

*Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State.* By Norman Solomon. Sausalito, CA: PoliPoint Press, 2007, 247p. (cloth) ISBN-10: 0-9778253-4-5; ISBN-13: 978-0-9778253-4-9.

Norman Solomon was born in the middle of the twentieth century, a few years after the United States became the first country on earth to drop nuclear bombs on civilian population centers. Daniel Ellsberg quotes President Truman in the forward to *Made Love, Got War*, as he tells Americans in 1945, "...the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, in so far as possible, the killing of civilians." It would be days before they knew that Hiroshima was a city, not a camp.

His cold-war childhood was punctuated with "duck and cover" drills. In 1957, the Kremlin announced the launch of *Sputnik*, the first satellite in space. *Time* magazine chided the country saying America had skimped on military research and development --the race for space was on. A dozen years later America triumphantly took "a giant step for mankind" with the Apollo 11 moonwalk, but by then U.S. warplanes "had already turned vast expanses of Southeast Asia into cratered wastelands (49)."

Given this history, and Robert Oppenheimer's famous words (borrowed from the Bhagavad- Gita), "Now I have become death, the destroyer of worlds," is it any wonder that the generation that grew up in the long, dark shadow of the bomb and the cold war never believed it had a future? We trusted no one over 30; we never thought we would *be* 30. In *Made Love, Got War*, Norman Solomon digs around in the rubble of the birth of the nuclear age and finds the music and lyrics, prose and poetry, drugs and counterculture, and his own experiences, to evoke the atmosphere of growing up nuclear, in the era when science and technology became fully harnessed in service to the warfare state.

As a teenager rebelling against the insanity of the Vietnam War he quickly felt the larger web of violence that sustained it. When he worked out of an activist center called Freedom House in 1969, it came under police surveillance and harassment. "It was all merging together in my mind: the war, social injustice, repressive cops (43)." He came of political age at 17 when he was arrested for spray-painting "REVOLT for Peace" on public property. He describes this turning in one of the most poignant passages in the book, when he pulls his ID card out of his pocket and pours chocolate milk over his old identity.

His life of activism would land him in jail, and the back of police cars, many times. In 1984 in Portland Oregon, he was dragged off the tracks of Union Pacific with 50 other peace activists trying to stop the "white trains" transporting nuclear warheads with "satellite-guided accuracy" to meet their disease vectors, the Trident submarines. In 1986, after Ronald Reagan refused the Kremlin's offer to stop nuclear testing, Norman heads to Moscow with Anthony Guarisco, director of the Alliance of Atomic Veterans, to speak truth to power. He is hauled out of the US Embassy by a marine guard who carries him in an "over the shoulder fireman's grip" (114).

Seeing the world through Norman's eyes can be disconcerting. Vivid ironic contrasts seem to clarify his visions. One such moment takes place in eastern

Washington state in 1978 when Norman decides to visit the Hanford Nuclear Reservation “which had provided the plutonium for the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki” (91). While there he also interviews the principal of nearby Columbia High School, where cheerleaders root for “Bomber Football” under the image of a mushroom cloud emblazoned on team banners and pennants.

When Norman was denied access to the US air force in Iraq in the summer of 2006, one helpful Major, John Thomas, suggests a story angle that could be written without leaving the country. Because of new technologies, he explains, it is possible to fight the air war from the United States “An Air Force officer could go to work in Nevada, spend the day directly guiding planes as they dropped bombs in Iraq, and get home in time to tuck his kids into bed” (161).

A few years ago I heard a talk on the radio by Tony Kushner. His insights vibrated out of the car’s speaker so fast I wanted to pull over, but I was midway across the Golden Gate Bridge. Reading Norman’s book brought back his point. In the grand sweep of history of any era, the people who are admirable are not the “great men” who dominate the times, but the creative, rebellious thinkers on the outskirts of power who criticize the forces of systems of injustice. Norman Solomon is that essential historical figure.

At times the loneliness of that struggle is revealed. In San Francisco, Norman stares “into the blank dark lens of a camera” and answers questions about the media coverage of the war in Yugoslavia three weeks into the U.S. bombing campaign. His analysis is fast and critical. He tells CNN host Roger Cossack that broadcasts of press briefings celebrate military video games depicting smart bombs detached from “collateral damage” and dead civilians. He decries the press/NATO alliance and the fourth estate morphing into a fourth branch of government. On another camera Judith Miller of the *New York Times* says, “I couldn’t disagree more” (128). A minute later NPR’s Daniel Schorr jumps in, “May I agree with my friend, Judy? Hello Judy.” She greets him. “Hi Daniel.” The friendly comradery of consensus journalism relegates independent thinkers to the lonely margins of the mainstream. But that is where Norman, and real history, live.

Coming up against the Clinton Administration, Solomon understood that those halcyon years of abundance set the stage for the downward spiral of democracy under Bush. Clinton ended the era of “big” government for mothers on welfare, leaving more of the federal largess for corporations, prisons, and the Pentagon, practices that transferred wealth upward. “From 1977 to 1999 the wealthiest 1 percent of U.S. households averaged a boost of 119.7 percent in after-tax income--- compared to a loss of 12 percent for the bottom fifth of households and a loss of 3.1 percent for the middle fifth during the same period (132-33).” A few carefully chosen words from Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis make the point, “We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few ... but we can’t have both (133).”

Norman has made a career of trying to inject a voice of reason and compassion into public debate. He formalized those efforts in 1997 when he found seed money for the Institute for Public Accuracy. The call for a “progressive infrastructure” to do media work came after he visited the \$30 million dollar a year Heritage Foundation “public relations juggernaut” that had succeeded in flooding the “media with

messages favored by its wealthy conservative donors and corporate backers (124).” Today IPA’s list serve carries the best analysis of unusual sources that make sense out of the unconscionable spin we refer to as the news cycle.

This book is more a people’s history told in the first person than an overly subjective memoir. The making of the techno-war’s infrastructure and its hypocrisies (including some of its most dangerous spokespeople, such as Thomas Friedman) are played before our eyes in sharp focus, but the glare can be blinding. Yet Solomon never stops trying to make the world a better place or bring the warfare state back from the brink of destruction, even as it sinks more desperately into ruin. I find myself wondering what keeps him going. In this regard, Norman might have offered us a few more intimacies that explain his inspirations. He clearly finds solace in Thomas Merton and Franz Kafka, but I am reminded of Dr. Rieux in *The Plague*. The first to notice the disease yet unable to prevent its spread, he grows weary of the world, yet stays to care for the sick anyway.

Norman ends the book with thoughts on the numbing of America and the unspeakable absence of love, but he follows in the footsteps of other legendary peace activist such as Dan Berrigan, who act in the name of love. As Berrigan explained in *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, “We could not – so help us god –do otherwise. For we are sick at heart – our hearts give us no rest...(138)” Love may not be all you need to resist war and its weapons, but it is essential and there is plenty of love in these pages.

## Reference

Berrigan, Daniel. 2004. *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*. New York: Fordham University Press.

*Robin Andersen*  
*Fordham University.*