



## War Promotes Bigotry

***Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously called racism, militarism, and extreme materialism the three evils, interrelated forms of violence that exist in a vicious cycle. War and war propaganda have often fueled and been fueled by bigotry, including racism, religious hatred, and nationalism.***

### Racism

The power of racism to facilitate the worst sorts of human behavior is well established. For example, during World War I, the French media and U.S. Congress overtly framed the war in terms of race, as an opportunity to fight the Germans.<sup>1</sup> During World War II, William Halsey, who commanded the U.S. naval forces in the South Pacific, thought of his mission as “Kill Japs, kill Japs, kill more Japs,” and vowed that, when the war was over, the Japanese language

would be spoken only in hell.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the U.S. Navy has hired psychiatrists to develop methodologies to better prepare assassins to kill. This includes techniques “to get the men to think of the potential enemies they will have to face as inferior forms of life...the stupidity of local customs is ridiculed, local personalities are presented as evil demigods.”<sup>3</sup>

Historian Kathleen Belew says there is a correlation in the U.S. between the



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aftermath of war and the rise of white supremacist violence. "If you look, for instance, at the surges in Ku Klux Klan membership, they align more consistently with the return of veterans from combat and the aftermath of war than they do with anti-immigration, populism, economic hardship, or any of the other factors that historians have typically used to explain them."<sup>4</sup>

### Religious Bigotry

Dating back to the crusades and colonial wars, religion has long been used as a justification for war, often as a cover for underlying prejudices or other motives. Centuries later, religious justifications are continually employed to greenlight war-making. For example, at the turn of the 20th century, U.S. President William McKinley cited divine guidance as the "inspiration" for the U.S. military occupation of the Philippines.<sup>5</sup>

Now, in the 21st century, Islamophobia is often incited to drum up support for war. Professor Karim Karim states: "The historically entrenched image of the 'bad Muslim' has been quite useful to Western governments planning to attack Muslim-majority lands. If public opinion in their countries can be convinced that Muslims are barbaric and violent, then killing them and destroying their property appears more acceptable."<sup>6</sup> According to the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, soldiers have

reported that, when seeking mental health counseling, chaplains have instead counseled them to stay on the "battlefield" to "kill Muslims for Christ."<sup>7</sup>



### Nationalism

When World War I began, many socialists in Europe rallied to their various national flags and abandoned their struggle for the international working class.<sup>8</sup> Nationalism is a new form of religion used to justify war. When it comes to motivating warlike emotions, if other differences fail, there is always this: the enemy does not belong to our country and does not salute our flag. When U.S. Senator Wayne Morse opposed the misinformation used to justify the Vietnam War, a fellow senator told him "[Y]ou can't get into a fight with the president when all the flags are waving....All [U.S. President] Lyndon [Johnson] wants is a piece of paper telling him we did right out there, and we support him."<sup>9</sup>

***Without religious hatred, racism, and patriotic jingoism, wars would be harder to sell.***

# Learn More at: [worldbeyondwar.org/bigotry](http://worldbeyondwar.org/bigotry)

*World BEYOND War is a global grassroots network of volunteers, activists, and allied organizations advocating for the abolition of war and its replacement with an alternative global security system based on peace and demilitarization. Visit [WorldBEYONDWar.org](http://WorldBEYONDWar.org) to join the global movement to end all wars.*

## References

<sup>1</sup> Lasswell, Harold. *Propaganda Technique in World War I*. Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1971.

"President Signs Declaration of War." *New York Times*, 8 December 1917, <https://www.nytimes.com/1917/12/08/archives/president-signs-declaration-of-war-on-austriahungary-after-congress.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*. London, Virago Press, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. New York, Back Bay Books, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> "How America's Perpetual Warfare Abroad Is Fueling an Increase in White Supremacist Violence in U.S." *Democracy Now*, 20 November 2018, [https://www.democracynow.org/2018/11/20/how\\_americas\\_perpetual\\_warfare\\_abroad\\_is](https://www.democracynow.org/2018/11/20/how_americas_perpetual_warfare_abroad_is).

<sup>5</sup> McKinley, William. "William McKinley's Imperial Gospel." *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, edited by Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill, vol. 1, D.C. Heath, 1995, 369-370.

<sup>6</sup> Lasswell, Harold. *Propaganda Technique in World War I*. Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Sullivan, Paul and Mikey Weinstein. "Vets for Common Sense and Religious Freedom Org Slam Christian Proselytizing in U.S. Military, GOing to God Won't Make it for PTSD Victims." *Veterans Today*, 10 August 2010, <https://www.veteranstodayarchives.com/2010/08/10/vets-for-common-sense-and-religious-freedom-org-slam-christian-proselytizing-in-u-s-military-going-to-god-wont-make-it-for-ptsd-victims/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*. London, Virago Press, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Brewer, Susan. *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.