

***Chris Hedges. War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning. NY:  
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"..war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug... It is peddled by mythmakers -- historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state... It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it...

"The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living... It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble..." (3).

"It is part of war's perversity that we lionize those who make great warriors and excuse their excesses in the name of self-defense..." (8).

"Once we sign on for war's crusade, once we see ourselves on the side of the angels, once we embrace a theological or ideological belief system that defines itself as the embodiment of goodness and light, it is only a matter of how we will carry out murder" (9).

"Patriotism, often a thinly veiled form of collective self-worship, celebrates our goodness... Never mind the murder and repression done in our name...

"War.. suspends thought, especially self-critical thought. All bow before the supreme effort" (10).

"That the myths are lies.. is carefully hidden from public view" (11). "The ethnic conflicts and insurgencies of our time.. are manufactured wars.. perpetuated by fear, greed, and paranoia, and they are run by gangsters, who rise up from the bottom of their own societies and terrorize all, including those they purport to protect" (20).

"Wars that lose their mythic stature for the public, such as Korea or Vietnam, are doomed to failure, for war is exposed for what it is -- organized murder...

"We demonize the enemy so that our opponent is no longer

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human. We view ourselves, our people, as the embodiment of absolute goodness" (21).

"..the goal we seek when we embrace myth is impossible to achieve. War never creates the security or the harmony we desire... [it] become[s] starting points for further conflicts..." (22).

"...docility on the part of the press made it easier to do what governments do in wartime, indeed what governments do much of the time, and that is lie...

"The potency of myth is that.. it gives a justification to what is often nothing more than gross human cruelty and stupidity" (23).

"The hijacking of language is fundamental to war. It becomes difficult to express contrary opinions" (34).

"The plague of nationalism [is] to lionize uniformed killers. All bowed before the state... We abandon individual responsibility for a shared, unquestioned communal enterprise, however morally dubious...

""The nationalist is by definition an ignoramus," wrote Danilo Kiš, the Yugoslav writer. "Nationalism is the line of least resistance..." (45).

"Life in wartime becomes theater.. nationalist vision.. We have failed to build an intellectual tradition where people think for themselves" (54-55).

"National symbols -- flags, patriotic songs, sentimental dedications -- invade and take over cultural space. Art becomes infected with the platitudes of patriotism... essential to mask the contradictions and lies..." (63).

"All groups looked at themselves as victims... They ignored the excesses of their own and highlighted the excesses of the other in gross distortions that fueled the war. The cultivation of victimhood is essential fodder for any

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conflict. It is studiously crafted by the state. All cultural life is directed to broadcast the injustices carried out against us... the drivel of agitprop" (64).

"..once a group or a nation establishes that it alone suffers, then all other competing claims to injustice are cancelled out. The nation.. falls into a collective "autism".. and does not listen to those outside the inner circle. Communication is impossible" (67).

"..the state.. take[s] control of the two most important mediums that transmit information to the nation -- the media and the schools... The reinterpretation of history and culture.. is the bedrock of the hatred and intolerance that leads to war" (77).

"The prospect of war is exciting. Many young men, schooled in the notion that war is the ultimate definition of manhood, that only in war will they be tested and proven, that they can discover their worth as human beings in battle, willingly join the great enterprise. The admiration of the crowd, the high-blown rhetoric, the chance to achieve.. glory.., the ideal of nobility beckon us forward. And people, ironically, enjoy righteous indignation and an object upon which to unleash their anger. War usually starts with collective euphoria.

"And it is all the more startling that such fantasy is believed, given the impersonal slaughter of modern industrial warfare" (84).

### **Veterans**

"It takes little in wartime to turn ordinary men into killers.. the narcotic of war that quickly transformed men into beasts... thugs" (87).

"To be sure, soldiers who kill innocents pay a tremendous personal emotional and spiritual price. But within the universe of total war, equipped with weapons that can kill hundreds or thousands of people in seconds, soldiers only

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have time to reflect later. By then these soldiers often have been discarded, left as broken men in a civilian society that does not understand them and does not want to understand them..." (86).

"The fighting was intense. As he moved down the street he heard a door swing open. He fired a burst from his AK-47 assault rifle. A twelve-year-old girl dropped dead. He saw in the body of the unknown girl lying prostrate in front of him the image of his own twelve-year-old daughter. He broke down. He had to be helped back to the city. He was lost for the rest of the war, shuttered inside his apartment, nervous, morose, and broken. This experience is far more typical of warfare than the Rambo heroics we are fed by the state and the entertainment industry. The cost of killing is all the more bitter because of the deep disillusionment that war usually brings" (87).

"War breaks down long-established prohibitions against violence, destruction, and murder. And with this often comes the crumbling of sexual, social, and political norms as the domination and brutality of the battlefield is carried into personal life. Rape, mutilation, abuse, and theft are the natural outcome of a world in which force rules, in which human beings are objects" (103-104).

"Many of those who set out to write their memoirs or speak about the war, do so with shame. They know war's perversion. It corrupts nearly everyone" (115).

"They know that it is not the best who survive war but often the selfish, the brutal, and the violent" (117).

### **Misleading Terminology**

"..societies continue to speak in euphamisms. They use words to mask reality. It was the Argentine junta that gave us words like *desaparecido* (disappeared person, almost always a euphamism for someone who had been secretly executed), *chupado* (sucked up, or kidnapped), and *trasladar* (transfer, a euphamism for take away to be

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killed). Terms like these blunt the campaign of terror. On the battlefield it is much the same. Soldiers get "waxed" rather than killed. Victims who are burned to death are "toasted" (135).

### **Media, Iraq**

"...the blame, as in many conflicts, lay not with the military but the press. Television reporters happily disseminated the spoon-fed images that served the propaganda effort of the military and the state. These images did little to convey the reality of war... "It was... war as entertainment. The images and stories were designed to make us feel good about our nation, about ourselves. The Iraqi families and soldiers being blown to bits by huge iron fragmentation bombs... were faceless and nameless phantoms" (143).

### **Setting the Agenda**

"We accept terms imposed upon us by the state -- for example, the "war on terror" -- and these terms set the narrow parameters by which we are able to think and discuss" (146).

### **State Worship**

"The state and the institutions of state become for many, the center of worship in wartime" (147).

### **WWI, Setting the Agenda**

"Edmund Dene Morel, the British crusader against Belgian atrocities in the Congo, denounced World War I as madness. He argued that through a series of treaties kept secret from Parliament and the public, Britain had become caught up in the senseless and tragic debacle. His fight against the war saw mobs break up his meetings with stink bombs and his banners ripped down. He finally could not rent a hall. His friends deserted him. Police raided his office and his home. The wartime censor banned some of his

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writings. He was flooded with hate mail. The government finally jailed him in 1917. It was only after 8.5 million dead and 21 million wounded that he was proven correct -- the treaties did indeed exist. The war indeed was a needless waste. But by then the myth of war was no longer needed, since the fighting had ended.

"The moral certitude of the state in wartime is a kind of fundamentalism" (147).

### **Why History?**

"As in most conflicts, the war, as presented to the public, was fantasy...

"The prosecution of war entails lying, often on a massive scale -- something most governments engage in" (149).

"The failure to dissect the cause of war leaves us open for the next installment" (151).

### **SUVs, Hummers**

"There are those for whom violence is sexual. They carry their phallic weapons slung low... Most of these fighters are militiamen, those who stay away from real combat, have little training or discipline, and primarily terrorize the weak and defenseless. And they look the part, often with tight black fatigues, wraparound sunglasses, and big ugly jeeps or cars with tinted windows" (163).

### **War**

"War is necrophilia. And this necrophilia is central to soldiering" (165).

### **Veterans**

"When the mask of war slips away and the rot and corruption is exposed, when the addiction turns sour and

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rank, when the myth is exposed as a fraud, we feel soiled and spent. It is then that we sink into despair, a despair that can lead us to welcome death. This despair is more common than many expect.

"In the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, almost a third of all Israeli casualties were due to psychiatric causes, and the war lasted only a few weeks. A World War II study determined that after sixty days of continuous combat, 98 percent of all surviving soldiers will have become psychiatric casualties. They found that a common trait among the 2 percent who were able to endure sustained combat was a predisposition toward "aggressive psychopathic personalities"" (164).

### **War, Veterans**

"The military histories -- which tell little of war's reality -- crowd out the wrenching tales by the emotionally maimed... "To say the least, killing is nearly always a sordid affair... those who are killed do not die the clean death we see on television or film. They die messy, disturbing deaths that often plague the killers... "Nothing is more sickening in war than watching human lives get snuffed out. Nothing haunts you more. And it is never, as outsiders think, clean or easy or neat. Killing is a dirty business, more like butchering animals" (173).

### **Patriotism, Vets, War**

"There is among many who fight in war a sense of shame, one that is made worse by the patriotic drivel used to justify the act of killing in war. Those who seek meaning in patriotism do not want to hear the truth of war" (176).