

ON CHRIS HAYES & AMERICA'S FALLEN HEROES

I will admit I was watching the F1 Grand Prix de Monaco this morning and not *Up With Chris Hayes* on MSNBC. It turns out I missed some controversy. I was referred to the matter by Doug Mataconis of Outside the Beltway. Mataconis argued that it seemed like the wrong tone for Memorial Day.

The key quote from the article Doug cited, which was from Mediate, quoted Hayes where he says he feels:

...uncomfortable, about the word because it seems to me that it is so rhetorically proximate to justifications for more war. Um, and, I don't want to obviously desecrate or disrespect memory of anyone that's fallen, and obviously there are individual circumstances in which there is genuine, tremendous heroism, you know, hail of gunfire, rescuing fellow soldiers, and things like that. But it seems to me that we marshal this word in a way that is problematic. But maybe I'm wrong about that.

Chris Hayes is a young and very smart talent in the progressive media, and his show has been a beyond rare breath of fresh air generally in what is the pitiful morass of cable news programming. Hayes quickly showed why by referring critics to the video at right, which does indeed present a much fuller and more nuanced take on the issue. As Jeremy Scahill noted, Hayes is being mauled for taking such a deeper and more nuanced look at the issue of praise for war. I agree wholeheartedly with Jeremy.

But, still, I have some, granted also nuanced, qualms.

Contrast Hayes tact with that of Olivier Knox of Yahoo News on Friday:

Memorial Day Weekend: My thoughts inevitably drift to visits to the Normandy Beaches. More moving each passing year. Merci.

...

When I was a kid, it was hard to appreciate the "full measure of devotion." Also my French grandparents hadn't fully briefed me.

There is a palpable difference in tone between the initial takes of Knox and Hayes. While I originally instinctively gravitated toward the Knox take, the more I chew on it, I think Scahill has a point, and the more I think my knee jerk reaction to Hayes was a bit too reflexive and shallow. Here is why.

It is a generational thing to some extent, and the wider the age gap in people reacting to this, the generally wider the potential for adverse reaction. That, of course, is not totally the crux of the biscuit (as Frank Zappa would say), but I think it may be a large part of it.

Chris Hayes touched on a critical and under appreciated point: there is far too much cheerleading for war propagated through obligatory honor of the souls the powers that be send to fight the wars. It does cloud and mask the reality of what is transpiring on the greater moral and humanitarian stage, and does so very much to the detriment of society and the relevant discussion. That is just a fact in my book.

By the same token, the older voices among us, even those of us who grew up with the mess that was Vietnam, still grew up in the halo years of WW II, with the remnants of WW I that preceded it. When I think of Memorial Day, it is under a

mental framework cast in those terms, that was still the framework conveyed in the 60's and, even if lesser, still in the 70's and 80's. Vietnam was the aberration, not the norm, for a very long time when considering war and "war heroes".

And that was me, a kid who mercifully avoided the draft and never served. I think the feelings could, and may well be, even stronger among those who did serve or, like Olivier Knox, who have land and families free today because of the last devotion expended on the beaches of Normandy or Okinawa.

To an older generation, and the differently situated, Memorial Day exists to honor true heroes. American soldiers who died so that you, me, Chris Hayes and everyone else may all have the discussions we do. The fact they gave what they did allows that. And, yes, they ARE heroes.

It is indeed a complex dynamic. Could Chris Hayes have exercised a bit more rhetorical discretion; no question. And he would be wise to not paint it quite as much as he does so primarily in terms of Afghanistan and, presumably, if not mentioned, Iraq (leaving aside Yemen and our other, um, areas of interest/conflict); there is a much larger and older framework, as Hayes himself cogently noted in his lead in.

But move beyond the patina of insensitivity, and Chris Hayes was quite right. We need desperately to unhinge the valor of our troops from the moral squalor of our leaders. Memorial Day may be a touchy time to hear that, but it needs to be said.

[Notice of Erratum: I would like to make quite clear that I do not think Chris Hayes and Olivier Knox are at any odds here; not at all. I simply found their initial takes demonstrative of the greater depth of the issue and discussion here, and illustrative of the point. Thanks to my friend Olivier for pointing that out]