

Quoth the Vultures “Evermore”

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On the short roof outside the bedroom window, two black vultures sit, staring in. They have come to remind me of something. I put my book down and peer back at these strange looking creatures. The book: [Our War: What We Did in Vietnam And What It Did to Us](#) by David Harris. I had read it when it was first published in 1996 and it has stuck with me, as has the utterly savage U.S. war against Vietnam that killed so many millions, what the Vietnamese call The American War.

I am of the same generation as [Harris](#), the courageous draft resister and anti-war campaigner who died on February 6. Like him, many of us who were of draft age then have never been able to extricate the horror of that war from our minds. Most, I suppose, but surely not those who went to Vietnam to fight, just moved on and allowed the war to disappear from their consciousness as they perhaps tried to think of it as a “mistake” and to live as if all the constant American wars since weren't happening. As for the young, the war against Vietnam is ancient history, and if they learned anything about it in school, it was erroneous for sure, a continuation of the lie.

But it was no mistake; it was an intentional genocidal war waged to torture, kill, and maim as many Vietnamese as possible and to use drafted (enslaved) American boys to do the killing and suffer the consequences. It's Phoenix Program, the CIA's assassination and torture operation, became the template for Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, CIA black sites, hybrid wars, terrorist actions, etc. up to today. Harris writes:

[that] . . . “calling the war a mistake is the fundamental equivalent of calling water wet or dirt dirty. . . . Let us not lose sight of what really happened. In this particular ‘mistake,’ at least 3 million people died, only 58,000 of whom were Americans. These 3 million people died crushed in the mud, riddled with shrapnel, hurled out of helicopters, impaled on sharpened bamboo, obliterated in carpets of explosives dropped from bombers flying so high they could only be heard and never seen; they died reduced to chunks by one or more land mines, finished off by a round through the temple or a bayonet through the throat, consumed by sizzling phosphorous, burned alive by jellied gasoline, strung up by their thumbs, starved in cages, executed after watching their

babies die, trapped on the barbed wire calling for their mothers. They died while trying to kill, they died while trying to kill no one, they died heroes, they died villains, they died at random, they died most often when someone who had no idea who they were killed them under the orders of who had even less idea than that.

That's the truth. Unvarnished. But such historical truth hurts to consider, for it reminds us that the belief in the U.S.A.'s good intentions is a delusion. The war against Vietnam was immoral, but even that word fails to grasp it. Pure evil is truer. And to consider that war on military terms alone, one must accept the fact the U.S. lost the war despite all its military technology.

Time, that truly mysterious bird, forces us back to the past as it perpetually opens to the future – all in the meditative present. I look out the window and think how each of us lives in the time circles of our days, morning till night and then the same again and again as these small carousels carry us like arrows to the day time runs out for us. Time is a circle and an arrow within a circle and . . . pure mystery. It encloses us. And when we are gone, as is dear David Harris, the circle game goes on and on as yesterday's wars are resurrected today. An unbroken circle of human madness. Yet many carry on in hope because conscience calls. And now is all the time we have.

I am writing this on Ash Wednesday, the day Christians begin Lent and take ashes on our foreheads to remind us of our mortality – dust to dust. Six weeks later comes Easter, the Resurrection from the dead, the day of hope. Six circular weeks celebrated every spring within the circle of every year on a calendar that moves straight ahead with the clicking of the numbers. Death, hope, and resurrection, even as history suggests it is hopeless to stop wars. That the vultures always triumph. Yet many carry it on in hope because conscience calls. And all time is now.

Yes, I look out and the vultures' gaze reduces me to a cataleptic state for a few moments. Then the thought of David Harris and his book on the table transports me back to the past, while my vulture visitors mouth the words "Evermore, Evermore" to remind me that the same war vultures are here now and are eager for prey in the future. They devour the dead. They have never left, just as the truth about the U.S. war against Vietnam has not, if one allows it to sink in. It is a lesson not too late for the learning, for the United States warfare state has continued to wage wars all around the world. [None are mistakes](#). It would be a terrible mistake to think so.

Cuba, Iraq, Serbia, Nicaragua, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Chile, Indonesia, China, Afghanistan, Philippines, Yemen, Somalia, Russia via Ukraine, etc. – all intentional and all based on lies. It's the American Way, just as it was for Vietnam.

Quoth the vultures "Evermore."

Like David Harris, I refused to go to the war but the war came to me. When I became a conscientious objector from the Marines, I avoided killing Vietnamese but their killing by my countrymen has haunted me to this day. Unlike David, who was far more courageous than I, I didn't go to prison, although I was prepared to do so. But I learned then, and have never forgotten, that my country is controlled by blood-thirsty vultures.

Flying back in time, I remember a conversation I had with a friend on the plane to Marine boot camp at Parris Island, that infamous torture chamber in South Carolina where boys are

made into professional killers. I told him how confused I was since I hadn't been raised to kill people. Actually the opposite. As a good Catholic boy, I was taught to love others, not to kill them. No one I knew ever said they saw a contradiction. Yet here I was going to do that. It was insane. I kept conflating the slogan "The Marines Build Men: Body, Mind, and Spirit" with the advertising jingle I grew up hearing from the New York Yankees' announcer, Mel Allen, who would intone the sponsor's (Ballantine Beer) slogan: remember fans "The Three Ring Sign: Purity, Body, and Flavor - So Ask the Man for Ballantine." Then there was the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: let us pray; men built by the Marines; purity and impurity, body, God's body, bodies denied and maimed, killing other bodies, "In the Name of the Father and the Son and..." It all felt so bizarre and my mind was a confused whirligig of contradictions. What the hell was I doing on that plane, I thought. Whose life was it anyway?

October 6, 1966. Zippo Squads on CBS News, setting fire to peasant huts in Vietnam. When I was younger, a Zippo lighter seemed so cool and manly. Silvery and clicky, a cigarette in the corner of my mouth. A real tough guy. John Wayne or Humphrey Bogart.

I thought I was only betrayed in Vietnam, until I began to realize the full extent of that betrayal throughout my boyhood. When I came back from Vietnam, I hated my government for lying to me, until I came to see the overwhelming evidence that the gun was put into my hands when I went to a toy store, and was further indoctrinated to believe that the glorification of war was essential to the American way of life. Intellectually this all made sense, but emotionally, it affected every area of my life, as this devastating wound went far beyond the intellect.

*Mike Hastie
Army Medic Vietnam*



These boys were on a flatbed truck with their plastic guns as they presented themselves at a Veterans Day Parade

in Albany, Oregon in 1991. This parade was a few months after the U.S. Military won Gulf War I, otherwise known as "Desert

Storm." The people at the parade were overwhelmed with joy that the U.S. had "won" another war. Little did they know

that the war was a slaughter. Like Viet Nam, the U.S. War Machine went berserk with their systematic killing and

destroying infrastructure. Every time you buy a boy a war toy, you trample his soul. In the film “ All Quiet On The

Western Front,” the key word in this title for me is the word, “ Quiet.” Soldiers stayed quiet about the horrors of war, as

they were too traumatized to talk about it. The truth is never passed down to the next generation. When it comes

their time to go to war, they are a patriotic blank slate. The entertainment of violence in the United States is a

malignant disease. When boys come home from war, they stop growing emotionally. PTSD is a state of being in

which the emotions have failed to grow to the stature of the intellect. Without help, it is a slow death sentence.

—[Mike Hastie](#)

Memories. That’s what vultures can do. One look and you are gone.

In the 1960s, things were simpler. Although there were many newspapers then, and people read much more, it was television with its few major networks that fixated people. Unlike today – when there is no military draft, the realities of U.S. wars are hidden from television viewers, and the internet is regularly scrubbed of the grizzly truth of our wars – in the 1960s, bloody images from Vietnam became a staple of the evening news shows. Harris writes:

We must not forget: it was a more simpleminded age, the information superhighway was still a deer trail, and network television was taken as reality, giving the folks back home a vivid, utterly riveting look at what some of their boys were going through, a kind of visceral access available to no previous generation of Americans.

To accompany those sights and sounds, the folks back home were also given a running explanation of what was going on from their government. And the latter created the war’s second front. Unprecedented visibility ensured that in this war, the government fought one war in the paddies against its NLF and North Vietnamese adversaries and another over the U.S. airwaves, trying to put the appropriate spin on events and convince America that there really was some important reason for going through all this. There wasn’t enough political support for the war to do otherwise, and television had too much impact. The obvious consequence was that Lyndon Johnson and then Richard Nixon spent a good deal of their energy playing to the cameras, just trying to make the war look like what America thought its wars should look like.

More simpleminded it may have been, but that so-called simplemindedness together with the visual imagery from Vietnam – despite all the government propaganda – did help turn many people against the war despite Nixon’s ruthless ability to keep it running so long.

Everything is different today, except for the propaganda and the wars. A look back to Vietnam is crucial for understanding what’s happening now, for it makes absolutely clear that the U.S. government has no compunction about killing millions of innocent people for

its evil ends, whatever they may be.

Then, it would destroy a village in order to save it; today, it will destroy the world in order to save it. It is the logic of madmen in the grip of evil beyond description. Yet most people repress the thought that nuclear war is very close.

All the mainstream media headlines about Ukraine echo the U.S. propaganda about the American War against Vietnam. Just substitute the word Russian for National Liberation Front or Viet Cong. They are suffering extraordinary casualties. The tide is turning. "The enemy was being taught the hard way," writes Harris, "that aggression does not pay. We were steadily destroying their capacity to fight . . . Victory was just around the corner."

It's easy to laugh at the parallels until a vulture comes calling. The seeming unreality of their visitation is only equaled by the delusional nature of what passes for news today.

Quoth the Vultures "Evermore."

David Harris was right about the 1960s when he said, "All that craziness had compromised the nation's epistemology, rendering our accustomed patterns of knowing dysfunctional." This is true a thousand times over today. If the '60s were simpler times, the digital internet revolution and AI have scrambled many people's minds into a morass perfectly suited for today's government lies. "Not only was it hard to know *what* was really going on," he writes of Vietnam, "but it was even hard to know *how* we would know what was really going on if we stumbled over it."

Then came a shocking surprise: the Tet Offensive that began on January 31, 1968 when everything became quite clear. This massive attack by the NFL and VC was "the mother of all such epiphanies." All official lies were exposed and any prominent dissenter to these lies about the war had to be eliminated, thus Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated in quick order by the government that would go on for seven more years to wage its genocidal war against the Vietnamese and neighboring Cambodia and Laos.

That was long ago and far away, but it's worth contemplating. No one knows what exactly is around the corner in Ukraine. But then, I didn't expect two vultures to visit me with their warning.

I'm just passing on their message. Epiphanies happen. But so do cataclysms.

All time is now.

Although David Harris has died, he and the many others, such as [Randy Kehler](#), who were caged in federal prisons for resisting the draft and opposing the war against Vietnam, live on to inspire us to believe that if we resist the warmongers, someday all free birds might chant in unison "Nevermore."

Here's their story, a revelatory film about David and those who refused the siren song of evil: *The Boys Who Said No*

True patriots.

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