

## There Always Has To Be an Enemy

by Polly Mann

Some place in the recesses of a storage box is a reel-to-reel tape of a talk given by Dick Gregory during the Vietnam War that, in my estimation, establishes him as a great political commentator/poet. As I remember it is called, "The Legend of the Cowboy and the Indian."

As Gregory explains it, every cowboy "has got to have an Injun," that is, an enemy. It proves his patriotism, his manhood, and his courage. Over the course of the history of the European occupation of the territory now known as the United States, the identity of the Indian has changed.

To begin with there were the British, then the French and Spanish and simultaneously the indigenous people who fought for the land they had occupied for centuries. Eventually, came the enslaved Africans and their descendants who continue to experience discrimination.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, various incursions of people from specific nations, such as the Irish became the enemy. There were signs in shop windows saying "No Irish Need Apply." The same held true for the Italians, Jews and other groups. Years ago I was discussing this with a Norwegian friend. I told him that the first anti-discrimination laws in Minnesota referred to Norwegians. He was aghast. "How could anybody discriminate against Norwegians?" he asked, his tone portraying that this could not be true.

It was probably difficult to understand because caucasians with white privilege could more easily assimilate into the dominant culture and thereby lose their enemy status, some of them becoming oppressors of another wave of immigrants.

Yet, in a culture that seeks enemies, no one is ever entirely safe. In Gregory's legend the Cowboy eventually conquered the Indian and had no enemies left. He then turned to his own children, exemplified by the students at Kent State and Jackson State Universities who were killed by U.S. National Guard soldiers during protests against the Vietnam War. Nearly a century earlier, the sacrifice of youth to the Civil War might be considered a parallel to this.

Then fast forward to the beginning of Communism when the United States took the side of Czarist Russia. Communism became the major enemy and because it existed the United States has, over the years, spent trillions of dollars. Those who continued to profit as one "Injun" passed on and another was born, were the manufacturers of armaments. For years the fear of Communism was sufficient to justify military expenditures that ate up almost half the annual U.S. budgets.

There was always an enemy that the people of the United States must be protected against. With the end of the Cold War, those people unaware of the cupidity of the arms industry might have presumed that the military budget might be drastically reduced and conceivably (but not assuredly) the savings might be delegated to low-income housing, healthcare, education, infrastructure, and environmental needs in other words, the “peace dividend.” But not so fast. The arms industry is saved by the bell.

But not exactly a bell. They’re saved by terrorists, those people who destroyed the World Trade Towers and all those unfortunate occupants who happened to be there on that fateful day of 9/11. Granted that even the most mercenary of the mercenaries would not have chosen that to happen. But it did and those responsible provided the Cowboy with another “Injun.” And here we are today.

The arms budget continues to rise. American lives are being lost in Afghanistan and Iraq through battle deaths, some friendly fire, illness, and suicides. But as we know terrorists are a reality, just as Communists were.

Is there any way out of this quagmire? I am convinced there is and it could be easily applied. It came to me as I was going through the check-point at the Minneapolis airport recently while I stood with my arms up as the airport employee passed a wand over my body, stopping at my hip where a metal insert caused a little bell to chime. I even said it out loud, probably a bit too loud. “All this because we haven’t learned to be a good neighbor.”

If the United States were a good neighbor it would not have to fear. If it treated all nations as it wants to be treated, terrorism would become just another of many ills to beware of. Who would want to destroy us if we were not trying to buy the cheapest labor available; exploit the natural resources of other nations; sell U.S. subsidized agricultural products to other nations, destroying their local economy, and, in general take every advantage of others? What would be the result if we devised programs whereby we would engage in genuine cooperative efforts to be a good neighbor in every sense of the word?

It wouldn’t be easy because our system depends upon consumerism, competition, one-upmanship and love of power. So we would have to kick a system where money rules, lobbyists are more important than philosophers, and the media and politicians are owned by the corporations. Any suggestions?

Polly Mann is a co-founder of WAMM and continues to be active with the organization. Her column appears regularly in the WAMM newsletter. Also find her writing online in the Middle East Committee section of [www.worldwidewamm.org](http://www.worldwidewamm.org).