

## SUNDAY SERVICE MAY 25, 2025 at AlbanyUU

### **Called by Loss, Called by Peace**

By Heather K Janules

We come this day, called by war  
By the suffering we inflict and endure  
When minds across borders  
fail to reason and compromise.

We come this day, called by loss,  
The deaths of those who serve in our name,  
Those whose lives end before their natural course  
In service to a cause greater than their own.

We come this day, called by hope  
Hope that we will, in some season,  
Finally surrender our swords for ploughshares

And we come this day called by peace.  
May we hear its song, may we proclaim its promise.  
May our remembrance today renew our struggle.

### **Our Opening Hymn is" America, My Country Tis of Thee"**

In 1832 Samuel Francis Smith wrote new lyrics to the British anthem "God Save the King" as a denunciation of monarchy. The third verse drives home his point.

No more shall **tyrants** here  
With haughty steps appear,  
No more shall **tyrants** tread  
Above the patriot dead

### READINGS

**Abraham Lincoln** delivered a speech during a formal dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery, on the grounds of Civil War's deadliest and most decisive battle. This is part of what he said.

.... our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation ... can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men ... who struggled here have consecrated it. ... From these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

**Major General Smedley Butler** United States Marine Corps was the most decorated marine in U.S. history. He fought in the Philippine–American War, the Boxer Rebellion, the Mexican Revolution, World War I, and the Banana Wars.

After he retired in 1931, he made a nationwide speaking tour. Here is some of what he said.

I helped make Mexico .... safe for American oil interests. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. ... I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests. In China I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

War Is a Racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. ... It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes.

The speech was so well received that it was published as a book in 1935.

Albany native, **Henry Johnson** answered the call to serve in the first world war enlisting in the U.S. Army and became part of the 369th Infantry Regiment, known as the Harlem Hellfighters. The regiment, composed primarily of African American soldiers, served under French command due to the racial prejudices of the U.S. military at the time.

On the night of May 14, 1918, in the Argonne Forest of France while on night sentry duty with his comrade Needham Roberts, Johnson faced a German raiding party of approximately 20 soldiers. Outnumbered and outgunned, he fought valiantly to defend his post and protect his wounded comrade.

Johnson's courage was extraordinary. He used his rifle, grenades, and even a bolo knife in close combat, refusing to back down despite being severely wounded. His actions not only saved Roberts from capture but also prevented a breach in their line, thwarting the enemy's assault.

Johnson's injuries left him unable to work, and he lived the rest of his life in poverty, largely forgotten by the nation he had served so bravely.

## **A Just war: The Moral Question**

**By Thomas Mercer**

All of human history is punctuated by wars. Fighting over territory and resources, fighting for dominance, fighting for defense, blood feuding, fighting for freedom. War brings suffering, loss, and destruction. It leaves scars—on individuals, families, and entire nations.

As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We commit to justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. We aspire to a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. These values push us toward a vision of nonviolence and reconciliation.

And yet, history reminds us that there are moments when the refusal to act—or to fight—can enable even greater suffering. When faced with the horrors of genocide, oppression, or unprovoked aggression, is it moral to remain passive? The struggle between pacifism and the justification for war is a profound spiritual and ethical challenge.

War is always a tragedy, even when it is necessary. It tests our humanity, challenging us to balance justice with compassion, and action with restraint. The tension between the necessity and moral costs of war is as old as human history. Religious traditions, philosophers, and moral thinkers have wrestled with this question for centuries.

The concept of a just war has its roots in ancient and medieval thought, particularly in the works of Augustine and Aquinas. It was later developed into a formal doctrine within various religious and secular traditions.

Just War Theory offers a framework to assess the moral justification of each conflict and guidance in navigating questions of morality.

Just War Theory has six principles:

**A Just Cause:** The war must seek to redress a grave injustice, such as defending against aggression or protecting innocent lives.

**Legitimate Authority:** It must be declared by a rightful governing body, not individuals acting on impulse or for personal gain.

**Right Intention:** Its purpose must be to establish peace, not to dominate, exploit, or exact revenge.

**Last Resort:** All peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted before resorting to violence.

**Proportionality:** The harm caused by the war must not outweigh the good it seeks to achieve.

**Collateral Damage:** Noncombatants must be protected to the fullest extent possible.

This morning, I will use the lens of Just War Theory to consider some of the most significant wars in US history. You may interpret history differently than I do. I merely offer food for thought.

Two and a half centuries ago our nation was born in a **War for Independence**. It is generally considered a just war, though there is some debate regarding motivations and outcomes.

- **Just Cause:** We can justify the American Revolution as the triumph of equality against aristocratic rule. The American independence movement challenged the assumption that some people are entitled to rule by the birthright of wealth inherited from distant European ancestors. The ideals of liberty and the proposition that all men are created equal is enshrined in our framing documents.
- **Last Resort:** Diplomatic efforts, like the Olive Branch Petition, failed.
- **Proportionality and Collateral Damage:** The independence movement was an activist minority. About a third of the population supported and fought for the King. Another third figured “somebody’s gonna tax us either way” and tried to stay neutral. The patriots and the loyalists treated each other savagely. When the King’s army was finally defeated, many loyalists lost their property and their livelihood.

On Memorial Day as we honor the rebelling patriots let's not forget the sacrifice and suffering of their friends, neighbors and family members who were the Tories.

## **War of 1812**

As Europe was embroiled in the Napoleonic war, Britain needed more sailors for its navy. They would hijack American Sailors at sea and force them into the service of the Royal Navy. This challenged American Independence.

Diplomatic measures were attempted but unsuccessful. Congress declared war on Britain. There was Right Intention and Legitimate Authority. America was justified in defending itself from aggression.

The British response was disproportional. They invaded and caused significant destruction, burning Washington, D.C. including the White House.

Ultimately, the War ended in a draw, and the negotiated peace reflected this. The Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24, 1814.

On Memorial Day we remember those who repelled this hostile invasion.

In 1846 the United States declared **war against Mexico**.

There was no Just cause. The United States was the aggressor under the expansionist doctrine of "Manifest Destiny".

No right intention.

It was Not fought as a **Last Resort**

It was Not **Proportional**. It Resulted in significant territorial gains for the U.S. at Mexico's expense.

Henry David Thoreau saw this war as an unnecessary, imperialistic act of aggression. He refused to pay his poll tax as a protest. He was arrested and spent a night in jail. According to the oft-told story, Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Thoreau in jail and asked why he was there. He purportedly responded: "Why are you *not* in here?"

Thoreau's time in jail had a profound influence on him. A few years later Thoreau wrote in his famous essay *Civil Disobedience*, "If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood."

On Memorial Day let's remember civil disobedience to unjust wars.

**The Civil War** is considered a just war for the Union States as they fought against the Confederate States.

Politically powerful plantation owners in the southern states did not fully accept the Revolutionary proposition that all men are created equal, because their wealth depended on the labor of enslaved people. Fearing nationwide abolition of slavery, the southern states succeeded from the Constitution and fired on the US Army at Fort Sumpter.

The Confederate cause, preserve slavery, is agreed by most to be unjust. The Union cause -- initially defense, and upholding the Constitutional order is considered to be Just. Later with the emancipation proclamation the Union also had **Right Intention** -- abolition of slavery.

**War came as a Last Resort:** Multiple compromises failed to prevent secession.

**Collateral Damage and Proportionality:** Extensive destruction in the South. High casualties on both sides.

At Gettysburg, In the aftermath of the battle resulting in the largest number of casualties President Lincoln said in reference to the fallen **Union** soldiers, "...we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain..."

But what about the Confederate soldiers? Was their death in vain?

This is always the case in war. Many will die in vain. That's something we should also remember on Memorial Day.

### **Native American War of Genocide.**

Ever since first contact, Europeans waged war on the indigenous people of the Americas. During the entire nineteenth century, the United States conducted an unrelenting mass genocide of the Native Peoples. There really can be no justification for this long brutal war.

On Memorial Day let us remember the Trail of Tears and Wounded Knee and all the other atrocities conducted against Native Americans.

**Spanish-American War** fails the test of a Just War on the criteria of a just cause, right intention, last resort, and proportionality.

In 1898 an explosion of unknown origin sank the battleship U.S.S. Maine while it was harbored in the Spanish colony of Cuba. 266 crew members were killed. The sinking of the Maine was used to enflame American passions against Spain.

There were limited diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. The U.S. had a strong military advantage. Motivated by imperial ambitions Congress declared war against Spain.

In defeat Spain relinquished Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States. The United States also annexed the independent state of Hawaii during the conflict.

"Teddy" Roosevelt fought in this war with gusto, leading "The Rough Riders." in the decisive attack on San Juan Hill.

General Smedley Butler also fought in this war. On Memorial Day we should remember he said "War's a racket".

### **The Great War (later called WWI)**

European countries were competitively expanding their empires and forming secret alliances to protect themselves from perceived threats. This created a complex web of rivalries and led to an arms race of new technologies.

In 1914 the increasing tensions and competition for power erupted in war. It fails the test of a Just War on most criteria. The European conflict devolved into a prolonged stalemate of miserable trench warfare.

At sea Germany's submarines were attacking passenger and merchant ships. In April 1917, with the toll in sunken U.S. merchant ships and civilian casualties rising, Congress declared war on Germany at the request President Wilson.

America's involvement is can be considered just. President Wilson argued that if we entered the war with our ideals, we could make this the war to end all wars and "make the world safe for democracy". American involvement broke the battlefield stalemate in favor of the French and British democracies.

- **Right Intention and Just Cause**
- **Last Resort:** Entered after repeated provocations.
- **Legitimate Authority:** War declared by Congress.

The League of Nations was established as a means of avoiding future wars. But it soon collapsed and the terms of the treaty with its harsh reparations and poorly drawn borders lead to future conflicts rather than the end of all wars.

This was Henry Johnson's war. Thanks to the efforts of activists, historians, and veterans, he was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart in 1996. In 2002, he received the Distinguished Service Cross, and in 2015, President Barack Obama awarded him the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration in the United States.

More than four million Americans served and 116,708 lost their lives in World War One.

On Memorial Day we remember the kind of heroism that Henry Johnson's resilience and determination exemplify.

Many would say **World War II** was the most justified of American's wars. It is often cited as a necessary response to an existential threat posed by fascism and genocide.

- **Last Resort:** US remained neutral and entered after direct attack
- **Legitimate Authority:** War declared by Congress.
- **Just Cause:** Response to Axis aggression.
- **Right Intention:** Defeat of totalitarian regimes and end atrocities.
- **Collateral damage to Civilians:** Extensive bombings of civilians – London, Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki to mention a few.

With World War II we approach the edge of living memory. My father and uncles served in WW2. They all survived. The war was never a topic of discussion at family gatherings. Dad never talked about his personal experience fighting the Japanese in New Guinea and the Philippines.

In the 1990's when Tom Brokaw was urging the Greatest Generation to record their recollections of the war, my dad agreed to record a video interview with me. Disappointingly he only spoke broadly of the troop movements his company was in and text book generalities.

But years later near the end of his life in one of the very last conversations I had with him he made what seemed like an unburdening of his secret torment. Out of the blue he suddenly changed the topic of conversation. He was recalling a time he was on patrol in the jungle with his men when he spotted a Japanese sniper. He said to me, "if I hadn't shot him first, he would have shot me and who knows how many others."

On Memorial Day we remember those who served with quiet distinction and returned home to raise families and build a prosperous nation.

At the end of World War II **Korea**, which had been a Japanese colony, was divided by the Soviet Union and the United States into two occupation zones, with plans for a future independent state. Instead, the zones formed their own governments. Both claimed to be the sole legitimate government of all of Korea.

On June 25 1950, the Korean People's Army, equipped and trained by the Soviets, launched an invasion of the south. The UN Security Council denounced the attack and recommended member states repel the invasion. UN forces comprised 21 countries, with the United States in command. They retook territory roughly back to the original dividing line.

Combat ended in 1953 with the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement. The conflict caused more than one million military deaths and an estimated two to three million civilian deaths.

- **Just Cause:** Defense of South Korea from North Korean invasion.
- **Legitimate Authority:** U.N. sanctioned a U.S. led coalition.
- **Right Intention:** support for South Korea.
- **Proportionality:** High casualties with limited territorial changes.

On Memorial Day we remember the United Nations and international efforts for peace keeping.

The **Vietnam War** is well within living memory. With us here this morning there may be veterans or others who were personally touched by that war as well as the wars that follow. I shall proceed with all due respect.

The stated intention of the Vietnam war was to prevent spread of communism and support South Vietnam's independence. But in the execution, it is generally understood to have been an unjust war.

- **Legitimate Authority:** U.S. involvement escalated without a formal declaration.
- **Last Resort:** diplomatic options were not fully pursued.
- **Collateral Damage:** Extensive destruction and civilian casualties.
- **Proportionality:** The harm caused by the war did not outweigh the good it sought to achieve. It resulted in defeat.

We sacrificed 58,000 Americans. In the process two million Vietnamese and perhaps another two million southeast Asians in Cambodia, Laos and beyond lost their lives.

The Vietnam War left a legacy of profound division and grief at home. And bitterly divided the nation. Returning veterans, many of them having been drafted against their will were shamefully

dishonored. Veterans faced negative reactions from both opponents of the war (who viewed them as having killed innocent civilians) and its supporters (who saw them as having lost the war).

Veterans suffered physical damage including the effects of exposure to the toxic herbicide Agent Orange, millions of gallons of which had been dumped by U.S. planes on the dense forests of Vietnam. Some 500,000 Vietnam veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, and rates of divorce, suicide, alcoholism and drug addiction were markedly higher among veterans.

The effects of the Vietnam War lingered long after the last troops returned home. The massive spending on the war led to widespread inflation, exacerbated by a worldwide oil crisis and skyrocketing fuel prices.

On Memorial Day we remember the sacrifices of those who believed in a cause greater than themselves, those who were drafted but served honorably and the protesters who helped end the war with mass demonstrations.

**The Gulf War** generally satisfies the principles of a Just War. In 1990 Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait and captured its oil fields.

- **Just Cause:** Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.
- **Right Intention:** Restore Kuwaiti sovereignty. Tainted somewhat by corporate oil interests.
- **Legitimate Authority:** U.N. sanctioned; U.S.-led coalition.
- **Last Resort:** Diplomatic efforts failed.
- **Proportionality:** Swift military action with limited objectives. Once objective was achieved the fighting ended.

On Memorial Day we remember our leaders who apply diplomacy, efficiently achieve necessary military objectives and exercise restraint resisting the temptation to overreach.

**War in Afghanistan (2001–2021)** could have been a just war.

- **Just Cause:** Response to 9/11 attacks.
- **Legitimate Authority:** NATO and U.N. support.
- **Right Intention:** The Taliban authorities governing Afghanistan were harboring the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, the al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The US demanded Afghanistan immediately extradite him to the United States;

The Taliban refused. A bombing campaign targeting al-Qaeda targets ensued.

The Taliban then offered to hand Osama bin Laden over to a third country if the US stopped its bombing and provided evidence of his guilt. The US insisted its demands were "not subject to negotiation" It might have been a Just War if negotiations had been pursued.

Instead, US and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban and establishing the Islamic Republic, a new democratic authority. International rebuilding efforts were launched.



It might have been a Just War if the goal of the new democratic authority -- prevent the Taliban from returning to power had been achieved. But US attention and resources were diverted to a new war in Iraq.

By 2003, Taliban had reorganized and waged guerrilla warfare. By 2007, large parts of Afghanistan had been retaken by the Taliban.

In response, the US led coalition began a major influx of troops.

In 2011 a US covert operation led to the killing of Osama bin Laden.

It might have been a Just War with the death of the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. But by that time the coalition forces had surged to 140,000 troops. And the counter insurgency against the Taliban was underway.

The fighting dragged on for another ten years without defeating the Taliban. In 2020 the US agreed to a deal with the Taliban to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by 2021.

This was America's longest war costing 2.3 trillion dollars. It might have been a just war if that kind of funding had been invested in rebuilding the democratic republic back in 2002 when the Taliban was first toppled. Instead on Memorial Day we are left to remember:

47,000 Afghan civilian killed

66,000 Afghan military and police killed

51,000 Taliban fighters killed

2,500 American service members killed

3,800 U.S. contractors killed

1,100 NATO and other allied service members killed

And one Osama bin Laden killed.

**Iraq War (2003–2011)** fails the test of a Just War on virtually every criterion. It was based on the false claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein was supporting al-Qaeda. Unstated motives were regime change and access to oil.

The 9/11 Commission concluded in 2004 that there was no credible evidence linking Saddam to al-Qaeda, and no WMD stockpiles were found in Iraq.

These false claims faced widespread criticism. Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, declared the invasion illegal under international law. And a 2016 British inquiry concluded the war was unnecessary, as peaceful alternatives had not been fully explored.

The Iraq war led to an estimated million deaths, including civilians, with most occurring during the post-invasion insurgency and ensuing civil war.

On Memorial Day let us not forget the often-used playbook for Unjust Wars: Leaders create irrational fear of an impending threat to convince the public that military action is needed to eliminate that threat, and quell the public fear.

## **Proxy Wars**

The United States is currently engaged in at least two proxy wars: Gaza and Ukraine. We have had many proxy wars in our long history. Some Just, some not. Those fighters and civilians who have fallen in our proxy wars should not be forgotten on Memorial Day. Their sacrifices should count for no less than our own.

The theory of a "just war" aims to impose moral discipline on the chaos of war. But as we know, in the fog of conflict, these ideals are often difficult—if not impossible—to uphold. So, is there ever a moral justification for war? Perhaps the answer lies not in certainty but in humility. War, even when justified, is a reminder of our human frailty and imperfection. It calls us to mourn, to reflect, and to strive for a world where such sacrifices are no longer needed.

**Benediction:** On this day of remembrance, we hold in our hearts the lives lost and the dreams left unfulfilled. Let us dedicate ourselves anew to the principles of justice and peace, so that the sacrifices of war will lead us closer to a world where such sacrifices are no longer necessary.