

White poppy honours dead without glamourizing war

GRAHAM
LETTNER

“Individuals are free to challenge the status quo, and to express new perspectives. Society’s capacity for freedom of thought is tremendously more valuable than its coerced adherence to tradition. That the Legion would seek to curb the freedom that its members ostensibly fought for is the pinnacle of irony.”

This November, I’m not wearing a red poppy. The poppy I’ll be wearing is a home-made white poppy, cut out of a blank cue card, pinned down by the pin and black centre of last year’s red poppy. I don’t take deviation from a societal custom as ingrained as wearing a red poppy for Remembrance Day lightly, but there are more than enough good reasons to wear white, not red.

The white poppy has a history of peace behind it. The Co-operative Women’s Guild in England created the white poppy in 1933 to symbolize the belief that there are better ways to resolve conflict than by killing strangers. This is always an appropriate statement to make—especially at a time of year when society reflects on past and current wars.

The white poppy also protests the obnoxiously repressive actions of the Royal Canadian Legion. White poppies used to be sold in Edmonton at Earth’s General Store on Whyte avenue—but not this year, after the Royal Canadian Legion threatened to

sue the owner of the store over trademark infringement.

That the Legion would be so bold and forceful in stifling scrutiny and critical rethinking of our society’s customs is beyond distasteful. Individuals are free to challenge the status quo and to express new perspectives. Society’s capacity for freedom of thought is tremendously more valuable than its coerced adherence to tradition. That the Legion would seek to curb the freedom that its members ostensibly fought for is the pinnacle of irony.

The red poppy no longer speaks to me or my values. To today’s society, it symbolizes the glory of fallen soldiers, the valour and sacrifice of those who served in past wars. I believe in none of these ideals.

On the contrary, with these Remembrance Day distortions removed, war can be seen as it is: a horrifying mess of propaganda, deceit, and suffering. Millions of people never sacrificed their lives, but rather had their lives torn from them while they kicked and screamed in

vain. The righteous sentiment of Remembrance Day doesn’t mix well with the realities of war.

Fortunately, the white poppy speaks to what society has been mute about: namely, that war is disgusting in all its forms, and that all of humanity is responsible for actively creating a better way of resolving differences between peoples.

Finally, I wear the white poppy as a tribute to my grandparents who all served in WWII, either in Europe or on the home front. My grandfathers, who have both now died, spoke hardly a word about their experiences at the front. I wish they never had to be participants in the war; their lives were lessened for it.

In a way the red poppy can’t, the white poppy reminds me of the need to put the experience of war out of reach of our society, to give everyone lives untainted by war—something my grandparents didn’t receive. I find the red poppy to be a symbol of our inability to move beyond the outmoded ways of thinking that led our world to war in the first place.

In campus fields the poppies don’t show

DEVIN
LACOMBE

My question, my fellow students and campus residents, is what happened to that pride?

Every year, in the month leading up to Remembrance Day, the Royal Canadian Legion distributes millions of small, red and black artificial flowers to stores and organizations across the country. They’re readily available to every passerby for a small donation. And they pin easily on a lapel, a pocket or even a backpack. They are our small measure of respect, our acknowledgement to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. I speak of the poppies, the eternal symbol of the cost of war made famous by Canadian John McCrae’s poem “In Flanders Fields.” And where are they on our campus?

**If you’re a pacifist,
wear a poppy anyway:
they’re not a show of
support for war but
rather a symbol of
what war costs.**

My great-grandfather was a hero. And I don’t say this to boast about the my family roots or the quality of my genes, nor do I proclaim it to trade on the respect he deserved or as a reference to any one event or action. The statement is just what it is: a statement of fact.

My great-grandfather immigrated to Canada in 1912 after narrowly escaping the harsh conditions of Ukraine at the time. He left his life, his family, and everyone he ever knew to come here to Canada and make a better life for himself. Once here, he worked hard every day to eke out a living and ensure his future. He’d only been here two years when the call to war sounded in Europe and Canada went to Great Britain’s aid. My great-grandfather answered that call, enlisted in the army in 1915, and went to Europe to fight for his new country.

Our family doesn’t know the specifics of his tour of duty because he didn’t like to talk much about the war. We have his service records and his medals, and we know he fought at Vimy Ridge in France and later in Belgium. But we don’t have detailed anecdotes or stories, we never heard about his war buddies, and he never bragged about achieving any heroic deeds on the battlefield.

And absolutely none of that matters. He was a hero because he was proud to be a Canadian, so proud that he went halfway across the world to put his life on the line for his country.

I’ve attended our honorable institution for three and a half years now, and every year, I see and hear the same thing in the days leading up to 11 November. I pin my poppy to my coat and watch others to see if they’ll do the same, and I’m invariably disappointed. While many U of A staff members, to their credit, diligently wear the poppy, the same can’t be said for the student body. A solid majority of students that I’ve observed don’t make the effort.

When asked about it, some of the popular responses I’ve heard include:

“Oh, I’ve been meaning to get one of those,” or “I lost mine because it wouldn’t stay on.” Even worse is the pathetic, “It would make a hole in my coat.”

I don’t care what excuse you have because none of them are acceptable. I’m not suggesting that we all start waving Canadian flags and singing the national anthem at every opportunity—we’ll leave that to the Americans. Nor am I saying that we should all make a pilgrimage to the National War Memorial in Ottawa every year. All we have to do is pin a small red flower to our chest for a few days.

If you’re a pacifist, wear a poppy anyway: they’re not a show of support for war but rather a symbol of what war costs. If you’re an international student, wear a poppy anyway: the people it represents died so that you could come here today and attend our school. If you’re just really lazy, wear a poppy anyway: they’re available at grocery and department stores, gas stations, and many other places that you regularly frequent, so pick one up.

Remembrance Day is about more than a break from classes and a long weekend. It’s about respect, national pride, and embracing an important part of our history. This year, turn campus red. Show our peers and elders that our generation is still respectful of tradition and mindful of how valuable our freedom is. Wear a poppy with pride, challenge your friends to wear them, and ask people in your classes why they don’t have one.

And on 11 November, stop for a moment to remember the brave men and women like my great-grandfather, and maybe yours too.

OIL CITY

ROADHOUSE

**HOTTEST THURSDAY
IN TOWN!**

25¢ highballs til 10pm
\$2 highballs all night

**GET YOUR NIGHT
STARTED RIGHT!!**

OIL CITY

ROADHOUSE

FRIDAYS

\$1 highballs 7-8pm
\$2 highballs 8-9pm

**10736 - Jasper Ave.
oilcityroadhouse.com
780.428.0099**