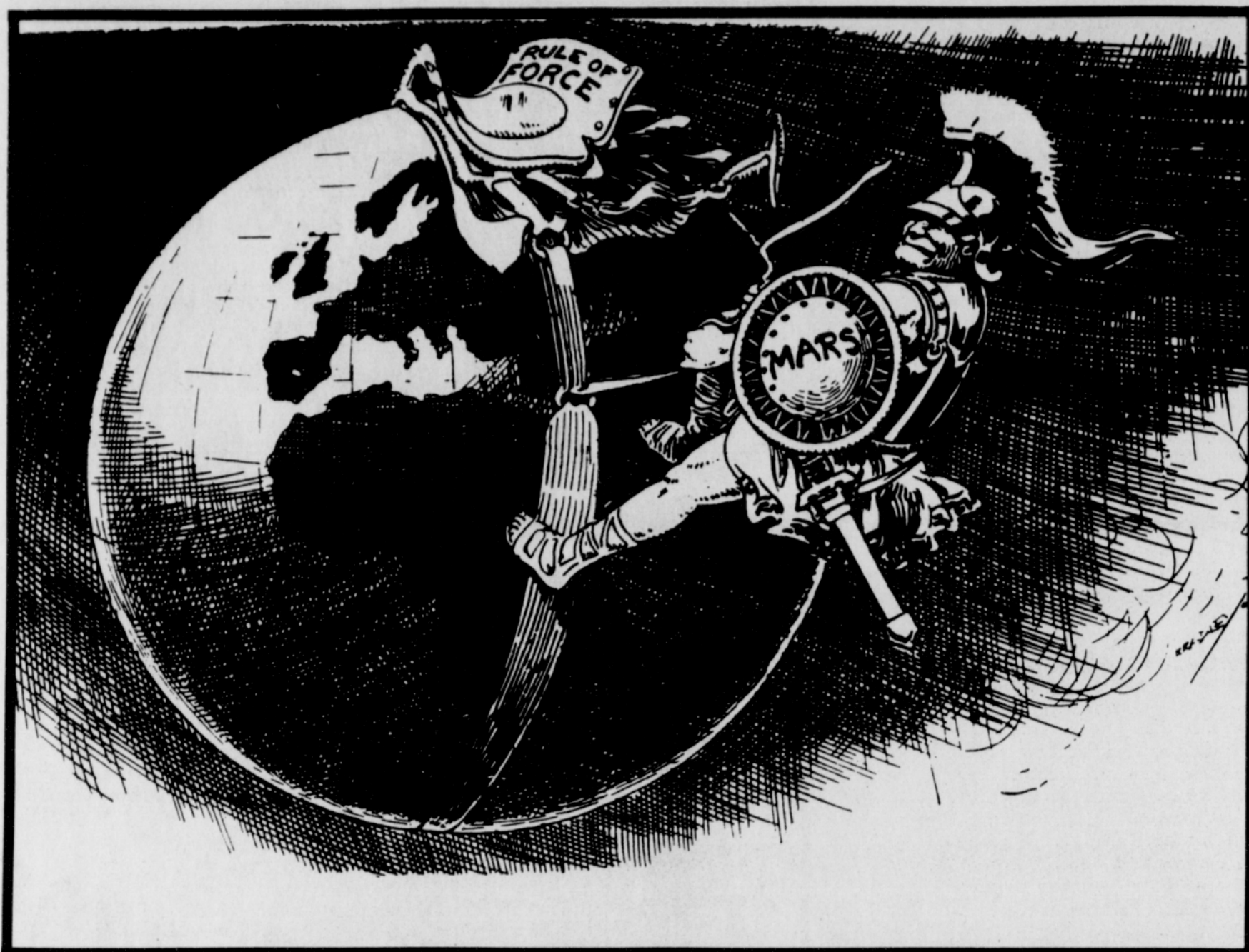




RECRUITING

TOMORROW'S DEAD

(Conchis:)

...Because these events could have taken place only in a world where a man considers himself superior to woman. In what the Americans call a 'man's world.' That is, a world governed by brute force, humorless arrogance, illusory prestige and primeval stupidity. Men love war because it allows them to look serious. Because it is the one thing that stops women laughing at them. In it they can reduce women to the status of objects. That is the great distinction between the sexes. Men see objects, women see the relationship between objects. Whether the objects need each other, love each other, match each other. It is an extra dimension of feeling that we men are without and one that makes war abhorrent to all real women — and absurd. I will tell you what war is. War is a psychosis caused by an inability to see relationships. Our relationship with our fellow men. Our relationship with our economic and historical situation. And above all our relationship to nothingness, to death."

— John Fowles, "The Magus"

The most shamelessly exploited minority in American society is its war dead. They died horribly and most of them unwillingly, but they are not left to rest in peace. Their molding corpses and parts of corpses are eloquently exhumed as spearheads for the next war, their deaths extolled to recruit new armies.

A language of lies develops. The dead always died for their country, always heroically and nobly, and all of them willingly made what is known as the final sacrifice. None raped, pillaged or burned or committed other than sanctioned murder or terrorism. None died because of simple bad luck or from their own stupidity or that of their commanders or from callous or asinine battle strategies. None died from accidental shelling or bombing by their own side. All of them were killed facing the enemy, not running away. Their deaths are celebrated as justifications for the wars that killed them.

Nations are haunted by their war dead. Monuments and memorials are built in every city and somewhere near the center of every town. The war dead assume a purity in death most of them would have found difficult to attain in life. The official piety is that the cultural lifeblood is sustained by their deaths instead of drained, and only by sacrificing themselves in the same manner will the living gain a similar historical legitimacy. Service to the state is always a possibility to the young, and death in its service is presented as either an ideal or an unavoidable necessity. Families of the dead who should protest the slaughter of their young are instead willing accomplices in the demand that warfare is the only acceptable response to an unruly world. Those who resist that specious reasoning are compared to the dead as cowards and traitors implicitly responsible for their deaths. "War would end if the dead could return," Stanley Baldwin said. But the irony of their deaths as coercion for others to murder and die is lost in the thunder of voices calling for vengeance and righteous war.

War survivors are used as shabbily as the dead. They are contained within government sponsored veterans' organizations that rubber-

stamp their approval on everything military. They are given parades and empty honors. The horror of their experiences is shielded from public view, yet they are undeniably representatives of the dark side of humanity that civilization attempts to disregard or abstract even while perpetuating it through them. War is blood, carnage and death, which is so obvious a fact we often ignore it in our preoccupation with strategies, weapons and the machines of war.

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Each generation seems to think it should not be outdone by its predecessors. It must leave its bloody mark on history no matter how absurd or pointless. Every generation has been incapable or unwilling to arrest the pattern of terror and suffering each inflicts on itself, and our own risks world holocaust because of a compulsive insistence that our time, which is noteworthy only because we live in it, be no less dramatic than the histories we imitate.

Albert Schweitzer warned in 1924 that the "suicide of civilization" was in progress because humanity had lost "the consciousness that every man is an object of concern because he is Man, and predicted that "the advance of fully developed inhumanity" was only a matter of time. "We have talked for decades with ever increasing lightmindedness about war and conquest as if these were merely operations on a chess board," he wrote, asking how else that might be possible than "as a result of a tone of mind which no longer pictured to itself the fate of individuals, but thought of them only as figures or objects belonging to the material world."

Half a century later philosopher Donald Wells offered another explanation. The problem of war and conquest and the diminished value of human life was not due to a vague tone of mind but the demand of governmental authority over its citizens. Wells wrote: "If it is presumed at the outset that the life of the state transcends that of the individual in value, indeed, that the state is more important than all the citizens, then the fact of human death, on even a cosmic scale, will prove irrelevant as an argument against war."

Inhumanity is exclusively human. History seldom mentions compassion or "the consciousness of every (human being) as an object of concern" as vital ingredients to the structuring of civilization. Humanity's history is of wars. The most fierce and acquisitive sweep away the gentle and least avaricious. It was that way when our hairy ancestors jammed pointed sticks into each other; it is that way now when weapons of our industry are able to reduce continents to ashes in minutes. The only real