

Just and Unjust War

by Howard Zinn

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[Declarations of Independence](#),
(...also found in [The Zinn Reader](#), and [Howard Zinn on War](#))

*I enlisted in the Army Air Corps in World War II and was an eager bombardier, determined to do everything I could to help defeat fascism. Yet, at the end of the war, when I collected my little mementos--my photos, logs of some of my missions--I wrote on the folder, without really thinking, and surprising myself: "Never Again." In the years after the war, I began to plumb the reasons for that spontaneous reaction, and came to the conclusions which I describe in the following essay, published as a chapter in my book *Declarations of Independence* (HarperCollins, 1990).*

*Years before (in *Postwar America*, Bobbs Merrill, 1973), I had written an essay called "The Best of Wars," in which I questioned--I was unaware of anyone else asking the same question--the total acceptance of World War II. After my own experience in that war, I had moved away from my own rather orthodox view that there are just wars and unjust wars, to a universal rejection of war as a solution to any human problem. Of all the positions I have taken over the years on questions of history and politics, this has undoubtedly aroused the most controversy. It is obviously a difficult viewpoint to present persuasively. I try to do that here, and leave it to the reader to judge whether I have succeeded.*

There are some people who do not question war. In 1972, the general who was head of the U.S. Strategic Air Command told an interviewer, "I've been asked often about my moral scruples if I had to send the planes out with hydrogen bombs. My answer is always the same. I would be concerned only with my professional responsibility."

It was a Machiavellian reply. Machiavelli did not ask if making war was right or wrong. He just wrote about the best way to wage it so as to conquer the enemy. One of his books is called *The Art of War*.

That title might make artists uneasy. Indeed, artists--poets, novelists, and playwrights as well as musicians, painters, and actors--have shown a special aversion to war. Perhaps because, as the playwright Arthur Miller once said, "When

the guns boom, the arts die." But that would make their interest too self-centered; they have always been sensitive to the fate of the larger society round them. They have questioned war, whether in the fifth century before Christ, with the plays of Euripedes, or in modern times, with the paintings of Goya and Picasso.

Machiavelli was being realistic. Wars were going to be fought. The only question was how to win them.

Some people have believed that war is not just inevitable but desirable. It is adventure and excitement, it brings out the best qualities in men--courage, comradeship, and sacrifice. It gives respect and glory to a country. In 1897, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to a friend, "In strict confidence...I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one."

In our time, fascist regimes have glorified war as heroic and ennobling. Bombing Ethiopia in 1935, Mussolini's son-in-law Count Ciano described the explosions as an aesthetic thrill, as having the beauty of a flower unfolding.

In the 1980s, two writers of a book on war see it as an effective instrument of national policy and say that even nuclear war can, under certain circumstances, be justified. They are contemptuous of "the pacifist passions: self-indulgence and fear," and of "American statesmen, who believe victory is an archaic concept." They say, "The bottom line in war and hence in political warfare is who gets buried and who gets to walk in the sun."

Most people are not that enamored of war. They see it as bad, but also as a possible means to something good. And so they distinguish between wars that are just and those that are unjust. The religions of the West and Middle East--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam--approve of violence and war under certain circumstances. The Catholic church has a specific doctrine of "just" and "unjust" war, worked out in some detail. Political philosophers today argue about which wars, or which actions in wars, may be considered just or unjust.

Beyond both viewpoints--the glorification of war and the weighing of good and bad wars--there is a third: that war is too evil to ever be just. The monk Erasmus, writing in the early sixteenth century, was repelled by war of any kind. One of his pupils was killed in battle and he reacted with anguish:

Tell me, what had you to do with Mars, the stupidest of all the poet's gods, you who were consecrated to the Muses, nay to Christ? Your youth, your beauty, your gentle nature, your honest mind--what had they to do with the flourishing of trumpets, the bombards, the swords?

Erasmus described war: "There is nothing more wicked, more disastrous, more widely destructive, more deeply tenacious, more loathsome." He said this was repugnant to nature: "Whoever heard of a hundred thousand animals rushing together to butcher each other, as men do everywhere?"

Erasmus saw war as useful to governments, for it enabled them to enhance their power over their subjects: "...once war has been declared, then all the affairs of the State are at the mercy of the appetites of a few."

This absolute aversion to war of any kind is outside the orthodoxy of modern thinking. In a series of lectures at Oxford University in the 1970s, English scholar Michael Howard talked disparagingly about Erasmus. He called him simplistic, unsophisticated, and someone who did not see beyond the "surface manifestations" of war. He said,

With all [Erasmus's] genius he was not a profound political analyst, nor did he ever have to exercise the responsibilities of power. Rather he was the first in that long line of humanitarian thinkers for whom it was enough to chronicle the horrors of war in order to condemn it.

Howard had praise for Thomas More: "Very different was the approach of Erasmus's friend, Thomas More; a man who had exercised political responsibility and, perhaps in consequence, saw the problem in all its complexity." More was a realist; Howard says,

He accepted, as thinkers for the next two hundred years were to accept that European society was organized in a system of states in which war was an inescapable process for the settlement of differences in the absence of any higher common jurisdiction. That being the case, it was a requirement of humanity, of religion and of common sense alike that those wars should be fought in such a manner as to cause as little damage as possible.. For better or worse war was an institution which could not be eliminated from the international system. All that could be done about it was, so far as possible, to codify its rationale and to civilize its means.

Thus, Machiavelli said: Don't question the ends of the prince, just tell him how best to do what he wants to do, make the means more efficient. Thomas More said: You can't do anything about the ends, but try to make the means more moral.

In the 400 years following the era of Machiavelli and More, making war more humane became the preoccupation of certain liberal "realists." Hugo Grotius, writing a century after More, proposed laws to govern the waging of war (Concerning the Law of War and Peace). The beginning of the twentieth century saw international conferences at The Hague in the Netherlands and at Geneva in

Switzerland which drew up agreements on how to wage war.

These realistic approaches however, had little effect on the reality of war. Rather than becoming more controlled, war became more uncontrolled and more deadly, using more horrible means and killing more noncombatants than ever before in the history of mankind. We note the use of poison gas in World War I, the bombardment of cities in World War II, the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki near the end of that war, the use of napalm in Vietnam, and the chemical warfare in the Iran-Iraq war of the early 1980s.

Albert Einstein, observing the effects of attempts to "humanize" wars, became more and more anguished. In 1932, he attended a conference of sixty nations in Geneva and listened to the lengthy discussions of which weapons were acceptable and which were not, which forms of killing were legitimate and which were not.

Einstein was a shy, private person, but he did something extraordinary for him: he called a press conference in Geneva. The international press turned out in force to hear Einstein, already world famous for his theories of relativity. Einstein told the assembled reporters, "One does not make wars less likely by formulating rules of warfare....War cannot be humanized. It can only be abolished." But the Geneva conference went on, working out rules for "humane" warfare, rules that were repeatedly ignored in the world war soon to come, a war of endless atrocities.

In early 1990, President George Bush, while approving new weapons systems for nuclear warheads (of which the United States had about 30,000) and refusing to join the Soviet Union in stopping nuclear testing, was willing to agree to destroy chemical weapons, but only over a ten-year period. Such are the absurdities of "humanizing" war.

Liberal States and Just Wars: Athens

The argument that there are just wars often rests on the social system of the nation engaging in war. It is supposed that if a "liberal" state is at war with a "totalitarian" state, then the war is justified. The beneficent nature of a government is assumed to give rightness to the wars it wages.

Ancient Athens has been one of the most admired of all societies, praised for its democratic institutions and its magnificent cultural achievements. It had enlightened statesmen (Solon and Pericles), pioneer historians (Herodotus and Thucydides), great philosophers (Plato and Aristotle), and an extraordinary quartet of playwrights (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes). When it went to war in 431 BC against its rival power, the city-state of Sparta, the war seemed to

be between a democratic society and a military dictatorship.

The great qualities of Athens were described early in that war by the Athenian leader Pericles at a public celebration for the warriors, dead or alive. The bones of the dead were placed in chests; there was an empty litter for the missing. There was a procession, a burial, and then Pericles spoke. Thucydides recorded Pericles' speech in his History of the Peloponnesian War:

Before I praise the dead, I should like to point out by what principles of action we rose to power, and under what institutions and through what manner of life our empire became great. Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institutions of others.... It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few.... The law secures equal justice to all alike.... Neither is poverty a bar.... There is no exclusiveness in our public life.... At home the style of our life is refined.... Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us.... And although our opponents are fighting for their homes and we on foreign soil, we seldom have any difficulty in overcoming them.... I have dwelt upon the greatness of Athens because I want to show you that we are contending for a higher prize than those who enjoy none of these privileges.

Similarly, American presidents in time of war have pointed to the qualities of the American system as evidence for the justness of the cause. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt were liberals, which gave credence to their words exalting the two world wars, just as the liberalism of Truman made going into Korea more acceptable and the idealism of Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society gave an early glow of righteousness to the war in Vietnam.

But we should take a closer look at the claim that liberalism at home carries over into military actions abroad.

The tendency, especially in time of war, is to exaggerate the difference between oneself and the opponent, to assume the conflict is between total good and total evil. It was true that Athens had certain features of political democracy. Each of ten tribes selected 50 representatives, by lot, to make a governing council of 500. Trial juries were large, from 100 to 1,000 people, with no judge and no professional lawyers; the cases were handled by the people involved.

Yet, these democratic institutions only applied to a minority of the population. A majority of the people--125,000 out of 225,000--were slaves. Even among the free people, only males were considered citizens with the right to participate in the political process.

Of the slaves, 50,000 worked in industry (this is as if, in the United States in 1990,

50 million people worked in industry as slaves) and 10,000 worked in the mines. H.D. Kitto, a leading scholar on Greek civilization and a great admirer of Athens, wrote: "The treatment of the miners was callous in the extreme, the only serious blot on the general humanity of the Athenians.. Slaves were often worked until they died." (To Kitto and others, slavery was only a "blot" on an otherwise wonderful society.)

The jury system in Athens was certainly preferable to summary executions by tyrants. Nevertheless, it put Socrates to death for speaking his mind to young people.

Athens was more democratic than Sparta, but this did not affect its addiction to warfare, to expansion into other territories, to the ruthless conduct of war against helpless peoples. In modern times we have seen the ease with which parliamentary democracies and constitutional republics have been among the most ferocious of imperialists. We recall the British and French empires of the nineteenth century and the United States as a world imperial power in this century.

Throughout the long war with Sparta, Athens' democratic institutions and artistic achievements continued. But the death toll was enormous. Pericles, on the eve of war, refused to make concessions that might have prevented it. In the second year of war, with the casualties mounting quickly, Pericles urged his fellow citizens not to weaken: "You have a great polis, and a great reputation; you must be worthy of them. Half the world is yours--the sea. For you the alternative to empire is slavery."

Pericles' kind of argument ("Ours is a great nation. It is worth dying for.") has persisted and been admired down to the present. Kitto, commenting on that speech by Pericles, again overcome by admiration, wrote,

When we reflect that this plague was as awful as the Plague of London, and that the Athenians had the additional horror of being cooped up inside their fortifications by the enemy without, we must admire the greatness of the man who could talk to his fellow citizens like this, and the greatness of the people who could not only listen to such a speech at such a time but actually be substantially persuaded by it.

They were enough persuaded by it so that the war with Sparta lasted twenty-seven years. Athens lost through plague and war (according to Kitto's own estimate) perhaps one-fourth of its population.

However liberal it was for its free male citizens at home, Athens became more and more cruel to its victims in war, not just to its enemy Sparta, but to every one caught in the crossfire of the two antagonists. As the war went on, Kitto himself

says, "a certain irresponsibility grew."

Could the treatment of the inhabitants of the island of Melos be best described as "a certain irresponsibility"? Athens demanded that the Melians submit to its rule. The Melians, however, argued (as reported by Thucydides), "It may be to your interest to be our masters, but how can it be ours to be your slaves?" The Melians would not submit. They fought and were defeated. Thucydides wrote, "The Athenians thereupon put to death all who were of military age, and made slaves of the women and children." (It was shortly after this event that Euripides wrote his great antiwar play, *The Trojan Women*).

What the experience of Athens suggests is that a nation may be relatively liberal at home and yet totally ruthless abroad. Indeed, it may more easily enlist its population in cruelty to others by pointing to the advantages at home. An entire nation is made into mercenaries, being paid with a bit of democracy at home for participating in the destruction of life abroad.

Liberalism at War

Liberalism at home, however, seems to become corrupted by war waged abroad. French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau noted that conquering nations "make war at least as much on their subjects as on their enemies." Tom Paine, in America, saw war as the creature of governments, serving their own interests, not the interests of justice for their citizens. "Man is not the enemy of man but through the medium of a false system of government." In our time, George Orwell has written that wars are mainly internal.

One certain effect of war is to diminish freedom of expression. Patriotism becomes the order of the day, and those who question the war are seen as traitors, to be silenced and imprisoned.

Mark Twain, observing the United States at the turn of the century, its wars in Cuba and the Philippines, described in *The Mysterious Stranger* the process by which wars that are at first seen as unnecessary by the mass of the people become converted into "just" wars:

The loud little handful will shout for war. The pulpit will warily and cautiously protest at first.... The great mass of the nation will rub its sleepy eyes, and will try to make out why there should be a war, and they will say earnestly and indignantly: "It is unjust and dishonorable and there is no need for war."

Then the few will shout even louder.... Before long you will see a curious thing: anti-war speakers will be stoned from the platform, and free speech will

be strangled by hordes of furious men who still agree with the speakers but dare not admit it...

Next, the statesmen will invent cheap lies...and each man will be glad of these lies and will study them because they soothe his conscience; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just and he will thank God for a better sleep he enjoys by his self-deception.

Mark Twain died in 1910. In 1917, the United States entered the slaughterhouse of the European war, and the process of silencing dissent and converting a butchery into a just war took place as he had predicted.

President Woodrow Wilson tried to rouse the nation, using the language of a crusade. It was a war, he said, "to end all wars." but large numbers of Americans were reluctant to join. A million men were needed, yet in the first six weeks after the declaration of war only 73,000 volunteered. It seemed that men would have to be compelled to fight by fear of prison, so Congress enacted a draft law.

The Socialist Party at the time was a formidable influence in the country. It had perhaps 100,000 members, and more than a thousand Socialists had been elected to office in 340 towns and cities. Probably a million Americans read Socialist newspapers. There were fifty-five weekly Socialist newspapers in Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas alone; over a hundred Socialists were elected to office in Oklahoma. The Socialist party candidate for president, Eugene Debs, got 900,000 votes in 1912 (Wilson won with 6 million).

A year before the United States entered the European war, Helen Keller, blind and deaf and a committed Socialist, told an audience at Carnegie Hall:

Strike against war, for without you no battles can be fought! Strike against manufacturing shrapnel and gas bombs and all other tools of murder! Strike against preparedness that means death and misery to millions of human beings! Be not dumb, obedient slaves in an army of destruction! Be heroes in an army of construction!

The day after Congress declared war, the Socialist party met in an emergency convention and called the declaration "a crime against the American people." Antiwar meetings took place all over the country. In the local elections of 1917, Socialists made great gains. Ten Socialists were elected to the New York State legislature. In Chicago the Socialist party had won 3.6 percent of the vote in 1915 and it got 34.7 percent in 1917. But with the advent of war, speaking against it became a crime; Debs and hundreds of other Socialists were imprisoned.

When that war ended, 10 million men of various countries had died on the battlefields of Europe, and millions more had been blinded, maimed, gassed, shell-shocked, and driven mad. It was hard to find in that war any gain for the human race to justify that suffering, that death.

Indeed, when the war was studied years later, it was clear that no rational decision based on any moral principle had led the nations into war. Rather, there were imperial rivalries, greed for more territory, a lust for national prestige, and the stupidity of revenge. And at the last moment, there was a reckless plunge by governments caught up in a series of threats and counterthreats, mobilizations and counter-mobilizations, ultimatums and counter-ultimatums, creating a momentum that mediocre leaders had neither the courage nor the will to stop. As described by Barbara Tuchman in her book *The Guns of August*:

War pressed against every frontier. Suddenly dismayed, governments struggled and twisted to fend it off. It was no use. Agents at frontiers were reporting every cavalry patrol as a deployment to beat the mobilization gun. General staffs, goaded by their relentless timetables, were pounding the table for the signal to move lest their opponents gain an hour's head start. Appalled upon the brink, the chiefs of state who would be ultimately responsible for their country's fate attempted to back away, but the pull of military schedules dragged them forward.

Bitterness and disillusion followed the end of the war, and this was reflected in the literature of those years: Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, and Ford Madox Ford's *No More Parades*. In Europe, German war veteran Erich Maria Remarque wrote the bitter antiwar novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

In 1935 French playwright Jean Giraudoux wrote *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (*The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*; the English translation was retitled *Tiger at the Gates*). The war of the Greeks against Troy, more than a thousand years before Christ, was provoked, according to legend, by the kidnapping of the beautiful Helen by the Trojans. Giraudoux at one point uses Hecuba, an old woman, and Demokos, a Trojan soldier, to show how the ugliness of war is masked by attractive causes, as in this case, the recapture of Helen.

Demokos: Tell us before you go, Hecuba, what it is you think war looks like.

Hecuba: Like the bottom of a baboon. When the baboon is up in a tree, with its hind end facing us, there is the face of war exactly; scarlet, scaly glazed, framed in a clotted filthy wig.

Demokos: So war has two faces: this you describe, and Helen's.

An Eager Bombardier

My own first impressions of something called war had come at the age of ten, when I read with excitement a series of books about "the boy allies"--A French boy, an English boy, an American boy, and a Russian boy, who became friends, united in the wonderful cause to defeat Germany in World War I. It was an adventure, a romance, told in a group of stories about comradeship and heroism. It was war cleansed of death and suffering.

If anything was left of that romantic view of war, it was totally extinguished when, at eighteen, I read a book by a Hollywood screenwriter named Dalton Trumbo (jailed in the 1950s for refusing to talk to the House Committee on Un-American Activities about his political affiliations). The book was called *Johnny Got His Gun*. It is perhaps, the most powerful antiwar novel ever written.

Here was war in its ultimate horror. A slab of flesh in an American uniform had been found on the battlefield, still alive, with no legs, no arms, no face, blind, deaf, unable to speak, but the heart still beating, the brain still functioning, able to think about his past, ponder his present condition, and wonder if he will ever be able to communicate with the world outside.

For him, the oratory of the politicians who sent him off to war--the language of freedom, democracy, and justice--is now seen as the ultimate hypocrisy. A mute, thinking torso on a hospital bed, he finds a way to communicate with a kindly nurse, and when a visiting delegation of military brass comes by to pin a medal on his body, he taps out a message. He says: Take me into the workplaces, into the schools, show me to the little children and to the college students, let them see what war is like.

Take me wherever there are parliaments and diets and congresses and chambers of statesmen. I want to be there when they talk about honor and justice and making the world safe for democracy and fourteen points and the self determination of peoples.... Put my glass case upon the speaker's desk and every time the gavel descends let me feel its vibration.... Then let them speak of trade policies and embargoes and new colonies and old grudges. Let them debate the menace of the yellow race and the white man's burden and the course of empire and why should we take all this crap off Germany or whoever the next Germany is.... Let them talk more munitions and airplanes and battleships and tanks and gases and why of course we've got to have them we can't get along without them how in the world could we protect the peace if we didn't have them....

But before they vote on them before they give the order for all the little guys to start killing each other let the main guy rap his gavel on my case and point

down at me and say here gentlemen is the only issue before this house and that is are you for this thing here or are you against it.

Johnny Got His Gun had a shattering effect on me when I read it. It left me with a bone-deep hatred of war.

Around the same time I read a book by Walter Millis, *The Road to War*, which was an account of how the United States had been led into World War I by a series of lies and deceptions. Afterward I would learn more about those lies. For instance, the sinking of the ship *Lusitania* by German submarines was presented as a brutal, unprovoked act against a harmless passenger vessel. It was later revealed that the *Lusitania* was loaded with munitions, intended for use against Germany; the ship's manifest had been falsified to hide that. This didn't lessen the ugliness of the sinking, but did show something about the ways in which nations are lured into war.

Class consciousness accounted for some of my feeling about war. I agreed with the judgment of the Roman biographer Plutarch, who said, "The poor go to war, to fight and die for the delights, riches, and superfluities of others."

And yet, in early 1943, at the age of twenty-one, I enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force. American troops were already in North Africa, Italy, and England; there was fierce fighting on the Russian front and the United States and Britain were preparing for the invasion of Western Europe. Bombing raids were taking place daily on the continent, U.S. planes bombing during the day, British planes bombing at night. I was so anxious to get overseas and start dropping bombs that after my training ~n gunnery school and bombing school I traded places with another man who was scheduled to go overseas sooner than me.

I had learned to hate war. But this war was different. It was not for profit or empire, it was a people's war, a war against the unspeakable brutality of fascism. I had been reading about Italian fascism in a book about Mussolini by journalist George Seldes called *Sawdust Caesar*. I was inspired by his account of the Socialist Matteotti, who stood up in the Italian Chamber of Deputies to denounce the establishment of a dictatorship. The black-shirted thugs of Mussolini's party picked up Matteotti outside his home one morning and shot him to death. That was fascism.

Mussolini's Italy, deciding to restore the glory of the old Roman Empire, invaded the East African country of Ethiopia, a pitifully poor country. Its people, armed with spears and muskets, tried to fight off an Italian army equipped with the most modern weapons and with an air force that, unopposed, dropped bombs on the

civilian populations of Ethiopian towns and villages. The Ethiopians who resisted were slaughtered, and finally surrendered.

American black poet Langston Hughes wrote,

The little fox is still--
The dogs of war have made their kill.

I was thirteen when this happened and was only vaguely aware of headlines: "Italian Planes Bomb Addis Ababa." But later I read about it and also about German Nazism. John Gunther's *Inside Europe* introduced me to the rise of Hitler, the SA, the SS, the attacks on the Jews, the shrill oratory of the little man with the mustache, and the monster rallies of Germans in sports stadia who shouted in unison: "Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!" Opponents were beaten and murdered. I learned the phrase concentration camp.

I came across a book called *The Brown Book of the Nazi Terror*. It told in detail about the burning of the German Reichstag shortly after Hitler came to power and the arrest of Communists accused of setting the fire, clearly a frame-up. It told also of the extraordinary courage of the defendants, led by the remarkable Bulgarian Communist George Dimitrov, who rose in the courtroom to point an accusing finger at Hermann Goering, Hitler's lieutenant. Dimitrov tore the prosecution's case to shreds and denounced the Nazi regime. The defendants were acquitted by the court. It was an amazing moment, which would never be repeated under Hitler.

In 1936 Hitler and Mussolini sent their troops and planes to support the Spanish Fascist Franco, who had plunged his country into civil war to overthrow the mildly socialist Spanish government. The Spanish Civil War became the symbol all over the world of resistance to fascism, and young men--many of them socialists, Communists and anarchists--volunteered from a dozen countries, forming brigades (from the United States, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade), going immediately into battle against the better-equipped army of Franco. They fought heroically and died in great numbers. The Fascists won.

Then came the Hitler onslaught in Europe--Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. France and England entered the war, and, a year after the quick defeat of France, three million German soldiers supported by tanks, artillery, and dive bombers turned eastward to attack the Soviet Union ("Operation Barbarossa") along a thousand-mile front.

Fascism had to be resisted and defeated. I had no doubts. This was a just war.

I was stationed at an airfield out in the countryside of East Anglia (between the

towns of Diss and Eye), that part of England that bulges eastward toward the Continent. East Anglia was crowded with military airfields, from which hundreds of bombers went out every day across the Channel.

Our little airfield housed the 490th Bomb Group. Its job was to make sure that every morning twelve B17s--splendid-looking, low-winged, four-engined heavy bombers--each with a crew of nine, wearing sheepskin jackets and fur-lined boots over electrically heated suits and equipped with oxygen masks and throat mikes--were ready to fly. We would take off around dawn and assemble with other groups of twelve, and then these huge flotillas would make their way east. Our bomb bay was full; our fifty-caliber machine guns (four in the nose, one in the upper turret, one in the ball turret, two in the waist, and one in the tail) were loaded and ready for attacking fighter planes.

I remember one morning standing out on that airfield, arguing with another bombardier over who was scheduled to fly that morning's mission. The target was Regensburg, and Intelligence reported that it was heavily defended by anti-aircraft guns, but the two of us argued heatedly over who was going to fly that mission. I wonder today, was his motive like mine--wanting to fly another mission to bring closer the defeat of fascism. Or was it because we had all been awakened at one AM in the cold dark of England in March, loaded onto trucks, taken to hours of briefings and breakfast, weighed down with equipment, and after going through all that, he did not want to be deprived of another step toward his air medal, another mission. Even though he might be killed.

Maybe that was partly my motive too, I can't be sure. But for me, it was also a war of high principle, and each bombing mission was a mission of high principle. The moral issue could hardly be clearer. The enemy could not be more obviously evil--openly espousing the superiority of the white Aryan, fanatically violent and murderous toward other nations, herding its own people into concentration camps, executing them if they dared dissent. The Nazis were pathological killers. They had to be stopped, and there seemed no other way but by force.

If there was such a thing as a just war, this was it. Even Dalton Trumbo, who had written *Johnny Got His Gun*, did not want his book to be reprinted, did not want that overpowering antiwar message to reach the American public, when a war had to be fought against fascism.

If, therefore, anyone wants to argue (as I am about to do) that there is no such thing as a just war, then World War II is the supreme test.

I flew the last bombing missions of the war, got my Air Medal and my battle stars. I

was quietly proud of my participation in the great war to defeat fascism. But when I packed up my things at the end of the war and put my old navigation logs and snapshots and other mementos in a folder, I marked that folder, almost without thinking, "Never Again."

I'm still not sure why I did that, because it was not until years later that I began consciously to question the motives, the conduct, and the consequences of that crusade against fascism. The point was not that my abhorrence of fascism was in any way diminished. I still believed something had to be done to stop fascism. But that clear certainty of moral rightness that propelled me into the Air Force as an enthusiastic bombardier was now clouded over by many thoughts.

Perhaps my conversations with that gunner on the other crew, the one who loaned me *The Yogi* and the *Commisar*, gave me the first flickers of doubt. He spoke of the war as "an imperialist war," fought on both sides for national power. Britain and the United States opposed fascism only because it threatened their own control over resources and people. Yes, Hitler was a maniacal dictator and invader of other countries. But what of the British Empire and its long history of wars against native peoples to subdue them for the profit and glory of the empire? And the Soviet Union--was it not also a brutal dictatorship, concerned not with the working classes of the world but with its own national power?

I was puzzled. "Why," I asked my friend, "are you flying missions, risking your life, in a war you don't believe in?" His answer astonished me. "I'm here to speak to people like you."

I found out later he was a member of the Socialist Workers party; they opposed the war but believed that instead of evading military service they should enter it and propagandize against the war every moment they could. I couldn't understand this, but I was impressed by it. Two weeks after that conversation with him, he was killed on a mission over Germany.

After the war, my doubts grew. I was reading history. Had the United States fought in World War II for the rights of nations to independence and self-determination? What of its own history of expansion through war and conquest? It had waged a hundred-year war against the native Americans, driving them off their ancestral lands. The United States had instigated a war with Mexico and taken almost half its land, had sent marines at least twenty times into the countries of the Caribbean for power and profit, had seized Hawaii, had fought a brutal war to subjugate the Filipinos, and had sent 5,000 marines into Nicaragua in 1926. Our nation could hardly claim it believed in the right of self-determination unless it believed in it

selectively.

Indeed, the United States had observed Fascist expansion without any strong reactions. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, the United States, while declaring an embargo on munitions, allowed American businesses to send oil to Italy, which was crucial for carrying on the war against Ethiopia. An official of the U.S. State Department, James E. Miller, reviewing a book on the relations between the United States and Mussolini, acknowledged that "American aid certainly reinforced the hold of fascism."

During the Spanish Civil War, while the Fascist side was receiving arms from Hitler and Mussolini, Roosevelt's administration sponsored a Neutrality Act that shut off help to the Spanish government fighting Franco.

Neither the invasion of Austria nor Czechoslovakia nor Poland brought the United States into armed collision with fascism. We went to war only when our possession Hawaii was attacked and when our navy was disabled by Japanese bombs. There was no reason to think that it was Japan's bombing of civilians at Pearl Harbor that caused us to declare war. Japan's attack on China in 1937, her massacre of civilians at Nanking, and her bombardments of helpless Chinese cities had not provoked the United States to war.

The sudden indignation against Japan contained a good deal of hypocrisy. The United States, along with Japan and the great European powers, had participated in the exploitation of China. Our Open Door Policy of 1901 accepted that ganging up of the great powers on China. The United States had exchanged notes with Japan in 1917 saying, "the Government of the United States recognizes that Japan has special interests in China," and in 1928, American consuls in China supported the coming of Japanese troops.

It was only when Japan threatened potential U.S. markets by its attempted takeover of China, but especially as it moved toward the tin, rubber, and oil of Southeast Asia, that the United States became alarmed and took those measures that led to the Japanese attack: a total embargo on scrap iron and a total embargo on oil in the summer of 1941.

A State Department memorandum on Japanese expansion, a year before Pearl Harbor, did not talk of the independence of China or the principle of self-determination. It said,

Our general diplomatic and strategic position would be considerably weakened--by our loss of Chinese, Indian and South Seas markets (and by our loss of much of the

Japanese market for our goods, as Japan would become more and more self-sufficient) as well as by insurmountable restrictions upon our access to the rubber, tin jute, and other vital materials of the Asian and Oceanic regions.

A War to Save the Jews

Did the United States enter the war because of its indignation at Hitler's treatment of the Jews? Hitler had been in power a year, and his campaign against the Jews had already begun when, in January 1934, a resolution was introduced into the Senate expressing "surprise and pain" at what the Germans were doing and asking for a restoration of Jewish rights. The State Department used its influence to get the resolution buried in committee.

Even after we were in the war against Germany (it should be noted that after Pearl Harbor Germany declared war on the United States, not vice versa) and reports began to arrive that Hitler was planning the annihilation of the Jews, Roosevelt's administration failed to take steps that might have saved thousands of lives.

Goebbels, minister of propaganda for Hitler's Germany, wrote in his diary on December 13, 1942: "At bottom, however, I believe both the English and the Americans are happy we are exterminating the Jewish riffraff." Goebbels was undoubtedly engaging in wishful thinking, but in fact, the English and American governments had not shown by their actions that they were terribly concerned about the Jews. As for Roosevelt, he shunted the problem to the State Department, where it did not become a matter of high priority.

As an example of this failure to treat the situation as an emergency, Raul Hilberg, a leading scholar of the Holocaust, points to an event that took place in 1942. Early in August of that year, with 1,500,000 Jews already dead, the Jewish leader Stephen Wise was informed indirectly through a German industrialist that there was a plan in Hitler's headquarters for the extermination of all Jews; Wise brought the information to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. Welles asked him not to release the story until it was investigated for confirmation. Three months were spent checking the report. During that time a million Jews were killed in Europe.

It is doubtful that all those Jews could have been saved. But thousands could have been rescued. All the entrenched governments and organizations were negligent.

The British were slow and cautious. In March 1943, in the presence of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary of State Hull pressed British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on plans to rescue the 60,000 Jews in Bulgaria threatened with death. According to a memo by Roosevelt aide Harry Hopkins who was at that meeting, Eden worried

that Polish and German Jews might then also ask to be rescued. "Hitler might well take us up on any such offer and there simply are not enough ships and means of transportation in the world to handle them." When there was a possibility of bombing the railroad lines leading into the murder chambers of Auschwitz, to stop further transportation of Jews there, the opportunity was ignored.

It should be noted that the Jewish organizations themselves behaved shamefully. In 1984, the American Jewish Commission on the Holocaust reviewed the historical record. It found that the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a relief agency set up during World War II by the various Jewish groups, "was dominated by the wealthier and more 'American' elements of U.S. Jewry.... Thus, its policy was to do nothing in wartime that the U.S. government would not officially condone."

Raul Hilberg points out that the Hungarian Jews might have been saved by a bargain: the Allies would not make air raids on Hungary if the Jews would be kept in the cities and not sent away. But "the Jews could not think in terms of interfering with the war effort, and the Allies on their part could not conceive of such a promise.... The Allied bombers roared over Hungary at will, killing Hungarians and Jews alike."

As I read this I recalled that one of the bombing raids I had done was on a town in Hungary.

Not only did waging war against Hitler fail to save the Jews, it may be that the war itself brought on the Final Solution of genocide. This is not to remove the responsibility from Hitler and the Nazis, but there is much evidence that Germany's anti-Semitic actions, cruel as they were, would not have turned to mass murder were it not for the psychic distortions of war, acting on already distorted minds. Hitler's early aim was forced emigration, not extermination, but the frenzy of it created an atmosphere in which the policy turned to genocide. This is the view of Princeton historian Arno Mayer, in his book *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken*, and it is supported by the chronology--that not until Germany was at war was the Final Solution adopted.

Hilberg, in his classic work on the Holocaust, says, "From 1938 to 1940, Hitler made extraordinary and unusual attempts to bring about a vast emigration scheme.... The Jews were not killed before the emigration policy was literally exhausted." The Nazis found that the Western powers were not anxious to cooperate in emigration and that no one wanted the Jews.

A War for Self-Determination?

We should examine another claim, that World War II was fought for the right of nations to determine their own destiny. This was declared with great fanfare by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt when they met off the coast of Newfoundland in August 1941 and announced the Atlantic Charter, saying their countries, looking to the postwar world, respected "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." This was a direct appeal to the dependent countries of the world, especially the colonies of Britain, France, Holland, and Belgium, that their rights of self-determination would be upheld after the war. The support of the nonwhite colonial world was seen as crucial to the defeat of fascism.

However, two weeks before the Atlantic Charter, with the longtime French colony of Indochina very much in mind, acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles had given quiet assurances to the French: "This Government, mindful of its traditional friendship for France, has deeply sympathized with the desire of the French people to maintain their territories and to preserve them intact." And in late 1942, Roosevelt's personal representative told French General Henri Giraud, "It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be reestablished as soon as possible throughout all the territory; metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939." (These assurances of the United States are especially interesting in view of the claims of the United States during the Vietnam War, that the United States was fighting for the right of the Vietnamese to rule themselves.)

If neither saving the Jews nor guaranteeing the principle of self-determination was the war aim of the United States (and there is no evidence that either was the aim of Britain or the Soviet Union), then what were the principal motives? Overthrowing the governments of Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo was certainly one of them. But was this desired on humanitarian grounds or because these regimes threatened the positions of the Allies in the world?

The rhetoric of morality--the language of freedom and democracy--had some substance to it, in that it represented the war aims of many ordinary citizens. However, it was not the citizenry but the governments who decided how the war was fought and who had the power to shape the world afterward.

Behind the halo of righteousness that surrounded the war against fascism, the usual motives of governments, repeatedly shown in history, were operating: the aggrandizement of the nation, more profit for its wealthy elite, and more power to its political leaders.

One of the most distinguished of British historians, A.J.P. Taylor, commented on World War II that "the British and American governments wanted no change in

Europe except that Hitler should disappear." At the end of the war, novelist George Orwell, always conscious of class, wrote, "I see the railings [which enclosed the parks and had been torn up so the metal could be used in war production] are returning in one London park after another, so the lawful denizens of the squares can make use of their keys again, and the children of the poor can be kept out."

World War II was an opportunity for United States business to penetrate areas that up to that time had been dominated by England. Secretary of State Hull said early in the war,

Leadership toward a new system of international relationships in trade and other economic affairs will devolve very largely upon the United States because of our great economic strength. We should assume this leadership, and the responsibility that goes with it, primarily for reasons of pure national self-interest.

Henry Luce, who owned three of the most influential magazines in the United States --Life, Time, and Fortune--and had powerful connections in Washington, wrote a famous editorial for Life in 1941 called "The American Century." This was the time, he said, "to accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit."

The British, weakened by war, clearly could not maintain their old empire. In 1944 England and the United States signed a pact on oil agreeing on "the principle of equal opportunity." This meant the United States was muscling in on England's traditional domination of Middle East oil. A study of the international oil business by the English writer Anthony Sampson concluded,

By the end of the war the dominant influence in Saudi Arabia was unquestionably the United States. King Ibn Saud was regarded no longer as a wild desert warrior, but as a key piece in the power-game, to be wooed by the West. Roosevelt, on his way back from Yalta in February, 1945, entertained the King on the cruiser Quincy, together with his entourage of fifty, including two sons, a prime minister, an astrologer and flocks of sheep for slaughter.

There was a critic inside the American government, not a politician but poet Archibald MacLeish, who briefly served as assistant secretary of state. He worried about the postwar world: "As things are now going the peace we will make, the peace we seem to be making, will be a peace of oil, a peace of gold, a peace of shipping, a peace, in brief, without moral purpose or human interest."

A War Against Racism?

If the war was truly a war of moral purpose, against the Nazi idea of superior and inferior races, then we might have seen action by the U.S. government to eliminate racial segregation. Such segregation had been declared lawful by the Supreme Court in 1896 and existed in both South and North, accepted by both state and national governments.

The armed forces were segregated by race. When I was in basic training at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, in 1943, it did not occur to me, so typical an American white was I, that there were no black men in training with us. But it was a huge base, and one day, taking a long walk to the other end of it, I was suddenly aware that all the GIs around me were black. There was a squad of blacks taking a ten-minute break from hiking in the sun, lying on a small grassy incline, and singing a hymn that surprised me at the moment, but that I realized later was quite appropriate to their situation: "Ain't Gonna Study War No More."

My air crew sailed to England on the *Queen Mary*. That elegant passenger liner had been converted into a troop ship. There were 16,000 men aboard, and 4,000 of them were black. The whites had quarters on deck and just below deck. The blacks were housed separately, deep in the hold of the ship, around the engine room, in the darkest, dirtiest sections. Meals were taken in four shifts (except for the officers, who ate in prewar *Queen Mary* style in a chandeliered ballroom--the war was not being fought to disturb class privilege), and the blacks had to wait until three shifts of whites had finished eating.

On the home front, racial discrimination in employment continued, and it was not until A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a union of black workers, threatened to organize a march on Washington during the war and embarrass the Roosevelt administration before the world that the president signed an order setting up a Fair Employment Practices Commission. But its orders were not enforced and job discrimination continued. A spokesman for a West Coast aviation plant said, "The Negro will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities.... Regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not employ them."

There was no organized black opposition to the war, but there were many signs of bitterness at the hypocrisy of a war against fascism that did nothing about American racism. One black journalist wrote: "The Negro...is angry, resentful, and utterly apathetic about the war. 'Fight for what?' he is asking. 'This war doesn't mean a thing to me. If we win I lose, so what?'"

A student at a black college told his teacher: "The Army jim-crows us. The Navy lets us serve only as messmen. The Red Cross refuses our blood. Employers and labor unions shut us out. Lynchings continue. We are disenfranchised, jim-crowded, spat upon. What more could Hitler do than that?" That student's statement was repeated by Walter White, a leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to an audience of several thousand black people in the Midwest, expecting that they would disapprove. Instead, as he recalled, "To my surprise and dismay the audience burst into such applause that it took me some thirty or forty seconds to quiet it."

In January 1943, there appeared in a Negro newspaper a "Draftee's Prayer":

Dear Lord, today
I go to war:
To fight, to die.
Tell me, what for?
Dear Lord, I'll fight,
I do not fear,
Germans or Japs
My fears are here
America!

In one little-known incident of World War II, two transport ships being loaded with ammunition by U.S. sailors at the Port Chicago naval base in California suddenly blew up on the night of July 17, 1944. It was an enormous explosion, and its glare could be seen in San Francisco, thirty-five miles away. More than 300 sailors were killed, two-thirds of them black, because blacks were given the hard jobs of ammunition loaders. "It was the worst home front disaster of World War II," historian Robert Allen writes in his book *The Port Chicago Mutiny*.

Three weeks later 328 of the survivors were asked to load ammunition again; 258 of them refused, citing unsafe conditions. They were immediately jailed. Fifty of them were then court-martialed on a charge of mutiny, and received sentences ranging from eight to fifteen years imprisonment. It took a massive campaign by the NAACP and its counsel, Thurgood Marshall, to get the sentences reduced.

To the Japanese who lived on the West Coast of the United States, it quickly became clear that the war against Hitler was not accompanied by a spirit of racial equality. After the attack by Japan on Pearl Harbor, anger rose against all people of Japanese ancestry. One Congressman said, "I'm for catching every Japanese in America, Alaska and Hawaii now and putting them in concentration camps.... Damn them! Let's get rid of them now!"

Hysteria grew. Roosevelt, persuaded by racists in the military that the Japanese on the West Coast constituted a threat to the security of the country, signed Executive Order 9066 in February 1942. This empowered the army, without warrants or indictments or hearings, to arrest every Japanese-American on the West Coast-- 110,000 men, women and children--to take them from their homes, to transport them to camps far in the interior, and to keep them there under prison conditions.

Three-fourths of the Japanese so removed from their homes were Nisei--children born in the United States of Japanese parents and, therefore American citizens. The other fourth--the Issei, born in Japan--were barred by law from becoming citizens. In 1944 the United States Supreme Court upheld the forced evacuation on the grounds of military necessity.

Data uncovered in the 1980s by legal historian Peter Irons showed that the army falsified material in its brief to the Supreme Court. When Congress in 1983 was considering financial compensation to the Japanese who had been removed from their homes and lost their possessions during the war, John J. McCloy wrote an article in *The New York Times* opposing such compensation, defending the action as necessary. As Peter Irons discovered in his research, it was McCloy, then assistant secretary of war, who had ordered the deletion of a critical footnote in the Justice Department brief to the Supreme Court, a footnote that cast great doubt on the army's assertions that the Japanese living on the West Coast were a threat to American security.

Michi Weglyn was a young girl when her family experienced evacuation and detention. She tells in her book *Years of Infamy* of bungling in the evacuation; of misery, confusion, and anger; but also of Japanese-American dignity and of fighting back. There were strikes, petitions, mass meetings, refusals to sign loyalty oaths, and riots against the camp authorities.

Only a few Americans protested publicly. The press often helped to feed racism. Reporting the bloody battle of Iwo Jima in the Pacific, *Time* magazine said, "The ordinary unreasoning Jap is ignorant. Perhaps he is human. Nothing indicates it."

In the 1970s, Peter Ota, then fifty-seven, was interviewed by Studs Terkel. His parents had come from Japan in 1904, and became respected members of the Los Angeles community. Ota was born in the United States. He remembered what had happened in the war:

On the evening of December 7, 1941, my father was at a wedding. He was dressed in a tuxedo. When the reception was over, the FBI agents were waiting. They rounded up at least a dozen wedding guests and took'em to county jail.

For a few days we didn't know what happened. We heard nothing. When we found out, my mother, my sister and myself went to jail.. When my father walked through the door my mother was so humiliated.... She cried. He was in prisoner's clothing, with a denim jacket and a number on the back. The shame and humiliation just broke her down.... Right after that day she got very ill and contracted tuberculosis. She had to be sent to a sanitarium.... She was there till she died....

My father was transferred to Missoula, Montana. We got letters from him-- censored, of course.... It was just my sister and myself I was fifteen, she was twelve.... School in camp was a joke.... One of our basic subjects was American history. They talked about freedom all the time. (Laughs.)

In England there was similar hysteria. People with German-sounding names were picked up and interned. In the panic, a number of Jewish refugees who had German names were arrested and thrown into the same camps. There were thousands of Italians who were living in England, and when Italy entered World War II in June of 1940, Winston Churchill gave the order: "Collar the lot." Italians were picked up and interned, the windows of Italian shops and restaurants were smashed by patriotic mobs. A British ship carrying Italian internees to Canada was sunk by a German submarine and everyone drowned.

A War for Democracy?

It was supposed to be a war for freedom. But in the United States, when Trotskyists and members of the Socialist Workers Party spoke out in criticism of the war, eighteen of them were prosecuted in 1943 in Minneapolis. The Smith Act, passed in 1940, extended the anti-freespeech provisions of the World War I Espionage Act to peacetime. It prohibited joining any group or publishing any material that advocated revolution or that might lead to refusal of military service. The Trotskyists were sentenced to prison terms, and the Supreme Court refused to review their case.

Fortunes were made during the war, and wealth was concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. By 1941 three-fourths of the value of military contracts were handled by fifty-six large corporations. Pressure was put on the labor unions to pledge they would not strike. But they saw their wages frozen, and profits of corporations rising, and so strikes went on. There were 14,000 strikes during the war, involving over 6 million workers, more than in any comparable period in American history.

An insight into what great profits were made during the war came years later, when the multibillionaire John McCone was nominated by President John F. Kennedy to head the CIA. The Senate Armed Services Committee, considering the nomination, was informed that in World War II, McCone and associates in a shipbuilding

company had made \$44 million on an investment of \$100,000. Reacting indignantly to criticism of McCone, one of his supporters on the Senate committee asked him:

Sen. Symington: Now, it is still legal in America, if not to make a profit, at least to try to make a profit, is it not?

McCone: That is my understanding.

Bruce Catton, a writer and historian working in Washington during the war, commented bitingly on the retention of wealth and power in the same hands, despite a war that seemed to promise a new world of social reform. He wrote:

We were committed to a defeat of the Axis but to nothing else.... It was solemnly decided that the war effort must not be used to bring about social or economic reform and to him that hath shall be given....

And through it all...the people were not trusted with the facts or relied on to display that intelligence, sanity, and innate decency of spirit, upon which democracy...finally rests. In a very real sense, our government spent the war years looking desperately for some safe middle ground between Hitler and Abraham Lincoln.

Dresden and Hiroshima

It becomes difficult to sustain the claim that a war is just when both sides commit atrocities, unless one wants to argue that their atrocities are worse than ours. True, nothing done by the Allied Powers in World War II matches in utter viciousness the deliberate gassing, shooting, and burning of six million Jews and four million others by the Nazis. The deaths caused by the Allies were less, but still so massive as to throw doubt on the justice of a war that includes such acts.

Early in the war, various world leaders condemned the indiscriminate bombing of city populations. Italy had bombed civilians in Ethiopia; Japan, in China; Germany and Italy, in the Spanish Civil War. Germany had dropped bombs on Rotterdam in Holland, on Coventry in England and other places. Roosevelt described these bombings as "inhuman barbarism that has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity."

But very soon, the United States and Britain were doing the same thing and on a far larger scale. When the Allied leaders met at Casablanca in January 1943, they agreed on massive air attacks to achieve "the destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system and the undermining of the morale of the German people to the point where their capacity for armed resistance

is fatally weakened." Churchill and his advisers had decided that bombing working-class districts of German cities would accomplish just that, "the undermining of the morale of the German people."

The saturation bombing of the German cities began. There were raids of a thousand planes on Cologne, Essen, Frankfurt, and Hamburg.

The British flew at night and did "area bombing" with no pretense of aiming at specific military targets.

The Americans flew in the daytime, pretending to precision, but bombing from high altitudes made that impossible. When I was doing my practice bombing in Deming, New Mexico, before going overseas, our egos were built up by having us fly at 4,000 feet and drop a bomb within twenty feet of the target. But at 11,000 feet, we were more likely to be 200 feet away. And when we flew combat missions, we did it from 30,000 feet, and might miss by a quarter of a mile. Hardly "precision bombing."

There was huge self-deception. We had been angered when the Germans bombed cities and killed several hundred or a thousand people. But now the British and Americans were killing tens of thousands in a single air strike. Michael Sherry, in his study of aerial bombing, notes that "so few in the air force asked questions." Sherry says there was no dear thinking about the effects of the bombing. Some generals objected, but were overruled by civilians. The technology crowded out moral considerations. Once the planes existed, targets had to be found.

It was terror bombing, and the German city of Dresden was the extreme example. (The city and the event are immortalized in fiction by Kurt Vonnegut's comic, bitter novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*.) It was February, 1945, the Red Army was eighty miles to the east and it was clear that Germany was on the way to defeat. In one day and one night of bombing, by American and British planes, the tremendous heat generated by the bombs created a vacuum, and an enormous firestorm swept the city, which was full of refugees at the time, increasing the population to a million. More than 100,000 people died.

The British pilot of a Lancaster bomber recalled, "There was a sea of fire covering in my estimation some forty square miles. We were so aghast at the awesome blaze that although alone over the city, we flew around in a stand-off position for many minutes before turning for home, quite subdued by our imagination of the horror that must be below."

One incident remembered by survivors is that on the afternoon of February 14,

1945, American fighter planes machine-gunned clusters of refugees on the banks of the Elbe. A German woman told of this years later: "We ran along the Elbe stepping over the bodies."

Winston Churchill, who seemed to have no moral qualms about his policy of indiscriminate bombing, described the annihilation of Dresden in his wartime memoirs with a simple statement: "We made a heavy raid in the latter month on Dresden, then a centre of communication of Germany's Eastern Front."

At one point in the war Churchill ordered thousands of anthrax bombs from a plant that was secretly producing them in the United States. His chief science adviser, Lord Cherwell, had informed him in February 1944: "Any animal breathing in minute quantities of these N (anthrax) spores is extremely likely to die suddenly but peacefully within the week. There is no known cure and no effective prophylaxis. There is little doubt that it is equally lethal to human beings." He told Churchill that a half dozen bombers could carry enough four-pound anthrax bombs to kill everyone within a square mile. However, production delays got in the way of this plan.

The actor Richard Burton once wrote an article for The New York Times about his experience playing the role of Winston Churchill in a television drama:

In the course of preparing myself...I realized afresh that I hate Churchill and all of his kind. I hate them virulently. They have stalked down the corridors of endless power all through history.... What man of sanity would say on hearing of the atrocities committed by the Japanese against British and Anzac prisoners of war, "We shall wipe them out, everyone of them, men, women, and children. There shall not be a Japanese left on the face of the earth"? Such simple-minded cravings for revenge leave me with a horrified but reluctant awe for such single-minded and merciless ferocity.

When Burton's statement appeared in the "Arts and Leisure" section of The New York Times, he was banned from future BBC productions. The supervisor of drama productions for BBC said, "As far as I am concerned, he will never work for us again.. Burton acted in an unprofessional way."

It seems that however moral is the cause that initiates a war (in the minds of the public, in the mouths of the politicians), it is in the nature of war to corrupt that morality until the rule becomes "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," and soon it is not a matter of equivalence, but indiscriminate revenge.

The policy of saturation bombing became even more brutal when B29s, with carried twice the bombload as the planes we flew in Europe, attacked Japanese

cities with incendiaries, turning them into infernos.

In one raid on Tokyo, after midnight on March 10, 1945, 300 B29s left the city in flames, fanned by a strong northwest wind. The fires could be seen by pilots 150 miles out in the Pacific Ocean. A million people were left homeless. It is estimated that 100,000 people died that night. Many of them attempting to escape leaped into the Sumida River and drowned. A Japanese novelist who was twelve years old at the time, described the scene years later: "The fire was like a living thing. It ran, just like a creature chasing us."

By the time the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima (August 6, 1945) and another on Nagasaki (three days later), the moral line had been crossed psychologically by the massive bombings in Europe and by the fire bombings of Tokyo and other cities.

The bomb on Hiroshima left perhaps 140,000 dead; the one on Nagasaki, 70,000 dead. Another 130,000 died in the next five years. Hundreds of thousands of others were left radiated and maimed. These numbers are based on the most detailed report that exists on the effects of the bombings; it was compiled by thirty-four Japanese specialists and was published in 1981.

The deception and self-deception that accompanied these atrocities was remarkable. Truman told the public, "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians."

Even the possibility that American prisoners of war would be killed in these bombings did not have any effect on the plans. On July 31, nine days before Nagasaki was bombed, the headquarters of the U.S. Army Strategic Air Forces on Guam (the take-off airfield for the atomic bombings) sent a message to the War Department:

Reports prisoner of war sources not verified by photo give location of Allied prisoner-of-war camp, one mile north of center of city of Nagasaki. Does this influence the choice of this target for initial Centerboard operation? Request immediate reply.

The reply came, "Targets previously assigned for Centerboard remain unchanged."

The terrible momentum of war continued even after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The end of the war was a few days away, yet B29s continued their missions. On August 14, five days after the Nagasaki bombing and the day before the actual acceptance of surrender terms, 449 B29s went out from the Marianas for

a daylight strike and 372 more went out that night. Altogether, more than 1,000 planes were sent to bomb Japanese cities. There were no American losses. The last plane had not yet returned when Truman announced the Japanese had surrendered.

Japanese writer Oda Makoto describes that August 14 in Osaka, where he lived. He was a boy. He went out into the streets and found in the midst of the corpses American leaflets written in Japanese, which had been dropped with the bombs: "Your government has surrendered; the war is over."

The American public, already conditioned to massive bombing, accepted the atomic bombings with equanimity, indeed with joy. I remember my own reaction. When the war ended in Europe, my crew flew our plane back to the United States. We were given a thirty-day furlough and then had to report for duty to be sent to Japan to continue bombing. My wife and I decided to spend that time in the countryside. Waiting for the bus to take us, I picked up the morning newspaper, August 7, 1945. The headline was "Atomic Bomb Dropped on Hiroshima." My immediate reaction was elation: "The war will end. I won't have to go to the Pacific."

I had no idea what the explosion of the atomic bomb had done to the men, women, and children of Hiroshima. It was abstract and distant, as were the deaths of the people from the bombs I had dropped in Europe from a height of six miles; I was unable to see anything below, there was no visible blood, and there were no audible screams. And I knew nothing of the imminence of a Japanese surrender. It was only later when I read John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, when I read the testimony of Japanese survivors, and when I studied the history of the decision to drop the bomb that I was outraged by what had been done.

It seems that once an initial judgment has been made that a war is just, there is a tendency to stop thinking, to assume then that everything done on behalf of victory is morally acceptable. I had myself participated in the bombing of cities, without even considering whether there was any relationship between what I was doing and the elimination of fascism in the world. Thus a war that apparently begins with a "good" cause--stopping aggression, helping victims, or punishing brutality--ends with its own aggression, creates more victims than before, and brings out more brutality than before, on both sides. The Holocaust, a plan made and executed in the ferocious atmosphere of war, and the saturation bombings, also created in the frenzy of war, are evidence of this.

The good cause in World War II was the defeat of fascism. And, in fact, it ended with that defeat: the corpse of Mussolini hanging in the public square in Milan; Hitler burned to death in his underground bunker; Tojo, captured and sentenced to

death by an international tribunal. But forty million people were dead, and the elements of fascism--militarism, racism, imperialism, dictatorship, ferocious nationalism, and war--were still at large in the postwar world.

Two of those forty million were my closest Air Force friends, Joe Perry and Ed Plotkin. We had suffered through basic training and rode horses and flew Piper Cubs in Burlington, Vermont, and played basketball at Santa Ana before going our own ways to different combat zones. Both were killed in the final weeks of the war. For years afterward, they appeared in my dreams. In my waking hours, the question grew: What did they really die for?

We were victorious over fascism, but this left two superpowers dominating the world, vying for control of other nations, carving out new spheres of influence, on a scale even larger than that attempted by the Fascist powers. Both superpowers supported dictatorships all over the world: the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and the United States in Latin America, Korea, and the Philippines.

The war machines of the Axis powers were destroyed, but the Soviet Union and the United States were building military machines greater than the world had ever seen, piling up frightful numbers of nuclear weapons, soon equivalent to a million Hiroshima-type bombs. They were preparing for a war to keep the peace, they said (this had also been said before World War I) but those preparations were such that if war took place (by accident? by miscalculation?) it would make the Holocaust look puny.

Hitler's aggression was over but wars continued, which the superpowers either initiated or fed with military aid or observed without attempting to halt them. Two million people died in Korea; two to five million in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; one million in Indonesia; perhaps two million in the Nigerian civil war; one million in the Iran-Iraq War; and many more in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. It is estimated that, in the forty years after 1945, there were 150 wars, with twenty million casualties.

The victorious and morally righteous superpowers stood by in the postwar world while millions--more than had died in Hitler's Holocaust--starved to death. They made gestures, but allowed national ambitions and interpower rivalries to stand in the way of saving the hungry. A United Nations official reported, with great bitterness that

in pursuit of political objectives in the Nigerian Civil War, a number of great and small nations, including Britain and the United States, worked to prevent supplies of food and medicine from reaching the starving children of rebel

Biafra.

Swept up in the obvious rightness of a crusade to rid the world of fascism, most people supported or participated in that crusade, to the point of risking their lives. But there were skeptics, especially among the nonwhite peoples of the world-- blacks in the United States and the colonized millions of the British Empire (Gandhi withheld his support).

The extraordinary black writer Zora Neale Hurston wrote her memoir, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, at the start of World War II. Just before it was to come out, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and her publisher, Lippincott, removed a section of the book in which she wrote bitterly about the "democracies" of the West and their hypocrisy. She said:

All around me, bitter tears are being shed over the fate of Holland, Belgium, France and England. I must confess to being a little dry around the eyes. I hear people shaking with shudders at the thought of Germany collecting taxes in Holland. I have not heard a word against Holland collecting one twelfth of poor people's wages in Asia. Hitler's crime is that he is actually doing a thing like that to his own kind....

As I see it, the doctrines of democracy deal with the aspirations of men's souls, but the application deals with things. One hand in somebody else's pocket and one on your gun, and you are highly civilized.... Desire enough for your own use only, and you are a heathen. Civilized people have things to show to their neighbors.

The editor at Lippincott wrote on her manuscript, "Suggest eliminating international opinions as irrelevant to autobiography." Only when the book was reissued in 1984 did the censored passages appear.

Hurston, in a letter she wrote to a journalist friend in 1946, showed her indignation at the hypocrisy that accompanied the war:

I am amazed at the complacency of Negro press and public. Truman is a monster. I can think of him as nothing else but the Butcher of Asia. Of his grin of triumph on giving the order to drop the Atom bombs on Japan. Of his maintaining troops in China who are shooting the starving Chinese for stealing a handful of food.

Some white writers were resistant to the fanaticism of war. After it was over, Joseph Heller wrote his biting, brilliant satire *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut wrote *Slaughterhouse Five*. In the 1957 film *Bridge on the River Kwai*, the Japanese military is obsessed with building a bridge, and the British are obsessed with destroying it. At the end it is blown up and a British lieutenant, barely surviving,

looks around at the river strewn with corpses and mutters: "Madness. Madness."

There were pacifists in the United States who went to prison rather than participate in World War II. There were 350,000 draft evaders in the United States. Six thousand men went to prison as conscientious objectors; one out of every six inmates in U.S. federal prisons was a conscientious objector to the war.

But the general mood in the United States was support. Liberals, conservatives, and Communists agreed that it was a just war. Only a few voices were raised publicly in Europe and the United States to question the motives of the participants, the means by which the war was being conducted, and the ends that would be achieved. Very few tried to stand back from the battle and take a long view. One was the French worker-philosopher Simone Weil. Early in 1945 she wrote in a new magazine called Politics:

Whether the mask is labeled Fascism, Democracy, or Dictatorship or the Proletariat, our great adversary remains the Apparatus--the bureaucracy, the police, the military.... No matter what the circumstances, the worst betrayal will always be to subordinate ourselves to this Apparatus, and to trample underfoot, in its service, all human values in ourselves and in others.

The editor of Politics was an extraordinary American intellectual named Dwight MacDonald, who with his wife, Nancy, produced the magazine as an outlet for unorthodox points of view. After the bombing of Hiroshima, MacDonald refused to join in the general jubilation. He wrote with a fury:

The CONCEPTS "WAR" AND "PROGRESS" ARE NOW OBSOLETE...THE FUTILITY OF MODERN WARFARE SHOULD NOW BE CLEAR. Must we not now conclude, with Simone Weil, that the technical aspect of war today is the evil, regardless of political factors? Can one imagine that the atomic bomb could ever be used "in a good cause"?

But what was the alternative to war, with Germany on the march in Europe, Japan on its rampage through Asia, and Italy looking for empire? This is the toughest possible question. Once the history of an epoch has run its course, it is very difficult to imagine an alternate set of events, to imagine that some act or acts might set in motion a whole new train of circumstances, leading in a different direction.

Would it have been possible to trade time and territory for human life? Was there an alternative preferable to using the most modern weapons of destruction for mass annihilation? Can we try to imagine instead of a six-year war a ten-year or twenty-year period of resistance; of guerrilla warfare, strikes, and non-cooperation; of underground movements, sabotage, and paralysis of vital communication and

transportation; and of clandestine propaganda for the organization of a larger and larger opposition?

Even in the midst of war, some nations occupied by the Nazis were able to resist: the Danes, the Norwegians, and the Bulgarians refused to give up their Jews. Gene Sharp, on the basis of his study of resistance movements in World War II, writes:

During the second World War--in such occupied countries as the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark--patriots resisted their Nazi overlords and internal puppets by such weapons as underground newspapers, labor slowdowns, general strikes, refusal of collaboration, special boycotts of German troops and quislings, and non-cooperation with fascist controls and efforts to restructure their societies' institutions.

Guerrilla warfare is more selective, its violence more limited and more discriminate, than conventional war. It is less centralized and more democratic by nature, requiring the commitment, the initiative, and the cooperation of ordinary people who do not need to be conscripted, but who are motivated by their desire for freedom and justice.

History is full of instances of successful resistance (although we are not informed very much about this) without violence and against tyranny, by people using strikes, boycotts, propaganda, and a dozen different ingenious forms of struggle. Gene Sharp, in his book *The Politics of Non-violent Action*, records hundreds of instances and dozens of methods of action.

Since the end of World War II, we have seen dictatorships overthrown by mass movements that mobilized so much popular opposition that the tyrant finally had to flee in Iran, in Nicaragua, in the Philippines, and in Haiti. Granted, the Nazi machine was formidable, efficient, and ruthless. But there are limits to conquest. A point is reached where the conqueror has swallowed too much territory, has to control too many people. Great empires have fallen when it was thought they would last forever.

We have seen, in the Eighties, mass movements of protest arise in the tightly controlled Communist countries of Eastern Europe, forcing dramatic changes in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Rumania, and East Germany. The Spanish people, having lost a million lives in their civil war, waited out Franco. He died, as all men do, and the dictatorship was over. For Portugal, the resistance in its outlying African Empire weakened control; corruption grew and the long dictatorship of Salazar was overthrown--without a bloodbath.

There is a fable written by German playwright Bertolt Brecht that goes roughly like

this: A man living alone answers a knock at the door. When he opens it, he sees in the doorway the powerful body, the cruel face, of The Tyrant. The Tyrant asks, "Will you submit?" The man does not reply. He steps aside. The Tyrant enters and establishes himself in the man's house. The man serves him for years. Then The Tyrant becomes sick from food poisoning. He dies. The man wraps the body, opens the door, gets rid of the body, comes back to his house, closes the door behind him, and says, firmly, "No."

Violence is not the only form of power. Sometimes it is the least effective. Always it is the most vicious, for the perpetrator as well as for the victim. And it is corrupting.

Immediately after the war, Albert Camus, the great French writer who fought in the underground against the Nazis, wrote in *Combat*, the daily newspaper of the French Resistance. In his essay called "Neither Victims Nor Executioners," he considered the tens of millions of dead caused by the war and asked that the world reconsider fanaticism and violence:

All I ask is that, in the midst of a murderous world, we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice.... Over the expanse of five continents throughout the coming years an endless struggle is going to be pursued between violence and friendly persuasion, a struggle in which, granted, the former has a thousand times the chances of success than has the latter. But I have always held that, if he who bases his hopes on human nature is a fool, he who gives up in the face of circumstances is a coward. And henceforth, the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions.

Whatever alternative scenarios we can imagine to replace World War II and its mountain of corpses, it really doesn't matter any more. That was is over. The practical effect of declaring World War II just is not for that war, but for the wars that follow. And that effect has been a dangerous one, because the glow of rightness that accompanied that war has been transferred, by false analogy and emotional carryover, to other wars. To put it another way, perhaps the worst consequence of World War II is that it kept alive the idea that war could be just.

Looking at World War II in perspective, looking at the world it created and the terror that grips our century, should we not bury for all time the idea of just war?

Some of the participants in that "good war" had second thoughts. Former GI Tommy Bridges, who after the war became a policeman in Michigan, expressed his feelings to Studs Terkel:

It was a useless war, as every war is.... How gaddamn foolish it is, the war.

They's no war in the world that's worth fighting for, I don't care where it is. They can't tell me any different. Money, money is the thing that causes it all. I wouldn't be a bit surprised that the people that start wars and promote'em are the men that make the money, make the ammunition, make the clothing and so forth. Just think of the poor kids that are starvin' to death in Asia and so forth that could be fed with how much you make one big shell out of.

Higher up in the military ranks was Admiral Gene LaRocque, who also spoke to Studs Terkel about the war:

I had been in thirteen battle engagements, had sunk a submarine, and was the first man ashore in the landing at Roi. In that four years, I thought, What a hell of a waste of a man's life. I lost a lot of friends. I had the task of telling my roommate's parents about our last days together. You lose limbs, sight, part of your life--for what? Old men send young men to war. Flag, banners, and patriotic sayings...

We've institutionalized militarism. This came out of World War Two.... It gave us the National Security Council. It gave us the CIA, that is able to spy on you and me this very moment. For the first time in the history of man, a country has divided up the world into military districts.... You could argue World War Two had to be fought. Hitler had to be stopped. Unfortunately, we translate it unchanged to the situation today....

I hate it when they say, "He gave his life for his country." Nobody gives their life for anything. We steal the lives of these kids. We take it away from them. They don't die for the honor and glory of their country. We kill them.

Granted that we have started in this century with the notion of just war, we don't have to keep it. Perhaps the change in our thinking can be as dramatic, as clear, as that in the life of a French general, whose obituary in 1986 was headed: "Gen. Jacques Paris de Bollardiere, War Hero Who Became a Pacifist, Dead at the age of 78."

He had served in the Free French Forces in Africa during World War II, later parachuted into France and Holland to organize the Resistance, and commanded an airborne unit in Indochina from 1946 to 1953. But in 1957, according to the obituary, he "caused an uproar in the French army when he asked to be relieved of his command in Algeria to protest the torture of Algerian rebels. In 1961 he began to speak out against militarism and nuclear weapons. He created an organization called The Alternative Movement for Non-Violence and in 1973 participated in a protest expedition to France's South Pacific nuclear testing site.

It remains to be seen how many people in our time will make that journey from war to nonviolent action against war. It is the great challenge of our time: How to

achieve justice, with struggle, but without war.