

Peace is patriotic – and permacultural



Permaculture in Practice

by Nate
Downey

You might not have expected to find an argument for peace gracing the pages of your friendly neighborhood Real Estate Guide. But since permaculture is about both creating permanent culture and taking personal responsibility, it would be neither practical nor ethical to avoid the defining topic of our time.

We find ourselves at the most decisive point in the evolution of both culture and human consciousness. At this moment we can either commit an act of aggression and fuel the fires of terrorism for centuries to come, or we can focus our resources on preventing attacks and build a free and sustainable society independent of oil. From a permacultural perspective the case

for peace is obvious.

At the outset of his 600-page tome, *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual*, Bill Mollison, the patron saint of permaculture, explains that "a person of courage today is a person of peace." Since our planet is in such bad shape, he says, warring among ourselves is as counterproductive as neighbors fighting during natural disasters. We should be "uniting" the free world against terrorism, rather than "dividing" our allies and severing our already-poor relationship with most of the Muslim world.

One of the great permaculture principles – Make the least change for the greatest possible effect – addresses the logistics of fighting wars on too many fronts. Imagine if even a portion of the massive monetary expense of war (deploying forces, fighting battles, and maintaining a combative presence in Iraq) could be used to improve schools, provide health care, feed children, jumpstart our economy and defend the homeland. Here we see peace as a fiscally responsible, conservative strategy that generates the greatest possible effect (sustainability) – as opposed to gen-

erating death, waste, pollution and ongoing conflict.

Mollison describes five types of resources: those that increase by modest use, those that are unaffected by use, those that disappear or degrade when not used, those that are reduced by use, and those that pollute or destroy other resources if used. Clearly, if oil is used and sought after in the manner proposed by George Bush, it not only disappears but it also pollutes and destroys other resources. Imagine the benefit if all of the work that we put into the war were directed toward improving and marketing renewable energies like solar, wind, bio-diesel and hydrogen cells. Instead of instigating the destruction of resources upon which we depend, we would invigorate our culture for generations to come.

Using a design method called sector analysis, permaculturalists try to place structures where they can avoid the negative effects of damaging natural forces. We prefer not to build houses in floodplains or on top of ridges in fire-prone areas. Similarly, if we

try to build a Jeffersonian democracy where no such tradition exists, it will be seen as the imposition of an outsider. Any "rebel" would be right to complain that this is antithetical to the concept of "of and by the people". So, like the fate of a house in the path of a crown fire being defended by someone with a garden hose, as soon as we leave Iraq, if not before, civil war will break out and further destabilize the region, its pipelines, and the world.

In short, our nation seems to be about to make what permaculturalists call a "Type One Error," an error that is fatal and irrevocable. If a war on Iraq has started (it hadn't at press time), the decisive moment has passed, the error has been made, and the arguments for immediate cease-fire become even more urgent than the current argument against initial aggression.

Nate Downey is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. a local landscape design, consultation and installation company, and chairman of the Permaculture Credit Union. Contact him at 424-4444 or nate@sfpermaculture.com.