

Teacher's concerns

I am a music teacher in the Holyoke Magnet School program and I would like to share with you part of a letter I just wrote to my fellow teachers there:

I am concerned that the Gulf War has the appearance to most U.S. residents of a sporting match that we won, where we asserted our national "greatness," and where we defended our "freedom." These sentiments are easily lapped up by children. In fact, the elation of people throughout the country may be an unconscious attempt to reclaim that childhood sense of patriotism, when everything was so simple and easy to grasp (good vs. evil). We, as teachers, owe it to humanity to question this simplistic thinking. It should not be a source of pride that our sophisticated weaponry killed 100,000 Iraqis in record time. Yes, the Kuwaitis can thank us for an end to their oppression, but children have a right to know that there is much such suffering worldwide about which our government does not take action. I am concerned that the military-industrial complex will have further justification and popular support to further bleed our under-nourished, under-educated and demoralized society. As public school teachers, we see the effects only too well. Should the lesson our government learns from this war be that you can get people to forget about administration culpability for the S&L crisis, unemployment and environmental destruction if you can get them all waving U.S. flags?

We need to teach children that we are one world family. It's nice to have them write to soldiers in the Gulf, but what about also having them write to children in Iraq? It would be a healing force, for us and for them, to say that we are sorry that this happened to them, that regardless of whose fault it was they do not deserve to suffer as they have. When I visited Nicaragua, I was moved to tears by the forgiveness expressed by those who were victims of the U.S.-backed Contras, and I wouldn't be surprised if young correspondents here got a similar response. Although this is a time to welcome our soldiers home and rejoice in their safe return, it should also be a time for grieving and healing, for examining how to keep this from happening again. Let us save the sporting match mentality for where it is appropriate and teach children to be "patriots" on behalf of the world.

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