

# Timeline

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**Destiny and War**

**An Editorial by Mac Lawrence**

Some very good people feel that war is sometimes justified. Always horrible, but at times appropriate—the “just war” concept that many religions avow. Even Jimmy Carter admitted to that in his Nobel Peace Prize lecture—disastrous, but acceptable as a last resort.

But to many, war is no longer an option if the human race is to have any future. Richard Leakey once observed that we humans are late arrivals on the planet and our place in the scheme of life is not yet assured.

Our species could fail to make it into the future if we grossly maltreat the oceans, the fresh water, the air, the ozone layer—the systems we depend on for survival. Some new virus, even more deadly than HIV or ebola, could move out from the jungle. We could even do ourselves in by ingesting our own man-made chemicals, including those hormone-mimickers that inhibit the development of our children.

Or our demise could come from war. One slip in the Cold War could have wiped out most of civilization. Those same nuclear weapons still exist, ready to launch at a moment's notice. Many nations now have nukes, and the U.S. threatens to use nuclear weapons in any war.

If it's war that finally does us humans in, it's just as likely it will start at the level of one group of people deciding to kill another. Nation against nation, religious group against religious group, ethnic group against ethnic group. It could be a fight for power, or territory, or dogma, or water, or oil.

If those in power really want a war, it's easy to stir up the emotions of fear and hatred, to create and demonize enemies. The techniques are well known: threats to our way of life, accusations, hurts and injustices of the past repeated endlessly, half-truths, outright lies, fabricated events. The realities of war—death and destruction—are not mentioned. No other solution than war is considered. The talk is only of the reasons for the war and how it will be won—with massive force, brilliant planning, surgical strikes, night-vision goggles, laser-guided bombs with incredible accuracy delivered from unimaginable heights, cruise missiles, bunker-buster nukes. Politicians of all parties fall in line. There is flag-waving, and a national rallying in support of the men and women in uniform. This is the “mythic view” of war.

In the case of the war on Iraq, for months any voices of caution were hard to find. Perhaps the idea of America attacking such a small and weakened country was too far-fetched to be taken seriously. But as the war machine ratcheted up, voices questioning the war began to be heard—from American media and internationally—and increased in frequency week by week. One of the miracles of the Internet is that, by striking a few keys, newspapers from around the world appear magically on one's computer screen. There are editorials that argue details and concepts, and the “real” reasons for the war. There are editorials that debunk statements made by those who are pushing for war, question the monetary costs, how Iraq will be governed after the war is won, the impact on the Middle East and around the world and on the war against terrorism.

And there are editorials that grapple head on with the human issues that—unless they are resolved by our species—could very well be the end of us. Some titles of recent editorials: “Europe and America: Some Know More about War;” “War’s Bottom Line: Death;” “Sanitized War Version Wrong;” “How Many Dead Iraqis Will it Take?” “What About the Children?” “Can we Justify Killing the Children of Iraq?”

Charley Reese, of King Syndicated Features, writes: “All of our wars and attacks kill, wound, and impoverish people, and the political talk about peace and democracy is just so much manure....I hate the phrase ‘collateral damage.’ It is an inhuman euphemism created to disguise murder. If you were a cop shooting at a fleeing felon, and you killed three innocent bystanders, no court in this country would allow you to brush it off as collateral damage.”

An editorial in the Australian newspaper, *The Age*, notes: “So much talk by those pressing for an attack on Iraq is stripped bare of the bloody reality of war. It is clinical, anesthetized, and intentionally devoid of emotion....We are meant to forget that war is about killing and maiming other people, about destroying their homes and communities. We are meant to ignore the fact that they are human at all, with the same hopes and fears as we have....We are asked to consider that they are lesser human beings who somehow deserve their fate and that their death is a reasonable price for us to ask them to pay for our objectives....The last Gulf War was fought without the grim, brutal reality of war ever being shown to us. It was made to look like a little boy’s video game. The military control of the images, the refusal to allow the media anywhere near the action, allowed us to retain the comfortable fantasy of a war without pain....We need to repudiate the all too ready use of force.”

Robert Wetzel writes in the *Capital Times*: “When essayists write about the deaths that will result from an attack, they invariably write about the tens of thousands—as if sheer numbers carry their argument. They rarely write about the ‘one.’ Even Stalin knew the difference between a tragedy and a statistic. ‘One death is a tragedy, one million is a statistic,’ is, I believe, what he said. War is about tragedy. The number of barrels of oil beneath the Iraqi desert is a statistic. People will die in this war, not by the tens of thousands, but each, alone—one irreversible death at a time. Bombs will vaporize families as they huddle together and cry and pray....A child will die whole from a single bullet through the brain or will die anonymously in pieces.

“People will lose their minds in this war, shattered by fear, anxiety, unbearable sorrow, and impotent rage. They will lose their souls and their humanity. Some people will become evil. A few will become saints—but that’s no reason for a war.” There is more from Wetzel, all hard to take in. He concludes: “If our country does not have the stomach to read, in unsanitized prose, about the singular tragedies that make a war, then it is only with the most profound hypocrisy that it can wage one.”

Where are those who believe that the death and destruction are worth it, as Madeline Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, was reported to have said when asked about the reports that sanctions have been responsible for the death of a half million Iraqi children. One has to wonder what this kind of thinking holds for us as a human race. There were more wars in the past century than ever before. There are weapons of incredible destruction just waiting to be used, with even more deadly ones in the imagination. There are more AK-47s in the hands of more people than ever before, many of whom are disenfranchised, desperate, fanatical, suicidal, bent on revenge. It is not a thought that makes for a good night's sleep, or portends well for the future.

Einstein could well have been right when he said that either we do away with war, or war will do away with us. Aren't we smart enough to do what is needed for our own survival? What if the option of war were forever denied to us? How would we handle the many disputes, crises, disagreements, threats that seem to multiply as the years go on? I have enough faith in the ingenuity and creativity of the human race to believe we could do a credible job.

All it would take is a change in the way we think.

*It is hard not to be struck by the hasty way people think about a war in which thousands will be killed. The people killed in an attack on Iraq will not be so different from those in hospital whose lives we treat so seriously. Some will be old; many will be babies and children. To think of just one five-year-old Iraqi girl, who may die in this war, as we would think of that same girl in a medical crisis is to see the enormous burden of proof on those who would justify killing her. Decisions for war seem less agonizing than the decision to let a girl in hospital die. But only because anonymity and distance numb the moral imagination.*

Jonathan Glover, writing in *The Guardian*

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## **War: The Lure, the Madness, the Way Through**

### **Three Book Reviews by Mac Lawrence**

*Timeline had originally planned to run the following article in our May/June issue. But with the Iraq situation so critical, we believe the insights from the three books reviewed here are particularly important for this moment in time.*

In thinking about war, I keep asking myself: What can possibly lead humans to do such horrible things to one another? And how can so many people willingly accept war as an option when the horrors of war are so obvious?

If we had answers to questions like these, and learned from them, the human race would have a much better chance of surviving in the coming years when the tools of war are

even more deadly, and when there are more and more people—many of whom are very angry and armed to the teeth—competing for land, food, water, oil, power, religious belief.

One place I look for answers is in books, such as three I've read recently. *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History* is a life work by sociologist Elise Boulding, who spent 50 years studying civil society, especially those societies and cultures which are peaceable. Carefully written, and accompanied by 72 pages of notes, bibliography, and index, it is for those who seriously study peace, international relations, and human rights. A typical paragraph, this from Boulding's overview, gives a flavor of the book:

“[A peace culture] includes lifeways, patterns of belief, values, behavior, and accompanying institutional arrangements that promote mutual caring and well-being as well as an equality that includes appreciation of differences, stewardship, and equitable sharing of the earth's resources among its members and with all living beings. It offers a mutual security for humankind in all its diversity through a profound sense of species identity as well as kinship with the living earth. There is no need for violence. In other words, peaceableness is an action concept, involving a constant shaping and reshaping of understandings, situations, and behaviors in a constantly changing lifeworld, to sustain well-being for all.”

*War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* is a book by Chris Hedges, who spent 15 years covering wars for *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and National Public Radio. He has seen war firsthand in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, the West Bank and Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, Algeria, Punjab, the Gulf, the Kurdish rebellion in Turkey and northern Iraq, the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo.

While others theorize and plan, Hedges has lived war. He's been ambushed, imprisoned, beaten by Saudi military police, deported from Libya and Iran, captured by Iraqi Republican Guard, strafed by Russian Migs, fired on by snipers, and has witnessed humans at their worst.

He says this of war: “The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is peddled by mythmakers—historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state....It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it. Fundamental questions about meaning or meaninglessness, or our place on the planet, are laid bare when we watch those around us sink to the lowest depths. War exposes the capacity for evil that lurks not far below the surface within all of us.”

About the present situation for America, Hedges notes: “We Americans find ourselves in the dangerous position of going to war not against a state, but against a phantom....As the

battle against terrorism continues, as terrorist attacks intrude on our lives, as we feel less and less secure, the acceptance of all methods to lash out at real and perceived enemies will distort and deform our democracy. For even as war gives meaning to our sterile lives, it also promotes killers and racists.”

Hedges refers to the book, *The Psychology of War*, in which author Lawrence LeShan differentiates between two types of reality: *mythic* and *sensory*. Hedges finds this distinction important: “In *mythic* war we fight absolutes. We must vanquish darkness. It is imperative and inevitable for civilization, for the free world, that good triumph, just as the Islamic militants see us as infidels whose existence corrupts the pure Islamic society they hope to build. [Mythic war] gives a justification to what is often nothing more than gross human cruelty and stupidity....In war, the state seeks to destroy its own culture.... Moral precepts—ones we have spent a lifetime honoring—are jettisoned.

“In *sensory* reality, we see events for what they really are. Most of those who are thrust into combat soon find it impossible to maintain the mythic perception of war. They would not survive if they did.” Hedges quotes a Marine Corps lieutenant: “Just remember that none of these boys is fighting for home, for the flag, for all that crap that the politicians fed the public. They are fighting for each other, just for each other.” Hedges adds that when the public also loses the mythic feeling for a war, as in Korea and Vietnam, “it is doomed for failure, for war is exposed for what it is—organized murder.”

Both the state and the press are important in presenting war to the public in mythological terms, Hedges notes. Actually, Hedges frequently uses the word “lie.” “The myth of war is essential to justify the horrible sacrifices required in war, the destruction and the death of innocents. It can be formed only by denying the reality of war, by turning lies, the manipulation, the inhumanness of war into the heroic ideal....The lie in war is almost always the lie of omission. The blunders and senseless slaughter by our generals, the execution of prisoners and innocents, and the horror of wounds are rarely disclosed to the public, at least during a mythic war. Only when the myth is punctured...does the press begin to report in a sensory rather than a mythical manner.”

In many places in his book, Hedges touches on how normal humans can turn into remorseless killing machines. In one passage, he writes: “I have watched fighters...enter villages, tense, exhausted, wary of ambushes, with the fear and tension that comes from combat, and begin to shoot at random....Items are looted, civilians battered with rifle butts, units fall apart, and the violence directed toward unarmed men, women, and children grows to feed on itself. They are high on the power to spare lives or take them, the divine power to destroy. And they are, indeed, for a moment, gods swatting down powerless human beings like flies.”

When he was in the midst of war, Hedges found few sanctuaries. One was provided by a couple in love. “They are not able to staunch the slaughter. They are often powerless and

can themselves become victims. But it was with them, seated around a wood stove, usually over a simple meal, that I found sanity and was reminded of what it means to be human.” War eventually became too much for Hedges and he returned to the U.S. to immerse himself in studying classic literature.

After Hedges’ book, it was a relief to read *The Future of Peace* by Scott Hunt. In the book’s introduction, Hunt writes: “Kindness is alive and well, and we have good reason to be hopeful about the future. Despite the horrors that we see unfolding daily on our television screens, every day around the world there are countless acts of restraint, decency, and goodness....The century just past was the bloodiest ever recorded, and we have begun a new century with new animosities and fears that threaten to tear peace apart. Yet nowhere is it written—either in our genes or in the stars—that we are fated to repeat our mistakes. Our world, like our mind, becomes exactly and only what we make it....The desire for happiness is universal, fundamental, and irrepressible.”

The key to a positive outcome, Hunt says, is to envision a world without conflict. To invigorate that vision, we need to encounter the right people. And that is what Hunt did, travelling the world to interview “some of the most fascinating people of our time. They are all great peacemakers who rose out of the ashes of conflict. From some of the most horrendous chapters in human history, these great leaders have emerged to show us a different path, proving not only that cessation of war is possible, but that the removal of hatred and violence from our hearts is possible as well.”

Hunt’s first story begins: “A dignified woman walks confidently through a large crowd. The woman is small in physical stature yet enormous in prestige. Her supporters are cheering, waving flags, and hoisting her portrait. Her slight build, colorful dress, and gracious smile stand in marked contrast to the heavily armed, drably uniformed soldiers lurking in the shadows. Without warning, the soldiers burst from the darkness, storm into the crowd, and form a line to keep the woman from reaching a nearby stage.

“The standoff is fraught with danger. The woman and her compatriots are well aware that the soldiers have a history of firing on peaceful demonstrators, and they would not hesitate to do so again in the name of public order. Yet the woman shows no hint of fear. She steps forward, waving off those who try to stop her. She advances slowly, resolutely, staring deeply into the eyes of the soldier who is pointing his rifle directly at her. The woman stands there as the symbol of freedom, face-to-face with the soldier, a symbol of violence and subjugation. He starts to tremble in confusion and fear and finally retreats. The woman steps gingerly, even graciously, through the line, followed by a flood of her supporters. It is a small victory of peaceful means over aggression.”

The woman is Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Burma’s famous General Aung San and, later, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. The military dictators in Burma have never known what to do with Suu Kyi. They permitted a democratic election in 1990 because they had

promised the world they would, and were shocked to see Suu Kyi's party capture 82 percent of the parliamentary seats despite all their efforts to defeat her. They disqualified, detained, imprisoned, and drove into exile the successful candidates and put Suu Kyi under house arrest. They refused to let Suu Kyi's English husband visit her even as he was dying, and forbade Suu Kyi from attending the Nobel Prize ceremony. Still, Suu Kyi remains an heroic figure and the leader of the Burmese people.

The weeks Hunt spent attempting to meet with Suu Kyi, the searches of his hotel room, the circuitous taxi rides, the armed guards around her home, how he got the recorded tape through the airport search—all are the stuff of a spy novel. When Hunt was able to interview her, he found a person who does not seek leadership, but takes it on willingly; does not see herself as extraordinary; has a lightness about her and a bubbling sense of humor. She is convinced that nonviolence has more power than violence and that patience alone is a loser if not paired with perseverance, “sometimes a dogged perseverance!”

Two other peacemakers Hunt interviewed are also highly revered by the people in their countries, and kept in near isolation. One is Thich Quang, a Buddhist monk who is Vietnam's leading dissident. As background, Hunt included a history of Vietnam, beginning with the year 208 B.C.E., when the country was called Nam Viet and dominated by the Chinese for a thousand years; America's war with its spraying of 100,000,000 pounds of herbicides on Vietnam's forests and search-and-destroy missions in villages like My Lai; and the current government of Vietnam “which severely limits freedom of expression, freedom of worship, and freedom to change the government by peaceful means.”

Thich Quang has been imprisoned twice, once for two years (without a trial) for protesting the Communist government's destruction of Buddhist property, then for five years for organizing a relief effort for flood victims. All of his prison time was spent in solitary confinement in degrading conditions. Now, Thich Quang is confined to his pagoda in Saigon. He can receive, but not make, phone calls. No one in Vietnam is allowed to speak his name, and his three books are published secretly with his name blotted out.

When asked about his forced isolation, he told Hunt: “I often say that I am the most free man in Vietnam. The government has made me an outlaw. Now I have no obligation. They have no right to make me act according to their law. I have full freedom now!” And he roared with laughter.

Despite his experiences, Thich Quang says he bears no bad feelings towards anyone—Communist officials, policemen, or soldiers. “They are human beings. Ones just like you and me. I have compassion for them because they have no wisdom. They have common



knowledge, but no wisdom. [Wisdom] is not gained through studying or reading books, but by meditating, by getting rid of hatred and anger and fear and self-cherishing.”

What keeps him going? “It is my duty! I am a Buddhist monk. I have to take care of my people’s happiness! That is my purpose.” His method is to work “only through nonviolence, strict nonviolence. I cannot do anything violent. I work according to Buddha’s teaching.”

Another peacemaker kept in isolation is Maha Ghosananda, who is called variously “the Gandhi of Cambodia,” “the Living Treasure,” and the “the Living Truth.” Hunt recounts the history of the U.S.-Vietnam war as it affected Cambodia, focusing on the U.S. secret bombing of Cambodia and the subsequent rise of the Khmer Rouge. To say that the Khmer Rouge committed unspeakable atrocities is an understatement.

“Yet,” Hunt notes, “Maha Ghosanandra felt a sense of compassion even toward the Khmer Rouge soldiers, though they had murdered his own family and plunged the country into such darkness. His compassion for them seems incomprehensible at first.”

But, as Maha Ghosanandra explained to Hunt: “I do not question that loving one’s oppressors—Cambodians loving the Khmer Rouge—may be the most difficult attitude to achieve. But it is a law of the universe that retaliation, hatred, and revenge only continue the cycle and never stop it. Reconciliation does not mean that we surrender rights and conditions, but rather that we use love in all of our negotiations. It means that we see ourselves in the opponent, for what is the opponent but a being in ignorance, and we ourselves are ignorant of many things. Therefore, only loving kindness and right mindfulness can free us.”

My favorite quote from Maha Ghosanandra was his response to a question Hunt posed, asking what one would say to the general of an army who is planning to attack another country: “The Buddha dealt with this very situation. His family was fighting over water to build a rice field. He went to them and told them, ‘If you make war, there will be no end to it. Those who claim victory will be met with hatred by those who lost. Those who won will also feel hatred toward those who lost. Hatred itself will kill you. There is no need for another enemy. Hatred will kill you.’”

Lest the reader dismiss Maha Ghosanandra as simple-minded and uneducated, he has traveled widely, and is proficient in English, French, German, Vietnamese, Laotian, Thai, Hindu, Bengali, Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhalese, Burmese, Japanese, and Chinese.

Three of Hunt’s other interviews were of people frequently in the news—His Holiness the Dalai Lama, former Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, and Jane Goodall. Each had valuable things to say, and these chapters are well worth reading. The book also has a sizeable chapter titled, “The Peacemakers of Israel and Palestine,” which goes deeply into

the background of that conflict, and includes interviews with people like Hanan Ashrawi and Uri Avnery.

I found the background and up-to-date information on Arias particularly interesting, since I thought I knew a lot about Arias' peacemaking efforts during the time of the Sandinistas. But I certainly was unaware of Arias' face-to-face run-ins with President Reagan, who kept trying to torpedo Arias' efforts for a peace treaty, insisting on a military approach using the U.S.-supported Contras.

Hunt offers some advice for America. Using the U.S. bombing of Cambodia as an example of an action with unintended consequences, he writes: "The people of our country, I believe, must be determined to exert maximum effort to prevent our leaders from using the nation's power in callous and unwise ways...that we prefer the simple wisdom of kindness to their labyrinth of political perceptions...that we treat others as we would have them treat us; and that we avoid hostility and cherish the lives of all people everywhere."

Hunt concludes: "Perhaps as individuals you and I will never achieve what the great peacemakers in this book have achieved. Yet we *can* do something, however minute it appears. All of these small acts, these small achievements, can eventually tip the balance and create a new culture of lasting peace."

**Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History** by *Elise Boulding*. *Syracuse University Press, New York*. 2000. \$24.95.

**War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning** by *Chris Hedges*. *Public Affairs, New York*. 2002. \$23.00.

**The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers** by *Scott A. Hunt*. *HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins, New York*. 2002. \$24.95.

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## **Beyond War 2003: A New Initiative is Underway**

Having begun in Oregon almost a year ago, a small but growing group of individuals is working hard to revitalize the original Beyond War movement of the 1980s. Calling themselves Beyond War 2003 to indicate a contemporary thrust, their mission is to "share, explore, develop, and disseminate the ideas of people who are dedicated to moving the world beyond war."

Like its predecessor, Beyond War 2003 proposes a new way of thinking about resolving conflicts. The three foundational concepts of the movement are: 1) War is obsolete; 2) We all live on one planet together; and 3) The means are the ends in the making. Based

on these principles and their implications, team members are participating in projects to educate themselves, raise community awareness, and influence elected officials in order to create the political will to move the world beyond war.

The group did a number of “pilot test” presentations to refine their materials, and have since done 12 more “Introductory Evening” presentations. Gayle Landt, one of the founders of the group, reports that “about 60 percent of those attending these sessions sign up to be on a team. Currently, there are three teams of 25 people each, and two more teams are forming. Beyond War 2003 will be a decentralized movement. Teams can decide on their own projects, and we anticipate that they will choose to cooperate and collaborate with other teams across the nation and elsewhere in order to give appropriate power and influence to this effort.”

Many people have contacted the FGC office in the past few years to inquire about how to contact others who were interested in reactivating Beyond War, or to ask if updated Beyond War materials were available. Information, curricula, presentation outlines, and study notes can now be obtained by contacting Gayle Landt by phone at (541) 485-0911 or email: [gaylelandt@att.net](mailto:gaylelandt@att.net). You can also write to her at 2300 Parkside Lane, Eugene, OR 97403-2111.

Beyond War 2003 will have its own section on the Foundation for Global Community website ([www.globalcommunity.org](http://www.globalcommunity.org)), or you will be able to link to this section by entering [www.beyondwar.org](http://www.beyondwar.org). The Foundation will act as the fiscal agent for the group, so contributions to Beyond War 2003 are tax deductible.

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## 18 Possible Reasons Why

Shortly after the United States withdrew from the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, Richard DuBoff of Z Magazine put together this list of international actions undertaken by the United States in recent years. It may help us all to understand some of the contributing factors to the way our nation is viewed from outside its borders.

1. ***The 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty.*** In December 2001, the United States officially withdrew from the Treaty, gutting the landmark agreement—the first time in the nuclear era that the U.S. renounced a major arms control accord.
2. ***Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.*** Ratified in 1972 by 144 nations including the United States. However, in July 2001 the U.S. walked out of a London conference to discuss a 1994 protocol designed to strengthen the Convention by providing for on-site inspections.

3. ***United Nations Agreement to Curb the International Flow of Illicit Small Arms.*** Drafted in July 2001, the agreement was approved by everyone except the U.S.
4. ***UN Human Rights Commission.*** In April 2001, the U.S. was not reelected to the Commission, after years of withholding dues to the UN (including then current dues of \$244 million) and after having forced the UN to lower the U.S. share of the UN budget from 25 to 22 percent.
5. ***International Criminal Court (ICC) Treaty.*** Set up in The Hague to try political leaders and military personnel charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. Signed in Rome in July 1998, the Treaty was approved by 120 countries, with 7 opposed (including the U.S.).
6. ***Land Mine Treaty.*** Banning land mines, it was signed in Ottawa in December 1997 by 122 nations. The United States refused to sign, along with Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Vietnam, Egypt, and Turkey.
7. ***Kyoto Protocol*** of 1997, for controlling global warming. Declared “dead” by President Bush in March 2001.
8. ***Economic espionage and electronic surveillance of phone calls, e-mail, and faxes.*** In May 2001, the U.S. refused to meet with European Union nations to discuss these issues, even at lower levels of government.
9. ***Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).*** The U.S. refused to participate in OECD-sponsored talks in Paris, May 2001, on ways to crack down on off-shore and other tax and money-laundering havens.
10. ***Pledge by 123 nations to ban the use and production of anti-personnel bombs and mines,*** February 2001. The U.S. refused to join.
11. ***International Plan for Cleaner Energy,*** July 2001. Out of the G-8 group of industrial nations (U.S., Canada, Japan, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, UK), the U.S. was the only one to oppose it.
12. ***UN General Assembly resolution calling for an end to the U.S. embargo of Cuba.*** Passed in October 2001 for the tenth consecutive year by a vote of 167 to 3. The U.S., Israel, and the Marshall Islands opposed it.
13. ***Comprehensive [Nuclear] Test Ban Treaty.*** Signed by 164 nations and ratified by 89 including France, Great Britain, and Russia; signed by President Clinton in 1996, but rejected by the Senate in 1999.

14. ***UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.*** The U.S. has signed but not ratified this 1989 agreement, which protects the economic and social rights of children. The only other country not to ratify is Somalia, which has no functioning government.
15. ***Optional Protocol to the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.*** Passed in 1989 and aimed at abolition of the death penalty, and containing a provision banning the execution of those under 18. The U.S. has neither signed nor ratified, and specifically exempts itself from the latter provision, making it one of five countries that still execute juveniles (along with Saudi Arabia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, and Nigeria). China abolished the practice in 1997, Pakistan in 2000.
16. ***1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.*** The only countries that have signed but not ratified are the U.S., Afghanistan, Sao Tome, and Principe.
17. ***International Court of Justice (The Hague).*** In 1986 the Court ruled that the U.S. was in violation of international law for “unlawful use of force” in Nicaragua through its actions and those of its Contra proxy army. The U.S. refused to recognize the Court’s jurisdiction. A UN resolution calling for compliance with the Court’s decision was approved 94-2 with only the U.S. and Israel voting no.
18. Measured by the percentage of their gross domestic product contributed to foreign aid, the three highest providers are Denmark (1.01%), Norway (0.91%), and the Netherlands (0.79%). The lowest are Australia, Portugal, and Austria (all 0.26%), UK (0.23%), and the U.S. (0.10%).

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## **Slow-Motion Disaster Below the Waves**

### **An Editorial by Randy Watson**

There is a new term in the environmental movement. It sounds esoteric, like the kind of thing you don’t really need to understand, something you can leave to the more technical types.

The term is “shifting baselines,” and you do need to know it, because shifting baselines affect the quality-of-life decisions you face daily. Shifting baselines are the chronic, slow, hard-to-notice changes in things, from the disappearance of birds and frogs in the countryside to the increased drive time from LA. to San Diego. If your ideal weight used to be 150 pounds and now it’s 160, your baseline—as well as your waistline—has shifted.

The term was coined by fisheries biologist Daniel Pauly in 1995. It was a term we’d apparently been needing, because it quickly spread to a variety of disciplines. It’s been

applied to analysis of everything from deteriorating cities to declining quality of entertainment.

Among environmentalists, a baseline is an important reference point for measuring the health of ecosystems. It provides information against which to evaluate change. It's how things used to be. It is the tall grass prairies filled with buffalo, the swamps of Florida teeming with bird life and the rivers of the Northwest packed with salmon. In an ideal world, the baseline for any given habitat would be what was there before humans had much impact.

If we know the baseline for a degraded ecosystem, we can work to restore it. But if the baseline shifted before we really had a chance to chart it, then we can end up accepting a degraded state as normal—or even as an improvement.

The number of salmon in the Pacific Northwest's Columbia River today is twice what it was in the 1930s. That sounds great—if the 1930s are your baseline. But salmon in the Columbia River in the 1930s were only 10 percent of what they were in the 1800s. The 1930s numbers reflect a baseline that had already shifted.

This is what most environmental groups are now struggling with. They are trying to decide: What do we want nature to look like in the future? And more important: What did nature look like in the past?

These questions are particularly important to ask about oceans, my main research interest. Last year Jeremy Jackson of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography brought the problem into focus with a cover article in *Science* that was chosen by *Discover* magazine as the most important discovery of the year.

Jackson and his 18 co-authors pulled together data from around the world to make the case that overfishing had been the most important alteration to the oceans over the past millennium. Furthermore, humans have had such a strong effect on the oceans for so long that, in many locations, it is difficult to even imagine how full of life the oceans used to be.

One of scientists' biggest concerns is that the baselines have shifted for many ocean ecosystems. What this means is that people are now visiting degraded coastal environments and calling them beautiful, unaware of how they used to look.

People go diving today in California kelp beds that are devoid of the large black sea bass, broomtailed groupers and sheephead that used to fill them. And they surface with big smiles on their faces because it is still a visually stunning experience to dive in a kelp bed. But all the veterans can think is, "You should have seen it in the old days."

Without the old-timers' knowledge, it's easy for each new generation to accept baselines that have shifted and make peace with empty kelp beds and coral reefs. Which is why it's so important to document how things are—and how they used to be.

For the oceans, there is disagreement on what the future holds. Some marine biologists argue that, as the desirable species are stripped out, we will be left with the hardest, most undesirable species—most likely jellyfish and bacteria, in effect the rats and roaches of the sea. They point to the world's most degraded coastal ecosystems—places like the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, even parts of the Chesapeake Bay. That's about all you find: jellyfish and bacteria.

We have already become comfortable with a new term, “jellyfish blooms,” which is used to describe sudden upticks in the number of jellyfish in an area. The phenomenon has become sufficiently common that an international symposium was held on the subject in 2000. Meanwhile, other types of world fisheries are in steep decline.

It is easy to miss changes in the ocean. It's big and deep. But sometimes, if people have studied the same oceanic trends over time, we get a glimpse of a highly disturbing picture. The Scripps Institution's Jackson, for example, has documented the nearly complete disappearance of the ecosystem he built his career studying—the coral reefs of Jamaica. “Virtually nothing remains of the vibrant, diverse coral reef communities I helped describe in the 1970s,” Jackson says. “Between overfishing, coastal development and coral bleaching, the ecosystem has been degraded into mounds of dead corals covered by algae in murky water.” Nothing you would want to make into a postcard.

Next year two major reports will be released on the state of the oceans: the Oceans Report from the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the report of the U.S. Oceans Commission. The advance word on both is that the news will not be good.

The last major U.S. report on the oceans was 30 years ago. That report warned that “there may be a risk some day of severely declining oceans.” The inside word on the upcoming reports is that they will conclude that the oceans are today in severe decline.

The Ocean Conservancy, Scripps Institution and the Surfrider Foundation are mounting a major media campaign for early next year to call attention to the overall fate of the oceans and the problem of shifting baselines. The solutions are already known: We must care more about the environment and work to prevent its decline. Hundreds of environmental groups have action plans to help achieve such goals. The only thing they are lacking is mass support.

The oceans are our collective responsibility. We all have to ask the questions: What did they used to look like? What are we putting into them? Where did these fish we are eating come from? Are my food preferences jeopardizing the health of the oceans?

And, in a more philosophical vein, we should consider the shifting baselines in our own lives, examining how and where have we lowered our standards to the point that we accept things that once would have been unacceptable. Our environment has clearly suffered from our increasing comfort with shifting baselines. I suspect our lives have suffered in other ways as well.

Randy Olson is a filmmaker and faculty member in marine biology at USC. See [www.shiftingbaselines.org](http://www.shiftingbaselines.org)

*This editorial is reprinted with permission.*

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## **The Pew Oceans Commission**

Leon Panetta, former White House Chief of Staff, is Chair of the Pew Oceans Commission. Mr. Panetta commented: “Can we get the nation to pay attention to the fate of our oceans at a time when we are fighting terrorism and securing our homeland?...My response is that protecting our oceans and their resources is also vital to our national security....This generation has a duty as good stewards to respond to this challenge for the sake of our children. This is our moment in time.”

The Pew Oceans Commission referenced in the previous article has undertaken the first independent review of U.S. national ocean policy in over 30 years. Final results were announced earlier this year by Dr. Stephen Palumbri at Stanford University and are being presented to Congress this spring.

Palumbri said our oceans are in crisis but that recovery is still possible if we act quickly. Fully protected marine reserves are the key, provided that a network of large and small reserves is implemented immediately, accompanied by monitoring inside and outside the reserves and comprehensive ocean-use planning that is integrated on local, state, and national levels. “As we are beginning to see here in the U.S. and throughout the world, marine reserves help ocean ecosystems recover and marine species rebound. Marine reserves are an enormously effective legacy for the future,” Palumbri said.

Findings of the Pew study show that the need to act is urgent:

- In the late 1960s, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 5 percent of the world’s commercial fisheries were “fully exploited, over exploited, or depleted.” Today that number is 67 percent, causing diminishing food supply, hardship for fishing families, and serious disruption of the oceans’ web of life.



- Habitat destruction and wasteful bycatch limit the ability of fisheries devastated by over-harvesting to recover. Pen-farmed fish pose a growing threat of disease, pollution, and invasive and genetic threats to wild stocks.
- Pollution from cities and farms finds its way into the oceans, and has created more than 40 “dead zones” around the world, including a 12,000-square-mile dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico and another, the size of Massachusetts, at the mouth of the Mississippi River.
- Oil running off of streets and driveways reaches our oceans in amounts equal to an Exxon Valdez spill—10.9 million gallons—every 8 months.
- Persistent Organic Pollutants—or POPS—produced worldwide are condensing in Arctic waters. They are an ever-increasing danger in each step up the marine food chain, with the highest concentration of these toxic substances in the mother’s milk of indigenous peoples who are dependent upon subsistence foods.
- 54 percent of America’s population already lives along our coastlines (which comprise just 17 percent of the nation’s land) and that is projected to increase to 75 percent over the next two decades. This increased development “will impair water quality in coastal streams and damage coastal wetlands that are vital nursery grounds for many marine species.” The State of California has already lost 90 percent of its original wetlands.
- Governance is fragmented at best and often hopelessly gridlocked.

*For the full report, see [www.pewoceans.org](http://www.pewoceans.org)*

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## **Saving Grace**

### **By Barbara Kingsolver**

*The following is an excerpt from *Small Wonder*, a new book of essays by Barbara Kingsolver, author of *The Poisonwood Bible*, *Prodigal Summer*, and other works. She began writing this book the day after September 11, 2001, as a response to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and in Pennsylvania. In her words, it is “a collection of essays about who we seem to be, what remains for us to live for, and what I believe we could make of ourselves.” Our thanks to the author and to the publisher, HarperCollins, for their permission to reprint the essay in *Timeline*.*

I’ve come to the Grand Canyon several times in my life, most lately without really understanding the necessity. As the holidays approached, I couldn’t name the reason for my uneasiness. We thought about the cross-country trip we’ve usually taken to join our extended family’s Thanksgiving celebration, but we didn’t make the airplane reservations. Barely a month before, terrorist attacks had distorted commercial air travel

to a horrifying new agenda, one that left everybody jittery. We understood, rationally, that it was as safe to fly as ever, and so it wasn't precisely nervousness that made us think twice about flying across the country for a long weekend. Rather, we were moved by a sense that this was wartime, and the prospect of such personal luxury felt somehow false.

I called my mother with our regrets and began making plans for a more modest family trip. On the days our daughters were out of school, we would wander north from Tucson to revisit some of the haunts I've come to love in my twenty years as a desert dweller transplanted from the verdant Southeast. We would kick through the leaves in Oak Creek Canyon, bask like lizards in the last late-autumn sun on Sedona's red rocks, puzzle out the secrets of the labyrinthine ruins at Wuptaki, and finally stand on the rim of that remarkable canyon.

I felt a little sorry for myself at first, missing the reassuring tradition of sitting down to face a huge, upside-down bird and count my blessings in the grand, joyful circle of my kin. And then I felt shame enough to ask myself, How greedy can one person be, to want more than the Grand Canyon? How much more could one earth offer me than to lay herself bare, presenting me with the whole of her bedrock history in one miraculous view? What feast could satisfy a mother more deeply than to walk along a creek through a particolored carpet of leaves, watching my children pick up the fine-toothed gifts of this scarlet maple, that yellow aspen, piecing together the picture puzzle of a biological homeplace? We could listen for several days to the songs of living birds instead of making short work of one big dead one. And we'd feel lighter afterward, too.

These are relevant questions to ask, in this moment when our country demands that we dedicate ourselves and our resources, again and again, to what we call the defense of our way of life. How greedy can one person be? How much do we need to feel blessed, sated and permanently safe? What is safety in this world, and on what broad stones is that house built?

Imagine that you come from a large family in which one brother ended up with a whole lot more than the rest of you. Sometimes it happens that way, the luck falling to one guy who didn't do that much to deserve it. Imagine his gorgeous house on a huge tract of forests, rolling hills and fertile fields. Your other relatives have decent places with smaller yards, but yours is mostly dust. Your lucky brother eats well, he has meat every day—in fact, let's face it, he's corpulent, and so are his kids. At your house, meanwhile, things are bad: Your kids cry themselves to sleep on empty stomachs. Your brother must not be able to hear them from the veranda where he dines, because he throws away all the food he can't finish. He will do you this favor: He's made a TV program of himself eating. If you want, you can watch it from your house. But you can't have his food, his house or the car he drives around in to view his unspoiled forests and majestic purple mountains. The rest of the family has noticed that all his driving is kicking up dust, wrecking not only the edges of his property but also their less pristine backyards and

even yours, which was dust to begin with. He's dammed the river to irrigate his fields, so that only a trickle reaches your place, and it's nasty. You're beginning to see that these problems are deep and deadly, that you'll be the first to starve, and the others will follow. The family takes a vote and agrees to do a handful of obvious things that will keep down the dust and clear the water—all except Fat Brother. He walks away from the table. He says that God gave him good land and the right to be greedy.

The ancient Greeks adored tragic plays about families like this, and their special word for the Fat Brother act was hubris. In the town where I grew up we called it “getting all high and mighty,” and the sentence that came next usually included the words “getting knocked down to size.” For most of my life I've felt embarrassed by a facet of our national character that I would have to call prideful wastefulness. What other name can there be for our noisy, celebratory appetite for unnecessary things, and our vast carelessness regarding their manufacture and disposal?

In the autumn of 2001 we faced the crisis of taking a very hard knock from the outside, and in its aftermath, as our nation grieved, every time I saw that wastefulness rear its head I felt even more ashamed. Some retailers rushed to convince us in ads printed across waving flags that it was our duty even in wartime, especially in wartime, to get out and buy those cars and shoes. We were asked not to think very much about the other side of the world, where, night after night, we were waging a costly war in a land whose people could not dream of owning cars or in some cases even shoes. For some, “wartime” became a matter of waving our pride above the waste, with slogans that didn't make sense to me: “Buy for your country” struck me as an exhortation to “erase from your mind what just happened.” And the real meaning of this one I can't even guess at: “Our enemies hate us because we're free.” I'm sorry, but I have eyes with which to see, and friends in many places. In Canada, for instance, I know people who are wicked cold in winter but otherwise in every way free as you and me. And nobody hates Canada.

Hubris isn't just about luck or wealth, it's about throwing away food while hungry people watch. Canadians were born lucky, too, in a global sense, but they seem more modest about it, and more deeply appreciative of their land; it's impossible to imagine Canada blighting its precious wilderness areas with “mock third-world villages” for bombing practice, as our air force has done in Arizona's Cabeza Prieta Range. I wonder how countries bereft of any wild lands at all view our plans for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the world's last immense and untouched wilderness, as we stake out our right to its plunder as we deem necessary. We must surely appear to the world as exactly what we are: a nation that organizes its economy around consuming twice as much oil as it produces, and around the profligate wastefulness of the wars and campaigns required to defend such consumption. In recent years we have defined our national interest largely in terms of the oil fields and pipelines we need to procure fuel.

In our country, we seldom question our right to burn this fuel in heavy passenger vehicles and to lead all nations in the race to pollute our planet beyond habitability; some of us, in fact, become belligerent toward anyone who dares raise the issue. We are disinclined as a nation to assign any moral value at all to our habits of consumption. But the circle of our family is large, larger than just one nation, and as we arrive at the end of our frontiers we can't possibly be surprised that the rest of the family would have us live within our means. Safety resides, I think, on the far side of endless hunger. Imagine how it would feel to fly a flag with a leaf on it, or a bird—something living. How remarkably generous we could have appeared to the world by being the first to limit fossil-fuel emissions by ratifying the Kyoto agreements, rather than walking away from the table, as we did last summer in Bonn, leaving 178 other signatory nations to do their best for the world without any help from the world's biggest contributor to global warming. I find it simply appalling that we could have done this; I know for a fact that many, many Americans were stunned, like me, by the selfishness of that act, and can hardly bear their own complicity in it. Given our societal devotion to taking in more energy than we put out, it's ironic that our culture is so cruelly intolerant of overweight individuals. As a nation we're not just overweight (a predicament that deserves sympathy); I fear we are also, as we live and breathe, possessed of the Fat Brother mindset.

I would like to have a chance to live with reordered expectations. I would rather that my country be seen as the rich, beloved brother than the rich and piggish one. If there's a heart beating in the United States that really disagrees, I've yet to meet it. We are, by nature, a generous people. Just about every American I know who has traveled abroad and taken the time to have genuine conversations with citizens of other countries has encountered the question, as I have, "Why isn't your country as nice as you are?" I wish I knew.

Maybe we're distracted by our attachment to convenience; maybe we believe the ads that tell us that material things are the key to happiness; or maybe we're too frightened to question those who routinely define our national interest for us in terms of corporate profits. Then, too, millions of Americans are so strapped by the task of keeping their kids fed and a roof over their heads that it's impossible for them to consider much of anything beyond that. But ultimately the answer must be that as a nation, we haven't yet demanded generosity of ourselves.

But we could, and we know it. Our country possesses the resources to bring solar technology, energy independence and sustainable living to our planet. Even in the simple realm of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations estimates that \$13 billion above current levels of aid would provide everyone in the world (including the hungry within our own borders) with basic health and nutrition. Collectively, Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food. We could do much more than just feed the family of mankind as well as our cats and dogs; we could assist that family in acquiring the basic skills and tools it needs to feed itself, while maintaining the natural resources on which

all life depends. Real generosity involves not only making a gift but also giving up something, and on both scores we're well situated to be the most generous nation on earth.

We like to say we already are, and it's true that American people give of their own minute proportion of the country's wealth to help victims of disasters far and wide. Our children collect pennies to buy rain forests one cubic inch at a time, but this is a widow's mite, not a national tithe. Our government's spending on foreign aid has plummeted over the last twenty years, to levels that are—to put it bluntly—the stingiest among all developed nations. In the year 2000, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United States allocated just 0.1 percent of its gross national product to foreign aid—or about one dime for every hundred dollars in its treasury—whereas Canada, Japan, Austria, Australia and Germany each contributed two to three times that much. Other countries gave even more, some as much as ten times the amount we do; they view this as a contribution to the world's stability and their own peace. But our country takes a different approach to generosity: Our tradition is to forgive debt in exchange for a strategic military base, an indentured economy, or mineral rights. We offer the hungry our magic seeds, genetically altered so the recipients must also buy our pesticides, while our sturdy native seed banks die out. At Fat Brother's house the domestic help might now and then slip out the back door with a plate of food for a neighbor, but for the record the household gives virtually nothing away. Even now, in what may be the most critical moment in our history, I fear that we seem to be telling the world we are not merciful so much as we are mighty.

In our darkest hours we may find comfort in the age-old slogan from the resistance movement, declaring that we shall not be moved. But we need to finish that sentence. Moved from where? Are we anchoring to the best of what we've believed in, throughout our history, or merely to an angry new mode of self-preservation? The American moral high ground can't possibly be an isolated mountaintop from which we refuse to learn anything at all to protect ourselves from monstrous losses. It is critical to distinguish here between innocence and naiveté: The innocent do not deserve to be violated, but only the naive refuse to think about the origins of violence. A nation that seems to believe so powerfully in retaliation cannot flatly refuse to look at the world in terms of cause and effect. The rage and fury of this world have not notably lashed out at Canada (the nation that takes the best care of its citizens) or Finland (the most literate), or Brazil or Costa Rica (among the most biodiverse). Neither have they tried to strike down our redwood forests or our fields of waving grain. Striving to cut us most deeply, they felled the towers that seemed to claim we buy and sell the world.

We don't own the world, as it turns out. Flight attendants and bankers, mothers and sons were ripped from us as proof, and thousands of families must now spend whole lifetimes reassembling themselves after shattering loss. The rest of us have lowered our flags in grief on their behalf. I believe we could do the same for the 35,600 of the world's

children who also died on September 11 from conditions of starvation, and extend our hearts to the fathers and mothers who lost them.

This seems a reasonable time to search our souls for some corner where humility resides. Our nation behaves in some ways that bring joy to the world, and in others that make people angry. Not all of those people are heartless enough to kill us for it, or fanatical enough to die in the effort, but some inevitably will be more and more, as desperation spreads. Wars of endless retaliation kill not only people but also the systems that grow food, deliver clean water and heal the sick; they destroy beauty, they extinguish species, they increase desperation.

I wish our national anthem were not the one about the bombs bursting in air, but the one about purple mountain majesties and amber waves of grain. It's easier to sing and closer to the heart of what we really have to sing about. A land as broad and green as ours demands of us thanks-giving and a certain breadth of spirit. It invites us to invest our hearts most deeply in invulnerable majesties that can never be brought down in a stroke of anger. If we can agree on anything in difficult times, it must be that we have the resources to behave more generously than we do, and that we are brave enough to rise from the ashes of loss as better citizens of the world than we have ever been. We've inherited the grace of the Grand Canyon, the mystery of the Everglades, the fertility of an Iowa plain—we could crown this good with brotherhood. What a vast inheritance for our children that would be, if we were to become a nation humble before our rich birthright, whose graciousness makes us beloved.

*Small Wonder* by Barbara Kingsolver. HarperCollins, New York. 2002. \$23.95.

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## From Wendell Berry

*We have not yet learned to think of peace apart from war.*

*We wait, still, until we face terrifying dangers and the necessity to choose among bad alternatives, and then we think again of peace, and again we fight a war to secure it.*

*At the end of the war, if we have won it, we declare peace; we congratulate ourselves on our victory; we marvel at the newly-proved efficiency of our latest weapons; we ignore the cost in lives, materials, and property, in suffering and disease, in damage to the natural world; we ignore the inevitable residue of resentment and hatred; and we go on as before, having, as we think, successfully defended our way of life.*

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