

Common Thoughts

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The New Poor Peoples' Campaign, initiated by Rev. William Barber, is now in a critical period when, between May 13 and June 23, the Campaign will force a serious national examination of the enmeshed evils of systemic racism, systemic poverty, ecological devastation and the war economy. The theme of Week Three is the War Economy, Militarism, and Gun Violence.

Speaking outside the State House this past Tuesday, these were my comments:

My name is John Gibbons and I am one of the ministers at the First Parish in Bedford. In 2003 and 2004, two courageous young men from Bedford, PFC John Hart and Lance Corporal Travis Desiato, were killed in Iraq. It was my solemn privilege to minister to their families and officiate at their funerals.

On Friday, four days ago, I joined in the dedication of a bridge over the Concord River, now named the Hart-Desiato Memorial Bridge.

The Hart's and Desiato's were at the dedication, of course, as were our state legislators, our congressman, and even our governor. It was said, "No soldier goes to war hoping to have a bridge named in your honor."

In no way would I diminish the honor of John Hart's and Travis Desiato's service, nor the heartfelt intent of that bridge dedication. And yet today I say that to have their names on a bridge is about *the least thing* we can do to bring them honor.

So that everything would be nice for the bridge dedication, the place was cleaned up, the road was resurfaced, and the railings were given fresh paint. But down below at the water's edge, the pilings that support that bridge are in disrepair, just like thousands of other rusting and decaying bridges in our country.

We live in a country where soaring military expenditures have priority over bridge and infrastructure repairs, education, healthcare, and human services. We are ashamed; we are angry, and we are determined to build a new bridge to America's future. Beside the bridge at the water's edge, there is a sign warning fishermen, some who come there to feed their families, DO NOT EAT THE FISH. The water is polluted and the fish are unsafe to eat.

We live in a country where soaring military expenditures have priority over clean water, clean air, and the safety of living things. We are ashamed; we are angry; and we are determined to build a new bridge to America's future.

John and Travis died as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom that was waged to promote free elections in Iraq. Two weeks ago the biggest vote-getter in Iraq elections was Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Mahdi Army who resisted the American invasion and contributed to

the deaths of 5000 Americans and the wounding of hundreds of thousands of others and added to the Iraqi death toll of hundreds of thousands.

John and Travis did not die so that Muqtada al-Sadr might win an election.

We live in a country where senseless military adventurism has priority over human need. We are ashamed; we are angry; but we are determined to build a new bridge to America's future.

And now our President has made plans for a military parade, the cost of which would easily feed our more than 40,000 homeless veterans.

We are ashamed; we are angry; but we would build a new bridge to America's future.

We live in a culture hoodwinked by militarism; numbed by violence; and made both stupid and dead by guns.

We are ashamed; we are angry; but we are determined to build a new bridge to America's future.

The poet Archibald MacLeish says

*The young dead soldiers do not speak. Nevertheless, who has not heard them?
They say, our deaths are not ours, they are yours.... They say: Whether our lives and our deaths
were for peace and new hope or for nothing we cannot say; it is you who must say this.
We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.*

Yes, we remember and we honor those who serve and risk their lives.

And we also are ashamed; we are angry; and we are determined to build a new bridge to America's future.