

Clash of Comments: Should we wear white poppies instead of red?

Dom Smithies and Amy Gibbons discuss alternate ways to commemorate the fallen on Remembrance Day

By [Amy Gibbons](#) and [Dom Smithies](#)

Tuesday 10 November 2015



Image: Pimlico Badger

YES- Dom Smithies

I would happily wear a white poppy. Thatcher would say that's being "deeply distasteful", so I'll assume I'm doing something right. Or maybe I'm just being 'up myself'. Thanks for that mum.

"What the hell is the white poppy?" I hear most of you ask. Until two weeks ago, I didn't know either. The white poppy is sold by the Peace Pledge Union, who've been campaigning for a warless world since 1934.

What the British Legion does in commemorating the dead, supporting veterans, servicemen and women and their families, is exceptional and, more importantly, essential! But the question that irks me is, why is the government not paying for it?

Something about the state shipping off young people to war and then not funding the necessary support for them and their families when they get back seems a bit uncommitted. It shouldn't be easy for the government to make the decision to engage in a war. They should be prepared to pay the full cost of it - which includes the support and rehabilitation that the British Legion provides.

In buying red poppies, you offset this essential cost of war that the government should be paying as part of the war bill. They are then free to spend more of their funds on everything else required for war - guns, developing weapons, training troops, etc. It's like opting to contribute the fruit and juice to a punch so others can buy more alcohol to put in it and taking no responsibility for people getting drunk because you yourself didn't provide the alcohol.

Even veterans have turned away from the poppy because it is now a tool of the government to instil a dangerous and compulsory military patriotism that people feel pressured to support because it is for a cause that people have fought for; a good and necessary cause that the government would rather not

have to pay for itself.

The white poppy, for me, serves as the only true symbol remembering all the atrocities of war and its victims. It is a symbol of making an effort to ensure that no soldiers or civilians have to endure its evil, and to build hope and peace back up from where a dogma of fear and terror now rules over our military.

As those veterans did serve in the name of freedom and democracy, I don't just feel justified, but obliged, to question our government's commitment to militarism and the culture that is leading to violent patriotism.

The message I want to convey is that everyone should be allowed to remember in their own way and this is irrelevant of which poppy you emblazon on your chest or across your Facebook page.

Remember those who died or were wounded while in service and their families, remember the innocent civilians that suffered, remember those coerced into service on the other side who had sweethearts and families waiting anxiously back home. Remember that the red poppy is not the only symbol of remembrance.

Put your money behind the brilliant work the Legion do, if you so wish. But I'm going to optimistically put money towards making a future where service men and women and the Legion would be redundant, because I don't like war. Never have. Never will.



Image: Sgt Wes Calder RLC

NO- Amy Gibbons

Let's get one thing straight: I am a pacifist. No, I haven't got confused and no, I'm not colour-blind. I don't believe in war of any kind, but I proudly wear a red poppy every year. Despite what my choice might imply, I have no issue with the white poppy; it stands for peace and honour, respect and solidarity. Those who choose to wear it certainly don't oppose the tradition of honouring those who have given their lives for their country.

My concern is that it is worn as an act of protest: an intended alternative to its red counterpart. Some people misunderstand the significance of the red poppy, since it has a stigma attached to it. If the white is to be worn, it should be worn alongside the red, because both stand for subtly different, but deeply

congruous things. They agree on essential principles: remembrance and respect.

The poppies benefit different funds. The proceeds from sales of the red poppy are donated to the Royal British Legion Benevolent Fund, for current and former Services people and their dependants. Donations for white poppies are said to fund the associated organisation's 'peace education work'. I agree that all efforts should be made "to challenge the view that war and preparations for war are necessary or inevitable", as the Peace Pledge Union advocates. However, it's worth noting that some might be unclear about the destination of their money when they donate. Do sales of the white poppy, therefore, detract from donations to the Benevolent Fund?

Contrary to popular opinion among peace advocates, The Royal British Legion insists that the red poppy is not an endorsement of war or violence of any kind. Its red hue is not intended to reflect the colour of blood, nor is it a political symbol. The charity states simply that "The poppy is a humble, neutral and universal symbol of remembrance and hope." Nothing more, nothing less.

So what's the issue? Many understand the red poppy to be a justification of conflict today or an empty symbol manipulated by politicians. But the poppy is, and always has been, a fundamentally important icon. If we attempt to change or protest it now, so much could be forgotten. That is because the red poppy is real; it is sown (pun intended) into our collective memory.

Modelled on the red poppies of the French and Belgian battlefields of World War One, the flowers that we don today transport us back to scenes of heroism and tragedy. Perhaps most importantly, we remember what cruelty human beings are capable of, and the horrors that war inevitably brings...which draws us back to today.

The symbol of the red poppy doesn't advocate conflict in Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. Quite the contrary, it reminds us how terrible war can be, and draws attention to our own proximity to conflict. When I wear my poppy, I'm inspired to protest fighting to protect today's soldiers in the memory of those who died for us. Pictures of evacuated children diffuse and refigure as images of refugees fleeing by treacherous boats; stories of cities wiped out by bombs translate as this week's news bulletins: 50 killed in terror attack; mass shooting leaves village shaken and children orphaned. The little paper petals unite and humble us. Lest we forget.

So I wear my poppy with pride. It is the symbol that we as a nation choose to remember the fallen, and hope for peace. To displace it with the white poppy would be to undermine its significance.



2 comments

Anon

11 Nov '15 at 12:16 pm

To the editor: I think you need to look up the definition of alternate and then realise you meant alternative. We are not in America. They are not interchangeable terms.

[Report](#)

Irene Robinson

12 Nov '15 at 11:34 am

Would it not be a much better idea to wear another flower to represent peace? A Spathiphyllum (the Peace Lily) for instance? I would cheerfully wear both on the 11th November: one to honour my great grandfather who was killed in 1915 and the other to support the peace movement.

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