I was once a young man, very much like the young men and women who have gone to Iraq and Afghanistan as US military soldiers. I grew up believing in the red, white and blue. I believed that the United States had a sacred mission to spread democracy around the world. Viet Nam was my generation’s war. I did not volunteer, but when I was drafted, I answered the call. It was in Viet Nam that my journey toward a different kind of knowledge began.

One hot sunny morning in April 1969 I found myself in a small Mekong Vietnamese fishing village that had just been bombed, burned bodies lying everywhere. My job in that moment was to assess the success of bombing missions of so-called military targets. In my naivete, it never occurred to me that the countless targets, systematically being bombed, were undefended, inhabited rice farming and fishing villages. In effect, all that mattered was the creation of “enemy” body counts – lots of them – Washington’s demonic criteria for defining “success.” I was overwhelmed in grief as I looked into the eyes of young, napalmed, blackened mothers with children – hundreds of them – lying in their own village 9,000 miles distant from my sleepy farm community in upstate New York. I gagged when I witnessed these horrible scenes of carnage, and later became enraged at the incomprehensible lie that I had so easily believed in.

What on earth was going on? Americans were taught that among nations we were unique: a nation of laws, not of men. In one shamefully startling moment in a Vietnamese village, I realized I had been brainwashed, mesmerized by US American mythology. I was overcome by an irreversible knowledge that a huge lie had been perpetrated by men in open defiance of the laws of the land at the expense of countless innocent people.

I futilely demanded that my superiors in Saigon headquarters stop the bombing that violated both US and international laws of warfare prohibiting targeting of civilians or their infrastructure. My pleas were summarily ignored, confirming that in fact there are no laws of war. The pilots of these planes were rewarded for their routinely successful turkey shoots at 300 feet, while other young men back in the states were jailed for burning the national symbol that represented this very policy of burning human beings – the US flag.

The vast majority of US citizenry were paying taxes to finance this grotesquely criminal war, absurdly touted by political, religious, economic and many academic leaders as necessary to protect our national security by destroying other, far-away people’s aspirations for independence. I staggered at how preposterous and racist this policy was. Later I learned that Ralph McGehee, a CIA officer in Viet Nam, had revealed intelligence that could find no significant support for our intervention there. Later I learned that Ralph McGehee, a CIA officer in Viet Nam, had revealed intelligence that could find no significant support for our intervention there. McGehee became depressed when his bosses in Washington reported exactly the opposite to the US American public. He reluctantly concluded that the CIA is the covert action arm of the President’s foreign policy advisers which reports and shapes “intelligence” to justify desired political policy.

This basic lie has been with us since our country’s origins. We ignore the fundamental fact that the US was built on dispossession and genocide of hundreds of ancient nations of Indigenous peoples, describing ourselves as being “as a city upon a hill,” and later as an “exceptional” people. We celebrate Thanksgiving, a holiday that was first officially proclaimed by the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637 to commemorate the massacre of 700 Pequot men, women and children at what is now Groton, Connecticut. Today, Groton is the home of the Electric Boat Corporation which makes US nuclear submarines. Thus, our official life as a nation is constructed on a shared denial of painful realities and the suffering
they created, and continue to create. Denial as a way of life is politics in US America.

Even our founding document, the Constitution, is suspect. The Convention was conducted by 55 well-to-do White men meeting in strict secrecy, and the document was never submitted to a popular vote. Domination by a very few men and the subordination of the many was made the law of the land, in effect, assuring that inherited property replaced inherited government, commercial enterprises reigning over human liberty. However, that is not how it is taught. As we persist in believing the lie that it is “we the people” and not “we the largest property owners” who govern this country, we assure our continued disempowerment.

For more than two centuries, the process of preserving and expanding private property and profits under the lofty rhetoric of living in a democracy has been assured by over 560 US military interventions in more than 100 countries, murdering millions of people. I did not know this history when I was in Viet Nam. One discovers deceit and secrecy surrounding every one of these foreign interventions (necessary to assure public support), starting with the very first intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1798 and through all of our wars and interventions to the present ones in Iraq and Afghanistan. World War II was no exception. Journalist Robert B. Stinnett discovered similar deceit behind US entrance into World War II, the so-called “good war.” His research confirms that not only was the attack on Pearl Harbor known in advance at the highest levels from decoded Japanese intelligence, but it was deliberately provoked.

Psychologist Carl Jung has described how the psychology of nations with imperial ambitions successfully hides its dark internal “shadows” (harsh truths) by projecting outward its own evils onto other nations described as enemies (“demons”): Everything our nation does is good, everything the “enemy” does is evil. But many of us obedient soldiers who participated first hand in these imperial wars of good versus evil had these projections quickly stripped from our eyes. We discovered in fact that we were the savages, not those lying dead at our feet in their home villages whom we had been taught to demonize.

It is easy to identify our nation’s shadows by carefully examining the images we project onto others. But if we continue to maintain a dangerous, distorted vision of the world, we assure protection of our moral high-mindedness at the expense of severely weakening our grasp of reality. We ensure our own destruction unless we muster the courage to look at our own dark shadows, whether as individuals or nations. Instead, we pretend, endlessly.

How many of our citizens know of the systematic crimes committed by the US throughout the world that have been constant, remorseless, and fully documented? As British playwright and Nobel Prize recipient Harold Pinter angrily comments: “Nobody talks about them…It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest.” The US just wouldn’t be involved in such criminal interventions any more than our origins are built upon dispossession and genocide.

Over 100 years ago, noted US socialist and reformer Upton Sinclair bemoaned our corrupt political and media system, and his words still ring true: “…we are just like Rome. Our legislatures are corrupt; our politicians are unprincipled; our rich men are ambitious and unscrupulous. Our newspapers have been purchased and gagged; our colleges have been bribed; our churches have been cowed. Our masses are sinking into degradation and misery; our ruling classes are becoming wanton and cynical.”

Pretending to be democratic takes a lot of effort. This harsh political reality has required the constant managing of the “public” mind to assure mass “democratic” compliance with the undemocratic oligarchic economic and political structures. Edward L. Bernays, the premier pioneer of US public relations, argued that the ability to shape and direct public opinion had become indispensable to the maintenance of order. President Woodrow Wilson was re-elected in 1916 on the promise that he would keep the US neutral, and would not send “American” boys to war in Europe. Once elected, however, ongoing pressures from US banking and other economic interests to enter the war on the side of England required Wilson to develop a strategy to convince a public overwhelmingly against the war to change their minds. With Bernays’ coaching, Wilson created the first modern de facto Minister for Propaganda, selecting liberal newspaperman George Creel to head up The Committee for Public Information (CPI). Creel launched an intense advertising campaign using catch phrases and fear-inducing language with 75,000 traveling speakers (the famous Four Minute Men), ads, and essays reaching every nook and cranny of the United States.
Fifty years later, as noted above, CIA officers realized during Viet Nam that another war was being stage managed from Washington, as the Vietnamese were telling us they understandably wanted no part of our imperial ambitions. This is systematically documented in the Pentagon Papers, released in 1971 by Pentagon insider Daniel Ellsberg.

Now, in the 21st Century we increasingly discover that the so-called War on Terror – actually a war of wholesale terror on retail terror, is itself stage managed, as Stephan Salisbury describes in his excellent expose, Mohamed’s Ghosts: An American Story of Love and Fear in the Homeland. “The plain fact is that if there is no ‘enemy within,’ if ‘homegrown’ cells are not simply elusive but an illusion – as appears increasingly to be the case – then the entire apparatus of the war on terror crumbles in the homeland…What can be imagined has replaced the actual.”

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire observed that manipulation of public thinking “is an instrument of conquest” and an indispensable means by which the “dominant elites try to conform the masses to their objectives.” Everything is make believe; honesty is dangerous. Wars abroad and wars at home must be constantly stage managed to keep the pretentions alive. Our national news constantly stage manages events to conform to our convenient view of ourselves as “exceptional.” Infotainment replaces information.

Eminent quantum physicist David Bohm summed up our dilemma perfectly. Since exploitation continues to be the essential feature of a modern society bent on accumulation of “wealth,” and its popular consumption, man is doomed to ever-increasing confusion, for he has to justify this theft to himself. “This is in fact impossible, except by continual recourse to confusion. For how else can you justify the arbitrary authority of some people over others? You can pretend that God or nature ordered it, that the others are inferior, that we are superior, etc. But once you start on this line, you can never allow yourself to think straight again, for fear that the truth will come out. You tell the child that she or he must be honest, treat people fairly, etc. Just this one point is enough to destroy the minds of most children. How can you square up the emotion of love and truth with that of plundering an enemy, stealing his wealth, murdering helpless people, and enslaving others?”

Viet Nam was not a mistake any more than the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars were a mistake. There neither was or is anything different about these wars. They are part of a pattern of brutality written into our country’s DNA. The long pattern of US intervention policy does not make atrocities by individual soldiers inevitable, but it does make it inevitable that US soldiers as a whole would murder many civilians. Currently, Army private Bradley Manning is accused of revealing to the public numerous and egregious US war crimes in Iraq (the truth). He has been incarcerated for nearly two years awaiting a trial that military judicial authorities say promises life in prison or possibly death. This dramatically contrasts with the recent exoneration (pretend), with no jail time, by that same military system, of eight US Marines, four of whom were officers, of cold-blooded murder of 24 unarmed civilians in Haditha, Iraq, aged one year to 76 years, shooting them at close range in the head and chest. The evil of the US simply does not occur.

Since the first European settlers raped, pillaged, and massacred the local Indian populations in order to claim the land for themselves, we in the United States have felt it our manifest destiny as exceptional people to gain ever more material goods, even at the expense of anyone and everyone else, and the earth. We continue to treat others as inferiors. We are told that these human beings are demons – vermin – which we could only absurdly believe because we as a people have not yet found the courage to look within and discover our own inner darkness – our own vermin – that festers from believing in the lies of our national myths, that we are the “exceptional” people.

I can never forget the eyes I saw on mother’s faces as they clutched their children when they were caught by the bombs exploding in their villages. In a sudden moment of truth, I realized we are all connected. If we continue to pretend that we are not connected, we invite our own destruction, even extinction. How sad that we would pretend rather than be honest, and become real. Living in a pretend world assures that countless more men, women and children, here and abroad, will continue to be considered as worthless, as the power of the few continue their plunder. Our survival demands that we seek courage to examine our own shadows, rather than cowardly project those shadows onto others, and thus begin peeling back the layers of deception to recover our humanity.
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*S. Brian Willson is the author of “Blood on the Tracks-The Life and Times of S. Brian Willson” (PM Press, 2011). Willson is a Viet Nam veteran whose wartime experiences transformed him into a revolutionary nonviolent pacifist. He gained renown as a participant in a prominent 1986 veterans fast on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. One year later, on September 1, 1987, he was again thrust into the public eye when he was run over and nearly killed by a U.S. Navy Munitions train while engaging in a nonviolent blockade in protest of weapons shipments to El Salvador. Since the 1980s he has continued efforts to educate the public about the diabolical nature of U.S. imperialism while striving to “walk his talk” (on two prosthetic legs and a three-wheeled handcycle) and live a simpler life.*

This entry was written by brian, posted on at 11:26 pm, filed under Brian's Blog, The Most Dangerous of Rogue Nations: The United States, Uncategorized, Challenging Traditional Patriotism. Bookmark the permalink. Follow any comments here with the RSS feed for this post. Post a comment or leave a trackback: Trackback URL.

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National poetry recitation competition open to all pupils and students in England aged between 14 and 18. The Poetry By Heart website is a shared asset of The Poetry Archive and The Full English. There has been a debate for many years as to the original language of the Gospels; what were they written in, what was Jesus native language. Many people have become comfortable with the idea that Jesus spoke Aramaic and even the Gospels claim (in their English translation) that some of the words of Jesus as he was dying, were spoken in Aramaic? But is this so? Certainly for the Gospel of Matthew there existed, according to Jerome, an original copy of the text in Hebrew in the library in Caesarea in his time (mid 300’s to early 400’s). The following link is to an article that argues for a Hebrew

I pretend to have read Dostoevsky but in fact cannot get past the first page usually. Kafka, the same. Saul Bellow – urgh. Fitzgerald, Hemingway and anything by Don Delillo make my bowels churn. Reply. Bernard Krapcha says: July 24, 2013 at 9:44 am. the writer of this blog asks people to anonymously comment on what books they have lied about reading…not to brag about how many books on the list you have read!!… Reply. BogMom says: October 28, 2013 at 7:35 am. The whale tale. . . .nnI was supposed to read it in high school, but didn’t.