

CHILDREN OF WAR

Every generation deserves a good war. So far, the world has been a generous provider. Bosnia, Somalia and the Persian Gulf offered the latest generation a fair sampling from the international conflict smorgasbord. The fathers and uncles of the soldiers who took advantage of these squabbles had Vietnam. Their fathers and uncles had Korea. Before that was World War II, and before that was World War I. No generation has been at a loss for a battlefield on which to test its mettle.

But lately, things seem to have gotten out of hand. In the last decade or so, the world appears to have gone overboard in its promise to stand and deliver military testing grounds to its young people. For one thing, the world has been spewing forth more wars than we can keep track of.

But what seems to have been the **modus operandi** for war in our parents' and grandparents' times is no longer the case today. War is moving off the battlefields and into our cities, towns and villages. Post-traumatic stress disorder is not something a handful of war veterans suffer in silence but a condition that can be seen creeping into nearly every culture as more and more civilians are drawn into these conflicts. Once upon a time, it was the soldiers who did most of the killing and dying. Today, it is the civilians. At least they're doing most of the dying. The civilian death toll in World War I was 14 percent. This figure jumped to 67 percent in World War II. Today, 90 percent of those killed in wars are civilians and children.

When war spills like ink from a bottle and seeps into the fabric of a culture, no one can escape the trauma. And it is the most tender and fragile fibers in the fabric of our society—our children—who suffer most. More children are killing and dying in wars than ever before. And the wounds they incur are neither short-lived nor just physical. They are deep and damaging, and they last a lifetime.

Today, there are enough big wars, internal squabbles, ethnic cleansings, tribal feuds, border disputes, soccer matches and TV talk shows to provide outlets for the violent urges in every man, woman and child on the planet. According to Save the Children, over the past decade, 10 million children—one child in every 200 throughout the world—have been traumatized by the effects of war and need help to overcome emotional distress. In its 1995 State of the World's Children, UNICEF said that in the past decade two million have been physically disabled; 12 million have been left homeless; and more than one million have been orphaned or separated from their parents.

Certainly, war qualifies as an unfortunate circumstance. And, as the figures presented by Saferworld, UNICEF and Save the Children show, more and more children are being drawn into these "unfortunate circumstances." To sit idly by while this injustice takes place is unconscionable, especially for those who are aware of such circumstances. The plight of our children, particularly those affected by war, ought to be self-evident. Apparently it isn't. Hillary Clinton has received her share of criticism in recent years, but it is difficult to argue with her claim that we need to wake up to the needs of our world's children. If we truly care about family values, which would seem to include children everywhere, we must take a serious look at the way war is ravaging our young people's lives as never before.