

When was the last time anybody asked what you thought about the war. I mean our two wars. Our two eight-year-old wars.

*“Leave me alone. I hate to think about it,”* you might respond. So you should, and so would I. We can’t afford to think seriously about it because we would throw up. We see the mortality count (U.S. and non-U.S.). We see the wounded count. And we are now learning more and more about the emotional casualties and family fall-out. Recently, Bob Herbert of the NYTimes called these wars a “meat grinder for service members and their families.” Naturally we want to avert our eyes, and minds.

To avoid thinking about it, we play happy—eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow (or some day far down the road) we all die. Easy to say if you’re not in a war zone. But that’s one strategy we have to protect our consciences.

Another way is simply to say that the war policy is beyond our control. Which it is—corporate interests control it (see *“Why We Fight,”* the 2005 award winning documentary by Eugene Jarecki). What’s to be done about that? And after Afghanistan, there are other candidates in cue.

But, you know, as well as actually trying to change the situation, there is also such a thing as acting in a way appropriate to the situation—like, SCREAM. To scream “bloody murder” would be, I believe, the perfectly sane reaction to the ongoing travesty and tragedy. It is only natural to grieve death and destruction—not to do so is unhealthy, inhuman. Whether one supports or opposes the war policy, keening over the maimed and dead is proper, mandatory really.

Is that realistic? There are so many casualties; they cease to have personal meaning for us. Now that’s just the problem we must avoid—but we have slipped into it long since. What personal meaning do these casualties have for any American except for the families involved? That is the unfortunate, impious state of affairs about our state of war.

Three or four years into the Iraq War, when I was serving a church in Boston, I would be preparing for Sunday worship and feeling how lame it seemed to enter a beautiful sanctuary and only say the usual prayers (“for peace,” “for our national leaders”) and not also break out weeping for the exploded bodies and shattered souls strewn across the Mesopotamian sands. In fact, I daydreamed, we should suspend “worship” entirely and just stage scenes from the Greek tragedies, say, scenes from *Iphegenia* (about a young woman sacrificed for war), or from *Antigone* (another young woman, pleading with the king to bury her rebel brother), or from *Ajax* (the Athenian general who killed himself upon his return home). Well, it didn’t happen.

But my daydreams continued here at Skidmore. Actually, I acted one of them out at the Club Fair last month when I dressed up as Uncle Sam (did I feel silly? Yes.) and handed out questions for students to consider this year: “*What are the costs of war?*” “*Who is carrying the burden of those costs?*” “*Do you realize what is being done on your behalf?*” “*Is it time to think about Universal National Service?*”

So, too, I could just imagine Skidaiko setting up their drums in the central quadrangle, interspersed with banners which read (in Japanese characters and in translation): “*We are a nation at war,*” and “*Consult your feelings.*” Or, again, I can envision one of our students as a mime performer, like the ones you see in Quincy Market or Washington Square, all white and rigid and silent like a statue, in the costume of Mars, the war god. Or perhaps a group of students might organize a staged reading from Tim O’Brien’s “*What They Carried.*” Already in the works, the dance department has choreographed Arvo Paart’s *Da Pacem*, a memorial of the Madrid bombings, to be performed in December.

Wouldn’t it be a helpful exercise in emotional honesty, and a hopeful one, for our community to offer up occasional reflections about our wars in some expressive, artistic fashion! Or is that just another daydream? I’m open.

--Rick Chrisman (10/6/2010)