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Peace and War in the Heartland: What has history taught us?

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Peace and War in the Heartland: What has history taught us?

GOAL: To provide a timely and current body of historical information, analyses, interpretations and evaluations to assist young men and women in understanding the issues around, and assessing how to respond as citizens of conscience and patriots to, the current matters of Peace and War

A timely public conversation

Minnesotans have a long history of engagement with state and national governmental authorities (viz., the State) concerning issues of Peace and War. During the Vietnam War era, a vigorous public conversation occurred. Just about every segment of society was involved in debating the issues and acting upon their political, moral and patriotic beliefs and values.

One group of local antiwar activists, named the *Minnesota 8* by the press, raided various state draft boards and destroyed “1A” files. This was a symbolic protest against what they held to be an illegally declared war and an unconstitutional Selective Service System. The raids also effectively disabled the drafting of men who were registered at these draft boards since copies were rarely maintained. The raids presented local males with the opportunity to make a conscious and informed decision about re-registering for the draft.

A defining theme of the *Minnesota 8* trials was the “Defense of Necessity” argument. The *8* argued that it was morally necessary to break one law in order to be faithful to a “higher law.” Their trial witnesses included Vietnam Veterans, research scientists who specialized in the study of chemical and biological warfare, American historians, lay and clerical theologians, war analysts and journalists, and a leading member of then Defense Secretary Robert McNamara’s team, namely, Daniel Ellsberg who was attempting to release the “Pentagon Papers” as part of his testimony.

The History Theatre www.historytheatre.org has commissioned a theatrical play based upon the event and times of the *Minnesota 8* trials. See, www.minnesota8.net The play unfolds over two fall seasons, that of 2006 and 2007.

During these fall seasons, this Project will promote the convening of a broad and many-sided public conversation about the issues of Peace and War in the Heartland. The *Minnesota 8* argued that “Patriotism Means Resistance.” Others countered and argued that their actions lead to “Jungle Law,” and one Letter to the Editor suggested that the *8*

be hung from a float during the annual Aquatennial parade.

Today, America is, once again, engaged in a war on foreign soil, and, once again, the country is seriously divided. It is timely to hold a many-sided, civil public discussion which focuses on the historical lessons learned since the Vietnam Era. In many ways, the trials of the *Minnesota 8*, and the reactions and responses to them, crystal the arguments of the Vietnam Era. In this light, the theatrical play about the *Minnesota 8* provides a common reference point for opening the many-sided conversation.

Objectives

- o To foster a timely many-sided public dialogue concerning the perennial issue of Peace and War by discussing the lessons history has taught Americans since the Vietnam War era
- o To initiate a broad public conversation about the individual's moral responsibility to governmental actions in a world of global economics, global communications and global citizenship
- o To present the history of the mid-western Heartland's response to the issues of Peace and War through a calendar of educational events, which events are expressed through numerous multi-media communication art forms and delivered through diverse broadcast and broadband networks
- o To create an original record and documentation of Minnesota's peace and war history, using the Minnesota *History Theatre's* play focused on the "Minnesota 8" theme as publicity catalyst

Background

Statistically, the mid-western Heartland States have provided a higher per-capita percentage of draftable males and enlisted soldiers as well as a higher percentage of draft resisters, draft trials and anti-war prisoners during and since the Vietnam Era.

Since the Vietnam Era returning war veterans have played a highly visible role in forming public opinion about war related issues of fact and morality. These returning veterans also played a critical role in energizing the anti-Vietnam war protests, nationally and in Minnesota. One Minnesota anti-war event so catalyzed by local veterans was the Selective Service draft board raids of the "*Minnesota 8*" in July of 1970.

Minnesota's *History Theatre* www.historytheatre.org has commissioned a playwright to develop a script around the *Minnesota 8* event and trials. See, Doris Baizley at www.minnesota8.net Click on "The Play" in the left menu. The working premise for the script is that everyone from the Sixties has a Vietnam story. It was a total war not only in terms of field actions but in its traumatic impact on American society and culture. While historical, the play's themes inevitably speak to current peace and war events and issues.

Public dialogue about issues of Peace and War have always been difficult in America. Politically, America lacks a history of a “loyal opposition.” Third parties have been formed often, but few have had sustaining power. During times of war the government’s intolerance for Constitutionally grounded dissent often becomes so intense that even mild criticism and moral self-reflection is branded as anti-American and/or traitorous.

During the Vietnam War era, the *Minnesota 8* acted upon their belief that “Patriotism Means Resistance.” They brought into the federal courts the argument that it is necessary for the individual to defy governmental and sovereign authority when it is clearly evident that such authority is violating that country’s own legal and moral principles. In respect to these principles, the Vietnam War was never declared. It was initiated by the Bay of Tonkin Resolution but never declared by Congress. Additionally, the Supreme Court has never ruled on the constitutionality of the Selective Service System, which many hold violates the 13th Amendment’s protection against involuntary servitude. What has become known as the “peace time draft” was authorized by President Truman and subsequent presidents, though, historically, drafts ceased when a war ended.

The members of the *Minnesota 8* spoke from humanistic and religious moral traditions. In one trial, the Roman Catholic moral theology tradition was the basis for supporting the applicability of the legal defense termed a “Defense of Necessity.” The defendant was a lay Catholic theologian who called Vietnam Veterans, scientists, historians, but most notably, theologians, former seminarians, and priests to the witness stand. The “Documents of Vatican II” and the encyclical of Pope John XXIII, “Pacem In Terris,” were submitted as legal evidence. Only when the judge explicitly instructed the jurors that such Catholic documents and testimonies were “irrelevant and immaterial” were the defendants convicted. Prior to that point, the jurors were reading the moral documents and were split 6-6.

On appeal, the final decision consumed six months of deliberation as the appellate court wrestled with the point that the jury should have been allowed to rule on the Defense of Necessity. As fitted the tumultuous times, the chief appellate judge later visited his own nephew who was serving time for draft resistance in the same prison where most of the *Minnesota 8* were incarcerated.

- o Public discussion needs an organizing theme and focus which attracts the broadest representation of points of views and moral traditions.
- o An “historical event” allows participants to approach the issues with an ecumenical degree of civility because “no one owns history.”
- o “Discussing history” is an invitation to groups from every sector of public and moral opinion to engage in a reasonable and many-sided conversation.

History can be a great teacher, providing societal and self-critical insight and inspiration. As with the “Pentagon Papers,” history often discloses patterns of decision-making which

were not apparent to those who participated in the actions of previous eras. It is the working premise of this Project that a many-sided public dialogue about the history of Peace and War in the Heartland will present to the present generation consciousness-raising insights about the history of American warfare and war resistance. Citizens, especially draft age youth, deserve to clearly hear the public voices which support and those which oppose war.

Events

The Project centers around a two year cycle with an annual six week agenda of public conversation and educational events.

- o The first event is set for Sunday, September 17, 2006. This is the *History Theatre's* "Raw Stages" event. At this performance, actors read a draft script and the public participates in critiquing the first draft of the play.
- o The second six week event will be launched when the play is finally produced. The theatrical curtain is anticipated to rise during the fall of 2007.

The trial of the *Minnesota 8* included witnesses whose profiles provide a template for organizations of every persuasion who want to sponsor and develop an educational event. Historians, theologians, Vietnam veterans, a university biochemist and geneticist, a former top government official (Daniel Ellsberg), local community activists, and others were witnesses. In total, these witnesses represented a broad and diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds and attitudes towards peace and war.

Of note is that more than a few who supported the *Minnesota 8*, even several witnesses, disapproved of the action, itself, while supporting the right for citizens to engage in civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance. Outside the trials, the "Committee to Defend the Eight" and other supporters included men and women from every sector of society. FBI agents, Federal Marshals, prosecutors and judges provide were participants whose profiles include various attitudes towards peace and war.

The educational events will present a broad range of opinions. Historical presentations will be solicited from representatives of contemporary organizations from academia, government, social justice agencies, seminaries and theological institutes, community associations and other relevant people and organizations.

Anticipated educational events will have one or all three key foci, namely, either a broad historical view, and/or a local historical view, and/or a and contemporary perspective. In collaboration with the *Minnesota Historical Society*, through a **oral history project**, participants and the public will be able to contribute relevant historical materials. In like manner, through a **film documentary project** others participants will contribute facts and insights of memory and current interpretations. The oral history and documentary projects will deposit their collections and products in the *Minnesota Historical Society* archive.

Each sponsoring organization which participates in the Project will determine its own agenda and schedule. However, Project coordinators will facilitate organizing meetings to keep all participants informed of what others are doing, their schedules, etc. A web site

www.minnesota8.net has already been secured to serve as an online scheduling and information clearinghouse.

Event Topics

Conveners will be sought from a wide range of thematic areas including art, history, political science, theology, education, journalism, ethnic-refugee of war groups, veterans associations, the healthcare industry, and women's organizations, among others.

While there are numerous thematic areas, the hosting of an event, its operations and costs, will be born by each separate sponsoring organization. A historical perspective can reveal links to novel aspects of the current situation. For example, women played a large role in the Draft Resistance Movement. Unknown to many, two women participated in the July 1970 *Minnesota 8* draft raids but they were at a draft board which the FBI missed. In contrast, during Vietnam there were no women soldiers, as there are today. How are the two facts connected? In another area, a Public Affairs institute may decide to sponsor a talk or debate or roundtable with Daniel Ellsberg about the influence of history on a contemporary war. The "Pentagon Papers" were "history," at the time, but they helped topple Nixon's war effort. Then, local Churches or associations may develop a series of theological discussions targeted for broadcast distribution via Cable TV.

It is the intention of the Project that sponsoring organizations invite "the other side" {pro-war and anti-war advocates } so that a vigorous many-sided public conversation occurs which is soundly educational.

The Project coordinators would assist in facilitating contact with telecommunication providers but in no other way influence content.

Event Headliners

The *Minnesota 8* trial involved several people who have attained national and international stature. It is anticipated that these will endorse the Project and make presentations. Daniel Ellsberg www.ellsberg.net was a trial witness who eventually released the "Pentagon Papers." Molly Ivins <http://www.alternet.org/columnists/1406/> was a Minneapolis newspaper cub-reporter whose byline is now national. Among others to be considered are: David Harris, internationally known draft resister whose recent book, "Our War: What we did in Vietnam and what it did to us," is a best seller. The noted Quaker, Staughton Lynd, a trial witness and still leading historian of nonviolence in America. Sewanee Hunt, international peace activist. Tim O'Brien, noted novelist, and veteran, of the Vietnam War.

As of this draft, only Daniel Ellsberg has committed to speak. All other individuals and groups mentioned in this document are still being solicited.

Event Thematic Areas Leadership Candidates - Working Suggestions As to Content

In each thematic area, the focus will revolve around making public presentations in

reference to “Peace and War in ...” e.g., “The Arts.” Where applicable, contests will be held to solicit new productions from professionals and from students.

For example in the thematic area of “Peace and War in the **Arts.**” Local, statewide and regional arts associations would present a “Peace and War in the Arts” event. A contest, with awards and a stipend, would be conducted among art professionals and art students. All entries would be accessible through the Project website. Categories would cover all major artistic disciplines and performance/delivery formats, from humor to video to performance art presentations.

Other thematic areas include, but are not limited to:

History
Political Science
Theology
Journalism
Ethnic-Refugee of Wars groups
Veterans Groups of every camp
Healthcare
Women’s Organizations
Others: TBD

Project Organizing Group

-partial listing of initial membership-

Convener, Frank Kroncke, *Minnesota 8* member
Ken Tilsen, lead attorney for the *Minnesota 8*
Joe Selvaggio, founder, *Project for Pride in Living*
Karen Clark, Minnesota State Representative
Connie Goldman, writer and oral historian
Fr. Harry Bury, professor and former director of the U of MN Newman Center
Bill Hunt, Ph.D., former *peritus* at the Council of Vatican II and trial witness

Project Leadership

Three individuals will be engaged as project staff. Their primary focus is on networking with and developing presentations by thematic area organizations. They function as general coordinators of the event, clearinghouse managers, and support providers to participating organizations.

Funding

Project expenses are estimated to be just under \$80,000.00. A Project expenses spreadsheet will be emailed upon request through information@minnesota8.net

END