

The Peace Memo

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Armistice and Elections

When you read this, the U.S. Election Carnival will be over. We may even get a government that, for a few months, will deign to govern rather than campaign. Unlikely, of course, but always possible.

In the furious tumult over the economy, taxes, abortion, and all the other hot-buttons that mask important issues of which they are just symptoms, I have been thinking about the deafening silence around American Empire. Why are we still looking for armed conflict with Korea, Russia, or anyone else? Why are we not closer to absenting ourselves from Afghanistan? Why are there 260,000 military contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan?¹ Why are we spending millions of dollars to maintain over 700 military bases² around the world, more than 30 of them in tiny Okinawa alone³?

This, and the approach of Veterans Day, got me thinking about “The Great War,” recently acknowledged as “The Great Carnage”. A short sojourn in my *Encyclopædia Britannica, 15th ed.* informed me that “armistice” is a temporary cease-fire. The Armistice of November 11, 1918 was renewed monthly until the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919 and hostilities were finally, formally over. The anniversary of the Armistice was, and in some places still is, observed with a two minute silence beginning at 11AM every November 11th. Everything stops. Everything.

Woodrow Wilson, U.S. President (1914-1920) and one of the architects of the [Versailles Treaty](#), also campaigned hard to establish the [League of Nations](#). In one of his last public statements, pub-

lished on November 11, 1923, he spoke of his great disappointment that his country declined to join the League, saying, in reference to the deteriorating situation in Europe, “That we should have thus done a great wrong to civilization at one of the most critical turning points in the history of the world is the more to be deplored because every anxious year that has followed has made the exceeding need for such services as we might have rendered more and more evident and more and more pressing, as demoralizing circumstances which we might have controlled have gone from bad to worse.”⁴

As indeed they did. Whether or not American influence/persuasion/pressure in the League would have diverted history from the course it took and the U.S. from the course it has taken, we know all too well the Peace lasted less than twenty years. After the Second World War, Armistice Day was renamed to include remembrance of and homage to another generation of young lives lost to war. And so it has been since then. In my childhood, the monument in the center of town added two more plaques – one for those killed in the Korean Conflict and one for Vietnam. I suppose there are more now, for those lost in more recent conflicts.

Wilson's writings reveal an interesting tension between the Calvinism of his Presbyterian roots and his passion for peace. “Peace” is something the blessed are entitled to define and administer. Wilson appears to have been a benevolent man, deeply concerned with the welfare of others. Yet, he also clearly assumes he knows what is best for others. He could justify using force to prevent escalating violence. How is this different from police showing up at nonviolent demonstrations in riot

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gear? In an Ideal democracy, with decision makers who represent free constituents fully and entirely, his approach might work smoothly. But that Ideal has not yet been attained and, given human nature, seems unlikely without adding something to the public drinking water supply.

Regardless of who occupies the Oval Office, we know the U.S. will continue on its fossil-fueled path of surveillance, aggression, and corporate exploitation. We know our some of our young, too many of them poor, will be persuaded to serve in the military. They deserve our thanks and honor for volunteering to do the dirty work of Empire. Even more, they deserve our support when they come back maimed, disabled, depressed, and unable to find a place in civilian life. They need us most when they realize their sacrifice was not so much to make their families and loved ones safe as to increase the wealth of the corporations that provided bad food and shoddy equipment for them in combat zones.

Let us redouble our efforts, as this year winds to an end, to work locally so that our children may attend schools with responsible boards, so that our towns may consider carefully before allowing fracking, so that our police will treat demonstrators with the respect and gentleness due neighbors involved in lawful activities.

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Peace Vanishes on Veterans' Day

Matthew Rothschild

Armistice Day, November 11, was first ushered in by President Woodrow Wilson to commemorate the ending of World War I.

Wilson saw it as an opportunity to honor the soldiers who died in that war (one of the most senseless in our history, by the way), and to give America an opportunity to “show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations.”

In 1938, Congress officially recognized Armistice Day, and said it was supposed to be a day “dedicated to the cause of world peace.”

Then in 1954, Congress changed the name to Veterans' Day, and the idea that this holiday should be “dedicated to the cause of world peace” or devoted to expressing our “sympathy with peace and justice” fell by the wayside.

Instead, it's become just another day to glorify war.

President Obama did so when he went to South Korea to retroactively declare victory in the Korean War.

“On this day, we honor every man and woman who has ever worn the uniform of the United

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States of America,” he said. “We salute fallen heroes, and keep in our prayers those who are still in harm’s way — like the men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Not a word about peace.

We’ve become a nation that wages permanent war.

This creates endless profits for the arms companies, and it creates more veterans to honor every November 11.

But it shows a profound lack of sympathy for the cause of world peace.

(I requested permission to publish Chris Hedges' column, "the Maimed," in its entirety here. I did not hear back from Truthdig, but I'm reprinting the article anyway.-- ed.)

[The Maimed](#)

Chris Hedges gave this talk Sunday night in New York City at a protest denouncing the 11th anniversary of the war in Afghanistan. The event, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, was led by Veterans for Peace.

Many of us who are here carry within us death. The smell of decayed and bloated corpses. The cries of the wounded. The shrieks of children. The sound of gunfire. The deafening blasts. The fear. The stench of cordite. The humiliation that comes when you surrender to terror and beg for life. The loss of comrades and friends. And then

the aftermath. The long alienation. The numbness. The nightmares. The lack of sleep. The inability to connect to all living things, even to those we love the most. The regret. The repugnant lies mouthed around us about honor and heroism and glory. The absurdity. The waste. The futility.

It is only the maimed that finally know war. And we are the maimed. We are the broken and the lame. We ask for forgiveness. We seek redemption. We carry on our backs this awful cross of death, for the essence of war is death, and the weight of it digs into our shoulders and eats away at our souls. We drag it through life, up hills and down hills, along the roads, into the most intimate recesses of our lives. It never leaves us. Those who know us best know that there is something unspeakable and evil many of us harbor within us. This evil is intimate. It is personal. We do not speak its name. It is the evil of things done and things left undone. It is the evil of war.

We do not speak of war. War is captured only in the long, vacant stares, in the silences, in the trembling fingers, in the memories most of us keep buried deep within us, in the tears.

It is impossible to portray war. Narratives, even anti-war narratives, make the irrational rational. They make the incomprehensible comprehensible. They make the illogical logical. They make the despicable beautiful. All words and images, all discussions, all films, all evocations of war, good or bad, are an obscenity. There is nothing to say. There are only the scars and wounds. These we carry within us. These we cannot articulate. The horror. The horror.

War gives to its killers a God-like power to take

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life. And there are those here tonight that have felt and exercised that power. They turned other human beings into objects. And in that process of killing they became objects, machines, instruments of death, war's victimizers and war's victims. And they do not want to be machines again.

We wander through life with the deadness of war within us. There is no escape. There is no peace. We know an awful truth, an existential truth. War exposed the lies of patriotism and collective virtue of the nation that our churches, our schools, our press, our movies, our books, our government told us about ourselves, about who we were. And we see through these illusions. But those who speak this truth are cast out. Ghosts. Strangers in a strange land.

Who are our brothers and sisters? Who is our family? Whom have we become? We have become those whom we once despised and killed. We have become the enemy. Our mother is the mother grieving over her murdered child, and we murdered this child, in a mud-walled village of Afghanistan or a sand-filled cemetery in Fallujah. Our father is the father lying on a pallet in a hut, paralyzed by the blast from an iron fragmentation bomb. Our sister lives in poverty in a refugee camp outside Kabul, widowed, desperately poor, raising her children alone. Our brother, yes, our brother, is in the Taliban and the Iraqi insurgency and al-Qaida. And he has an automatic rifle. And he kills. And he is becoming us. War is always the same plague. It imparts the same deadly virus. It teaches us to deny another's humanity, worth, being, and to kill and be killed.

There are days we wish we were whole. We wish

we could put down this cross. We envy those who, in their innocence, believe in the innate goodness of America and the righteousness of war and celebrate what we know is despicable. And sometimes it makes us wish for death, for the peace of it. But we know too the awful truth, as James Baldwin wrote, that "people who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster." And we would rather be maimed and broken and in pain than be a monster, and some of us, once, were monsters.

I cannot heal you. You will never be healed. I cannot take away your wounds, visible and invisible. I cannot promise that it will be better. I cannot impart to you the cheerful and childish optimism that is the curse of America. I can only tell you to stand up, to pick up your cross, to keep moving. I can only tell you that you must always defy the forces that eat away at you, at the nation—this plague of war.

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long ways from home
A long ways from home*

Towering about us are banks and other financial institutions that profit from war. War, for some, is a business. And across this country lies a labyrinth of military industries that produce nothing but instruments of death. And some of us once served these forces. It is death we defy, not our own death, but the vast enterprise of death. The dark, primeval lusts for power and personal wealth, the hypermasculine language of war and patriotism, are used to justify the slaughter of the weak and

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the innocent and mock justice. ... And we will not use these words of war.

We cannot flee from evil. Some of us have tried through drink and drugs and self-destructiveness. Evil is always with us. It is because we know evil, our own evil, that we do not let go, do not surrender. It is because we know evil that we resist. It is because we know violence that we are nonviolent. And we know that it is not about us; war taught us that. It is about the other, lying by the side of the road. It is about reaching down in defiance of creeds and oaths, in defiance of religion and nationality, and lifting our enemy up. All acts of healing and love—and the defiance of war is an affirmation of love—allow us to shout out to the vast powers of the universe that, however broken we are, we are not yet helpless, however much we despair we are not yet without hope, however weak we may feel, we will always, always, always resist. And it is in this act of resistance that we find our salvation.

Memorial Day: Honor the Dead, Heal the Wounded, Stop the Wars

Amy Goodman

Gen. John Allen, commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, spoke Wednesday at the Pentagon, four stars on each shoulder, his chest bedecked with medals. Allen said the NATO summit in Chicago, which left him feeling “heartened,” “was a powerful signal of international support for the Afghan-led process of reconciliation.” Unlike Allen, many decorated U.S. military veterans left the streets of Chicago after the NATO summit without their medals. They marched on the paramilitarized convention center where the generals and heads of state had gathered and threw their medals at the high fence surrounding the summit. They were joined by women from Afghans for Peace, and an American mother whose son killed himself after his second deployment to Iraq.

Leading thousands of protesters in a peaceful march against NATO’s wars, each veteran climbed to the makeshift stage outside the fenced summit, made a brief statement and threw his or her medals at the gate.

As taps was played, veterans folded an American flag that had flown over NATO military operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia, Afghanistan and Libya and handed it to Mary Kirkland. Her son, Derrick, joined the Army in January 2007, since he was not earning enough to support his wife and child as a cook at an IHOP restaurant. During his second deployment, Mary told me, “he ended up putting a shotgun in his mouth over there in Iraq, and one of his buddies stopped him.” He was transferred to Germany then back to his home base of Fort



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Lewis, Wash.

“He came back on a Monday after two failed suicide attempts in a three-week period. They kept him overnight at Madigan Army Medical Center at Fort Lewis. He met with a psychiatrist the next day who deemed him to be low to moderate risk for suicide.” Five days later, on Friday, March 19, 2010, he hanged himself. Said his mother, “Derrick was not killed in action; he was killed because of failed mental health care at Fort Lewis.”

On stage, Lance Cpl. Scott Olsen declared: “Today I have with me my Global War on Terror Medal, Operation Iraqi Freedom Medal, National Defense Medal and Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal. These medals, once upon a time, made me feel good about what I was doing. ... I came back to reality, and I don’t want these anymore.” Like the riot police flanking the stage, many on horseback, Olsen also wore a helmet. He is recovering from a fractured skull after being shot in the head at close range by a beanbag projectile. He wasn’t shot in Iraq, but by Oakland, Calif., police at Occupy Oakland last fall, where he was protesting. On stage with the veterans were three Afghan women, holding the flag of Afghanistan. Just before they marched, I asked one of them, Suraia Sahar, why she was there: “I’m representing Afghans for Peace. And we’re here to protest NATO and call on all NATO representatives to end this inhumane, illegal, barbaric war against our home country and our people. ... It’s the first time an Afghan-led peace movement is now working side by side with a veteran-led peace movement. And so, this is the beginning of something new, something better:

reconciliation and peace.”

The night before the protest and the summit, Allen threw out the first pitch at the “Crosstown Classic” baseball game between the Chicago White Sox and the Chicago Cubs. Members of the teams joked that Allen could join them in the dugout, if he would only quit his day job. I dare say, the members of the Iraq Veterans Against the War wish he would.

After the march and the return of the medals, I caught up with Kirkland’s mourning mother as she embraced her new family: those who were protesting the wars that had taken the life of her son. I asked if she had any message for President Obama and the NATO generals. This quiet, soft-spoken woman from Indiana didn’t hesitate: “Honor the dead, heal the wounded, stop the wars.

[Only In America Could Cost of Care Bankrupt Victims of Violence Like in Aurora, Colorado](#)

Wendell Potter

One of the reasons Americans seem so willing to tolerate the fact that close to [50 million](#) of us are uninsured and [29 million](#) more of us are underinsured is that most of us who have coverage assume we are OK. That nothing truly catastrophic will happen to us, and that, even if it did, our insurance policies will pay our bills and keep us whole.

Who would think that a decision to go see a movie on a Friday morning could change our lives -- and

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the lives of our families -- forever? That we or a loved one, even with what we believed was decent coverage, might become a victim of violence that could leave us not only disabled for life but also potentially bankrupt and homeless?

That random act of violence in Aurora, Colorado earlier this month could have happened anywhere in America, of course -- or in any other country, for that matter -- but among the world's developed nations, we live in the only one where the families of some of the injured would have to face begging for money to pay the doctors and hospitals and keep the sheriff and his foreclosure papers at bay. Talk about American exceptionalism. This is one area where, sadly, we truly are unique.

(For the rest of the article and a great deal more excellent journalism, visit [OpEd News](#).-Ed.)



[Lake Junaluska Peace Conference](#)

November 8 - 11, 2012

Is there a place for nonviolent action in our world? The 2012 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference, "Love in Action: The Transformative Power of Nonviolence," will draw upon the lessons of nonviolent campaigns and their leaders who discovered a force that can change the world.

Participants will explore the principles and learn the applications of nonviolence as taught by Gandhi, King, and many spiritual leaders who offered this alternative paradigm for resolving conflict, achieving justice, and building peace.

1.6 CEUs are available.

2012 Speakers include:

- [Leymah Gbowee](#), Liberian Peace Activist and Nobel Peace Prize Winner
- [Rev. Dr. Bernard Lafayette, Jr.](#), Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence, Candler School of Theology
- [Michael Nagler](#), President of the Metta Center for Nonviolence
- [Alan Storey](#), Central Methodist Mission in Cape Town, Africa. Rev. Alan Storey is a key speaker at both the **Lake Junaluska Peace Conference** and the [Manna and Mercy Retreat](#). He will give his testimony of the struggles and victories during his commitment of peacekeeping in South Africa and various places.

NEW: Detailed [workshops](#) descriptions are now available.



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THE SPARROW SINGS

Oct., 2012

A man was returning a chain saw he bought at a hardware store. When asked why he was returning it, he said that he was told the saw would cut down 14 trees an hour, and it took him an hour to cut down just one small tree. The hardware worker looked at the chain saw and pulled the cord. The man exclaimed, "What's that noise?" In the same way people complain that we sacrifice thousands of young lives and spend trillions of dollars trying to protect people in the world, and they still hate us. They fail to see that one must "pull the cord" and bring all our soldiers and weapons home if we are going to get the respect and favor of other people. People do not like aggressive, violent strangers coming to their land with weapons to intimidate, maim and kill them, and call it bringing peace and freedom to them. Sending drones to bomb the innocent women and children does not produce freedom and peace for others. Just as the chain saw does not work without pulling the cord so peace and friendship will not be accomplished without showing love, kindness and compassion to the rest of the world. Doing this will mean relinquishing our desire for material wealth and sharing it with others; but the end result, peace and friendship, is priceless. Money can buy a dog, but only love can make her wag her tail. Instead of cow-towing to the military industrial complex and wasting trillions of dollars on war and weapons and then taking care of the resulting wounded and dying; we must use our wealth to help those most in need in the world. Then the "saw" will work, and we will harvest more than

we can imagine.--Don Timmerman

The only time we should look down on someone is when we are helping them up."--Jesse Jackson

"Christians must become active in every possible way, mobilizing all their resources for the fight against war. Peace is to be preached, nonviolent is to be explained as a practical method, and not left to be mocked as an outlet for crackpots who want to make a show of themselves. Prayer and sacrifice must be used as the most effective spiritual weapons in the war against war, and like all weapons, they must be used with deliberate aim not just with a vague aspiration for peace and security, but against violence and war. We may never succeed in the campaign, but whether we succeed or not, the duty is evident. It is the great Christian task of our time. Everything else is secondary."--Thomas Merton

"But up close war is a soulless void. War is about barbarity, perversion and pain. Human decency and tenderness are crushed, and people become objects to use or kill. The noise, the stench, the fear, the scenes of eviscerated bodies and bloated corpses, the cries of the wounded all combine to spin those in combat into another universe. In this moral void, naively blessed by secular and religious institutions at home, the hypocrisy of our social conventions, our strict adherence to moral precepts, becomes stark."--Christopher Hedges, Boston Review, July 13, 2012

INTERESTING FACTS

Washington may be preparing for permanent war. Special operations forces may be in up to 120 nations. Drone bases are proliferating across the planet. The U.S. has 78% (\$66.3 billion) of all

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weapons in the world. We have marines and drones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Central Africa, northern Mali, The Philippines and Guatemala.--Readers Supported News, 9/15/12

Despite the U.S. Army insisting it did not need more tanks, Congress approved \$225 million for 42 new M1 Abrams tanks. With 2,300 M1s already deployed around the world, and 3,000 more sitting idle at a base in California's Sierra Nevada mountains.--The Week, 10/5/12

Two thirds of U.S. foreign aid is really military aid. For the past 2 years. the Pentagon got \$10 billion more than the State Dept. for foreign aid projects. More is spent training soldiers than feeding the poor. --CNN, 12/27/11

In three and a half minutes the U.S. military spends \$7.7 million.--AFSC

Much of the federal budget is for the military, the wars and subsidies to corporations, not for welfare for the poor.--Salon, 10/18/12

The Green Party candidate, Jill Stein, and her running mate, Cheri Honkala, were both arrested outside where the recent debate took place at Hofstra University. They were taken into custody by the Long Island police and chained to chairs for 8 hours. Their crime -- wanting to participate in the debate --Salon, 10/17/12

The Palermo Pizza workers went on strike in June to demand safe working conditions, the recognition of their union and the reinstatement of workers fired for organizing. Palermo's has received \$26 million in tax credits, subsidies and loans from the state, city and federal sources since 2005. Independent assessments say

Palermo's has not met accountability standards for public funds. The workers are asking why public funds are supporting the company that retaliated against its employees for exercising their rights and that pays poverty-level wages.--Contact: Voices de la Frontera at [414-643-1620](tel:414-643-1620).

As many as 18 U.S. veterans kill themselves every day. --Democracy No

The U.S. military has 234 golf courses costing \$11 million a year to maintain.--America's Defense Monitor

NOTES FROM 21ST STREET: The branches of the trees are bare. Two weeks ago, they formed a golden archway over the street, and when I walked outside it looked like golden coins were falling all around me. Today brown leaves cover the ground. I have hung the bed sheets out on the clothesline, and the wind is chilly. More clothespins are needed because of the strong winds from Hurricane Sandy. Yet I am surprised and delighted at how green the grass is. All through the hot, drought-filled summer the grass was brown as a very faded green. With winter coming the grass will disappear, and I will find my soul yearning for the first sign of green in early spring. Perhaps that is why I keep drinking in the beautiful green of the grass, so that my soul will be fed until spring. Peace, Roberta

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