

Why do celebrate Veteran's Day?

Historically, Veterans Day was called "Armistice Day." Promulgated by President Woodrow Wilson and first celebrated on November 11, 1919, it was to be a day dedicated to honoring and furthering world peace. Historical ironies aside (Wilson was not exactly a pacifist), the move to militarize this day and even to change its name began in Kansas, and eventually, in 1954, the U.S. Congress changed the name of the day and with it the meaning. Instead of celebrating world peace, the day now celebrates the U.S. military. If you doubt the factual nature of this assertion, just watch a sporting event this week. Better, watch where President Obama goes and what he says in celebration of this day.

So reflective citizens need to ask, what is the celebration of Veterans Day really about? If we are no longer celebrating the cause of peace, and instead are celebrating the military, what exactly are we celebrating? Are we celebrating the (capitalist) system which perpetuates war and the oppression of others in order to make billions in personal profit? Are we celebrating the soldiers who in large measure have joined the military not so much "to keep us free" (whatever that means), but because that is their best or only way out of poverty? Are we celebrating the imperialism of American foreign policy by celebrating its enforcers? Or are we just generally celebrating our militaristic culture?

The most vitriolic dime store patriots will find this series of questions most offensive. They choose to focus on the "protectors of our freedom" theme. But from what threats to "our" freedom" have the protectors defended us? In the hundreds of small and the two big wars in which the U.S. has engaged, there is only one—WW II—that was arguably for our freedom. So whose freedom is being protected by all the wars in which the U.S. engages? It is unlikely that the freedom involved is that of the average U.S. citizen, since there has been no overwhelming foreign threat to the daily freedoms which we take for granted. That is demonstrated clearly by the fact that most citizens do not even know how many wars have been and continue to be fought in our name. But if one defines as a "war" the use of military force in another country or against another group, the U.S. has been involved in no fewer than 145 "wars" during its 235 year history. That's a new war approximately every year-and-a-half. Surely the world is not that threatening to the freedom of the U.S. people, especially when it is recognized that most people around the world, when polled, have their freedom at the top of their agenda as well.

A reasonable answer to the question why we celebrate Veterans Day is to be seen by comprehending who benefits from all these wars. Certainly it is the case that those who desire world power benefit. The U.S. leaders have consistently attacked those countries which do not agree with them or do what they are told to do by the U.S. leaders. A short and certainly non-exhaustive list would include U.S. military attacks against Iran, Guatemala, Panama, Palestine, Haiti, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Turkey, El Salvador, Cuba, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

It is also the case that those who crave resources for control and/or consumption likewise benefit from U.S. wars. This would obviously include the corporate "captains of industry," who salivate from thoughts of control of resources and the cheap labor desired to procure those resources. Note not only Iraq in this context, but also the diamond industry and the materials needed to

make cell phones for Americans. These materials are all procured from Africa, and the exploitation of the people there to mine these materials is indefensible for a country that touts “freedom” as a reason to celebrate. Note that this would include not only the capitalist leaders of the country, but also we, the citizens, who consume as though we had an unencumbered right to strip the world bare of its natural resources for our own comfort and convenience. To keep that consumption going, we need access to the world’s resources and we require that the poor population of those countries mine and produce those resources for us, and remain poor in the process. This is in part because the more resources they want to live like us, the less we will be able to live in unchallenged fashion (witness the problems of power-producing pollution concomitant with the clamor for equal standards of living as the U.S., in India, China, and elsewhere). So we are all guilty of contributing to the U.S. militarism celebrated by and in Veterans Day as long as unconscious uncontrolled consumption is part of our culture’s daily living.

It is thus the freedom for the economic elites to force markets open by military means, the expansion and “defense” of capitalism’s alleged “free markets” (which historically are anything but free, due to the lopsided use of protectionism for U.S. corporations while holding other nations to the standards of “the free market”), and the freedom of Americans to consume, cheaply and without limits, that all underpin the accolades that go into celebrations of Veterans’ Day. The sooner we realize this and reject it, the healthier our country will become. Stop celebrating Veteran’s Day, period. Return to Armistice Day, if we want an excuse to declare a holiday before we celebrate even more our consumptive abilities as we gorge ourselves at Thanksgiving and then again at Christmas. Veterans Day continues to underscore our lopsided consumption, our militarism and our imperialism, and cannot help but end with deepening the world’s animosity toward the now-dying Imperial Rome.