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Veterans for Peace Scholarship

### Lessons from History

Dried dirt and fine layers of gun powder and grime coat their weary faces and smear over their able arms. Sweat and oil mingle, staining their skin to form a different kind of camouflage. Nonetheless, their eyes remain keen, their movement swift, and their hearts ever brave. These are our soldiers, our men and women, as well as all those who they have fought against. This is every flag-waver who has ever fought for his or her nation, who has ever rushed that barren battlefield, suffered in the dank trenches, braved the barbed wire, and even left the home they love to fight for what they believe in. Humankind's history is pockmarked with the scars of war. It is our nature as humans to be at odds against each other and this almost always leads to inevitable confrontation and violence. I simply have one point to make in regards to this: maybe things can be different.

To solve the 'unsolvable' problem of war, I suggest we first look to history. The thing about history is that it is wonderful, and it also tends to repeat itself. So many correlations can be found throughout history and I believe that because of this, it is possible for certain events to be anticipated, maybe even prevented. In this way, the secret to our future is actually in our past. History is a lesson waiting to be learned and understanding it could ultimately lead to an absence of war and a culture of peace.

If one were to observe the history of war, he or she would find that it is most commonly caused by expansionism. Expansionism is exactly what it sounds like; it is a nation's desire to expand their boundaries, thus increasing the amount of land they control, by invading what does not belong to them. Such acts spur from greed and lust for power. When such ingredients mix, disaster in the form of war is the outcome. A prime example of this in our own country's history

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is our westward migration from the original eastern colonies to the Pacific Ocean. In this endeavor we declared war, and in doing so destroyed a way of life and we virtually destroyed an entire people: the Native Americans. Some may say that it was worth it because otherwise, we would not be the same country we are today. But does the end truly justify the means in this case? It was our pride, confidence, lust for land, and our belief in Manifest Destiny that drove us westward with such purpose. It was a darker part of our history, but a history that we share with many other nations who have also sought to conquer land through violence.

Discrimination, racism, and prejudice are also major components that go along with expansionism in that they have all caused wars. Throughout history, nations of different religious backgrounds have fought excessively in efforts to exert and force their religion upon others. Additionally, discrimination against people of different skin color have caused some of the bloodiest wars in history. World War II and the American Civil War serve as product examples of the former and latter causes.

Overall, there are many aspects of life that we must deal with every day, but if not reacted to or handled properly, war-like sentiments quickly take root and begin to breed, spreading as an endemic over all people. In order to prevent this, we as a world need to learn how to foster thoughts of peace and understanding into the hearts and minds of all. The first step to preventing war is respect. If the young United States would have respected the Native Americans' right to the land on which they had lived for centuries, war could have been prevented. If nations could learn to respect those who are different from them, whether it be by religion, race, or creed, there would be much more peace. But yet, as I mentioned before humans are most definitely subject to human-like behaviors. In other words, we are prone to be at odds. In cases when we simply do not agree, instead of going to war it is absolutely essential that we

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communicate. Communication can make personal relationships prosper and they can make political relationships prosper as well.

The key to peace is in our past. All we must do is brush away a little dust from the history and it will show itself to us clearly. We have seen how humanity has treated each other, we have seen the reasons for their disagreements, and we have seen the gory aftereffects. The same disagreements are occurring and we are still fighting the same wars. Fortunately, we have the advantage of foreseeing the results and therefore proactively avoiding them. We at least owe it to the veterans, the ones who bear the actual scars of war, to try for peace. Those men and women who come from all nations, the ones with the greased brows and broken backs, know everything there is to know about war and peace, and they are the ones we must first look to to guide us into a new generation of respect and peace for all.

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