

# PATRIOTISM

Patriotism...is a superstition artificially created and maintained through a network of lies and falsehoods; a superstition that robs man of his self- respect and dignity, and increases his arrogance and conceit. - Emma Goldman

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Since the revival of the modern day Olympics in 1896, the games have come to represent the coming together of sovereign nations. Regardless of imminent wars, alliances, national bigotry or hierarchical importance, the Olympics are supposed to represent hope and peace for all mankind through sport.

In Canada, it is difficult to deny that the Olympics provide us with a sense of pride when one of our own athletes, bearing the immediately recognizable and famous red and white attire, brings home the gold. And, while I cannot deny my love of sports or even the idea of the Olympics, it is the fallacies and unjust structures upon which these games are built that guide my stark criticisms of their relevance and damage. How can we fundamentally justify the excessive glorification of, and investment in, the Olympic Games, when a significant portion of the world's population is in a daily struggle to simply supply the necessities of life? The group responsible for bringing the Olympics to Vancouver promised that no social housing units would be lost because of the Olympics – how can we be proud of our nation when the Vancouver Olympics is predicted, by the Olympic television partner CTV, to cause at least a three fold increase in homelessness? According to the Native Youth Movement, Vancouver has the fastest growing homeless population in Canada – the number of people who struggle to feed themselves, house themselves, appropriately protect themselves from natural elements is growing in our Olympic capital.

The Olympics have become a symbol of patriotism in its most superficial embodiment, as host countries are provided with the opportunity to ignore their political demons and justify the unacceptable treatment of their civilians. The world turns a blind eye when a host country violates and ignores the human rights of their people in order to protect the pristine Olympic utopia as promised to their guests, to provide the wealthy with two weeks of escape from the problems and woes of the world. We saw this in its most exploitive form during the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China when riots broke out around the world in solidarity against the abuses of Tibetan human rights by the Chinese government.

Perhaps the most devastating patriarchal use of the Olympics was the 1936 Berlin Games which were used as a tool to spread German/Aryan national identity, to establish their ideologies within the national setting. These games have since been referred to as the "Nazi Games." It was here that the rings and the torch were first popularized as symbols of the Olympics.

Canada will be hosting the Winter Olympics in 2010 and is a country that has been recognized as holding a relatively positive position within the international political construct. The Anti-Poverty Committee of Vancouver believes that the government is taking an extremely aggressive and undemocratic approach to their hosting duties by violating the human rights of thousands within Vancouver in an attempt to "clean up the streets," with such legislation as the Safe Streets Act, which has been starkly criticized by anti-poverty groups for being discriminate of the homeless, in an attempt to build a false image for international guests.



The Olympics are perhaps the most detrimental form of patriotism as they encourage countries to ignore their own demographics as a means of impressing the rest of the world, their extravagancy a measure of national power, of national prestige. In the case of Vancouver, the plauging issues of poverty, drug abuse and homelessness are being disregarded and swept under the rug. The mainstream media is ignoring the issues and rather than spending tax dollars to solve these issues, the government has chosen to push the problems out of the public sphere. There are billions being spent on the construction of high-income housing, and privileged access to sporting venues and security. The Olympic budget has ballooned with the realization that securing the Olympics from those which it most deeply affects will be a costly endeavor. It has widely been reported that the security budget for the games will cost in excess of one billion, yet Canadians are being dispossessed; their personal sovereignty infringed upon - all in the name of building a national identity based on the stated Olympic ideals of respect for culture, environment, and sport.

As a nation we must hold our government accountable. The problems faced by the thousands who are on the brink of losing their housing or social services, and the thousands of others who have already suffered that loss should be acknowledged as a problem for our entire nation. By many around the world, Canada is considered a leading national entity, our outward expression should not be shaped solely by the glamour of our Olympics; our recognition and identity as a dignified and respectful country should be shaped by our compassion and mutual respect for our people.

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