

# Women's Rights and Social Justice: Julia Ward Howe's 1870 Anti-War Mother's Day Proclamation, A Day of Peace

An Anti-War Manifesto Lamenting the Dead, Dying and Soul-Sickened Soldiers Returning from the Killing Fields

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*150 years ago, the disastrous human and economic consequences of the American Civil War were becoming increasingly apparent, especially to certain thoughtful wise women who had seen their testosterone-laden loved ones eagerly march off to that "inglorious" war 5 years earlier. Those men and women, as is still the case today, had no idea of the psychological and spiritual devastation that comes from killing fellow humans until it was too late. But the well-hidden truth hit them when they saw their loved ones come home, changed forever. Some came home dead, some were just physically wounded but all were spiritually deadened.*

That "patriotic" war basically ended in mutual exhaustion in 1865. The Northern foot-soldiers (who were numerically stronger) did not feel gleeful over the hollow victory" – just relief. Many Civil War-era women, including Howe, had actually willingly participated in the flag-waving fervor that war-mongers and war-profiteers can easily manufacture. Pro-war propaganda has always been directed at poor and working class men who must be duped into doing the soul-damning dirty work of killing and being killed.

Julia Ward Howe, author of the Mother's Day Proclamation of 1870, was a life-long abolitionist and therefore, early on, she was a supporter of the Union Army's anti-slavery rationale for going to war to prevent the pro-slavery politicians and industrialists in the Confederate South from seceding from the union over the slavery issue.



## BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.

BY MRS. JULIA WARD HOWE.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord: Library of Congress

Howe was a compassionate and well-educated middle child of an upper class family. She was also a poet who, in the early days of the Civil War, had written “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” using many biblically-based lyrics. Howe had intended her song to be sung as an abolitionist song; however, because of some of the militant-sounding lyrics and the eminently marchable tune, it was rapidly adopted by Union Army propagandists as its most inspiring war song, a reality that Howe likely regretted when the mass slaughter of the world’s first “total war” became clear to her.

Howe wrote the “Battle Hymn” in one sitting (in the early hours of November 18, 1861), but she soon became a pacifist and an antiwar activist. At the time she wrote the song, the Civil War was just starting and had not yet degenerated into the wholesale slaughter that was made possible by the technological advances in weaponry (mainly artillery and rifled muskets that were more accurate) that would make cavalry charges, the bayonet and the sword obsolete.

Back then the Press Didn’t Censor out ALL the Horrors of War

Howe’s evolution from cheerleader for war to anti-war activism came about after she witnessed the mutual mass slaughter of the War Between the States (1861 – 1865). By the time she proposed a national day of mourning for the victims of all wars, she had also become aware of the carnage that was occurring overseas in the Franco-Prussian War, which had started in July of 1870.

That war, won by Germany, was brief, but close to 100,000 soldiers were killed in action and another 100,000 were severely wounded. As is tragically normal for warrior nations of all historical eras, nobody thought to count up the psychological and spiritual casualties or either soldiers or civilians. But Howe understood. Her awareness of the realities of war was possible because war correspondents were allowed to write about the barbaric nature of modern war, which horrified sensitive humans like Howe.

It hadn’t taken too long for peace-loving, justice-oriented and compassionate observers to recognize that war was indeed, the equivalent of hell on earth. Howe understood what Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman had meant when he uttered his famous statement about the satanic nature of war. Sherman’s statement indicted his era’s **“Chicken Hawks”**:

**“I confess without shame that I am sick and tired of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have never heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for more blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is Hell.”**

**\*Chicken Hawks** are flag-waving war-mongering political or economic leaders who have never experienced the gruesome realities of combat war and yet have no problems promoting militarism and sending somebody else’s sons and daughters off “into harm’s way”. Recent examples include Republicans like Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush, Scott Walker, Chris Christie, Mike Huckabee, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, Donald Rumsfeld, John Ashcroft, Condoleezza Rice, Mitch McConnell, Newt Gingrich, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Richard Perle, Eliot Abrams, Rudy Guiliani, Rick Santorum, Phil Gramm, and many Democrats as well, including Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

The list of Chicken Hawk elites also includes many right-wing journalists and reporters who particularly love to beat the war drum, but who also avoided serving in the military themselves, including Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Charles Krauthammer, George Will, Bill Kristol, Rush Limbaugh, etc, etc.

Women throughout history have witnessed their sons and husbands returning home broken in body, mind and spirit. Those psychologically traumatized veterans, no matter on what side of the battle line they fought, and whether they claimed some sort of hollow victory or not, were all equally defeated when the war ended. And most of them never regarded themselves as heroes until somebody else insisted on the designation. Their bodies and brains had been forever changed and they knew it. And in their hearts they knew that war was not glorious.

### Soldiers' Heart: the Civil War-era's PTSD

The unexpected development for many of the mothers of the returning Civil War soldiers was the fact that, while many of the veterans came home showing no physical scars, most of them were still disabled mentally, and many of them actually got progressively worse after coming home. In cases of combat-induced trauma the healing effect of time doesn't work like it can work in less serious types of trauma.

Military veterans with combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) all too commonly have trouble functioning in society after the war. Many become severely depressed and/or anxious and suffer disabling daytime flashbacks of the original trauma (called nightmares when they occur in their sleep, but which are commonly misdiagnosed by psychiatrists as hallucinations – thus accounting for the falsely high incidence of “schizophrenia” among Vietnam vets). Many military vets have serious insomnia (and thus sleep deprivation), serious concentration problems and are frequently develop drug addictions (to both illicit drugs and prescription drugs). Many combat-induced PTSD victims become suicidal, homicidal and/or turn to a life of crime (all these behaviors are seriously potentiated by the use of brain-altering addictive drugs or during the process of withdrawing from them).

It is a fact that some of the most infamous post-Civil War outlaws, train robbers, bank robbers and serial killers of the late 1800s got their start as Civil War soldiers (the members of the James and Younger gangs are good examples).

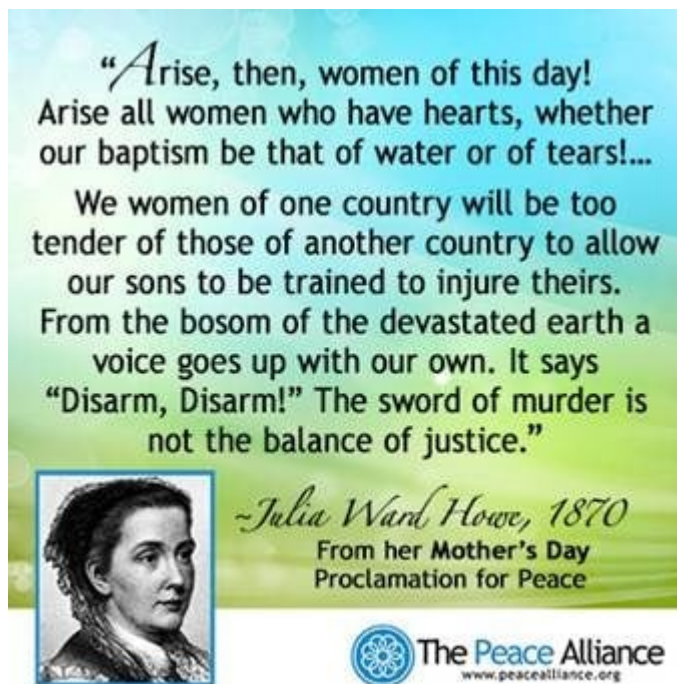
America has never known what to do with the large numbers of traumatized veterans that come home after any of their wars, and in the Civil War, the first “veterans homes” were constructed specifically for the care of invalided ex-soldiers who were “made crazy” by the war. Without the nation's help, these victims would have otherwise been homeless, despairing, jobless, helpless and likely to starve to death.

Many of these unfortunate veterans were diagnosed as having “Soldiers' Heart”, also known in the Civil War era as “Nostalgia”, a commonly incurable malady, that, after World War I came to be known as “shell shock”. After World War II the disorder was known as “combat fatigue”, and after the Vietnam War it was known as “post-traumatic stress disorder”.

### Howe's Call to Action for Mothers

Julia Ward Howe was a humanist who cared about suffering people. She was also a feminist,

a social justice activist and a suffragette, and it was because of her anti-war commitment that she wrote the famous “Mother’s Day Proclamation” five years after the end of the Civil War, which resulted in a total of 600,000 dead American soldiers, with no accurate count of the probably much larger number of those soldiers who were wounded, missing in action or committed suicide after the war was over.



The Mother’s Day Proclamation was partly a lament for the useless deaths and partly a call to stop future wars. The call to action was not directed at men, most of whom would have refused to admit, because of their masculine pride, that their dead buddies had died in vain. Rather, the call was directed at women, who were more thoughtful, humane and compassionate than the more violence-prone male members of the species.

#### The Intent of Howe’s Mother’s Day Proclamation has Been Conveniently Forgotten

Sadly, Howe’s original call for mothers to protest against war on a regular basis has been struck from the consciousness of our capitalist, corporate-controlled media, militarized and war-profiteering society. Howe’s call has been watered-down to a sentimental shadow of its original intent. And the war-weary world and its innocent children are increasingly suffering because of it.

Mother’s Day in America was officially established in 1914 (May 9) as an annual holiday, but no mention was made by President Wilson that Howe wanted the day dedicated as a day of peace. Wilson instead said it was to commemorate America’s mothers.

And so Mother’s Day eventually became commercialized into just another profit-making holiday for corporations, with no regard for its original intent (pro-peace/anti-war). So now, just like most American holidays (especially including the originally religious ones like Easter and Christmas), Mother’s Day has been commercially exploited. What was originally a call to mobilize outraged mothers to keep their duped sons and husbands from going off half-cocked to kill and die for some corporate war profiteer or other, has become just another opportunity for commercial enterprises to enhance their bottom lines. Mention of its original purpose is a rarity.

One wonders what “irrelevant agencies” Howe was talking about in line two of her Proclamation below. Surely she meant the predecessors of America’s modern-day militarists, politicians, bankers, media moguls, sociopathic corporatists and various bureaucratic agencies that have been royally messing things up all over the world.

Think of all the nations that America’s military has bombed, invaded, and occupied with many of them then being economically colonized by our predatory financial corporations. Think of all the countries around the world that our CIA has destabilized and helped to overthrow. Think of all the foreign national elections that our American Deep State has covertly influenced so that they will conform to our “national interests” (meaning, of course, mainly American “business interests”).



Here is a list of all the nations that America has bombed, just since World War II: China 1945-46, Korea 1950-53, China 1950-53, Guatemala 1954, Indonesia 1958, Cuba 1959-60, Guatemala 1960, Belgian Congo 1964, Guatemala 1964, Dominican Republic 1965-66, Peru 1965, Laos 1964-73, Vietnam 1961-73, Cambodia 1969-70, Guatemala 1967-69, Lebanon 1982-84, Grenada 1983-84, Libya 1986, El Salvador 1981-92, Nicaragua 1981-90, Iran 1987-88, Libya 1989, Panama 1989-90, Iraq 1991, Kuwait 1991, Somalia 1992-94, Bosnia 1995, Iran 1998, Sudan 1998, Afghanistan 1998, Yugoslavia – Serbia 1999, Afghanistan 2001 – ?, Iraq 2003 – ?, Somalia 2001, 2011, Pakistan 2009 – ?, Yemen 2009, 2011, 2016 – ?, Libya 2011, Syria 2015 – ?. The list of CIA covert operations is much longer.

When Will We (Males) Ever Learn?

Note in Howe’s manifesto below how strongly she felt about wives and mothers never again having to be put in the position of applauding their soldier-husbands or soldier-sons when they came home from war “reeking of carnage”. Howe clearly felt that mothers should never again let war-making, war-profiteering institutions make killers out of their sons who they had raised to be ethical, humane citizens with a love for humankind. The prevention of such “reeking of carnage” is so much simpler than the never-ending attempts to somehow reverse the often untreatable consequences of the horrors of combat war. ***An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and all that.***

Let the people of good will begin again to promote the peacemaking vision of Julia Ward Howe and her female cohorts a century and a half ago. Given America’s current chaotic time of perpetual war, there is no time to lose. A good place to begin would be this Mother’s Day, May 13, 2017, perhaps followed up by a boycott of the upcoming, highly militarized, war-promoting Duluth Air Show (featuring the US Navy Blue Angels, and various war planes



including an F-35, an F-16 and Canadian Air Force fighter jet ) partially designed to interest impressionable young boys into someday joining the military but with no information about the above-mentioned consequences of participating in war.

*Dr. Kohls is a retired physician from the Duluth, MN, USA who writes about issues of war, peace and mental health.*

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#### Julia Ward Howe's 1870 Mother's Day Proclamation

"Arise then, women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be of water or tears!

"Say firmly: 'We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies.

"Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

"Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have taught them of charity, mercy and patience.

"We women of one country will be too tender of those of another to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.

"From the bosom of the devastated earth, a voice goes up with our own. It says, 'Disarm, disarm'

"The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor does violence indicate possession.

"As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel.

"Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar but of God.

"In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions and the great and general interests of peace."

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