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## *American Militarism, a Bi-Partisan Affair*



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“I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

“As societies grow decadent, the language grows decadent, too. Words are used to disguise, not to illuminate, action: you liberate a city by destroying it. Words are to confuse, so that at election time people will solemnly vote against their own interests.”

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– Gore Vidal

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

On August 25 the American senior Senator John McCain succumbed to a brain tumor; and the US media exploded in unbridled praise. He was lauded as a “war hero” in the paper of record and there has been a seemingly endless stream of tributes since on social media and on network cable news. What was perhaps more telling was the outpouring of grief among liberals. McCain represented to them a sort of bulwark against their arch nemesis Donald Trump. Without a doubt McCain’s sparring with the megalomaniacal liar in the Oval Office made headlines almost weekly. But it was the surreal erasure of public memory that was overwhelming.

McCain came from the ruling class. His great, great grandfather, William Alexander McCain, owned slaves on a cotton plantation in Mississippi. Both his grandfather and father were admirals and had a record of advocating for American military expansion. But John McCain’s foray into war mongering began when he bombed civilian targets in Vietnam, a crime under international law since Nuremburg. Following the war McCain chose the route of militarism and for that he was given an exalted position among the elite in American Empire. Others, like Phil Berrigan and Howard Zinn, who shared similar experiences chose to face the reality of America’s imperialistic war machine and were largely marginalized from the mainstream because of it.

McCain’s death has inadvertently torn the veil off of American supremacy. Americans, both liberal and conservative, shared memes drenched in patriotic colours and accolades for the deceased politician and chided those of us who dared question the Senator’s well documented history of war mongering and viciousness. Yet unsurprisingly, few of these same people appeared to raise an eyebrow over the recent Saudi slaughter of dozens of Yemeni boys on a school bus by a US made bomb. McCain lobbied hard for that war too.

We have seen this adoration before, and very recently. After all, what becomes of a man who started a war based upon lies that killed thousands, displaced millions, and destabilized an entire region, decimated civil liberties with sweeping powers granted to government surveillance agencies, instituted torture programs and rounded up scores of innocent people in secret raids sending them to wither away in a gulag in the Caribbean, left thousands of his citizens to languish in disease infested flood waters in the Gulf Coast following a major hurricane, gutted environmental regulations in favour of industry, and

created the predatory and neoliberal economic conditions that led to the “Great Recession?” Apparently, if you are a former US President you get transfigured into saint.

Like a bad penny, this past year has seen the curious resurfacing of George W. Bush in public life. It seemed that overnight a war criminal had been miraculously transformed into a lovable “senior statesman;” a granddad who paints delightful pictures of world leaders and gives “inspiring” speeches against bigotry. Bush, like practically all of the ruling political class in Washington, should have been brought before the International Criminal Court in the Hague for his crimes against humanity and the living planet. But as a response to the mendacious, sexist, racist behaviour and policies of Donald Trump, and with the assistance of a corporate media which delights in collective, cultural amnesia, many establishment liberals have been pining for a time that never was.

When one understands the machinations of American political power and its ruling class it isn't all that strange. Mythology dominates the American psyche. This kind of unreality fuels the engine of American bellicosity on the world stage. “Exceptionalism” and an idea of America being an “indispensable nation” are common themes. No one dares question the supremacist character of such beliefs because they are bipartisan, through and through. Militarism unpins it all because it is the most popular religion of the empire. Any American sporting event demonstrates this blind devotion in spades. Yet at home its veterans sleep on the streets and struggle with PTSD and neglect. With a failing VA, Go Fund Me has become their healthcare system along with millions of other Americans.

The Obama administration, too, is pined for even among the conservative elite. After all, while bailing out Wall Street and the banks, his administration expanded the wars and forgave the torturers of the previous administration. He dropped over 26,000 bombs in seven Muslim majority countries, assassinated a 16 year old US citizen without due process, drone bombed wedding parties and ambulances, supported a rightwing coup in Honduras which has helped exacerbate a massive migration crisis. This is all par for the course of the American ruling class. Lockheed Martin and Northrup Grumman could not be more pleased. To them as well as many ordinary Americans, foreign lives simply do not matter much, if they matter at all. And after veterans serve their usefulness, they are generally cast aside lest their hidden and festering wounds reveal the fruitlessness of imperialistic war.

But today liberals are united in a fight against Donald Trump at all costs. Indeed, he is a living dumpster fire of grotesque vulgarity and mendacity who has surrounded himself with the most malignant people in power today. He has reinvigorated white nationalists,

cheered on police brutality, stoked xenophobia, all while bamboozling many in the working class into thinking he cares about their problems. And his foreign policy is so erratic and volatile that it makes one shudder to think he has access to the nuclear codes. He and his administration must be opposed. Yet without recognizing the larger picture of empire and how it works, or how the ruling class still reigns supreme, Americans will continue to canonize their war criminals and support a bipartisan death machine that has caused untold misery for decades.

The Civil Rights veteran and Senator John Lewis recently said John McCain was a “warrior for peace.” Orwellian doublespeak that defies all logic. Aside from his overt racism (“I hated the g\*\*ks,” a comment made long after the war was over which he never apologized for, or his vicious fight to stop an MLK holiday, or his stealing water rights from the Navajo, or his multiple defenses of apartheid South Africa), McCain enthusiastically supported and championed every single war of American Empire. After Vietnam he campaigned for bombing Cambodia, then Kosovo, then the Middle-East, culminating with the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Now those last three countries are in ruins and slavery has made a disturbing comeback in Northern Africa. He even said he would be fine with US soldiers occupying Iraq “for 100 years.” He joked about bombing Iran, something not uncommon among America’s ruling class, and lobbied for that privilege hard. Thankfully he never got to see that one pan out.

All of this has been lost down the bipartisan memory hole in its unfettered adoration of the myth of American militarism. A “warrior for peace?” Such historical revisionism and cruel indifference to the incalculable suffering caused by American militaristic aggression is a hallmark of a bipartisan ruling class. It’s what Martin Luther King, Jr. realized at the end of his short life. And it is all of this, and the failure to face squarely its well decorated, distinguished and odious demons, that continues to lead it toward the spiritual doom he warned us about.