

WORLD WAR II GENERATION'S
HOPES DESTROYED

The members of the World War II generation are dying. you have to wonder what they really feel about the world they're leaving behind.

The victory of the Allies in World War II may have been the greatest single accomplishment with which this nation has ever been involved. The number of American men and women who served in the military in World War II was 16,353,659 - a unified national commitment that makes the word "extraordinary" seem terribly inadequate. More than 400,000 of them died in the war.

They did so in an effort to provide a world of safety, decency, tranquillity and peace. It should not be surprising that the American decade of the 1950's is often stereotyped as being quiet, bland, conformist and staid - the "suburban back-yard barbecue" image that is regularly derided. To the millions coming home from the war, that America - even if the image never was wholly accurate - seemed to be pretty good domestic representation of the kind of world they had fought for.

They are all elderly now, the World War II generation, and every day you see their names on the obituary pages of the newspapers. They didn't make a lot of noise after they came back from Europe and the Pacific - in addition to being a generation that worked hard to gain astonishing achievements, all in all they happened to be a remarkably self effacing generation - but before they are all gone we ought to consider what has become of the world they sacrificed so much for.

The butchery and barbarism they fought in Europe - it's coming back all over the map, in such scattershot fashion that it is difficult to keep up with the meanness and the horror. If the people of the planet sighed a blessed relief at the end of World War II - sighed with pride and gratitude at the apparent end of such widespread inhumanity - then the men and women of the World War II can be really excused if some of them find themselves "weeping" at the world they see around them now.

In Bosnia, the cold-eyed slaughter is a mockery of everything the American military forces in Europe tried to do away with in World War II; "ethnic cleansing" may be a relatively new phrase but it's meaning needs no translation to those among the American fighting forces who are still alive. In Rwanda, at least 100,000 men, women and children are reported to have been massacred in the last three weeks, and in one 24-hr period last week 250,000 Rwandans were reported to have fled into neighboring Tanzania. From different outposts around the globe, news photos of the starving and the slain are so commonplace that they are losing their power to shock.

What we are seeing around the world, is tribalism at its more terrifying - fueled by hunger to kill, tribalism that cares for no one and for nothing outside the tribe. If the dreams of World War II was a dream of a world of safe and welcoming borders, that dream is dying just as the the World War II generation is dying. If anything, as the World War II generation leaves us, humankind may be in even worse shape than in the days of that war - because now the tribalism is not only between countries, tribalism has beset the cities of the world, most especially the cities of the United States, the cities where the World War II soldiers returned to stake their claims for happiness. In this country, 24,500 people were murdered last year - dered in one year - on American streets. In what we call peacetime.

The men and women of the World War II generation - the men and women who will soon enough all be gone - are all but invisible on these American streets. They are in their 70s and 80s, many of them fear going out at night. many of them fear walking down certain streets in their own cities even in the daylight. When you see them, there is no apparent heroism to them, at least not the kind heroism that is visible to the quick glance. They won something great, something to pass on to their children and grandchildren - to us - and as they leave, they must know that the wonderful thing they thought they had won had been "SQUANDERED", HAS VANISHED".

THEY ARE DEPARTING NOW, THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE WORLD WAR II GENERATION. "THEY MAY BE THE LUCKY ONES"

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