What’s at stake:  **Belief that the US is an exceptional nation boundlessly benign is a major cause and justification of US bloody imperialism.** Who believes that myth?  The percentage of US populace aged 45 to 59 who believe it is 65.  Aged 18 to 29: 45.  “Harper’s Index,” *Harper’s Magazine* (Sept. 2015), p. 9.  “American Exceptionalism”  This phrase offers the perfect time for each of us who knows better to resolve never again to use the phrase but also never to use the word “American” to refer to one country of the Americas—North, Central, and South—and one country of North America.  “American Exceptionalism” is a false phrase composed of two illusory words created in the cauldron of the arrogance of power.  See OMNI’s Exceptionalism newsletters

OMNI’S NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL DAYS PROJECT:  Affirming days supporting nonviolence, world peace, human rights, social and economic justice, democracy, and environmental stewardship; providing alternatives to the other days (Indigenous People of the Americas Day instead of Columbus Day).
Newsletters

http://omnicenter.org/dick-bennetts-peace-justice-and-ecology-newsletters/index:

Blog: http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

EXCEPTIONALISM NEWSLETTER Nos. 1-2

#1 US “EXCEPTIONALISM” NEWSLETTER #1, APRIL 26, 2011

#2 US “EXCEPTIONALISM” NEWSLETTER #2, September 26, 2013
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2013/09/us-exceptionalism-newsletter-2.html
Poetry by Gerald Sloan

Myth of Human Supremacy


These two myths in combination—humans superior in the chain of being (in the Renaissance: God:King:Men), US humans superior among nations—have produced exceptionally arrogant and bullying, rapacious and killing.

**MYTH OF US EXCEPTIONALISM (EXCEPTIONALLY GOOD)**

Critics of the Myth Teach US History

Chomsky, *Who Rules the World?* The most powerful single book against the Myth of US Exceptionalism in Foreign Policy

Lawrence Wittner, We’re #1 in violence abroad and at home.

Rothschild on Obama’s Favorite Whitewash

Dick, LTE on Michael Ignatieff’s Book on US Exceptionalism

Hixson on US and USSR

VIETNAM WAR: ALL-OUT WHITENWASH 2016-17

US Violence

Dick: Christian Appy, *American Reckoning*, Who Are We?

Doug Anderson’s Review of Appy
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Henry Kissinger, Amy Goodman Interviews Greg Grandin about US Dark Side

Real Exceptionalism Imagined and Begun, Now Almost Lost: Harvey Kaye, *The Four Freedoms*

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**MANIFEST DESTINY IN ZERO GRAVITY**
by Gerry Sloan (rcvd 12-17-15)

"Carpet crawl" is what my daughter-in-law would call "a First World problem," putting it in perspective, along with sinus headaches and burnt toast. Call it the American Dream having a bad day. Never mind the problems those unexceptional people in the Third World have to deal with. You know, like deforestation and radiation, by-products of our special brand of liberation, which desperate countries learn to shun, along with our diplomacy at gunpoint.
ODIOUS ODE
By Gerald Sloan (rcvd 10-31-16)
The reporter on NPR announces
the poaching of African elephants
meanwhile sharing a scary statistic:
that in four years two-thirds of the
species on Earth may go extinct.

In the rearview mirror I see
elephants and giraffes at the
miniature golf course across
the street, lifesize effigies
to our wreckless greed.

MYTH OF HUMAN SUPREMACY

The Myth of Human Supremacy By DERRICK JENSEN
May 17, 2016 | 352 Pages

In this impassioned polemic, radical environmental philosopher Derrick Jensen debunks the
near-universal belief in a hierarchy of nature and the superiority of humans. Vast and
underappreciated complexities of nonhuman life are explored in detail—from the cultures of
pigs and prairie dogs, to the creative use of tools by elephants and fish, to the acumen of
caterpillars and fungi. The paralysis of the scientific establishment on moral and ethical issues
is confronted and a radical new framework for assessing the intelligence and sentience of
nonhuman life is put forth.
Jensen attacks mainstream environmental journalism, which too often limits discussions to how ecological changes affect humans or the economy—with little or no regard for nonhuman life. With his signature compassionate logic, he argues that when we separate ourselves from the rest of nature, we in fact orient ourselves against nature, taking an unjust and, in the long run, impossible position.

Jensen expresses profound disdain for the human industrial complex and its ecological excesses, contending that it is based on the systematic exploitation of the earth. Page by page, Jensen, who has been called the philosopher-poet of the environmental movement, demonstrates his deep appreciation of the natural world in all its intimacy, and sounds an urgent call for its liberation from human domination.

“Derrick Jensen’s ferocious love of this earth and all her living beings has ignited and crafted a genius work that has the potential to shift human consciousness. The Myth of Human Supremacy must be read and reread and read again. It will shatter and rearrange your beliefs, call up your sorrow and rage. It will humble you and inspire you to fight with every bit of your being for the end of hierarchy, dominance and destruction.” —Eve Ensler, author of The Vagina Monologues and In the Body of the World

“In the hottest year we’ve ever recorded, perhaps people of all persuasions should take a moment to grapple with Derrick Jensen’s anger and love. This is a necessary provocation—it’s clearly time to think anew about who and what we are.” —Bill McKibben, author of Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet

“Derrick Jensen’s Myth of Human Supremacy brilliantly challenges our fatal belief in ‘progress,’ our inability to absorb the looming ecocide around us, and the deadly consequences of our hubris. Jensen has never fled from hard truths. This book is no exception. Jensen’s work is vital to our understanding of the suicidal impulses that exist within human society.” —Chris Hedges

“[The Myth of Human Supremacy] offers a new way of thinking about the role of humans in relation to all other life on Earth, and a call to reevaluate our most basic assumptions about human domination of the planet.” —George Wuerthner, author, ecologist, and wildlands advocate
“This book dissects and demolishes one of our culture’s most pernicious assumptions, that humans are the pinnacle of evolution and the supreme species on the planet. Derrick Jensen is a master at digging into our beliefs, turning over rocks and unflinchingly looking at what lies beneath. The Myth of Human Supremacy brilliantly exposes our dangerous, nature-devouring belief that humans are superior and reveals to what absurd lengths we will go to preserve that belief. This is an important book full of critical lessons. It shows the value—and urgency—of humbly taking our true, unexceptional but valuable place among all of life’s marvelous creatures.” —Toby Hemenway, author of Gaia’s Garden and The Permaculture City

“When I read Endgame (2006), I believed I had found the clearest description of patriarchal civilization and how it is killing every aspect of the living planet. I was mistaken. Derrick Jensen has outdone himself. In heartfelt, compelling prose, he asks the reader to question the obvious lies embedded within the dominant paradigm.” —Guy McPherson, professor emeritus of conservation biology at the University of Arizona

“Jensen’s arguments are ferocious, heartbroken, hilarious, and lethally logical. The truths he tells are the most important in this reeling world, bar none.” —Kathleen Dean Moore, author of Moral Ground and Great Tide Rising

“This book made me weep. It’s an angry ballad, an anguished love song to life itself. I sit here, tears in my eyes as I type these words, as if yet another human needed to be heard from. I sit here wishing, dreaming we could instead hear what the Amani flatwing damselflies, ploughshare tortoises, Asiatic black bears, and the pea plants have to say about The Myth of Human Supremacy. I imagine they’d bellow in unison: ‘It’s about fuckin’ time you caught on!’” —Mickey Z., author of Occupy These Photos

“Brilliant, lucid and gorgeously written, The Myth of Human Supremacy attacks the core of the planet-scale problem, the idea that only humans matter. The book is elegant and poised; the argument unassailable; the narrative engaging, witty, and full of surprises; the research meticulous. This is perhaps my favorite of his books.” —Suprabha Seshan, environmental educator, activist and restoration ecologist, winner of 2006 Whitley Fund for Nature award, Ashoka Fellow, Executive Director of Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary

“In this important book, Jensen upends longstanding ‘truths’ about human domination of the planet, demanding that we not only rethink our ideas about politics and economics, but about ourselves. He focuses our attention on the multiple, cascading crises that can be traced to
human supremacy—the deeply destructive illusion that the world was made for humans because we are so very special. Jensen considers, and rejects, every reason we want to believe ourselves the anointed species, and challenges all of us to take seriously the moral principles we claim to hold.” —Robert Jensen, University of Texas at Austin, author of Plain Radical

“The Myth of Human Supremacy is poetic and deeply moving. Jensen is unafraid to interrogate unquestionable assumptions and ask ‘crazy’ questions. Here he dismantles the core of our crises, the mythologies that guide authoritarian, unsustainable, human supremacist cultures. Read this and weep, but then with new awareness shake off emotional and ideological blinders you have been taught, and take action with those who understand that humans are one among many.” —Darcia Narvaez, Professor of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame, blogger at Psychology Today (“Moral Landscapes”), and author of Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture and Wisdom

“Derrick Jensen elegantly shows that everything in our world is interconnected, and animals, plants, and even bacteria are sentient, conscious, and much like us. We humans refuse to believe that, preferring to believe a vast gulf exists between us and the rest of the natural world. That leads to the end of us and all of nature as we kill our planet. I hope this book will help people change their belief in human supremacy and help save our world.” —Con Slobodchikoff, PhD, author of Chasing Doctor Dolittle: Learning the Language of Animals

“In his most important work since A Language Older Than Words, Jensen lays bare the sociopathy of the ideology of human supremacy: the fact that western ‘civilization’ is based on domination, thievery, and murder, while the natural world innately gravitates towards harmony and balance. This supremacy is destroying the planet, an infinitely complex living entity we’ve only barely begun to understand. This book is mandatory reading.” —Dahr Jamail, author/journalist

“It is said that a revolution begins in the mind—an alternative to our present circumstances must first be imagined before we can be moved to fight for it. So we should all be grateful to Derrick Jensen, who with this book breaks the ideological chains of human supremacy and reveals the world as the interconnected web of being that it truly is. With our illusions ripped away, we may yet be able to save ourselves and our beautiful planet from the system that is killing us all.” —Stephanie McMillan, author of Capitalism Must Die
DERRICK JENSEN is the best-known voice of the deep ecology movement. Winner of numerous awards and honors including the Eric Hoffer Book Award, USA Today's Critic’s Choice, and Press Action’s person of the Year, Jensen is the author of over fifteen…

MYTH OF US EXCEPTIONALISM

Critics of the Myth

NOAM CHOMSKY, Perhaps the Single Greatest Antidote to the Myth of US Exceptionalism

WHO RULES THE WORLD? The Greatest Single Critique of the Myth

Who Rules the World? BY Noam Chomsky

Internationally renowned political commentator Noam Chomsky examines America's pursuit and exercise of power in a post 9/11 world

Noam Chomsky is the world's foremost intellectual activist. Over the last half century, no one has done more to question the great global powers who govern our lives, forensically scrutinizing policies and actions, calling our politicians, institutions and media to account.

The culmination of years of work, Who Rules the World? is Chomsky's definitive intellectual investigation into the major issues of our times. From the dark history of the US and Cuba to China's global rise, from torture memos to sanctions on Iran, Chomsky explores how America's talk of freedom and human rights is often at odds with its actions. Delving deep into the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and
Israel/Palestine, he provides nuanced, surprising insights into the workings of modern-day imperial power.

The world’s political and financial elite have become ever more insulated from democratic constraints on their actions. Chomsky shines a powerful light on this inconvenient truth. With climate change and nuclear proliferation threatening the survival of our civilization, the message has never been more pertinent or more urgent: the need for an engaged and active public to steer the world away from disaster grows ever greater.

Fiercely outspoken and rigorously argued, Who Rules the World? is an indispensable guide to how things really are from the lone authoritative voice courageous and clear-sighted enough to tell us the truth.

Read more at https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/280531/who-rules-the-world/#luUQPzioxlHv5fkL.99

The United States Is Number 1 — But in What?

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lawrence-wittner/the-united-states-is-no-1_b_5974516.html

10/13/2014 01:54 pm

By Lawrence Wittner, Professor of History emeritus, SUNY Albany

American politicians are fond of telling their audiences that the United States is the greatest country in the world. Is there any evidence for this claim?

Well, yes. When it comes to violence and preparations for violence, the United States is, indeed, No. 1. In 2013, according to a report by the Stockholm
International Peace Research Institute, the U.S. government accounted for 37 percent of world military expenditures, putting it far ahead of all other nations. (The two closest competitors, China and Russia, accounted for 11 percent and 5 percent respectively.) From 2004 to 2013, the United States was also the No. 1 weapons exporter in the world. Moreover, given the U.S. government’s almost unbroken series of wars and acts of military intervention since 1941, it also seems likely that it surpasses all rivals when it comes to international violence.

This record is paralleled on the domestic front, where the United States has more guns and gun deaths than any other country. A study released in late 2013 reported that the United States had 88 guns for every 100 people, and 40 gun-related deaths for every 400,000 people—more than any of the 27 economically developed countries studied. By contrast, in Britain there were 6 guns per 100 people and 1 gun-related death per 400,000 people.

Yet, in a great many other areas, the United States is not No. 1 at all.

Take education. In late 2013, the Program for International Student Assessment released a ranking of how 15-year old students from 65 nations performed on its tests. It showed that U.S. students ranked 17th in reading and 21st in math. An international survey a bit earlier that year by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that the ranking was roughly the same among American adults. In 2014, Pearson, a multinational educational company, placed the United States 20th in the world in “educational attainment” — well behind Poland and Slovakia.

American health care and health fare even worse. In a 2014 study of health care (including infant mortality, healthy life expectancy, and mortality from preventable conditions) in 11 advanced industrial countries, the Commonwealth Fund concluded that the United States ranked last among them. According to the World Health Organization, the U.S. health care system ranks 37th in the world. Other studiesreach somewhat different conclusions, but all are very unflattering to the United States, as are studies of American health. The United States, for example, has one of the world’s worst cancer rates (the seventh highest), and life expectancy
is declining compared to other nations. An article in the Washington Post in late 2013 reported that the United States ranked 26th among nations in life expectancy, and that the average American lifespan had fallen a year behind the international average.

And what about the environment? Specialists at Yale University have developed a highly sophisticated Environmental Performance Index to examine the behavior of nations. In the area of protection of human health from environmental harm, their 2014 index placed the United States 35th in health impacts, 36th in water and sanitation, and 38th in air quality. In the other area studied—protection of ecosystems—the United States ranked 32nd in water resources, 49th in climate and energy, 86th in biodiversity and habitat, 96th in fisheries, 107th in forests, and 109th in agriculture.

These and other areas of interest are dealt with by the Social Progress Index, which was developed by Michael Porter, an eminent professor of business (and Republican) at Harvard. According to Porter and his team, in 2014 the United States ranked 23rd in access to information and communications, 24th in nutrition and basic medical care, 31st in personal safety, 34th in water and sanitation, 39th in access to basic knowledge, 69th in ecosystem sustainability, and 70th in health and wellness.

Poverty, especially among children, remains a disgrace in one of the world’s wealthiest nations. A 2013 report by the United Nations Children's Fund noted that, of the 35 economically advanced countries that had been studied, only Romania had a higher percentage of children living in poverty than did the United States.

Of course, the United States is not locked into these dismal rankings and the sad situation they reveal about the health, education, and welfare of its citizens. It could do much better if its vast wealth, resources, and technology were utilized differently than they are at present. Ultimately, it’s a matter of priorities. When most U.S. government discretionary spending goes for war and preparations for war, it should come as no surprise that the United States emerges No. 1 among nations in the
capacity for violence and falls far behind other nations in providing for the well-being of its people.

Americans might want to keep this in mind as their nation embarks upon yet another costly military crusade.

Lawrence S. Wittner (www.lawrenceswittner.com) is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany. His latest book is a satirical novel about university corporatization and rebellion, What’s Going On at UAardvark?

By Matthew Rothschild on October 25, 2013


I imagine Vladimir Putin took perverse pleasure at the op-ed that his foreign service wrote, under his name, for The New York Times.

But he was right about two things. First, that had President Obama attacked Syria without Security Council approval, he would have violated international law. And second, that the United States needs to get over “American exceptionalism.”

In the bellicose part of Obama’s speech to the nation on Syria, he said, in Bush-like language: “For nearly seven decades, the United States has been the anchor of global security. This has meant doing more than forging international agreements; it has meant enforcing them. The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world’s a better place because we have borne them.”

Really?

Was the United States an anchor of global security and an enforcer of international agreements when it overthrew the Mossadegh government in Iran in 1953, or the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954?

Is the world a better place because the United States helped overthrow Salvador Allende’s democratically elected government in Chile in 1973?

Is the world a better place because the United States killed three million people in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and because we dropped twenty million gallons of napalm (waging our own version of chemical warfare) on those countries?

Is the world a better place because the United States gave Indonesia the green light to invade East Timor in 1975, an invasion and subsequent occupation that wiped out one-third of the population there?
Is the world a better place because the United States supported brutal governments in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s, which killed tens of thousands of their own people?

Is the world a better place because George W. Bush waged an illegal war against Iraq and killed between 100,000 and a million civilians?

And what international agreements was the United States enforcing when it tortured people after 9/11?

When he was at the United Nations in September, Obama again invoked American exceptionalism. It is the favorite falsehood of U.S. Presidents—one we can live without. . . .

Matthew Rothschild is senior editor of The Progressive.

- See more at: http://ftp.progressive.org/obama-favorite-falsehood#sthash.E4YR8rYn.dpuf

American Exceptionalism and Human Rights Michael Ignatieff

DICK’S LTE to Editor, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

US Exceptionalism

John Ziegler’s letter (3-8-14) contains an interesting perspective on “U.S. exceptionalism” regarding the character of the people, either idealistic individuals (Turner) or materialistic conformists (de Tocqueville). The Democrat-Gazette editorially endorses the myth as it regards capitalism: “Never bet against America, which has a way of coming back despite all the odds. Why is that? Could it be because freedom has a way of outlasting, and outperforming, the utopian dreams of statist economies? And when this government does intervene, it’s to strengthen the rule of law, not override it. And save the American system, not overturn it.” (“Opinions on the Fly,” 9-3-15).

In his book American Exceptionalism and Human Rights Michael Ignatieff offers a political analysis of US exceptionalism, particularly through the role of international law in US behavior toward other countries. He presents three arguments.

First, US leaders sign on to human rights and humanitarian conventions and treaties, and then exempt the US via various evasions. Second, our leaders maintain double standards, judging “enemies” by higher standards than for the US and its friends. And third, US leaders from the president to the judges deny
the jurisdiction of treaties (laws of our land) by arguing the sufficiency and even the superiority of our laws over those of other nations.

This panoply of exemptions, double dealing, and legal isolationism is justified by our leaders in four ways: US military and economic power, sense of Providential destiny, conservative evangelical individualism, and distinctive institutions.

No exceptionalism here, but only naked power. US “exceptionalism,” because it exerts a malignant influence over our leaders and people (the arrogant belief that only home-grown truths are self-evident) or over US international behavior (occupying the world, some 800 military bases around the world), deserves if not contempt at least profound skepticism.

The Myth Of U.S. Exceptionalism


February 25, 1988|By Walter L. Hixson. Walter L. Hixson is a visiting assistant professor of history at Northwestern University, where he teaches courses on U.S. foreign policy and Soviet-American relations. He also is the author of a study of the career of Soviet expert George F. Kennan. The following focuses on US misbehavior toward the Soviet Union.

Most people would agree that the two most vital issues in American foreign policy today are the Central American crisis and arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union. In assessing American policy on these two issues, most politicians and opinion leaders-and thus most of the public-focus on our communist adversaries. Can we trust the Soviets? Will the Sandinistas live up to their pledges? That these questions, though clearly pertinent, should dominate our thinking reflects a disturbing tendency among many Americans to assume that the United States pursues noble and worthy objectives while its adversaries-particularly the “communists”-embody all that is evil and are not to be trusted.

Underlying these assumptions, as historians have long recognized, is a widespread faith in American “exceptionalism”-the belief that the United States is a “chosen” nation whose values and democratic institutions represent the best hopes for humankind.
Unfortunately, the great national myth of American exceptionalism is rooted in a widespread ignorance of history, and this ignorance breeds intolerance and hypocrisy in our approach to Central America, arms control and foreign affairs in general.

The first ingredient of a more effective foreign policy might be a willingness to look more critically at ourselves. Despite the recent bicentennial of the Constitution, too few Americans are willing to recognize that the United States has been an imperfect democracy. It was initially governed by a privileged elite of white propertied males; women were nonvoting and (as they remain today) nonpersons under the Constitution; a cruel enslavement of blacks was sanctioned; and Native Americans were to be all but exterminated.

The point is not that the United States is more or less evil than other peoples of the world but that we are not as exceptional as some, including Ronald Reagan and most of the 1988 presidential candidates, would have us believe.

Greater recognition of our own failures and limitations would make us, not a weaker power, but a stronger and wiser one. For example, if more Americans were aware of our own early national struggle and halting approach to democracy, they would be less likely to demand that Nicaragua—a country wracked by war and deprivation and having little or no democratic political tradition—promptly assume all the trappings of a pluralistic democracy or once again face the wrath of our refinanced covert armies.

After first adopting greater patience and humility, we could then apply some lessons from the history of postwar international relations to our approach to the problems of Central America. The 1948 Soviet-Yugoslav rift, the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s and contemporary disputes within the communist world, for example, all suggest that nationalism and local cultural tradition tend to override loose alliances based on ideology. Yet too many Americans glubly assume that a Sandinista regime will serve as a Soviet `beachhead` in Central America.

Those who point to Cuba as an example of Soviet intentions invariably oversimplify the complex course of Cuban-American (and Cuban-Soviet) relations and ignore the extent to which our own hostile response to Fidel Castro encouraged Cuba`s close ties with the Soviet Union.

Faith in American exceptionalism and historical blinders also undermine our efforts to mold a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union. Like our forebears who reassured themselves of their own virtues by depicting the Old World as a den of corruption and iniquity, Americans persist in seeing the darkest motives behind virtually all Soviet behavior.

The most obvious example is our unrealistic 40-year obsession with the prospect of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe; there is no reason to believe the Kremlin has ever considered launching an invasion. Another is arms control; some Americans still oppose arms accords, on grounds that the Kremlin leaders enter into such negotiations disingenuously and that they `cheat.`

This argument not only falsely implies that the Soviets have no real stake in arms control but also constitutes a double standard insofar as it ignores our own violations of agreements, such as the unilateral repudiation of SALT II and the current call for a broad interpretation of the 1972 ABM agreement. The broad interpretation, as Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia and others have pointed out, actually constitutes a repudiation of the ABM accord in order to pave the way for `Star Wars,`
which, incidentally, finds America once again in the familiar position of escalating the arms race while couching its actions under the benign rubric of “deterring aggression.” Again, the point is not that the Soviets are actually “good” while we persist in seeing them as “bad.” It would be naive to suggest that the Soviet Union does not pose problems for American diplomacy.

Special attention to the Vietnam War is called for because the US has budgeted billions of dollars to rehabilitate its reputation so thoroughly damaged by that war.

TWO REVIEWS OF APPY’S AMERICAN RECKONING—by Dick Bennett and Doug Anderson-- and a SUMMARY OF J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT ON VIETNAM IN THE PRICE OF EMPIRE by Dick.

US IDENTITY: WHO ARE WE?


The title could be Judgment: US Wars Are Who We Are, for the author ranges far wider than the Vietnam War and his conclusions are much more severely specific than a mere tabulation. “My main argument is that the Vietnam War shattered the central tenet of American national identify—the broad faith that the United States is a unique force for good in the world” (xiii).

The opening chapter, “Saving Vietnam,” recounts the story of Dr. Tom Dooley and US intervention in Vietnam. In the 1950s Dooley was a chief megaphone for the idealistic myth of the US as a bastion of compassion, freedom, and hope against Communist tyranny that justified and propelled the US invasion of Vietnam.

What happened to that vision? The war itself, and, as MLK,Jr., said, economic inequality and racism at home. The US was not supporting democracy and self-determination. It had opposed the popular will of the Vietnamese in numerous says, including supporting France’s bloody imperial occupation (1946-54); setting up the Catholic puppet leader Ngo Dinh Diem in Buddhist S. Vietnam in 1955; cancelling nationwide elections in 1956 because
Ho would have won; building a non-Communist S. Vietnam when the majority had supported Ho Chi Minh against the French and then against Diem. The US, proclaiming itself the leader of the Free World, had forced the Vietnamese majority to turn to violence for its self-determination.

And they were met with the fire-power of the most powerful military force in history—more bomb tonnage than during WWII, millions killed and injured by indiscriminate destruction not only by bombs but also by napalm, artillery, chemical defoliants, automatic weapons, grenades. And the US forced millions of Vietnamese into camps. In one round-up in 1967, six thousand rural peasants, two-thirds of them children, were made US prisoners, called “refugees fleeing Communism.” Altogether the US drove “more than five million South Vietnamese off their land—roughly one-third of the population. . . .victims of one of the largest forced relocations in history” (29).

Succeeding chapters flesh out the catastrophe (except for all the other species killed, tortured, and dislocated, a book not yet written about any of our wars): Part I: “Why Are We in Vietnam?” to show how the official rationalizations for the US War Against Vietnam, especially that of US exceptionalism, were shattered by the horrendous cruelty of the invaders; Part II: “America at War” to trace US unexceptional war-making: the physical brutality of US troops, the moral harms to US soldiers themselves, and the movement to stop the war; Part III: “What Have We Become?” to assay the legacy of the war by “exceptional” USA.

The penultimate chapter, ironically entitled “No More Vietnams,” ends with the story of President Clinton’s Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, when asked by Lesley Stahl on Sixty Minutes in 1996 whether the death of a half-million Iraqi children because of the sanctions was worth it, Albright replied, “we think the price is worth it.” The final chapter, “Who We Are” summarizes our record as a nation and culture and the reckoning that had been building since the opening pages. In 2002 following the invasion of Iraq, President G. W. Bush declared: “Our nation is the greatest force for good in history,” and now Iraq is decimated and torn in half. In 2013 President Obama said, “If you want to know who we are, what America is, how we respond to evil—that’s it. Selflessly. Compassionately. Unafraid.” And Afghanistan is Vietnam. These and over forty interventions and invasions since 1945 have “explicitly violated long-established U.S. and international law. More than that, they fundamentally contradicted a
core principle of American exceptionalism—the belief that the United States adheres to a higher ethical standard than other nations. Since WWII the series of senseless, stupid, vicious wars initiated by the US has so turned on its head the patriotic fairy tale of national exceptionalism that not the troops or the executive and congressional leaders represent who we are, but the parents of killed and physically or mentally maimed US soldiers—of Paul Meadlo, or Alexander Arredondo, or Casey Sheehan, or other members of Gold Star Families for Peace.

What to do with such a judgement? “. . .to seek the fuller reckoning of our role in the world that the Vietnam War so powerfully awakened—to confront the evidence of what we have done. It is our record; it is who we are” (335).

**MASSCHUSETTS REVIEW**

**AMERICAN RECKONING: THE VIETNAM WAR AND OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY**

by Christian Appy. Viking, 2015. Review by Blogger

Doug Anderson.

[https://www.massreview.org/node/431](https://www.massreview.org/node/431)

Christian Appy's new book, *American Reckoning*, is a brilliant and readable synthesis of all previous thinking about the Vietnam War plus deep insights into the inner workings of the powers behind the war, especially what the American people were not privy to at the time. The war had gone sour for LBJ and key members of his administration long before anybody knew about it. The war had become unwinnable but simultaneously unendable.

Appy recounts a moment when Lyndon Johnson, badgered by reporters to explain why we continued to fight a war that was plainly unwinnable, “the president unzipped his fly, drew out his substantial organ, and declared, ‘This is why.’” This was typical of LBJ’s Aristophanic self-expression but it was also a metaphor Freud would have loved—revealing what American power thought of itself and its assumed place in the world. Johnson and his key players thought that a withdrawal from Vietnam would signal weakness to the rest of the world.

Appy is particularly astute about Vietnam Veterans, a demographic still largely misunderstood by the American public. All combat troops, whatever their politics, had the following
experience. They were taught to believe that we were fighting a noble war to prevent the innocent South Vietnamese from being overrun by the godless communist hoards from the north. They arrived in country and quickly discovered that the Vietnamese civilians were in on the game. True, many Vietnamese, especially those who remembered the French, merely wanted to be left alone by both sides, but eighty percent of the country was pro-NLF. When Diem, the president we had installed in Saigon realized this, he canceled elections. This structural oversight on the part of the war's architects was responsible for a lot of dead Americans and Vietnamese.

Ground troops were continually walking into ambushes and stepping on mines in close proximity to villages and were quick to assume that the villagers knew about the mines and the enemy presence. If a farmer walks over the same paddy dike for a week and doesn't step on the mine and then an American does, soldiers and marines assumed the villagers were working for the enemy. Often, they were. In any case, by the time I arrived in Vietnam in 1967 the hostility toward the Vietnamese in general was extreme. The war became a matter of staying alive for American ground troops and any notions of a noble cause had flown. The reprisals against the civilian population were often fierce.

Most of the American servicemen in Vietnam were decent human beings who had inherited their military service identity from their World War II-generation parents, a belief that the US was the world's eternal good guy always doing the right thing and helping out the underdog. We had stopped Tojo and Hitler, after all. The fall from grace of this generation of men was to have devastating consequences. The My Lai massacre brought attention to the problem of civilian casualties and revealed that it wasn't only mass killings like My Lai: the brutal treatment of civilians was a daily occurrence.

The next nightmare was the relocation of entire village populations to large camps called "strategic hamlets," and the chemical defoliation of known enemy sanctuaries that became known as "free fire zones." The affects of these relocations and the chemical spraying destroyed most of the rice crop and mid-war, Vietnam, known for its rice, was having to import it. Appy's tracking of the stages of the continuing disaster is quite convincing: idiocy after idiocy, bungle after bungle, all the way to "Vietnamization" and the ignominious exit of the Americans in 1975.

Appy follows the troops home to their dismal reception. Incidents of returning soldiers being spit on and called baby killers were very rare. What most troops faced was indifference, disgust or embarrassment. In some cases they were literally shunned. They were not
welcomed. They were further stigmatized as drug addicts and psychopaths. For a while during the seventies every time a television series needed a psycho they created a character that was a Vietnam veteran.

After the initial shaming of homecoming troops, Ronald Reagan and his administration tried to resuscitate them as victims. The memory of the war had sufficiently subsided enough for veterans to be recast as men who, if they had been allowed to fight the war, if they hadn't been undermined by student protests, would have won. Most veterans rejected both roles—loser or hero—and watched in amazement while they were reconstructed for political purposes.

The American right has been trying to make Vietnam go away for nearly a half century. The week after the first invasion of Iraq in 1991, George H. W. Bush declared that the "Vietnam Syndrome" was over. The slick media packaging of the invasion with lots of exploding ordnance was meant to kick off a new era in which the US would be restored to its position as supreme power. Bush the Second began two wars that were supposed to kick the ball further down field. In both cases, they failed, and Vietnam, is still very much with us.

The Vietnam War was an opportunity for the US to question and revise its national identity in ways that could have avoided much of the violence that continues now in the Middle East. With the swing toward the right since Reagan it has done the opposite, and the GOP in particular has become downright arterially sclerotic in its insistence that the country be restored to its pre Vietnam idea of itself. That will never happen, and they just continue to dig the grave deeper.

Appy has subsumed most of the previous books—from Michael Herr's Dispatches to Frances Fitzgerald's Fire in the Lake, to Neil Sheehan's A Bright and Shining Lie—into a brilliant analysis of a war doomed from the get-go. He has exhaustively interviewed people, dug around in the Library of Congress, and woven it all into a vigorous and gracefully written argument. Let's hope he finds an audience beyond the well-preached-to choir. A joke-meme is gathering momentum online, sometimes appearing as a cartoon, with the following caption: "Those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it. Those who do study history are doomed to sit around and watch other people repeat it."
Doug Anderson is the author of the memoir *Keep Your Head Down*, as well as several collections of poetry, including *The Moon Reflected Fire*. His poem "Seventy" appears in the current issue of MR.

Also see the excellent review by Bill Griffin in *The Catholic Worker* (June-July 2015). I wasn't able to find it online in order to forward to you. The book “focuses on US imperialism in the post Second World War era and the civic religion of American exceptionalism,” which Appy exposes as “a dangerous myth.”

**The Vietnam War: From Fulbright to Turse and Appy by Dick Bennett**

Fulbright learned to abhor the Vietnam War. The feelings prompted him to consider how, had he been more effective, he might have prevented the war, as he explains in *The Price of Empire*. First, he would have negotiated with Ho Chi Minh from the beginning. Ho had asked Truman’s State Department in 1946 to assist him in modeling his constitution on our institutions, but his messages were not answered. The State Department’s Secretary Acheson, a Cold Warrior, thought Ho under the control of communist masters. In 1965 Fulbright suggested to Pres. Johnson and Secretary McNamara that a Vietnam under Ho should be acceptable to the US. He compared Ho to Tito of Yugoslavia, an independent communist to whom the US had sent aid. Fulbright condemns, as he does repeatedly in this book, this mindless, dogmatic anticommunist mentality dominating US leaders (122).

Second, he would have accepted the Geneva accords in 1954. “It is quite possible” that had Eisenhower allowed the elections to proceed according to the accords “the whole course of our history would have been different.” Polls showed Ho would have won by 80%. The US professed to believe in self-determination. But the US blocked the vote and “the brutalization that later took place because of the war” ensued. Why? “. . .because it didn’t suit us” to adhere to an agreement with evil communism (110). Had we followed the accords “Vietnam could have been an Asian Yugoslavia” (127).

That history leads Fulbright to another of several repudiations of US exceptionalism.

“The question is, what have we learned from Vietnam?” And his answer is, thinking of the aggressions perpetrated by the US between the Vietnam War and 1989, “apparently little or nothing. Yet there is much that we should have learned, above all that we, as a nation, are no more immune than the great powers of the past from the arrogance of power.” Had we learned that lesson, we would have escaped the great anticommunist obsession and “the futile quest for primacy” that had gripped the country for over forty years.
He concludes the chapter, “Vietnam Revisited,” with this rebuke of the arrogance of believing one’s own nation to be exceptional beyond all others: “There is no greater human vanity than the belief that one’s own values have universal validity, no greater folly than the attempt to impose the preference of a single society on an unwilling world.”

At the time, Fulbright had only slightly glimpsed the brutality we now know occurred. The evidence has accumulated steadily since the end of the war. And in 2015, Nick Turse wrote Kill Everything that Moves.

WITH LEADERS LIKE THESE
HENRY KISSINGER AND EXCEPTIONAL US HARM AGAINST OTHERS. Democracy Now (Sept. 2, 2015)

“With a Record Backing Coups, Secret War & Genocide, Is Kissinger an Elder Statesman or War Criminal?”

Four decades after Henry Kissinger left office, his influence on the national security state can still be widely felt, as the United States engages in declared and undeclared wars across the globe. Kissinger served as national security adviser and secretary of state in the Nixon and Ford administrations and helped revive a militarized version of American exceptionalism. We speak with Greg Grandin, author of the new book, Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman. MORE
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Gen. Manuel Contreras, died in August 2015. He led the atrocious spy agency that kidnapped, tortured, and killed thousands during Chile’s military dictatorship, following the murder of President Salvador Allende in a coup partly organized by the CIA. According to an official report, 40,018 people were imprisoned, tortured, or slain during the 1973-1980 dictatorship,” which Pres. Nixon and Secretary Henry Kissinger helped to establish. –Dick (from AP report “General, Spy Chief in Chile Dictatorship,” Arkansas Democrat-Gazette 8-7-15).
US Exceptional Dark Sides

**Mass Shootings Dubbed the 'Dark Side of American Exceptionalism'**


_Firearm ownership is an underlying factor, but many mass shootings may be motivated by the 'lost American dream'.

FDR’S IMAGINED FOUR FREEDOMS THE REAL EXCEPTIONALISM

Full Show: Fighting for the Four Freedoms

April 11, 2014 | Moyers & Company

Historian Harvey J. Kaye talks to Bill about why FDR’s “Four Freedoms” — freedom from fear and want and freedom of speech and religion — are more important now than ever. Read Kaye’s _The Fight for the Four Freedoms_ (2014). The real US exceptionalism is its struggle for the values and organization of the New Deal from the 1930s to the 1970s.

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END EXCEPTIONALISM NEWSLETTER #3

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