

Breaking Our Addiction to War

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Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Global Research, November 28, 2010

brianwillson.com 25 January 2010

I am sick of being anti-war. Are wars inevitable? War crimes? If we really don't want wars, it behooves us to get serious about understanding their causes, and choose to radically address them. Otherwise, what's the point? Feeling a "rush" with like-minded folks at political actions only perpetuates our addiction to anti-war rallies, which do nothing to stop wars from occurring.

The inarticulate presidency of George Bush II successfully unmasked the US empire for everyone to see in its gruesome glory – laying bare all the lies, sordid details, and egregious consequences of unfettered greed. Then the hopium associated with Obama's election served as a soothing tranquilizer, quieting the movement, at least for a time. Yet, no matter who is in power, wars continue *ad nauseum*. To learn why we must examine the vertical/hierarchical, patriarchal political-economic system to which we humans have adapted over millennia.

First, let's look at US history. The record reveals a chronic, depressing pattern of war making – 550 direct military interventions since 1799 in more than 100 countries. More than 300 of these have occurred since World War II, including bombing of 28 countries. In addition, the US has conducted thousands of covert interventions, mostly in "Third World" countries.

The longer view: Since the advent of "civilization" around 3500 BC (55 centuries ago), there have been 14,600 recorded "decisive wars," not counting thousands of smaller, "indecisive" ones, according to the Norwegian Academy of Sciences. This coincides with development of writing and emergence of patriarchal, hierarchical kingdoms, most of which later became empires. The rulers of these kingdoms gained power by manipulating surplus that had grown out of the agricultural revolution. Another coincidence with the advent of civilization is a notable increase in findings of human remains for which the cause of death has been attributed to warfare injuries. Archaeologists have found little if any evidence of systemic warfare prior to this time.

Since 1500 AD, war scholar Quincy Wright documents 3,000 recorded "battles" which involved casualties of at least 1,000 in land battles, and 500 in naval ones, with an additional quarter million "hostile encounters." The US Army alone has been engaged in over 9,000 "battles and skirmishes" between 1775-1900, most against Native Americans, with the US Navy engaged in over 1,100 encounters in addition.

Efforts to prevent wars are also well established. Historical sociologist Jacques Novicow documented more than 8,000 treaties for peace between 1,500 BC and 1860 AD.

Modern efforts to impose accountability for war behavior include the Hague and Geneva Conventions, the United Nations Charter, and the Nuremberg Principles. The 1928 Kellogg-

Briand Pact renounced war altogether. Since the 1950s, the US Army Field Manual adopted provisions of international law, absolutely prohibiting targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure. It has done little, if anything, to retard murder of civilians.

Attempting to understand this chronic pattern of human carnage, scholars such as Lewis Mumford, Thomas Berry, Marija Gimbutus, Riane Eisler, and James Hillman chronicle the record of more than five millennia of the four patriarchal establishments – classical empires, ecclesiastical institutions, nation-states, and modern corporations. All four can be described as male-dominated, vertical hierarchies dependent for their functioning on strict obedience from their population base.

“Civilization” is marked by a dramatic shift from long-standing decentralized, horizontal, matriarchal societies, to centralized, vertical/class-oriented, patriarchal societies, in which obedience to a King was required, and slave labor utilized to construct massive projects like tombs, irrigation and grain storage systems. Class and stratification ripped people from their historical roots as autonomous beings living in small cooperative tribal groups. This separation of people from their intimate connections with the earth produced deep insecurity, anxiety and fear in the psyche, and ecopsychologists such as Chellis Glendinning and Theodore Roszak suggest that such fragmentation created a traumatic primordial breach. Being forced to live and work in a class system generally leads to a feeling of lack of self worth. People will avoid this shame at any cost, often by adopting “defense mechanism” such as projecting demonization onto others “below,” and/or deference of authentic autonomous freedoms to belief in authority structures and adoption of their accompanying mythologies and ideologies.

For 300 generations civilization has required obedience. This has become a cultural habit enabling each of us to successfully adapt to our non-Indigenous culture. Observers such as Etienne De La Boetie have discovered that virtually all vertical power quickly becomes ego-tyrannical, inherent in concentration of political, social and economic power, whether achieved through elections (such as the USA), force of arms, or inheritance. Method of rule is essentially the same – achieving mass consent through either fear or propaganda/myth. Barbara Tuchman describes the historical folly of ego-maniacs at war in her 1984 book, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*.

In essence, by being conditioned to obey the laws and mores of modern society dictated and shaped by vertical political-economic systems, we have been living contrary to our authentic nature as cooperative beings capable of self-governance in small communities without authority from above. In addition, in the West, with but 20 percent of the world’s population, we have materially benefited from 500 years of colonial exploitation at the expense of the remaining 80 percent. This is not only immoral, it is ecologically unsustainable. In the US, with but 4.6 percent of the world’s population, our insatiable consumption devours more than 30 percent of the globe’s resources. Habits of obedience to our system have historically been reinforced by our personal addiction to consumer goods, fed by the myth that our material well-being derives from our “exceptionalism” as US Americans. Our allegiance to this myth and our addiction to its benefits are what enable those dreadful wars – these are nothing more than imperial projects to assure, at gunpoint, continuation of our American Way Of Life, not to mention endless profits for the “emperor” and his entourage.

In summary, we are addicted to war because we are addicted to a materialist way of life, which requires obedience to an infrastructure of imperialism that enables business as usual.

That it is totally unsustainable is only now being realized.

The prescription: Re-discover the eco-consciousness that already resides in our visceral genetic memory outside our brains. Choosing to live with less stuff in locally sufficient, food producing and simple tool making/artisan cultures can be joyful, and pockets of such revivalist cultures are cropping up in many places as people strive to re-establish their local autonomy. We are coming full circle – those we exterminated because we deemed them “savage,” were in fact authentic. We are the savages and now must turn to the authentics to help in our healing.

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