

Electronic Journal of Sociology (2006)

ISSN: 1198 3655

## **Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Humanist Perspective**

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### **Introduction**

This slide presentation was presented at the Hawaii Sociological Association 2006 conference in Honolulu. Presiding over the conference was Professor Michael Burawoy, promoting a theme centered on a public sociology. Stripping away the usual form, this presentation digs into historic and verifiable facts and presents them in a conversational style easily understood by readers not versed or interested in sociological jargon.

Mounting evidence suggests that the chemical weapons commonly used by the United States contain toxins that threaten the lives of the brave men and woman who execute the war effort on “our” behalf and the Iraqi civilians who are left to deal with the chemical aftermath. Reflecting on American Exceptionalism, that is the notion that American lives and values are somehow more “moral” and “righteous” than other peoples, this presentation through meta-analysis of 30 hyperlinked foreign press articles, reviews the historic use of chemical weapons by the United States.

Even as any tangible link to 9/11 or WMD has evaporated, the main thrust of the media as a run-up to invasion of Iraq, public support continues to waiver but remain inert in denunciation of the war. Despite calls for immediate withdrawal by various pundits, American men and women continue to die in the desert or return to face mysterious physiological systems failure without a full bodied public consensus. The general public is largely ignorant to the dark side of the installation of “democracy” and remains ignorant in the American “exceptionalism” mythology that has guided foreign policy since the Revolutionary War.

In plain language, this presentation purports that the use of chemical weapons like Depleted Uranium, MK77 and Whiskey Pete in Operation Iraqi Freedom represent an ecological and human health catastrophe that exceeds the atrocity of Agent Orange use in Vietnam by a factor of 100. This presentation suggests that the cost of war in terms of health effects is staggering and perhaps not mysteriously, is largely ignored by mainstream media within the United States, while creating a firestorm in the foreign media. This knowledge gap is the

difference between public ignorance and public apathy and represents the “spin” that inspires confidence while facilitating ignorance in support of American “exceptionalism.”

The central thesis of this presentation is that a public sociology addressed to average people will increase awareness of the deadly legacy of U.S. deployed chemical weapons and has the potential to shift perceptions regarding the “exceptional” nature of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the United States and hopefully a re-evaluation of the true cost of war. Further, by calling into question the agenda setting media suggests that the very essence of democracy within the United States has been compromised and that common people have been duped and continue to support a brutal regime that meets or exceeds the atrocities attributed to Saddam Hussein.

What you as a reader are asked to consider is the possibility that the limited information available about chemical weapons use by the United States has done more harm than good and caused long-term damage in terms of environmental and health. Further, as American “exceptionalism” hinges on our unanimous support of democracy and an increase in world-wide freedom, it is wise to look at the long-term outcome of our use of chemical weapons to evaluate whether we are in fact supporting democracy or if chemical weapons are merely a bludgeon to ensure submission to rulers appointed by the elite of the United States for their own economic gain.

## **WMD & American exceptionalism – background.**

The use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds and in the Iran-Iraq war was offered as proof of the imminent need for regime change in the run up to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Corporate media within the United States, most notably Fox News, provided a steady stream of evidence that Saddam was a brutal dictator and the logic followed that “if he did this to his own people, what could he do to us?” Essentially, the dichotomy of the United States as liberator and Saddam as sadistic madman set up the framework for public evaluation of our moral duty as world policemen. Historically, this has been the classic dichotomy used to justify nuclear and chemical weapons use by the United States. To date, this continues to shape public perception of the current War in Iraq, but is this a reality? The focus of public opinion since the inception of the War in Iraq has centered on the bad things, *the other guy did*. The culpability from a political, human rights and environmental perspective suggests some of the greatest atrocities mankind has ever known have come out of Washington. Further, the dissemination of information within the United States has provided such a limited view of the complexity of the war that the average person does not even realize how brutal the war effort has become.

This presentation offers a conflict theory perspective that questions conventional thinking about the moral superiority and “Exceptionalism” of the United States with regard to Operation Iraqi Freedom. The premise is that, when key information is filtered out of the media system, as it has been with regard to the effects of chemical weapons, the resulting bias both in media and public perception cannot be blamed solely on the masses but speaks to

deficiencies in the social structure. The chasm between what is known by the average person and what is “real” from an international perspective, serves the interest of the powerful at the expense of the weak and illustrates Noam Chomsky’s “propaganda model” with chilling accuracy. More broadly, in a representative democracy what is done in the name of a nation reflects the accepted cultural values and norms of that nation.

The innocent of 9/11 died in part because the ruthlessness of the United States at war and our tax dollars at work allowed for the purchase and deployment of depleted uranium in Afghanistan and Iraq that to use contemporary language, “turned into parking lots” the homelands of our “enemies.”

By shifting the focus back on “ourselves” and what has been done abroad in the name of the “United” States and examining chemical weapons use that has incensed the world, a better understand of the consequences and implications of chemical weapons use and American “exceptionalism” may emerge. Further, exposing our chemical weapons legacy to a largely ignorant public has the potential to redirect foreign policy that validates a common humanity and nurtures a sustainable vision for the future of the world, not just the “United” States.

As Michael Borawoy 2004 President of the American Sociological Association suggests, public sociology offers the chance to explore contemporary issues using in ways that are accessible to non-academics. This presentation aims squarely at people who have no interest in academic literature per se, but seek new knowledge with which to evaluate their world.