

Over Hill, Over Dale: The Militarization of Culture

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A very disturbing commercial is being shown on network television in the United States with alarming regularity. I have seen it frequently during the past few weeks on an NBC station that broadcasts from the nation's capital, Washington, DC.

It opens with a male chorus—perhaps a military choir—singing: “Over hill, over dale; we have hit the dusty trail.” The song has the cadence of a forced march. In muted light soldiers are seen wading through fetid water with weapons aloft, while well coordinated precision military operations are unfolding all around, like a Rogers and Hammerstein musical. We are supposed to be impressed with the military and technological prowess on display, awed into admiration for it; awed into submission to it, the oracle of our times.

As a montage of war images flicker across the screen, each of them portraying military operations (none of them showing the real horrors of war); a male voice extols the virtues of technological warfare and the unification of all military branches. Air force. Navy. Marines. Army. One force. The commercial ends with the statement, “Northrop Grumman: Defining the future.”

The infomercial clearly targets a male audience. Northrop Grumman and other defense contractors are realizing staggering profits from U.S. imperial policy in the Middle East and around the globe. The social and environmental costs, as always, are born by others. This is corporate welfare in its most hideous form—socialized costs and privatized profits. It is parasitic capitalism in its most malignant incarnation. It is the kind of propaganda Americans are exposed to their every waking moment.

No one who views the advertisement is going to run out and buy an advanced weapons system from Northrop Grumman. Thus one must ponder the real purpose of the ad. The message is not designed to sell weapons systems; it was created to sell the American people on the notion of superior technological prowess, perpetual warfare and war profiteering that guarantees, for a little while longer, at least, an unsustainable way of life: ideas that have already won widespread acceptance among the slumbering masses and the willfully ignorant.

We are supposed to believe that the Military Industrial Complex, a conglomeration of defense contractors with its long poisonous tentacles firmly lodged in the gangrened flesh of government, is protecting us and our way of life from a hostile world intent on destroying both. We are supposed to see perpetual war in Orwellian terms of peace; ignorance as strength, evil as good. Destruction of the commons and our civil liberties by fascist corporatism is supposedly good for the country because it is good for the war profiteers in government and Northrop Grumman—which is only the tip of a much larger malignancy

rooted deeply in the cadaverous flesh of American society.

If Northrop Grumman is indeed defining the future, America—and the world—are in deep trouble. We are witnessing the blatant militarization of our culture by the forces of darkness, the machines of misery and death.

Hummers, a military vehicle, populate the roads and highways of America, even as the last drops of cheap oil are being sucked from the sands of the occupied territories. The human costs of war that sustain patterns of conspicuous consumption and waste never enter the minds of consumers. After all we are an exceptional people. The costs are born by others and kept hidden from view.

The glorification of war is nearly ubiquitous in the culture. You see it in the vehicles we drive, aggressive behavior, excessive national pride, flag waving, military style clothing, movies, video games; and now—television commercials. The American consumer is essentially becoming a piece of computer hardware programmed to download propaganda and to execute its commands without thinking. It does what it is programmed to do.

Northrop Grumman, the neocons, and their timorous accomplices in Congress are all peddling the same bogus image to the American people. Like the forces portrayed in the television ad, they are a well financed, well organized array of seemingly disparate forces fighting as one. Who are they fighting? We the people. Democracy. Truth. Peace. Organized labor. Working class people the world over.

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