



For Now, We Can't Be Patriots

BY [Herb Rothschild](#) July 16, 2018

When we founded the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, had we been more interested in polemics than civics, we might have named it the Counterculture of Peace Commission. Not that peace is countercultural in Ashland. Before ACPC formed in 2015, Ashland aspired to be “a city marked by mutually respectful and caring relationships among all its residents and between its residents and the natural environment on which we depend” (to quote language in the City proclamation blessing our endeavor), and it had already gone a long way toward realizing that aspiration. It’s in our nation, not our city, that peace is countercultural.

Peace building requires intention, and intention starts with attention. We must attend to the ways our larger culture is committed to violence, and then we should find ways to challenge it, certainly by the witness of our lives, but also by forthright declarations of disaffection.

From the start of their colonization of the New World, Europeans began appropriating the property of indigenous inhabitants and the bodies of imported Africans. Such appropriations required force—initial and continual. Slavery ended in 1865, and in 1890 the superintendent of the U.S. Census announced that there was no more frontier. By that time we had violently wrested from Mexico half of its territory, and shortly after, the Philippines and Cuba from Spain, opening new frontiers of appropriation. The entire globe is now divided into U.S. military commands. Our troops are stationed at about 800 bases in some 70 countries. Our warships sail on and under every sea. Hardly a day passes without casualties of U.S. combat.

It's hard to compartmentalize habits of violence. In *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement in Paramilitary America* (Harvard University Press, 2018), Kathleen Belew documents how a small but deeply disaffected group of Vietnam veterans, active-duty personnel, and their civilian supporters, believing that politicians didn't permit us to win that otherwise winnable war, unified people from militant groups such as Klansmen, neo-Nazis, Skinheads, radical tax protestors, and white separatists into a movement committed to violence—violence against non-whites and against the government itself.

More pervasive than the violence of the White Power movement is violence in the home, and veterans inflict it at high rates. That's the focus of Ashland resident Stacy Bannerman's *Homefront 911*. She asserts that even as the overall rate of domestic abuse in the U.S. declined, levels of intimate partner violence within the post-9/11 military and veterans' communities skyrocketed. Calls for help from people affiliated with the military more than tripled from 2006 to 2011. Eighty percent of veterans diagnosed with PTSD committed at least one act of violence in the year prior to their diagnosis, including strangulation, stabbing and shooting. That is more than 14 times higher than the civilian population.

The saturation of our culture by militarism promotes violence well beyond military personnel and veterans. Our cult of guns, including the military-style weapons used in school shootings, has contributed to a gun homicide rate that, in 2016, was almost 2.5 times Canada's, 55 times the UK's, and 96 times Japan's. Predictably, of the 15 states with the highest overall homicide rates, eight were in the South, where white violence to intimidate blacks continued after the Civil War until the end of Jim Crow, and where militarism flourishes.

In the U.S., saying one is for peace is commonplace. Saying one is against war is counter-cultural. We cannot build a culture of peace unless we acknowledge that militarism is a standing repudiation of “mutually respectful and caring relationships among all people” and try to discredit it.

That acknowledgment and intention should influence our political attitudes and advocacy. But as we build a culture of peace in Ashland, we should take some declarative local actions. For example, wouldn't it be stunning if, next Veterans Day, instead of honoring our veterans of war, we honored our veterans of peace, namely the many returned Peace Corps volunteers who live here? That might make national news, shining the Peace Flame far beyond our city borders.

Herb Rothschild and his wife moved to the Rogue Valley in 2009. He chaired the board of Peace House from 2012-2015. Currently he writes a weekly column for the Daily Tidings. Email comments and questions

to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.