

## Milestones Of Freedom- Memorial Days

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Memorial Day in DC is always filled with marches, concerts, and celebration. This year the city has had an unusual amount of activity all week. A great endearing aspect of American culture is our respect for our military people from every branch of the armed services.

In my youth, anti-Vietnam war slogans were summarized by the statement "Make Love not War." In those days, we sold out to hedonism instead of heroism. It seems that today's America is beginning to believe the words of General George S. Patton, "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived." I personally believe that Rudyard Kipling said it best in his work - *The Old Issue, 1899*, "All we have of freedom, all we use or know - This our fathers bought for us long and long ago."

American patriotism fosters our desire to celebrate those who have lost life or limb to protect our freedoms. Yet recently, numerous domestic and external critics have accused America of simply being imperialistic or greedy. Frequently, liberal talk show hosts have questioned me, a conservative Christian, about the morality of "George Bush's war." Impetuously, they often quote the words of Jesus out of context and cite several messages of Martin Luther King, Jr. My answer has always included a little church history, if I could squeeze it in before the session deteriorated into ad homonyms and name-calling.

St. Augustine, known as a father of modern Christianity, is often credited with developing foundational, biblical premises of how national armed conflict should be viewed. He did not promote war because of self-defense. Rather, based on Jesus' teaching of turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39; Luke 6:29), he felt that Christian love required a nonviolent response to imminent personal danger. But this rule of "turning the other cheek" did not apply to the Christian obligation to care for the defenseless and weak. Therefore, according to Augustine, Christian rulers were obligated to make peace (if possible) in order to protect their citizens. Sometimes the use of force of arms is the only way to stop an attack upon the defenseless.

Augustine's biblical views became the basis of the medieval Christian doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas called the Just War Theory. Today, these Just War principles are used by most nations to define the ethical basis for going to war. In contrast, international agreements like the Geneva Conventions define the rules of conduct during war. It's obvious that the Hitlers of any generation should be opposed militarily.

Once we understand that certain wars are moral, another moral question looms in the minds of the minority community. Who should go to war? Should minority citizens, who die disproportionately compared to their white counterparts, do so because of their inferior social status? These questions point to matters of racial justice and fairness.

Ironically from the Revolution through World War II, many blacks have fought enthusiastically for the nation - when allowed. I have been reading a book called: *Root and Branch: Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and the Struggle to End Segregation*. It contains a detailed view of the personal courage of the featured men and the cultural struggle during World Wars I and II. In the context of the civil rights movement, it was amazing to read that blacks were proud of military service throughout their battle for social equality.

In contrast, by the time Martin Luther King, Jr spoke out against the war in Vietnam; things had changed dramatically. King saw the overseas struggle as a seductive diversion from the priority battle for social justice for blacks at home.

Here are the words of King's speech entitled "Beyond Vietnam."

"Since I am a preacher by calling, I suppose it is not surprising that I have seven major reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision... A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war. And I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such."

King's opposition to the war in Vietnam should not be misconstrued with a hatred for all war. I believe he would stand up for truly just wars.

It was not until 1948 that President Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces. Unfortunately, my father and uncle proudly served the nation in World War II before their service was on equal footing with their white counterparts. Today, however, blacks have made great strides. At the 60th anniversary of the desegregation order in 2008, blacks made up about 17 percent of the total force, but just 9 percent of all officers. Clearly, there is still ground for improvement for all minorities. Nonetheless, we have progressed in the realm of personal and national freedom more thoroughly than any other culture on the planet.

Americans should be proud of the way we have conducted ourselves in both armed external conflicts and the progress we are making with our internal, non-military social conflicts. We have been and will increasingly be torchbearers of freedom for the world to see.

**America's courage in past just wars has made a difference for the freedom of the entire globe. As a child of the 60s and 70s, I am amazed by the current support for the nation's military, in spite of our current numerous battlefronts.**