriotic catchphrases and flags can be misused, so can the slogans and ideals of the values we embrace. “Peace is patriotic” we said in our responsive reading. And so it is, usually. But I recently read Philip Roth’s novel, The Plot Against America, a dystopian fantasy about an America where the 1940 election was won by Lindbergh, a fascist friendly, Hitler loving isolationist. He campaigned against getting into the “Jews war” in Europe. It was a scary book. A call for peace is worthy of closer examination, but it is not automatically in our best interests. I remain skeptical of any bumper sticker politics, even those I find appealing or amusing. If your argument in politics – or religion – is something that you can shout across an abyss at the other side, I want to look more closely before I sign on.

So this morning we offer some of the depths, some of the elements of patriotism, or matriotism, some of the underlying values. Some and some were brought by members of the congregation. They are all worthy of your further attention.

Echoing through my mind as I thought about this service was a scene from my childhood kitchen. Next to the cellar door my mother hung a small cork bulletin board, no doubt for the various lists and clippings that accumulate in any family – this was before the ubiquity of refrigerator magnets. But I had other ideas. In school, bulletin boards were for educational and celebratory displays. And so I took it upon myself to decorate for the Fourth of July – flags and fireworks clipped from magazines, and in large letters against a beautiful cloud studded sky, a quote which I remember as being from Eisenhower, but Google tells me is attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville: “America is great because she is good; if she ceases to be good she will cease to be great.” You might argue the literal truth of that, you might question the details, but, especially in recent years, it might serve as a beacon for us.
Matriotism requires us to always live towards our democratic ideals, to be good in every sense, to aspire towards a world with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

Readings

Excerpt: 'Why Women Should Rule the World' by Dee Dee Myers

Different Perspectives, Different Priorities

As women have played an increasingly important role in politics, there is no question that they've brought a different perspective, focusing attention on a broader set of issues and building alliances with other women. That's not to say that women in elective office focus only, or even mostly, on so-called women's issues. But research confirms that both Republican and Democratic women are more likely than their male counterparts to initiate and fight for bills that champion social justice, protect the environment, advocate for families, and promote nonviolent conflict resolution. They also focus on issues like transportation, agriculture, and arms control, just like men. But women, as Geraldine Ferraro once said, "raise issues that others overlook, pass bills that others oppose, invest in projects that others dismiss, and seek to end abuses that others ignore." Amen.

Kay Bailey Hutchison was the first Republican woman elected to the Texas House in 1972. "There were four Democratic women and me, for a total of five who were elected that year. And we did get together to do several things that were definitely a result of our experience as women. We changed the laws regarding rape victims in Texas and became really the leader in the nation on fair treatment for rape victims. And we did that as a coalition. We did equal credit rights for women. We did historical preservation. I also did transportation . . . That was not my experience as a woman, but I definitely worked with the Democratic women. And it was a great coalition that we had because the Republicans knew that if I was on it, it was okay. And the Democratic women had the credibility with the Democrats. So when we went together, we just mowed over them."

Hutchison believes the goal of representative government is to bring together as many backgrounds, points of view, and experiences as possible "to make a better result. And it's just that, historically, the women's experience was not at the table." But that's changing, she told me during an interview in her stately Senate office, and the effect on legislation is undeniable.

. . .

Kathleen Sebelius, the Democratic governor of Kansas, told me she's a "huge believer" that more women in elective office would produce better decisions. "People bring their own life experiences, and women's life experiences are different than men's — not better, not worse, different. And 51, 52 percent of the population is women. And so having people at the table who make decisions based on their life experiences, their lens — whether it's as a mother, a daughter, a spouse, somebody who's in the workplace — I think we get better policies, a better dynamic."

As women slowly gain power, their values and priorities are reshaping the agenda. A multitude of studies show that when women control the family funds, they generally spend more on health, nutrition, and education — and less on alcohol and cigarettes. The effects extend beyond the family. In one study of local councils (panchayats) in India, researchers found that when women are in charge, they make different choices than men, investing in projects that directly affect their particular needs, like clean drinking water and better roads. That's not to say that women's priorities are better than men's. Rather, when women are empowered, when they can speak from the experience of their own lives, they often address different, previously neglected issues. And families and whole communities benefit.

Excerpted from Why Women Should Rule the World by Dee Dee Myers. Copyright (c) 2008 Dee Dee Myers.

Published on Sunday, January 22, 2006 by CommonDreams.org

“Matriotism” by Cindy Sheehan
Much as I wish I could take credit for the word "matriotism," another woman wrote to me and gave me the concept. I was so intrigued by the word that I have been meditating on the possible ideology behind it, and a new paradigm for true and lasting peace in the world.

Before I dive into the concept of Matriotism, let's explore the word "patriotism." Dictionary.com defines it as: love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it. When we all know that patriotism in the US means: exploiting others' love for country by sending them and their children off to sacrifice for my bank balance!

There have been volumes written about patriotism, defining it, supporting it, challenging the notion of it, etc. I believe the notion of patriotism has been expeditiously and nefariously exploited, and used to lead our nation into scores of disastrous and needless wars. The idea of patriotism has virtually wiped out entire generations of our precious young people and has allowed our nation's leaders to commit mass murder on an unprecedented scale. The vile sputum of "if you aren't with us, then you are against us" is basically the epitome of patriotism gone wild. After the tragedy of 9/11 we were on our way to becoming a fledgling Matriotic society until our leaders jumped on the bandwagon of inappropriate and misguided vengeance to send our young people to die and kill in two countries that were no threat to the USA or to our way of life. The neocons exploited patriotism to fulfill their goals of imperialism and plunder.

This sort of patriotism begins when we enter kindergarten and learn the nationalist "Pledge of Allegiance." It transcends all sense when we are taught the "Star Spangled Banner," a hymn to war. In our history classes the genocide of the Native American peoples is glossed over as we learn about the spread of American Imperialism over our continent, though it wasn't named until the 1840's, when the doctrine of Manifest Destiny was expounded to justify the USA's conquest of and "civilizing" of Mexican territories and Native American populations. Manifest Destiny sought to spread the "the boundaries of freedom" to the American Continent, with the notion that we have a special mission from God. Sound familiar?

All though school, we are brainwashed into believing that some how our leaders are always right and certainly have our best interests at heart when they wave the flag and convince us to hate fellow human beings who stand in the way of making immense profits from war. As Samuel Johnson said, patriotism is the "last refuge of a scoundrel."

Matriotism is the opposite of patriotism not to destroy it, but to be a yin to its yang, and balance out the militarism of patriotism.

Not everyone is a mother, but there is one universal truth that no one can dispute no matter how hard they try (and believe me, some will try): Everyone has a mother! Mothers give life, and if the child is lucky, mothers nurture life. And if a man has had a nurturing mother he will already have a base of Matriotism.

A Matriot loves his/her country but does not buy into the exploitive phrase of "My country right or wrong." (As Chesterton said, that's like saying, "My mother, drunk or sober.") A Matriot knows that her country can do a lot of things right, especially when the government is not involved. For example, I know of no other citizens of any country who are more personally generous than those of America. However, a Matriot also knows that when her country is wrong, it can be responsible for murdering thousands upon thousands of innocent and unsuspecting humans. A true Matriot would never drop an atomic bomb or bombs filled with white phosphorous, carpet bomb cities and villages, or control drones from thousands of miles away to kill innocent men, women and children.

There is one most important thing that matriots would never do, however, and this is the key to stopping killing to solve problems: a matriot would never send her child or another mother's child to fight nonsense wars and would march into a war herself that she considered just to protect her child from harm. Aha! Matriots would fight their own battles, but take a dim view of having to do so, and would seldom resort to violence to solve conflict! Patriots cowardly hide behind the flag and eagerly send young people to die to fill their own pocketbooks.
War will end forever when we matriots stand up and say: "No, I am not giving my child to the fake patriotism of the war machine which chews up my flesh and blood to spit out obscene profits."
"It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens." ~ Baha'u'llah
Matriotism above all is a commitment to truth and to celebrate the dignity of all life.

Judge Learned Hand Address at “I Am an American” Day May 21, 1944

What do we mean when we say that first of all we seek liberty? I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions upon laws and upon courts. ... Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it. While it lies there it needs no constitution, no law, no court to save it.

And what is this liberty which must lie in the hearts of men and women? It is not the ruthless, the unbridled will; it is not freedom to do as one likes. That is the denial of liberty, and leads straight to its overthrow. A society in which men recognize no check upon their freedom soon becomes a society where freedom is the possession of only a savage few; as we have learned to our sorrow.

What then is the spirit of liberty? I cannot define it; I can only tell you my own faith. The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias; the spirit of liberty remembers that not even a sparrow falls to earth unheeded.

Dave Hunter, How Patriotic Are You?
Patriotism, in my view, involves more than flying the flag on the 4th of July and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. These outward acts are important, but they're not enough. Here's a quiz, intended to stimulate thought about the meaning of patriotism.
1. Do you vote in national, state, and local elections? The legitimacy of the government, at every level, comes from the people. While voting is not ones only civic duty, it is an important one. By voting, I mean informed voting. Study the issues, study the candidates, study the parties, and make informed and responsible decisions.
2. Do you obey the law? While there are times when civil disobedience may be appropriate, or even required (remember segregated lunch counters), under normal circumstances, the law is for everyone, not just for everyone else. If a particular law appears to be unwise or unjust, work to get it changed.
3. Do you pay your taxes cheerfully, honestly, and fully? Taxes are a small price to pay for a civilized society.
4. Do you show concern for the welfare of the community? We are all in this together. We need to come to each others help in time of need. We do this by helping people one to one, by volunteering for organizations, by making monetary contributions.
5. Do you confront injustice? Our ideal is a nation "with liberty and justice for all." The reality inevitably falls short. When you witness an injustice for example, racial discrimination dont let it go, but confront the apparent offender, write a letter to the Times-News, report the incident to the proper governmental authorities, get involved with justice-seeking organizations.
6. Are you prepared to sacrifice? Many before us have sacrificed years of their lives, or their very lives in, for example, World War II battlefields and efforts in the South to gain civil rights for all to protect this nation and to push it to fulfill it vision.
7. Do you know our history? We can hardly claim to love our country is we dont bother to learn its
history. There is much of which we can be proud in that history, and lessons to be learned lest we repeat our mistakes.

8. Do you understand that love need not be rationed? We can love the flag and the Nation for which it stands, and, at the same time, we can love our family, God, and much else.

9. Do you speak and behave in a way that will bring respect to our nation? Whether we are private citizens or national leaders, what we say and how we act affects how others around the world judge us. It is our hope that others will respect the United States and seek to follow our example. We must assure that we are worthy of that respect, and that our example is one that deserves to be followed.

10. Do you want our Nation to have a future? If the United States is to survive as a free and prosperous nation, as the role model for others, then we need to protect our environment (for example, by combating global warming) and our economic foundation (for example, by not leaving our grandchildren burdened by federal debt).

July 4 is an appropriate day to celebrate patriotism; every day of the year we should live patriotism.

Daniel Webster

Dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument
June 17, 1825

Our proper business is improvement. Let our age be the age of improvement. In a day of peace let us advance the arts of peace and the works of peace. Let us advance the arts of peace and the works of peace. Let us develop the resources of our land, call forth its powers, built up its institutions, promote all its great interests, and see whether we also, in our day and generation, may not perform something worthy to be remembered. Let us cultivate a true spirit of union and harmony. In pursuing the great objects which our condition points out to us, let us act under a settled conviction, and a habitual feeling that these twenty four states are one country. Let our conceptions be enlarged to the circle of our duties. Let us extend our ideas over the whole of the vast field in which we are called to act. Let us object be our country, our whole country, and nothing but our country. And may that country itself become a vast and splendid monument, not of oppression and terror, but of wisdom, of peace, and of liberty, upon which the world may gaze with admiration forever.
War is a force that gives us meaning

by Chris Hedges

Amnesty International NOW magazine, Winter 2002

War and conflict have marked most of my adult life. I have been in ambushes on desolate stretches of Central American roads, locked in unnerving firefights in the marshes in southern Iraq, imprisoned in the Sudan, beaten by Saudi military police, deported from Libya and Iran, captured and held for a week by Iraqi Republican Guards, strafed by Russian Mig-21s in central Bosnia, shot at by Serb snipers and shelled with deafening rounds of artillery in Sarajevo that threw out thousands of deadly bits of iron fragments. I have seen too much of violent death. I have tasted too much of my own fear. I have painful memories that lie buried most of the time. It is never easy when they surface.

And yet there is a part of me that remains nostalgic for war's simplicity and high. The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it gives us what we all long for in life. It gives us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of our lives become apparent. Trivia dominates our conversations and increasingly our news. And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble. And those that have the least meaning in their lives-the impoverished refugees in Gaza, the disenfranchised North African immigrants in France, even the lost legions of youth that live in the splendid indolence and safety of the industrialized world-are all susceptible to war's appeal.

WAR AS CULTURE

I learned early on that war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is peddled by myth makers -historians, war correspondents, filmmakers novelists and the state-all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty. It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language and infects everything around it, even humor, which becomes preoccupied with the grim perversities of smut and death. Fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, of our place on the planet are laid bare when we watch those around us sink to the lowest depths. War exposes the capacity for evil that lurks just below the surface within all of us.

And so it takes little in wartime to turn ordinary men into killers. Most give themselves willingly to the seduction of unlimited power to destroy, and all feel the peer pressure. Few, once in bottle, can find the strength to resist.
The historian Christopher Browning noted the willingness to kill in Ordinary Men, his study of Reserve Police Battalion 101 in Poland during World War II. On the morning of July 12, 1942, the battalion was ordered to shoot 1800 Jews in the village of Jozefow in a day-long action. The men in the unit had to round up the Jews, march them into the forest and one by one order them to lie down in a row. The victims, including women, infants, children and the elderly, were shot dead at close range.

Battalion members were offered the option to refuse, an option only about a dozen men took, although more asked to be relieved once the killing began. Those who did not want to continue, Browning says, were disgusted rather than plagued by conscience. When the men returned to the barracks they "were depressed, angered, embittered and shaken." They drank heavily. They were told not to talk about the event, "but they needed no encouragement in that direction."

WAR AS MYTH

The most recent U.S. conflicts have insulated the public and U.S. troops from both the disgust and pangs of conscience. The Gulf War-waged from bombers high above the fray and reported by carefully controlled journalists-made war fashionable again. It was a cause the nation willingly embraced. It exorcised the ghosts of Vietnam. It gave us heroes and the heady belief in our own military superiority and technology. It almost made war fun. And the chief culprit was, as in many conflicts, not the military but the press. Television reporters happily disseminated the spoon-fed images that served the propaganda effort of the military and the state. These images did little to convey the reality of war. Pool reporters, those guided around in groups by the military, wrote once again about "our boys" eating packaged army food, practicing for chemical weapons attacks and bathing out of buckets in the desert. It was war as spectacle, war, if we are honest, as entertainment. The images and stories were designed to make us feel good about our nation, about ourselves. The families and soldiers being blown to bits by iron fragmentation bombs just over the border in Iraq were faceless and nameless phantoms.

The moment I stepped off an Army C-130 military transport in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, to cover the Persian Gulf War, I was escorted to a room with several dozen other reporters and photographers. I was told to sign a paper that said I would abide by the severe restrictions placed on the press. The restrictions authorized "pool reporters" to be escorted by the military on field trips. Most of the press sat in hotel rooms and rewrote the bland copy filed by the pool or used the pool video and photos. I violated this agreement the next morning when I went into the field without authorization. The rest of the war, most of which I spent dodging Military Police and trying to talk my way into units, was a forlorn and lonely struggle against the heavy press control.
The notion that the press was used in the war is incorrect. The press wanted to be used. It saw itself as part of the war effort. Most reporters sent to cover a war don't really want to go near the fighting. They do not tell this to their editors and indeed will moan and complain about restrictions. The handful who actually head out into the field have a bitter enmity with the hotel room warriors. But even those who do go out are guilty of distortion—maybe more so. For they not only believe the myth, feed off of the drug, but also embrace the cause. They may do it with more skepticism. They certainly expose more lies and misconceptions. But they believe. We all believe. When you stop believing you stop going to war.

I knew a Muslim soldier, a father, who fought on the front lines around Sarajevo. His unit, in one of the rare attempts to take back a few streets controlled by the Serbs, pushed across Serb lines. They did not get very far. The fighting was heavy. As he moved down the street, he heard a door swing open and fired a burst from his AK-47 assault rifle. A 12-year-old girl dropped dead. He saw in the body of the unknown girl lying prostrate in front of him the image of his own 1z-year-old daughter. He broke down. He had to be helped back to the city. He was lost for the rest of the war, shuttered inside his apartment, nervous, morose and broken. This experience is far more typical of warfare than the Rambo heroics we are fed by the state and the entertainment industry. The cost of killing is all the more bitter because of the deep disillusionment that war usually brings.

WAR AS CRUSADE

The disillusionment comes later. Each generation again responds to war as innocents. Each generation discovers its own disillusionment—often at a terrible price.

"We believed we were there for a high moral purpose," wrote Philip Caputo in his book on Vietnam, Rumor of War. "But somehow our idealism was lost, our morals corrupted, and the purpose forgotten."

Once again the United States stands poised on the threshold of war. "We go forward," President George W. Bush assures us, "to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world." He is not shy about warning other states that they either stand with us in the war on terrorism or will be counted as aligned with those that defy us. This too is a crusade.

But the war on terrorism is different in that we Americans find ourselves in the dangerous position of going to war not against a state but a phantom. The crusade we have embarked upon in the war on terrorism is targeting an elusive and protean enemy. The battle we have begun is never-ending. But it may be too late to wind back the heady rhetoric. We have embarked on a campaign as quixotic as the one mounted to destroy us. As it continues, as terrorist attacks intrude on our lives, as we feel less and less secure, the acceptance of all methods to lash out at real and perceived enemies will distort and deform our democracy.
And yet, the campaign's attraction seems irresistible. War makes the world understandable, a black-and-white tableau of them and us. It suspends thought, especially self-critical thought. All bow before the supreme effort. We are one. Most of us willingly accept war as long as we can fold it into a belief system that paints the ensuing suffering as necessary for a higher good; for human beings seek not only happiness but also meaning. And tragically, war is sometimes the most powerful way in human society to achieve meaning.

Chris Hedges is a reporter with the New York Times where he was part of the team that won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for reporting on global terrorism. He won Al's 2002 Global Award for Human Rights Journalism. This article was adapted from War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning (Public Affairs, Perseus Group, 2002).

END PATRIOTISM NEWSLETTER #2

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Dick Bennett
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See Newsletters
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See INMOtion
jbennet@uark.edu
(479) 442-4600
2582 Jimmie Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72703