

"We can bomb the world to pieces, but we can't bomb it into peace." Michael Franti

Essay by Tina Law

Senior at C.K. McClatchy High School, Sacramento, California

On Monday, March 19. I woke up and went to class. After class, I went home, checked for college acceptance letters, and chatted with friends. It was an excruciatingly normal day. For most people, this is how their Monday went. Americans woke up, went to work, went home without a problem. What most people, including myself, seemed to have forgotten was that Monday was the four year anniversary of the U.S' invasion of Iraq. While most people might blame their heavy work schedules or bad memories, this instance of selective amnesia needs to be examined. Americans are forgetting about Iraq. And while this memory loss cuts across social, economic, and political boundaries, the epidemic has claimed anti-war activists as its main victims.

Four years ago, while Washington was busy bombing Fallujah, anti-war activists were busy devising their counterplan. Mass protests were carried out in every major city in the U.S., college campuses, outside federal government buildings - everywhere. The anti-war groups were vehement about making it clear that they did not support the invasion of Iraq and weren't going to give up. And as the years passed, the statistics and evidence, or lack thereof, affirmed the opinion of these groups. The increasing instability of Iraq, innumerable death tolls, lack of weapons of mass destruction found, and unrelenting violence against U.S. Troops all seemed to make it explicitly clear that invading Iraq was a huge mistake. With this overwhelming evidence, even the most stubborn supporters of the war are now beginning to doubt our occupation.

However, as consciousness is gradually spreading throughout the country, so is complacency. Particularly with anti-war protesters, there has been little activism, continually dwindling numbers at demonstrations, and generally, less determination to stop this war. Whether this decrease in motivation has been due to political fracturing or a loss of stamina, the loss of the anti-war movement in this country will be devastating. Complacency is the most avid supporter of this war. For every day that Americans choose to acquiesce, it's another day of bombing, suffering, homelessness, fear, anger, resentment, starving, injury, dying, discrimination, and subjugation for Iraqis. For every day that Americans decide to forget about Iraq, it's another day of dead children, broken families, and obliterated communities for Iraqis. For every day that Americans choose inaction, it's another day of war for Iraqis.

Americans must fight the war against complacency and forgetting. The anti-war movement in this country is key to not only ending this war, but to prevent further injustices in the future. Whether it is invading Iran or North Korea, activism in this country is necessary to check future offenses. This nation must not forget about progress, change, and peace. We must not forget about Iraq. And Americans must not forget that "we can bomb the world into pieces, but we cannot bomb it into peace." We must remember Iraq.

Monday was the four-year anniversary of this war and I forgot. But I remember it now.
Will you?

Assigned number 66

"YOU CAN BOMB THE WORLD TO PIECES"

"You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it into peace." Your bombs are great, but do not speak of your greatness. Your bombs are sent in "peace", but received in war. Your bombs silence many, but cannot stifle my anger. Much like the African proverb, "There is no phrase without a double meaning", there is no bomb without two impacts.

Your bombs took my child; I do not know you as the nation that heals children. Your bombs took my neighbors; I do not know you as the nation that helps in times of disaster. Your bombs destroyed my home; I do not know you as the nation that helps rebuild.

If you had sat with me and listened to my story, I might have heard you. If you had walked our streets to understand us, I might have traveled down a different path. If you had delivered a hospital, I might have believed your words of peace. If you had respected me as a person, I might have called you friend.

For the cost of one day of war, you could have invested in an eternity of peace. For one day of war, over 17,000 soldiers could have gone to college. For one day of war, every hungry child in the world could have been fed. For one day of war, over 5,000 AIDS clinics could have been built in Africa. For one day of war, you could have built schools for our children.

Instead of a photograph of a young girl with gauze on her face where there was once an eye, there could have been a child receiving new glasses. Instead of a photograph of a grandfather carrying the limp body of his granddaughter, there could have been vaccinations for childhood diseases. Instead of a photograph of a soldier cradling an injured infant, there could have been gifts of food.

Forty insurgents were killed today. Among the dead was my baby son. Because you took my son, I will fight to protect my daughter. Because you took my arm, I will fight to protect the other arm. Because you took my home, I will fight to protect the homes of my neighbors. Because you took the peace I have known, I will fight to take that peace you enjoy.

"You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it into peace." Bombs cannot tell if I am Sunni or Shiite. Bombs cannot tell if I am insurgent or innocent child. Bombs cannot tell if I am building or person. Bombs cannot listen. Bombs cannot talk. Bombs cannot heal.

Bombs are not the answer! Stop the war! If you do not stop, I will have nothing but memories. If I do not stop, you will have nothing but memories. It is time to stop and find a way to understand.

Assigned number 111

Bob Dylan was an influential musician who used his political opinions to write morally and ideologically inspiring songs that would forever change the role of music in our nation. He set a precedent for all future musicians by pioneering a movement that fused politics and music into an enjoyable and intellectual experience. He coined the influential mantra "the times they are a-changing," which still holds true today. Michael Franti, a modern American poet, recording artist and political activist has taken after Bob Dylan and has become a powerhouse voice of peace and justice for our ever-changing times. In his song "Bomb The World," he reflects on the changes in our modern world and the global impact of our political decisions.

When reading or listening to the works of Michael Franti, one must take into account the political and social events of our modern society to fully appreciate and understand the meaning of his works. "Bomb The World" was written in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks and the American government's actions following the crisis. Violence stands out as one of the prominent themes of the song, and this is understandable because of the extremely violent events of the world during this time. Franti is a known political activist, and a member of the nonviolent Green Party. As a peace advocate, Franti recognizes that reacting to a bombing attack by going into war solves nothing. It brings us no closer to peace, but only throws us further into the vicious cycle of violence. In this song, he addresses the terrors of the modern world and what is happening around us, and more importantly, what we can do about it.

As a teenager, I am constantly surrounded by violence- it is on television, in videogames, movies, advertisements, and all over the news. I see firsthand how hard it is for our nation's youth to grow up to be politically conscious, active adults in such an environment. Our society's focus needs to be shifted from promoting violence to promoting education. When equipped with information and knowledge, we are able to form our own opinions and act on them. It is perhaps an overused cliché to say that our youth will become the adults of our future, but it is inevitably true, whether or not we young people like to stand up to the responsibility. We need to be surrounded by positive role models who create an environment that supports and encourages us to become politically aware and active, because we learn largely from-example. When we see violence and war as our only examples, it is undeniable that we will grow to accept and support those things in our own lives, forever carrying on the evil tradition. Artists like Michael Franti are doing a great service to society and its youth by challenging society's accepted norms and standing up for their own beliefs. They are the ones setting good examples and encouraging the future of our world to do the same.

Assigned number 113

"Peace through the Practice of Peaceful Action"

No amount of violence in the world will generate peace. Peace is not something concrete and external; it is a way of life that must come from within us all. Michael Franti's lyrics, "We can bomb the world to pieces, but we can't bomb it into peace," ring with clear truth, especially in today's world of global competition, industrialization, and war.

What counts as peace? Fighting with weapons does not support peace, whether the fighting serves as revenge, an "offensive defense," or any other purpose. However, peace must not be misconstrued as passivity in the face of injustice. Peace is active resistance of injustices that occur. If someone attacks me, and I am an advocate of peace, I do not physically fight back. I take the pain, not happily, but I resist the injustice by courageously facing the adversity in hopes that my attacker will see my pain and suffering and that seeing it will change the attacker's heart, arousing peace. In Sanskrit, peace can be equated with the word "ahimsa," meaning non-violence, and more specifically, doing no harm. I practice ahimsa, but ahimsa is not the violence avoided because I am weaker than others and I would lose in a fight. I actively choose not to cause harm to others, though I am strong, because peace bubbles forth from within me and I actively choose to be a channel of peace.

Despite these definitions of peace, peace remains abstract and difficult to hear when it calls to us. Yet we have guides in our world today: the people who followed peace persistently before us. Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, presents an apparent example. He never used violence in fighting unjust laws; however, he did not sit by and allow discrimination to happen, either. Gandhi gathered the Indian people together to stand up to the injustice of the imposing British, and they sought fair laws and equal treatment. Never touching a sword, Gandhi changed the world with his words and peaceful actions, catching the attention and respect of the British, who did in fact change their laws. We, too, can forget our bombs and nuclear weapons; they are totally unnecessary. Gandhi proved that peace can work! With peace as a constant option, violence proves to be a shabby alternative.

When "we bomb the world to pieces" in an attempt to reach peace, we are trying to fight fire with fire, simply creating more fire and chaos. Surely, it is difficult to fight the fire, the injustice, with water, peace, but acting out of peace and ahimsa will bring us closer to world peace than committing more violence will; we must fight the cycle. It is easier to try to "bomb [the world] into peace," but the longer, more demanding path of peace and nonviolence promises a happier, more harmonious world for humankind.