

REMEMBRANCE IN OUR NEW CULTURE

by Howard Rotberg



In a world where cultural and moral relativism seem to demand that we should tolerate and respect every culture and every belief system equally, Canadian Remembrance Day and the U.S Veterans Day have more and more become the last bastion of traditional patriotism as a key value for our nations.

When we remember the soldiers who gave up their lives, or were disabled, for the maintenance of our way of life, our liberal democracies and our freedoms, we necessarily hold that our way of life is superior to those whose totalitarian illiberal governments forced the necessity of war upon us.

This year's commemorations highlighted to me, how political correctness and relativism are going to have a large effect on future November 11th remembrances.

First, as a way to remember the brave sailors and airmen who

fought the Japanese in the Pacific, a small group of us went to see the movie *Midway*, about the key battle at Midway Island, where the Americans reversed the tragic losses at Pearl Harbor by routing the Japanese at Midway. This victory by the Americans likely prevented Japan from taking the war to the U.S. and Canadian Pacific coasts.

The movie was brilliant in its battle scenes and its portrayal of the brave fighter pilots and sailors who achieved this important victory. I highly recommend it. However, at the very end of the movie, there was something that provoked some unease in my mind. You see, the movie was “dedicated” to the American *and* Japanese who fought at Midway.

The movie sought to humanize the Japanese airmen and sailors, and there is nothing wrong with that. But, to me, *dedicating* the production **equally** to both sides is somewhat troubling.

You see, war crimes involved the [Imperial Japanese Navy](#) under Emperor Hirohito were responsible for the deaths of millions. Historical estimates of the number of deaths which resulted from Japanese war crimes range from 3 to 14 million through [human experimentation](#), [forced labor](#) that was either directly perpetrated or condoned by the Japanese military and government.

Mark Towhey, writing in the *Toronto Sun*, at the end of his movie review, discusses this dedication and certain thoughts of the talented director of the film, Roland Emmerich,

Emmerich says that both sides “respected” the other’s dedication and professionalism.

My ears perk up when I hear people talking about “respecting” the enemy.

“You know what’s going on in politics these days. Nationalism is on the rise,” says Emmerich, carefully. “This was the right

movie to do right now, because it shows what nationalism leads to.”

Really? Does American nationalism lead inevitably to war and war crimes when that war has been started by enemies like German Nazis and fanatical Japanese?

“People need to respect each other more,” he says. “Nations have fought bitter wars with each other and yet been able to reconcile their differences.” However, I believe, from my studies of history, that such reconciliation only followed the resounding defeat of the enemy, not a sharing of mutual “respect”

And then Emmerich plays political philosopher: “This is what America should be like,” says Emmerich. “Just because you have a different political opinion you don’t have to hate each other.”

The confusion of war against evil with differing political opinions, is to me, a naive adoption of moral relativism. The perpetrators of what is often called the “Asian holocaust” just as the perpetrators of the Nazi Holocaust, had nothing in common with American political disputes of today, even if the Leftist-Islamist alliance in America wants to call President Trump a “Nazi.”

Cultural relativists would have us believe that Tolerance is the new primary value, and that if all peoples are equally deserving of respect, pacifism is so obviously more moral than war, since if everybody is like us, who would bother to attack us, and even if they did, submission to their values would, according to the relativists, be a lesser evil than fighting them.

In my book, *Tolerism: The Ideology Revealed* (Mantua Books), I suggest that adherence to a tolerant worldview has now passed beyond mere respect for the idea of diversity – and become an ideology that holds that we must have, not only a sympathy but

an *indulgence*, that is, an *excessive* leniency, for beliefs or practices *conflicting* with our own. At times, I contend that this ideology contains not only an undue tolerance of the illiberals, but a disturbing element of self-hatred, cultural masochism, and delusions about the difference between social tolerance and political tolerance. I explore the issue of what limitations should be placed on Tolerance and whether Tolerance should be trumped by Justice.

First of all, are we in Remembrance Day/ Veterans Day mourning all soldiers of every state, or only those who proudly represented liberal democracies against such forces as Nazi Germany?

I used to live in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Some years ago, the remains of Nazi soldiers who had died in POW camps in Canada were disinterred and transferred to one cemetery in Kitchener, which has a sizable German population. And so, a few days after Remembrance Day, there takes place a gathering of some 400 to 500 people, at this cemetery of Nazi soldiers, where the German Remembrance Day, called Volkstrauertag, takes place. In 2006, the German Ambassador to Canada decided to include in his speech there, a substantial remembrance of the Holocaust. This so bothered the local German organizations that the Cooperative Council of German Canadian Clubs of Waterloo Region felt it necessary to write an Open Letter to the German ambassador noting that his talk “certainly fit into the theme of holocaust (sic) education,” but expressing their “community’s extreme disappointment that its focus created the impression of a political demonstration of ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ (meaning “struggle to come to terms with the past”).

The Kitchener Germans protested that this speech “missed its mark” because in their view the ceremony was for the purpose of remembering all victims of war and political persecution anywhere “*and our compatriots in particular*” (emphasis added)

And so, a ceremony attended every year by local mayors, members of the legislature and parliament is meant by its organizers to remember and honor Nazi soldiers. Are we comfortable with this? Are we comfortable that nearly as many people attend this remembrance ceremony as attend the Remembrance Day ceremony at the cenotaph in downtown Kitchener? Will we be comfortable if Islamists demand that their soldiers, often terrorists, should be also honored? Will we be comfortable if Islamists argue for the abolition of Holocaust Remembrance Day, because, despite overwhelming and clear evidence, they don't believe it happened and it was somehow part of a Jewish plot to return to land that Islamists now declare is once and forever to be Muslim ruled?

Then, since 1995, UNESCO, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization has sponsored a Day of Tolerance on November 16th each year, again an interesting counterpoint to Remembrance Day on November 11th. On the UNESCO website is stated that the day "affirms that tolerance is neither indulgence nor indifference. It is respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. People are naturally diverse; only tolerance can ensure the survival of mixed communities in every region of the globe."

It sounds so nice. But why must we in the liberal democracies "tolerate" beliefs and cultures that rob individuals, women, gays, or minority religions from all human rights. Shouldn't we be encouraged to speak out against such human rights abuses, rather than tolerate them? I do not suggest we militarily free every oppressed group in the totalitarian parts of the world, but why is there a day to celebrate the rich variety of oppressive regimes?

As the U.S. and Canada take in more immigrants, will these

immigrants share in a Remembrance Day to remember why our soldiers die, or will they want their own remembrance days, commemorating values that may be very different than those of a liberal democracy? And don't we have the right to vet such immigrants to see if they will accept our Remembrance/Armistice Day?

Don Cherry is a very popular hockey analyst on Canadian television. He is known for his strong opinions and telling it like it is, without worrying about political correctness. He is also a longtime supporter of veterans, and speaks about them, more than any other television personality.

This year, he noticed that, in the part of Greater Toronto where he resides, which has large immigrant Asian communities, many new Canadians were not wearing the red poppies, which honour our war dead and injured. This bothered him and he spoke his mind:

"You people...you love our way of life, you love our milk and honey, at least you can pay a couple of bucks for a poppy or something like that," Cherry said. "These guys paid for your way of life that you enjoy in Canada, these guys paid the biggest price."

The television network that employs him apologized right away. "Don's discriminatory comments are offensive and they do not represent our values and what we stand for as a network ... We have spoken with Don about the severity of this and we sincerely apologize for these divisive remarks."

Poor Mr. Cherry. He didn't realize that in politically correct Canada, where every new immigrant is said to enrich our country, no matter what cultural values or lack of values that they have, he would get in trouble for speaking his mind. The mayor of the city where he lives, Bonnie Crombie, of Mississauga, called his comments "despicable" and former Ontario premier Bob Rae said the remarks were "ignorant and

prejudiced.”

One more example of the relativist undermining of remembrance will suffice: Canadian Professor Anne Bayefsky, writing on January 27, 2005 in *National Review Online* points out that the United Nations commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz made sure that there were no actual Resolutions coming out of the ceremony, so as not to offend the Arab states, which boycotted the event (the auditorium was half empty). Of the 41 speakers at the event, only 5 dared to mention the word, “Israel” in their speeches, and such word was not mentioned in the speeches by the U.S., Canada, the European Union and Australia. Then, most amazing of all, at the ceremony that took place at Auschwitz, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz stated: “We have agreed to set aside contemporary political issues, in order to reflect on those events of 60 years ago in a spirit of unanimity.” The price, however, for unanimity is to abandon the notion that the Holocaust contains lessons for contemporary politics. To concede as Wolfowitz did, that European leftists and the Muslims are offended by the lessons to be drawn, is to render the Holocaust into a meaningless symbol.

Bayefsky notes the irony of the constant repetition of the mantra “Never Again” when we fail to give primacy to discussions of what that means in the contemporary situation for the Jewish state: “Jews everywhere are indebted to the willingness and ability of Israelis to live and breathe self-determination. When contemporary political issues are set aside and an affirmation of the centrality of the Jewish state’s well-being is not key to a commemoration of the Holocaust, ‘never again’ is an empty phrase.”

With respect to our Remembrance and Veterans Days, let us, as part of the education we give to our students, emphasize that we are remembering those who gave their lives for the *maintenance of liberties in a liberal democratic state*.

Let us not mistake multiculturalism (that is, the acceptance of diversity as long as the constituent parts all respect our main liberal democratic values) for cultural relativism, that leads to the position that all beliefs and cultures are equal.

Let us remember, but let us first put some context to that remembrance. And that context is that we should remember with pride those who did not just die, but died for the purpose of maintaining a free and democratic country, which, while always capable of improvement, represents a political system and a cultural milieu of which we can be proud.

Howard Rotberg is the author of The Second Catastrophe: A Novel about a Book and its Author (Mantua Books), Exploring Vancouverism: The Political Culture of Canada's Lotus Land (CanadianValuesPress), TOLERism: The Ideology Revealed (Mantua Books) and The Ideological Path to Submission... and what we can do about it. (Mantua Books). He spent 20 years as a practicing lawyer and 20 years as a developer of affordable housing for low income working people in converted heritage buildings.