

“War is a racket...in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.”
--Major General Smedley Butler

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We are at war, yet at this very moment, a myth holds our nation's people enraptured in the glow of beautiful and unattainable ideals. This myth of war evokes pride in the hearts of Americans, causes them to put up yellow ribbons or red, white, and blue flags, and compels men and women to tear themselves from loving families and fight in a completely foreign land. Yet the reality of war is far less noble. Its effects reflect in the destruction of our planet through pollution, the tangible hatred against the US throughout the world, and the deaths of innocent civilians whose blood is on our hands. The myth: war is morally justified.

World War I Marine Major General Smedley Darlington Butler, two time Medal of Honor recipient, was the first to define this myth of war as a “racket”, or in his words “something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people.” Due to his personal experience in combat during WWI, as well as the high level of access granted to his rank in the US government, Butler understood the real reason men, such as those that he had fought beside, were being sent to war; “(war) is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very few, at the expense of the very many.”

And who, you may say, are these “very few”? They are the characters who linger on the periphery of every story, song, and poem about war, such as in Hugo's *Les Miserables*, where they take the form of foul men slinking through the streets of France, pulling gold teeth from those who fought and died for independence. These are the men who profit from war, and therefore, profit from death.

Since the twentieth century, there has been a profound difference- war profiteers are not sewer rats living in the gutters of Paris. They are men who have never “shouldered a rifle”, “spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine gun bullets”, or “were wounded or killed in battle,” as described by Butler. These few “war millionaires” take advantage of the chaos of war from the comfort of large, gilded chairs. This includes attempts to keep Japan from monopolizing profits during WWII or trade access open to US companies in the Pacific during the Vietnam War. And now in the war currently waged in Iraq and Afghanistan, private contractors, such as Halliburton Oil Company, who are being handed billions of US tax dollars, are not required to meet deadlines or account for progress. And the end of the war is nowhere in sight.

Butler made the decision to stand up and decry the greed of war profiteers. Our government now protects the interests of the wealthy, thus neglecting its citizens. Our nation is once again at a point where we must decide to cut through the “racket”, and destroy the myth that keeps our eyes covered and our soldiers in Iraq.

