

GET THE POINT

Not to Know is Bad: Not to Wish to Know is Worse

BY: Fritz Pointer

“Everything we face, we may not be able to change, but it is certain that what is not faced can never be changed.” James Baldwin

One key tool for maintaining perpetual war is the “bloodless narrative” spun by Pentagon and media lies and manipulation, to create the impression that America’s wars have few consequences, at least for Americans: and appear too often not to care, or are completely oblivious to the pain and suffering of the recipients of their bombs and missiles, oblivious, that is, to the very meaning and power of empathy.

It was, no doubt, this kind of voluntary and involuntary *blindness*, this policy of ‘don’t look, don’t tell’ that banned media from Dover Air Force Base, where deceased American personnel arrive from the Middle East. The dead are one part of the ‘bloodless narrative,’ the wounded are another.

The “bloodless narrative” advances; giving us the *outside* story of brave soldiers, with their state-of-the-art prosthetic limbs, shown racing, skiing, surfing or working out. However, the *inside* story, revealed in a recent book by Ann Jones, *They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return from America’s Wars*, fills in what the narrative omits: Jones offers the haiku of one military trauma nurse:

“Amputees up to the waist. No arms. No legs. No genitals: Age 21 or 22. We cry.”

I remain mindful of Dalton Trumbo’s 1939 novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*. In this novel, the main character, Joe Bonham, relates the reality of the consequences of “a war between a man and a high-explosive shell.” As a result, he loses his arms, legs and is blind, and discovers a new purpose.

Believing he could still be of use, he says: “Take me in my glass case to the beaches and the county fairs and the church bazaars and the circuses and the traveling carnivals...they’ve seen nothing like this. This will be the goddamndest dime’s worth a man ever had...I am the live-man-who-is-dead...I’m the man who made the world safe for democracy...Let them join the army because the army makes men...”

Instead of the military recruiters in their best-dressed uniforms, with shiny buttons and fancy epaulets, showing up on campuses throughout America, Joe Bonham insists: “Take me into the schoolhouses all the schoolhouses in the world. Suffer little children to come unto me isn’t that right? ...Gather them around my case and say here little girl here little boy come and take a look at your daddy. Come and look at yourself. You’ll be like that when you grow up to be great big strong men and women. You’ll have a chance to die for your country. And you may not die you may come back like this. Not everybody dies little kiddies.”

“Take me into the colleges and universities and academies and convents. Call the girls together all the healthy beautiful young girls. Point down to me and say here girls is your father. Here is that boy who was strong last night...Look down on him girls so you won’t forget him. See that red gash there with mucus hanging to it? That was his face girls” (225-229).

The novel was inspired by an article Trumbo had read several years earlier; an account of a hospital visit by the Prince of Wales to a Canadian soldier who had lost all his limbs in World War I. Now, if we’re blind to, and don’t care to see and know what’s happening to “our children,” how will we find the empathy to care about what’s happening to the children of others? Trumbo was “Whiteballed” and persecuted, way back then, for daring to depict in fiction the horrors of war. It’s too bad that ignorance and simplicity have become virtues in America.

In the spirit of that old adage, “One picture is worth a thousand words”. Perhaps, if people could see, graphically and disturbingly what American bombs, missiles, mortars and artillery are doing to human beings, in the Middle East, they would demand it stop immediately. One of the ways the U.S. is able to sustain *perpetual war* is by hiding the bodies: bodies of U.S. (Christian) and Middle Eastern (Muslim) women, children and men.

We are no longer likely to see in commercial media (visual or print) such awful, nasty pictures of the consequences of war, at home and abroad. The military

has become more skillful at manipulating the media, even as the media has become more compliant. As long as Americans are convinced of the bloodlessness of perpetual war, the wars will go on. Not to know is bad: not to wish to know is worse.

Kathleen Barry (*Unmaking War, Remaking Men*) knows: she knows how the U.S. military spawns massacres and daily acts of depravity. She knows how *EMPATHY* can reshape our politics, our soldiers and ourselves. As one retired military general asked after the most recent massacre of 16 Afghan civilians: How much organized and spontaneous killing and destruction from air, land and sea – is too much?

“By now” Barry says, and consistent with the reports from corporate and alternative media over the last seven years: “Americans are used to such reports, most turning the other way either because they don’t care or because they feel impotent to make change, both reasons leaving the US military virtually untouched while one investigation and court judgment after another exonerates the murderers.”

August 5, 2017, a federal appeals court “Threw Out the Murder Conviction for Blackwater Guards in Nissour Square Massacre” (*The Real News*). At Nissour Square, in Iraq, Sept. 16, 2007, the four guards opened fire on the Iraqis, including women and children, with machine guns and grenade launchers. In addition to 14

dead, another 17 Iraqis were wounded. So, anyone any soldier considers a threat for any reason can be killed just in case they might pose a danger. State sponsored terrorism and murder, in the name of “Spreading Democracy.”

Killing civilians, children on their way to school, elders out for a daily stroll, the very definition of “Terrorism,” is, of course, not new for the United States. On August 6th, 1945, we learned that human intelligence had invented the means to bring the human experiment of 200,000 years to an end. “On that grim day” notes Noam Chomsky, “humanity entered into a new era, the nuclear age. It’s one that’s unlikely to last long, either we will bring it to an end or it’s likely to bring us to an end.” Cataclysmic climate change (the Anthropocene) and the nuclear age coincide, a dual threat to the perpetuation of organized human life (Chomsky, *Internationalism or Extinction*, 2020).

Let us conclude with this from broadcast journalist Walter Cronkite: “It seems to many of us that if we are to avoid the eventual catastrophic world conflict we must **strengthen the United Nations** as a first step toward a world government patterned after our own government. To do that, of course, **we Americans will have to yield up some of our sovereignty**. That would take a lot of courage, a lot of faith in the new order. But the American colonies did it once and brought forth one of the most nearly perfect unions the world has ever seen.” It

is better to know than not know that there is an Alternative: World Federation (a “new UN”) with enforceable world law...or world war.”

(Readers are directed to the appeal by DWF for the UN General Assembly to launch a review of the fatally flawed UN Charter, and using the *Earth Constitution* as a guide and model to form a more perfect world union.)